

**Digital Storytelling  
and the Production of the Personal  
in Lwandle, Cape Town**



UNIVERSITY *of the*  
WESTERN CAPE

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History,  
University of the Western Cape

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Supervisors: Professor Leslie Witz and Professor Patricia Hayes

## Declaration

I declare that **Digital Storytelling and the Production of the Personal in Lwandle, Cape Town** is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.



**Pamela Jane Sykes**

21 November 2019



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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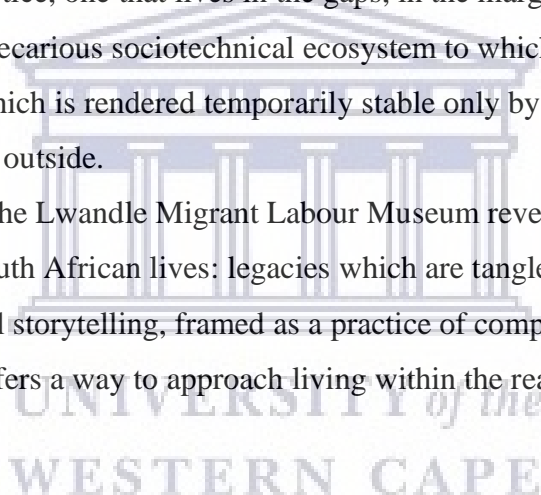


## Abstract

Digital storytelling is a workshop-based practice, originally developed by the California-based nonprofit StoryCenter, in which people create short, first-person digital video narratives based on stories from their own lives. The practice has been adopted around the world as a participatory research method, as a pedagogical tool, as a community-based reflective arts practice and as medium for advocacy. It is associated with a loosely connected global movement linked by genealogy and a set of ethical commitments to the significance of all life stories and to the power of listening as a creative and political act.

This thesis, based on workshops conducted in the Cape Town township of Lwandle, investigates how digital stories are shaped in the workshop by the multiple mediations of facilitation, picture production and digital video editing. Digital storytelling emerges as a fundamentally liminal practice, one that lives in the gaps, in the margins and at the limits. It is enabled by mobilising a precarious sociotechnical ecosystem to which Lwandle and places like it are marginal, and which is rendered temporarily stable only by the importation of energy and resources from outside.

The stories made at the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum reveal the continuing legacies of apartheid in South African lives: legacies which are tangled, intractable and often tragic. I suggest that digital storytelling, framed as a practice of compassionate witnessing and of reasonable hope, offers a way to approach living within the realities of postcolonial and postapartheid tragedy.



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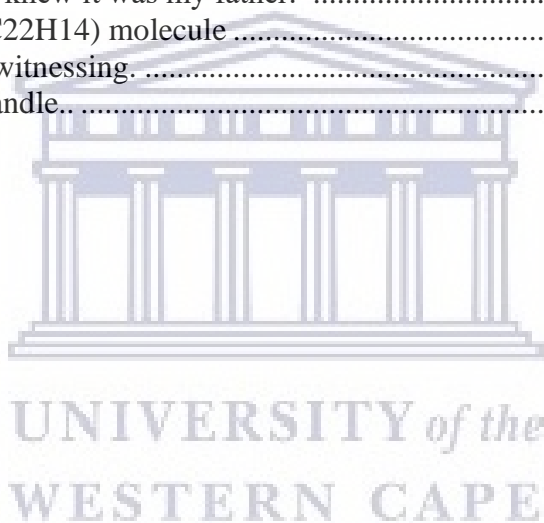
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# 1. Introduction

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What happens is of little significance compared with the stories we tell ourselves about what happens. Events matter little, only stories of those events affect us.<sup>1</sup>

It matters little that the connections established in narrative may not be amenable to proof, that they may seem arbitrary when viewed from the outside. What matters is that the story be one's own. And that it have explanatory force—"the power to convince". That is what matters.<sup>2</sup>

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## Overview

This thesis began as an attempt to answer a nagging question: What, exactly, is going on when people gather in a digital storytelling workshop, under the guidance of a facilitator, to make video stories out of personal experiences? Wrestling with this question has led me deep into "between" spaces: the borderlands of (dis)connection, uncertainty, discomfort and generativity that exist where different disciplines, practices, places, people and ways of reading the world rub up against each other. From within these spaces, I want to argue for the value of holding them open—that is, for the value of leaving questions unanswered, doubts unresolved and stories unfinished. Keeping borders open requires work, and in the context of the digital storytelling workshop it is the facilitator who must undertake this labour. A large part of this thesis is thus concerned with what exactly such labour entails, and how it shapes the co-production of "personal" stories. I will argue that facilitation, as one of the primary ways in which digital stories are mediated, deserves much closer attention.

Although starting with a question about digital storytelling, this thesis has been shaped by three forces which have worked together to place it in the margins in several different ways. First, the location of this project within the Department of History at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) has placed it outside the mainstream of work on digital storytelling. This mainstream tends to be located in disciplines such as education, anthropology and public health, as well as outside the academy altogether, in the practices of digital storytelling facilitators and organisations around the world. Working within history, and particularly at UWC, has entailed grappling with a literature and set of concerns that are

<sup>1</sup> Rabih Alameddine, *The Hakawati*, Ebook edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 450.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Newton-King, "Hilletjie Smits and the Shadow of Death" in *Out of History: Re-Imagining South African Pasts*, ed. Jung Ran Forte, Paolo Israel, and Leslie Witz (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2016), 79.



to some extent new for digital storytelling, and has opened up a productive set of questions about different kinds of histories and the processes of their production.

Second, the digital storytelling workshops on which this thesis is based were held over several months in the township of Lwandle on the outskirts of Cape Town, at the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum. There is nothing new about digital storytelling workshops being held with groups of people who are marked in some way as marginal or vulnerable—the young, the elderly, homeless people, migrants and refugees, the rural, the poor<sup>3</sup>—and to this extent choosing a community museum in Lwandle was entirely within standard practice. But working at Lwandle, which is also marginal to many of the systems and networks that make digital storytelling possible, forced me into a much deeper engagement than I had expected with the materiality of digital storytelling: the technologies and resources that sustain it. These turn out to shape the production of personal stories in very significant ways.

Finally, my own position as facilitator at Lwandle was complicated by the fact that the workshops, while hosted by the Museum, were wholly initiated by me, rather than by any client or commissioning institution. This placed me in an ambiguous position that was simultaneously both vulnerable and powerful. At the same time I was in a second ambiguous position, that of being both a practitioner and a researcher observing my own practice. These ambiguities provided another set of shifting positions from which to consider the role of the facilitator.

### **Considering migration and translation**

One of the zones of unease within which this thesis resides is the space between the different disciplines and domains of knowledge it attempts to bring together. It is an attempt to create what Donna Haraway calls a “contact zone between cognitive apparatuses”.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand there is the domain of digital storytelling, which is large, but also new and very vaguely boundaried. On the other hand, there are vast existing bodies of work on South African history in particular and practices of history-making in general. Jargons, assumptions and taken-for-granted knowledges do not translate easily across disciplinary borders, and for readers familiar with either of these domains the other may appear at first unintelligible. The historian may wonder, for example, what is this “facilitation” of which I speak? Likewise,

<sup>3</sup> A comment from the floor at a digital storytelling conference in London in 2016 asked “where are the digital stories by stockbrokers?”. Digital storytelling is much concerned with voice, and this question points directly to underlying assumptions about which voices do, and do not, need assistance.

<sup>4</sup> “A Giant Bumptious Litter: Donna Haraway on Truth, Technology, and Resisting Extinction,” *Logic*, Issue 9: Nature, 2019. <https://logicmag.io/nature/a-giant-bumptious-litter/>

readers unfamiliar with South Africa's particular history and milieu may find themselves tripped up by assumptions I have made about things which are obvious to me, but not universally understood. I have tried to identify and fill in as many of these blind spots as possible, but I have no doubt that many remain.

The idea of migration has been useful to me in thinking through these dilemmas. It was first suggested by the fact that I was working in a museum about migrant labour experiences, with a set of stories which, as will become clear throughout this thesis, attest to the ongoing power of migration as a life-shaping force in South Africa. This highlighted for me my own status as a migrant, and descendant of migrants<sup>5</sup>, and the fact that migration is more often a state of being than a singular event. Migrating, crossing and re-crossing boundaries, means engaging in a constant process of monitoring and translation: Does this thing work here? What do I need to explain, and can I explain it successfully? Can I explain *myself*? What do I need to give up?

I approach this work, then, as a migrant from multiple directions. I migrated into digital storytelling a decade ago, and into the discipline of history within the past four years. Fortunately history is a capacious discipline<sup>6</sup> with generously elastic boundaries, but I remain idiosyncratically assimilated; I am not a member of the guild. There will as a consequence be much explaining, as I attempt to carry concepts back and forth across borders to places where they may or may not thrive.

The first of these sets of explanations, to prepare the ground for what follows, is a fuller introduction to digital storytelling, and then to the three shaping forces I mentioned above: the discipline of history as it has developed at UWC in particular, Lwandle, and my own position as both researcher and practitioner.

### **A brief introduction to digital storytelling**

To define something is to draw boundaries around it: to specify, as exactly as possible, what it is and what it is not so that we can accommodate it to some model of the world. I am going to end by retreating from an attempt at such clarity in the case of digital storytelling, but in the meantime a definition is a useful place to start.

Digital storytelling, then, is a workshop-based facilitated process during which participants create short (around three minutes) first-person video narratives, usually based on

<sup>5</sup> There is a complex of meanings around the distinct but entwined ideas of "migration" and "settling" which hovers suggestively in the wings here.

<sup>6</sup> I'm grateful to Dr Elizabeth Elbourne for suggesting this phrase in conversation.



photographs that are either part of their personal archive, sourced from public domain/Creative Commons material or taken during the workshop. This definition already contains an element of wishful thinking—it describes things as I believe they ought to be, not as they are. In reality, as I will show in Chapters 4 and 6, images in many digital stories are ripped from wherever people can rip them. I am letting it stand as a useful reminder of the seductive power of definition.

To unpack this a bit: To make a digital story is to engage in a process of hands-on practical creation that happens in a group led by a digital storytelling facilitator. The word “facilitator” is chosen over “trainer” or “teacher” to reflect an approach which is supportive rather than directive (the metaphor of midwife is often invoked). The workshop usually takes around 24 hours, often over an intensive three-day sprint. It almost always includes a story circle, during which people speak stories of personal, lived experiences. They then transform these stories into scripts, record them as voiceover, gather pictures (including drawings, photographs and sometimes short video clips) and finally stitch it all together using editing software on a personal computer, tablet or smartphone. It typically involves non-professional storytellers (which is not to suggest that they are unskilled) who have little or no previous experience of video production, so teaching technical skills is often a significant part of the workshop. The creator(s) retain ownership of their stories and may choose whether or not to share the final version with the workshop group itself, with their families, with their communities or with a broader public.

This practice is historically associated with a movement which has an associated set of ethical and political commitments. This movement originated in the San Francisco Bay area in the early 1990s, when a group of people with a background in theatre and arts-based activism began to explore the opportunities opened up by new developments in multimedia technology. Affordable personal computers, non-linear video editing software, image scanners and other ways to digitise sound and pictures combined to make it possible to produce short videos in a three-day public workshop. The first digital storytelling workshops were held in 1993 at the American Film Institute's new Digital Media Computer Lab in Los Angeles.<sup>7</sup> The work was formalised around the Berkeley-based non-profit Center for Digital

<sup>7</sup> One of the films produced at this first workshop, *Tanya* by Monte Hallis, has become part of the canon as a sample story that is passed around between facilitators and shown as part of introductory presentations. An online version, which provides a useful introduction to the genre, can be viewed at [YouTube](#).

Storytelling, now StoryCenter, which has become one of the key nodes in a loosely-organised global community of practice.<sup>8</sup>

This community of practice has evolved its own set of definitions and descriptions as digital storytelling has been applied in new domains and to different ends. Digital stories have been variously described as “scrapbook television” and “digital sonnets”,<sup>9</sup> as “hyper short, personally narrated multimedia fragments”,<sup>10</sup> as “a collection of still images joined and overlaid with a voice narrative”,<sup>11</sup> as “family album meets creative writing meets video”<sup>12</sup>, as “a short form of digital media production that allows everyday people to share aspects of their story”<sup>13</sup> and as “personal narrative that documents a wide range of culturally and historically embedded lived experiences combining voice, sound and images into a short video, developed by non-professionals with non-professional tools within the context of a digital storytelling workshop”<sup>14</sup>. These descriptions come from a TV producer, an anthropologist and documentary film maker, a group of computer scientists, from StoryCenter, from Wikipedia, and from an academic teaching and learning specialist. This sprawl is evidence of a healthily growing and diversifying practice, but it also complicates any attempt at definition and demarcation.

The task of definition is complicated even further by the fact that in the decades since 1993, the universe of things which share the name “digital storytelling” has expanded dramatically to include some kinds of fictional storytelling, games, journalism, documentary and more (I discuss this further in Chapter 2). As a result of all this expansion, as I noted above, “digital storytelling” is a very vaguely bounded domain, which makes it troublesome to discuss. First conversations are often mostly concerned with trying to explain just what it is one is talking about. As a result much of my own thinking about it was driven initially by a desire which is basically taxonomic: What IS this thing? Where does it belong? What is its genealogy?

8 For a much fuller account of the evolution of digital storytelling see Joe Lambert, *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*, 4th ed (New York: Routledge, 2013), especially chapters 3 and 4.

9 In Daniel Meadows, “Digital Storytelling: Research-Based Practice in New Media”, *Visual Communication* 2, no. 2 (2003), 189–193.

10 Darcy Alexandra, “Digital Storytelling as Transformative Practice: Critical Analysis and Creative Expression in the Representation of Migration in Ireland”, *Journal of Media Practice* 9, no. 2 (2008), 101–112.

11 Gary Marsden, Ilda Ladiera, Thomas Reitmaier, Nicola J. Bidwell, and Edwin Blake, “Digital Storytelling in Africa”, *International Journal of Computing* 9, no. 3 (2010), 257–265.

12 From an oral presentation by Joe Lambert to the UN/Told Conference on digital storytelling held in London in 2017.

13 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital\\_storytelling](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_storytelling).

14 Daniela Gachago, “Sentimentality and Digital Storytelling: Towards a Post-Conflict Pedagogy in Pre-Service Teacher Education in South Africa.” (PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 2015).

I have not been alone in this desire. The entire fourth chapter of StoryCenter co-founder<sup>15</sup> and director Joe Lambert's book *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*, for example, is concerned with questions of definition and taxonomy.<sup>16</sup> Lambert identifies seven components of StoryCenter digital stories: They are told in the first person; they are self-revelatory, concerned with the sharing of insights; they are based on moments or scenes; they are dominated by still rather than moving images; they often include music or ambient sound; they are short, around three minutes; and the workshop model "privileges self-expression and self-awareness over concerns of publication and audience. Process over product."<sup>17</sup>

Lambert goes on to locate digital storytelling along what he calls three different spectra, although I find it helpful to think in terms of three different questions. First, what are the respective creative roles of the workshop participant and the facilitator? Second, what voice is being expressed—whose story is being told? Third, how does digital storytelling intersect with related forms of story production?

Considering creative roles, Lambert locates digital storytelling somewhere between do-it-yourself sole authorship and what he calls co-constructed or artist-led media projects, in which creators craft their version of a story "with as much engagement by the subjects/storytellers as they can manage".<sup>18</sup> Facilitated approaches, on the other hand, "describe any environment where the storytellers understand that they are making the story with support, not completely do-it-yourself, but as close as is possible."<sup>19</sup>

15 Lambert's co-founders were Dana Atchley and Nina Mullen.

16 Lambert, *Digital Storytelling*, 37-49.

17 Ibid., 38.

18 Ibid., 40.

19 Ibid., 42.

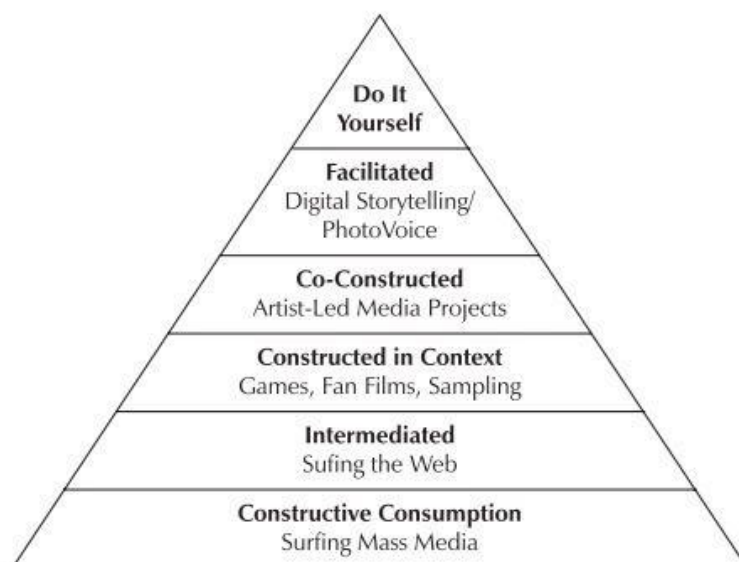


Figure 1.1: A spectrum of participation in media making.<sup>20</sup>

“As much... as they can manage”; “as close as is possible”—these phrases reveal that the neatly drawn lines in the diagram above are a convenient fiction from the start. What is helpful about this focus on authorship is less its ability to demarcate clear categories than its focussing of attention on the role of the facilitator as a mediator or co-creator of the story. The idea of supporting participants to create their stories in a way that is “as close as is possible” to solo authorship is often spoken of in terms of fingerprints: “Don’t put your fingerprints on it” was one of the more striking lessons of my own initial training as a digital storytelling facilitator, and I have heard similar statements often since, usually informally. This idea is typically expressed as an ideal to work towards, while acknowledging that it can rarely, if ever, be attained in practice. Yet there is much more going on here than a simple gap between the ideal and the attainable. Digital stories are essentially and inescapably an act of co-creation, and so the mechanisms of this co-creation deserve much closer attention than they have received so far.<sup>21</sup> Much of this thesis is an exploration of how this process of co-creation or mediation plays out.

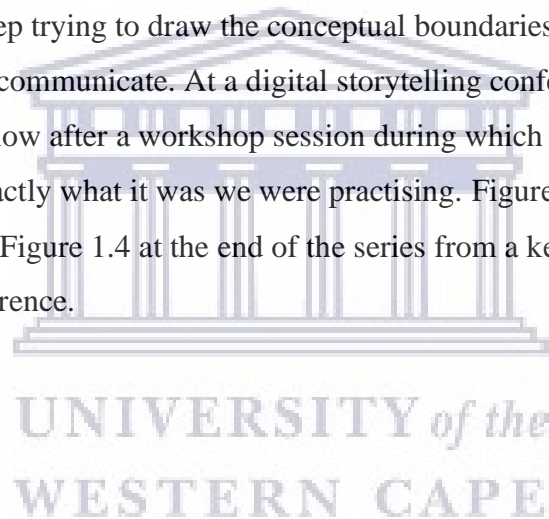
<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>21</sup> Significant contributions to the process of thinking through what facilitation means have been made in particular by Darcy Alexandra, whose PhD tracked a long-form workshop with asylum seekers in Ireland, and by Chloe Brushwood Rose of York University in Canada and her collaborators. See for example Darcy Alexandra, “Are We Listening Yet? Participatory Knowledge Production Through Media Practice: Encounters of Political Listening”, in *Participatory Visual and Digital Research in Action*, ed. Aline Gubrium, Krista Harper, and Marty Otanez (Left Coast Press, 2015), 41–55; Bronwen Low, Chloë Brushwood Rose, and Paula M. Salvio, *Community-Based Media Pedagogies: Relational Practices of Listening in the Commons* (Routledge, 2017); and other works by these authors referenced throughout. See

On the question of voice, Lambert locates digital storytelling within concentric circles of intimacy. At the centre are “me” stories, the self-defining stories that shape individual identities. Next to these are “my” stories, often about the teller’s experience of some important external person or event; “we” stories and “they” stories are further out and less intimate. Most digital stories are of the “my” variety, one step removed from the vulnerability of the “me” story but retaining an immediacy which may not be present in “we” stories, where the author speaks on behalf of a larger group.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, Lambert locates digital storytelling alongside related media production practices like PhotoVoice,<sup>23</sup> community video, audio storytelling, mobile storytelling and oral history. Each of these is itself a more or less loosely-bound constellation of practices, and all are constantly evolving. Any attempt to create clear demarcations breaks down entirely at this point.

Nevertheless, we keep trying to draw the conceptual boundaries, because without them it is extremely difficult to communicate. At a digital storytelling conference in London in 2017 I drew Figure 1.2 below after a workshop session during which practitioners grappled with questions of what exactly what it was we were practising. Figure 1.3 below that is from an earlier conference, and Figure 1.4 at the end of the series from a keynote lecture by Joe Lambert at the 2017 conference.



also Amanda Stacey Hill, “Power to the People: Responsible Facilitation in Co-Creative Story-Making” (PhD thesis, University of Central Florida, 2018); and Daniela Gachago and Pam Sykes, “Navigating Ethical Boundaries When Adopting Digital Storytelling in Higher Education”, In *Digital Storytelling in Higher Education*, ed. Grete Jamissen, Pip Hardy, Yngve Nordkvelle, and Heather Pleasants (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 91–106.

22 Interestingly, Lambert does not include the collectively told “we” story of a group, which is a relatively common form in South Africa. Preferences for individually vs collectively told stories may reflect deep differences in how people understand their place in the world; see the “Seven Steps/Six Steps” section in Chapter 3.

23 PhotoVoice is a practice which involves giving people photography training and cameras, and inviting them to document their own lives and communities. See PhotoVoice, *The PhotoVoice Manual*, n.d. <https://photovoice.org/photovoice-manual-for-participatory-photography>.



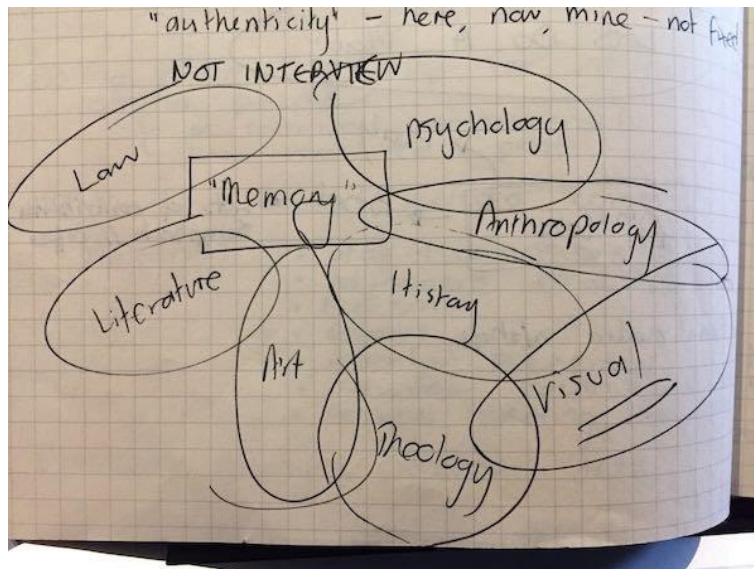


Figure 1.2: Trying to pin it down 1—2015

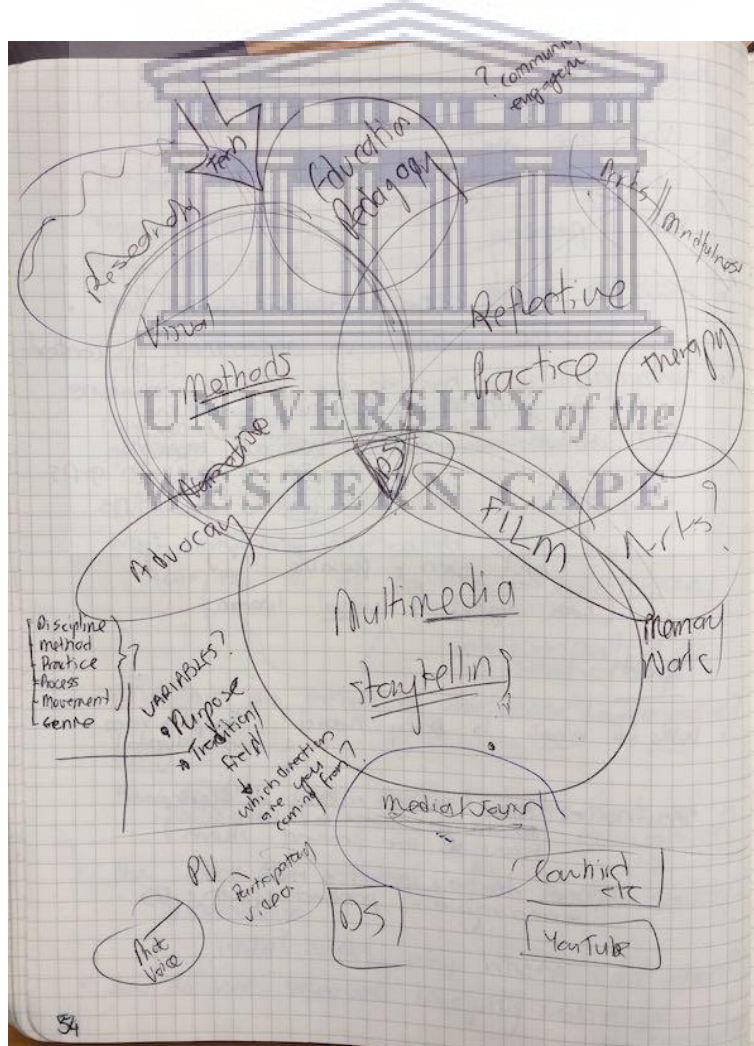


Figure 1.3: Trying to pin it down 2—2017

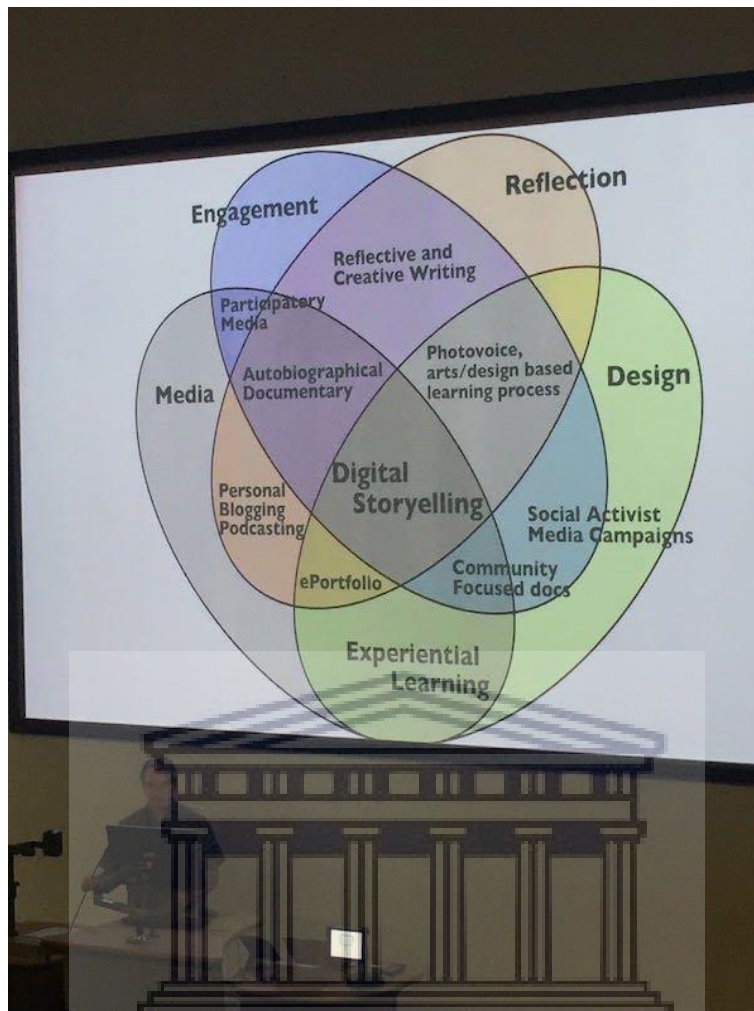


Figure 1.4: Trying to pin it down 3—Presentation by Joe Lambert, 2017

The repeated appearance of bubble diagrams was unexpected but is probably not accidental: they reflect the enduring difficulty of trying to pin down a practice which is essentially liminal. Digital storytelling is a bit like autobiographical documentary, but not quite; a bit like PhotoVoice or StoryCorps, but not quite; a bit like community arts activism, but not quite. It is protean and improvisational, changing constantly as it migrates to, and adapts to, new contexts and requirements.<sup>24</sup> What holds it all together is mostly genealogy: an ancestral link to the StoryCenter model and set of affiliations to related practices.

One result of this formlessness is that academic attention to digital storytelling has been patchy—appropriately for a migratory practice, it is all over the place. Research has been

<sup>24</sup> There are occasional calls for digital storytelling to become a more formally institutionalised practice, perhaps with an association, certifications and accreditations. These have never gained traction, and this may cast light on why: the rigidity and potential ossification associated with such formalisation are fundamentally at odds with a practice which lives by its flexibility.

published in computer science, education studies, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies and public health, often with a strong focus on digital storytelling as visual research method (in journalism, film and media studies, “digital storytelling” tends to refer much more broadly to any form of media production that uses modern digital tools).

In the NGO space, digital storytelling has been adopted as a tool for advocacy and fundraising. In schools and universities, it is most often treated either as a learning technology that provides useful reflective space for students in otherwise dry curricula<sup>25</sup> or as a participatory visual research method<sup>26</sup> (I will discuss much of this in more detail in the next chapter).

In this process of migration and translation, one of the things that has proved most enduring is StoryCenter’s technical process for teaching ways to tell stories digitally. As this technical process spreads digital storytelling can easily become disconnected from its political roots, which StoryCenter has consistently asserted. In a book chapter looking back on the movement's beginnings nearly two decades later, Lambert notes that it emerged at the moment of “consumer capitalism's essential victory in the Cold War... my joining the digital media revolution was an attempt at looking beyond my socialist legacy to a hybridized future.” He says attempts to understand the work “outside a social justice framework... miss the point, almost entirely.”<sup>27</sup>

Lambert and other prominent members of the movement have continually refined and reasserted this original sense of mission, making explicit a link with the work of Paolo Freire:

Many digital storytelling projects take their lead from Freire's process of building critical consciousness. Workshop participants are given the space to reflect on the world they live in and on their position within that world. They are encouraged to imagine and be part of a shifted power arrangement that increases personal and social agency by producing and sharing stories that represent their individual experiences. The workshop is also a group process, where a reflective and collaborative space for analysing injustice and oppression and articulating a more hopeful future is created.<sup>28</sup>

25 See for example Bernard Robin, “Digital Storytelling: A Powerful Technology Tool for the 21st Century Classroom”, *Theory Into Practice* 47 (2008), 220–228; and Rina Benmayor, “Digital Storytelling as a Signature Pedagogy for the New Humanities”, *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 7 (2008), 188–204.

26 See Aline Gubrium, Amy Hill, and Sarah Flicker, “A Situated Practice of Ethics for Participatory Visual and Digital Methods in Public Health Research and Practice: A Focus on Digital Storytelling”, *American Journal of Public Health* 104 (2014), 1606–1614.

27 Joe Lambert, “Where It All Started: The Center for Digital Storytelling in California”, in *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling around the World*, ed. John Hartley and Kelly McWilliam (Blackwell Publishing: 2009), 82.

28 Gubrium, Hill and Flicker, “A Situated Practice of Ethics”, 1607.



Many proponents of digital storytelling in education emphasise this ability to promote empathy and self-reflection, or to surface stories in which people challenge dominant discourses and construct new understandings of themselves and their worlds.

More recent scholarship has pointed out the dangers of romanticising<sup>29</sup> or overselling what digital storytelling might achieve, suggesting that there is nothing necessarily liberating or transformative about the act of telling one's story, particularly if the voice that is uttered is not heard.<sup>30</sup> This suggests that one important set of questions to ask centres on which audiences storytellers intend to address with their stories, and what work they want the stories to do. Stories intended to address governments or policy makers, for example, can be expected to unfold in very different ways from stories intended to address family members or local communities, and it is perhaps necessary to resist any temptation to read the former as somehow more important than the latter. Writing from Australia, Jean Burgess suggests that “somewhat paradoxically from a critical perspective, it is the very qualities that mark digital stories as uncool, conservative, and ideologically suspect—‘stock’ tropes, nostalgia, even sentimentality—that give them the power of social connectivity.”<sup>31</sup> Many of the stories told in Lwandle, as will become clear throughout this thesis, enthusiastically embraced such “stock tropes”, notably persistence and triumph over adversity and the importance of family and community. I do not believe this made them any less meaningful to their tellers and audiences.



My own history with digital storytelling began in 2010 when I completed an eight-day facilitator training course at the Centre for Digital Storytelling (now StoryCenter). I had been working as a freelance journalist, researcher and writer for technology companies, but was seeking ways to expand my skills beyond writing and also to break out of the frames of journalistic storytelling, which I was finding increasingly confining and unsatisfactory. I was frustrated by the very limited number of lenses through which Africa was refracted to the world: at one stage, compiling a monthly newsletter on telecommunications developments around the continent for a client, I found myself having to modify all my Google search

29 See for example Daniela Gachago, “Owning your emotions or sentimental navel-gazing: Digital Storytelling with South African pre-service student educators” in *Telling Stories Differently: Engaging 21st Century Students Through Digital Storytelling*, ed. Janet Condy (Sun Press, 2015), 165–78.

30 See Alexandra, “Are We Listening Yet?”

31 Jean Burgess, “Hearing Ordinary Voices: Cultural Studies, Vernacular Creativity and Digital Storytelling”, *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 20 (2006), 201–14.

strings with additions like “-war -conflict -HIV -safari -refugees -malaria -NGO -aid - wildebeest -famine”. I read Binyavanga Wainana’s classic essay *How to Write About Africa* many times.<sup>32</sup> I was curious about what stories people might choose to tell about themselves if they could do so on their own terms. When I encountered my first digital stories via the NGO Sonke Gender Justice, I found them riveting. I booked a ticket to Berkeley and offered my first workshop within a few months of my return.

I’ve since facilitated several workshops a year: some have been public sessions open to all, but most have been commissioned by clients like companies, NGOs and universities. The stories created during these workshops have varied extensively in subject matter, impact and sophistication—but in each case participants have reported, and I have had a sense of, some form of the transformation that is frequently spoken about in accounts of digital storytelling. In wrestling memories about key moments from their lives into the form of a digital story, people’s relationships to their own life history appear to shift, often towards a stronger sense and assertion of their own agency. In storying their experiences, they seem to create a new sense of meaning. This idea of personal transformation turns up remarkably often in writing about digital storytelling,<sup>33</sup> to the extent that it appears to have quasi-therapeutic value for many participants. Australian historian Helen Klæbe notes that “public historians are not usually also psychologists, but as is the case in oral history interviewing, creating a digital story can be a powerfully emotive experience for the participant and this fact needs to be acknowledged.”<sup>34</sup> I began to be intensely curious about how and why this worked—what exactly was going on? This was the question that began the process which has culminated in the production of this thesis, although it is not, in the end, the question that has been answered.

I will, as noted above, map the terrain of digital storytelling in more detail in Chapter 2. In the meantime, this should serve as an overview of the territory we are dealing with. I turn now to the three shaping forces of the discipline of history, Lwandle, and my own position as facilitator.

32 “Never have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book, or in it, unless that African has won the Nobel Prize. An AK-47, prominent ribs, naked breasts: use these. If you must include an African, make sure you get one in Masai or Zulu or Dogon dress.” Binyavanga Wainana, “How to Write About Africa.” *Granta* 92 (2005). <https://granta.com/how-to-write-about-africa/>.

33 The Benmayor article cited above offers a particularly strong statement of this, but see also Daniel Meadows and Jenny Kidd, “Capture Wales: The BBC Digital Storytelling Project”, in *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling around the World*, ed. John Hartley and Kelly McWilliam (Blackwell Publishing, 2009).

34 Helen Klæbe, ‘The Problems and Possibilities of Using Digital Storytelling in Public History Projects’, in *Proceedings XIII International Oral History Conference - Dancing with Memory* (Sydney, 2006), 8.

## Digital storytelling as history

I did not originally intend to approach this work from within the discipline of history. My search for a disciplinary home led me on an extended journey that took in film and media studies, psychology, public health, education studies, management studies and human-computer interaction before a chance encounter at a gathering of a short-lived organisation called StoryCode<sup>35</sup> led to a series of coffee dates and meetings and, eventually, a feeling of having arrived somewhere congenial. I tell this story because there is something entirely fitting about having stumbled more or less by accident, after prolonged searching, into an intellectual environment that would turn out to be an excellent base for my explorations of uncertainty, contingency and permeable borders.

The Department of History at UWC, particularly in the collaborations between Gary Minkley, Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz as well as in work by Nicky Rousseau and Patricia Hayes, has wrestled since the 1990s with questions about what history is and how it is made. In particular, they have argued for recognising the genres of history produced outside the academic guild of historians—in stories, oral histories, heritage tours, museum exhibitions, festivals and the like—as histories in themselves, not just the raw material of a singular and authoritative History:

These “documents” then are not to be treated as primary sources of history but as visual and textual narratives about pasts with a range of changing authors which are modified, circulated, archived and re-presented to make histories... [we want] to imply the elimination of a distinction between source and history, often expressed as “primary and secondary evidence”.<sup>36</sup>

This call for an openness to different kinds of historical authority is in part a response to a genre of social history that is framed in terms of inclusion, recuperation, giving voice, restoring agency or uncovering “history which has been hidden from us”.<sup>37</sup> While these goals might on the face of it be entirely unobjectionable, scholars at UWC have pointed out that they tend to preserve a distinction between professional historians and everyone else—after all, there is no need to “give voice” unless one first discounts all the other ways in which people might express themselves and their histories. Within this frame, oral histories and images can be reduced to the status of testimony, source material that is valuable for filling in

35 “An open-source, global community for emerging and established cross-platform and immersive storytellers,” according to its now-dormant Twitter profile. <https://twitter.com/storycodect>.

36 Leslie Witz and Ciraj Rassool, “Making Histories,” *Kronos* 34 (2008), 9.

37 Leslie Witz, *Write Your Own History* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press/SACHED Trust, 1988), 12.

historical gaps and righting historical wrongs but must always be supported by other evidence and filtered through professional lenses. The outcome is an ‘improved’ version of what remains a singular, positivist History.

This tendency to view oral histories and stories as source for, or supplement to, more professional versions is by no means confined to South Africa, and has surfaced in history-oriented digital storytelling projects elsewhere (of which very few have been reported). For example, an Australian public history project which occurred in the context of a large new housing development in Kelvin Grove (a working-class, inner-city suburb of Brisbane) aimed “to collate and build on the historical archives and to connect the community through participatory activities and public events”.<sup>38</sup> Author Helen Klaebe suggested that digital stories may constitute a complement to oral and archival approaches to history, that they may encourage public interest and participation and “can highlight aspects of historical interest in an engaging, social manner”.<sup>39</sup> In a subsequent book chapter she and collaborator Jean Burgess claim that “digital storytelling works to broaden participation by articulating everyday vernacular experiences and practices (such as oral storytelling) with professional expertise and institutional support.”<sup>40</sup>

The danger in this approach, those writing at UWC suggest, is that it can paradoxically re-inscribe and entrench the marginal status of those to whom it seeks to give voice.<sup>41</sup> The implicit corollaries of an approach to history production that seeks to restore agency to “ordinary people” are that historians are not themselves ordinary people, and ordinary people in turn are not historians—at least, not unless they learn and deploy the skills of the craft. So long as this binary remains in place, and the production of history remains the prerogative of professional historians, other possibilities for the making and understanding of history remain foreclosed. Nicky Rousseau argued in a pivotal 1995 paper that while the recuperative approach to social history at least recognised the active role of “ordinary people” as participants in history production, it failed to challenge the terms of that participation. This approach, she said:

38 Klaebe, “The Problems and Possibilities of Using Digital Storytelling”, 8.

39 Ibid., 9.

40 Jean Burgess and Helen Klaebe, “Digital Storytelling as Participatory Public History in Australia”, in Hartley and McWilliam, *Story Circle*, 156.

41 See Gary Minkley, Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz, “Oral History in South Africa: A Country Report”, in *Unsettled History: Making South African Public Pasts*, ed. Leslie Witz, Gary Minkley, and Ciraj Rassool (University of Michigan Press: 2017), 41.

Remains concerned to transmit a particular approach to history, namely critical history... the process of demarcation and assertion of disciplinary rules... is evident and thus the question remains of whether control of the 'means of historical production' have indeed been transferred.<sup>42</sup>

Opening up the boundary between academic and other kinds of history productively destabilises a number of other binaries: between the oral and the literate,<sup>43</sup> between oppression and resistance and between the traditional and the modern. The reification of these categories can tend to support a simplified nationalist history which obscures much of the complexity of South Africa's past and present and sometimes "actually serves to maintain and reproduce the dichotomies of apartheid and its racially modern relations and basis of difference."<sup>44</sup> Those at UWC trying to avoid "fossilizing the apartheid subject",<sup>45</sup> have sought "to focus instead on the continuing haunting of the past in the present"<sup>46</sup> by acknowledging multiple and contested knowledges and pasts.

This work also usefully complicates the idea of voice. The project of giving voice rests partly on an assumption that the "voices of the people" are somehow automatically authentic and unmediated. Giving this up and taking informal histories seriously *as histories*, rather than simply as data, encourages a focus on the ways in which they are produced<sup>47</sup>. Voice, then, is never unmediated or spontaneous but always performed, with an audience in mind (which need not make it inauthentic).

Voice is also often associated with power, the underlying assumption here being that to speak is to be empowered, while silence is the result of *being silenced*. Several scholars at

42 Nicky Rousseau, "'Unpalatable Truths' and 'Popular Hunger': Reflections on Popular History in the 1980s," in Forte et al., *Out of History*, 63-64. Through the 1980s "critical" was often code, certainly in South Africa, for a specifically Marxist approach which entailed certain conclusions about race, class and appropriate political action. The much-discussed ordinary people could thus become 'mere representative allegories of correct political [and historical] practice' (Nicky Rousseau's 1994 MA thesis "Popular history in South Africa in the 1980's; the politics of production", cited in Minkley, Rassool and Witz, "Oral History in South Africa", 36.)

43 See Isabel Hofmeyr, "Reading Oral Texts: New Methodological Directions," in Forte et al., *Out of History*, 97-110.

44 Gary Minkley, "'A Fragile Inheritor': The Post-Apartheid Memorial Complex, A.C. Jordan and the Re-Imagining of Cultural Heritage in the Eastern Cape." *Kronos* 34 no. 1 (2008): 35.

45 Leslie Witz, Gary Minkley, and Ciraj Rassool, "Sources and Genealogies of the New Museum," in Witz et al., *Unsettled History*, 178.

46 Leslie Witz, Jung Ran Forte, and Paolo Israel, "Epistemological Restlessness: Trajectories in and out of History," in Forte et al., *Out of History*, 16.

47 David Cohen has drawn attention to history as a process of production that occurs outside the confines of academic history, allowing for the recognition of multiple sites of knowledge: "This processing of the past in societies and historical settings all over the world, and the struggles for control of voices and texts in innumerable settings which often animate the process of the past, this we term the *production of history*." David Cohen, *The Combing of History* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 4.



UWC have begun productively to propose other ways of considering voice and silence: To note, for example, the subtle gendering at play where voice is unproblematically associated with action, movement and resistance; to interrogate the associations between voice and visibility; to ask about what space is created for and by listening;<sup>48</sup> and to note that silence itself can hold power:

Silences can be replete and paradoxical; they can be ‘more accurate and pure’ than the garrulousness of the colonizers, who ‘were mainly interested in hearing themselves speak.’ The silent subject who is not silenced by external structure... the subject who is not mute but who chooses silence over speaking, has been under-theorized in Southern African and African writings.<sup>49</sup>

For my own work, this has supported a much deeper engagement with notions of edges, boundaries and margins. I am alert to what Desiree Lewis calls “the dangers of straightforwardly celebrating marginal subjects and spaces”<sup>50</sup>—notably, that celebration can all too easily slide into reification and a reinforcement of precisely the rigid categories and inside/outside, centre/periphery distinctions one wishes to move away from.

This ossification dehumanises those on both sides of the binary: “The othering of the oppressive subject,” Lewis notes, “is a defence against the othering of the oppressed”.<sup>51</sup> Oscillation between opposing poles of a duality leaves us stuck in precisely the same old spaces. I am reminded of a passage in Ursula Le Guin’s novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*:

To oppose something is to maintain it. They say here “all roads lead to Mishnory”. To be sure, if you turn your back on Mishnory and walk away from it, you are still on the Mishnory road... You must go somewhere else; you must have another goal; then you walk in a different road.<sup>52</sup>

This echoes a question asked in the introduction to a collection of papers presented at UWC’s weekly History and Humanities seminar since 1994:

48 Minkley, Rassool and Witz suggest that South African social history practices have shared with public media representations of, for example, the TRC hearings, “very little real engagement with listening.” Minkley et al., “Oral History in South Africa: A Country Report”, 45.

49 Wendy Woodward, Patricia Hayes, and Gary Minkley, “Deep HiStories: Gender and Colonialism in Southern Africa,” in *Deep HiStories: Gender and Colonialism in Southern Africa*, ed. Wendy Woodward, Patricia Hayes, and Gary Minkley, xxi–xlvi. (Amsterdam: Rodopi BV, 2002), xxxii.

50 Desiree Lewis, “Self-Representation and Reconstructions of Southern African Pasts: Bessie Head’s A Bewitched Crossroad,” in Woodward et al., *Deep HiStories*, 279.

51 Ibid., 275.

52 Ursula Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (New York: Ace Books, 2019), Kindle edition, Ch 11. She writes a few paragraphs later: “To learn which questions are unanswerable, and *not to answer them*: this skill is most needful in times of stress and darkness” (italics in original).

Could one take a different path? Instead of dissolving the differences between source and reconstruction, popular and learned, history and historiography, one might keep these gaps open; instead of dwelling on metaphors of edges and limits, suspicion and suspension, prisons and ruptures, one might pursue a quest for balance or proportion.<sup>53</sup>

“Keeping the gaps open” describes much of what I am attempting to do in this thesis: to resist the temptations of resolution, closure and certainty<sup>54</sup> and instead to stay within the liminal zone, listening and watching both for what is uttered and what is not.

## **Lwandle**

If my location at UWC has been one serendipitously important shaping force of this thesis, another has been the choice of Lwandle as the location for the workshops on which it is based. Since my interest was in the internal processes of the digital storytelling workshop, I began with no idea which workshop(s) I would study, and no particular preference for where they should be based. A suggestion by my supervisor Leslie Witz that I consider the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, with which he had a long-standing association and which has a strong storytelling tradition of its own, rapidly solidified into a plan. Again, the semi-accidental nature of this outcome turned out to be entirely in keeping with themes of contingency and uncertainty that would recur throughout.

I had never visited Lwandle before 2016. I had driven past it many times and sometimes wondered what the museum sign on the national road might be pointing to; but it never occurred to me to go and find out. Lwandle is a backwater’s backwater - a marginal satellite of Somerset West and Strand, themselves now marginal satellites of greater Cape Town (although all are within the administrative borders of the City of Cape Town).

Throughout the 18 months that it took to produce the stories I write about in this thesis, I drove the 43km from my home in Cape Town to Lwandle every couple of weeks, on an irregular schedule shaped nominally by a project plan but in practice just as much by the weather, who was available, and the exigencies and contingencies of funding and equipment.

<sup>53</sup> Witz et al., “Epistemological Restlessness”, 17.

<sup>54</sup> David Cohen: “I do not mistake uncertainty as a subordinant element of the objectivity question...

Uncertainty operates along a different axis. Uncertainty draws attention to the unfinished status of knowledge. Uncertainty bears both powers and poetics. Uncertainty signals a distance from closure in the construction of the historical record. And, not inconsequentially, yet often without notice, uncertainty is itself constitutive of social and political life and, also, historical knowledge, historical understanding.

Uncertainty underlines the importance of justice as process, and not simply as closure.” David Cohen, “The Uncertainty of Africa in an Age of Certainty,” in *Responsibility in Crisis: Knowledge Politics and Global Publics*, ed. David William Cohen and Michael D Kennedy (Ann Arbor: Scholarly Publishing Office, 2005), 28-9.

The Museum is three turns and a few hundred metres off the N2, the major highway that links Cape Town with the other major coastal cities of South Africa, all the way through the Eastern Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal to the Eswatini border and the inland towns of Piet Retief and Ermelo, over 2000km away. When people move between the Eastern Cape and Cape Town, between rural homes and urban homes, on the recurring semi-seasonal migrations that are the theme of this museum, it is often this road they travel on.

These recurring migrations are in part a legacy of the fact that Lwandle was from the start a place that existed on sufferance. It is one of the many ghosts of apartheid's failure that continue to haunt the present. Its genesis lies in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century attempts to create and sustain racial purity, which first of all meant working hard to establish and maintain racial categories as "natural".<sup>55</sup> The Population Registration Act of 1950 provided that "Every person whose name is included in the register shall be classified by the Director as a white person, a coloured<sup>56</sup> person or a native"<sup>57</sup> (these categories later expanded to include "Indian", while "native" became "bantú").

In 1955 the Secretary of Native Affairs, Dr WWM Eiselen, formally announced the western part of the Cape Province as a Coloured Labour Preference Area, declaring: "Briefly and concisely put, our Native policy regarding the Western Province aims at the ultimate elimination of Natives from this region".<sup>58</sup> The area was demarcated by the "Eiselen line" drawn around the borders of magisterial districts, and twice moved to expand the area eastwards.

55 "Colonialism's defensive reaction is to attempt to stabilise categories that are under threat. One way in which this is manifested is to harness the powerful metaphors of purity and contamination." Woodward et al.

"Deep HiStories, xl. See also Deborah Posel, "What's in a Name? Racial Categorisations under Apartheid and Their Afterlife," *Transformation* 47 (2001).

56 The uniquely South African meaning of "coloured" is a reference to people of mixed descent "including Khoisan, African slave, Malay, Chinese, white and other descent." (*Dictionary of South African English*, s.v. "coloured" accessed October 25, 2019, <https://dsae.co.za/entry/coloured/e01740>). There are of course entire volumes, even libraries, behind this; but it will do for now to avoid confusion with other usages of the word, particularly in North America.

57 Union of South Africa, Population Registration Act No 30 (1950), Section 5(10).

58 Cited in Ilse Eigelaar-Meets, "Internal Migration in Post-Apartheid South Africa: The Cases of the Western and Northern Cape" (PhD Thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2018), 140.



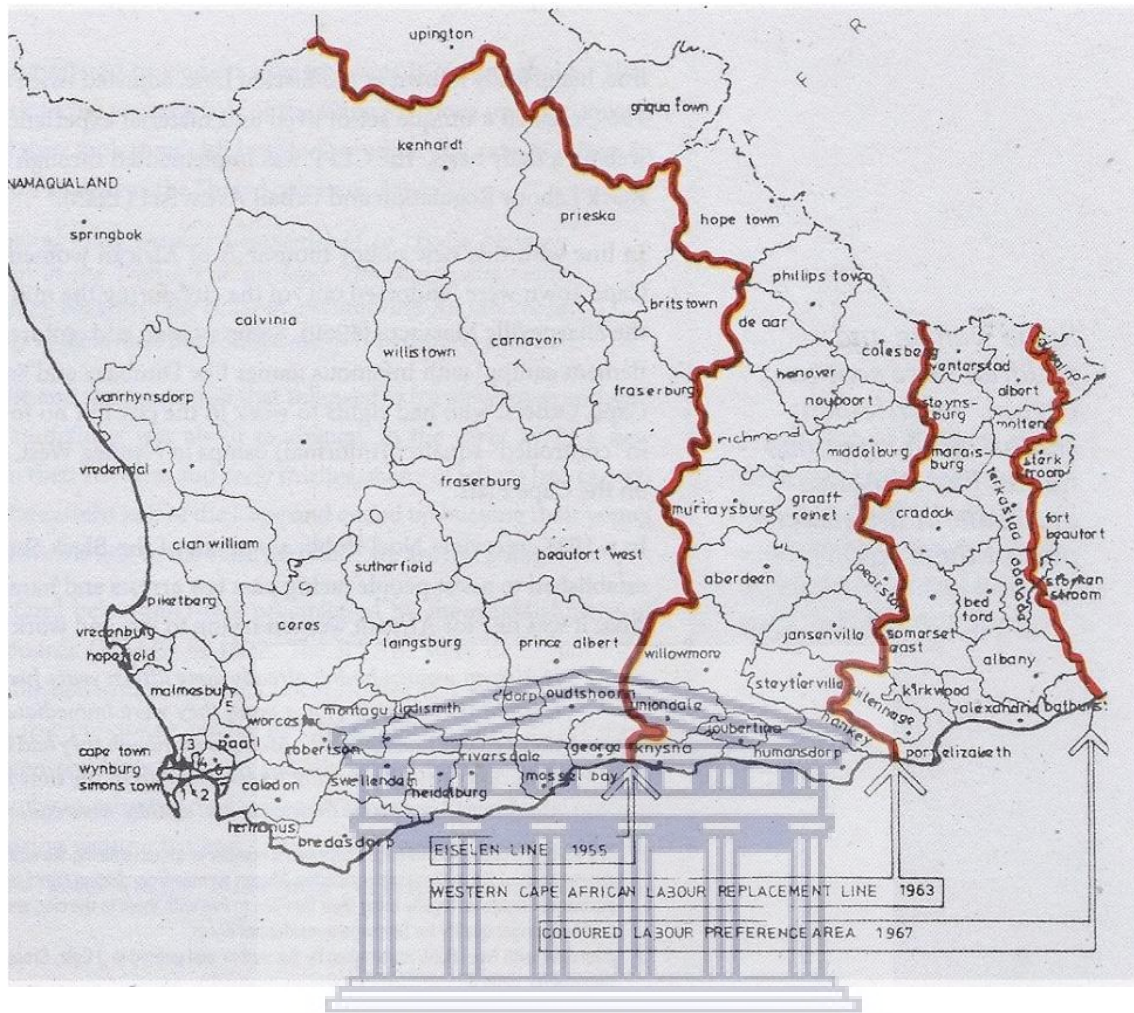


Figure 1.5: The Eiselen line.<sup>59</sup>

Within the area defined by the Eiselen line jobs were to be reserved first and foremost, of course, for those designated “white”; next for those designated “coloured”; and finally, if there was really no alternative, for those designated “native”. The movements of “natives” were to be rigidly controlled and their presence would be tolerated west of the Eiselen line only on the understanding that it was strictly temporary and purely for the purpose of providing labour.<sup>60</sup> Homes and families must be elsewhere, and no housing for black families would be built. As late as the mid-1980s, it could be reported in the present tense that, despite harsh enforcement of the law, “the result of this is the presence of large numbers of black

59 Josette Cole, *Behind and beyond the Eiselen line*. (Cape Town: St George’s Cathedral Crypt Memory and Witness Centre, 2012), cited in Eigelaar-Meets, above, 142.

60 See Noëleen Murray and Leslie Witz, “Camp Lwandle: Rehabilitating a Migrant Labour Hostel at the Seaside,” *Social Dynamics* 39, no. 1 (2013): 51–74 and Leslie Witz, “Revisualising Township Tourism in the Western Cape: The Migrant Labour Museum and the Re-Construction of Lwandle,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 29, no. 4 (2011): 371–88.

people who live and work illegally in the urban and industrial areas,”<sup>61</sup> and that this entailed “living in squatter camps which are liable to be bulldozed by the authorities.”<sup>62</sup>

The policy had begun, in fact, to fail even before it was launched. Agricultural and industrial employers around Somerset West relied on “native” labour and in the absence of formal housing many labourers lived on the properties of their employers. There was a continuing need for more labour, however, so in response to private sector pressure the Lwandle hostel barracks were built on expropriated former farmland in January 1958.<sup>63</sup> The Lwandle hostels were kept carefully isolated and out of sight of both Somerset West and Strand and separated from the N2 by one of the “buffer zones” which were a feature of apartheid urban planning.<sup>64</sup> The maps below, of Lwandle in 1960, 1990, and 2010, show the stubborn persistence of this buffer zone even as Lwandle has grown. It is now contiguous with the much newer township of Nomzamo.



61 Martin West, “From Pass Courts to Deportation: Changing Patterns of Influx Control in Cape Town,” *African Affairs* 81, no. 325 (1982): 465.

62 Anthony Lemon, “State Control over the Labor Market in South Africa,” *International Political Science Review* 5, no. 2 (1984): 194. See also A.J. Christopher, *The Atlas of Changing South Africa*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2001), 121.

63 Bongani Mgiijima and Vusi Buthelezi, “Mapping Museum-Community Relations in Lwandle,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32, no. 4 (2006): 798.

64 Although Lwandle was at the same time laid out to be easily subject to surveillance: “The visual paradox of the Lwandle hostels was that they were created to be unseen, as if they did not exist, and so eminently observable that there was no way that any sense of privacy could be achieved. These features combined to create complete alienation and ‘disaccommodation’.” Witz, “Revisualising Township Tourism”, 375.



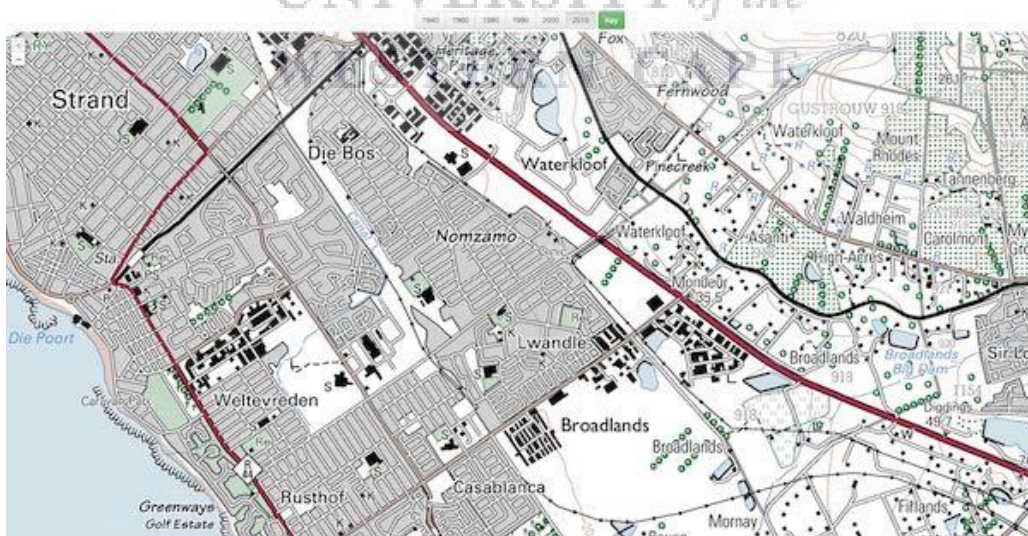
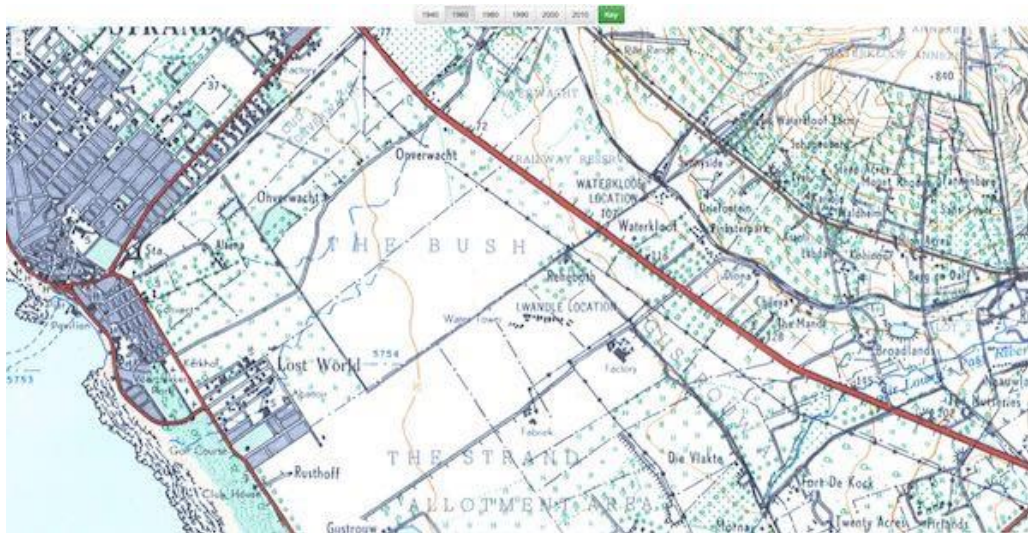


Figure 1.6: The growth of Lwandle since 1960s

65 Maps from Openstreetmap.org, based on information from the Chief Directorate: National Geospatial

The hostels, it is worth repeating, were for men only. Women and children were supposed to stay behind in the bantustans or “homelands” of the Transkei and Ciskei, in what is now part of the Eastern Cape, to be rejoined by their husbands and fathers at the holidays and when their labour was no longer needed. Lwandle was not intended to be anyone’s home. Yet women and children arrived and remained, unofficially and precariously, always at risk of being rounded up and sent back to the Eastern Cape until influx control regulations were relaxed in 1986. The resultant overcrowding led to calls to demolish Lwandle entirely and relocate its residents to some unspecified (but presumably even less visible) elsewhere.<sup>66</sup> Residents successfully blocked this, however, with the support of local businesses,<sup>67</sup> and by 2000 there were approximately 40,000 people living there.<sup>68</sup> In the 1990s, when Lwandle was officially declared a township and plans were announced to convert the hostels to family housing, a group of residents began campaigning for one of them to be preserved as a museum, which opened in 2000. The museum now consists of a converted community hall housing offices and exhibits and a reconstructed hostel, which can be visited as part of a guided tour by museum staff.

I will discuss the Museum itself in more detail in Chapter 2. For now, it may be worth noting that just across the N2 from Lwandle and Nomzamo is a campus belonging to a private for-profit school group that started in South Africa and has since expanded internationally. The company’s chairman and CEO previously worked in a private equity firm and the education director taught for 16 years at Eton.<sup>69</sup> The school, Reddam House, has large grounds (visible through a tall electrified security fence) which remained well-watered all the way through Cape Town’s catastrophic drought of 2017-2018. In Lwandle, where the Museum’s scabby patch of grass is one of very few that survives in the beach-sand soil of the Cape Flats, this new school was mentioned to me on one of my very first visits, with the comment that its sports grounds, tennis courts and indoor aquatic centre were not available to the residents of Lwandle. This includes pupils at Solomon Qatyana Primary School and Nomzamo High School, both on the other side of the N2 from Reddam House, easily within a

Information. <https://htonl.dev.openstreetmap.org/50k-ct/#15/-34.1170/18.8636/c2010>  
<sup>66</sup> Noëleen Murray and Leslie Witz, *Hostels, Homes, Museum: Memorialising Migrant Labour Pasts in Lwandle, South Africa*. (Claremont: UCT Press, 2014), 95.

<sup>67</sup> Mgijima and Buthelezi, “Mapping Museum-community relations”, 798.

<sup>68</sup> Murray and Witz, *Hostels, Homes, Museum*, 1.

<sup>69</sup> “Management Team.” n.d. <http://Reddamhouse.Com/Management-Team/>. Accessed November 7, 2018. <http://reddamhouse.com/management-team/>.



short walk. Nomzamo High School consists entirely of prefab classrooms in a dusty field; Solomon Qatyana's single building is also supplemented by prefab classrooms.

This moment has stayed with me for its evocation of how Lwandle remains marginal to and buffered from the surrounding towns, which are largely white and in some places very wealthy. It is also marginal to the circulations of public and political discourse, surfacing into view only where there are incidents of violence or unrest, notably xenophobic attacks on migrants from other African countries or occupations of vacant land.<sup>70</sup> This comment from a researcher who was part of a long-term project involving Delft, a much larger township about halfway between Lwandle and Cape Town, applies equally well to Lwandle:

These experiences of marginalization are invisibilised in the broad systems of political inclusion and exclusion as places like Delft are either missing or presented in a highly distorted way in public discourse.<sup>71</sup>

Getting by in Lwandle involves a constant struggle, and so our digital storytelling workshops struggled in various ways as well. Digital storytelling sits within a constellation of technologies and other resources that includes, but is not limited to, recorded voice, printed and digital photographs, image scanning, video editing software, mobile phones, data networks, desktop computers, iPads, facilitation techniques, the internet in general and YouTube in particular, WhatsApp, and so on. All of this would have been easily available and accessible at Reddam House. In Lwandle, however, it is much less so, and Lwandle's position in the constellation or ecosystem that supports digital storytelling is precarious at best. This will be a dominant theme of Chapter 3 in particular.

### **Facilitation: Who benefits?**

The final shaping force of this thesis was my own position as simultaneously organiser, facilitator and researcher of the workshops at Lwandle. I have so far avoided giving any kind of definition of "facilitation" and will continue to resist doing so, because the vagueness of the word points to how easily it can be adapted or appropriated into different contexts, sometimes in the service of concealing difficulty. But for the purposes of this discussion I will adopt a working description of a facilitator as someone who works with a group of adults

<sup>70</sup> See for example the web page on which a national news service collates its stories about Lwandle: "Topic: Lwandle." Eyewitness News. Accessed November 9, 2019. <https://ewn.co.za/Topic/Lwandle>.

<sup>71</sup> Joanna Wheeler, "Troubling Transformation: Storytelling and Political Subjectivities in Cape Town, South Africa." *Critical African Studies* 10, no. 3 (2018): 336.

to help them learn something new, achieve a goal, resolve a problem or decide on a course of action. The context might be a company, a development project, an arts practice, a learning institution or just about anywhere groups need to get things done. There is considerable slippage between “facilitation” and “adult learning”, between “facilitation” and “conflict resolution” and even between “facilitation” and “management”. A masterful facilitator, one who can guide a group of people to profound learning by applying the subtlest of nudges, is a joy to experience. An inept facilitator, on the other hand, might be boring, bullying, embarrassing, chaotic, aggressive, manipulative or just ineffective.

There may, in fact, be a contradiction at the heart of facilitation practices. Chris Hughes notes that “almost all adult educators appear to be committed to quite strong ethical principles involving unqualified respect for persons and their autonomy. Indeed, these values are almost constitutive of significant accounts of the discipline,”<sup>72</sup> but also that “the major accounts of facilitation either just assume that there is no conflict of interest between the facilitator and the learner, or they ignore the issue altogether.”<sup>73</sup>

The International Association of Facilitators, for example, has this statement in its Code of Ethics:

*We are in service to our clients, using our group facilitation competencies to add value to their work. Our clients include the groups we facilitate and those who contract with us on their behalf. We work closely with our clients to understand their expectations so that we provide the appropriate service, and that the group produces the desired outcomes. It is our responsibility to ensure that we are competent to handle the intervention. If the group decides it needs to go in a direction other than that originally intended by either the group or its representatives, our role is to help the group move forward, reconciling the original intent with the emergent direction.*<sup>74</sup>

The assumption here is that interests are always transparent and reconcilable, and that a way forward is always possible. This makes it difficult to properly imagine, and thus to deal with, possibilities that include subtle or overt coercion, concealed agendas, genuinely irreconcilable differences or even active malignity. Yet Hughes points out that employees are always, to some extent, subject to the coercive control of their employers no matter how idealistically this relationship is framed. It is possible, then, for facilitation to produce the appearance of

<sup>72</sup> Chris Hughes, “Facilitation in Context: Challenging Some Basic Principles,” *Studies in Continuing Education* 21, no. 1 (1999): 28.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>74</sup> International Association of Facilitators, “Statement of Values & Code of Ethics.” IAFWorld, 2004. <https://www.iaf-world.org/site/professional/iaf-code-of-ethics>.

emergent harmony when in fact there is nothing of the sort. Nor are employment relationships the only ones that can become coercive—it is a possibility any time there is an inequality of access to power or resources, as between donors and those they fund<sup>75</sup> and researchers and those they research (more on this below).

Hughes was writing in 1999, but there is still little or no formal discussion of what happens to facilitation when there are conflicting interests at play. It is an essentially optimistic practice that, like some of the caring professions, attracts idealists—but the naive do not survive. There are many informal conversations at gatherings or in closed Facebook groups (the equivalent of “corridor talk”<sup>76</sup>) about what is usually called “managing client expectations” and the compromises that must be struck between service to the paying client and service to those whose voices the client claims (often quite sincerely) to want to hear. Veteran facilitators tend to be rather sober and hard-headed idealists.

How does this bear on my own work as a digital storytelling facilitator in Lwandle? As I noted above, I was in an anomalous position. In Lwandle, I had to drive the project from the start and rely on the interest and goodwill of potential participants. In all the previous digital storytelling work I had done, I had either been commissioned by a client who had a specific brief to fill, or I had offered a public workshop which any interested person could pay for and attend.

The latter is the easiest case because it represents a clear exchange of value. When an adult chooses to pay for a service to be delivered—in this case to be assisted to make a digital story—they are implicitly agreeing that this is a valuable use of their time and money. They will have expectations about how the service will benefit them, and are likely to feel entitled to insist that these expectations are met. When the service entails learning a new skill, there is an additional twist, because the teacher-learner relationship has its own power dynamics—as a learner I put myself to some extent in the hands of my teacher, trusting that they will guide me through ignorance and confusion to some position of greater knowledge and understanding. At best, these parallel relationships of client:service provider and

75 See for example Wendy Harcourt, “Editorial: The Politics of Funding,” *Development* 49, no. 2 (June 2006): 1–3. See also Jillian Reilly, *Shame: Confessions of an Aid Worker in Africa* (Moonshine Media, 2012) for a compelling account of the subtle coercions the author was blind to as the American director of an organisation dispensing US donor funds in Zimbabwe.

76 Paul Rabinow, “Representations Are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-Modernity in Anthropology.” In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (University of California Press, 1986), 234–61.

teacher:learner balance each other out, so that the teacher's expertise is sought out, acknowledged and deferred to, but cannot become dominant.

When I have been hired by an organisation and the participants in the workshop are distinct from the client, things have been murkier. As the facilitator I must manage the dance of balancing interests and expectations between those who are participating in the process and those who are paying for it—in the knowledge that there is almost certainly more going on than I am aware of, and that the sphere of my influence is limited. This dance between facilitators, clients and participants may be one of the reasons digital storytelling is so improvisational and mutable: “Digital storytelling is a contextually embedded practice. In different settings, with different populations of participants, the practice and genre can take on different forms. Its potential for good is not always, or always easily, achieved.”<sup>77</sup>

At Lwandle, I found myself treading ground that was new to me. I approached the museum effectively asking for a favour—I needed access to their space, relationships and other resources to achieve the entirely personal goal of doing the research for this thesis. In return, I could offer the service of a digital storytelling workshop for museum staff if they wanted it, and likewise for community members who might be interested. From the start, therefore, my power as a relatively well-resourced outsider and as an urban, middle-class white South African was undercut and complicated by my reliance on the generosity and goodwill of my hosts at the museum.

At the same time, I was acutely aware of the potential for exploitation, both in the act of asking for stories and in the research relationship. My reflective notes after a workshop commissioned by a large international funder in 2015 asked: “When is story harvesting exploitative? We take their stories and give back... what?” Six months later: “What I ASK of people—to share their stories with me. What do I GIVE people?” I returned often to a poem by American artist Alok Vaid-Menon about their experience doing research with transgender sex workers in Cape Town:

One.

Dear Cym: In America I am learning how to think that I am better than you.

In fact, I am majoring in you. Don't worry, they don't use your name, keep it confidential.

Two.

<sup>77</sup> Lisa Dush, “The Ethical Complexities of Sponsored Digital Storytelling,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 16, no. 6 (2012): 627–40.



I am turning your body into a new theory  
Don't worry they will pay me to use you,  
I will cut you some of the profit in my acknowledgements.<sup>78</sup>

These concerns are not new, of course, but they have no satisfactory resolution.

Anthropologist Christopher Colvin notes ruefully that his lengthy preparation for doing fieldwork in South Africa, wrestling in graduate seminars with “the ethics of ‘voice’ and the symbolic violence that ethnographic representations always seemed to entail” had nevertheless left him “unprepared... for the very concrete, precise and mundane discussions of the benefits of research I encountered.”<sup>79</sup> Arriving in South Africa in 2000 in the aftermath of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to work with a support group for the survivors of torture, he was aware that they had begun to weary of being researched. He did not, however, anticipate the extent to which their stories had become “not only objectified—seen as a stable ‘thing’ that members ‘had’—but commodified as well.”<sup>80</sup> The debates he encountered were not about the subtleties of epistemic violence but about how much, exactly, these stories were worth in monetary terms.

Many discussions about the issue of whether, how much and on what terms to pay research participants seem to mask a certain deep queasiness under brisk practicality and a focus on the procedures of ethics committees. The problem is framed largely as one of coercion or undue influence, as if the financial elements of a person’s decision to participate in a research project somehow invalidate that decision in a way other motivations do not. The UK’s Economic & Social Research Council notes blandly that “there is no clear guidance or consensus on this important topic” and recommends researchers follow a five-point checklist starting with “develop guidelines for when and how payment is made”.<sup>81</sup> At UWC, ethics committee members are mandated simply to “review the amount and method of payment to participants to ensure that neither presents a problem of undue influence for the study participants.”<sup>82</sup> South Africa’s National Health Research Ethics Council proposes a framework for paying participants in clinical research trials that even offers a neat three-letter

78 Alok Vaid-Menon, “Gender Studies.” May 13, 2013. <https://www.alokvmenon.com/blog/2013/5/13/gender-studies>.

79 Christopher J. Colvin, “Who Benefits from Research? Ethical Dilemmas in Compensation in Anthropology and Public Health.” In *Ethical Quandaries in Social Research*, ed. Deborah Posel and Fiona C Ross (HSRC Press, 2014), 57–58.

80 Colvin, “Who Benefits?,” 60.

81 Economic & Social Research Council, “Compensation, Rewards or Incentives?” *The Research Ethics Guidebook*, 2012. <http://www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk/Compensation-rewards-or-incentives-89>.

82 UWC Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee. “Terms of Reference and Standard Operating Procedures,” n.d. Section 5.

acronym: “the proposed payment approach is payment for Time, Inconvenience and Expenses (TIE).”<sup>83</sup>

The vagueness that lies just beneath the surface of these recommendations is striking. As Lynn Meskell and Peter Pels note in their argument against relying too heavily on ethical codes, “the framework provided by the ‘proxy’ of documents disembods ethical guidelines from practice.”<sup>84</sup> The messy business of actually negotiating benefits and rewards is left, again, to be worked out in practice and to be discussed in informal exchanges and corridor talk. Colvin notes that while there is a great deal of work, across many disciplines, on how to protect research participants from harm, “there is much less thinking about what it might mean... to *benefit* from research.”<sup>85</sup> One gets the distinct impression of people holding their noses to deal with something necessary but nevertheless vulgar and deeply unpleasant:

Such payments are generally frowned upon in anthropological circles because they ostensibly hamper the quality of data, undermine ‘proper rapport’ and make it hard for others to conduct research. As one of my professors once remarked, ‘Researchers pay where they don’t have relationships’.<sup>86</sup>

Again, the assumption here is that money is somehow external (or even detrimental) to “real” relationship, rather than just one of many things to be negotiated in any relationship<sup>87</sup>.

I was not in a position to pay my participants, but I was clear that I wanted to offer an exchange of benefits that felt real, even as I understood that “the benefits of research are always complex, contested and uncertain”<sup>88</sup> and that “knowledge production is (always) stealing”.<sup>89</sup> I trusted that the digital storytelling workshops would prove valuable to the

83 National Health Research Ethics Council. “Payment of Trial Participants in South Africa: Ethical Considerations for Research Ethics Committees,” 2012, 5

84 Lynn Meskell and Peter Pels, “Introduction,” In *Embedding Ethics*, ed. Lynn Meskell and Peter Pels (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), 20.

85 Colvin, “Who Benefits?”, 62 (my italics).

86 Ilana Van Wyk, “The Ethics of Dislike in the Field.” In Posel and Ross, *Ethical Quandaries in Social Research*, 208. Note by comparison Paul Rabinow’s insight that “one of the most common tactics of an elite group is to refuse to discuss—to label as vulgar or uninteresting—issues that are uncomfortable for them” (Rabinow, “Representations are social facts,” 253).

87 Marjorie Shostak’s account of her complex relationship with her !Kung San friend and collaborator named only as Nisa is a particularly moving and thoughtful exploration of these negotiations: Marjorie Shostak, “‘What the Wind Won’t Take Away’: The Genesis of Nisa—the Life and Words of a !Kung Woman.” In *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (Routledge, 2003), 402–13.

88 Colvin, “Who Benefits?”, 74

89 Jigna Desai, Danielle Bouchard, and Diane Detournay, “Disavowed Legacies and Honorable Thievery: The Work of the ‘Transnational’ in Feminist and LGBTQ Studies.” In *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*, ed. Amanda Lock Swarr and Richa Nagar (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 60.

participants, and prepared myself to have frank conversations about money, benefit and value.

## **Protection from harm**

Beyond concerns about who benefits from the processes of facilitation and research, there is also the ethical concern about protection from harm. In the case of storytelling, the potential consequences for people's lives are complex and subtle. Some of these might include: experiencing post-traumatic flashbacks as a result of telling one's own story or hearing the story of another; revealing personal information like medical history, sexuality, financial circumstances or family background that might, if it becomes public, result in harm or changed circumstances; revealing information about a non-participant that might result in harm to them or change their circumstances; changing the nature of relationships or creating new ones; coming to new understandings about one's personal character or history; seeing one's community, family or other group in a new way; acquiring new skills and developing expectations about what might be done with those skills; and exposing, creating, exacerbating or resolving conflict within a group.

Some of these consequences are harmful, some are beneficial and some are ambiguous. In many cases, because human lives and relationships are complex, it might be difficult or even impossible to identify a clear link between a storytelling process as cause and something else as effect. I have found it helpful in this context to borrow from systems theory a distinction between systems which are complicated, and those which are complex. In complicated systems causes and effect relationships are knowable, even if not obvious. In complex systems, on the other hand, these relationships can be perceived only retrospectively, do not repeat and cannot be predicted. Instead of clear cause-effect relationships, there are patterns:

Once a pattern has stabilized, its path appears logical, but it is only one of many that could have stabilized, each of which also would have appeared logical in retrospect. Patterns may indeed repeat for a time in this space, but we cannot be sure that they will continue to repeat, because the underlying sources of the patterns are not open to inspection (and observation of the system may itself disrupt the patterns).<sup>90</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Cynthia Kurtz and David Snowden, "The New Dynamics of Strategy: Sense-Making in a Complex and Complicated World." *IBM Systems Journal* 42, no. 3 (2003), 469. See also Roberto Poli, "A Note on the Difference Between Complicated and Complex Social Systems." *Cadmus* 2, no. 1 (2013): 142–47.

In digital storytelling there are patterns which repeat, and which enable a sensitivity to potential consequences like the ones I listed above. For example, if a workshop explicitly invites or is likely to include stories of violence, then post-traumatic stress responses may be triggered and preparations should be made to deal with these. But such preparations can never be complete. Triggered responses are not inevitable, and it is not possible to know in advance which stories may trigger which responses in which people. Such stories may surface unexpectedly even when they are not asked for, or fail to surface when they are expected. In such situations an ethical checklist has limited usefulness. What is required is an ability to recognise the emerging pattern and to respond to it as appropriately and flexibly as possible—to dance with it.<sup>91</sup>

Beyond the internal processes of the workshop, there are also questions around the completed digital stories themselves, and the forms of consent participants give for these stories to be shared. I have, in general, attempted to engage with the participants in my workshops on the basis of StoryCenter guidelines for good practice, which emphasise that “ethics must be viewed as a process, rather than as a one-off occasion of ‘gaining consent’.”<sup>92</sup> This is particularly important in digital storytelling processes because it is not reasonable to ask participants at the outset of the process, before they have made digital stories, whether or not they are happy for those stories to be made public.

Accordingly, I asked participants for signed consent both at the start of the research, before workshops began, and again at the end of the workshop, before stories were screened. The consent forms distinguished clearly between consent to participate in the research project, and consent to share stories in different forums. At the end of the project, five participants who had completed digital stories gave permission for their stories to be made widely available via YouTube. The remaining five gave limited permission for their stories to be used for this thesis and in more limited screenings.

I also attempted to strike a balance between maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of those participants who wanted it, and honouring the desires of those who wished to be publicly acknowledged as the authors of their stories and contributors to my work. The people whose stories are the bedrock of this thesis are all adults who are not in any

<sup>91</sup> I have long thought of facilitation as a dance, but the notion is not of course peculiar to me—Poli above mentions, but does not cite, US environmental scientist and systems thinker Donella Meadows. The posthumously published article “Dancing with systems” is at <http://donellameadows.org/archives/dancing-with-systems/>.

<sup>92</sup> StoryCenter, ‘Ethical Practice’, 2015. <http://www.storycenter.org/s/Ethics.pdf/>. The full Storyteller’s Bill of Rights is reproduced in Appendix B.

position of special vulnerability relative to their peers, and I have chosen to respect their own decisions, made after extended conversations, about whether to be named or not. So some participants are referred to by their real names; others chose their own pseudonyms; and some asked me to choose pseudonyms for them. In the case of participants who started the project but were not able to finish it and could not be contacted afterwards, I created pseudonyms as well. These are noted in the text as they are introduced. I also shared with each storyteller the sections of this work that discuss them and their stories.

Finally, while compliance with formal ethical guidelines may be not be a sufficient condition for ethical practice, it remains necessary: Ethical clearance for this research was granted by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape under registration number HS/17/3/19.

### **The ecosystem of digital storytelling**

Throughout this thesis I use the biological term *ecosystem* to make sense of the complex environment of digital storytelling. It can be a troublesome metaphor, however, so at this point I would like to draw out some of its implications, and establish what I do and do not mean when I use it.

The coining of the term “ecosystem” is widely credited to British biologist AG Tansley, who proposed it to resolve a debate over how best to characterise interrelated plant communities. The idea has traditionally been associated with the idea of equilibrium and stability, although Tansley recognised from the start that “the equilibrium attained is however never quite perfect... the ecosystems are extremely vulnerable, both on account of their own unstable components and because they are very liable to invasion by the components of other systems.”<sup>93</sup> Later generations of ecologists have modified or abandoned this assumption of equilibrium, to the extent that a contemporary textbook notes that “most ecosystems exhibit unbalanced inputs and losses; their dynamics are influenced by varying external and internal factors; they exhibit no single stable equilibrium; disturbance is a natural component of their dynamics; and human activities exert a pervasive influence.”<sup>94</sup> A proposed contemporary definition of ecosystem is “a unit comprising a community (or communities) of organisms

93 AG Tansley, “The Use and Abuse of Vegetational Concepts and Terms,” *Ecology* 16, no. 3 (1935): 301.

94 F. Stuart Chapin, Pamela A. Matson, and Peter M. Vitousek, *Principles of Terrestrial Ecosystem Ecology*, 2nd ed. (Springer: 2012), 7.



and their physical and chemical environment, at any scale, desirably specified, in which there are continuous fluxes of matter and energy in an interactive open system.”<sup>95</sup>

The words I wish to draw attention to here are *vulnerable, unstable, unbalanced, dynamics, fluxes, interactive* and *open*. An ecosystem is not a clearly bounded independent whole, but an interacting and interdependent assemblage of entities and energy flows with permeable boundaries, within which stability is sometimes achieved but always temporary. This understanding is also reflected in the more recent adoption of ecosystem as a metaphor in discussions of information technology and economic development, where “digital ecosystems” invoke ideas of networks, interdependence and openness.<sup>96</sup>

I am using the metaphor of ecosystem, then, to evoke not equilibrium and harmony but (especially in the era of the Anthropocene, climate crisis and mass extinction) instability and vulnerability. I intend to show that to the extent digital storytelling happens within an ecosystem, it is a particularly fragile and contingent one which becomes more so the further away one travels from the contexts of its origin.

Entering Lwandle, I was simultaneously a digital storytelling facilitator with an optimistic belief in the value of my practice, a visitor seeking hospitality and a conflicted researcher venturing into disciplinary waters that were new to me. All of this shaped my work in ways I will draw out throughout the following chapters.

This project was begun with the hope of producing stories that would speak directly to the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum’s core topic of migrant labour, but that is not what happened. The Lwandle elders who are the custodians of these older stories decided, for whatever reasons, that participation in this project did not interest them. Perhaps they felt that since their stories had already been told, and are written out, pictured and displayed in the museum already, that there was no need to go into it all again. In any case, who showed up was firstly the museum staff, and secondly young people from Lwandle (these categories overlap). The result was a set of stories that speak in far subtler ways to the enduring legacies

95 A.J. Willis, “The Ecosystem: An Evolving Concept Viewed Historically”, *Functional Ecology* 11, no. 2 (1997): 270.

96 See for example Francesco Nachira, Paolo Dini, and Andrea Nicolai, *A Network of Digital Business Ecosystems for Europe: Roots, Processes and Perspectives* (European Commission Introductory Paper 106: 2007), especially p. 5.

of the migrant labour system, in particular how it continues to shape homes and families today.

In the end I conducted two workshops in Lwandle, one over a period of several months in 2017 with museum staff, and another with a group of community members over a shorter period in early 2018. A selection of stories was screened as part of an event at the museum on May 28th 2018. Altogether, ten participants completed digital stories, and another three told stories and wrote scripts but were unable for various reasons to complete videos. These stories—the videos, images, working project files and scripts—are the major material on which this thesis is based. Additional material includes my own notes and reflective interviews with participants who completed their stories.

In Chapter 2, I explore the ecosystem of this digital storytelling project in Lwandle in more detail, specifically by examining the intersecting histories of the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, myself as the facilitator, and digital storytelling more broadly, including its links to distinct but related /neighbouring (eco)systems such as journalism and documentary filmmaking.

Chapter 3 continues to elaborate the idea of digital storytelling as ecosystem by considering how people and objects, including technologies, are recruited and assembled. I argue that Lwandle's marginal status highlights the extent to which this ecosystem is fragile and contingent, especially at its boundaries.

Chapter 4 examines the production of stories in detail, from the story circle through processes of scripting and recording. In Chapter 5, using the crafted stories as well as reflective interviews with participants and my own field notes, I reflect on how my own role as facilitator intersected with participants' own desires to produce these stories in particular ways.

Chapter 6 approaches the digital stories as visual productions, considering the strategies participants deploy to create visual narratives of their lives from the margins—and, again, how my interventions as facilitator shaped this production.

Finally, I conclude by arguing that conceiving of digital storytelling as an ecosystem can open up new and fruitful approaches to working in the margins. I also suggest that using a framework of compassionate witnessing enables living with reasonable hope amid the realities of postcolonial and post-apartheid tragedy.

## 2. Location

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At my first visit to the Museum in 2018, one of last year's storytellers is not there; she has found a new job and moved away. "They all seem proud of her and slightly envious," I write in my notes, adding this quote: "I grew up in the township, now I'm working in the township. I don't want to stay in the township."

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Digital storytelling, I argued above, takes place within an ecosystem which is fragile, contingent, and must be assembled anew for every workshop. The components of this ecosystem include physical objects and spaces, humans, and also the webs of ideas, practices and information which make this an ecosystem suitable for digital storytelling as opposed to, say, documentary filmmaking or the production of a museum exhibition. In this chapter and the next I will examine the salient components of the ecosystem that was assembled to produce digital stories at the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum. More specifically, I will focus on what might be called the background or environmental factors which shaped the workshop and the stories that came out of it. These begin with the Museum, which was envisaged and built as a place of storytelling and which evoked particular kinds of stories. Then there is that which I brought with me as the instigator, facilitator and sustaining force of the workshop, my particular history and position at the time I came into Lwandle. Finally, there are the practices and associations of digital storytelling itself, including its relationships to journalism, documentary filmmaking, visual and participatory research methods and pedagogy. I have already written above about the fuzziness around digital storytelling which makes it so difficult to talk about, and I will attempt to unpack some of that uncertainty here. The intention is not to draw any clear boundaries and declare that *here* a thing is digital storytelling and *here* it is not, but rather to explore how ideas about media production, storytelling, research and participation rub up against and influence each other in sometimes unpredictable ways. Working inside open boundaries, it turns out, means constant questioning: what kind of a thing am I doing here? Where is its heart and centre? If I improvise or adopt practices from neighbouring domains, how much can I change and how far away can I travel before I sever the last thread connecting me to that heart? Do I still want to be here, or somewhere else? Questions like these, even if not always clearly articulated, constitute a great deal of the dance of facilitation.

## The Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum

Officially, there are two parts to the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum: the old community hall which houses the reception, kitchen, offices and exhibitions; and Hostel 33, which preserves and reconstructs the experiences of migrant workers and their families living in Lwandle from its founding right through the 1980s. Hostel 33 can be experienced only as part of a guided tour by museum staff and I visited it only once, on my very first visit as part of a museum studies class in 2016.

The old community hall building is fenced off from the street, with a small parking area in front. Across the road is a taxi rank, just outside the gate is a small canteen serving takeaway food, and the Lwandle Library is just behind the hall. As one approaches the building from the small parking area in front, one sees double wooden doors below a brickwork detail echoing the peak of the roof. This was the original main entrance to the building, but the doors now open onto the kitchen; the main entrance is around the side of the building to the right. The doors are often left open on hot days and the kitchen is a gathering place, so there can be a small moment of hesitation as one approaches: where is the ‘real’ entrance? There is a certain intimacy involved in entering a space through the kitchen, so I usually used the official entrance, but not always.



*Figure 2.1: The main building of the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum*

Entering through the main door, there is a small reception desk immediately to the right, with the manager’s office behind it. To the left is a small exhibition of garments, photographs and



interviews called *Lwandle Designers/Abavelisi Benginqi yaseLwandle*.<sup>97</sup> Immediately in front is a large display panel with maps and photographs of Lwandle as it has developed over two decades.



*Figure 2.2: Whites only*

Stepping further into the hall, one passes under a “whites only” sign salvaged from the nearby beach in 1990. Lwandle literally means “by the sea”, so this is a stark and heavy reminder of the segregated isolation to which Lwandle was confined for much of its history. To the left, behind the entrance panel, is the *Stories of Home/Iimbali zeKhaya* exhibition, featuring extracts from oral histories of long-term hostel residents along with large-format photographs and a collection of domestic artefacts like buckets, braziers, kettles, radios, and suitcases.

<sup>97</sup> For a detailed history of the development of the exhibitions mentioned below, see Chapters 4 and 5 in Murray and Witz, *Hostels, Homes, Museum*.



The exhibition reflects one of the primary intentions of the museum's founders, which was that it should be a place of storytelling:

Bongani Mgijima wanted the envisaged museum in Lwandle to move beyond objects and for the primary modus operandi to be the gathering of stories... He pleaded that 'for history's sake people's testimonies have to be collected and recorded.'<sup>98</sup>

The stories reflect a deep ambivalence and ambiguity about "home" which is the legacy of generations of enforced migration. Against the apartheid state's insistence that black South Africans should never make permanent homes west of the Eiselen Line, that they should never be at home in Cape Town, some people made homes anyway. The story by long-time resident Siboniwe Tyeku declares:

In fact since 1975 I used to come here on weekends. Lwandle is home to me... this could be a better place. It is situated amongst such rich areas with a beautiful landscape.

I will be buried here. We built this place as a home. People need to be buried here. Some people have houses and children here, but they still want to be taken back home. Maybe they have not realised what a home is. A home is a place where you stay with the entire family, that is home.

On another panel Minenkulu Molo also declares: "I will be buried here because I am known here and I made everything here."

These stories are accompanied by pictures of Lwandle, and portraits of the storytellers in or outside their Lwandle homes. Other pictures, showing rural scenes from the Eastern Cape, accompany more ambiguous stories that point to a link between home and land.

Nozolile Cynthia Nontobeko Galada's story declares:

As a person that grew up on the farms, and who is married to [a] man from the Transkei, I like the Transkei. We go there every holiday to spend some time there. My home is in Qunu. We have a house there. When we go away and come back we sometimes find that the crops have been damaged and we have to start afresh. There is no time to cultivate the fields because we are not there. There is actually a lot that we miss there even though we think we are gaining by being here in Lwandle.

And yet on the adjacent panel she continues:

I can also say that my home is here in Lwandle, because I serve my life here. I came here in 1985 when my parents were trying to force me to

<sup>98</sup> Murray and Witz, *Hostels Homes Museum*, 118.

marry an older man, whom I did not know. I escaped from my home and came to Cape Town... In 1988-89 I moved in with [my husband]. We have four children. I named my first-born Nomakhaya, meaning “home”.

*iMuyuziyam Yamagoduka*, “the museum of the ones who go home”, has produced a remarkably complex picture of home. Home is where family is, a place to return to, a place to escape from, a place to raise children, a place to raise crops, a place to be buried, a place that you make against the odds. It is important to note, however, that this production is not spontaneous: it is the outcome of a long and intentional process of mediations, selections and translations, starting with the collection of oral histories by museum researchers who were interested precisely in concepts of home. As Murray and Witz note:

Much of the work on oral history has dealt with issues of performance, memory, orality and literate forms in the constitution of interviews and their multiple reinscriptions as audio, visual and textual narratives... All these mediations counter any sense of a readily available, pure, authentic ‘voice’ that can be recovered and easily slotted in as evidence of experience or as sociological data.<sup>99</sup>

In the case of Lwandle, the chain of mediations is striking: Museum researchers conducted oral history interviews with residents in isiXhosa, then transcribed these interviews to be translated into English by professional translators. The exhibition design team used these English transcripts to craft succinct and coherent narratives suitable for display, and they were translated back into isiXhosa. Some of the passages then became too long to fit the exhibition boards, so the English version was cut and then retranslated.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Murray and Witz, *Hostels Homes Museum*, 120.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-7.

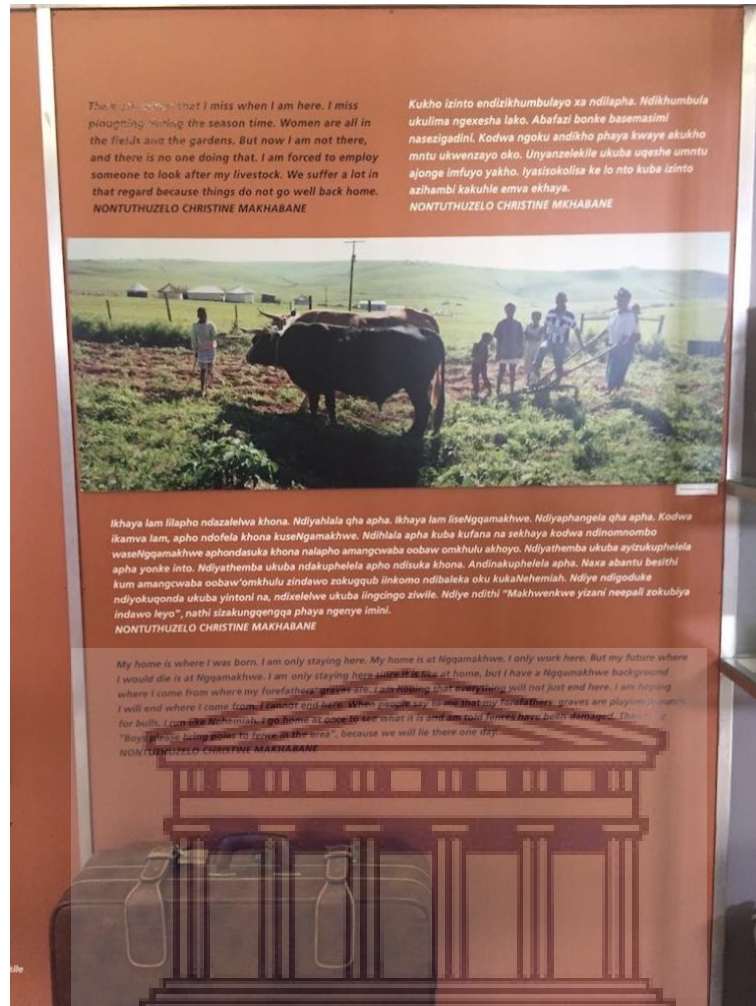


Figure 2.3: A panel from the Stories of Home/Imbali zeKhaya exhibition

The stories of home in this exhibition, then, are far from spontaneous. They have been extensively and skilfully crafted by a team that extends far beyond the original storytellers. This does not, however, necessarily make them inauthentic or untrue. I would suggest that they point to what Meskell and Pels call “significant truths”:

Archaeologists [and by extension historians?] should redefine their goal as a search not for a transcendent truth opposed to local or particular interests but for *significant* truths about materials and sites in an open-ended negotiation.<sup>101</sup>

The idea that there are significant but not transcendent truths leaves open the possibility of other truths—and the further possibility that some of these other truths might have been crowded out by the shaping force of the museum’s own priorities, “so that, in effect the same

101 Meskell and Pels, *Embedding Ethics*, 7.

series of stories were repeated again and again, the plot remaining the same and only the characters changing.”<sup>102</sup> There may be another force at work, however. Perhaps one of the most enduringly significant and tragic truths of apartheid was its effect of flattening and constricting the lives that came under its rule, so that people were offered a very limited choice of stories to live. Any narrative of heroic struggle and ultimate victory over apartheid must deal with the enduring facts of the lives that it crushed and stunted. In the words of David Scott, arguing for a tragic rather than a romantic attitude towards what comes after colonialism:

Tragedy has a more respectful attitude to the contingencies of the past in the present, to the uncanny ways in which its remains come back to usurp our hopes and subvert our ambitions... The colonial past may never let go. This is a hard truth<sup>103</sup>.

The longer I spent in Lwandle, the more palpably I felt this sense of the tragedy of foreclosed possibilities, which is already implicit in *Stories of Home* and other exhibitions of the museum.

On the far wall of the museum from the entrance is a wall-mounted exhibition of words and photographs tracing some of the more general history of migrant labour in South Africa, as well as the struggle of Lwandle’s residents to establish this place as a home. To the left is the kitchen which is visible from the front of the building; to the right is a stage which is used for performances and to stage exhibitions. Halfway through my work at Lwandle the exhibition *Siyanyanzela/We are doing it by force* was installed on the walls around the stage. This commemorates the eviction in winter 2014 of 849 people from land they had illegally occupied on a road reserve along the N2 near Lwandle. All the homes they had built were demolished. The exhibition is dominated by a photograph commissioned from UWC postdoctoral fellow Aubrey Graham: it was taken from the top of an earthwork that, together with an adjacent electric fence-topped concrete wall, separates Lwandle from a more affluent neighbouring suburb. Here is another moment of the present being haunted by the remains of the past.

<sup>102</sup> Murray and Witz, *Hostels Homes Museum*, 127.

<sup>103</sup> David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004), 220.





Figure 2.4: *The Siyanyanzela exhibition*. Photograph by Aubrey Graham.

In front of the stage are two lines of construction workers' wheelbarrows, part of an artwork called *Workmen's Compensation II* by Gavin Young<sup>104</sup>. The wheelbarrows contain objects—boots, enamelled tin plates and mugs, passbooks, letters—that the artist says he collected originally from migrant workers who were employed by Afrox and living in hostels at Langa and Gugulethu. *Workmen's Compensation I*, made in 1981 for an exhibition sponsored by Afrox (and never repeated), was lost after being exhibited in Paris. Version II was recreated and expanded to ten wheelbarrows for another exhibition in Paris, and then donated to the Museum.<sup>105</sup> The objects in the wheelbarrows seem curiously unmoored from real lives: in a museum largely devoted to storytelling, they have been stripped of all stories. There are photographs in the old passbooks and some names can be dimly read, but of the lives behind these passbooks we can know nothing.

104 In the museum, the exhibit is actually labelled *Migrant Workers II*; I have used the artist's original name.

105 Gavin Young, "Prosthesis: Catalogue for an Exhibition of Art Works by Gavin Young—the Decade 1997-2007," (La Noire Galerie, 2007) <https://www.academia.edu/961530/Prosthesis>; and also Sue Williamson, *Resistance Art in South Africa* (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2004), 66.





Figure 2.5: Detail from *Workmen's Compensation II*

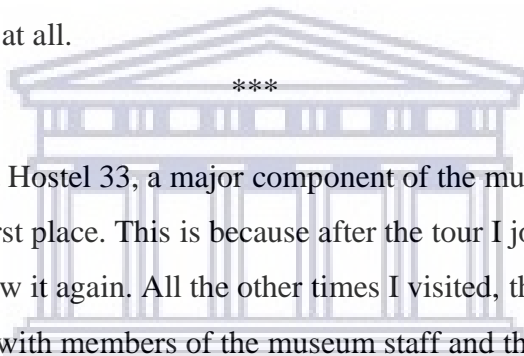
A similar anonymity characterises the neighbouring exhibit, situated on the wall to the right as one turns back towards the museum entrance. This is a selection of images from David Goldblatt's 1984 photo essay *The Transported of KwaNdebele*, again donated by the artist. The photographs of men and women snatching sleep on a crowded bus during their four-hour daily commute have become famous as a depiction of apartheid's inhumanity; and yet, the process of documenting injustice has become somewhat inhuman itself, stripping those photographed of their names and histories, reducing them to emblems of stoic suffering.

There is one last exhibit to mention: right at the back of the museum, in a corner behind the Designers of Lwandle where they are easily overlooked, are sixteen framed paintings and drawings made by Lwandle residents during a series of facilitated workshops that were part of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation-sponsored *Memory, Arts and Culture* project. This months-long project, which included oral history gathering, storytelling, dance,

photography, screenprinting and sewing, was an optimistic one of “bringing the forgotten margins to the centre”:

The Memory, Arts and Culture Project fosters the sharing of personal truths through the medium of the creative and performing arts. In this way, the histories are not simply observed from an outsider’s perspective, but internalized, ‘claimed’ and honoured by each creative process. Everyone can, through these projects, become part of the process of understanding, respecting and healing.<sup>106</sup>

Yet these sixteen paintings are the only remaining trace of the project. Of a later community photography project that was intended, among other things, to “start the process of making ‘sustainable careers’ for the local participants as photographers,”<sup>107</sup> there is no trace at all. Where did all the other work go? It is possible that in a place like Lwandle, cut off from the circuits of money, influence and energy that sustain creative output in more privileged places, such work can go nowhere at all.



I have said very little about Hostel 33, a major component of the museum and its reason for coming into being in the first place. This is because after the tour I joined on my very first visit to Lwandle, I never saw it again. All the other times I visited, through the months of making digital stories first with members of the museum staff and then with others, I was scarcely conscious of the hostel.

In fact, I was scarcely conscious of the rest of Lwandle. For several months I did not leave the confines of the hall and the car park. When I did, it was to visit the canteen just outside the gate to buy food with and for participants in the community workshop; to help two participants record video for their stories; and once to drive a participant to an ATM so that I could draw cash to help her repair the broken screen of her cellphone.<sup>108</sup> It’s true that the hall is where the work was, but there were other occasions when it might have made sense for me to venture further afield. For example, when some members of my first group of storytellers had trouble finding photographs, I could have accompanied them on a photo walk of Lwandle, instead of sending them out to take photographs on their own. Yet I found

106 Institute for Justice and Reconciliation and Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, *A Community on the Move: Belonging and Migrancy in the Cape* (2008), 2-3. <https://www.ijr.org.za/portfolio-items/a-community-on-the-move/>.

107 Murray and Witz, *Hostels Homes Museum*, 110.

108 I had some misgivings that this might be crossing a boundary but quickly decided otherwise: this same participant would not have eaten that morning if it had not been for the food provided as part of the workshop.

myself reluctant to step outside the cocoon of the hall, largely because I felt conspicuous, like an outsider or a stranger who might not be welcome, or who might be perceived as a tourist. It was only much later that it occurred to me that my reticence might have been perceived as fear, arrogance or an unwillingness to engage. Race is deeply implicated here: it was my whiteness that made me conspicuous in Lwandle, where white people seldom go except as tourists, researchers, dispensers of charity or to fetch and drop off manual labourers. What, after all, is there for them? (I will discuss this in more detail in the next section).

Inside the hall, the everyday routines I experienced had curiously little to do with the exhibits and subject matter of the museum itself. Much of the work I witnessed (incidentally, since this was not what I was there to study) had to do with planning and attending community events. The hall was used by a community theatre group, there were regular events for school children and youth, and the museum itself hosted exhibition launches and commemorative events on national holidays and other days of interest. When something big was happening, most of the staff congregated in the kitchen to help prepare food. There was a steady trickle of people coming to use the photocopy facilities, groups of foreign students passed through on their own seasonal migrations, and very occasionally a tour group came to visit the hostel. Daily activities clustered around the kitchen, the reception desk and the oversized sofa in the corner where much of our digital storytelling work happened. This was the setting for the workshops.

### **My own positionality**

“Knowledge is never ‘point-of-viewless’,”<sup>109</sup> says Jerome Bruner, so where was I in all of this? I’m an English-speaking South African, classified white under apartheid, who came of age in its dying days, in the deep madness of the late 1980s and early 1990s. At that time, when there was a clear enemy, I positioned myself dutifully on what appeared to be the right side of history: I joined the anti-apartheid National Union of South African Students and the End Conscription Campaign and took part in many, many hours of committee meetings, workshops about non-racialism and march planning meetings. We were all deeply earnest. On the day the ANC was unbanned in 1990, I was in a meeting of the Grahamstown Cultural Workers Committee when I was called out to take a phone call from a friend in Johannesburg telling me the news. My comrades (we all used the word quite unselfconsciously by then) scoffed when I told them; we all thought at first it was a practical joke.

109 Jerome Bruner, “The Narrative Construction of Reality.” *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (1991): 2.

Two decades later, there was a growing feeling that South Africa had failed to come to terms with the legacies of apartheid and with race in particular. In 2010 philosopher Samantha Vice suggested shame as an appropriate moral stance for white South Africans:

There is nothing about one's particular self that makes one deserve special treatment and that ease of moving about the world that comes with being white. When one discovers that one is, after all, such a person, however unavoidably, and insofar as one is morally aware and rational, one can only feel shame.<sup>110</sup>

Acknowledging that this shame is inescapable—that we cannot change history or our position in it—she asks what it takes to live appropriately with this shame, and suggests that we consider inner-directed action to be just as valuable as outer-directed political action:

To be morally successful, a certain restraint on our parts is required, which I now suggest we think about in terms of humility and silence... So, recognizing their damaging presence, whites would try, in a significantly different way to the normal workings of whiteness, to make themselves invisible and unheard, concentrating rather on those damaged selves... One would live as quietly and decently as possible, refraining from airing one's view on the political situation in the public realm, realizing that it is not one's place to offer diagnoses and analyses, that blacks must be left to remake the country in their own way. Whites have too long had influence and a public voice; now they should in humility step back from expressing their thoughts or managing others.<sup>111</sup>

This suggestion was widely rejected as anti-democratic, as reifying apartheid racial categories and even as patronising to black South Africans.<sup>112</sup> My own first reaction was deep discomfort at the idea that I should actively choose a form of silence that I was already beginning to feel was being imposed upon me. I sensed that any kind of public speech I might utter would be read only through the narrow lens of my whiteness. Yet I have come increasingly to believe that Vice may have been right. Given our history it is exceedingly difficult for white South Africans, certainly of my generation, to take any kind of public political platform without re-enacting relations of dominance. The silence that follows is

110 Samantha Vice, "How Do I Live in This Strange Place?" *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41, no. 3 (2010): 329.

111 Vice, "How do I live in this strange place?", 335

112 See for example Pierre de Vos, "Taking Risks, Taking Responsibility: On Whiteness and Full Citizenship under the South African Constitution." *Constitutionally Speaking*, 2012.

<https://constitutionallyspeaking.co.za/pierre-de-vos-taking-risks-taking-responsibility-on-whiteness-and-full-citizenship-under-the-south-african-constitution>; and also Desné Masie, "South Africa: How I Live in That Strange Place," *African Arguments*, 2011. <https://africanarguments.org/2011/11/10/south-africa-how-i-live-in-that-strange-place-by-desne-masie/>. For a supportive reading, see Eusebius McKaiser, "Confronting Whiteness." *Mail & Guardian*, July 1, 2011. <https://mg.co.za/article/2011-07-01-confronting-whiteness>.



complex, containing not just humility but also despair, resignation and a certain grief that the original sin of apartheid can never be redeemed; there is no innocence to be had. In conversations with friends and acquaintances in the years that followed,<sup>113</sup> I spoke of feeling that we were in a sense orphans of colonialism, the stranded flotsam of apartheid's failed project. The descendants of settlers, we were now un-settled and deeply anxious about where we belonged.

This sense of displacement reached a peak in 2015 and 2016, with the upheavals of the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student protests. I submitted my initial application as the first wave of #FeesMustFall protests hit South African campuses in late 2015. The position of white people was made uncompromisingly clear:

We support the White Privilege Project and encourage white students to engage with that. They can contribute through conscientising their own community on campus. We also welcome their participation in radical action as a sign of solidarity, so long as that participation takes place on our terms.<sup>114</sup>

As my research unfolded, so did the trajectory of this new protest movement, which wanted little to do with its predecessors.<sup>115</sup> It was a final blow to any sense my generation still clung to that we were on the right side of history. We had known Nelson Mandela, for example, as a political prisoner and freedom fighter before we knew him as president and politician. The new generation of students, by contrast, had only ever known him as an old man who appeared to be at the mercy of corporate interests. The Mandela we had hailed as a hero was branded a sell-out. The language of non-racialism, a staple of the ANC through the 1980s and 1990s, had gradually disappeared through the first decade of the twenty-first century; now it was supplanted by a deeply racialised and highly emotive public discourse. At a symposium on storytelling hosted by the District Six Museum in 2017, I sat at the back of the hall in

113 I owe a particular debt to Daniela Gachago, who has never ceased to challenge me. See Daniela Gachago, "Lessons on Humility: White Women's Racial Allyship in Academia." In *Feminism and Intersectionality in Academia*, ed. Stephanie Anne Shelton, Jill Ewing Flynn, and Tanetha Jamay Grosland, 131–44. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

114 Rhodes Must Fall, "UCT Rhodes Must Fall Mission Statement," In *The Johannesburg Salon Volume Nine*, ed. Rhodes Must Fall (The Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism, 2015), 6. [www.jwtc.org.za/resources/docs/salon-volume-9/FINAL\\_FINAL\\_Vol9\\_Book.pdf](http://www.jwtc.org.za/resources/docs/salon-volume-9/FINAL_FINAL_Vol9_Book.pdf).

115 For useful overviews see Sisonke Msimang, "End of the Rainbow," *Overland* 223, no. Winter (2016). <https://overland.org.au/previous-issues/issue-223/feature-sisonke-msimang>; and "Shutdown—on the Death of Compromise in South Africa." *Africa is a country*, 2016. <https://africasacountry.com/2016/10/shutdown-on-the-death-of-compromise-in-south-africa>. See also Eve Fairbanks, "Why South African Students Have Turned on Their Parents' Generation." *The Guardian*, November 18<sup>th</sup> 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/nov/18/why-south-african-students-have-turned-on-their-parents-generation>.



silence with a friend as a group of protestors chanted “one settler, one bullet”. I had not been on the receiving end of that chant before. From that position, I discovered, it is much harder to explain the slogan away as an abstract “response to the historical question of colonialism”<sup>116</sup> or only applying to white people who were “part of the establishment”.<sup>117</sup> It felt very clear that “to call white people ‘settlers’ is to deny their right to lay claim to any kind of South African-ness.”<sup>118</sup>

I came into digital storytelling, and into this research project, believing that I was both committed to the project of decentering power, and skilful at doing so. I did not believe I had any significant blind spots<sup>119</sup>. What the fallist movement did, with all its associated conversations about privilege and complicity, was to cast me into deep doubt not only about my own good faith, but about how much any of my intentions and actions mattered. Initial exhilaration that South Africa’s stagnant politics might be shifting faded over time into apathy, despair, and conviction of my own irrelevance. As a member of the generation that had supposedly been in charge since 1994, I experienced the deeply uncomfortable realisation that I was, from the perspective of some in the new generation, one of the bad guys. I felt simultaneously “in the wrong” and powerless to change anything for the better.

Unknown to me at the time, performance artist Tossie van Tonder undertook a once-off, unadvertised performance in Lwandle in late 2016, grappling with the same issues:

South Africa felt like it was slamming down and building a city a day. Politics was becoming very complex, tight, illuminating, perplexing, dangerous, healing. Students protested fees, libraries were burnt down... I went to a play reading of young dramatists with a plot depicting the new leader in her hubristic plan to execute the young white woman as sacrifice for all blood already let in the colonial project...

There is an unspeakable cry, unposturable stance, an impressible guilt to be had by White people for being the reason that everything is wrong, a fact that can not be refuted... It is not imaginable for me to exist with some degree of mental stability and purpose with all these streams of embattlements through my being.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>116</sup> Black First Land First, “BLF Just Defeated Dr Makhosi Khoza’s ADeC,” May 3, 2019. <https://blf.org.za/tag/one-settler/>.

<sup>117</sup> Dictionary of South African English, s.v. “settler”, <https://dsae.co.za/entry/settler/e06399>

<sup>118</sup> Grant Farred, “Bulletproof Settlers: The Politics of Offense in the New South Africa.” In *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, edited by Mike Hill (New York University Press, 1997), 72.

<sup>119</sup> Hindsight points at this and laughs.

<sup>120</sup> Tossie Van Tonder, “Lwandle,” 2016.

<http://www.theimageofyourperfection.co.za/archive/index2.php?p=42>.



*Figure 2.6: Tossie van Tonder performs at Lwandle. Picture by Guy de Lancey.*

This is relevant because, when I travelled the N2 to Lwandle to facilitate digital storytelling workshops, it all travelled with me. Sharing stories, especially across the divides of age, race, class, location and language that separated me from my co-creators in Lwandle, is a whole-person activity, encompassing mind, body, emotions and soul. If one of the goals is to forge human connections, then one succeeds only to the extent that one shows up, baggage and all. At the same time, the stories I intended to highlight were not my own: my role was to facilitate the stories of others. This is one of the balancing acts one must attempt in facilitation: to bring one's whole self to the process, while at the same time staying out of the centre of attention.<sup>121</sup> So while my personal story rarely surfaced explicitly during the workshops, it nevertheless shaped many of my actions and thus, very likely, the stories that were produced. I cannot claim that I was always conscious of this shaping; as Gillian Rose points out, complete self-knowledge is not possible and so there are limits to the illuminating power of the self-reflexive gaze.<sup>122</sup> Nevertheless, as an actor in this drama/network rather

<sup>121</sup> Whether this is actually a good idea or not is a question that I am only beginning to ask at the end of the project.

<sup>122</sup> Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Methods* (SAGE Publications, 2001), 131.

than any kind of wannabe-impartial observer, it is useful to bear in mind what I brought with me into the space of Lwandle.

## Homelessness

“Where are you from? Aphi amaXhosa akho?” I never know how to answer that question.<sup>123</sup>

One more element of my own life story turns out to be relevant: like Phulula Sidlayi, I am never quite sure how to answer the question “Where are you from?”. I have lived in Cape Town since 1992, with a couple of years away, but I am not “from” here; if I am “from” anywhere, it is the succession of mining towns across what are now the provinces of Gauteng, Free State, North West and the Northern Cape where I spent my childhood and adolescence. The concept of “home” for me is complicated—and the same goes for the Lwandle residents who participated in my workshops. As the work unfolded, so too did themes of movement, rootedness, home and family that mirrored, highlighted or contrasted with my own history in sometimes surprising ways. What “home” means turns out to be a central concern for all of us, as it is a central concern for the museum, which turned out to shape our stories in ways I did not anticipate.

It is perhaps no coincidence that digital storytelling itself is troubled by a certain homelessness (although it is far from rootless). Digital storytelling is both method and practice. As a method, within the university it belongs (or doesn't) anywhere people use it; as a practice, it doesn't easily belong anywhere. Its frequent use as a tool for student engagement or alternative to conventional essays and research projects is often associated with an institutional base in a centre for teaching and learning, or for digital pedagogy, or e-learning. But this is far from being its only application, and so one of the persistent features in my experience of digital storytelling has been that it is unusually difficult to talk about: one spends at least as much time explaining what it is not as describing what it is. The next section takes this problem of being hard to talk about as the starting point for an exploration of digital storytelling's complex and unstable roots, connections, commitments and trajectories.

<sup>123</sup> Phulula Sidlayi, *AmaXhosa Am*. Digital story, 2018.

## Why is it so hard to talk about digital storytelling?

At its broadest “digital storytelling” encompasses any kind of storytelling that uses digital tools: filmmaking, virtual reality programming and the building of game worlds, variously ambitious kinds of multimedia reportage and journalism, “brand storytelling” and Kardashian Instagram feeds, all the way through literacy apps for primary school learners.

Within this scrappy universe nests the very specific kind of workshop-based digital storytelling I outlined in the introduction, which is associated with the global community of practice loosely based on the work of StoryCenter. I suggested that this affiliation is part of the definition of the kind of digital storytelling I am talking about; another part is the workshop process itself. Talking about digital storytelling via this community of practice has the advantage of directing attention not to methods or outputs, but to a set of underlying principles which more or less unites its practitioners and which might be one candidate for the “heart and centre” I mentioned above. Borrowing loosely from Lambert,<sup>124</sup> these organising principles might be expressed as a set of commitments to:

1. The value and significance of the life stories, and by extension the lives and life experiences, of “ordinary” people. (The founders of Brazil’s Museu da Pessoa/Museum of the Person put it this way: “Stories matter. All stories matter, because all people matter.”<sup>125</sup>)
2. Listening as a creative act.
3. Allowing stories to emerge as they need to, without imposing particular formulas, structures or styles.
4. Respecting the storytelling expertise of those who are not recognised as “artists” or “creative professionals”.
5. The ability of humans to appropriate and make creative use of available digital media technology even when it is inadequate, poorly designed or in constant flux.

For those who are not part of this community of practice, who inhabit other sectors of the universe of stories and ways to tell stories, these principles may be irrelevant, and in some cases appear antithetical to “good” storytelling. In the following sections I will discuss the

<sup>124</sup> Joe Lambert, “Where It All Started: The Center for Digital Storytelling in California.” In Hartley and McWilliam, *Story Circle*, 79-90.

<sup>125</sup> Carol Misorelli and Karen Worcman, “People, Stories and Museums: Museu Da Pessoa, Sao Paolo, Brazil.” Presentation at International Digital Storytelling Festival, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, 2016.

ways in which digital storytelling overlaps with multimedia storytelling, visual and participatory research methods, and educational technology, to identify the boundary zones more clearly. First, however, because valuing the lives and stories of ordinary people is so foundational to digital storytelling, I take a brief digression to address some of the complexities of the word “ordinary”.

### **A digression on the ordinary**

Often I become attached to certain simple words—*city, song, half, pocket, dead, ceiling, house, silence, wound, light*—words that call little attention to themselves, that have nothing antique about them, but that seem to trail a thousand centuries of stories behind them, arriving in a great dust cloud of possibilities.<sup>126</sup>

Talking about the ordinary, the everyday, the commonplace, the vernacular, and the amateur in English is troublesome. These are words that trail not so much a dust cloud of possibilities as a wagonload of value judgements. In English, to be an amateur is not just to do something for the love of it, without expectation of monetary reward, but to be “contemptibly inept”.<sup>127</sup> This is not a universal association. In French, for example, which shares the same Latin source word *amator* or lover, the pejorative meaning is less important than connotations of being an enthusiast, a connoisseur or a fan.<sup>128</sup> Conversely, “professional” in English means not just to do one’s work for remuneration but also to be “competent or skilled”. Our association between ability and monetary reward goes deep.

Similarly, “commonplace” suggests that which is so ordinary as to be unworthy of attention.<sup>129</sup> However, it also contains “common”—and it is towards commonality, community and shared experience that I wish to direct attention. The digital stories made for this project are for the most part about experiences which are very ordinary, shared by millions of South Africans if not by billions around the world. I want, however, to resist the tendency to assume that this makes them mediocre, shallow, banal or uninteresting.

126 Gregory Cowles, “Stray Questions for: Kevin Brockmeier.” *The New York Times*, November 13, 2009. <https://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/13/stray-questions-for-kevin-brockmeier/>.

127 Oxford Dictionary of English, Apple native version Version 2.3.0 (203.16.12).

128 See e.g. [https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/french-english/amateur](https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/french-english/amateur;); <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/french-english/amateur>; <https://www.linguee.com/english-french>. I am grateful to my friend Jeremy Meyer for first pointing this out to me.

129 “If these self-representations are by, and of, “ordinary people,” then the implication is that they must be interchangeable, and it does not matter which are looked at in detail; yet a sustained analysis highlights how these self-representations are each unique and so troubles the categorization ‘ordinary.’” Nancy Thumim, “Exploring Self-Representations in Wales and London: Tensions in the Text,” In Hartley and McWilliam, *Story Circle*, 216.



On the other hand, there is a celebratory invocation of ordinariness—often, as Nancy Thumim points out, in direct reaction to the pejorative—which values people and their experiences “precisely because they have been marginalised”.<sup>130</sup> “Ordinary” then becomes a euphemism for “poor” or “working class” or “black”, and people are reduced to “mere representative allegories”.<sup>131</sup> This tendency, which has underlain much South African (and global) work in social history, can amount to a naive romanticism, which I want equally to resist. I am no more, and no less, ordinary than the people whose stories I went to Lwandle to hear.

Thumim also flags the danger that using “ordinary” to claim commonality can amount to a denial of difference. This would be the case if, for example, I were to ignore the many ways in which South African life histories are shaped by race, class, gender, location, access to resources, and so on, and imagine that the ambivalences about home I share with some of my participants could somehow overcome or erase the other differences between us. At this point in South Africa’s history it would take a monumental effort of self-deception to achieve and maintain this belief, but such efforts do happen—so perhaps it is worth noting explicitly what might otherwise be taken for granted, that I am not making such an attempt.

I am aware that by invoking what is common and ordinary I am inviting the trailing company of centuries of judgements about whose lives, actions and experiences matter, and why they matter. I am also aware that my readers may occasionally find themselves tripped up either by their own internalised versions of these judgements, or (more likely) by objections to these judgements and thus to my characterisation of any experience as ordinary. I am flagging the possibility here because the links between ordinary/extraordinary, boring/interesting and amateur/professional turn up several times in the next section; it is not the last time it will come up.

## **Digital storytelling as multimedia storytelling**

As noted above, multimedia storytelling is a broad field that spans everything from narrative computer games and Disney films to emerging forms of citizen journalism. What, then, is the difference between all these forms of storytelling and the digital storytelling I am talking about?

130 Nancy Thumim, “Mediated Self-Representations: ‘Ordinary People’ in ‘Communities’” In *Returning to Communities: Theory, Culture and Political Practice of the Communal*, ed. Stefan Herbrechter and Michael Higgins (Amsterdam: Rodopi BV, 2006), 263.

131 Nicky Rousseau, “Popular history in South Africa in the 1980’s; the politics of production”, 1994 MA thesis cited in Minkley, Rassool and Witz, “Oral History in South Africa”, 36.

One early distinction to make is between fictional and non-fictional storytelling. The boundary between them is of course fuzzy—we know that all stories are constructed. The construction process renders non-fictional stories open to questions about truth, accuracy and authenticity, and these questions get more significant as the claims to truth, accuracy and authenticity become stronger. But to start with, a common-sense distinction is perhaps good enough: some kinds of multimedia storytelling explicitly claim to be fictional, and we are not concerned with those.<sup>132</sup> If we narrow the field to multimedia storytelling which claims or intends to be non-fictional, then the two largest plots in that field are journalism and documentary filmmaking.

### **Digital storytelling and journalism**

In drawing the line between digital storytelling and journalism, perhaps the most useful tool is the concept of “news”. Distinguishing news from not-news is one of the core skills of the journalist, one which many journalists internalise to the extent that it feels like instinct. Scholarly studies of news highlight characteristics like conflict, sensation, relevance, unusualness, importance and timeliness.<sup>133</sup> In general, what distinguishes a news story from any-old-story is a sense of extra-ordinariness: either something out of the ordinary must happen, whether good or bad (disasters, conflicts, murders, lottery wins, exceptional achievements, men biting dogs) or it must happen to people who are considered out of the ordinary (politicians, celebrities, sports stars, billionaires, warlords, dictators, criminals, those who are already known, those very different from the imagined audience) or both. The more it diverges from the everyday, the more newsworthy an event is. It also helps to be an event, rather than an unfolding process—the more clearly a thing happening in the world is boundaried in time and space, the more easily it can be packaged as news. News organisations will also favour stories to which they can lay some exclusive claim, and stories which are relatively easy and cheap to cover, like those arising from press conferences, court cases, speeches, summits and conventions.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>132</sup> For examples of “digital storytelling” which fall squarely into the category of fictional entertainment, see Carolyn Handler Miller, *Digital Storytelling: A Creator’s Guide to Interactive Entertainment* (Focal Press, 2004) and Shilo T. McClean, *Digital Storytelling: The Narrative Power of Visual Effects in Film* (MIT Press, 2007).

<sup>133</sup> Tony Harcup and Deirdre O’Neill, “What Is News?: News Values Revisited (Again).” *Journalism Studies* 18, no. 12 (2017): 1470–88.

<sup>134</sup> Herbert J Gans, *Deciding What’s News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*. 25th anniv. ed (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2004).

The traditional ethical commitments of journalism include accuracy, impartiality and concern for the wellbeing of sources and subjects, although this is often subordinate to the perceived importance of the story. The US-based Poynter Institute, for example, summarises its guiding principles as: “Seek truth and report it as accurately as possible. Act independently. Minimise harm.”<sup>135</sup> More recently there have been moves to develop an expanded ethics that considers issues of power, colonialism and neocolonialism and a sensitivity to cultural difference,<sup>136</sup> but the extent to which these have found purchase in actual newsrooms is unclear.

From the perspectives of news and ethical journalism, digital stories are suspect. Indeed, from the perspective of news digital stories are often not stories at all: an unknown person’s account of undergoing a common experience may be significant (if only to that person and their community), but it is seldom newsworthy. If a digital story ever did relate something newsworthy, it still could not stand on its own—or at any rate, not without straying into grey areas of journalistic ethics—without some independent verification of the facts. Single-source stories are acceptable as journalism only when the source is “authoritative”.<sup>137</sup>

Paradoxically, as Thumim points out, it is in distinguishing itself from journalism that digital storytelling locates its own claims to authority: “Emotional and experiential accounts are offered as trustworthy precisely *because* they do not claim to be objective”.<sup>138</sup> Where journalism attempts to offer a panoptic, exterior view of a story, digital storytelling tends to claim an insider’s perspective. When a workshop participant wants to tell a story about someone else, for example, facilitators are taught to guide them to a personal version with questions like “what makes this story your story?” The idea is to reflect on how a person or experience has changed one’s own life, not the world in general.

135 The Poynter Institute. n.d. “Ethics.” Accessed December 6, 2018. <https://www.poynter.org/channels/ethics>; see also Society of Professional Journalists. 2014. “SPJ Code of Ethics.” 2014. <https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>.

136 See for example Stephen JA Ward, “Global Journalism Ethics.” *Global Media Journal — Canadian Edition* 1, no. 1 (2008): 137–49; and Herman Wasserman, “Towards A Global Journalism Ethics Via Local Narratives: Southern African Perspectives.” *Journalism Studies* 12, no. 6 (2011): 791–803.

137 Clive McKeef, “The Essentials of Reuters Sourcing.” *Handbook of Journalism*, 2017. <http://handbook.reuters.com>; see also Alan Rusbridger, “The Guardian’s Post Hutton Guidelines for Journalists.” *The Guardian*, January 30, 2004.

138 Nancy Thumim, “Self-Representation in Museums: Therapy or Democracy?” *Critical Discourse Studies* 7, no. 4 (2010): 294.

## Digital stories as documentary

Multimedia journalism, then, is not the kind of digital storytelling we are talking about. Perhaps digital stories are closer to documentary film; but the relationship between digital story and documentary is troubled in some interesting ways, which perhaps help to explain why digital stories are rarely claimed as documentary, and rarely screened at documentary film festivals.<sup>139</sup>

The documentary theorist Bill Nichols proposes two ways of classifying documentary: according to the non-fiction models it borrows from other media, and according to the cinematic modes it employs.<sup>140</sup> Many documentary films, for example, borrow from the journalistic traditions of the investigation and the exposé. Others advocate or argue for a cause, or present a history. Documentaries may be travelogues, ethnographies, essays or testimonials, and many borrow from more than one of these non-fiction models.

Then there are multiple cinematic modes that documentary may employ: voiceover-driven exposition is the mode of many wildlife documentaries, while investigations and exposés often employ the modes of fly-on-the-wall observation or participation (through interview or provocation, for example). Poetic, reflexive and performative modes may also be used, in all of which the voice or perspective of the filmmaker may be foregrounded.

Using Nichols' classifications, digital stories can be seen as a species of short documentary. They are related to or borrow from the models of the testimonial, the first-person essay, the journal and the autobiography. Their cinematic modes, meanwhile, are primarily expository—the voiceover is an essential element—and poetic.

Crucially, digital stories, in common with documentary, attempt to represent “real life” in ways that lay claim to some kind of truthfulness—however fragmented, unstable, and point-of-viewful that truth may be. In Patricia Aufderheide's useful formulation:

Viewers expect not to be tricked and lied to. We expect to be told things about the real world, things that are true. We do not demand that these things be portrayed objectively, and they do not have to be the complete

<sup>139</sup> The work of filmmaker and digital storyteller Darcy Alexandra is one notable exception, but it is an exception. One initially promising search revealed a “digital storytelling” offshoot of the Sundance Film Festival which turned out to be treating it as an offshoot of digital marketing: “Digital Storytelling will shine a light on ways innovative marketers are leveraging content to raise their brand appeal.” James Cooper, “Sundance's First Digital Storytelling Conference Showcases the Best in Brand Videos.” *Adweek*, January 19, 2016. <https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/sundances-first-digital-storytelling-conference-showcases-best-brand-videos-169028/>.

<sup>140</sup> Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*. 2nd ed. (Indiana University Press, 2010).

truth... But we do expect that a documentary will be a fair and honest representation of somebody's experience of reality.<sup>141</sup>

Digital stories share this claim or intention not to be deliberately untruthful—although, as Ana Luisa Sanchez-Laws points out, the careful “attention to the contract between media maker and public in relation to truth or realism claims present in the final product that is so important in discussions about documentary filmmaking is not found”<sup>142</sup> in definitions of digital storytelling. Sanchez-Laws asks why the truth claims of amateurs should not be subject to the same scrutiny as those of professionals, and notes that digital stories, like autobiographical documentaries, call attention to the “uncertainties and equivocations” that are always present in accounts of the self.

The answer lies, I suggest, in the *scale* of the truth claims being made in digital stories, in the nature and size of the audience being addressed, and perhaps in the vulnerability of the storytellers. If the truth being claimed is entirely personal, and if the audience being addressed is limited to other participants in a workshop, to a family or to a local community—if there is no broader public being addressed—then perhaps a less rigorous standard of evidence is justified. Nevertheless, there is something useful being flagged here: a local audience is still an audience, and the content of a digital story may affect members of that audience in unpredictable ways. This is another reason digital story facilitators tend to encourage workshop participants to stick to the personal (this will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on elicitation).

This points to something unusual in the relationship of digital stories to audience, which I argue is one of the main ways digital stories are distinct from other kinds of documentary. The other is their approach to the visual. Both are related to the status of the digital storyteller as a once-off or at most occasional filmmaker: what is extra-ordinary about digital stories is often not their subject matter, but their makers and the fact of their being made at all. It is the event of production itself—the short, intensive small-group workshop—that is extra-ordinary.

To deal first with audience: as noted above, many digital stories will never be seen beyond the confines of the workshop and perhaps a local screening. This follows from one of the core promises the process makes to its participants, which is that their stories are, and

141 Patricia Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*, Vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3. See also Linda Williams, “Mirrors without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary.” *Film Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1993): 9–21.

142 Ana Luisa Sanchez-Laws, “Digital Storytelling as an Emerging Documentary Form.” *Seminar.Net. International Journal of Media, Technology & Lifelong Learning* 6, no. 3 (2010): 361.



remain, their own, and that they are the final decision makers about whether and how to share those stories. As a result many tellers decide to restrict the distribution of their stories, thus limiting the scope of their potential publics.

It may be useful at this point to distinguish between different kinds of “public” and “audience”. A single person can constitute an audience, as recent experiments in one-to-one theatre performances have shown,<sup>143</sup> but a single person cannot be a public. Michael Warner distinguishes three senses of “public”<sup>144</sup>: first, there is “the public”, or the people in general, a “kind of social totality” that includes everyone within a particular nation, city, or community. Then there are limited publics, like theatre audiences, “bounded by the event or by the shared physical space”. Finally, there are the open-ended publics that are brought into being and sustained “only in relation to texts and their circulation”. Warner suggests that these publics cannot be created by single texts. Rather, a public must exist as “an ongoing space of encounter for discourse” (fandoms would seem to be paradigmatic of this kind of public). So it is possible to be part of a text’s public without at the same time being part of its audience. I have not watched *Game of Thrones*, for example, but I have seen memes, read articles and participated in conversations about it, and I am familiar with key characters and plot moments, so I am part of its public.

Digital stories have audiences—but, I would argue, they do not necessarily have publics in Warner’s third sense, because in many cases they are not intended to be seen outside a small circle of family and friends. In these cases, there is no question of the kind of ongoing circulation and intertextual discourse that are constitutive of this kind of public.

This is not universal—many digital storytelling projects around the world go to considerable lengths to ensure that the results are seen as widely as possible, and external funders are likely to expect that the stories they fund will be available for use or distribution. This is especially true of stories that are linked to advocacy projects or that claim to be in some way “giving voice”. In the UK, for example, the Patient Voices project has an explicitly activist mission to use personal stories (including those of doctors, nurses and family members as well as patients) to change the National Health Service and “to put patients’ experiences firmly at the heart of healthcare”<sup>145</sup>. The digital stories produced in Patient

143 See for example DEURnis/Uzwalo, performed at the National Arts Festival in 2019. “Theatre for One Actor, One Audience Member at a Time.” National Arts Festival Programme, 2019.

<https://www.nationalartsfestival.co.za/ab-theatre/deurnis-naf2019/>.

144 Michael Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics.” *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 49–90.

145 Pip Hardy and Tony Sumner, “About Patient Voices.” Accessed November 4, 2019.  
<https://www.patientvoices.org.uk/who-we-are/about-patient-voices>.

Voices are used as educational materials in virtual learning environments, lecture theatres and conferences, as well as being circulated within the governance structures of the NHS.<sup>146</sup> *Undocumented in Ireland* and *Living in Direct Provision*, two collections of refugee stories produced in workshops by Darcy Alexandra, were shown to lawmakers and public forums on asylum policy and migrant rights, as well as at film festivals.<sup>147</sup> In South Africa, the NGO Sonke Gender Justice partnered with StoryCenter to produce digital stories that were used in training and advocacy programmes around HIV/Aids and gender-based violence.<sup>148</sup> In these and similar projects, the question of who is listening to the voices that are raised is important.<sup>149</sup> If, as Warner suggests, a text “must continue to circulate through time” if it is to have a public,<sup>150</sup> then the publics of such projects are fragile, unknowable and unpredictable. My citing of these projects here means I am part of a public in which they do, in fact, continue to circulate; but it is a public concerned with digital storytelling, not with health care or migrant rights or advocacy. To what extent this public resembles those that were originally imagined is an open question.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that screening beyond the small and evanescent group of the workshop itself is not a primary objective of every digital storytelling process. From the perspective of a documentary filmmaker, this is nonsensical. The first questions filmmakers ask about digital stories are remarkably consistent: “Where will you show this?” or “Who’s the audience?” What, they are asking, is the point of making a film that will never be widely seen? Such a thing would be a stillbirth, a failure.

There are two things going on here. First, to make a film typically requires a substantial investment of time, effort, and money. The returns on that investment come in the form of recognition and, when things go very well indeed, a return flow of money. The digital

146 See Pip Hardy and Tony Sumner, *Cultivating Compassion: How Digital Storytelling Is Transforming Healthcare*, 2nd ed (Palgrave MacMillan, 2018).

147 Darcy Alexandra, “Undocumented in Ireland: Our Stories.”

<https://www.darcyalexandra.com/practice/undocumented-in-ireland-our-stories/> and “Living in Direct Provision: 9 Stories.” <https://www.darcyalexandra.com/practice/living-in-direct-provision-9-stories/>. See also Darcy Alexandra, “Reconceptualising Digital Storytelling: Thinking Through Audiovisual Inquiry.” In *Digital Storytelling: Form and Content*, ed. Mark Dunford and Tricia Jenkins (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017), 167–82.

148 Sonke Gender Justice Network, *Responding to Violence and HIV/AIDS: Digital Stories from Southern Africa Facilitation Guide*, n.d. <https://genderjustice.org.za/publication/digital-stories-southern-africa/> and Silence Speaks, and Sonke Gender Justice Network. “The Sonke Gender Justice - Silence Speaks Digital Storytelling Project: Using Narrative and Participatory Media to Explore the Links between Gender, Violence and HIV and AIDS in South Africa,” n.d. <https://www.storycenter.org/case-studies/sonke>.

149 See for example Nick Couldry, “Rethinking the Politics of Voice.” *Continuum* 23 no.4 (2009): 579–82; Tanya Dreher, “A Partial Promise of Voice: Digital Storytelling and the Limits of Listening.” *Media International Australia* 142 (2012): 157–66; and Alexandra, “Are We Listening Yet?”

150 Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics,” 68.

storytelling workshop, compressed as it is into the space of a few days and frequently offered at no cost to participants, lowers the stakes: with less invested, there is less need to reap an external reward.<sup>151</sup>

Secondly, there is an assumption about what makes a story matter. There is something very Newtonian in this idea of mattering: to *matter* is to have substance, gravity, impact, momentum, weight, real existence. The bigger the impact (the louder the bang?), the more it matters. The size of the audience thus becomes a mark of importance, or significance—and if the audience is very small, then the story cannot matter at all.

What makes these concerns about audience slightly beside the point for digital storytelling is its quasi-therapeutic or self-expressive character. It is not that a digital story doesn't need an audience at all: just that the nature of the audience may be, from the perspective of documentary, peculiar. The motto of StoryCenter is "Listen Deeply, Tell Stories"—listening and witnessing are essential acts of recognition. A digital story composed in isolation and never witnessed by another human being would be as tragically stillborn a creature as the never-watched film. This is why there is always a group screening at the end of the workshop: the story circle must be closed, the products must be shared.

There is, as Thumim points out,<sup>152</sup> a tension between this therapeutic or self-expressive aspect of digital storytelling and a more overtly political version of self-representation as participation in democratic process. This is particularly the case when self-representation is invited by public or publicly funded institutions, which sharpens concerns about who may be listening.

But very often a digital storyteller has no particular external audience in mind, and perhaps not even an intent to share their story beyond the confines of the workshop group. It may be the case that the making of the story, the creative working through of an experience in a witnessed space, is its own reward. If meaning-making by the storyteller in relation to their peers in the workshop is what it is all about, then that goal can be achieved regardless of the size of the final audience. The process of witnessing and being witnessed is something quite different from what goes on in public discourse. I am drawing here on Kelly Oliver's notion of witnessing—both in the judicial sense of eyewitness testimony and the religious sense of

151 "A major obstacle to making films that look for the extraordinary in the ordinary has been corporate television's unwillingness to allow work expressing personal politics or beliefs—unless, of course, large viewing figures are assured." Michael Rabiger, *Directing the Documentary* (Focal Press, 2004), 94.

152 Nancy Thumim, "Self-Representation in Museums," 291–304; "Mediated Self-Representations"; and "Everyone Has a Story to Tell": Mediation and Self-Representation in Two UK Institutions." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 12 no.6 (2009): 617–38.

bearing witness “to something beyond recognition that can’t be seen”—as inherently relational and response-able.<sup>153</sup>

Apart from this relationship to audience, the second thing distinguishing digital stories from other documentaries is their relationship to the visual. Digital stories rely heavily, and often exclusively, on still images—on photographs or other images brought from home or made in workshops. This reflects not only the fact that most people’s archives, even today and especially in places like Lwandle, contain very few moving images,<sup>154</sup> but also the constraints of the workshop format. Working with video is technically and creatively more demanding than working with stills, and it is often not feasible to tackle it in a short workshop. Of course the use of stills in documentary is widespread, so this alone is not enough to draw a line between digital stories and other forms of documentary. What really makes the difference is that most digital stories have, by the standards of documentary, horrible production values. This is a consequence of, again, the short workshop format and the low visual and technical skills that most participants start with. The workshop facilitator may seek to help each participant push the limits of what is creatively possible within these constraints<sup>155</sup>—but the limits are there. So it is possible, if one ignores the process of production, to see a digital story as nothing but a short autobiographical documentary with low production values—and yet the process makes all the difference.

### **Digital stories as visual and participatory research method**

Digital storytelling has been widely adopted in university settings, in part for its value as a pedagogical tool (which will be discussed in the next section) and in part for its usefulness as a research method, specifically within the categories of visual methods and participatory methods.

The turn in the social sciences and humanities to the visual and the participatory (the two terms are not clearly differentiated and often conflated) is motivated by two sets of reasons. First, there is a belief that these methods generate rich and unique qualitative data<sup>156</sup>

153 Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 15-16.

154 Video files take up a lot more data storage space than photographs—and so to build a video archive, people need not only a camera capable of recording video but also the means to store it. My experience in Lwandle suggests that the former is a lot more available than the latter. This is one of the features of the materiality of digital storytelling I will discuss at greater length in chapters 3 and 5.

155 See Alexandra, “Reconceptualising Digital Storytelling,” for an account of a project which successfully produced high-quality digital stories by using a combination of an extended workshop and enlisting professional production support.

156 Luc Pauwels, “‘Participatory’ Visual Research Revisited: A Critical-Constructive Assessment of Epistemological, Methodological and Social Activist Tenets.” *Ethnography* 16 no.1 (2015): 95–117.

(quantitative visual methods are rarely mentioned<sup>157</sup>). Second, as I have already flagged in my introduction, there is an ethical concern that people who are being researched should in some way benefit from the process:

Participatory work is not merely a way to gain entree into difficult-to-access communities. Rather, the projects described here are rooted in an egalitarian ethic where the research participants and communities are first and foremost prioritised. Lying at the heart of much of this work are process questions: What good is it? Who is it good for? And who determines what good it is for?<sup>158</sup>

This good is often identified as some form of empowerment or “giving voice”, and so these methods tend to cluster in places where people are marked as marginalised, stigmatised or relatively powerless compared to the researcher: the elderly, the homeless, children, immigrants and refugees, the mentally and physically ill or disabled, the poor, ethnic or religious minorities and those living “in countries with histories of colonisation”.<sup>159</sup> This comes with many of the same dangers flagged in the discussion of ordinariness above—it is all too easy to bring in the kind of naive romanticism that has been characterised in popular culture as “saviour complex” and manifests as a kind of paternalistic othering which is no less damaging for being well-intentioned<sup>160</sup>. The egalitarian intentions behind participatory work are not always so easy to realise in practice.

The specific techniques that cluster under the large umbrella of “participation” range from simply using photographs as the basis for interviews (photo elicitation or image elicitation)<sup>161</sup> to involving research participants in the production, and sometimes discussion and analysis, of their own visual material. Terms proliferate: photovoice, photo production, photonovella, participatory video, participatory filmmaking, participatory learning and action, participatory action research, cellphilm, body mapping, community mapping. Sometimes this proliferation of terms sounds a distinctly proprietary note, as Pauwels remarks: “it seems at times that more effort has been expended in inventing new terms for existing practices, and

157 Gillian Rose, “On the Relation between ‘Visual Research Methods’ and Contemporary Visual Culture.” *Sociological Review* 62 no. 1 (2014): 24–46.

158 Aline Gubrium, Krista Harper, and Marty Otanez, “Introduction” in Gubrium et al., *Participatory Visual and Digital Research in Action*, 18.

159 Adèle de Jager, Andrea Fogarty, Anna Tewson, Caroline Lenette, and Katherine M. Boydell, “Digital Storytelling in Research: A Systematic Review.” *The Qualitative Report* 22 no. 10 (2017): 2550.

160 I have found the Buddhist concept of “idiot compassion” immensely helpful in working through these ideas. See Marnie L. Froberg, “Manifestations of Idiot Compassion.” <https://enlightenmentward.wordpress.com/2010/04/28/manifestations-of-idiot-compassion/>.

161 See Douglas Harper, “Talking about Pictures : A Case for Photo Elicitation.” *Visual Studies* 17 no.1 (2010): 13–26; and Alan Radley, “What People Do with Pictures.” *Visual Studies* 25 no.3 (2010): 268–79.



claiming ownership or superiority of quite similar practices, than in explaining what these ‘new’ or revised techniques really involve.”<sup>162</sup>

Many of these techniques are also used widely among NGOs, often with a relatively greater emphasis on catalysing some kind of empowerment or social change than on generating research results. This concern with change is by no means absent in scholarly work, however, as evidenced perhaps by the volume of work questioning whether and how any change is in fact achieved, and to what extent these attempts are naive.<sup>163</sup> The relationships between research, community mobilisation and governance are never tidy. Questions about what exactly “participation” is, and what it is worth, have been current at least since Sherry Arnstein proposed a hierarchy of participation ranging from manipulation and therapy through informing, consulting, and placation to partnership, delegated power and citizen control.<sup>164</sup> Arnstein applied her ladder of participation specifically to governance, but it works equally well for research.<sup>165</sup>

The question of silence is always implicit in discussions of voice, usually with the assumption that voice is preferable and will always be chosen if there is no power imposing the silence. There is very little discussion of actively chosen silences, rejections, refusals and exclusions—although Cornwall notes that “‘participation fatigue’ has come to account for more and more active self-exclusion”,<sup>166</sup> suggesting that the promise of beneficial research has failed to be realised. Often references to silence are oblique, disguised as difficulties or obstacles to research.<sup>167</sup> Yet silences, as suggested in the introduction, can be assertive:

<sup>162</sup> Pauwels, “Participatory visual research revisited,” 114.

<sup>163</sup> See for example Wendy Luttrell and Richard Chalfen, “Lifting up Voices of Participatory Visual Research.” *Visual Studies* 25 no.3 (2010): 197–200; Robin Evans-Agnew and Marie-Anne Rosemberg, “Questioning Photovoice Research: Whose Voice?” *Qualitative Health Research* 26 no.8 (2016): 1019–30; Arjun Shankar, “Autership and Image-Making: A (Gentle) Critique of the Photovoice Method.” *Visual Anthropology Review* 32 no. 2 (2016): 157–66; Claudia Mitchell, Naydene de Lange and Relebohile Moletsane, “Me and My Cellphone: Constructing Change from the inside through Cellphilms and Participatory Video in a Rural Community.” *Area* 48 no. 4 (2016): 435–41.

<sup>164</sup> Sherry Arnstein, “A Ladder of Citizen Participation.” *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35 no.4 (1969): 216–24. See also Andrea Cornwall, “Unpacking ‘Participation’ Models, Meanings and Practices.” *Community Development Journal* 43 no.3 (2008): 269–83.

<sup>165</sup> For an example of a digital storytelling project that invites members of a community to express needs without offering any means to meet those needs, see Juliet Stoltenkamp, André Siebrits, Carolynne Kies, and Norina Braaf, “Community Digital Story Project: George Community Needs.” *British Journal of Education, Society & Behavioural Science* 7 no.1 (2015): 50–70. By Arnstein’s criteria this would be participation at the level of informing, at best.

<sup>166</sup> Cornwall, “Unpacking ‘Participation’ Models,” 280.

<sup>167</sup> For example: “Establishing positive contacts in low resource settings, often characterized by suspicion and competition for resources, is a challenging task.” Shose Kessi, “Photovoice as a Practice of Re-Presentation and Social Solidarity: Experiences from a Youth Empowerment Project in Dar Es Salaam and Soweto.” *Papers on Social Representations* 20 no.7 (2011): 20.

consider the white silence suggested by Samantha Vice, the silence of self-restraint when speaking would be harmful, the silences strategically deployed by therapists or salespeople<sup>168</sup> to encourage the other to fill them, or the silence at the end of a story that refuses its audience the emotional satisfaction of a contrived happy ending.<sup>169</sup>

Finally, there is the silence of attentive listening, which is so central to digital storytelling and which points to those silences which are created in a failure, not of speech but of listening. As Jacques Depelchin cautions, “the breaking of silence would be applicable only to those who have refused to listen to the voices which have never ceased to speak.”<sup>170</sup> How to listen for what is not spoken is one of the core skills of facilitation.

## Digital storytelling in education

As noted in the introduction and above, digital storytelling has been widely adopted as a pedagogical tool in educational settings, from preschool all the way through to universities. While a subset of educational digital storytelling applications refers to the StoryCenter model, many do not. This is especially the case in school settings, where “digital storytelling” broadly defined is used in basic literacy education and as a way to engage learners with subject-specific content. New apps and technical tools are constantly being created.<sup>171</sup> The core StoryCenter elements of personal storytelling and group process are absent.

In universities, where digital storytelling initiatives are often housed within or supported by centres for educational technology, the literature reflects a wide range of both content-based and personal experience-based storytelling, as well as overlaps between the

168 Ashley Ramsden and Sue Hollingsworth, *The Storyteller's Way: Sourcebook for Inspired Storytelling*. (Hawthorn Press, 2013), 153.

169 For a useful discussion of how such silences can play out in a digital storytelling workshop see Chloe Brushwood Rose, “Resistance as Method: Unhappiness, Group Feeling, and the Limits of Participation in a Digital Storytelling Workshop.” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 32, no. 7 (2019): 857–71.

170 Jacques Depelchin, *Silences in African History* (Mkuki Na Niota, 2000), 12.

171 See for example Trevor Moodley and Shelley Aronstam, “Authentic Learning for Teaching Reading: Foundation Phase Pre-Service Student Teachers’ Learning Experiences of Creating and Using Digital Stories in Real Classrooms.” *Reading & Writing: Journal of the Reading Association of South Africa* 7 no.1 (2016): 1–10; Sheng-Kuan Chung, “Digital Storytelling in Integrated Arts Education.” *The International Journal of Arts Education* 4 no. 1 (2006): 33–50; Oliver Dreon, Richard M. Kerper, and Jon Landis, “Digital Storytelling: A Tool for Teaching and Learning in the YouTube Generation.” *Middle School Journal* 42 no. 5 (2011): 4–10; Lesley Farmer, “Using Technology for Storytelling: Tools for Children.” *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship* 10 no.2 (2004): 155–68; Fei Lu, Feng Tian, Yingying Jiang, Xiang Cao, Wencan Luo, Guang Li, Xiaolong Zhang, Guozhong Dai, and Hongan Wang, “ShadowStory: Creative and Collaborative Digital Storytelling Inspired by Cultural Heritage.” In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (New York: ACM Press, 2011), 1919–28; Franca Garzotto, Paolo Paolini, and Amalia Sabiescu, “Interactive Storytelling for Children.” In *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Interaction Design and Children* (New York: ACM Press: 2010), 356. There are many more.

two. At the level of skills and content, there is plenty of evidence that digital storytelling in university learning spaces can increase student engagement, boost confidence, promote visual and digital literacy and effectively integrate technology into instruction.<sup>172</sup> Of more interest for this study are digital storytelling interventions which cross into more subtle terrains of self-expression, self-representation, critical reflection, conscientization and building solidarity. Self-expression and solidarity are entirely compatible in this context, despite concerns that the self-centering of personal experience might be too heavily flavoured with American individualism.<sup>173</sup> Both are enabled through group process in which “participant storytellers recognise one another as peers as they move through a shared creative struggle and culminating experience”.<sup>174</sup>

At Lwandle, I built a temporary digital storytelling ecosystem beginning with myself, the Museum and a diverse range of intersecting practices of media production and participatory research. I found it useful to reflect on how what I was attempting was both like and unlike any of these, particularly when it came to questions of voice, listening and silence. I wanted to make a space within which to invite people to tell stories that would be meaningful and beneficial to them, while at the same time being acutely aware that I could guarantee neither, and that my own position and history of political and ethical commitments made me vulnerable to precisely the kinds of naive, romantic or patronising engagements I wished to avoid.

Before I could engage in the actual workshop process, however, I needed to complete the ecosystem by populating it with people who had stories to offer, as well as with the technologies they would need to work with and various kinds of supporting infrastructure. This process of invitation and recruitment is the subject of the next chapter.

172 For some examples from a university in Cape Town see Daniela Gachago, Eunice Ivala, Veronica Barnes, Penny Gill, Joseline Felix-Minnaar, Jolanda Morkel, and Nazma Vajat, “Towards the Development of Digital Storytelling Practices for Use in Resource-Poor Environments, across Disciplines and with Students from Diverse Backgrounds.” *South African Journal for Higher Education (SAJHE)* 28 no.3 (2014): 961–82. For wider examples see Alaa Sadik, “Digital Storytelling: A Meaningful Technology-Integrated Approach for Engaged Student Learning.” *Educational Technology Research and Development* 56 no. 4 (2008): 487–506; Bernard Robin, “The Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling.” In *Proceedings of Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference 2006*, ed. C Crawford, R Carlsen, K McFerrin, J Price, D Weber, and D Willis (Chesapeake, VA: Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education, 2006). 709–16.

173 “As self-representation has proliferated, it has become synonymous with the telling of personal experience, sometimes – and this is key – to the exclusion of what is political about the personal.” Thumim, “Self-Representation in Museums,” 298.

174 Brooke Hessler and Joe Lambert, “Threshold Concepts in Digital Storytelling: Naming What We Know About Storywork.” In Jamissen et al., *Digital Storytelling in Higher Education*, 26-27.

### 3. Invitation

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Ja, but now... for me to get something, I have to fight for it. Things don't come easily to me, even the simplest thing. You see, I have an assignment to do, and then my uncle bought me a laptop, because I don't have the hardcopy of the book, I have it on soft copy. Now Pam, the simplest thing, what is it, Adobe, it doesn't want to install. So I can't... you see? It's just a simple thing, but eish. I even asked this other IT guy I know. It doesn't want to work, but he took it to work today so that he can fix it, hopefully.<sup>1</sup>

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In the environments in which digital storytelling evolved, some ecosystem elements are more or less universally available and can be taken for granted, so that they are scarcely ever discussed. Questions like how to access a power supply are usually dealt with as mere housekeeping details, like the announcements at the beginning of an event about where to find the toilets and what the wifi password is. I have not been able to find, in the discussions of digital storytelling I have read so far, anything beyond brief acknowledgements that “digital storytelling has been mainly taken up within the regions, cities, and networks of high modernity, where electricity runs smoothly, computers are available, and ‘ordinary people’ have the competence to use them”.<sup>2</sup>

Yet in Lwandle, none of this was the case—these basic elements of the ecosystem could either not be relied upon, were only partially present or needed to be imported from elsewhere. This means the digital storytelling ecosystem in Lwandle, and places like it, is precarious and fragile from the start: at any given moment a large number of things might go wrong. If there is a larger global ecosystem of digital storytelling, Lwandle hovers on its margins, liable to fall out or fall apart at any time once the imported resources which pulled it in are either exhausted or withdrawn.

Although I have facilitated many workshops in places with limited resources, I had previously understood this only as making the process a bit more difficult. It was only when I was forced to contemplate the material realities of Lwandle at length, in writing this chapter, that this new understanding of its essential fragility crystallized. Lwandle does not just happen to be a challenging place in which to work; it is a place in which the ecosystem for

<sup>1</sup> Post-workshop interview with Hintsabe S’duli, August 30th 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Knut Lundby, “The Matrices of Digital Storytelling: Examples from Scandinavia”. In Hartley et al., *Story Circle*, 178.

digital storytelling can be assembled and maintained only with great effort, and under the constant threat of failure.

This chapter, then, will deal in detail with this process of assembling both the participants in the workshop and the material systems and spaces that complete the ecosystem. The technical discussion will be exhaustive but not, I hope, exhausting: it is, after all, in the details and contingencies that the whole becomes clear.

## **Recruiting the humans: Stage 1**

My original intention for this project was to recruit elders from Lwandle who might have memories and stories to share of life within the migrant labour system that is the museum's focus, or of Lwandle during the last decades of the twentieth century. At the end of August 2016, before I had completed my research proposal or received ethical clearance, I visited Lwandle to meet the museum director Masa Soko and members of her staff to introduce myself and ask if the museum would be willing to participate in the project and help with recruiting participants. They readily agreed, and in mid-September Soko arranged a community information session with several community elders, including some whose stories are part of the *Stories of Home/Imbali zeKhaya* exhibit. The session was conducted in a mixture of English and isiXhosa, with museum staff member Mandilakhe Nompehle acting as translator.

My notes from these meetings are scrappy—it felt as if the “real” project hadn't started yet—but revealing. I knew that my own beginner-level competence in isiXhosa was not up to the task of facilitating a story circle and that I might need translation. Soko was quick to note that if I did, I should not bring in people from outside Lwandle. Nompehle asked me to edit a short video the museum staff wanted to show at a community event; I noted “possibly a test?”. At the community information session, it became clear that the women who attended (there were no men) had followed what they thought were similar scripts before: they asked how long I would be in the country and when I would like to schedule interviews with them. One woman told a long and clearly well-practiced story about her life in the hostels that largely mirrored what was already on display around me. Like the support group members Christopher Colvin encountered in his own research, their stories had become objectified and ossified. The meeting ended inconclusively: not only could I not actually begin work until ethics approval was granted, I also realised that this group and my plan were not a good fit. The women were polite, but not very interested in what I had to offer.



Over the next few months as I waited for ethics approval, which was granted in April 2017, my sense of what was possible, and desirable, shifted. I wanted to work with a group of people who would not only benefit from the digital storytelling process, but who would participate enthusiastically and with a clear sense of *how* they wanted to benefit. I realised that this group of elder women were at best lukewarm about the project, and did not want to put pressure on them. I also reflected on my own lack of linguistic competence, my failure to master isiXhosa at anywhere near the level required to manage a storytelling process with people who were not also comfortable in English. On the one hand, this might present an opportunity to practice a more hands-off style of facilitation that would allow participants to support each other and deepen their own skills in the process, and also to work closely with a translator (or translators) who could, if they wished, become a collaborator and partner in the work. On the other hand, none of the museum staff whose services Soko had offered were trained translators, and all had other duties. There was no funding to hire an external translator, and in any case I took to heart Soko's request not to bring in "outsiders". A few offhand remarks had already alerted me to a sense that Lwandle residents felt marginalised and isolated, cut out of the networks and funding loops that made opportunities relatively more available to residents of large townships like Khayelitsha. I did not want to inflame this wound. Without translation, running a workshop mainly in isiXhosa would cut me out of many of the processes I most wished to examine.

In the end, I decided to begin by offering a workshop to the museum's staff, and then to host a second workshop that would be open to any community members who wished to attend. My intention was that the first workshop would be in some sense a gift to the museum, both in teaching skills that staff members wanted to learn and, perhaps, in producing stories that might become part of the museum collection. I also expected that some of the group members might learn enough, and be excited enough about the process, to want to help me facilitate the second workshop with community members.

For the first workshop, I planned with the museum's staff that we would meet for three-to four-hour sessions once a week. A digital storytelling workshop typically takes around 24 hours of a participant's time, whether in a three-day intensive sprint or spread over a longer period. We all agreed that the three-day intensive would not suit this process. The museum staff did not want to work over a weekend, and it was not feasible for the entire staff to take three days off work simultaneously. I was also keen to explore the possibilities of a longer workshop for allowing people more time to work into their stories, and to gather or make their own pictures rather than ripping them from the internet.

Note that these desires were entirely my own: I felt personally dissatisfied with stories that relied too heavily on images sourced from the internet, and felt that my expertise as a facilitator was tied up in my ability to coach participants through producing their own images. I had criteria for what constituted “good” stories, independent of the criteria my participants had, and I wanted to these stories to be good.

We began the workshop with six participants: Masa Soko, Anele Kalipa, Nontsikelelo Cotiyana, Hintsabe S’duli, Nyameko Dyantyi and Unathi Diko.<sup>3</sup>

In the end, between existing commitments and sessions that had to be rescheduled around unexpected emergencies, I ran the workshop over a total of 15 sessions, beginning with an introductory presentation and discussion on May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017 and ending with a screening of final stories and presentation of completion certificates on August 18<sup>th</sup>. Altogether, there were between 45 and 60 workshop hours in total, many more than the typical 24. This was perhaps to be expected: at various times different staff members had other duties that meant they weren’t able to attend a session, and there was much catching up and fluidity in the middle.

There was another, more jarring, reason why the workshop took so long: two members of the initial group, Nyameko Dyantyi and Unathi Diko, left the museum’s employ at the end of May. Several of the museum’s posts were funded through the Extended Public Works Programme, a South African government programme to create jobs through public expenditure of various kinds, from infrastructure projects to arts and culture programmes.<sup>4</sup> Most of these jobs are temporary, offered on the basis of 12-month contracts, and their contracts had come to an end.

I was blindsided and disoriented by this news. “Basically, I hadn’t understood a lot,” I wrote in my notes for June 7<sup>th</sup>, a day on which I was deeply relieved to be able to reschedule the session because local emergency services had asked everyone to avoid non-essential travel in anticipation of a major storm. I had not understood that some of the museum’s employees were temporary. On May 31<sup>st</sup>, when only one person was available because, according to my notes, “the rest of the team were busy with job interviews,” I totally failed to grasp what this meant. I didn’t ask, and nobody told me. I never saw either of these

<sup>3</sup> For the first three I have used their real names, at their request; Hintsabe S’duli chose her own pseudonym; and the remaining two, whom I could not contact after the workshop, I have assigned pseudonyms.

<sup>4</sup> See Department of Public Works. n.d. “Welcome to EPWP.” Accessed February 20, 2019. <http://www.epwp.gov.za/index.html>; and Western Cape Government Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport. n.d. “Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP).” Accessed February 20, 2019. <https://www.westerncape.gov.za/general-publication/expanded-public-works-programme-epwp>.

participants again despite inviting them, via Masa Soko as museum manager, to continue attending the workshops. Instead, I met three new staff members—Mandisa Jacobs, Vinnie da Davayo and Zukile Ntlemeza<sup>5</sup>—who needed to be folded into the workshop process. I will discuss this process in more detail in the following chapters, but for now it will suffice to note that this was a moment of deep personal and ethical discomfort for me. I had invited two people to begin a process during which both of them had told deeply personal stories, in the expectation that they would be able to work these stories through creatively—and then I had failed to provide a secure way for them to complete this process. I also feared that my failure of perception and understanding reflected a deeper failure to connect and communicate with the team at Lwandle: that I had fallen into precisely the traps of cluelessness that I had intended to avoid.

One of the rules of facilitation I have learned is to pay attention to emotions I experience during a workshop, as a potential clue to what is being experienced by others. This is partly borrowed from the psychoanalytic idea of transference, which is that a client's relationship with their therapist will at some stage mirror or recapitulate their earliest and most significant relationships: "the therapist is the personification of parental images, of teachers, of authority, of established tradition, of incorporated values".<sup>6</sup> Countertransference in turn arises from the therapist's own responses. A facilitator is not a therapist, but the role can elicit some of the same dynamics which it is well to be aware of, including the possibilities of vicarious trauma and emotional contagion.<sup>7</sup> This becomes particularly helpful when read alongside Kelly Oliver's notion of affective energy:

A crucial, yet often ignored, part of the forces of nature are the social forces that enable communication and communion. Just as heat, chemical, mechanical, and photic energy sustain life, psychic energy or the energy of affects also surrounds us, connects us, and moves through us to sustain us. All relationships and all of human experience are the result of the flow and circulation of affective energy. Affective energy circulates between and among us. It is never contained. It migrates from person to person. We are constantly negotiating affective energy transfers... Like other forms of energy, affective energy is invisible but has a powerful effect.<sup>8</sup>

5 The first name is a pseudonym chosen by me and approved by the storyteller, the second is a pseudonym chosen by the participant and the last is a real name, at his request.

6 Irvin D Yalom and Molyn Leszcz, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 5th ed. (Basic Books, 2005), 76; see also Chapters 6 and 7.

7 See Anthony Collins, "Teaching Sensitive Topics : Transformative Pedagogy in a Violent Society." *Alternation* 9, (2013): 128–49.

8 Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, 195.

In this case I recognised that my own feelings of disorientation might reflect similar feelings on the part of my group members. In particular, I realised that I had left the process very open-ended by not setting a clear finishing date or deadline. What had seemed at the time to be flexibility now appeared as a failure to provide needed boundaries and a sense of security. I took steps to re-orient us all in the next session by repeating the introductory session, and also by explicitly naming a deadline for finishing the stories.

## **Recruiting the humans: Stage 2**

As the first workshop with museum staff drew to a close with a screening of the stories for the group and a series of reflective interviews, I intended to complete the second workshop, for community members, before the end of 2017. Extending the first workshop over the four months from May to August had allowed everyone to participate around the constraints of their existing jobs, and I felt I had achieved my goal of at least ensuring that everyone used their own images, instead of taking images from the internet. But the drawn-out process also meant there was less momentum. In previous three-day workshops I had found that the intense focus and tight deadlines tended to produce an emotional high and a deep sense of accomplishment at the end. In contrast the screening event in August, which was the first time that many group members saw each other's completed stories, did not feel to me as intensely satisfying.

At a group discussion on August 18<sup>th</sup> I asked staff members whether they still thought it was realistic to recruit elder members of the community. They agreed, but with some caveats. Notably:

Nontsikelelo: There's always that issue of... *imali*...  
Pam: The issue of... money? Would they want to be paid?  
Masa: No, like you are going to make a hell of a lot of money  
out of this.<sup>9</sup>

This concern had been raised before. Masa Soko and the team had pointed out a widespread perception that making a video, or writing a book, meant making money. "A hell of a lot of money" is relative: the state old age pension in South Africa is currently R1700 a month (or R1720 for those over 75); the child support grant that may be paid to grandparents who are

<sup>9</sup> Group interview at the museum, August 18th 2017.

primary caregivers to children is R410 a month per child.<sup>10</sup> Community members had noted that a book about the museum<sup>11</sup> was on sale for R250 a copy at reception.

After a lifetime of poverty and apartheid exploitation, it was unsurprising that residents would be alert to signs of further exploitation, and this was something I was eager to avoid. We agreed that if it was feasible, the stories coming out of the second workshop would be made into a DVD that could be sold at the museum, with all proceeds going to the storytellers. I did try to downplay the possibility, to avoid raising expectations that would not be met.

The next caveat, however, combined with other factors to completely derail the process for several months: access to computers. During the first workshop, the group had used the museum's own desktop and laptop computers to produce their stories, but this was not an option for the second workshop. The Lwandle public library next to the museum has computers available, but these are heavily used by community members;<sup>12</sup> the Silulo Ulutho internet cafe in the neighbouring township of Nomzamo is likewise in constant use. This was my starkest confrontation so far, although not my first, with the fragility of the digital storytelling ecosystem in Lwandle: there was literally nowhere to go to find the resources that would be needed.

Before I could begin to grapple with this, several other destabilising factors intervened. My own laptop's CPU failed, in the middle of a session on the sofa at the museum while checking the English translation of an isiXhosa script for subtitles. This led to weeks of negotiation with my insurers, and then a difficult replacement decision when it turned out newer models did not meet my needs. In the middle of that process a neighbour's teenage daughter, a schoolmate and friend of my own daughters, died by suicide. Shortly afterwards a close friend and another neighbour were injured in separate violent attacks on their homes, echoing an attack I had experienced several years earlier and triggering post-traumatic responses of my own. At the same time I was involved in a series of challenging freelance projects. All of this goes to show that my own position, living as I was at the limits of my

10 South African Government. n.d. "Old Age Pension." Accessed February 21, 2019.

<https://www.gov.za/services/social-benefits-retirement-and-old-age/old-age-pension>; South African Government. 2014. "Child Support Grant." October 2014. <https://www.gov.za/services/child-care-social-benefits/child-support-grant>.

11 Noëleen Murray and Leslie Witz. *Hostels, Homes, Museum : Memorialising Migrant Labour Pasts in Lwandle, South Africa* (Claremont: UCT Press, 2014).

12 At least, they were at the time I was considering these decisions. The library has been without internet access since copper cables were stolen in mid-2018. See Velani Ludidi, "No Internet for over a Year at Lwandle Public Library." *GroundUp*, 2019. <https://www.groundup.org.za/article/no-internet-over-year-lwandle-public-library/>.



personal and financial resources in a place deeply marked by generations of violence and trauma, was in some ways just as precarious as that of my collaborators in Lwandle.

The net result of all this was that my plans to recruit for a second workshop, starting in September 2017 and ending before the summer holidays, failed utterly. In my notes I called it “a collapse”. It was early February 2018 before I was able to visit Lwandle again.

In the interim, at least the technology problem was solved: NRF funding through the SARChI Chair in Visual History and Theory enabled the purchase of eight iPad mini tablets, which made it possible from a technical perspective at least to run a workshop for community members using the museum as a venue. The ecosystem was temporarily stabilised by the importation of resources it would not otherwise contain.

When I reconvened with the museum team in February, we quickly mapped out a plan to advertise and host a community information session on February 15<sup>th</sup>, with a six-week workshop planned to run two days a week from February 27<sup>th</sup> to March 20<sup>th</sup>. I made a poster, an A5 pamphlet and a WhatsApp flier to advertise the session; museum staff put the poster up, distributed pamphlets and sent the WhatsApp flier to their contact lists for me.





Figure 3.1: The WhatsApp flyer distributed via Museum staff

I hoped to have a full group of eight people, and by this stage was no longer as deeply concerned about whether any of the community elders I had spoken to a year earlier would be part of it. I hoped they would, but also decided that if the workshop was not intrinsically attractive to any of them, I would not try to force the issue—at least as much to preserve my own energy as out of respect for their preferences. Stories about events of previous decades might be more useful to the museum, but for my own interest in studying the dynamics of a workshop they were not necessary. I was also increasingly conscious that it was the younger people in the museum’s orbit, the staff members and members of the drama group who met there several times a month, who were most interested and enthusiastic to participate. It seemed wise to follow the desire lines<sup>13</sup> that were already becoming clear.

<sup>13</sup> “Desire lines” in architecture and urban planning are the informal paths marked out by pedestrians who take

Since we didn't know before the information session how many people might attend, and whether there might be more than I could handle, Masa Soko suggested we establish selection criteria. These were:

1. That applicants should be available to attend all the sessions and commit to doing so;
2. That they should at least be able to follow a conversation in English;
3. That they should be over 18;
4. That they should write a brief motivation about why they wanted to attend the course; and
5. That we would prefer applicants who might be willing to share their final digital stories with the Museum and possibly more widely.

In the end six people came to the information session, and four applied to attend the workshop: theatre group member Mzukisi Makhanya, who was now also employed at the museum; Zizipho Somtsewu, a young woman also employed at the museum; and Phulula Sidlayi and Lupho Mzamo, two young people living in Lwandle.<sup>14</sup>

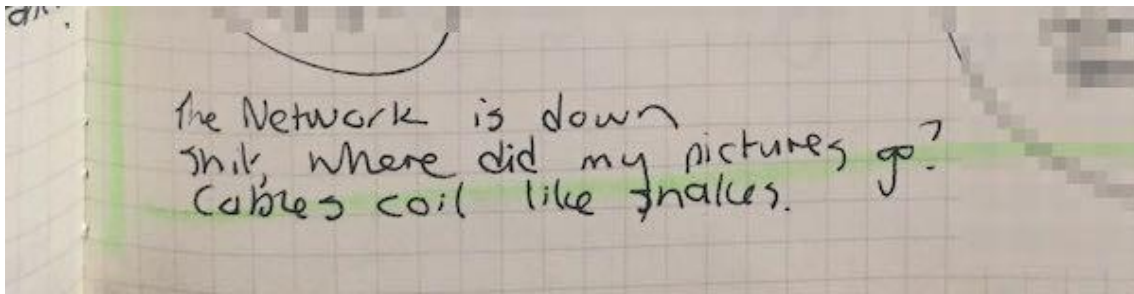
I had now recruited my second cohort—and also, in a way, recruited myself back into the process. “Recruit” has military associations, but its roots are biological: in the Latin *crescere*, to grow, which has also given us increase, concrete and create.<sup>15</sup> This connection was one of my first clues that what I was trying to build was not a project that could be managed, but something more organic and unpredictable. Considering the collapses and frustrations I have described, I felt there had been some failure of planning, prediction or control on my part; that if only I had known more, or thought things through more carefully, some slumps and stumbles might have been avoided. But if what I was doing was assembling and trying to sustain an ecosystem rather than rolling out an algorithmic plan, questions about prediction and control were the wrong ones to be asking.

their own routes around and through formally designed landscape features like paved paths and roads. They can also usefully capture something of liminality and betweenness: “The space between the planned and the providential, the engineered and the ‘lived’, and between official projects of capture and containment and the popular energies which subvert, bypass, supersede and evade them.” Nick Shepherd and Noëleen Murray, “Introduction: Space, Memory and Identity in the Post-Apartheid City.” In *Desire Lines: Space, Memory and Identity in the Post-Apartheid City*, ed. Noëleen Murray, Nick Shepherd, and Martin Hall (Routledge, 2007), 1.

<sup>14</sup> At their request, I have used their real names.

<sup>15</sup> “crescent.” In John Ayto, *Word Origins*, 2nd ed (A&C Black, 2006).

## Recruiting technology



*Figure 3.2: Haiku composed during the 6th International Digital Storytelling Conference, 2015*

The “digital” in digital storytelling sometimes evokes ideas about technological smoothness and seamlessness. The dream, like the old Apple slogan, is that “it just works”. I have seen photographs of digital storytelling workshops run in Scandinavian universities, and envied the rows of brand new iMacs in well-lit, comfortable spaces. I have imagined that there is abundant and competent tech support, that all the software works seamlessly, that all the students are confident and competent. But these fantasies of seamlessness are invariably undermined, to a greater or lesser extent, in the actual process of planning and running a workshop—and the more marginal the workshop environment, the greater the effort required to hold it all together.

As I suggested at the start of this chapter, much of this discussion covers what might be thought of as purely administrative or housekeeping detail—but it is precisely in these details that much of the work happens. Details like whether or not there is a power point capable of charging six devices at once, and how long the power cables are, are not incidental—they constitute the possibility of doing digital storytelling work at all.

The digital environment of a digital storytelling workshop includes hardware, software, communications networks, storage, power, and code for compressing and sharing video. They all interact to shape the workshop environment, but they must be approached singly. In the next few sections I will discuss each of them in turn.

## Hardware

To make a digital story, a storyteller must have access to some kind of computing device. “Access” is a troublesome word, though: does availability of a device for the duration of the workshop really count as access? In the early days of my practice as a digital storytelling facilitator, I sometimes borrowed a portable kit that had been donated to a local NGO.

Housed in a large, padded aluminium trunk on wheels, it originally contained eight MacBook laptops, eight earphone/microphone headsets and mouse devices, speakers, a scanner and a printer.<sup>16</sup> This had the advantage of being uniform and easy to set up and manage—but few people in South Africa are familiar with the Mac system and it rapidly became clear that this was making participant experiences in the workshops more difficult than they needed to be. I also felt uneasy about teaching skills people might not have another opportunity to use, so I began to work, as often as I could, with whatever people already had available and were familiar with. For any workshop, this meant answering at least the following questions: Do participants own, or can they borrow, smartphones or tablets? Do they have laptop or desktop computers? How old and how intact are those devices? Where are they, and are they portable? What operating systems are they running and how up to date are they? Do they have microphones and cameras, and if so of what quality? Do they have spare storage space?

The questions about operating systems, age, condition and storage space are important, because they spotlight the fact that any set of devices a group of people brings into a room is going to be diverse. South Africa has remarkably high penetration of mobile phones and smartphones given the size of its economy: according to data supplied to the International Telecommunications Union by regulatory authority ICASA, at the end of 2017 there were 156 mobile subscriptions for every 100 people.<sup>17</sup> The international GSM Association put that number at 169 at the end of 2018.<sup>18</sup> Many people use more than one SIM card to take advantage of different pricing between networks, so the actual number of people who own a mobile phone is lower—37.5m or 68% of the total population at the end of 2016,<sup>19</sup> according to one report. The number of smartphones that are capable of running digital storytelling apps is lower again: the Pew Research Centre reports 60% of South African adults have a smartphone, 33% have some other mobile phone<sup>20</sup> and only 6% have no mobile phone at

16 As far as I'm aware, this kit was never used for digital storytelling by anyone but me. It was gradually whittled down as people raided it for spare parts, and was eventually stolen. I read this as entirely typical of what happens to technical objects imported into ecosystems that cannot sustain them.

17 International Telecommunications Union, "South Africa Profile," 2017. <https://www.itu.int/net4/itu-d/icteye/CountryProfile.aspx>.

18 GSMA Intelligence. n.d. "GSMA Intelligence South Africa Data Dashboard." <https://www.gsmainelligence.com/markets/3788/dashboard/>.

19 "The State of South Africa's Mobile Market vs the Rest of Africa." *BusinessTech*, July 11, 2017. <https://businesstech.co.za/news/mobile/184693/the-state-of-south-africas-mobile-market-vs-the-rest-of-africa/>.

20 These two sets of numbers appear to conflict. Is it around 70% of the population who have mobile phones, or over 90%? The number is likely to have increased since the end of 2016, but an increase of over 20% is much less likely. Different organisations use different methods; mobile network operators are likely to have the most accurate information, but they don't make it publicly available. For the purposes of this discussion, the discrepancies are not critical.



all.<sup>21</sup> Just over 81% of these smartphones are running the Android operating system, and another 15% are running Apple's iOS.<sup>22</sup>

In short, around half or slightly more of South African adults have, in theory, a phone they might be able to use for digital storytelling. The reality on the ground is messier: my own purely anecdotal experience is that the typical South African smartphone has a cracked screen and a message warning that the owner is about to run out of storage. The cheaper the phone, the lower its storage capacity and the more quickly it will fill up with music, photographs and videos, often leaving little or no space for installing new apps. In addition, given any set of Android phones, they are likely to be running different versions of the operating system, which is not only regularly updated by Google but also frequently modified by handset manufacturers and network operators.<sup>23</sup>



- 21 Kyle Taylor and Laura Silver, "Smartphone Ownership Is Growing Rapidly Around the World, but Not Always Equally." *Pew Research Center: Global Attitudes and Trends*. February 5, 2019. <http://www.pewglobal.org/2019/02/05/smartphone-ownership-is-growing-rapidly-around-the-world-but-not-always-equally/>.
- 22 "Mobile Operating System Market Share South Africa." *Statcounter Globalstats*, January 2019. <http://gs.statcounter.com/os-market-share/mobile/south-africa>. This data is based on information gleaned from visits to websites around the world.
- 23 Ryan Dawes, "Android's Latest OS Distribution Stats Are in, and It's Still a Problem." *Developer Tech*, September 4, 2018. <https://www.developer-tech.com/news/2018/sep/04/android-os-distribution-stats-problem/>.



*Figure 3.3: The typical South African cellphone has a cracked screen*

What of tablets, laptops and desktop computers? Data on these are harder to come by, but many of the same issues apply: there are multiple operating systems in multiple versions,

installed on a diverse range of hardware. Taken together, these issues of access, condition and configuration mean that it is very seldom possible to run a digital storytelling workshop based only on what participants already have. Even when it is possible, the hiccups and glitches that are likely to ensue make it more difficult. There is an exception when participants are relatively wealthy and technically competent and confident, with devices not more than three or four years old, working in a place with abundant bandwidth that enables them either to use online services or to download what they need easily. This is not a common scenario in South Africa, however, and so usually a trade-off must be made between equipping people with skills they can continue to use, and running a workshop that is not fatally undermined by technical problems.

Using a lab or training room raises more questions: Where is the facility and how accessible is it? Is it available at suitable times? How much does it cost? How many people can it accommodate? What is the quality of the hardware available? Is appropriate software available and if not, can it be installed? What technical support is available?

What all of this means is that, in practice, most digital storytelling workshops I have facilitated have been a constant struggle against the forces of entropy and chaos. In nature, ecosystems are sustained and life maintains its organisation by a constant inflow of energy from the sun; digital storytelling ecosystems must likewise be maintained by inflows of energy by the facilitator and/or by a hosting organisation. As more of this energy is spent simply on arranging and maintaining the technical building blocks, so less is available for the processes of storytelling. It is worth pointing out here that money is a form of energy: if there is a budget to support two or more facilitators for a group, for example, or to supply technical support, the chaos threat goes down dramatically and there is more space to engage with story making. This has seldom been the case in my experience in South Africa.

In Lwandle, the Museum was my key technical ally and (quite literally) energy source. In the first phase of the workshop, I was able to take advantage of the fact that everyone on the staff had computers on their desks or access to a museum-owned laptop. These machines were not uniform—some were much older than others, running older versions of Windows—and they were not all in the same room, or able to be moved into a common space without unduly disrupting normal activities. The fact that they were available at all, and at no additional cost, made the workshop possible, but it also had consequences for the story-editing phase of the workshop. Because people's working spaces were dispersed so they weren't able to support each other to nearly the same extent as is possible when everyone is

in the same room. It was a less than perfect solution to the problem of hardware, but a solution nonetheless.

During the second phase, as already mentioned, using the museum's own hardware was not an option and the workshop was made possible only by the purchase of the eight iPad Mini tablets,<sup>24</sup> funded by the National Research Foundation through the SARChI Chair in Visual History and Theory. What if the iPad option, and the funding that enabled it, had not been available? It is not possible to answer that question with any certainty. I would have approached the library and the Nomzamo internet cafe and tried to negotiate access; failing that, it might have been possible to transport participants to an outside venue. Perhaps another option would have appeared, or I would have been able to raise funding elsewhere; or perhaps the workshop would not have happened at all, or happened much later. Considering all these options, I am deeply grateful that funding made the problem go away. Indeed, as I have suggested above, money is very often a powerful way to make technical challenges disappear (and one that people are often coy about beyond the usual acknowledgements of funders). It would be interesting to track a digital storytelling workshop from the point of view of its money flows, although that is not within the scope of this project.

Marshalling all the financial and technological resources needed to make the second workshop possible in Lwandle, then, was challenging—and yet, given that I had access to networks and the institutional resources of the university, just about possible. It seems very unlikely that it would have been possible for a resident of Lwandle with even fewer resources than I had.

All of this has profound consequences for what kinds of stories can be told, and what kinds of histories can be made. The stories that emerged at Lwandle were entirely contingent on the workshops. I often use the idea that when someone tells a story, they are creating a world and inviting an audience to join them in that world.<sup>25</sup> But before a story can be told, it must itself be invited into the world, and the form of the invitation will shape the story. So an invitation from me as a white outsider elicited stories that my participants may never have told to each other; an invitation from within the Museum elicited stories that touched on themes of home and family; and an invitation to make specifically digital stories, using

<sup>24</sup> I researched 11 separate tablet options; the final choice of iPad minis was made because they were relatively inexpensive and easy to use, familiar to me and fit well with my existing Apple equipment.

<sup>25</sup> This first became clear to me in a workshop facilitated by Sue Hollingsworth: see <https://suehollingsworth.com/> and also Ramsden and Hollingsworth, *The Storyteller's Way*.

digital tools, opened up some possibilities and foreclosed others (I will explore the ways technology shaped visual choices in particular in Chapter 5).

### **iPads: Never “just working”**

I would like to discuss my use of iPads in more detail, because the work required to make these devices fit into Lwandle is a useful demonstration of some of the points I have been trying to make about the fragility of storytelling ecosystems. iPads are designed to be easy and fun to use—they are famously popular with privileged toddlers—but none of the four participants in the second phase of the workshop had used one before. So when I first brought them to Lwandle I took participants through a brief tutorial to familiarise them with the basics of what all the buttons did, how the touch screen worked and how to access apps.

This was relatively easy for the group members only because I had already spent several hours preparing the iPads for use. This turned out to be a decidedly non-trivial task which provided a useful opportunity to think through dependencies: those relationships between events in which X cannot happen until condition Y has been satisfied. To use an iPad, it is not enough simply to buy an iPad and switch it on: One must set it up. To set it up, one must have an email address, or create an email address, which requires at least being familiar with the ways of email. One must be competent in a language that is offered (of South Africa’s 11 official languages, only English is on the list). One must have access to a working wifi network, or money to access cellular data. One must create a password, and remember the password, or write it down somewhere safe, or have a second, stable email address that reminders can be sent to. One must set up answers to three security questions that embed assumptions likely to break down in resource-poor settings, like “Where did you go the first time you flew on an airplane?” and “What was the model of your first motorised vehicle?” One must accept terms and conditions, opt into or out of various data sharing services, and decide whether to allow apps to access your location. The iPad must be charged, and kept safe from theft and damage. To members of the global upper middle class who already live inside digital ecosystems, this is all mildly annoying but ultimately trivial. Indeed, if one is upgrading from a previous iPad or has an iPhone, all the setup can be copied across automatically and most of the annoyance goes away. (To those who have, more shall be given.) But for those who are not already inside these systems, the experience is like being asked to show a different access pass every time one passes through a door: every step becomes a potential hurdle and a new set of things to understand and negotiate. Even once entry to the system is gained, staying inside is not guaranteed: if the device is lost or stolen or



broken, for example, it is gone forever unless one had the ability to insure it, and to make a successful claim. Losing a power cable, forgetting a password, not having easy, reliable and affordable access to wifi: any of these could push one out to the margins again. Without abundant resources to sustain one's position, becoming and staying a digital insider is a precarious business. In spaces where all these resources are abundant they can be taken for granted and fade invisibly into the background. At Lwandle, however, one is forced to confront the additional burdens of work required to sustain a foothold in the margins.

## **Negotiations about software**

The one absolutely non-negotiable output of a digital storytelling workshop is a digital story—if there is no story, it is a failed workshop. The only way to produce a digital story is to use a piece of software that can export a video file. This encompasses not just formal video editing software, but also a range of other applications like PowerPoint which offer this function as an extra to their core purpose.

Sometimes the choice of software is given, predetermined by the hosting organisation and what it has available—some universities, for example, have computer labs with software already installed which can enable digital storytelling.<sup>26</sup> Most often in my experience, however, the process of planning a workshop has included making a choice about what software to use. This means answering questions like: What hardware and operating systems are available? Is there a reliable Internet connection? What functionality is absolutely required (the ability to export a video file, for example) and what is merely nice to have (the ability to add a musical soundtrack)? Is there a budget available? If not, the software must be free, or at least available for a short-term free trial that will last the duration of the workshop. If there is no reliable Internet connection, or if it is very slow or expensive, then online apps are not feasible—and even downloading and registering other software may be troublesome. If the available hardware runs a patchwork of Windows, Mac, Android and iOS operating systems—and different versions of each—then they will each enable different apps, and some additional effort will be required to teach and support all of them. What does that rule out?

<sup>26</sup> I use “afford” here in the sense of *affordance*, which refers to the possibilities for action presented to humans by objects they encounter in the world; affordances are the answer to the question “how can I use this?”. There are hardly any apps specifically designed for digital storytelling, but many which afford it, if not always easily. See Don Norman, *The design of everyday things* (Doubleday/Currency, 1990), 9; and Joelle Proust, “Affordance” in Barbara Cassin, ed., *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (Princeton University Press, 1990).

The informal corridor talk of digital storytelling facilitators includes a fairly constant exchange of questions and information about technology and software. At one stage, eager to try and pin down a “best” alternative for every situation, I attempted to maintain a table listing all the current applications that could be used for digital storytelling, including their cost, what operating systems they were available for and a note on their suitability in different settings. The attempt is long abandoned, because software simply changes too fast: in any given month new versions of existing apps will be released, old versions will become obsolete, entire apps will be launched or withdrawn, terms of use and payment structures may change, operating system updates may create or resolve incompatibilities and ownership of the underlying company may change, leading to new priorities and directions. This instability, combined with the diversity and unpredictability of digital storytelling environments, makes any attempt at pinning down software choices fruitless. The ecosystem is simply too dynamic.

	Cost	Platform	Pros	Cons
<b>Photostory</b>	Free	Windows	Free! Easy to use Few complex choices	Sound must be recorded slide by slide No video
<b>Soundslides</b>	Free for demo version Basic \$39.95 Plus \$69.95	Windows OS X	Easy to use Narration can be imported separately	Doesn't export standalone movies
<b>Com Phone Story Maker</b>	Free	Android	Very easy to use	Buggy Very limited feature set
<b>Windows Live Movie Maker</b>	Free	Windows	Free Standard component	Poor ease of use Buggy
<b>WeVideo</b>	Variable from free to \$249/year for 50 users (ed pricing)	Browser based	Great feature set	Requires 1MBps upload and download speed per user
<b>iMovie</b>	OS X \$14.99 iOS \$4.99	OS X iOS	Relatively easy to use Full featured	Mac and iPad only
<b>Sony Movie Studio 13</b>	Free 30-day trial From \$49.95	Windows	Low cost Good feature set Easy to use	Not free
<b>Final Cut Pro</b>	\$299.99	OS X	Fully professional video editor	Expensive Complex to use
<b>Adobe Premiere Elements</b>	Free 30-day trial \$85	Windows	Well reviewed as beginner friendly	More expensive than Sony Movie Studio

Figure 3.4: Software comparison slide from a presentation about digital storytelling in 2015.

*This attempt to keep a running table was soon abandoned.*

Some apps, full of useful features, can be instantly ruled out because they simply cost too much. Final Cut Pro and Adobe Premiere Pro, for example, are professional-level industry

standards which are nevertheless easy for beginners to use, but they cost several thousand rands per user. Even Adobe Premiere Elements, a trimmed-down version of the professional app aimed at novices and home users, cost in the region of R1,500 per copy at the time of writing.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, none of these are available on mobile devices and require significant system resources (disk storage space, working memory, video cards and drivers) to run reliably. The low-end laptops and ageing Windows desktop machines that characterise NGO and public sector environments would deliver a very frustrating experience.

Other apps would be too expensive to buy outright, but helpfully offer free trial periods that are long enough to complete most workshops. Vegas Movie Studio (formerly Sony Vegas Movie Studio), a consumer version of another professional app, Vegas Pro, offers a 30-day free trial version which is enough to complete most workshops—but after that users will be locked out unless they are able to pay the \$49.99 licence fee, which is beyond the reach of most South Africans.

There are two free Windows apps which have been widely used for digital storytelling in the past: Microsoft Photo Story and Windows Movie Maker. Photo Story in particular has been popular in education settings: it is free, well tested and stable and, because it is also very old (the currently available version was released in 2005) and simple, runs reliably on even the creakiest old computers. It does, however, impose very significant creative constraints on the storyteller. The most significant is that a voiceover narration can't be separately recorded and then imported to the project; it must be recorded directly in the app. This almost always results in terrible sound quality unless the storyteller has access to both a quiet environment and a good microphone that can be successfully plugged into the computer—both very rare in workshop environments. It also makes it extremely difficult to match the pacing of images to the narration. Photo Story supports only one soundtrack, with very limited ability to manage volume, so any attempt to use music usually results in an unpleasantly clashing transition between music and voice. Photo Story cannot incorporate video files; and finally, it adds automatic Ken Burns effects<sup>28</sup> that can have bizarre results—a slow zoom away from the face and into the shins of a person posing for a photograph, for example. It is possible to change

27 The rand/dollar exchange rate is a significant player here. Most software is priced in dollars, and what might be an affordable or even negligible monthly cost in the US (“the price of a cup of coffee” is a popular metaphor) rapidly becomes unaffordable in South Africa—especially when multiple licenses are needed. This is just one of the many ways that high-level political and economic structures and events very directly shape what is possible in a community digital storytelling workshop in Lwandle.

28 The technique of panning and zooming across still photographs, named for American documentary maker Ken Burns. See <http://www.poynter.org/2007/meaning-in-motion-ken-burns-and-his-effect/82987/> and <http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/>.

these, but many storytellers never make the effort, or cannot navigate their way through the dialogue boxes to get there. As I have already mentioned above, I had my own criteria for what constituted “good” stories, which included well-recorded audio clearly linked to images. I had also seen storytellers grow impatient with being unable to achieve what they wanted. Photo Story was ruled out.

Windows Movie Maker has in the past been popular because it was free and came pre-installed on some versions of Windows. However, it imposed creative constraints as great or greater than those of Photo Story, was not particularly easy to use and above all was unstable and crashed often. In addition, by 2017 when I planned these workshops, it was several years out of date and, having never been as simple or as stable as Photo Story, was often simply impossible to run.

Other popular apps that were considered but ultimately rejected include Shotcut (free but unstable and extremely slow on older machines) and Lightworks (powerful, but complex and not an app I had used before in a workshop setting).

There is a free app called Com-Phone Story Maker that was designed specifically for digital storytelling on Android smartphones and tablets, which are relatively cheap and easily available in South Africa. The app was developed as a part of a large collaborative project funded by the UK’s Engineering and Physical Sciences Council and involving several universities in the UK and South Africa as well as the CSIR and a South African NGO. Its aim was specifically “to support audiovisual content creation and sharing in locations where there is low textual and computing literacy and limited power and network coverage”.<sup>29</sup> Fieldwork was conducted in rural areas of the Eastern Cape.<sup>30</sup>

Com-Phone has the potential to be useful as a digital storytelling app, but like Photo Story suffers from severe limitations. I had previously used it to work with a class of first-year students to make digital stories about a learning experience.<sup>31</sup> The students were all participants in an extended curriculum programme designed to compensate for high school experiences which had left them under-prepared for the academic requirements of a full first-

29 Simon Robinson, David Frohlich, Kristen Eglinton, Matt Jones, Justin Marshall, Adam Stringer, and Kristina Langhein, “Com-Me : Community Media Toolkit.” *Digital Futures*, 2012, 1–2.  
<http://digitaleconomytoolkit.org/com-phone/>.

30 The acknowledgements in the paper cited above mention “our local researchers from the Mankosi region of the Eastern Cape, South Africa” and proceed to list eight first names. All the other people acknowledged are listed by first name and surname. This suggests to me a research project that has not engaged deeply enough with the place it was rooted in.

31 See Gerhard Griesel and Christine Price, “Using Tablets to Enhance the Teaching and Learning Environment in Landscape Architecture: A Pilot Study.” *Teaching and Learning* 5, no. 7 (2017): 8.

year programme. Their initial lack of confidence in using tools that were new to them was very rapidly overcome, and within a day several were expressing frustration that they wanted to do more and were unable to. Com-Phone's focus on situations of extreme lack had made it inadequate to meet the needs of even the least privileged urban students. It has also suffered from its own form of deprivation: developed as part of a one-off project, it is now effectively orphaned. The underlying code is open source and available on the Github development platform, in theory meaning anyone who is interested may join the team and continue developing and updating the app. In practice, the code is maintained by a single individual, and between 2013 and March 2019 there were just 24 releases of new and updated versions, most of them during the early development phase in 2013.<sup>32</sup> By contrast Pageflow, a multimedia storytelling app for journalists jointly developed with the West German Broadcasting Corporation, had at the time of writing 13 contributors and 63 releases since May 2015.<sup>33</sup>

The chances that anybody will adopt Com-Phone for further development are slim. Without further funding or institutional support, and with a target market that is explicitly not in a position to pay for it, there is no financial incentive for anyone to devote their time to it. There are no technical boundaries to be pushed and thus no special skills to be gained or demonstrated; and accolades from the intended users will confer no special prestige within the Github community. Mobile operating systems change frequently, so unless an app is maintained consistently it will rapidly become unstable, unpredictable and eventually unusable. This is the likely fate of Com-Phone. If my experience with the iPads showed how difficult it is for those on the digital margins to gain access to the digital storytelling system, the Com-Phone story shows how easy it is to fall out again.

There are many, many other apps for both Android and iPhone that bill themselves as for "digital storytelling" or "multimedia storytelling". Some are plainly unsuitable (for example, apps which automatically generate a video file from a selection of photographs and a song). Others are too expensive, too unstable, too limited, require too much bandwidth or do not work on the low-end phones that characterise communities like Lwandle.

Within the global digital storytelling community, online video editor WeVideo is rapidly becoming a standard. It is relatively powerful and stable, and because it is primarily

32 "An Android multimedia narrative application (Com-Phone)" (n.d.) <https://github.com/communitymedia/mediaphone>

33 See "Pageflow Digital Storytelling Tool & Publishing Platform" (n.d.) <https://pageflow.io/en/>; and "Codevise/pageflow: Multimedia story telling for the web" (n.d.) <https://github.com/codevise/pageflow>.

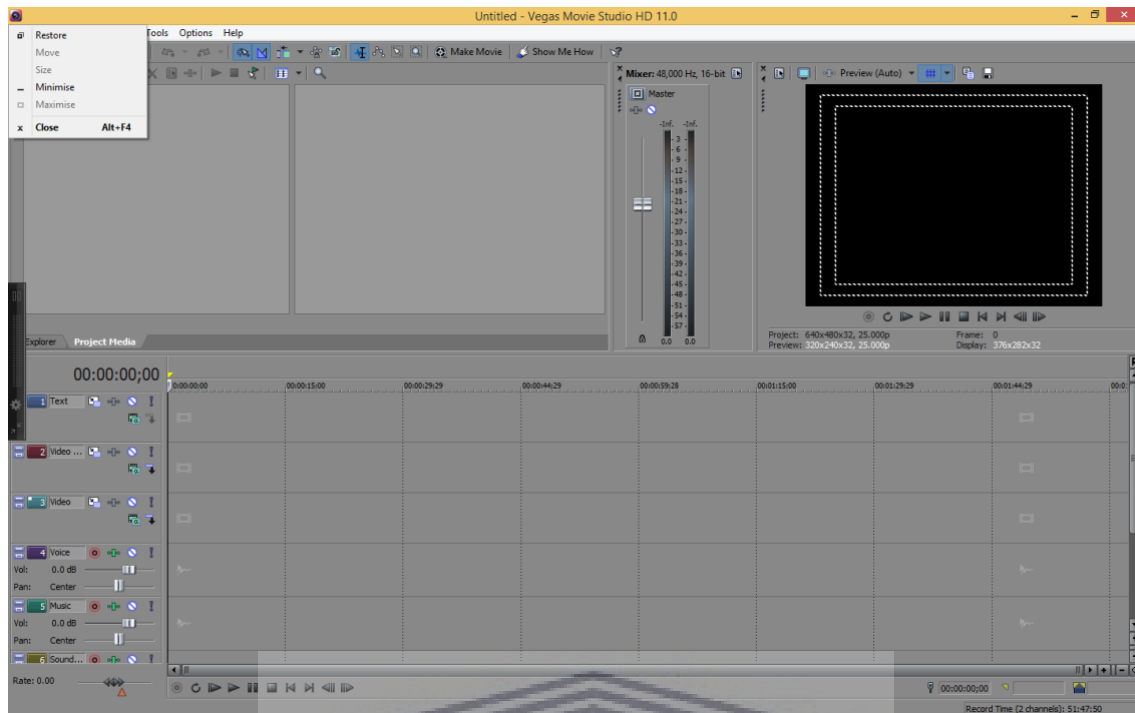


available as a browser-based app it looks and behaves the same way for users of different operating systems. It stores media and does processing work in the cloud (i.e. on its own servers rather than the user's machine) which not only makes efficient use of limited bandwidth but also ensures that projects are not lost if there is a power failure or if a user's machine is lost, stolen or damaged. It is also available in mobile versions for both iOS and Android, and a limited version is available free. All of this makes it a very attractive choice for digital storytelling in many settings—but not, unfortunately, in Lwandle. There are two reasons for this: Firstly, the free version imposes a watermark, a logo that is displayed prominently in the upper left corner of the screen, on every video produced. The watermark is removed from paid versions, but the cheapest available paid version for individual users costs \$4.99 per person per month, with a minimum sign-up period of 12 months; educational versions start at \$199 per year for a minimum class size of 30.<sup>34</sup> This might have been affordable at Lwandle, but there was a second reason not to use it: although WeVideo uses bandwidth efficiently, there is still a minimum required to make it work (at least 1Mbps upload and download speeds per user at the time of writing).<sup>35</sup> This could not be guaranteed at Lwandle—and for the second workshop, which did not involve the Museum's staff, we would not be able to use its internet connection at all.

The final outcome of the negotiation between hardware, software, bandwidth, skills, budgets and bureaucracies for the Lwandle project involved different choices for the two successive workshops. The first group of Museum employees, who had access to the Museum's equipment and bandwidth, used Vegas Movie Studio. The choice of software for the second group, who used the specially bought iPads, was much easier: Apple's iMovie software is available free, so that is what we used.

34 "Plans - Get a Free Online Video Maker" (n.d.) [https://www.wevideo.com/sign-up#tab\\_education](https://www.wevideo.com/sign-up#tab_education).

35 "What browser/settings are best for WeVideo? (System Requirements)" (n.d.) <https://wevideo.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/210290298-What-browser-settings-are-best-for-WeVideo-System-Requirements>.



*Figure 3.5: The Vegas Movie Studio editing environment*

## Negotiations with software

Having decided which video editing software to use is not the same thing, unfortunately, as using it successfully. I can import it into the ecosystem, but whether it lives or dies there rests on another string of contingencies and negotiations.

For example, I had previous experience with Vegas Movie Studio in workshops and was confident in my ability to teach and support it, but this was not always easy. Over the past few years the company has changed hands (Sony sold it to German company Magix), and there are multiple versions available with multiple different sets of functionality, some very different from each other. Version 12, released in 2012, was in many ways less useful than its predecessor Version 11, so I have kept installation files for both, as well as for version 10. Versions 13, 14, 15 and 16 are currently all available for download—and each of these versions is available across multiple products including not only Vegas Movie Studio but also Vegas Movie Studio Platinum, Vegas Movie Studio Suite and Vegas Pro. If this is bewildering to read, it is equally so to live with: “It’s confusing,” I wrote in my field notes in early 2018: “I currently have five different versions installed. It’s easy to lose track.” In Lwandle, different people installing software on different machines resulted in several different configurations, each of which introduced new problems to solve. All of this is a direct result of the Museum’s liminal position in the ecosystem. Its computer systems are

cobbled together out of whatever has been possible given the available funding at different times. In environments which are uniform and carefully planned, one can choose a single option and stick with it; in more unruly spaces, one must negotiate and improvise at every step of the way.

To further complicate things, my own equipment was incompatible with what was available in Lwandle. I have a MacBook Air and an iPhone. To use Windows software so that I can learn and teach it, I must run a virtual Windows machine inside VMWare Fusion virtualisation software—a beautiful piece of technical wizardry which substantially increases my ability to work effectively in widely different spaces. It is, however, expensive, pointing yet another spotlight at the difference between what is possible for me, with access to a wide range of technical, financial, educational and social resources, and what is possible for my participants in Lwandle and places like it. In some senses, I was arriving in Lwandle inappropriately equipped for the environment I would meet there. I had to undergo technical translation to fit in, and what was lost in the process was possibly a certain sense of ease as well as time.

The outcome of all this negotiation and improvisation is that a considerable chunk of digital storytelling in places like Lwandle involves technical troubleshooting. Living and working with software is no more certain than living and working with any complex system (despite a human tendency to assume that the inanimate should be predictable). Things don't always work, and it's not always clear WHY they won't work. Experience and Google between them suggest a menu of things to try: quit and restart, delete and reinstall, install an extra driver, update something, try it on a different machine, adjust a setting, check the power connections, try the cable in a different slot, and so on. In a workshop context, all of these attempts take time, are frustrating for participants, and may or may not work. On older Windows machines, for example, I have seen Vegas Movie Studio sometimes halt mid-installation with a message that it needs to download "MS.NET Framework"—a mystifying, if not terrifying, message for the uninitiated, and one that frequently kicks off a long and possibly unsuccessful attempt to download yet another piece of software. Sometimes there is some other software error or hardware incompatibility. You can never predict in advance which of these things is going to happen.

All of this reflects, yet again, the precarity inherent in undertaking a once-off project in a setting which is not otherwise geared for this activity. Permanence brings a degree of control and predictability. In a lab or classroom which is often used for digital storytelling projects, for example, it is more likely to be possible to provide identical equipment to each

participant, with everything already installed, updated, registered and ready to use. This would leave more time for actually telling and working on stories, which might as a result show signs of more extended, thoughtful and skilful crafting. The price of precarity is paid in time, in frustration, and in a foreclosure of possibilities.

It is very probable that the different technical environments of each workshop made a material difference to the final stories that were produced. Two of the three stories produced during the second workshop, for example, included video clips. Phulula Sidlayi used a video that had been uploaded to YouTube by a friend, cutting it up to provide footage of her home near Mount Fletcher. Lupho Mzamo used footage he shot on his own phone. Both also used footage shot on my phone during the workshop sessions. The Airdrop utility that enables communication between Apple devices made it easy to transfer files between my phone, my laptop and the iPads, and iMovie made it easy to use the footage.

None of the seven stories from the first workshop, by contrast, included a single frame of video. The open workshop attracted people who were explicitly interested in and ambitious about video storytelling, but the more seamless technical environment made it easier to achieve those ambitions. Even if some of the participants in the first workshop had expressed a desire to use video, it may not have been possible—or at least without significant extra work.

The easier technical environment of the second workshop led, in effect, to a better or more interesting set of problems. Instead of battling through the initial stages of installing software and getting started, we were able to move quickly into learning and then working with iMovie. My field notes mention frustration with the way iMovie handles titles and transitions between clips, with its automated Ken Burns effects, with the lack of an envelope tool to enable fine control of the audio volume, and with its automatic cropping of pictures (this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5).

Some of these concerns were very much my own: I was familiar with possibilities of editing and video creation that my participants were not, and experienced frustration when I saw how stories might have been created differently if we had had access to different tools. I had to adjust my own ambitions to produce “good” stories in the face of what the available resources made possible.

What of the ambitions of the storytellers? They all expressed themselves satisfied with the stories they were able to produce and the new skills they learned. I am nevertheless haunted by the suspicion that many of them have learned to tailor their ambitions to their

circumstances, in what amounts to a kind of stunting. Lwandle confronted me as a digital storytelling facilitator very directly with the limits of the transformative power of storytelling.

The challenges of assembling and stabilising a digital storytelling ecosystem at Lwandle could be viewed through a “digital divide” lens, but this have/have-not binary elides too much. The issue at Lwandle is not one of absolute or relative lack of “access”, but of precarity. There are smartphones and high-speed internet connections and computers available, but they are expensive and vulnerable; people tend to ration their use. This rationing, I suspect, prioritises communication with friends and family (Facebook and WhatsApp in particular) over more complicated and less immediately useful applications like digital storytelling.

### **Some technical bit players**

Hardware and software are the most prominent stars in the technical constellation that supports a digital storytelling workshop, but others deserve attention as well: communication systems, storage, power and various systems for encoding and sharing video files. I will deal relatively briefly with each of these before concluding with a discussion of space and social organisation.

### **Communication**

The previous sections highlighted the importance of internet connectivity for downloading, installing and using video editing software. The requirement for connectivity does not end there, however, because information needs to be transported between different devices and environments all the way through the workshop. Pictures are the most mobile elements: their destination in every case is a video editing application, but their starting points vary widely. Printed photographs or handmade images might come to the workshop with participants, or be in the hands of friends or family members far away. Digital photographs might be stored on the participant’s phone, on a friend or family member’s phone, in Google Photos, or in a Facebook album, WhatsApp message or other social media space. Finally, photographs may be taken during the workshop, images might be found on the internet and downloaded, or drawings or collages might be created on paper or digitally.

There are situations in which the journey from starting point to destination is trivial, for example if a participant brings their own up to date and well-managed laptop to the workshop with all the images they might need already stored, sorted and easy to find. This hardly ever happens—and, as always, those who already live full-time inside abundant digital ecosystems



find the process much easier to navigate than those who are visiting from less privileged neighbourhoods. (Although it is worth noting that having access to generous technical resources is not always the same as being able to use them effectively—experience and confidence are also valuable resources in this process, and those who lack either will have a harder time).

For the vast majority of aspirant digital storytellers in South Africa, however, moving data to where it needs to be is a challenging undertaking, and transport routes must often be improvised during the workshop using the available resources. Here are some possible scenarios:

1. A friend or relative uses a mobile phone to take a picture of a picture, or of a scene that the storyteller requests. They send the digital photograph to the storyteller using WhatsApp, which compresses the image to use less bandwidth, losing some information or quality in the process. The storyteller saves the picture on their phone and then uses a cable to transfer the picture to a folder on a computer.
2. The storyteller has a picture they want to use on their phone, but no way of transferring it to a computer because they don't have the cable they need, and it's not in the facilitator's toolkit. They use Bluetooth to send it to the facilitator's laptop, the facilitator saves it to a portable flash drive and the storyteller copies it from the flash drive to the computer.
3. The storyteller knows there is a photograph that they want to use, but it's been deleted from their phone. Fortunately it was shared on Facebook, so the storyteller can download it, either from their own album or from a post shared by someone else.
4. The storyteller borrows the facilitator's iPhone to take some pictures during a session, then the facilitator uses Airdrop to send the pictures directly to the iPad the storyteller is using.

During the Lwandle workshops pictures travelled by all of these routes, or hybrid variations of them. The background actors or enablers included South Africa's mobile phone networks (MTN, Vodacom and Cell C being the most prominent), the State Information Technology Agency (SITA) which provides and maintains the network infrastructure at the museum, Apple, Facebook, Google, and all the engineers who develop and maintain communication protocols and tools like Bluetooth and Airdrop.

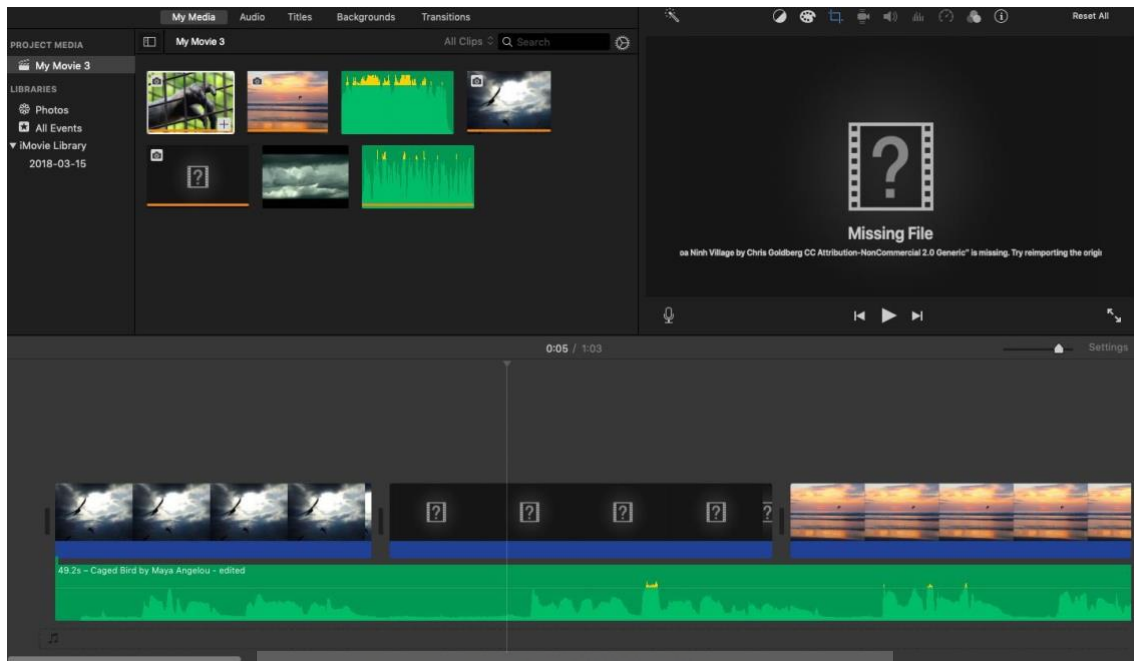
One of the major advantages of using iPads during the second workshop was that Apple's Airdrop utility made transferring sound and image files so easy. Airdrop uses wireless networking but doesn't need internet connectivity—so even though we couldn't use the Museum's wifi to access the internet, we could use it to send files between devices.

All of these transport routes require either a wifi network connected to the internet, or a mobile data connection. Both of these are precarious in different ways. Mobile data connections are expensive and people have to ration their use carefully; and the last time I visited Lwandle, the Museum had been without any internet service for three weeks. The cables providing their connection had been stolen and not yet replaced, and SITA had not provided any alternative.<sup>36</sup>

## Storage

The digital files storytellers use during video editing must be stored somewhere that the editing software can access. Almost always, this means in a local folder on a computer, phone or tablet. The most common storage problem is simple mis-filing. One of the first steps in the editing process is to import media files (images, video, audio) into the project, and users tend to assume this means the file is now part of the project in some integral and irreversible way, that it has in effect been eaten or incorporated. In fact, most apps do this by creating a reference link to the media file wherever it is stored. If that file is later moved or deleted, or if its name changes, the app will no longer be able to find it and will show an error, as in figure X below. This happens most often in digital storytelling workshops when files have been moved around on flash drives—participants will sometimes import the media directly from the flash drive, then later when the drive is removed lose the file. This situation is usually fixable, but requires the time and attention of a facilitator.

<sup>36</sup> The same theft left the library next door without electricity and unable to function, just as students were preparing for year-end exams. See Jenna Etheridge, "Cable Theft Cripples Public Library in Cape Town." *News24*, 2019. <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/cable-theft-cripples-public-library-in-cape-town-20191023>.



*Figure 3.6: An iMovie project showing a media file has been moved or deleted*

Storage can also fill up, again a situation which is more likely on low-cost or old equipment, and then something else must be deleted to make new space. Finally, digital files which exist only as single copies, whether on laptops, in phone galleries, on SD cards or on flash drives, are always vulnerable to loss, theft or damage.<sup>37</sup> None of my Lwandle storytellers who lost material in one of these ways had conventional backups on disks or flash drives—but several had uploaded pictures to Facebook or sent them via WhatsApp, and were able to retrieve them. Social media has become a de facto backup option.

## **Power**

Storytelling can happen anytime two humans meet, but digital storytelling is entirely dependent on an electric power supply—without it even the most efficient fully-charged battery runs out eventually (and the ageing laptop batteries characteristic of environments like Lwandle are often unable to hold a charge and must be kept plugged in). Com-Phone Story Maker, the app discussed in the software section above, is part of a larger project which also,

<sup>37</sup> When my own CPU failed in the middle of a workshop session, as discussed earlier in this chapter, my first thought was that I'd suffered a hard drive failure—quickly followed by relief that since I store all my work in Dropbox, I would lose no more than a day's work. I was protected by my financial, experiential and educational resources.

for exactly this reason, includes a component called Com-Charge, “a portable and adaptable solar-powered mobile phone charging station”.<sup>38</sup>

The museum at Lwandle experienced power cuts several times during my workshop sessions, sometimes because of problems with the larger electrical grid but most often during winter, when the building’s electrical wiring was unable to support multiple heaters, a kettle and computers all running simultaneously. There is a backup power supply for the computers to prevent data loss, and the problem was usually fixable by turning off a heater, but we all knew the system was vulnerable, and every interruption was also a disruption of the flow of the workshop.

Beyond the reliability of supply, there are the mechanics of actually getting electricity to all the devices which need it. My usual facilitator’s kit doesn’t include solar chargers, but it does include extension cables and a variety of adapters. Even so, I have encountered all of the following: power cables which are too short to reach the nearest power outlet; participants rearranging furniture so they can all huddle around the sole power outlet in the room; cables being pulled out because people trip over them; plugs that don’t fit into the available adapters; and adapters that are so poorly designed they don’t accommodate all the plugs they are supposed to.



*Figure 3.7: At some point every digital storytelling workshop becomes an exercise in cable management*

38 Robinson et al. “Com-Me : Community Media Toolkit.” 1.

This focus on the minutiae of operating systems, power supply and data connections may seem trivial: these are usually dealt with as mere housekeeping details, like the announcements at the beginning of an event about where to find the toilets and what the wifi password is. But, as I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the details of the myriad ways in which the material elements of a digital storytelling workshop may fail to run smoothly, and the ways people must compensate for and adapt to them, matter. The time and mental energy taken up by problem-solving—by the housekeeping—is time and energy taken away from the creative and emotional work of crafting the story.

If one is to ask what difference the digital makes in digital storytelling, this is part of the answer: if it is to work at all it requires the support of massive infrastructural, technical, financial and educational networks and resources. It is in the nature of infrastructure to be invisible so long as it works properly. As a result, in well-resourced environments much of what supports digital storytelling can be taken for granted. Examining it too closely would be in some sense a waste of effort. Working in Lwandle and places like it, however, removes major parts of the digital storytelling support system from what can be taken for granted and puts it back into the realm of what must be navigated and negotiated.

### **Space, food and hospitality**

I would like to conclude this chapter's consideration of the materiality of digital storytelling by turning my attention to those elements which bear most directly on participants' physical, and hence also emotional, experience of the workshop. In a 2018 paper Daniela Gachago and I conjured a scenario of failed participation in a university setting:

...the bodies of the people in the room are never acknowledged or cared for. No introductions are made, so that many of them remain strangers to each other. When the morning's first presentation runs over time, the break is shortened to make up. We wonder: which bodies are comfortable in this space (which contains this table, these chairs, that air conditioner) and which are not? Whose body is awash with anxiety, who is flushed or sweating, who is full of energy and enthusiasm, whose back is hurting, who is tired, hungry or thirsty, who is desperate for a toilet break, who is sick, who can't hear properly over the noise of a poorly designed space, who has to leave early to attend to family caring needs, who feels awkward, out of place and unwelcome? We have these questions but we do not know how to ask them, and so we become complicit in perpetuating the conditions we wish to see changed.<sup>39</sup>

39 Pam Sykes and Daniela Gachago, "Creating 'Safe-Ish' Learning Spaces—Attempts to Practice an Ethics of



As the facilitator of a digital storytelling workshop I consider myself responsible not only for assembling the technical requirements but also for creating, so far as I can, a space in which it is possible for people to feel comfortable. The physical affordances of a computer lab, for example, are very different to those of a church hall, lecture theatre or conference room: chairs afford sitting and tables afford writing, but not all of them are comfortable and only some of them afford changing the configuration of the room from rows to a circle.

Overall, the questions I ask about a space when assessing it for digital storytelling would include: How many chairs and tables are there, how are they arranged and can they be rearranged? How comfortable are they? How big is the space? Where are the power points? How is the temperature managed? What are the acoustics like? What privacy options are there? Where are the bathrooms? Where is the kitchen? And, very importantly: what does it feel like to walk into this space? Is it welcoming?



*Figure 3.8: Not a welcoming space*

Care.” *South African Journal of Higher Education* 32, no. 6 (December 2018), 88.

The quality of being welcoming is affective and embodied: it can be recognised by the sense of ease and confident belonging it produces. Welcoming spaces offer places to sit and to gather, a degree of comfort and clear signals about where to go and what to do; they act to reduce the feelings of awkwardness, discomfort, suspicion and hesitance that might otherwise characterise situations in which strangers meet for the first time.

To think about the quality of welcome focusses attention on hospitality, and on the facilitator or convenor of a gathering as host. A host greets visitors, performs introductions, shows people around a space, models appropriate behaviour, steers conversations, manages conflict and offers food and drink. A careful host can mitigate the effects of hostile or unwelcoming spaces, although not erase them entirely. From my field notes: “Food matters. Hosting matters. Being [at another workshop in the township of Enkanini] last week reconfirmed this for me - holding space includes holding physical and emotional comfort. The housekeeping details are not trivial even though they are often treated as such.”<sup>40</sup>

In Lwandle, the spaces of the museum offered different degrees of welcome and comfort at different times. During the first workshop, it had the advantage of being home ground for my participants, a space in which I was the visitor. This meant not only that participants already felt at ease, but could show hospitality to me as well as being the recipients of hospitality. I was served coffee and biscuits at every visit; several times staff members cooked and served fresh muffins from the kitchen; and we shared several lunches around the tables in the kitchen.<sup>41</sup> When I stepped into the role of host/facilitator of the workshop sessions, it was within spaces that had been gifted to me as a guest. This turned out to be an effective way of reducing the power differentials between me and the rest of the group.<sup>42</sup>

During the second workshop, several of us were guests or strangers in the museum, which continued to welcome and make space for us, even though it was not possible to offer us full access to all the museum’s resources. At two points, though, I took the group outside the museum. The first time was the story circle, a ritualised meeting which more than any other phase of the workshop requires a space which is private, free of interruptions and

40 Housekeeping is also, of course, gendered, which suggests that the lack of attention to it is part of a larger pattern of disregarding the gendered work of caring.

41 Hospitality is relational; it “relies on mutual respect and understanding of the reciprocal roles of guest and host, mutual giving and receiving”. Pip Hardy and Tony Sumner, *Cultivating Compassion*, 72.

42 Paul Thompson frames the acceptance of more than minimal hospitality as creating a “problem of mutual obligation”—from the oral historian’s point of view, it may compromise the ability to draw conclusions not shared by one’s host. In this case, a sense of mutual obligation is precisely what we are after. See Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 1988), 241.

emotionally and physically comfortable. For this I found a church-run cafe with extensive grounds and outdoor seating a short drive away in Somerset West (the serene atmosphere of a garden is often good for story circles).

The cafe also had the advantage of providing a way to offer food and drink. I had made it clear in the public invitation to the workshop that lunch would be served, but at the first formal session one of the participants asked that I serve breakfast as well. It became clear that she had not eaten yet that day, and not by choice. The suggested breakfast menu included bread, cheese, jam and polony as well as tea and coffee, all of which I brought to subsequent sessions (although I substituted peanut butter for the polony—the country was at that time in the middle of a listeria outbreak that had been traced to polony and I did not want to poison my participants).

By focussing in detail in this chapter on the material constituents of the ecosystem of digital storytelling, I hope to have demonstrated the extent to which this is always fragile and contingent. This is most starkly the case in places like Lwandle, which can be accommodated or drawn inside the boundaries only with immense effort, always imperfectly and probably only temporarily. This is expensive—in time, energy and attention as well as financially—and the resources that must be devoted to maintaining this inclusion are inevitably diverted from elsewhere. In the next two chapters I will explore the stories themselves, and the ways they were visualised as digital stories, to discover some of the ways they were shaped by this fragility.

The logo of the University of the Western Cape, featuring a classical building facade with columns and a pediment.

UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE

## 4. Elicitation

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We don't talk... we have never been raised to talk.<sup>1</sup>

No one wants to tell his Black story.  
They are too common, and we are too ashamed.<sup>2</sup>

Each time we talk about things that can be experienced only in privacy or intimacy, we bring them out into a sphere where they will assume a kind of reality which, their intensity notwithstanding, they never could have had before. The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves.<sup>3</sup>

Witnessing and responding, testifying and listening transform our reality, the realness of our experiences... experiences are constituted and reconstituted in the process of witnessing.<sup>4</sup>

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Assembling and maintaining the material elements of the ecosystem that enables digital storytelling is effortful, but the storytelling itself can be a process of surprising grace and ease. In part, this is because the digital storytelling workshop process has evolved a powerful and effective set of tools for eliciting, containing and developing personal stories. In this chapter I will unpack this process in detail, drawing attention to how facilitation shapes the stories that emerge—in particular, to its inherent potential for coercion and how the liminal zone between elicitation and coercion must be navigated. I will interweave descriptions of the workshops unfolding in Lwandle with reflections on how this illustrates some of these dilemmas. I do not, however, want to lose sight of the fact that for all my attempts to problematise the notion of voice, finding a voice remains a valuable experience for many people.

### **The digital storytelling workshop process**

StoryCenter-derived digital storytelling workshops have, over the years, developed a more or less standard set of procedures. The workshop begins with introductions, of the storytellers to each other and the facilitator, and to digital storytelling with a presentation that includes a

1 Masa Soko, post-story interview.

2 Quoted in Kristian D Stewart and Eunice Ivala, "Silence, Voice, and 'Other Languages': Digital Storytelling as a Site for Resistance and Restoration in a South African Higher Education Classroom." *British Journal of Educational Technology* 48, no. 5 (2017): 1164.

3 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 50.

4 Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, 106.

number of sample stories and a description of how the story-making process will unfold. The story circle during which participants tell each other their stories follows, possibly preceded by a set of storytelling exercises or prompts. Storytellers then work on their own, with the facilitator standing by to offer assistance, to produce a written script of around 300 words which is then recorded to produce a voiceover. A storyboarding process may follow, during which participants match their words to a sequence of images. The facilitator takes the group through a tutorial in how to use video editing software, and then participants again work alone, with the facilitator on standby, to craft their stories. Finally, the group assembles again to watch the completed stories together and go through a series of leave-taking rituals.

There is a very carefully designed arc to these processes. They are intended to take a set of people who may be strangers to each other, constitute them as a group with shared norms, create a sense of “safe space” in which people are able to do some kinds of work which are not otherwise possible, and then to close the space again, dissolving its boundaries so people can return comfortably to their everyday activities. This arc—a journey in and then out again—characterises both the entire workshop process, and the story circle within it.<sup>5</sup>

## Creating a group

Constituting the group as a group, rather than a random agglomeration of individuals, is important for several reasons. First, since doing any kind of personal story work entails vulnerability, those who are doing this work together need to establish a sense of mutual trust.<sup>6</sup> Second, when people think of themselves as members of a group they are more likely to honour commitments such as attending sessions and abiding by whatever rules are agreed to. Third, peers within a group are more likely to offer each other mutual assistance and support. This makes it possible to draw on expertise which might not otherwise be

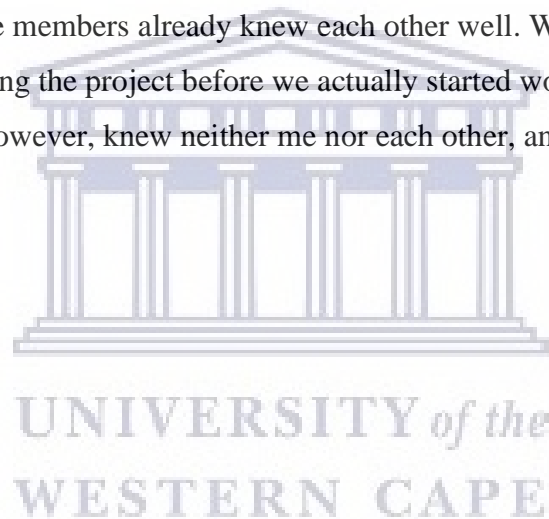
<sup>5</sup> It is difficult to provide references for this claim because the skill is largely learned in the doing, by experience, observation, conversation and practice. There is also a proliferation of practical guides and handbooks aimed principally at the corporate training market—for a particularly useful example, see Sharon Bowman below. But for a sample of formally documented approaches (some of which I find uncomfortably algorithmic or industrial), see Roger Schwarz, Anne S. Davidson, Margaret C. Carlson, and Susanne C. McKinney, eds, *The Skilled Facilitator Fieldbook* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005); Sandy Schuman, *The IAF Handbook of Group Facilitation: Best Practices from the Leading Organizations in Facilitation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005); Kathryn Quick and Jodi Sandfort, “Learning to Facilitate Deliberation: Practicing the Art of Hosting.” *Critical Policy Studies* 8, no. 3 (2014): 300–322; and Dorothy Strachan and Paul Tomlinson, *Process Design Making It Work: A Practical Guide to What to Do When and How for Facilitators, Consultants, Managers, and Coaches* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> “In training, psychological safety means that, from the moment learners enter the room, they are immersed in meaningful topic-related activities that help them form a strong learning community, that is, a group of folks who share a common goal of learning together in positive, respectful ways.” Sharon Bowman, *Training from the BACK of the Room!* (Pfeiffer, 2008) 77.



recognised; it reduces the workload on the facilitator; and, importantly, it shifts the power balance away from the facilitator. This is part of what is being signalled when chairs are arranged in a circle rather than in rows facing towards the front: that there is an intention that power should not be focussed on a single point. Of course it is entirely possible to do this thoughtlessly or in bad faith, or to fail at all the other things which need to be done to decentre power, so that the circle doesn't *necessarily* do anything at all, nor is it sufficient to achieve anything on its own.<sup>7</sup> It sends a signal nonetheless.

How does the constitution of a group happen? My experience of facilitation suggests that the process can begin informally, as people recognise that they are coming together with similar intentions and will share a common experience. It is often useful, however, to supplement this informal process with a more formal session of establishing common goals and standards for how the group will conduct itself. I chose not to do this agreement session with the first group, whose members already knew each other well. We had also had several meetings together discussing the project before we actually started work, so they knew me well. The second group, however, knew neither me nor each other, and so we began with an agreements session.



<sup>7</sup> For a demonstration, see just about any seminar involving graduate students.

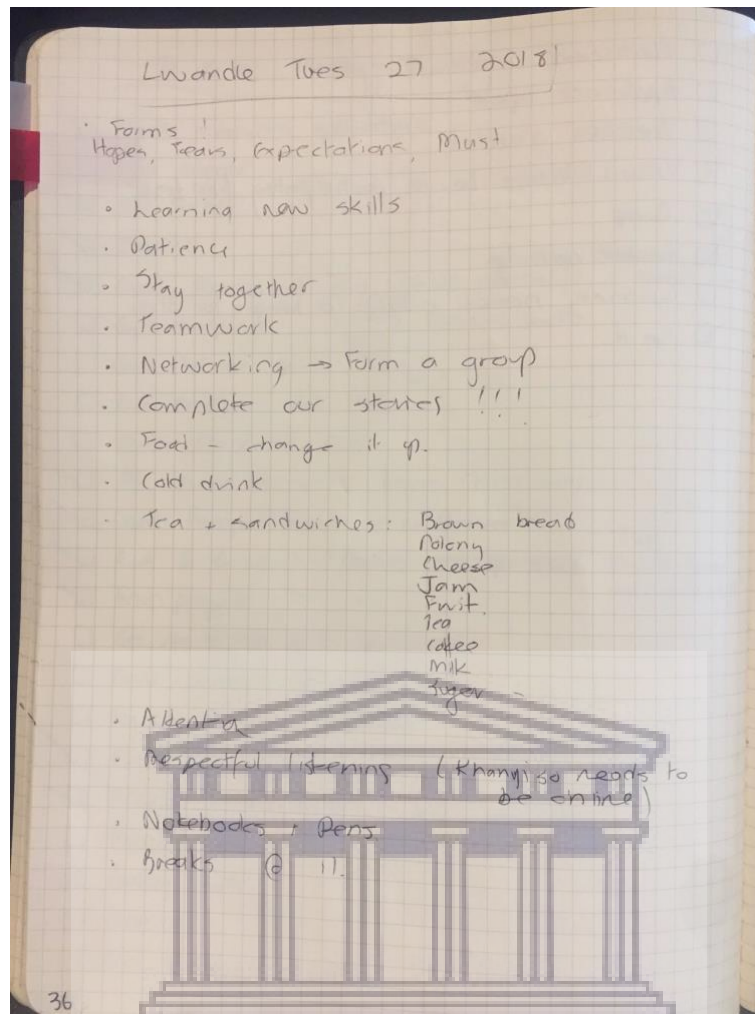


Figure 4.1: Notes from the agreement session for the second group

In facilitating agreement sessions I had previously used questions like “what do you want to achieve in this workshop?”, “what will make this process successful for you?” and “what do you need to feel comfortable and productive in this space?”. These are usually perfectly adequate, but in this session I wanted to experiment with something slightly different. I had spent the previous week helping to facilitate a five-day workshop, convened and hosted by Cape Town-based NGO the Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation, with people living in Enkanini, an informal settlement in Stellenbosch. At a one-day inception workshop, the lead facilitator Gill Black had used a framework of hopes, fears, and non-negotiables (“needs” or “musts”) to structure the agreement session, which I adapted for this session, adding a question about expectations, which sit somewhere between hopes and fears. In a way this amounts to asking the same question several times in different ways, in the hopes that everyone in the group will find at least one form of the question productive.

This kind of agreement-setting accomplishes several goals at once. It produces house rules like “don’t use your phone during sessions” and “listen respectfully”; it orients participants around and encourages responsibility for meeting their own personal goals; it creates documented success criteria which can be revisited at the end to assess how well those goals have been achieved; and it surfaces requirements that the facilitator might not otherwise have known.

There is another important but seldom acknowledged purpose to these sessions. Following the storytelling mantra “show, don’t tell”, I use these introductory sessions as a sample of my facilitation style—it is a performance in its own right. My intention is that I should demonstrate, rather than simply declare, that everyone’s contributions will be treated as valuable, that there is space for disagreement and dissent, that I am actually interested in hearing the answers to the questions I ask, and so on. The trust that needs to be built is not only between the group members but between them and the facilitator, and this is one of the first steps in that process. If this trust-building fails, it is entirely possible to go through the entire agreements process as an empty exercise—most adults, after all, have been through enough similar exercises to know what is expected. There is a difficult zone of uncertainty here: how do I know whether people are genuinely engaging or just going through the motions? There is no litmus test for this; it is just one of the moments when one must trust one’s intentions.

At Lwandle, the group expressed that they expected to learn new skills and complete their stories, wanted an atmosphere of respectful listening and attention and, very strongly, that they wanted to *be a group*, working together as a team (recall that this was a group of four who had previously been strangers to each other). We agreed start, end and break times, and the group detailed what kinds of food and snacks they wanted. I had learned from previous experience that my own notions of what constitutes good food are not universal and, as discussed in the previous chapter, wanted to offer food that would help my participants feel at ease and welcomed.

In this case, the group asked that I provide notebooks and pens—a reminder to me, along with the requests for food, that I had made incorrect assumptions about what these young people could afford.

### **Waking the story senses**

The presentation that follows the introductory session, some form of which opens every digital storytelling workshop I present, has evolved over years from a version first shared

with me by the staff of StoryCenter (then the Center for Digital Storytelling) in 2010. I keep the presentation on my laptop and attach it to a projector if one is available—as it was for the first workshop at Lwandle—or if not, let the group gather around the screen while the sample stories play. The presentation is usually in English, although it includes stories in other languages with English subtitles. I have also done it in Afrikaans, but my isiXhosa is not good enough for the task.

This presentation is a liminal zone in its own right, a transition space between the initial introductions and the story circle, a low-stakes next step into the workshop that allows more time for participants to settle in and get to know each other. It explains the storymaking process and what participants will be doing for the rest of the workshop. It also makes it clear, right from the start, that each story will have an audience, even as I emphasise that there is no obligation to share the story outside the workshop. The frame for these stories is always public, even if that public is the very small and temporary one of the workshop group.

The changes I have made to this presentation over the years have generally been in the direction of simplifying it: I have removed much of the content and added space for questions and discussion. This is partly a response to habits of deference to authority, seniority and whiteness that are still deeply embedded in South African society. Assertiveness and outspokenness are not, on the whole, traits that are highly valued and developed, particularly in the education system.<sup>8</sup> Breaking the mould in which an older (often white) person talks and everyone else listens and agrees (or at least pretends to) requires work. In particular, as I suggested above, it requires a conscious decision by those in more powerful positions to step back. In making this presentation I am, again, delivering a performance about how things will be handled in this space.

For example, at Lwandle I preceded the presentation by first asking each group what they thought made a good story, rather than presenting a set of rules for good storytelling. My intention was to affirm their own existing storytelling expertise and to encourage them to view the sample stories in a mode of evaluation—as creators and critics of stories, not only

<sup>8</sup> Samantha Vice's thoughts on the value of white silence are worth noting again here. And on deference to authority and seniority, note the fact that corporal punishment is still widely accepted in South African schools and homes despite being against the law. See for example Save the Children South Africa, "On Corporal Punishment in Mpumalanga Schools," 2015. <https://www.savethechildren.org.za/news-and-events/news/on-corporal-punishment-in-mpumalanga-schools>; and Michael Swain, "Spanking Judgment Sets Dangerous Precedent." *Freedom of Religion South Africa*, 2017. <https://forsa.org.za/press-release-spanking-judgment-sets-dangerous-precedent/>.

consumers. I sometimes describe this as “waking up the story senses”, which also helps to prime people for how they might approach the story circle.<sup>9</sup>

In both groups, the first characteristic of a good story that surfaced was emotion: everyone agreed that a good story was one that made them feel something. Both groups also felt strongly that a story must be “believable”, which was a factor both of the technical competence of the storyteller (how well the story is told), and of the perceived reality of the story—“I must be able to relate it to my experience”. They agreed that clarity and logical sequencing were important elements of a good story.

These initial conversations were slightly awkward and hesitant. Part of the reason may have been the oddness of speaking about stories in the abstract, before having seen any examples. Another reason was very probably that this was still at a very early stage in the workshop, and participants were feeling out what was and was not allowed. Would I tell anyone they were wrong, or mock them? (At the workshop in Enkanini I mentioned above, I had been struck by how many people expressed the fear that they would be laughed at.)

This awkwardness tends to decrease with each succeeding round of conversation, once the presentation has started and we start to talk about individual stories. I know a threshold has been crossed the first time someone expresses criticism or dislike of a story I have selected.

### **Seed stories**

The sample stories shown during the opening presentation are a model of what digital stories are—perhaps the first ones participants have ever seen—and so they are a powerful influence on what stories are told in the story circle. Choosing which stories to include involves a dance between several objectives, which do not always pull in the same direction. I want to show stories that feel relevant to the group I am addressing and ideally reflect something of their own lives. At the same time, I also want to show stories that stretch the limits of the form and highlight some of its creative possibilities, and the opportunities for participants to reach beyond their here-and-now. I want to show what impact can be achieved by a certain amount of emotional honesty, while steering clear of encouraging a level of disclosure that cuts too deep—as I have suggested, there is a fine line between encouragement and subtle coercion. I want to share stories that are visually ambitious or engaging, not content with the

<sup>9</sup> This emphasis on stories as crafted objects which are open to critique, not as spontaneous expressions of self, is one of the ways to maintain the boundary between a story circle and a group therapy session.



stereotypical and occasionally chaotic scraped-off-the-internet aesthetic of some digital stories. At the same time, I also want to avoid stories that are so polished that they seem beyond what my participants could ever hope to achieve within the limits of their resources. And finally, I must choose from a limited pool of stories I have permission to share publicly or that are available on the internet, bearing in mind constraints of language and cultural distance.

On the day I formally began the workshop with the first group of Museum employees, I repeated the first session twice so that the entire staff wouldn't be away from their regular duties at the same time. I showed first a short video in which StoryCenter director Joe Lambert discusses some of the history of digital storytelling, followed by four stories, all around two or three minutes long, which is typical for a digital story:

1. *Rachel's Story* was made in 2012 during a workshop for community care workers in Cape Town, organised and sponsored by a now-defunct NGO which advocated for better pay and working conditions and taught techniques of self-care. The story details a typical day in this community care worker's life, her exhaustion and feelings of isolation and abandonment, and describes how the NGO has helped her improve her well-being, build solidarity with others and improve her relationships. It included professionally taken photographs from the organisation's archive as well as pictures staged and taken by me during the workshop, which was held over three days at a church retreat centre near Cape Town. It was edited on a Windows laptop using Vegas Movie Studio.<sup>10</sup>
2. *A Student Story* was made in 2014 by a group of first-year landscape design students at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology to reflect on their involvement in a project to design, build and plant a new footpath across a section of the campus. The workshop was held over three morning sessions in a large classroom, with students working on their stories between classes. The students talk about how their own involvement in a construction project changed their attitude to manual labour, from seeing it as undignified "dirty work" to recognising the role of construction workers in creating useful and beautiful structures. Some of the pictures used in the story were archival shots from the construction project, but most were taken during the

<sup>10</sup> "Rachel's Story." 2014. Digital story file in personal collection.

storymaking process, on an Android tablet supplied by the university. The story was assembled on the same tablet using Com Phone Story Maker.<sup>11</sup>

3. *Go Around* is a story from the global digital storytelling canon, in which a lecturer from a US school of nursing tells of a night towards the end of her 16-year career as a flight nurse on emergency services helicopters, when the entire crew narrowly avoided death by crashing into unseen power lines. The story skilfully links the idea of voice and assertiveness in personal relationships with the confident voice needed to alert a pilot to danger, and makes excellent use of just five pictures, complemented by music and additional sound effects, to tell a gripping story.<sup>12</sup>
4. *Victoria's Story* was made in 2017 by a participant in a digital skills development programme sponsored by the Cape Information Technology Initiative at their lab space in Woodstock.<sup>13</sup> She describes how she moved from the rural Eastern Cape to Port Elizabeth to complete her schooling and begin a diploma in electrical engineering, but then had her education plans derailed by lack of funds. She did domestic work for many years until being recruited into an internet start-up by her employer's son. The story was made using the teller's own photographs and the online video editing app WeVideo.<sup>14</sup>

After screening each story, I asked a set of open-ended questions intended, as before, to encourage participants to think critically about the stories and to increase their sense of comfort and confidence with me and with each other. These include questions like: How did this story make you feel? What did you learn from it? What did you like, or not like, about it? What would you do differently?

The responses to these questions are always diverse and often illuminating. The first group strongly disliked the *Rachel* community care worker story, finding it one-sided and self-indulgent and expressing impatience with the teller for “moaning” and “feeling sorry for herself”. Even though the story describes how Rachel finds resources to deal with her sense of isolation and shares these with others, it uses an emotional language of self-care and support with which the Lwandle group had little sympathy.

11 “A Student Story”. 2014. Digital story file in personal collection.

12 Cathy Jaynes (n.d.). *Go Around*. Retrieved April 30, 2019, from <http://www.nurstory.org/story-gallery/2016/11/9/go-around-by-cathy-jaynes>. The other stories mentioned here are not publicly available; the makers gave me permission to use them only in the context of digital storytelling workshops.

13 See <http://www.citi.org.za/project-tenaciti/>.

14 “Victoria's Story”. 2017. Digital story file in personal collection.

The students' story about the construction project was much better received: one group member commented that "it relates to me". The students had included street scenes, photographs of themselves re-enacting scenes from the story and photographs they had taken of construction workers, and group said they enjoyed seeing pictures of people and settings that were familiar to them. There was some feeling that the narrator was perhaps a little more middle class or privileged than the story suggested. One group member commented: "The story shows ignorance but also *ubuyena* [being true to oneself] ... personal growth?"

*Go Around*, the US flight nurse story, was more ambivalently received. The group loved the story's pacing and its use of sound effects (a helicopter starting up and in flight, a beeping which suggests medical monitors), but some said they were not entirely sure what was going on. The viewing conditions were not ideal—a digital projection of a story containing mostly dark pictures in a room which could not be entirely darkened—but much of the bewilderment was a matter of language and cultural distance. The story, about a moment of personal revelation for a middle-aged, white American woman, may simply have lacked enough common reference points with this audience to be completely intelligible, a point which gives extra force to the group's preference for stories that "relate to me". Stories do not, it turns out, always translate well across differences.

Because, as discussed in the preceding chapter, the first group suffered a disruption when two of its members left the Museum and three new people joined, I repeated a pared-down version of this introductory session for the new members on June 14<sup>th</sup> 2017 when I first met them. I left out most of the content which is discussed in the next section and instead just showed the sample stories, swapping out the *Rachel* story which had been so poorly received with *Sunrise in an Unlikely Place*.<sup>15</sup> This story was made by a group of women who were living in the informal settlement of Thembelihle south of Johannesburg, with the support of a group of researchers from UNISA's Institute for Health and Social Services and Institute for Dispute Resolution in Africa, as part of a broader project called Community Storylines.<sup>16</sup> It describes the women's struggles to earn a livelihood and their establishment of a number of early childhood development centres, and asserts a sense of pride in both their own personal development and their contributions to their community.<sup>17</sup>

15 University of South Africa and South African Medical Research Council, *Sunrise in an Unlikely Place*. (Institute for Social & Health Sciences, University of South Africa, 2015).

16 Institute for Social and Health Services, *Annual Report 2015*. Retrieved April 30, 2019, from [www.samrc.ac.za/sites/default/files/files/2017-08-14/2015Annualreport.pdf](http://www.samrc.ac.za/sites/default/files/files/2017-08-14/2015Annualreport.pdf).

17 See Ursula Lau and Mohamed Seedat, "Structural violence and the struggle for recognition: Examining community narratives in a post-apartheid democracy." In M. Seedat, S. Suffla, & D. J. Christie (Eds.),

This subgroup particularly liked *Victoria's Story*, again for its relatability, and like the first group found *Go Around* difficult to follow. They liked *Sunrise in An Unlikely Place* particularly for the song which begins and ends it, a 2014 collaboration between The Soil and Ladysmith Black Mambazo called *Hamba Uyosebenza* [Go Work].

For the second workshop group, I repeated this second set of stories during the general information and recruitment session on February 15<sup>th</sup> 2018. Then, since they had already seen several local stories, I showed three stories from outside South Africa during the first formal session of the workshop on February 27<sup>th</sup>:

1. The first was *Sofas*, made in collaboration with StoryCenter and the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, which uses images of sofas abandoned on city streets to carry the story of a young man who becomes homeless after the death of his grandmother, his only caregiver, and his journey to becoming a community organiser.<sup>18</sup>
2. *Beauty*, another story from the US, is a nurse's reflection on women he has worked with who are survivors of various forms of abuse, how their experiences might illuminate his mother's anger, and his coming to terms with what he cannot know.<sup>19</sup>
3. Finally, I showed *Flashback*,<sup>20</sup> a lyrical story from the BBC's Capture Wales Project in which a man reflects back 70 years to his early schooldays in rural Wales.

In this group, we talked about what made a good story after viewing *Sofas*, so this story was fresh in their minds as they considered the question. My notes don't identify individual speakers, but the conversation again surfaced a desire for stories to be "universal and relatable". Allowing viewers to "share in the experience" was considered one of the hallmarks of a good story. They liked themes of struggle, success and overcoming, and noted that honesty was an advantage: "Don't hide things, don't be ashamed." Finally, "sharing stories can help people express feelings".

I have no further details about reactions to individual stories during this session, because I chose not to make audio or video recordings of these sessions or the story circles. This was partly because I knew it would be difficult and prohibitively expensive to transcribe

*Enlarging the scope of peace psychology: African and world-regional contributions* (Springer, 2017), 203–220.

18 Richard, W. (n.d.). Sofas. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPmDD51Y5s>

19 Cowling, R. (n.d.). Beauty. <http://www.nurstory.org/story-gallery/2016/11/9/beauty-by-richard-cowling>

20 Ieuan Sheen. 2003. "Flashback." BBC Wales. 2003.

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/audiovideo/sites/yourvideo/pages/ieuan\\_sheen\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/audiovideo/sites/yourvideo/pages/ieuan_sheen_01.shtml)

them. Mainly, however, it was because a recording device is never just a recording device but also always a participant in its own right, influencing not just what participants say and do but also my own attention. Where there is a recording device, there is always a concern about whether it is working properly. A glance at the recorder to check whether the light is still blinking, like a glance at a watch, signals that my attention is not entirely with the person who is speaking.

In any case, my notes reveal that my attention was already multiply engaged: there is far more in them about food, planning for the story circle to come and the particular personalities and concerns of my four participants than there is about the content of our conversations. This moment highlights the tension between the roles of facilitator and researcher: the facilitator must always be watching the process as well as being inside it, but it is not the same observational distance or point of view as that of the researcher. I was attempting to be both at the same time, with limited success.

### **Seven steps?**

In the conventional progress of a digital storytelling workshop, this viewing and discussion of stories is followed by, or interwoven with, an explanation of the “seven steps” of digital storytelling: owning your insights, owning your emotions, finding the moment of change, seeing the story, hearing the story, assembling the story and finally sharing the story<sup>21</sup>. Although to some extent arbitrary—why seven and not six, or eight?—these steps have proven to be a durable framework for structuring workshops, for talking about digital stories and for carrying the practice into new settings.

In South Africa, I have found that the first three steps in particular, which focus on the reflective aspects of the story (insights, emotions and moments of change), sometimes translate very uneasily into the contexts of my work. It is not entirely clear exactly where this uneasiness lies, but I suspect it has something to do with how ideas of self are articulated and connected with ideas of the collective. In the StoryCenter tradition, “we want to help storytellers move through a process of self-discovery about the why of their story”, but also “a group process invites us to see how our stories are connected;<sup>22</sup> the self is first, and the collective arises from the interaction of these selves. In South Africa, it more often feels that the collective is first. Sometimes groups of people elect to tell collective stories, and at other

<sup>21</sup> Lambert, *Digital Storytelling*, 53-69.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-5.



time, with individual stories, I sense a self working to emerge out of the collective. I raise this with misgiving because the concept of *ubuntu* has been so widely abused and commodified that it has become almost a caricature, but it is probably significant that the phrase *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*—a person is a person because of other people—is South African. Although a shallow version of *ubuntu* has been co-opted by what Pumla Dineo Gqola has called rainbowism—“the illusion of unity and equanimity” that makes it possible “to dismiss the effects of history on the contemporary”<sup>23</sup>—it nevertheless points to a relational understanding of the self that I have found useful.<sup>24</sup>

For example: “Tell a story about your name” is a prompt I have seen used, and used myself, at the beginning of story-focussed events and workshops. The first time I did this exercise, I told a story about the shock and anger I had felt when I got married and realised that I would have to make a special application to the Department of Home Affairs to prevent the automatic changing of my surname to my husband’s. I had thought of my name as a singular thing that was core to my identity, and was deeply disturbed by the idea that someone else had the power to tell me what it was. After years of hearing stories about how names shift in response to changing relationships, I came to think of myself as an outlier. An isiXhosa language teacher explained to me how women, upon marriage, are given new names by their husband’s families, and how she had come to enjoy the fluidity of being able to go by different names in different settings. I learned how names denote clan affiliations and religious commitments, and how the names people use for the purposes of engagement with the state and other bureaucracies are often different from the names they use in everyday life. I recognised how the loss of control over my own name that had so outraged me was a commonplace experience for black South Africans, and that even now many of my white compatriots routinely declare black names “too difficult”, and impose names of their own choosing.<sup>25</sup>

23 Pumla Dineo Gqola, “Defining People: Analysing Power, Language and Representation in Metaphors of the New South Africa.” *Transformation* 47 (2001): 102-3.

24 Although this relational understanding is not, of course, exclusive to Africa. Feminist philosopher Kelly Oliver puts it this way: “We are neither self-contained nor separated. Rather, we are profoundly dependent on our environment and other people for the energy that sustains us. Far from being alienated from the world or others, we are intimately and continually connected, and responding, to them. We are by virtue of our response to the biosocial energy that surrounds us.” Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, 198.

25 See Simamkele Dlakavu, “#MyNameIsNot That Difficult.” *IOL*, March 4, 2015.

<https://www.iol.co.za/news/opinion/mynameisnot-that-difficult-1826957> and Alyssa Klein, “2016 Is #TheYearWeMispronounceBack: Black South Africans Are Taking A Stand Against White Mispronunciation.” *OkayAfrica*, January 4, 2016. <https://www.okayafrica.com/the-year-we-mispronounce-back-2016-south-africa-twitter-hashtag/>.

Now I realise I was entirely wrong about the singularity of my name: I also, in fact, have many names, because names are intrinsically relational. The child who greets me at school with “hello, Sarah’s mom!” is placing me within a web of significant relationships, as is the neighbour who calls me “Aunty Pam” or the stranger who simply calls me “mama”. Where once I would have felt such names as a diminution or reduction of self, now I think of them rather as an extension, a recognition of the extent to which I am made in the spaces between me and others.

The shift of perspective involved here is subtle but significant. I can understand myself as an autonomous self who is enriched in the process of connection and exchange with others, or I can understand myself as actually constituted through my entanglements with others (who may include both humans and non-humans). It is not necessary to choose between these perspectives, but it is useful to be able to take one or the other at different times, or to oscillate between them.

So in the traditional language of digital storytelling, “owning the insight” and “owning the emotion” are part of a process of taking responsibility for the self and its development; to own something (think of “owning up”) is to take it in, to incorporate it. This language makes perfect sense if the self is more or less bounded within one’s skin, but if most of myself is out there, in between, it doesn’t quite land. So in my practice in South Africa, I have often found that this language feels discordant and out of place. My presentation of the seven steps has moved in the direction of a far more functional set of guidelines about deciding what story to tell and unpacking its emotional content, less as a doorway to self-discovery than as a tool for telling an engaging story.



Figure 4.2: An adaptation of the seven steps

There is another reason for this step back from a deep dive into the self: the pervasiveness of violence and trauma in South African lives. This is not the background historical trauma of apartheid which has been so extensively recognised, but the stuff of daily life:

The contemporary experience of citizenship in South Africa is largely characterized by abandonment and trauma. The everyday reality... is marked by the continual transgression of boundaries through multiple forms of violence.<sup>26</sup>

If “about 75% of South Africans experience *at least* one violence-related traumatic event over the course of their lifetime”,<sup>27</sup> then this reality is always present in the background. Many stories hint at it—but talking directly about one’s experience of violence can be

26 Joanna Wheeler, “Troubling Transformation”, 332. See also Mamphela Ramphele, “Teach Me How to Be a Man: An Exploration of the Definition of Masculinity,” in *Violence and Subjectivity*, ed. Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, Mamphela Ramphele and Pamela Reynolds (University of California Press, 2000), 102–19; and Anthony Collins, “Violence Is Not a Crime: The Impact of ‘Acceptable’ Violence on South African Society.” *SA Crime Quarterly*, no. 43 (2013): 29–37.

27 Mohamed Seedat, Ashley Van Niekerk, Shahnaz Suffla, and Kopano Ratele, “Psychological Research and South Africa’s Violence Prevention Responses.” *South African Journal of Psychology* 44, no. 2 (2014): 136–7. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0081246314526831>. Emphasis added.

destabilising and damaging, especially in the context of a short-term workshop where professional psychosocial support is unavailable (and very possibly based on theories of the self and of suffering which do not travel well across cultures).<sup>28</sup> In this context, when silence can be self-protective, the kinds of probing questions associated with a drive to self-knowledge can be out of place.

Working to facilitate digital stories in South Africa, then, I tend to avoid pushing too deep. Nevertheless, many people choose anyway to tell stories they have never told before, and report that they find the experience of sharing these stories with others valuable. This is enabled by some combination of the seed stories, the opening presentation, the story circle and the emphasis on group process: and since I am working with adults, I must balance my fear of acting coercively with respect for their own ability to make decisions that serve them. As Amy Hill of the *Silence Speaks* digital storytelling initiative notes:

Most people choose to tell their stories, even if doing so is quite challenging, when they intuit that they have the strength and internal resources necessary for doing so and when they sense that someone capable of truly listening is available to hear them.<sup>29</sup>

I ask participants to consider what story they want to tell, what it means, what work they might like the story to do and what makes it their own—what is it about this story that only they can tell? Finally, the question “Why this story? Why now?” provides a valuable opportunity to reflect on the fact that at any given moment there are multiple stories that might appropriately be told, that these stories might change from day to day, and that no life is defined by a single story.<sup>30</sup>

I combine these questions with others about the emotional content of a story. I suggest that people pay attention to what they feel during a story both as tellers and as audience; alert

28 For a very small sample, see: Amy L Hill, “Digital Storytelling for Gender Justice: Exploring the Challenges and the Limits of Polyvocality” in *Confronting Global Gender Justice: Women’s Lives, Human Rights*, Ed. Debra Bergoffen, Paula Ruth Gilbert, Tamara Harvey, and Connie L McNeely (Routledge, 2011), 126–40; Christopher J Colvin, “Ambivalent Narrations : Pursuing the Political through Traumatic Storytelling.” *American Anthropological Association*, no. 12 (2004): 72–89; Rosemary Jolly, “Witnessing Embodiment: Trauma, Narrative and Theory at the Limit in Field Research and in the Classroom.” *Australian Feminist Studies* 26, no. 69 (2011): 297–317; Vanessa Pupavac, “Pathologizing Populations and Colonizing Minds: International Psychosocial Programs in Kosovo.” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 27, no. 4 (2002): 489–511; Natalie Clark, “Shock and Awe: Trauma as the New Colonial Frontier.” *Humanities* 5, no. 1 (February 5, 2016): 14; Siddharth Ashvin Shah, “Ethnomedical Best Practices for International Psychosocial Efforts in Disaster and Trauma.” In *Cross-Cultural Assessment of Psychological Trauma and PTSD*, ed. E. Tang and J Wilson (New York: Springer, 2007), 51–64.

29 Hill, “Digital Storytelling for Gender Justice”, 129.

30 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story.” *TED*, July 2009.

[https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story/transcript?language=en#t-1110024](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript?language=en#t-1110024).

them to the possibility that the emotional content of stories may be complex and sometimes conflicting; and note that during the production process a teller can choose which emotions to highlight and which to exclude or downplay.

Identifying the moment of change, at its simplest, is reminding participants that unless there is some change between the beginning and the ending, there is no story. A useful simplifying framework is the idea that there are only two kinds of story: “I went out one day” and “A stranger came to town”—either we go looking for change, or it comes to us unbidden.<sup>31</sup> Knowing which of these kinds of story one is telling can help to clarify how one figures as the protagonist or lead character in one’s own story. This is also one of the things about personal storytelling that can change the nature of a person’s relationship with their own past experience: it is inherent in the structure of narrative that in a story I tell about myself, I am necessarily the protagonist even when the events of the story subject me to changes not of my own choosing. If the experience being told has involved being victimised or objectified, the mere act of telling is already a powerful reframing and reclaiming of this experience. Kelly Oliver argues that:

There is no voice from inside victimization. Testifying to a witness opens up the space to step outside. For this reason, it is in the process of testifying that the victim first comes to "know" his or her own experience.<sup>32</sup>

I would suggest further that it is the act of story-making—taking the raw material of experience and crafting into a work of art, a shareable object that has a life independent of its maker—which enables a neutralisation of the shame which often attends experiences of victimisation. Sharing a story of one’s own choosing among a group of peers enables the creation of solidarity and an assertion of agency that is very different from the experience of answering questions put by an interviewer. This is not antithetical to a recognition of the

31 Various attributed to Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Hemingway and many others, but most likely the American author John Gardner “catalyzed the construction of this adage”. See Garson O’Toole, “There Are Only Two Plots: (1) A Person Goes on a Journey (2) A Stranger Comes to Town.” *Quote Investigator*, 2015. <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2015/05/06/two-plots/>.

32 Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, 92. It’s worth stressing here that Oliver sets her notion of witnessing as inherently responsive and response-able in opposition to theories of subjectivity which are “populated with subjects warring with others, often referred to as objects, subjects struggling to deny their dependence on others”; in fact, “We create an impossible problem for ourselves by presuming to be separated in the first place. By presuming that we are fundamentally separated from the world and other people by the void of empty space, we at once eliminate the possibility of connection and relationships even while we make desperate attempts to bridge that abyss.” (5-12).



power of silence: our attentiveness to silences within and beyond stories is part of what makes them resonant.

Very little of this can be made explicit in the actual process of a digital storytelling workshop, which has an agenda and a deadline, but it lies just beneath the surface and frames the invitation to tell a story. If the framing works, questions about the purpose of a story, its emotional content and the change it tracks seem to achieve the goal of encouraging or supporting stories that have stakes high enough to make the telling worthwhile, without risking too much.

From a discussion of the internal dynamics of story, the introductory presentation moves to a more practical discussion of what comes next, after the story circle: script writing, audio recording, assembling pictures, and editing the story. All of these are matters of varying degrees of anxiety to most people, and so much of what needs to be achieved is reassurance and encouragement rather than simply giving information.

The prospect of writing is particularly fraught for people whose mother tongue is not English, and so during the Lwandle workshops this was an opportunity to restate an invitation to use isiXhosa. I also stressed the brevity of the scripts required (typically 250-350 words), and the idea of writing for the mouth and the ears rather than for the eyes. At this point I often mention explicitly that much of what people were taught in school about writing can be, and should be, set aside. The reminder that this is not “for marks” seems to be helpful. (Working with people who are not confidently literate requires another set of strategies altogether, but this was not the case at Lwandle.)

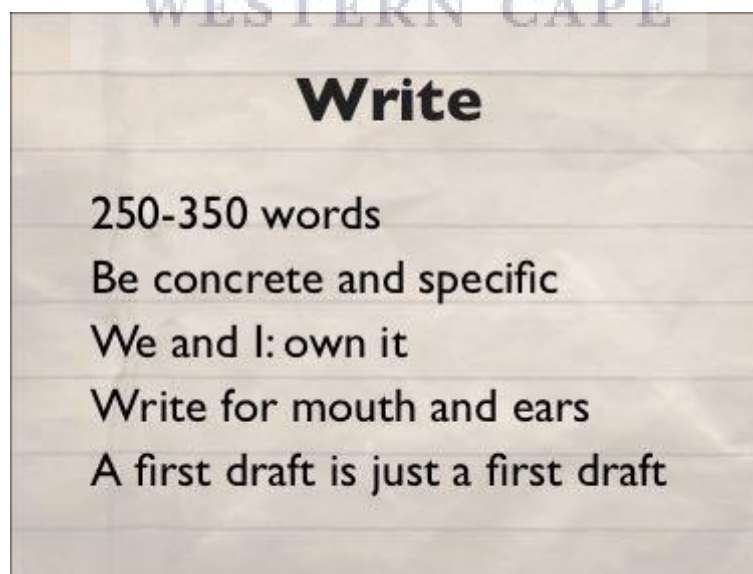
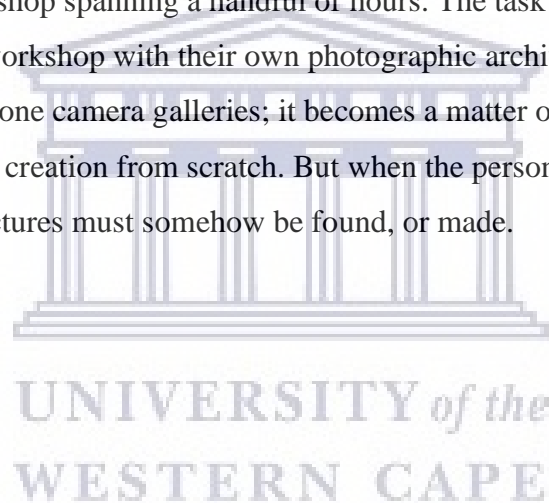


Figure 4.3: The “writing” slide from the workshop introductory presentation

Audio recording and picture taking, although less familiar, are also often somehow less threatening, perhaps because they offer the excitement of an encounter with the new—and are not freighted with the baggage of years of educational judgement and correction. I reassure people that they do not need expensive equipment, and alert them to the fact that they are likely to be dismayed by their first encounter with their own recorded voice (although this is becoming increasingly less necessary in the age of the WhatsApp voice note).

### **Seeing the story**

Talking about how to visualise a digital story, and the role of images, confronts the facilitator with the task of reducing a vast landscape—covering at a minimum two centuries of photographic practice and theory, with several millennia of diverse visual cultures hovering just around the corner—to a brief sketch of ideas and techniques that will be just enough to get the job done in a workshop spanning a handful of hours. The task is slightly easier when participants arrive at the workshop with their own photographic archives of family snapshots and, increasingly, smartphone camera galleries; it becomes a matter of selection and presentation rather than of creation from scratch. But when the personal archive is limited or even absent altogether, pictures must somehow be found, or made.





*Figure 4.4: Two of the “seeing” slides from the introductory presentation. The first is an adaptation from a presentation that was first shared with me by StoryCenter in 2010.<sup>33</sup>*

Since it is always more comfortable to use something already existing than to create something new, one of the great pitfalls of digital storytelling is that any storyteller with visual gaps to fill and an internet connection will turn to Google Image Search before venturing out to take their own pictures. There are several results of this turn to the search engine that are at odds with my understanding of my own role and responsibilities as a facilitator.

<sup>33</sup> StoryCenter. 2010. “7StepsKeynote.” Keynote presentation file in personal collection.

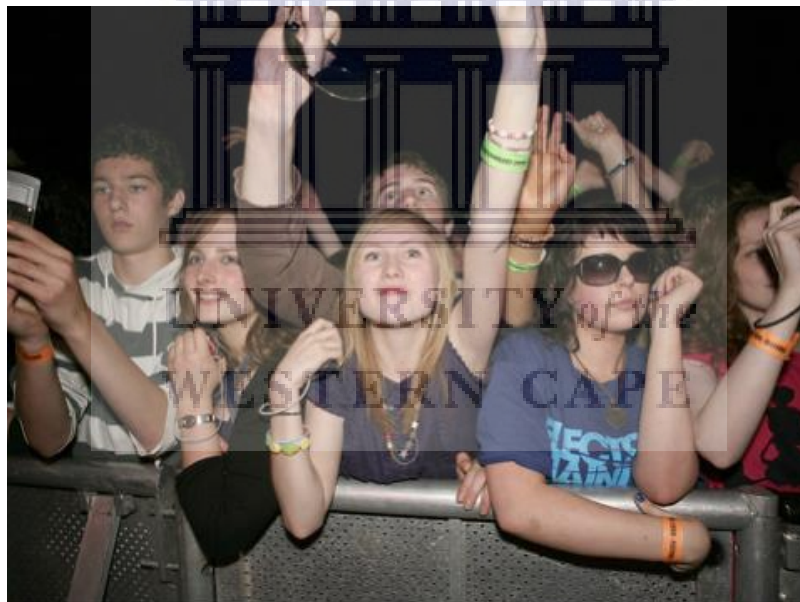
The first result is a problem of attribution: few people I have worked with, not excluding university students, are familiar with the conventions of acknowledging the sources of their material, and internet culture as it has evolved over the past 20 years has encouraged people to copy, adapt, re-use and share images without thought for their original creators. One can, as a facilitator, take pains to point out the ethical problems of this approach and encourage use of public domain and Creative Commons-licensed material, but these lessons very rarely take—there is simply too much going on. And in the rush of creation, even those with the best intentions often neglect to make notes about exactly where they found their images, so that by the end of the workshop the information often simply isn't available and can only be rediscovered with great effort, if at all.

The second result is that internet-sourced images often display features that I read as problems of quality, like low resolution. Storytellers rarely have the knowledge, skill or even desire to tell the difference between high- and low-resolution images, or to discriminate between various image sizes available. In some cases, they don't have the network bandwidth needed to download high-resolution images even if they did have this desire. Many, many digital stories end up full of images that are pixelated, blurry or sport watermarks (adding copyright violation to poor quality). An image that is blurry because it's a scan or photograph of a blurry but irreplaceable old snapshot is one thing; an image that is blurry because it was hastily cut-and-pasted from the first screen of a Google image search is quite another.

I should acknowledge here that this concern with quality, although not unique to me, is by no means universal; the literature of digital storytelling has concerned itself curiously little with the visual. In many cases, any image that more or less successfully illustrates what the storyteller is saying in the voiceover will do; but I am not satisfied with this. One of my roles as a facilitator is to teach, and in Lwandle, as in other places, people agreed to participate in the workshop understanding that they would learn new skills. Allowing a carelessly ripped image to pass without comment would be an abdication of my responsibility as a teacher, which I take to include supporting people to achieve things they did not believe themselves to be capable of. The key word, perhaps, is "careless"—there is no external aesthetic standard I can point to, so one of the proxies I use for quality is the level of care and thought the storyteller has put into choosing an image, and what it means to them. Unless the storyteller has a very clear idea about a specific image or type of image they want to use, they are most likely to use a generic search term, which will return a set of generic and often stereotyped images that do not serve the story they wish to tell, or reflect the effort they are making to tell

it. I am careful to point this out in presentations, and will almost always challenge a storyteller if I see them using images like this, and work with them to find alternatives.

This brings us to the final result of reliance on Google, which is questions of representation. This first became very forcefully clear to me during a workshop I ran in 2012, with a group of young men from townships near Johannesburg who were part of a corporate programme to match them with workplace mentors. One of them chose to tell his story as a rap, in which he described how music had helped him overcome life challenges. It included the line “now I hear applause and cheers as the ambient sound”, which he illustrated with an image of a group of sleek young white people crowded at a barrier, suggesting a rock concert or celebrity appearance. In the context of a story by a young black man from Soweto, this image was jarringly out of place. It does have the virtue of calling attention to what kinds of images are easily available; but this was not the storyteller’s intent. I experienced this image as a disruption of his story, a feeling of being “thrown out” of its flow.



*Figure 4.5: “Now I hear applause and cheers as the ambient sound”*

This is an almost inevitable consequence of the structure of the internet, dominated as it is (at least in the English-speaking world) by people from wealthy countries who occupy relatively privileged class positions and are very often white. To take relatively high-quality photographs and upload them to the public internet so that they are searchable and downloadable requires resources—photographic equipment, affordable high-speed connectivity, knowledge of the relevant networks and systems, skill, confidence and time—



that are unequally distributed and favour the rich. As a result the images of their own environments that South Africans, and Africans in general, see reflected back at them by the internet are oddly skewed by the visions of tourists, journalists and other outsiders. A Google image search for Lwandle, for instance, is dominated by news photographs, alongside a handful of pictures from the Museum. The overriding impression is of unrest and deprivation. I took to calling this “the white people problem” in workshops, finding that naming it and addressing it explicitly seemed to serve as better encouragement to go out and take new photographs than appeals to creative ambition.

In Lwandle, when I demonstrated this to the second group with a live search using the key word “excitement” and asked what the resulting images had in common, the group mentioned that the people in the pictures had their hands up, that there were lots of wide eyes, and lots of children. When I pointed out that they were also mostly pictures of white people, one of the group members said she had thought of this, but dismissed the idea as not worth mentioning (or perhaps, although she did not say this, it was not worth running the risk of offending the white facilitator).<sup>34</sup>



Figure 4.6: First page of results from a Google image search on ‘excitement’ conducted on May 1 2019.

34 This is one more reason to have the conversation: it is a way of signaling that I am open to conversations about race.

None of this is to say that images off the internet are never appropriate; indeed, the internet was an essential visual resource for most of the stories made in Lwandle, as will become clear in subsequent chapters. My aim in the introductory session was to encourage creative exploration, confidence in participants' own image-making abilities and a more thoughtful approach to finding and appropriating images.

As far as the making or taking of new images goes, I offer very bare-bones advice during the introductory session, hoping at the very least to alert inexperienced photographers to the fact that there are more ways to take photographs than aiming a camera from face-height at an object in the middle distance. Everything else is left to one-on-one coaching and feedback during the story-making process. How this played out in the Lwandle workshops will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

All of this—the agreement setting, the sample stories, the advice, the demonstrations and the discussion—takes an hour or two during the actual workshop. The work done is significant, however. The facilitator must constitute the group as a group, establish a level of trust among its members and between members and the facilitator, model the kinds of engagement that are allowed and invited, and give practical advice that will guide the next stages of story telling and story production. At Lwandle, the screening of seed stories and the discussion of those stories also served to awaken a critical engagement with how stories are produced and to demonstrate what kinds of stories were being invited. The selection of sample stories, then, is one of the ways in which a facilitator can most powerfully shape the stories that will emerge in the story circle.

### **The story circle**

The story circle lies at the heart of digital storytelling, as of many other storytelling practices. There are of course many other ways to elicit stories, either in conjunction with a story circle or independently. There are exercises like creating a body map or community map, or drawing a “river of life” or “tree of life” that identify important places, events, themes, people and influences in a person's life. One could tell a story about a picture, or an object, or in response to another story or to a prompt: “Tell a story about this topic”. Story prompts are effectively part of a storytelling facilitator's stock in trade, and they are widely exchanged, shared, copied, adapted, mashed up and passed on. Yet I and many others keep coming back to the story circle: a group of people who come together to share personal stories, in a space that is both informal and carefully structured by a set of rules that mark it off as ceremonial and separate from the everyday.



Figure 4.7: Preparing for the story circle, May 2017

Why a circle and not some other arrangement? Why not, for example, arrange participants in a couple of rows all facing the same way, and then invite people to take turns to stand up and tell their stories to this audience? I have, interestingly, not been able to find this question asked in any of the literature; it is simply one of the founding assumptions of digital storytelling that stories are told in circles. I am aware of cases where people dispense with the story circle altogether, but in those cases participants simply work on their stories individually. I do know that having asked the question, I would not substitute the story circle for another way of telling because of what it signals about the process. When people are arranged in space so that one person is a focal point to whom everyone else's attention is directed, that sets up expectations of performance and authority—that there will be a certain level of polish and a particular kind of attention to the audience. Standing (or even sitting) *in front of* others is not a position of vulnerability; one does not share the story, one delivers it.

By contrast the circle, as I have already suggested, signals an aspiration to some kind of mutuality and egalitarian exchange:

The experience of working in a group process is inherently democratic and altruistic, everyone understands that they have something to give in support, even as they have something to take as experience, knowledge and hopefully, an improved story. We also understand the creative environment to be essentially hopeful, that whatever we bring into the story process, the work is to make beauty and insight out of it. The process is also very much about supporting interaction and a sense of group cohesion.<sup>35</sup>

Is this idealistic, or even utopian? Yes it is. It is also, provided the process is managed skilfully and in good faith, highly effective. Writing about this puts me straight into the uneasy contact zone where the appreciative, developmental stance of the facilitator rubs up against the critical, evaluative stance of the researcher. The researcher wonders about subtle manipulations and coercions, about how power operates when it denies that it is powerful, about pressure to produce performances of harmony that mask underlying frictions, about how the invitation to tell certain kinds of story might suppress or silence others. The facilitator responds that yes, all of this is important and worth thinking about; but really, what is one to do? The world is full of imperfection and there is a thing here that works a lot of the time, so let's not smother it with scepticism. At best, I aspire to maintain a position right in the middle of this tension, where a coolly critical eye can refine and direct a practice without undermining the grounds of its possibility.

So, in this practice, how does a story circle actually work? It is structured by a set of core rules,<sup>36</sup> some of which are so taken-for-granted as to remain largely unspoken and unwritten. They are:

- The story circle is bounded in time and space: it happens in a particular place, at a particular time, and has a clear beginning and ending.
- The story circle, while it is constituted, is closed; participants do not enter it, or leave it unless this is necessary for their own welfare (on the rare occasions that this unspoken rule is violated, it is felt as a disruption or disturbance of the circle, which is how we know it is a rule).
- The circle is held in a private space that is free of distractions or interruptions.

<sup>35</sup> Lambert, *Digital Storytelling*, 72

<sup>36</sup> These are rules in the sense of accepted procedure—there is no particular sanction or censure for breaking them, but doing so would change the nature of the game.



- The circle has a leader or facilitator who keeps time, maintains flow, monitors adherence to the rules, maintains the boundaries and declares the constitution and dissolution of the circle.

The rules which are explicit, and which I explain before every story circle, are:

- The time and space are to be shared as equally as possible between all the members of the circle; each one must have their turn to speak and be heard. There are no observers (this is another reason I avoided recording these sessions).
- Only one person speaks at a time. This is not a space for conversational turn-taking but for focussed sequential attention on one person at a time. Once a story is begun, listeners must wait until it is finished before speaking.<sup>37</sup>
- Every story is to be received and acknowledged as a gift; every storyteller is to be thanked.
- The space is understood as one of development rather than critique. Questions or comments are to be framed in ways that help the storyteller to refine and craft their story. Sometimes, following a StoryCenter cue, I suggest members use phrases like “if this was my story, I would...”
- Since time and attention are rationed, digital storytelling facilitators typically discourage comments that merely suggest agreement or approval. Participants are encouraged to use non-verbal signals like finger clicks or a “jazz hands” gesture to signal their support of someone else’s comment, or to mark particularly powerful moments in a story without breaking its flow.

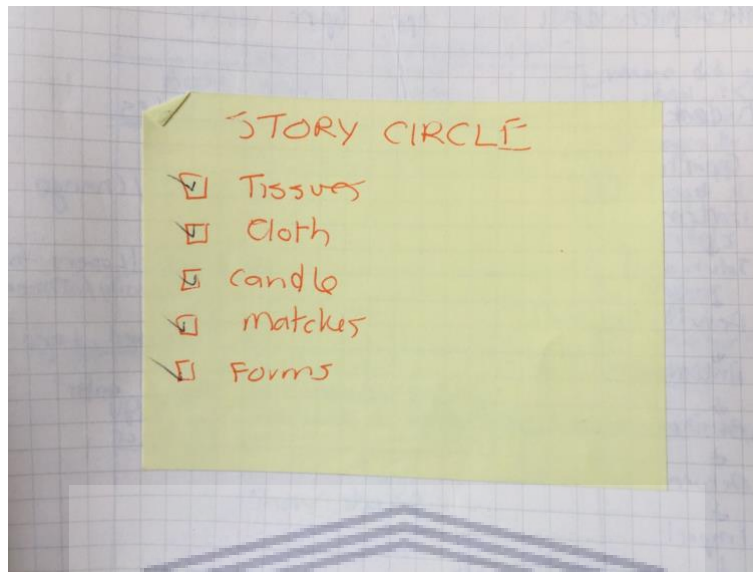
To demarcate the story circle I might use a number of techniques, include marking it off in time by placing it, for example, between a tea break and a lunch break; marking it off in space by rearranging furniture (a circle of chairs without a table is common) or moving to a new location altogether; lighting a candle or placing some other significant object in the centre of the circle; and opening with a prayer or meditation.

There were three story circles in total during the Lwandle workshops: one for the initial group of Museum staff on May 10<sup>th</sup> 2017, another for the three new members on June 21<sup>st</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Under exceptional circumstances the facilitator may interrupt a speaker, for example if they are going very far over their allotted time, if they are lecturing rather than telling a story, or if they are so distressed they are unable to continue.



2017, and one for the second group on March 1<sup>st</sup> 2018.<sup>38</sup> For each of these I used two or more of these circle-marking techniques in combination (the final story circle was held outside the museum, in a garden cafe run by a church in Somerset West).



*Figure 4.8: Checklist for a story circle*

After the ground rules had been established, all the story circles opened with a focussing meditation I have developed over several years, and which seems to be a particularly potent key for unlocking story space. It begins with a focus on the body, inviting people to stretch, put down anything they might be holding, close their eyes and move about in their chairs until they are comfortable. This is followed by three leisurely deep breaths, and then an invitation to each person to bring to mind a space in which they feel at home and safe. I ask them to use all their senses, not only visualising this space but also bringing to mind sound, smell, and tactile details like temperature, air movement and the texture of the place where they are sitting. I invite them to imagine themselves at leisure in this space, using words along the lines of: “All your tasks for the day are complete, all the deadlines are met and the children are taken care of. Nobody needs you for anything right now. You have all the time you want.” I then suggest they bring into the space a loved one, someone whom they trust, and invite them to imagine that this person is waiting to hear their story. After giving people a few moments to fix all of this in their minds and see what story emerges into this space, I ask them to recollect themselves in the present moment and open their eyes. When everyone’s

<sup>38</sup> Some facilitators repeat the story circle twice or more during a workshop as part of the story development process; this is an extension of my practice I am would like to explore in the future.

eyes are open, I invite whoever feels the urgent pressure of a story to start when they are ready.

This is a technique to be used with caution. I am suggesting, and implicitly promising, a safe space in which vulnerable stories will be received with care and love. There are dangers here: I have no control over anyone else in the circle, so what if I cannot fulfil this promise? What if someone, carried away in the moment, reveals something they later regret? What if a story exceeds my own capacity to receive it with care? What if a story unexpectedly triggers a trauma response in the storyteller, myself or someone else in the circle?

There are a number of ways to mitigate these dangers, starting with the opening exercise of setting agreements. In the introductory presentation, as noted above, I also explicitly note that storytelling might have unexpected personal consequences and ask, following the lead of StoryCenter: “are you OK to share this story?” During the story circle, I avoid probing too deeply and redirect others if I sense that questions are beginning to touch dangerous territory. As I noted above, this is something I have learned the hard way, given the prevalence of violence in South Africa. In one of the very first digital storytelling workshops I ever facilitated, one participant told a story about the death of a colleague which appeared coherent; but she then found herself unable to transform it into a script. The substance of the story would not hang together and kept slipping through her fingers. In the end she made a much smaller, modified version of the story which only hinted at what she had spoken of in the story circle. I felt this as a failure of my ability to support the story, and only understood when a psychotherapist friend from whom I’d sought advice said “oh, but that’s characteristic of trauma”. Trauma is a shattering: those in trauma can’t make the events that caused it fit together into a coherent narrative that has meaning.<sup>39</sup>

There is a very delicate boundary to be navigated here. On the one hand, moving out of one’s comfort zone is a precondition for growth, and participants expect that the experience of digital storytelling will enable them to grow in some way, even if it is just by acquiring new skills. It is my responsibility as a storyteller to teach, support, encourage and challenge when appropriate to achieve this goal. On the other hand, a digital storytelling facilitator is not a psychotherapist, and a story circle is not a therapy group even if it draws on some of the same principles. Sometimes probing questions about a story help to clarify it or bring the

<sup>39</sup> See Gachago and Sykes, “Navigating Ethical Boundaries When Adopting Digital Storytelling in Higher Education”, 91–106.

storyteller to new insight, and sometimes they are an indulgence of an appetite for drama which can verge, at its most extreme, on the exploitative or ghoulish.

StoryCenter cofounder Joe Lambert puts it this way:

The art of facilitation is in listening for the storyteller's conscious and unconscious vulnerabilities – to delicately probe the borders of the extent their ego can withstand critique. Over time, erring on the side of caution yields a safer and consistently more successful process, while pushing a storyteller at precisely the right moment with the right suggestion can yield a transformative breakthrough for the story, and the storyteller. Some qualified risk versus reward is part of our intention. We want our storytellers to go deeper, farther, be more complexly nuanced than they may have before in their creative process.<sup>40</sup>

Yet simply claiming the space within which to tell a story is already, for many people, pushing way beyond their comfort zones; scarcely any of my Lwandle participants were engaged in any kind of conscious or long-term “creative process” which might be taken further. Creative boundaries and emotional boundaries are not at all clearly distinguishable when it comes to personal storytelling, so “erring on the side of caution” is on the whole more ethical as well as safer.

Beyond this, it is necessary to trust. One must trust the process to create a group dynamic and ethic that will honour the stories, the group to support each of its members, each individual storyteller to be able to manage their own well-being, and one's own abilities as a facilitator.

Petra Munro Hendry, critiquing an approach to narrative research that views personal stories primarily as objects of study, or data to be interpreted and verified, speaks of faith: “Faith in the story is a political act in which we acknowledge our participants, not as incomplete, but as meaning makers and central to our own meaning making”.<sup>41</sup> She notes that “we have no epistemology of listening” and, drawing on Fiumara and Heidegger, suggests that listening is “a sense of hearkening and heeding that is supposed to be a transposition of hearing proper into the realm of the spiritual.”

It feels a little academically disreputable to write of the spiritual and the sacred, but there is no getting away from it: properly constituted, a story circle is a sacred space, and it is this sense of the sacred that both calls forth powerful stories and shapes their reception. The power with which this space is charged is able to match and contain the power of the stories

<sup>40</sup> Lambert, *Digital Storytelling*, 73.

<sup>41</sup> Petra Munro Hendry, “The Future of Narrative.” *Qualitative Inquiry* 13 no. 4 (2007): 494.

that emerge, and the emotions that may emerge with it. It creates the conditions for stories to be heard with reverence and respect, far more powerfully than any rules about confidentiality or non-judgement that may have been agreed at the start of the workshop, or through the bureaucratic ritual of signing a consent form.

The story circle is, in effect, a space of witnessing, in the sense used by Kelly Oliver in which witnessing is an act that can repair or restore a subjectivity or sense of agency that may have been damaged by experiences of objectification or subordination. “The importance of testimony,” she writes, is “the transformation from victim to agent”. Such testimony is only possible in the presence of someone who is willing to take on the labour of bearing witness: “The performance of witnessing is transformative because it re-establishes the dialogue through which representation and thereby meaning are possible, and because this representation allows the victim to reassert his own subjective agency and humanity into an experience in which it was annihilated or reduced to guilt and self-abuse.”

Of course not every story uttered in a story circle is about experiences of victimisation, oppression or subordination—but in the aftermath of apartheid, such experiences are baked into the everyday background of life in South Africa, always present even when they are not explicitly addressed. I have already made the point that there are few South African lives untouched by trauma, and most of these traumas are interlinked: living with the diminishment and denial of one’s humanity that characterised apartheid, experiencing violence and seeing loved ones experience (or commit) violence, family disruption, physical and mental illness and the humiliations of poverty—a story that touches on any one of these hints at all the others.<sup>42</sup>

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After each story has been shared and acknowledged, there is an opportunity for comments, questions and feedback. Lambert suggests this is a time for facilitators to step back and “defer to the group genius”<sup>43</sup>—that facilitators should focus on the group process and allow others to manage the shaping of the story. I have found this very difficult to achieve. Many of those who participate in my workshops are unaccustomed to group processes of this kind and may be reluctant to say anything that might be construed as criticism—especially when, as in

<sup>42</sup> Given the statistics, it is also of course highly likely that many of the people who have passed through my digital storytelling workshops have been perpetrators as well as victims to or witnesses of violence; yet I can recall only one story in which a teller acknowledge his own violence. This is one of the most silent stories of all.

<sup>43</sup> Lambert, *Digital Storytelling*, 78.

Lwandle, they are colleagues who may not want to risk disrupting the everyday working together which they must resume after the workshop is over. There are also the facts of my own privileged racial, class and language positions, to which people often defer and which I have not succeeded in negotiating a way out of. In practice, feedback during the story circle is often limited to expressions of appreciation, comments on what listeners feel they learned from the story, some questions of clarification and mentions (usually from me) of particularly vivid or resonant words, phrases or images. I do not make video or audio recordings of story circles, but I do take notes, including of phrases and expressions I find particularly powerful. During the script writing process which follows, reminding tellers of their own words can help to restore vigour to a story which has become diluted in the more formal, and often unfamiliar, process of writing.

Once the last teller has finished their story and received feedback, I close the circle by offering final thanks for the stories that been shared, running again through a quick explanation of what comes next—the scripting, editing and recording of the stories—and inviting comments on the experience of the story circle as a whole.

During the three story circles at Lwandle thirteen stories were told and ten digital stories were completed. The remaining three were abandoned after scripts had been written, two because the storytellers left the Museum’s employ and one because the teller had many other commitments and was unable to attend workshop sessions.

Produced in *iMuyuziyam Yamagoduka*, the “museum of the ones who go home” which is itself full of ambivalent stories of home, the stories are resonant with themes of ongoing migration, dislocation, relocation and the ruptures of family and self that attend all this movement. In the following chapter I will introduce and discuss each of these stories in turn, in the order of their telling.



## 5. Telling

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Any telling is produced of silences and erasures.<sup>1</sup>

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The stories told at Lwandle were produced in multiple iterations and multiple forms. There were the verbal stories told in the story circle, sometimes from drafts already written. There were additional written versions produced by each storyteller, then revised and edited in conversation with me as facilitator to become scripts. There were the recorded voiceovers, read from the script with some changes made on the fly, including in one case a live translation from English into isiXhosa. There are the completed digital stories which include images, effects, music, titles and subtitles in addition to the voiced script; and finally, there are transcripts of these completed stories, in three cases translated from isiXhosa to English.

I strongly encourage readers not to rely on the story transcripts alone, but to watch and listen to the completed stories. I have embedded a link to the online video file for each story in this chapter: clicking or right-clicking on the image should open the digital story in a browser window. Alternatively, the full set of digital stories can also be viewed online at [Vimeo](https://vimeo.com/showcase/6574073).<sup>2</sup> Transcripts are included in Appendix A. Not all the storytellers gave permission for their stories to be shared publicly, so some of them are password-protected; please contact me via email ([pam@pamsykes.com](mailto:pam@pamsykes.com)) for the password.

In what follows, I present the final version of each story, along with an account of how the story developed and what I hear and see in it. This account is informed by my notes as well as by interviews I conducted with the storytellers afterwards, individually and in groups. These interviews were not oral history interviews: they were not intended to flesh out the stories, to provide extra information or to confirm or deny them. Rather, they were intended as an opportunity to reflect on how participants experienced the process of story production and how they made decisions about what to include and what to leave out—the interplay between voice and silence. I am not interested in the stories as evidence or testimony so much as I am interested in the processes of their telling, and what this did for the tellers.

It is worth repeating here that I was in some respects in an anomalous position in Lwandle: I was not called in by the Museum or by the storytellers to achieve their own purposes, but was asking them to help me achieve mine. I did not have any particular themes

<sup>1</sup> Fiona Ross, *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 5.

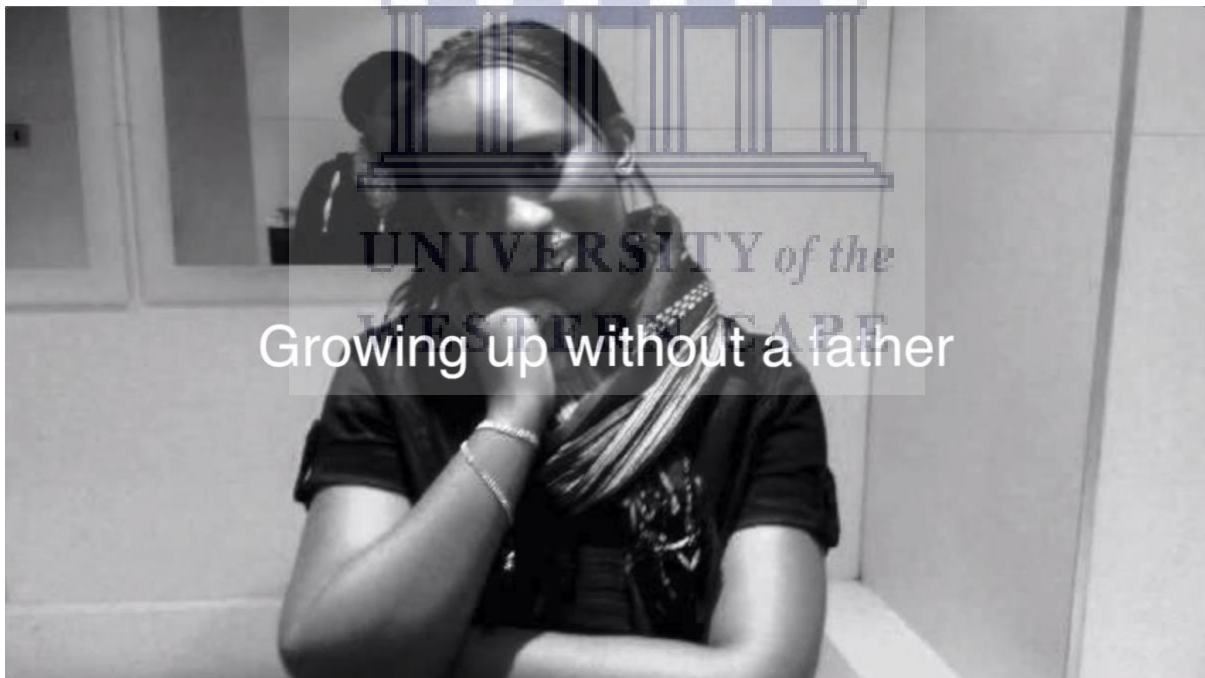
<sup>2</sup> The URL is <https://vimeo.com/showcase/6574073>.

or topics in mind and did not explicitly prompt for any. Nevertheless, the stories that emerged share common themes and common structures. There are several reasons for this: the commonalities of experience that mark lives shaped by the limitations and restrictions of apartheid; the influence of the seed stories I showed and the discussions we had about them; the Museum and its own stories; and the mutual influencing of the story circle. Mandisa Jacobs suggests:

Once I saw that it wasn't only me who had a sad story to tell—once I heard other people telling their stories, it was much easier to—for me to share my story as well.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, my presence as an outsider—in particular, as a white South African outsider—very likely elicited stories that participants would not have chosen, or not have bothered, to tell each other. My presence licensed the telling of stories about things that are otherwise not spoken of.

### **Growing up without a father**



*Figure 5.1: Growing up without a father (click to play)*

Anele Kalipa told of a childhood spent not knowing her father, and a journey in early adulthood to find him. Her final script is very close to the story circle version, including her

<sup>3</sup> Interview, September 20th 2017.

choice to end her story at the moment of meeting her father, when all possibilities were still open. She made this choice despite being well aware that her audience would likely have—and indeed, did have—many questions about what happened next. The answers to these questions are deliberately withheld: she gives us a celebratory moment of meeting, but no “happily ever after”.

In our interview Kalipa<sup>4</sup> suggested several reasons for this, starting with the fact that the story has not, in fact, ended: “it's still part of my life, it's not a past, it's something that I'm still going through.”<sup>5</sup> She chose this story, out of many others she might have told, partly as a way to stake a claim to her own relationship with her father in the face of a number of continuing pressures and conflicts. There are ongoing complexities within the paternal relationship itself: “I still need that father thing. But I can't get it because he's married and got his own family, you know. So sometimes I feel like... I'm in a competition with his family.” There are also wider issues. Her parents' relationship ended before she was born and her father never paid the traditional damages that were due to her family,<sup>6</sup> a fact that has sparked continuing resentment and conflict within her extended family. She did not want to be caught between her father and the rest of her family: “I'm not going to be a messenger now, so if they want to solve the thing they will solve it. So that's why I chose this story, because I see that it's going to be a long journey still.”

She also chose not to share the digital story beyond the circle of workshop participants and a few carefully chosen friends and family members, saying that it was “just for myself”.<sup>7</sup> She feared that if other family members saw the video, it would create additional conflict and drama:

4 There is a convention in the digital storytelling literature of using first names only to refer to workshop participants. This creates a certain sense of intimacy and comfort in addition to serving the needs of anonymity, but I am choosing to break with the convention here. This is both because several participants at Lwandle asked very clearly to be acknowledged by their real names, and also because I am uneasy about the distinction set up when I use first names for participants and last names for authors cited. I could use full names every time, but this feels clumsy in the writing; so for every person named here, whatever their contribution, I use their full name first and then surnames.

5 This and subsequent quotes are from our interview on August 23rd 2017.

6 Within Xhosa culture, if an unmarried woman becomes pregnant her family can claim a payment from the father, called *intlawulo yesisu*. See Pamela Maseko, “IsiXhosa for Law,” (Rhodes University School of Languages, 2011), 54. Maseko adds: “Once a man has paid for the pregnancy, and if he does not ask for the girl's hand in marriage, the child born out of wedlock is then raised/adopted (*ukukhuliswa*) by his/her maternal family. S/he will assume his/her maternal family name, clan name and practise their customs even if her father is known. Even if the woman were to get married to someone else, the child would remain in this home, and normally brought up by maternal grandparents. So in isiXhosa, traditionally, there is no illegitimate child.”

7 Kalipa did give permission for the story to be used for research purposes and in limited spaces such as other digital storytelling workshops or even public screenings; it was specifically viewing by her family she was concerned about.

It's the truth, but maybe there are people that get hurt when they hear the story, so... but that's how I feel, because I've got no one to talk to about the story, so now that it's out of my chest I feel good about it.

Kalipa used the word “closure” about her experience of telling this story: “I feel like I've got closure now because I've never spoken about it; so since I did the story... I feel good about it.”

It may be useful, at this point, to distinguish between various notions of closure, since popular usage of the word overlaps, but is not identical with, other more specialised uses. In psychology, the idea of closure is associated both with Gestalt therapy and with more recent developments in cognitive psychology. Gestalt theory holds that when a person suffers some kind of disruption or disturbance to an existing equilibrium, they must work to assimilate the cause of the disturbance into a new, modified (and itself inevitably temporary) equilibrium. This assimilation of something new into the self is referred to as Gestalt closure.<sup>8</sup> Within cognitive psychology, the term “need for closure” refers to “individuals' desire for a firm answer to a question and an aversion toward ambiguity”.<sup>9</sup> In popular culture the term is used more generally to suggest some kind of resolution to distress, a wrapping up and putting away of an experience as a precursor to “moving on”.

In the case of narrative in particular, closure refers most often to a certain sense of completeness and resolution—a typing up of loose ends that is distinct from merely stopping.<sup>10</sup> It can also refer to the formal elements of the story that enable an audience to make sense of what is going on, “understanding bits and pieces of information as a single idea”.<sup>11</sup>

In South Africa, a particular conversation about closure was set up by the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC), the quasi-judicial and quasi-therapeutic process which sought in the 1990s to “deal with” the violations of apartheid. The TRC, with a particular focus on individual victims of gross human rights violations, “privileged ‘release’ and ‘closure’ as the core emotional concepts”,<sup>12</sup> leading to critiques that victims “were being put on stage and

8 Peter Mortola, “Narrative Formation and Gestalt Closure: Helping Clients Make Sense of ‘Disequilibrium’ Through Stories in the Therapeutic Setting.” *Gestalt Review* 3 no.4 (1999): 308–20.

9 Arie W. Kruglanski and Donna M. Webster, “Motivated Closing of the Mind: ‘Seizing’ and ‘Freezing.’” *Psychological Review* 103 no.2 (1996): 263–83.

10 Although this relational understanding is not, of course, exclusive to Africa: “We are neither self-contained nor separated. Rather, we are profoundly dependent on our environment and other people for the energy that sustains us. Far from being alienated from the world or others, we are intimately and continually connected, and responding, to them. We are by virtue of our response to the biosocial energy that surrounds us.” Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, 198.

11 Lambert, *Digital Storytelling*, 67.

12 Colvin, “Ambivalent Narrations”, 79.

asked to perform traumatic but ultimately redeeming stories of suffering and recovery for the benefit of a closely watching nation and world”<sup>13</sup> and that “the ideal of ‘closure’ appears to exist primarily in the minds of many who advocate for [mechanisms like the TRC].”<sup>14</sup> Less prominent were the everyday violations that did not constitute injuries but which continue to reverberate. Fiona Ross, reading between the lines of women’s testimonies about gross injuries, notes that:

Hidden within women’s words are narratives of the destruction of kinship, of the alteration of time’s expected flow, of the power of economies in shaping experience, of the intrusion of the state, and of women’s determined attempts to create and maintain families. Read together, the accounts describe the penetration of violence into everyday life.<sup>15</sup>

These are precisely the destructions and disruptions that underlie Kalipa’s story (and, as will be seen, several others). Against all this background, the story does interestingly ambiguous work with closure, simultaneously claiming it for herself and refusing it, in the sense of narrative closure, to everyone else; her story simply stops. This resistance to meeting audience expectations is a bold move, shifting our sense of who and what the story is *for*—Kalipa has used her story to accomplish something for herself, but leaves her audience slightly uncomfortable, and forced to confront the reasons for that discomfort. We are offered an intimate glimpse into her world, and at the same time reminded that this intimacy is a privilege granted entirely on her own terms. We may guess or speculate, but cannot presume to know anything more than what we have been told. That’s all we get, she tells us; you get so far, and no further. She has chosen a silence that is also a refusal of a certain invitation inherent in story to cater to her audience, to see to their needs. She hands the burden of this particular form of emotional labour back to us, to deal with as best we can.

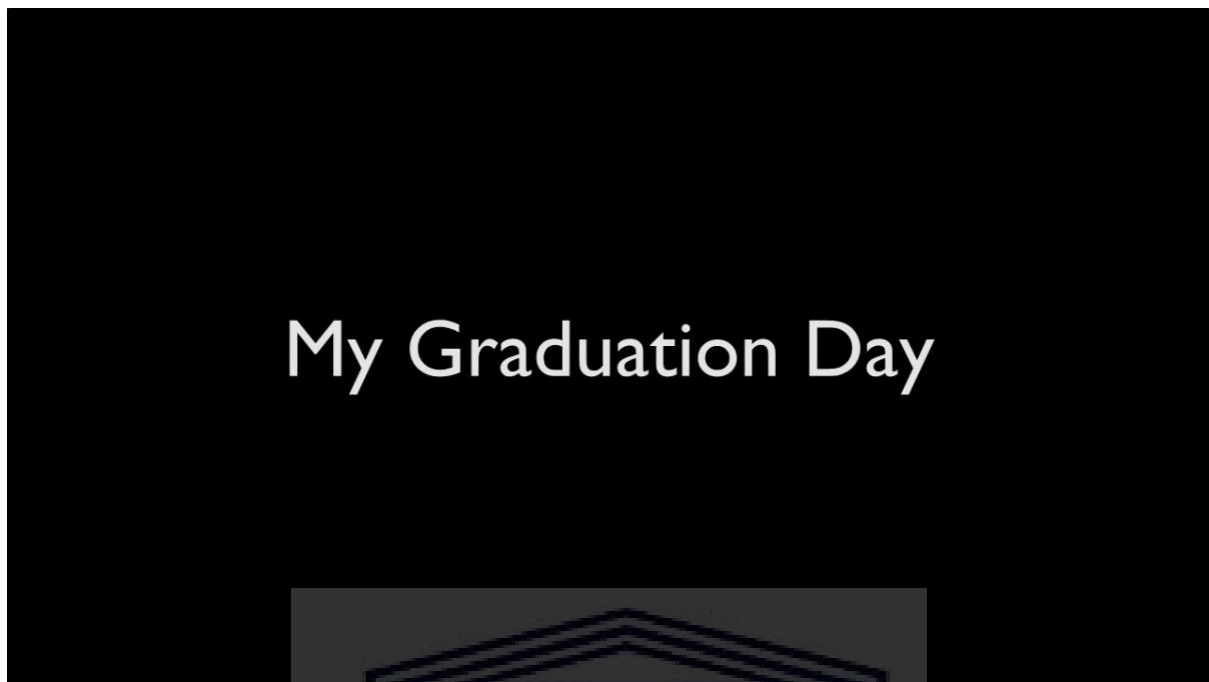
13 Ibid., 82.

14 Harvey M Weinstein, “Editorial Note: The Myth of Closure, the Illusion of Reconciliation: Final Thoughts on Five Years as Co-Editor-in-Chief.” *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 5, no. 1 (2011): 6.

15 Ross, *Bearing Witness*, 48.



## My graduation day



*Figure 5.2: My graduation day (click to play)*

Masa Soko took the next turn in the story circle, telling a story about being the only one of seven siblings to go to university and complete a degree, and how the support and sacrifices of her single mother enabled her to do this. The climax of the story is the moment at her graduation when her mother, followed by other women, stands up and ululates in triumph. Unlike Anele Kalipa, Soko said that her story was consciously addressing a wider audience with a clear message:

Your background does not define you... you can be educated even if there is no-one working at home, there is no money, the struggles shouldn't stop you from pursuing what you want to do in life, because there are things that you can do.<sup>16</sup>

But like Kalipa, Soko is using the opportunity to stake a claim to her own version of her life story, one that may be at odds with interpretations made by outsiders like me. During our interview, we discussed whether her story was about being poor. She was adamant that it was not:

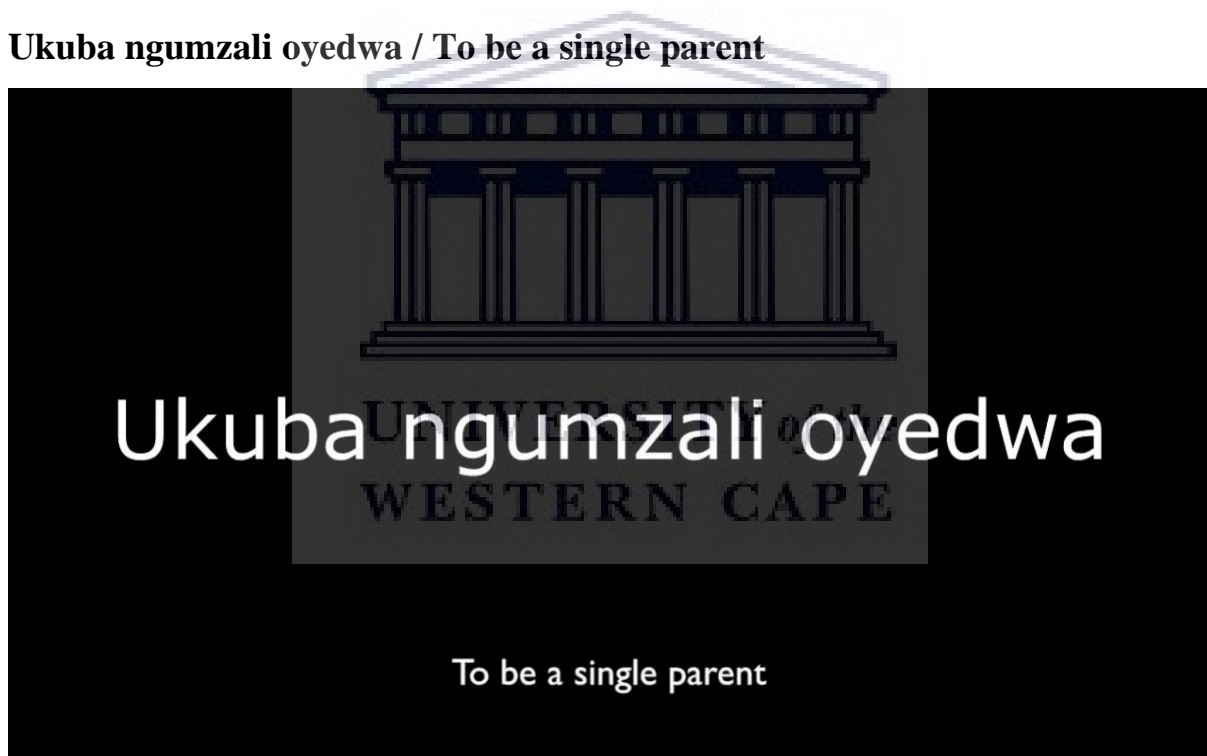
There is not a single, single day where I've seen myself as poor... yes there were times when we didn't have food, there were times when we didn't have electricity, there were times when we didn't have money, but

<sup>16</sup> This and subsequent quotes from our interview, August 30 2017.

I've never actually felt 'you know what I'm very poor'. I've never felt like that. I think it's here [tapping head]... we were never raised to feel like there was something missing.

For Soko, the idea of poverty is associated with utter destitution and starvation, with having an absolute lack of choices and of social capital. During our interview she told a supplementary story, of days when she and a fellow student would choose to walk to the station and take a train to campus rather than using a more convenient and expensive taxi, so that they would have extra money to buy gatsbys<sup>17</sup>: “Sometimes it was fun... it would be a decision that we make.” I read this as a choice to highlight her agency and her skilful management of available resources. These resources include the support of her family, to the extent that she notes, “It's not my story. It's my family's story, in a way.” (I will return to this point in the next chapter, discussing the visual choices she made).

### **Ukuba ngumzali oyedwa / To be a single parent**



*Figure 5.3: To be a single parent*

Next in the circle was Nontsikelelo Cotiyana, following Soko's tribute to her mother with a story from the other side, about the emotional and financial struggle of raising two children as

<sup>17</sup> A gatsby is a Cape Town street food classic, a long sandwich stuffed with meat or fish, hot chips and sauce and designed to be shared with friends. See <https://www.capetownmagazine.com/gatsby-sandwich>.

a single mother.<sup>18</sup> Like Soko, Cotiyana has chosen in the final script to highlight her own agency in the face of challenging circumstances. The climax of her story is the moment when she is able to provide the outfit her daughter wants for her matric dance. This decision was a direct result of an interaction in the story circle. After she had told the first version of her story, I asked if she could identify a single moment that summed up her experience, and this was when the story of the dance surfaced. When I pointed out that this was a significant achievement she became tearful, overwhelmed with emotion. This was the only moment during the story circles that I needed to use the box of tissues that is a usual accessory.

What to do in, and with, such moments of intense emotion is critically important in the story circle. The emotions must be allowed, acknowledged and honoured; but they must also be contained, for the sake of others in the time-limited circle as well as for the sake of the storyteller. Taking a moment to hand over tissues, offer whatever other physical support seems appropriate in the moment and allow the person to compose themselves is usually sufficient, as it was in this case. I also took the opportunity to return to what is noted in the introductory presentation: that intensity of emotion felt in the story circle is an indication of where the power of a story lies. When it comes to developing the story as a script to be read as a voiceover—when it starts being crafted *as a story*, not just a recounting of experience—these moments are valuable guides.

Cotiyana's final script, written in isiXhosa, notes “kwaye yonke lonto yabe yenziwe ndim isetyenzelwe ndim” (I did it all, and I worked hard for it)—and also that this was “ngoncedo luka Thixo” (with the help of God). In the final story this is backed up by pictures of her in her church uniform and the interior of her church. Her faith, she suggests, is an important part of her resilience. She underlined the point in our interview, noting that when one is living on a limited income:

Everything is about money... but then you tell yourself ‘I can do this’, even though you don’t know how you are going to do it. But you have that hope of our Creator that stores in us that... I will put you up when you need help. So, with that hope it keeps... you keep on going, even how hard it is.<sup>19</sup>

During the interview Cotiyana also revealed that the story contains a veiled tribute and message of support for her daughter:

<sup>18</sup> There is a deep silence in this story, as in several others, around her children’s father.

<sup>19</sup> This and subsequent quotes from our interview on September 1st, 2017.

You look at this child and you see this child is trying her best. She is attending school classes every day. She has the respect... And, you don't want to disappoint her... I wanted to fulfil those things in a way that I'm appreciating her, that you're doing very well, and you can do further than that.

She also notes the physical and emotional costs of the R100 a month she put aside for the dance, not only "because I needed that R100", but because she is supporting her parents as well and "at the same time, I wanted to do something for them. I was like in the middle of... I don't know how, but I was in the middle of something that I can't even explain because I wanted to fulfil those gaps."

Cotiyana's feeling of being "in the middle" echoes Kalipa's. Both stories, although they highlight singular moments, point to a densely woven web of relationships within complex extended families, bridging multiple generations as well as locations. They are the tips of very large icebergs, and some of their power as stories lies in their ability to make this clear. One of the dangers of telling personal stories, as happened for example to TRC stories, is the possibility of stasis, of freezing a single moment so that it becomes definitive of oneself. The story can become a trap or anchor. These stories, on the contrary, resist such fixing; they are able to maintain contact with their hinterlands.

### **My life my struggle**

Nyameko Dyantyi told a long story, titled *My Life My Struggle*, that covered much of his life. He was born in the Eastern Cape and raised there by extended family members, not knowing his parents. He recounted a teenage suicide attempt, academic success at university despite severe financial stresses, an unrelenting struggle to find long-term work, and the recent death of a father figure.

The disclosure of his teenage suicide attempt was particularly powerful, and in my field notes I wrote: "It was only right at the end of the day, when he spoke of feeling as if a burden had been lifted, that I realised he may not have told anyone this story before. The group was supportive but also asked probing questions and agreed he would have to choose one element of the story to focus on." The story circle's challenge, in the face of not just one but several deeply moving episodes of difficulty and trauma, was to help him identify a single tellable story out of the lifetime's worth he laid before us. At the next meeting, he had prepared a script that focussed on his struggles for education and work; the rest was left behind in the story circle.

This decision of Dyantyi's to leave part of his story in silence is not unusual in the digital storytelling processes I have facilitated and witnessed. The intimate space of the story circle invites deep disclosure, which storytellers may feel is not suitable for taking forward into more public spaces. A previously unspoken thing may have been uttered and named, but this does not make it available for further exploration or excavation. As I have suggested before, I have come to understand this withholding silence as an act of self-preservation. People with life histories like Dyantyi's, oversupplied with difficulty and loss, are well aware that their world offers them only the most skeletal of resources for dealing with it, and that they need to continue negotiating daily life regardless of what may be lurking in the shadows.<sup>20</sup> There is often a matter-of-factness to the recounting of such stories, a restraint that is consonant not only with the needs of self-preservation but with the strong distaste for "moaning" and "feeling sorry for yourself" that was mentioned in the section on seed stories above.

Dyantyi was one of the two members of this group who left the museum's employ and did not return to complete their stories. Unathi Diko was the second—in fact, I never saw her again after the story circle. She was out of the office the next time I visited on May 24<sup>th</sup>, and by the end of the month had left the museum. She arrived at the story circle with a complete draft of her story, titled *The Sleepless Nights*, which vividly described a series of attempts by unknown men to enter her home at night (she was living alone as a backyard dweller in Nomzamo) and her subsequent fear and feelings of insecurity. My field notes mention that the story was "really well constructed and told" and that group members had specifically praised her voice and her use of imagery.

I felt the abandonment of Dyantyi's and Diko's stories as one of the failures or insufficiencies of this project. I issued an invitation via the museum manager for them to continue, but did not hear from either of them again, leaving me in some doubt as to whether I had met my own ethical standards of care. As with many of the questions raised in these stories, I had to content myself with not knowing the answer.

<sup>20</sup> Gachago and Sykes, "Navigating Ethical Boundaries."



## My degree with two eyes

# My degree with two eyes

*Figure 5.4: My degree with two eyes*

Hintsabe S'duli was the last person to take her turn during this story circle, sharing an intimate, emotionally complex and deliberately ambiguous account of an unplanned pregnancy, an intended abortion and a decision not to go through with it. She ends the verbal part of the story with the birth of her son, like several of her colleagues deliberately withholding answers to our questions about what happened next—although in the final version of the story she includes several photographs of her son, allowing some of the gaps to be filled visually.

I found this story difficult to listen and respond to, and was grateful for the support in the story circle of Soko and Cotiyana, who clearly understood the ambivalence that frequently accompanies motherhood but is rarely acknowledged. Both described trying to knead their babies out of their bodies when pregnant.

The baby's father is notably absent from this story, as were Soko's father and the father of Cotiyana's children. During our interview S'duli made a clear link between generations, reflecting on her own relationship with her mother and her abusive, largely absent father:

These things, they do haunt you... I had deep thoughts, because actually, it's like history is repeating itself, because my mother went through the

same thing. She didn't want to abort me, but my dad—[gesturing] what, what, what, what—then now, it's me. You see?<sup>21</sup>

She also looked ahead to the future of her relationship with her own son, and the role his father might play in his life:

I don't know if he loves his son, but he is always there for him, but there are some certain things... He is actually being my dad at a later stage of my life, because my dad didn't want to do anything with my mother, he abused her, now my baby daddy, he also started with the abuse.

By the end of the interview S'duli had decided not to share the story outside of the group, largely because she was aware that it could cause pain to both her mother and her son, not only directly but also via the judgements of others who might see it. Her sense of disappointment in herself, and of her mother's disappointment in her, lie just below the surface of the story and she noted in the interview that "I don't want her to revisit those feelings of how she felt, because it's not nice."

She also said that this was not the story she originally intended to tell, but that "when I started writing it, it just flew." It is a story that she is still living in and through, every day, with all its ambivalence. She loves her son, but motherhood changed her life irrevocably and things might have been easier without it—or not. Ultimately, she cannot know:

I asked myself why does God give me a baby and there are so many people that are married and that are in stable jobs and God doesn't give them babies? Why me? Why are you giving me the wrong blessings?... Ja, but if I didn't have a baby, Pam, maybe I would have been, I would have not been sitting here... because eish, I was starting to go my own ways... Ja, he actually changed my life to the better.

S'duli is also acutely aware of the complex relationships between silence, speech and shame. In the story circle, for example, she said that while her mother had "pretended to be cool" when their neighbour revealed her pregnancy, she later overheard her aunt counselling her mother through suicidal thoughts. This detail is withheld from the final story; it is not something viewers need to know. She also returned throughout our interview to the idea that if she had carried through her plan to have an abortion, it would have become an unspeakable and poisonous secret: "I can't keep deep secrets Pam, they kill you." And later: "I think if I went through with the abortion, I don't think I would have done the story and said I actually

<sup>21</sup> This and subsequent quotes are from our interview of August 30th 2017.

did something like this. I think it was going to kill me.” And later again, referring to her feeling that nothing comes to her easily:

- S’duli: Just everything.. the simplest thing, it kept bouncing back. That’s my life. I have to fight for every simple thing. It doesn't come easy, uh-uh. I don't know, ja.
- Pam: So things are not flowing...
- S’duli: Mm.
- Pam: ...in the way you would like them to.
- S’duli: Ja, life is fighting against me, and you know what was going to be worse? If I went through with the abortion, I was going to think oh, it’s because I aborted the baby. Oh, it was going to haunt me. Yoh, I don't want to lie, because it comes back.

For S’duli, making her digital story seems to have neutralised some of the shame and guilt she felt about her desire for an abortion:

- S’duli: It helped... It feels like it’s not part of me anymore, you understand?
- Pam: Hmm, it’s out there.
- S’duli: Ja, it feels like that. Now that the story has been told, it feels like, it’s like I didn't want to do that thing. It’s not there anymore. Like, it’s like I killed someone, and then that someone came back, and that person is alive again. So, I'm not guilty anymore, something like that.

Nevertheless, she remains haunted by the unrealised possibilities of her life and by her fears for what will happen if or when her son comes to know the story of his birth. This is perhaps why I found this story particularly troublesome: it confronted me very directly with the limits of what storytelling can achieve. S’duli may have forged a new accommodation with this pivotal moment in her life, but nothing about it is resolved. Its consequences continue to reverberate and will do so throughout her life, and the lives of her extended family. This is a haunting that will not go away.

I closed this first story circle with final thanks, some comments about what would happen next, and a request for feedback on how the group had experienced the process.

### **Overlapping circles**

Had things proceeded according to plan, I would have spent the next two meetings helping the group to refine their scripts, record voice-overs, learn how to use Sony Movie Studio and begin crafting their digital stories. As discussed in Chapter 3, however, the project was disrupted at this point by the departure of Nyameko Dyantyi and Unathi Diko and the

appointment of three new temporary staff members. By June 14<sup>th</sup>, when I met Zukile Ntlemeza, Mandisa Jacobs and Vinni da Davayo for the first time and introduced them to the project, three of the first group had already recorded voice-overs and one had completed the software tutorial. I had to support their continued progress while also bringing the three new members in. On June 21<sup>st</sup> I started the morning with a software tutorial for the first group, then held a supplementary story circle for the new members. Their stories follow, again in the order of their telling.

### **Zukile's story**



*Figure 5.5: Zukile's story*

Zukile Ntlemeza's story details a series of disruptions and dislocations, from the death of his father when he was just over a year old, to a childhood spent shuttling between the Eastern Cape and Gauteng, an early adulthood marked by substance abuse and mental illness, the death of his brother and a move to Cape Town. "A little abstract," I wrote in my notes; "when pushed for detail he spoke about how boring Cape Town seemed at first and how that helped him. Waiting to see what the script revision brings."

Ntlemeza's final script details the "fast life" he lived in Johannesburg, during which he "lost a very huge part of me", including the closeness of his family, and felt "empty". Cape Town, by contrast, although "boring and slow", has inspired him and he is "getting back to my old self that I know."

During our interview Ntlemeza mentioned that he is very private and does not talk about his life much, as a result of which he feels a disconnect between how people perceive him and what he knows about himself:

Most people... read me through what they see. They don't know who I've been. And they always think I'm this clean, somehow routine kind of person. And, they just don't know that I've been through a lot... Yes, there's a lot. We all go through certain things in life.<sup>22</sup>

For him, the story is an assertion of the complexity of his experience and character, a quiet demand to be seen in his wholeness, not just glanced at and quickly filed away. This may be particularly important for someone whose move from Johannesburg to Cape Town, and out of drug use into sobriety, has involved leaving behind an entire social circle.

Rediscovering himself has also involved reconnecting with his family, with the loss of an elder brother acting as a catalyst:

I almost killed myself. I almost killed myself and killed everything about me. And I think that's where my mother picked it up: "You know what, you're not going back to Joburg." Even though she didn't say it. But I think that decision she made, she saw that "you know what, I'm going to lose him."

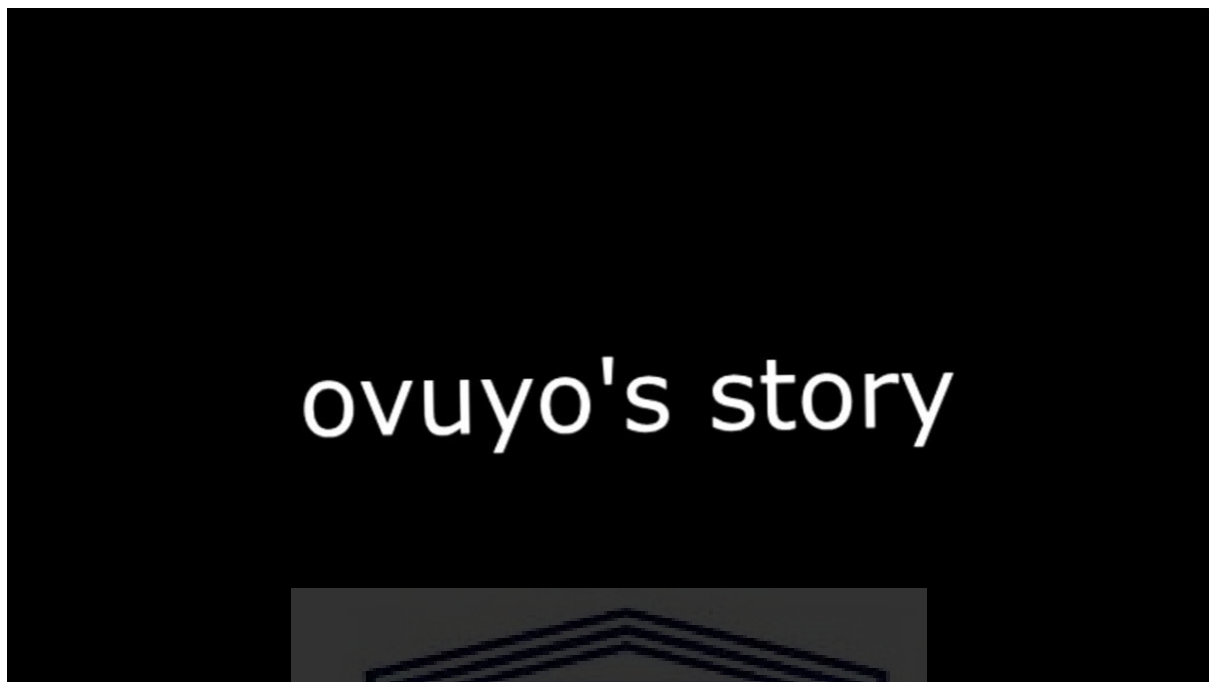
For all that Ntlemeza reveals, there are silences that reverberate through his story. I am struck by the silence of his mother, who has lost both a husband and a son already and to whom he ascribes words that she did not say, or perhaps did not need to say. I wonder about the silence left by the death of his father, and about the timing of that death<sup>23</sup>. I wonder about the work behind "let bygones be bygones", and how "striving and hungry for success" will meet the realities of Lwandle.

<sup>22</sup> This and subsequent quotations are from our interview of September 1st 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Mortality rates began to rise in South Africa in the early 1990s as HIV/AIDS took hold and did not begin to come down again until the widespread introduction of antiretroviral treatment in the mid-2000s: "South Africa - Mortality Rate." *Index Mundi*. Accessed November 12, 2019. <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/south-africa/mortality-rate>.



## Ovuyo's story



*Figure 5.6: Ovuyo's story*

Vinni da Davayo's story, following directly after Ntelemeza's, stakes a very different claim to personal experience and intention in the face of powerful stereotypes and expectations. It recounts his own daughter's premature birth, his anxieties about how to provide for her and his efforts to remain present as a father despite the end of his relationship with her mother:

Most of the fathers out there are not part of their child's life. So, I'd say for me it brings back the fact that we are still here as fathers, not everyone wants to disappear... some of us are planning to stick around. And we will do whatever it takes to be around our children... We see fathers abusing their children, we see fathers abusing their partners... I'm not one of those guys, I'm one of those guys who are appreciating women, I'm one of those guys who are appreciating children. So, I have to put it out there as well so that it be known that not everyone is like that, not everyone is trash, not everyone is abusive like the other guys are. So, for me it brought back that sense of humanity.<sup>24</sup>

Submerged in the final version of Davayo's story is a deeper story about his relationship with his own father, referenced briefly in the story circle when he spoke about having grown up without his biological parents, wanting to break the cycle and not let history repeat itself.

<sup>24</sup> This and subsequent quotes are from our interview of August 30th 2017.

During our interview he explained that his mother, of whom he has no memories, was alcoholic and that his father had arranged for him to be formally adopted:

My mother... when she's drunk, would take me to him and say no, you must take care of your kid, I'm leaving so you can take care of the kid. Even though, he's supposed to go to work. So, he must make sure he takes me and ask someone to take care of me while he goes to work and when he comes back to work, he must make sure that I eat, I bath, I do everything. So, in time he saw no, I can't keep doing this thing and I can't keep fighting with this one person. So, what I must do is, I must put my baby's future in front here... But I'm not just going to leave him, I'm going to make arrangements and arrange with the social workers and make sure that this guy is getting a proper home.

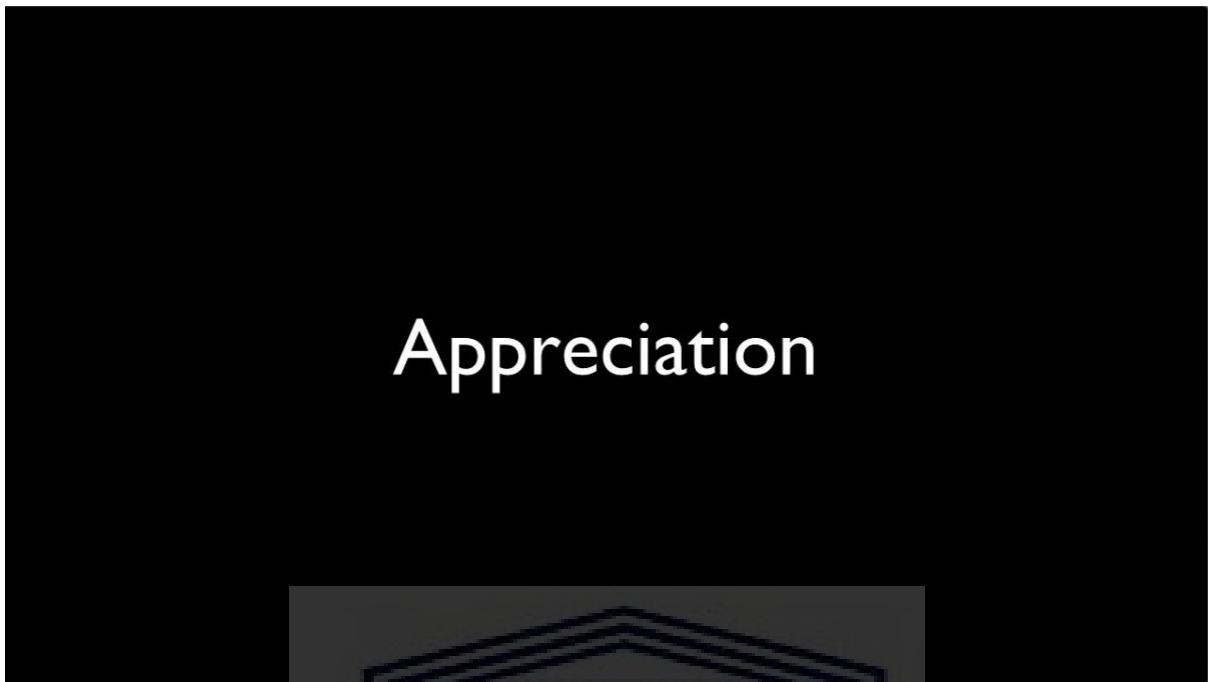
Davayo knows this story because he did subsequently develop a relationship with his father, which lasted for seven years until his father's death in 2017. He says "I think he did the best job [he could] even though he was not around."<sup>25</sup> The experience has, however, made him determined to give his own child what he did not have:

She's my everything... you can fight and divorce, but you can't divorce your own blood... We make sure everything we do, we do it for her not for us.

None of this is referenced even tangentially in the story, but for anyone familiar with South Africa the gist is not hard to read between the lines. Stories about loving, present fathers are rare compared with stories of absent or abusive ones, as Davayo acknowledges. He chose—after encouragement from me, given that his first draft was in English—to make his story in isiXhosa and hoped it would serve as inspiration for other young men.

<sup>25</sup> Davayo has, of course, only his father's version of events to go on. What his mother might have wanted to tell him remains unknown.

## Appreciation



*Figure 5.7: Appreciation*

Mandisa Jacobs told the final story of the day, an elegy for her friend Nokuthula, who died by suicide. Her own feelings of grief, guilt and regret were palpable in the story and it silenced the group for a long while afterward. We concluded with a formal moment of silence before closing the circle and returning to the mundane world and lunch.

During our interview, Jacobs suggested that she had used the story circle deliberately and strategically as an opportunity to work through this experience:

There are a lot of things that have happened in my life that are significant, but I felt like I had to share that story in particular... because they say sharing things like these can actually, you know, make you feel much better; because for a long time I've been feeling guilty and blaming myself, but then I came to realise that it wasn't actually my fault and that these things actually happen, and sharing my story made me feel at ease with myself, you know.<sup>26</sup>

She also found that the story circle itself made it easier to tell the story: “Once I saw that it wasn't only me who had a sad story to tell, once I heard other people telling their stories, it was much easier for me.”

<sup>26</sup> This and subsequent quotes are from our interview of August 20th 2017.

Jacobs handwrote three drafts of her story, and it is possible to trace my interventions as facilitator through them (I have included photographs of the first page of each draft below). The first draft was heavily marked up by Jacobs herself, as she worked to put the words of the story on paper. She changed the title of the story from “Suicide” to “Appreciation”, replaced “is” with “was” in references to her friend and replaced the words “committed suicide” with “was no more”—by the second draft this had changed again, to “passed away”. I added a “but” to link two clauses and suggested paragraphing. I also flagged the phrase “we didn’t pay her much attention” and linked to a sentence on the second page: “All the signs were there and we never paid any attention to them..

We discussed using the phrase “we never paid much attention to her” as a refrain to give rhythm to the story, and by the second draft it had appeared—on the second page I changed “them” to her” to reinforce the echo, as well as suggesting that the line be repeated a third time. I also struck out the introductory sentence “my story is about a friend of mine.” When I do this, which happens often, I offer the storytelling principle of “show, don’t tell” and explain how introductory lines like this don’t add any information. In a digital story, where there are opening titles and pictures to work with, they are redundant.

I also changed “her place of residence” to “home” and, again, suggested paragraphing. I am always conscious that these are scripts written to be performed as speech, so many of my editing suggestions and changes are made to support this. I explain, as I did with Jacobs, how paragraphs and punctuation can help when the time comes to record the voice-over, by indicating pauses. Few people have been taught how to read aloud and the most common response is often to go much too fast, so I am attempting at this stage already to prepare storytellers for this part of the process.

There is one change I chose not to make which is worth discussing. At the end of the story Jacobs says “Nokuthula’s suicide taught me a thing or two about appreciation”. This is, strictly speaking, a grammatical error—and if I was editing a piece of writing for publication or assessment I would change it to “taught” without thinking twice. In the process of facilitating a story, however, I take it that my role is not to correct errors but to help the storyteller craft a more effective expression of the story. Unless there is a possibility of misunderstanding, I tend to leave expressions like this alone. I am also conscious that some “errors” are matters of idiom, or reflect the fact that people are working in a second (or third or fourth) language with different grammatical structures to their first language. In isiXhosa, for example, there are no gendered pronouns and so isiXhosa speakers often use “he” and “she” interchangeably, in the same way an English speaker will mix up gendered nouns in

German. Stories to be told aloud take a much less formal register than stories made only to be read, which provides an opportunity to allow and make visible (or audible) the slippages and failures that happen in the zones of translation.

~~Self~~ Appreciation  
 My story is about a friend of mine who attempted to kill herself. Her name is Nokuthula. Nokuthula takes after ~~was~~ <sup>is</sup> a naturally a humble person. She was friendly and <sup>she</sup> always puts other people's needs before her own. As her friends we always <sup>went</sup> to her for advice and she always been to help. Never for once have we as her friends asked her about her life or she never comes to us for advice or for help. She always had a smile on her face. As her friends we never paid much attention to her. On this one Sunday evening we went out as friends. ~~to~~ Nokuthula wanted to tell us something, but ~~we~~ <sup>we</sup> didn't pay her much attention. She was crying that night. <sup>we</sup> We never even attempted to find out what was wrong. <sup>at the</sup> ~~end~~ <sup>end</sup> of that night we dropped her off at her place of residence. ~~Later~~ <sup>Later</sup> that night she ~~sent~~ <sup>sent</sup> us all telling us she ~~could not~~ <sup>could not</sup> stand her life anymore. We ignored her texts once more. The next morning I received a phone call from her.

Appreciation  
 My story is about a friend of mine. Her name <sup>was</sup> ~~is~~ Nokuthula (a isiXhosa name meaning quiet). Nokuthula was a naturally humble person. She was friendly and she always put other people's needs before her own. As her friends we always went to her for advice and she was always willing to help. Never for once have we as her friends asked her about her life. She never came to us for advice or for help. She always had a smile on her face. We never paid much attention to her. On this one Sunday evening we went out as friends. Nokuthula wanted to tell us something that night. We came back from the outing and dropped her off at her <sup>new</sup> place of residence. Later that night she ~~sent~~ <sup>sent</sup> us all telling us she could not stand her life anymore. We ignored her once more. The next morning I received a phone call from her cousin telling me that her name was Nokuthula (a isiXhosa name for quiet or silence). Nokuthula was a naturally humble person. She was friendly and she always put other people's needs before her own. As her friends we always went to her for advice and she was always willing to help. Never for once have we as her friends asked her about her personal life. She never came to us for advice or any help. She always had a smile on her face. We never paid much attention to her. On this one Sunday evening we went out as friends. Nokuthula wanted to tell us something that night. She was crying that night but we never even attempted to find out what was wrong. At the end of that night we dropped

Figure 5.8: Successive drafts of Appreciation

In the sessions following the story circle Mandisa needed very little guidance. She found the software easy to use and worked from her own extensive archive of cellphone pictures (this



will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter). In fact, I worried that she might be feeling sad and that I was failing to support her adequately, but she was drawing ably on her own resources. Of all the participants in this process, Mandisa was the one whose journey reflected most closely what I had come to believe about digital storytelling: that the physical crafting and working-through of the story, the transformation of experience into artefact, had the power to neutralise some of the enduring effects of traumatic experiences. She acknowledged in the interview that telling the story had initially made her sad, “but as I kept on telling the story I felt much better and at ease.”

### **Disconnected circles**

After this second group of stories there was a hiatus of several months before the third and final group of storytellers convened again for the final story circle. There was no private space available in the Museum so we held the session outside, at a garden cafe that is part of a church and college campus in Somerset West. Subsequent working sessions were held in the Museum, usually on the sofa in the corner of the large exhibition space.

This group included two members who worked at the Museum and two who had responded to the public advertisement, both of them interested in learning more about filmmaking. One of the group members had to attend a meeting related to another project, so only three were present for the story circle.

### **Your help can change someone's life**



**Your HELP can  
change someone's  
LIFE**

*Figure 5.9: Your help can change someone's life*

Lupho Mzamo told the story of a friend of his: a young woman who arrived in Cape Town with ambitions to be a doctor, but ended up trapped in an increasingly abusive relationship which he helped her to escape.

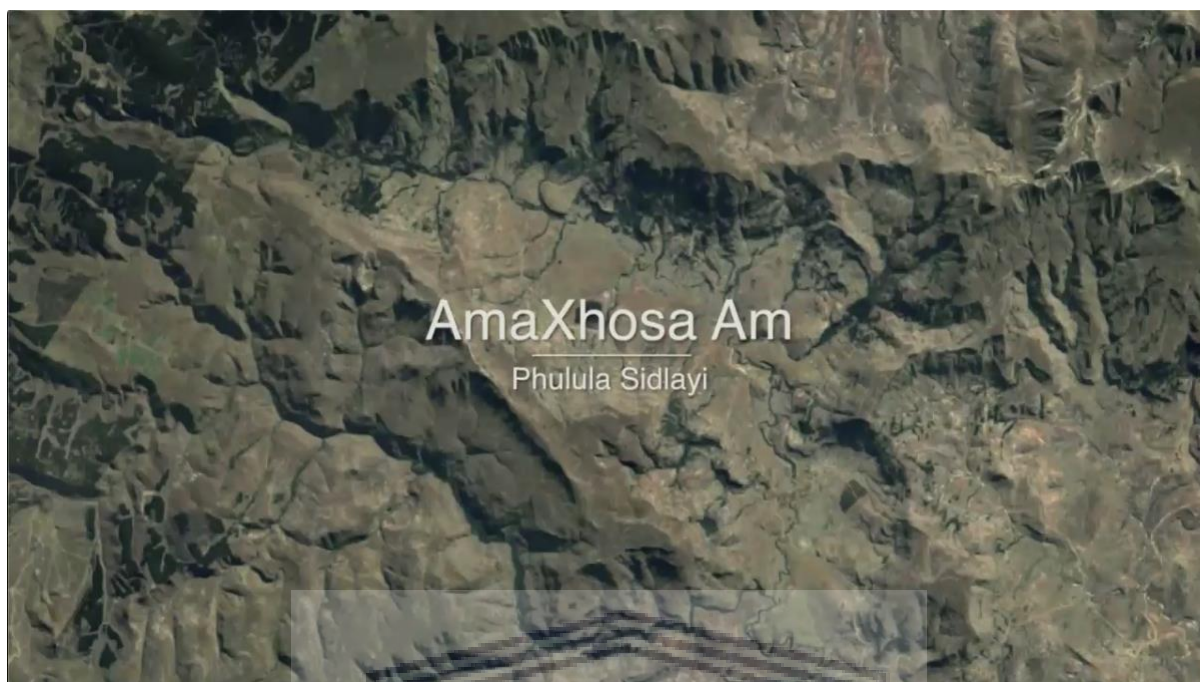
Stories like this can be challenging to handle in the story circle and are the occasion for some of the most direct and obvious moments of shaping intervention by the facilitator.<sup>27</sup> This is partly because telling someone else's story can be a way to avoid doing the personal reflection and accounting which is an important part of the process—it can hardly be coincidental that I have only ever experienced this particular move from men (compare my note that Zukile Ntlemeza's story initially felt “abstract”). It can also raise ethical concerns, particularly given the emphasis in digital storytelling on the storyteller's ownership of and control over their own story. By what right do I mine someone else's experience for my own story? What effect might the telling of the story have on them?

In this case, the fact that Mzamo himself is an important actor in this story enabled me to shift the emphasis, via questions like “What makes this story *your* story?” and “What is there about this story that only you can tell?” During the group discussion, both I and fellow group member Phulula Sidlayi noted that it was unusual to hear a man's story of intervention in a domestic abuse situation and we appreciated it. We encouraged him to write from his own point of view, which he appeared to struggle with in the story circle—but his subsequent script substantially achieved this.

Mzamo had a job working at a food factory just outside Lwandle and had to rearrange shifts to come to workshop sessions. He was also one of the group members who was interested in learning more about filmmaking, and had already done some experimentation with video and audio production. This may have partially informed his choice of story—he was less interested in the personal storytelling than in being the creator of a film. I had also showed this group the digital story *Beauty*, detailing a man's experience of women who had survived abuse, which may point to the priming role of sample stories.

<sup>27</sup> Nancy Thumim specifically mentions situations like this as a case of “institutional mediation”. See Thumim, “Mediated Self-Representations”, 260.

## AmaXhosa Am



*Figure 5.10: AmaXhosa Am*

Phulula Sidlayi was another young person who joined the group with a specific interest in learning more about filmmaking. Inspired by the project's setting in the Museum and by contemporary political debates about land, her story is an exploration of the multiple meanings of home and migration, and the difficulty of answering the question "where are you from?" She makes an explicit link between her own sense that "family is home" because residence is precarious, and the xenophobic attacks suffered by Lwandle residents who are migrants from other African countries.

During the discussion in the story circle Sidlayi added that "moving around feels like the natural thing" in her family and among those she knows: people move to Gauteng or the Western Cape in search of work, but go "home" to the Eastern Cape for holidays and funerals. This oscillation between homes was intimately familiar to almost everyone in the Lwandle workshops, but I felt a particular affinity with Sidlayi, also never having had an easy answer to the question "where are you from?" I told her this explicitly during the story circle.

Some viewers of the completed story commented that it was perhaps trying to do too much, combining personal reflections on home and family with reflections on two hot political issues: the land debate and xenophobia. This is not a response I share. I found Sidlayi's questioning and critical gaze at her own environment, and her ambition, energising. Where another facilitator might have encouraged her to pare down and simplify her story, as I

did with Nyameko Dyantyi in the first story circle, I did not. This is one of the places, then, where the shaping influence of my own aesthetic preferences as a facilitator is particularly clear, in this case because of interventions I could have made but chose not to.

The largeness of Sidlayi's story is also due to her ambitions for it: she wanted not only to push her own creative limits but to have an impact on other people. In our interview she said that "writing that story was, for me, an aspect of trying to figure out where I come from and see if anybody else has that question, if anybody else questions that". The responses in the story circle helped her to understand that "oh, okay, it's actually something relatable that can be accepted, that people can understand. It's not just a wonder in my head."<sup>28</sup>

This understanding, that "it's not just me", articulated by several of the participants at Lwandle, can be one of the most powerful lasting effects of the story circle and the wider group storytelling process. If silence can be resonant and protective, attempts to protect through silence can also backfire. South Africa's student protests of 2015 and 2016 contained a strong thread of anger among young black people that their elders had, in trying to shield them from the horrors of the past, concealed much that would have helped make sense of their world.<sup>29</sup> Silence about the past could not conceal its continual surfacing in and shaping of the present. Telling stories about "the things we never talk about", then, can help to build solidarity and a sense of mutual support as tellers recognise the common threads that tie their experiences together. This storytelling must be appropriately contained, however—stories can evoke reactions of denial, defensiveness and aggression just as easily as they can evoke solidarity, which is why it is so important for facilitators to be able to recognise, name, explain, contain and redirect these dynamics.<sup>30</sup>

28 Interview, May 21st 2018.

29 See Eve Fairbanks, "Why South African Students Have Turned on Their Parents' Generation." *The Guardian*, November 18th 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/nov/18/why-south-african-students-have-turned-on-their-parents-generation>.

30 For a particularly useful discussion of how to manage these dynamics in a South African university classroom, see Anthony Collins, "Teaching Sensitive Topics : Transformative Pedagogy in a Violent Society." *Alternation* 9, no. 2013 (2013): 128–49.



## **Amahlandenyuka obomi nokungalahlitemba ngamaphupho akho**

### **The ups and downs of life and not giving up on your dreams**



*Figure 5.11: Amahlandenyuka obomi nokungalahlitemba ngamaphupho akho*

*The ups and downs of life and not giving up on your dreams*

Zizipho Somtsewu took the last turn in our small story circle, with a story she explicitly framed at the start as a tribute to her mother. She was pregnant at the time, and her story is about how the death of her father during her own adolescence spurred her to work hard for her family, her struggle for education and eventual success, and her hopes for her unborn child.

During our interview Somtsewu mentioned that she took a long time to tell her mother about her pregnancy because “I felt like I had failed my parents... I didn’t fulfil their dreams”<sup>31</sup>. Her final story, however, contains little of the regret and ambivalence about motherhood that characterised Hintsabe S’duli’s story. She is older and had managed to complete her degree and find a job, which may explain why there is less sense of missed opportunities in her story.

Somtsewu also used her story to assert her sense of pride in having overcome difficulties, and hoped it would be inspiring to others: “I always want to tell people about how I grew up and how far I’ve been in life and I’m still standing... I’m excited about that... I

31 This and subsequent quotations are from our interview of May 21st 2018.



think my story, they can learn a lot from it.” She is also aware of the possibilities of using the story to stand in or speak for her in some situations, freeing her for example of the need to keep re-telling the story of her father’s death: “I don’t have to tell everyone, ‘when I was 13...’—I can just send the story.”

Along with Nontsikelelo Cotiyana and Vinni da Davayo, Somtsewu was one of three participants who chose—after some prompting and permission from me—to tell their stories in isiXhosa, in her case because her primary audience is her mother, who lives in the Eastern Cape and is not fluent in English. She said during our interview that if her primary audience had been in Lwandle she would have used English, but also acknowledged that isiXhosa flowed more easily for her. She wrote her script in English and translated it on the fly during the voiceover recording, editing as she spoke and then, after listening to the first version and deciding it was too long, re-editing again as she recorded a second take.

### **Mzukisi Makhanya**

There is one last, uncompleted story to account for. Mzukisi Makhanya had expressed reservations from the start about his ability to complete the workshop given his existing commitments both to his employer and to his theatre group. He was not part of the story circle and was able to attend only one more session, during which he completed a script and recorded a voic-over which mixed both English and isiXhosa.

Makhanya’s story covers his birth in the Eastern Cape, the early loss of his mother and a subsequent move to Cape Town, the intricacies of making space for himself as a child between parents, grandparents, step-parents and extended family members, a flirtation with gangsterism and drugs and an intervention by his uncle which led him to find a “second home” with a theatre group.

I was not able to interview Makhanya, but his motivations for telling this story can be read from his description of himself as a “community game changer”. Like all three of the other young men who participated in these workshops, he used the opportunity to inscribe a version of himself that works deliberately counter to conceptions of young black men as irresponsible, violent, abusive or irretrievably “lost”.

### **Hearing Stories**

Once the words of the stories have been fixed as scripts, the storyteller reads them out loud to be recorded as a voice-over for the digital story. The voiceover is thus the translation of a

story which was first spoken, then written,<sup>32</sup> back into speech, and it is attended by many of the typical losses of translation. A story that was vivid and moving in the story circle can lose much of its life when pinned down to a page, and then die entirely when read aloud rather than told or performed. Keeping the story alive in writing and speaking when it is no longer spontaneous is a matter of skill.

At the beginning of a workshop most of this skill is likely to reside within the facilitator, but it can be taught and learned, and like most facilitators I have developed a repertoire of ways to try and enable this learning. To summarise from earlier sections, I start by noting during the introductory presentation that writing for the mouth and ear is different from writing for the eye—less formal, shorter, often simpler. I repeat this as people begin to write their scripts, and again during the process of reviewing and helping to edit drafts, as I described with Mandisa Jacobs' story. I also keep notes during the story circle of particularly resonant phrases, so that I can remind people to write their own words back into their stories. Finally, I invite people to read their scripts aloud, taking note of points where they stumble—these are often markers of words that need to be translated from the language of the eye back into the language of the mouth.

In Lwandle, there was yet another layer of translations between English and isiXhosa. In deference to my insufficient isiXhosa language skills the first, story circle versions of the stories were all in English, as were the first versions of all the scripts; after some prompting from me, three of the final stories were recorded in isiXhosa. Nontsikelelo Cotiyana and Vinni da Davayo translated their own scripts back from English into isiXhosa; Zizipho Somtsewu translated on the fly from an English script into spoken isiXhosa. She listened back to the first take, said “no, it’s too long”, and re-recorded a shorter version. This translation back into her mother tongue was quite literally for her mother, who was the primary intended audience for the story.

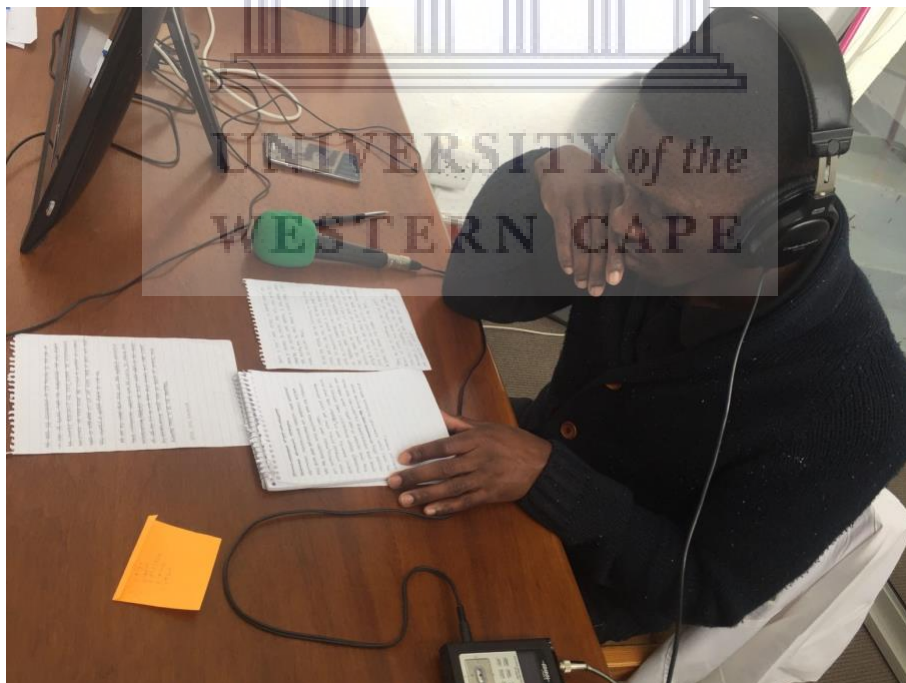
Recording can be an uncomfortable experience—if one is not used to it, a microphone can be just as intimidating as a camera, and hearing one’s own recorded voice is always a shock to begin with. At Lwandle I used a digital voice recorder and a microphone tailored for vocals, doing several takes with each storyteller and playing each one back so we could listen together and decide what to keep, reject or alter. I also demonstrated for the group exactly how to edit and clean a sound file to remove mistakes, hesitations and repetitions, and edited

<sup>32</sup> When participants are not literate, or not confidently literate, the writing step may be heavily modified or left out altogether.

each voiceover in tandem with the storyteller. This demonstration of the malleability of the recorded voice helped to reduce the anxiety associated with recording.



*Figure 5.12: Recording kit*



*Figure 5.13: Vinnie da Davayo listening back to his recording*

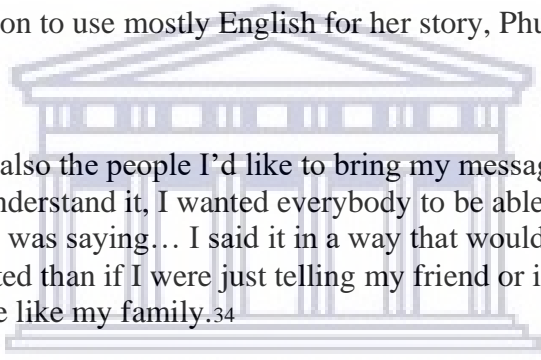
A handful of participants used sound effects or music in addition to their voice-overs. S’duli had a friend send her the sound of a newborn’s cry as a WhatsApp voice note; Somtsewu

used her own recording of a hymn sung in her church; and Sidlayi used a song of her own which she had previously recorded.

The Lwandle stories are deeply inscribed by dislocation and loss, as well as by dense and complex webs of relationship, mainly within extended families but also within friend groups. They are also instantly recognisable to many South Africans, so common as to be commonplace; and within communities like Lwandle they are rarely discussed. During interviews more than one of my participants noted that “we don’t talk about these things”.

It is also very probably the case that I heard the stories I did precisely because I am an outsider in Lwandle by virtue of my race, language, cultural heritage and socioeconomic position<sup>33</sup>. What everybody knows inside Lwandle, what is not worth mentioning, is not the same as what everybody knows outside Lwandle. I was an audience in my own right, and brought with me the possibility of a much larger, if nebulous, audience as well.

Discussing her decision to use mostly English for her story, Phulula Sidlayi put it like this:



I was considering also the people I’d like to bring my message to. I wanted them to understand it, I wanted everybody to be able to understand what I was saying... I said it in a way that would be more universally accepted than if I were just telling my friend or if I was just doing it for maybe like my family.<sup>34</sup>

To the extent that these stories are intimate, then, it is a curious kind of intimacy, one shared with imagined strangers rather than with family and friends. And to the extent they are commonplace, they are so only within a very particular time and location. The losses and disruptions that seem ordinary to these storytellers in Lwandle might very well appear extraordinary to others.

<sup>33</sup> I am grateful to Dr Siza Ngabaza of UWC’s Department of Women’s and Gender Studies for first helping me clarify this in conversation.

<sup>34</sup> Interview, May 21st 2018.

## 6. Picturing

### Working with images in Lwandle

The translations and transformations stories undergo in the process of becoming *digital* stories peak in the process of becoming visual. On the purely practical level, this means that once participants have written scripts and recorded voiceovers they must somehow create a collection of digital image files, then assemble these and all the other elements of their story using video editing software. On another level, it requires them to engage with using images as a means of communication—what does a picture say or mean? Might it mean something different to me than it means to someone else? How does it interact with the words I am speaking in the voiceover? How might I make or adapt an image to serve the needs of this story?

Given the brevity of a typical workshop and the primacy of the voiceover, digital stories often neglect the visual. As I suggested above, many digital stories can become a cobbled-together hash of images hastily ripped off the internet, with all the attendant problems of attribution, quality and representation. This is a particular risk when storytellers are constrained by time, limited visual resources and visual literacy, and by a lack of confidence in their own abilities to be image-makers. They tend to reach for images that are “primarily illustrative or evidential”.<sup>1</sup> As a result, much of what I was attempting at Lwandle was a deeper engagement with the visual than is typically possible in a budget- and time-constrained three-day workshop, ideally including work with images that might work at the level of metaphor. In doing so I was building on the efforts of a number of other facilitators who have worked in recent years to build storytellers’ resources for working in the field of the visual. The range of interventions they have experimented with include: Acting as photographer and videographer during the workshop under the direction of the storyteller;<sup>2</sup> experimenting with different workshop formats that give primacy to the image;<sup>3</sup> and offering additional training in photography and photo editing, along with more time, so that

1 Darcy Alexandra, “More Than Words: Co-Creative Visual Ethnography.” In *Deep Stories: Practising, Teaching and Learning Anthropology with Digital Storytelling*, ed. Mariela Nunez-James, Aaron Thornburg, and Angela Booker (Warsaw/Berlin: De Gruyter Open, 2017), 120.

2 I have been guided in particular by the work of Amy Hill, founder and director of StoryCenter’s Silence Speaks initiative. See <https://www.storycenter.org/ss-about>.

3 For example: Rob Kershaw, “Stories Seen,” Workshop preceding the 6th International Digital Storytelling Conference at Amherst, Massachusetts, Sept 23-25 2015.



storytellers can work with images as “meditational objects that facilitate inquiry and allow for analytical and poetic engagements with experience”.<sup>4</sup>

Lwandle, like many similar places in South Africa, has a thin visual presence in the world. It was built to be invisible, and “this invisibility is reflected in the lack of a photographic archive for almost the first 30 years of Lwandle’s existence.”<sup>5</sup> Even though the Museum itself became the trigger for a “photographic frenzy”<sup>6</sup> among both visitors and residents, including a series of photography workshops in Lwandle (at least one was held during the period I was visiting there), little public trace of this remains outside the Museum itself (and writings about the Museum). As I noted in Chapter 4, images that can be found online are dominated by pictures from the Museum and from news stories, usually highlighting crime, protest action or poverty. Just as Lwandle exists in the precarious margins of the ecosystem that supports digital storytelling, so it exists in the margins of formal practices of photography, far from the circuits of money, influence, and conversation that might support greater visibility. To the extent there is a visual record of contemporary life in Lwandle, it exists in the private and semi-private spaces of Facebook and WhatsApp, where people create and circulate a dizzying and constantly evolving variety of photographs, memes, videos, screen-grabs, emoji, stickers, texts and combinations of all of the above.<sup>7</sup> This circulation has only begun to evolve since around 2010 when camera phones first began to be widely used in South Africa, and it is still constrained by the cost of data. Before then the visual archive of most South African lives, to the extent it exists at all, consists at most of a small handful of images like school photographs and snapshots from work functions. Vinnida Davayo, for example, has only four or five pictures of himself as a child, but dozens of his daughter, which he noted is “because of the phones:”

Everywhere you go you have your phone with you. You think okay, let’s take a picture here because this place is beautiful; you don’t have to wait. Because [previously] you had to have those camera guys to be hired—“okay, take pictures of this event”—but now you don’t even need those things.<sup>8</sup>

4 Alexandra, “More Than Words”, 120. See also, by the same author, “Digital Storytelling as Transformative Practice”, already cited.

5 Murray and Witz, *Hostels Homes Museum*, 94.

6 *Ibid.*, 101.

7 For a discussion of how the circulation of images on Facebook operates as a form of political speech, see George Agbo, “Photography, Facebook and Virtualisation of Resistance in Nigeria.”(PhD thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2016).

8 Interview, August 30th 2017.

The scarcity of images in Lwandle was an opportunity for me as the facilitator to initiate the deeper engagement with the visual that I have mentioned. Given all the realities of working in the margins and at the limits, I could not achieve the fantasy goal of including things like input from professional photography trainers, extensive work in Photoshop, or even sustained individual and group reflection on pictures and the work they were doing. What I could do—through a combination of coaching, teaching, coaxing, giving permission, suggesting, directing and photographing—was to expand the range of physical, technical, aesthetic and social resources available to the storytellers. In the process, of course, I had once again to confront my own power in the workshop and the possibilities of coercion this introduced. My very framing of images “hastily ripped off the internet” as problematic and undesirable, for example, is already pushing (or coaxing, or inviting, or forcing—there are many verbs to choose from and all of them have different evaluative weight) participants past a point where they might, left to themselves, be perfectly comfortable (or complacent). I will consider this further in my discussion of Masa Soko’s story below. For now, I will note that this is precisely why it is so important, in the early stages of the workshop, to demonstrate an openness to challenge and resistance, and to build a sense of group solidarity that can counterbalance my power as the facilitator.<sup>9</sup> By the time it came to negotiations about images, I had to trust participants to be able to take care of themselves and each other, and they had to trust me to support them without force. I brought with me a set of ideas about what constituted good-enough images: mainly, I wanted images that would evoke the textures of the stories that were being told, opening possibilities for reading into them beyond their words. I was open about this, and relied on the dynamics of the workshop and the group, as well as my own reflection, to hold my desires and ambitions in balance with those of the storytellers.

In the subsequent conversations and negotiations, three major themes emerged: the precarity of images and the image-making resources available; the malleability and mobility

<sup>9</sup> In 2013 I worked with a group of health researchers to facilitate digital stories by a group in rural northern KwaZulu-Natal, about their experiences of antiretroviral (ARV) treatment. (The group included family members and friends as well as those taking ARVs). The facilitation team did the actual editing under the direction of participants. At one point while I was reviewing a story draft with a participant, she stopped me to say no, I had chosen the wrong picture; we needed to take a new one. This moment stands out in my memory as one of success. The project is described in Astrid Treffry-Goatley, Richard Lessells, Pam Sykes, Till Bärnighausen, Tulio De Oliveira, Relebohile Moletsane and Janet Seeley, “Understanding Specific Contexts of Antiretroviral Therapy Adherence in Rural South Africa: A Thematic Analysis of Digital Stories from a Community with High HIV Prevalence.” *PLoS ONE* 11, no. 2 (2016): 1–18.

of images within sociotechnical networks; and the multiplicity of transformations they undergo in the production process.

## **The precarious life of pictures**

The extent of the need for active picture-making intervention at Lwandle reflects not only the lack of access to image-making resources that has characterised many South African lives, but also the precarious life of pictures,<sup>10</sup> which are vulnerable to being misplaced, deleted, stolen or otherwise rendered inaccessible. Photographic prints can be lost to theft or fire,<sup>11</sup> or just mislaid as people move from the countryside to town and back, and between various more or less temporary living places in town. Digital storage media can be lost, damaged, corrupted or stolen—and those with the least access to resources are at highest risk for these losses. Sometimes storage cards simply fill up, and images are deleted to free up space.

This fragility and precarity affected several participants. For example, when I asked Zukile Ntlemeza whether he had any pictures of himself as a child he said: “Unfortunately, not. Because there’s other ones, that I left in Joburg, of us all when we were in Durban at school. But then I don’t know where it went, hey. But I think it’s still in Joburg.”<sup>12</sup>

In Nontsikelelo Cotiyana’s case, she lost many of the pictures she had hoped to use—images of great personal significance—when the MicroSD card on which she was storing them malfunctioned. Ironically, she had chosen to use the card storage rather than her phone’s onboard memory for security reasons, because the phone was more likely to be stolen and she could keep the card stored separately. Safety from theft, however, did not confer safety from deterioration. Others chose Facebook as their primary personal image archive for similar reasons: if a phone is lost or stolen the images are still safe (and Facebook, unlike cloud storage services, is free).

Given these twin constraints, of images that are both scarce and precarious, storytellers turn to their networks—which includes personal networks, the internet (in the form mainly of Google image search), and the middle ground of social media.

10 Which in turn reflects the precarious lives of humans. According to national crime statistics released in September 2018, seven of the ten police stations in South Africa with the highest murder rates are located in the greater Cape Town metropolitan area. See <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2018-09-11-crimestats-ten-years-of-murder-in-south-africa-in-one-terrifying-graphic/>.

11 In the ten years from 2005 to 2015 there were 372 reported dwelling fires in Lwandle and the neighbouring townships of Nomzamo and Asanda Village. Many of these involved multiple dwellings—in one case 300 homes were destroyed in one fire. See Alberto Paolo Francioli, “Investigating Energy Usage among Low Income Households and Implications for Fire Risk.” (PhD thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2018), 32.

12 Interview, September 1st 2017.

## Networked pictures

Here is a partial list of ways the Lwandle storytellers, and their stories, acquired their pictures:

Google image search

Google Maps (including satellite views) and Google Street View

YouTube videos

Facebook albums

WhatsApp status pictures

Existing picture in a phone gallery

Existing picture sent by a friend or family member via WhatsApp or Facebook

Taken by a friend or family member specially for the workshop

Taken by the facilitator during the workshop

Taken by the storyteller during the workshop

There are photographs taken with a cellphone camera and inserted unchanged into a story, cropped and filtered photographs, scanned photographs, photographs of photographs, digitally produced photo collages, stock photographs, clips from YouTube videos, pictures and video taken in the Museum and its grounds, pictures and video taken on the streets of Lwandle, screen grabs, staged scenes, and candid shots.

At one point I imagined I might be able to trace the histories of individual images in detail, down to some kind of “original”, but this vision rapidly disintegrated in the face of just how mobile these images are. Some embedded metadata can be read using specialist file viewing software, but very often this data traces only the last in a long series of transformations as the images have been cropped, collaged, copied, screen-grabbed, uploaded, downloaded, Bluetoothed, WhatsApped, compressed, filtered, pixelated, named and renamed in their migrations.

If there is one thing that stands out, it is that these images are the outcome of profoundly networked processes of seeing, taking, sharing, discussing, transporting, editing, and transforming. The networks involved are a complex amalgam of the human and the technical. James Hevia suggests, following Bruno Latour, that photographs are “immutable mobiles”<sup>13</sup>—objects or inscriptions that are able to carry information across boundaries of

<sup>13</sup> James L. Hevia, “The Photography Complex: Exposing Boxer-Era China (1900-1901), Making Civilization.” In *Photographies East: The Camera and Its Histories in East and Southeast Asia*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris

space and time and through multiple transformations. I am less sure about the immutability of photographs and other images, however. Latour first proposed the idea of the immutable mobile in the context of specifically scientific modes of knowledge production. Knowledge, he writes, can be described “only by considering a whole cycle of accumulation: how to bring things back to a place for someone to see it for the first time so that others might be sent again to bring other things back. How to be familiar with things, people and events, which are *distant*.”<sup>14</sup> Immutable mobiles are the pieces of information, like maps or scientific formulae, which travel “without deformation through massive transformations”.<sup>15</sup> In the case of images, however, where is the boundary between transformation and deformation? How much transformation can an image sustain before it becomes a different image altogether?

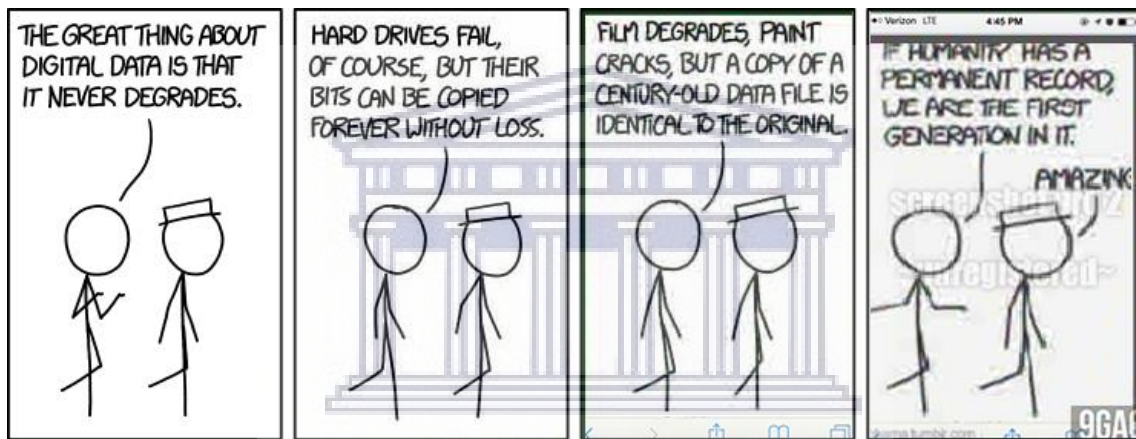


Figure 6.1: “Digital data” by Randall Monroe: Images are both mobile and mutable; with every translation, some information is lost and other information is gained.<sup>16</sup>

Hans Belting’s distinction between images and the media in which they are expressed provides another way of looking at this. An image, he suggests, “often straddles the boundary between physical and mental existence”<sup>17</sup>—it is being seen or regarded that turns a picture into an image. It is the medium, then, that “functions as a support, host and tool for the image”,<sup>18</sup> and the same image can live or be expressed in different media. I can call the image

(Duke University Press, 2009), 96..

14 Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), 220; emphasis in the original.

15 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 223.

16 Randall Monroe, “Digital Data.” xkcd. Accessed November 13, 2019. <https://xkcd.com/1683/>.

17 Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, translated by Thomas Dunlap (Princeton University Press, 2011), 2.

18 Ibid., 5.



of the view from my window to mind, in which case my body and mind are the medium. I can also take a photograph, then print it and hang it on a wall, or post it to Instagram, or even paint it—in each case the image “emerges in our gaze, and with a paradoxical ambiguity, for it straddles the boundary between... media”.<sup>19</sup>

In tracking the migrations and transformations between media of the images I discuss in the rest of this chapter, I want to be mindful of this ambiguity—what is lost, what is gained and what changes as images slips between different mediums? First, however, I want to attend to some of the ways in which images are sourced from, and created in, networks of technology and people.

### Starting with Google

When digital storytellers are confronted in the workshop with, on the one hand, a need to make a picture-based story, and on the other hand no pictures to do it with, a near-universal first resort is a turn to Google. Countless digital stories consist almost entirely of images grabbed from the first page of Google image search results, with a proliferation of watermarks betraying little or no regard for issues of copyright and ownership.

In Lwandle, the first version of Masa Soko’s story, about the financial sacrifices her family made to support her through university, contained this sequence of four images grabbed from Google image searches.

1a		<p>My mum would sacrifice her last money so that I could have taxi fare... money set aside for electricity.</p>
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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>20</sup> This picture originally appeared on the South African news site *The Daily Maverick* on January 13 2016, as the lead illustration for an article by Stephen Grootes headlined “Treasury document: South Africa’s future matters”. The caption reads: “Photo: A shopkeeper counts out change above her cash box at her shop in Hillcrest, west of Durban, South Africa, January 11, 2016. REUTERS/Rogan Ward”.  
<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-01-13-treasury-document-south-africas-future-matters/>.




2a		<p>We sometimes spent our evenings in the dark,</p>
3a		<p>bathing with cold water, so that I could go to school the next day.</p>
4a		<p>When those results came to confirm that I have passed, excitement was everywhere in the house. Everyone wanted to be part of the graduation day.</p>

Figure 6.2: Googled images in Masa Soko's story

The first thing to notice about these pictures, perhaps, is their explicitness and tight link with the accompanying voiceover text. They are an attempt to illustrate the words of the

21 Published without any attribution or caption as the lead illustration on an *Eyewitness News* story headlined “Macassar Community Remembers Slain Elzane Thomas”. <http://ewn.co.za/2017/03/09/macassar-community-remembers-slain-elzane-thomas>

22 Picture illustrating a blog post by Andy Graham about his experiences in Rwandan hotel bathrooms: <https://www.hobotraveler.com/travel-journal/butare-rwanda-hotel.html>

23 Stock image that appeared in the first line of Google Image Search results for “excitement”. The source page, now unavailable, was a blog post announcement about a new logo for Kindred Credit Union: <https://www.kindredcu.com/AboutUs/Media/Announcements/ExcitementIsInTheAir/>; the original stock photograph is from Getty images.

story, a translation of words directly into image. More subtly, they feel jarring; they do not “fit” with Soko’s story.<sup>24</sup> This feeling of unease began as something largely instinctual on my part, so it’s worth exploring in some detail exactly what it is about these images that marks them as “out of place” for a story from Lwandle.

Image 1, a tightly cropped over-the-shoulder shot of a woman’s hands holding South African R10 and R20 banknotes, suggests sophisticated equipment and a high degree of competence in using it: it is perfectly lit, crisply focussed on its primary subject matter and the busy background is rendered unobtrusive by narrow depth of field. Unlike in a snapshot, in which the whole of life tries to muscle in on the frame, the intrusion of any visual excess has been carefully and competently excluded; the subject matter is clear and unambiguous.

There is a similar lack of excess in the second image—the Google image search requested a candle in the dark and this is what has been served up.

A reverse image search suggests that both these images were originally grabbed from news stories: created and cropped to serve the illustrative needs of one story, they fit uneasily into another.

Image 3 offers intriguing additional detail, but its excesses beyond “basin of water”—the bathroom tiles, the detergent bucket bearing branding unfamiliar to South Africans—mark it as out of place with a story set in a Western Cape township. Image 4, which appeared in the first five results of a Google image search for “excitement” when I first looked for it, is a version of a Getty stock image that has been widely used, in this case on a blog post about a new logo for a Canadian credit union. The airborne silhouettes suggest people who are skinny and white; not one of them is wearing a skirt or dress. Again, even without the obvious stock-photo origin, the image is jarringly out of place.

## Turning to the personal

Without strong intervention by facilitators, many storytellers are content to let their stories rest there. For someone with little experience of photography or visual storytelling outside the context of the museum itself, these pictures served Soko’s purpose well enough. Encouraged to go out and create images that would better fit her story, she was initially sceptical but then discovered that the extra work did have some rewards:

At first it was like, yo hayi this woman! But when you begin to understand—you know, it’s the *why* that will make you want to do

<sup>24</sup> See Lambert, *Digital Storytelling*, 60-63 for a discussion of picture choice in digital storytelling.

something—so when you explained about the originality and the personal feeling attached to the picture that you take, then that's when it made sense that you can't just put any random pictures, but there has to be pictures that have meaning, pictures that people can relate to.<sup>25</sup>

So the pictures in the final version of the same sequence from Soko's story are very different:

1b		<p>My mum would sacrifice her last money so that I could have taxi fare... money set aside for electricity.</p>
2b		<p>We sometimes spent our evenings in the dark,</p>

<sup>25</sup> Interview, August 30th 2017.

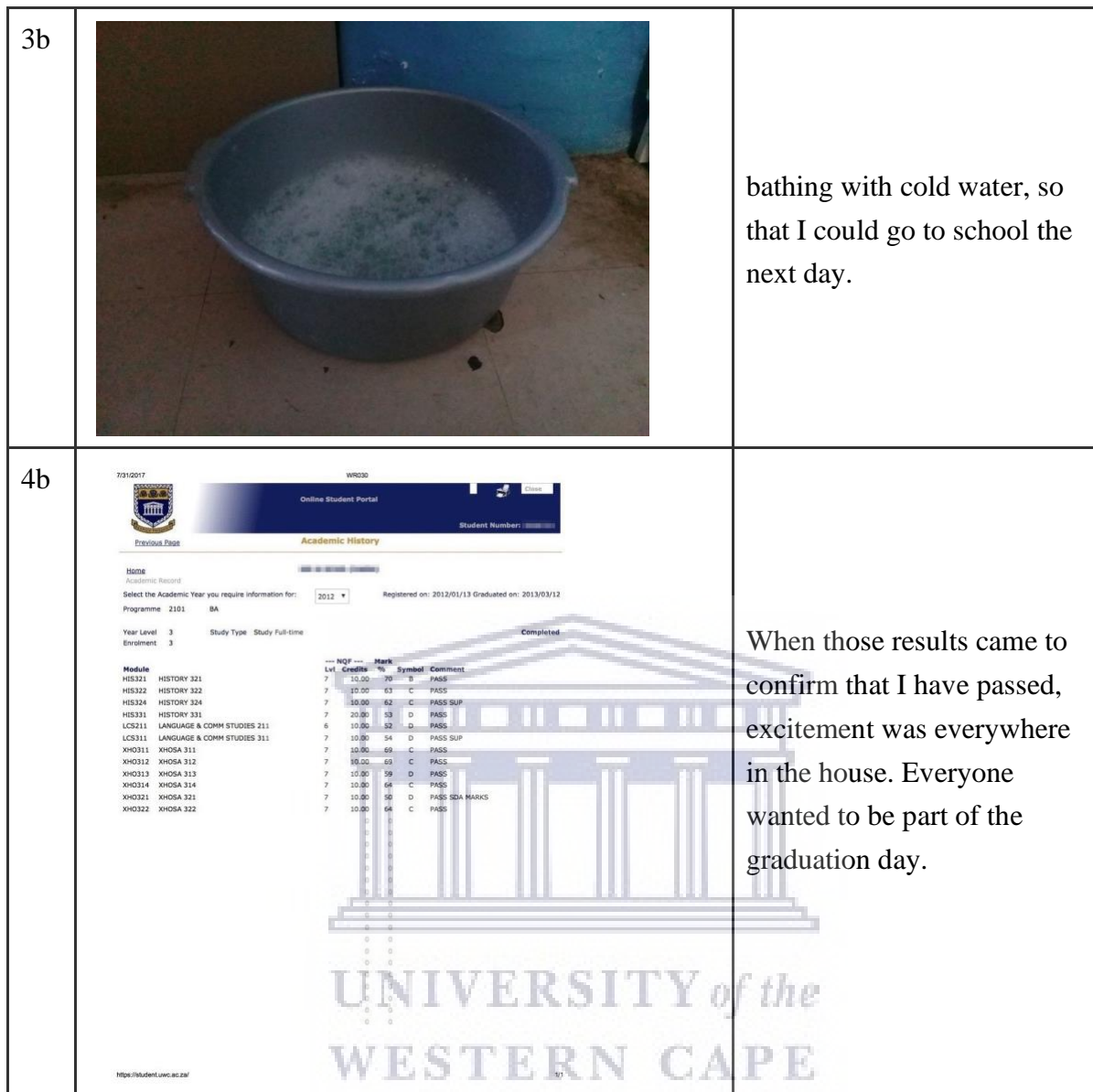


Figure 6.3: Photographs taken by Masa Soko for her story

The move from Picture 1a to Picture 1b is particularly striking. The second image was made by stealth, as Soko pretended to be taking a selfie. Taken through the slightly scratched and blurry lens of a mid-range phone camera which is not held perfectly straight, it is far less formally and technically sophisticated, less crisp and controlled, than the first image of banknotes. Yet this lack of tight control yields a rich visual excess that gives depth and resonance to her words. There are uncontrolled flares of light from a late-afternoon slanting winter sun, there are mysterious shapes and planes in the background which resolve themselves on close examination into a fridge, a stove, the realisation that this living room is also a kitchen. The woman in the picture, Soko's mother, is counting coins rather than notes, a difference which throws the phrase "her last money" into much sharper relief.



The pictures of the candle and the bathtub appear at first to be mere re-stagings of the original, rejected images, but again there is a lot more going on here. Reconsidering the pictures during our interview, Soko noted of the first candle image that “not many people would relate to that... the candle is lit but the background is still dark”. The first photograph’s isolation of the candle flame and its invocation of the stock trope “light in the darkness” work against the very purpose of the candle, which is to illuminate.

When Soko came to take her own picture, she staged it carefully, moving the candle onto the floor away from tabletop clutter and turning off the automatic flash so that both the candle—burned down to near its end as a mark of actual use, not just ornamental presence—and its environment are made clearly visible. Similarly she notes of her bathtub picture, in contrast to the internet-grabbed image: “It has made it relevant. especially with the water that has soap and everything. And it's on the floor - because in most cases in our homes you kneel down to take a bath. But compare that one, that's just clean water that is there, it could have been for anything, you could have been doing your laundry or anything like that. But [my picture], it feels—it feels real.”<sup>26</sup>

Taken together, these three images not only share the quality of having been taken by the same camera, but also offer an intimate glimpse into the life of a particular household, firmly located in a particular place and space. They anchor the personal aspect of this personal story in a way that compels attention to the texture of this experience rather than a generalised or stereotyped story of success despite adversity.

The final image was the outcome of much discussion: How to represent the excitement of getting those long-awaited results? In the end, we settled on the simple expedient of just showing the results—not visually exciting, but intensely personal.

Soko said of her digital story: “It’s not my story, it’s my family’s story.” Before this was raised in the post-workshop interview it was evident in the pictures used in the rest of the story, in which she is rarely alone but rather photographed with members of her family, friends or teachers. In fact, she says she has no pictures of herself alone: her choice was constrained and thus the story’s pictures, taken together, reveal an important dimension that is not necessarily explicit in its text.

Her images were able to evoke a reality beyond her words, the resonances of a life and a world which extends in time, space and connections far beyond the fragmentary moments

<sup>26</sup> Interview, August 30th 2017.

of the story. If one of the dangers of storytelling from the margins is a fixation on, and of, marginality, then this is one of the ways to avoid that fixation.

### **Pictures in human networks**

As a further demonstration of the sociability of images, several other storytellers enlisted friends and family members to send them existing pictures, take new pictures or take part in the production of pictures. Zizipho Somtsewu's friends and her older sister, Hintsabe S'duli's friends and a neighbour, friends of Zukile Ntlemeza and Phulula Sidlayi and Lupho Mzamo and Anele Kalipa, are all either pictured in their stories and/or helped to produce images for them.

In particular, the only two storytellers at Lwandle who used video footage in their stories relied heavily on others to source and film it. *AmaXhosa Am*, Phulula Sidlayi's story, uses several short clips from a video she remembered and found on YouTube, shot by an acquaintance, of a trip to her home village of eTsitsana (Mount Fletcher).<sup>27</sup> She combines this with footage I took during the workshop, showing her interacting with the Museum displays, visiting the unit in the converted hostels where she lived with her family when they first arrived in Lwandle, walking in the street and visiting Somali friends at their spaza shop near the Museum.

Lupho Mzamo, in his film about gender-based violence called *Your Help Can Change Someone's Life*, originally intended to use pictures and footage, shot on his cellphone, of the friend his story is about. When he showed me the first draft of the story, I asked whether it was safe for his friend to use pictures that could identify her—and he realised it was not. The short film that he had imagined was finished had to be almost entirely reconstructed. Mzamo worked with his friends to produce some staged footage, and we also went out together on a walk through Lwandle, taking turns to use my phone to shoot murals, buildings and things spotted in the streets.

Mzamo's own dramatisations of his story were shot at night on a cellphone held by a friend, with himself and another friend as actors. During the edit he used a wide range of the tools iMovie could offer: He converted the re-enactments to black and white, slowed some of the shots down and added text and colour filters.

27 Nontumekelelo Magwa, *Life in Rural South Africa | Fobane | Matatiele | Mount Fletcher*. YouTube, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XM8cmMNNvuw>. For an idea of just how invisible this rural place is: Google searches for "Tsitsana" and "eTsitsana" combined yield just 139 results, many of which are auto-generated by weather or mapping sites or from other languages and countries.





*Figure 6.4: Stills from Lupho Mzamo's re-enactments of romance and intimate violence*

Mzamo is one of the storytellers who continues to haunt me with unrealised possibilities. There is a compelling quality to these images that suggests a talent that has never had the opportunity to be more fully developed; he was, remember, working in a food factory at the time of the workshop. He gave me an email address and phone number and after the workshop I sent him links to opportunities at film school, but I never found out what happened—Mzamo fell out of the ecosystem.

### **Images of desolation**

Among the Lwandle storytellers, Hintsabe S'duli was one of those who most fully embraced the possibilities of photography to create her own story. *My Degree with Two Eyes*, about an unplanned pregnancy and a planned but abandoned abortion, was no easier to visualise than it is to tell. She commissioned me and friends to take some pictures she wanted, notably of the taxi ride from Lwandle to Somerset West, of the Choices crisis pregnancy centre where she went for mandatory counselling before she could schedule a clinic date for her abortion, and of the clinic interior.

She also walked around Lwandle with a friend and took a number of striking photographs:

	<p>For that moment, and that moment alone, I thought I had to be smart about the whole situation and deal with it silently.</p>
	<p>The following day I asked the friend which I did the pregnancy test with, for sanitary towels and later that day I asked my mother for money to buy more. I had to pretend for days that I'm having menstruation, while I knew there was nothing coming out of my uterus.</p>
	<p>I couldn't find inner peace.</p>

Figure 6.5: Images of Lwandle from S'duli's story

S'duli said during our interview that she had followed my advice to take her phone everywhere with her, and with her story very much in her mind had taken pictures whenever it occurred to her.<sup>28</sup> The ugliness and desolation in the three images above are entirely intentional, reflecting her continuing ambivalence and despair. Of the final picture, showing a rubbish-strewn patch of ground near the school, she said:

It's there, it's there Pam... I am trying to get rid of it, but I can't. It's going to be there. It's a human body, it's growing. I can't get rid of it, because you see that dirt, they clean up now, tomorrow it's going to be there... Even after a year, it's there. It's going to be there. Even after three years it's going to be there... sometimes I used to take this route to

<sup>28</sup> Interview, August 30th 2017.



school, I used to walk there, but I was thinking of something else, “Hey, I’m going to be not living here, in my own house, etc”, but the choices I made, I am still working at the same place... Those dreams are no longer there.<sup>29</sup>

### **Risky picture-making**

Taking one’s own pictures is not, however, a strategy equally available to everyone. It requires time that may not be available; it requires access to a camera; and it requires a certain sense of comfort and safety. Taking new photographs can be risky and difficult.

During the workshop Nontsikelelo Cotiyana struggled with pictures for her story. First, the SD card on which she’d saved a lot of family photographs became corrupted, so that it was impossible to read or use any of the files. Her daughter was able to send some pictures that she had copies of, but others were lost forever—in particular, the photographs of the preparations for her daughter’s school-leaving dance that is an important part of her story. We discussed what to do, and Cotiyana decided on a number of new pictures that could compensate for these losses. She wanted a picture of her local clinic, as well as of the salon where her daughter had her hair and nails done for the dance. Yet week after week, I would arrive at the museum to find that she had not been able to make any progress. I didn’t understand at first what was going on, but Cotiyana explained:

I was scared because we are living in a society where you cannot do anything when you want to... I went to the clinic and there were people outside. I got inside to ask for permission. But then I didn’t get the manager or something. So, I went out because I didn’t want to put myself in trouble.

I went to that salon. The owner of the salon wasn’t there. The person who was there she said to me, no you can wait for the owner, you cannot take. And, I was like Jesus Christ I want these photos.

While the owner of the salon wasn’t there, I still went to my place to take a photo of the shoes. I took the photo of the shoes, came back and the owner of the salon wasn’t there yet. I just went outside, and I just took a picture so that the lady inside couldn’t see me. And, I just took a picture and left because I was running out of time.

So, when I tried to go to that clinic the same day I couldn’t because there were patients outside. So, I didn’t want to put myself in trouble.

<sup>29</sup> Interview, August 30th 2017.

Cotiyana was vulnerable to several kinds of trouble here: Taking photographs outside, especially at the clinic, put her at risk of having her phone stolen, a risk she cannot afford to take. “There were people outside,” on a street she knows to be unsafe, whom she did not trust.

There was also a more subtle social risk of suspicion and disapproval, linked to a belief that photographers will profit unfairly from those they photograph:

S’duli: We also have this mentality that when people take pictures of us, they want to make money, and you don't know where that picture is going to lead at the end of the day.

Soko: Eh but some people, when you are taking pictures, like that wood place. I went there and then politely asked the lady, do you mind if I take pictures of this smiley thing, [and she was] like “oh, afterwards you will be making money out of pictures of my smileys.”<sup>30</sup>

This puts people like Cotiyana—who is in any case a reserved person who prefers not to draw attention to herself—at a double disadvantage. Taking pictures on the streets is simultaneously risky and suspicious; but permission to take pictures inside is invariably refused. In the case of the clinic the need to maintain patient confidentiality is an obvious explanation, but a deep distrust of photography and fear of authority are also present. “What do you want the picture for?” is a frequent answer, conditioned partly by an ingrained deference to authority—in the absence of a manager or owner explicitly authorised to grant permission, a reflexive “no” is the easiest solution. What good reason could anybody have, after all, to photograph a place like Lwandle which is not beautiful or notable? There is also a deep legacy of decades of apartheid state surveillance: Lwandle was originally built to be simultaneously both invisible and easily overseen,<sup>31</sup> compromising both privacy<sup>32</sup> and personal safety—police photographers were commonly present at protests and funerals during the 1980s, their cameras signalling an explicit threat of state violence.<sup>33</sup> Taken together with the legacy of a century and more of colonial photographic appropriation and

30 Group interview, August 18th 2017. A smiley is township street food, a cooked sheep’s head.

31 Witz, “Revisualising Township Tourism”, 375.

32 Mijima and Buthelezi, “Mapping Museum-Community Relations,” 797.

33 The Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg includes an armoured vehicle called a Casspir, which visitors can enter to view footage shot (the verb is chosen with care) by security forces. Darren Newbury, “Lest We Forget: Photography and the Presentation of History at the Apartheid Museum, Gold Reef City, and the Hector Pieterse Museum, Soweto.” *Visual Communication* 4, no. 3 (2005): 273. See also Patricia Hayes, “Vision and Violence: Photographies of War in Southern Angola and Northern Namibia,” and Casper Erichsen, “Shoot to Kill: Photographic Images in the Namibian Liberation/Bush War,” both in *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, no. 27 (2001), 133–182.

exploitation, there is good reason for people to distrust photography which is not directly under their personal control, limited to the smartphone in their pocket and small private networks of circulation.

Faced with these obstacles, Cotiyana filled out some of her gaps by commissioning me to take portraits of her. She also took an exterior shot of the salon where her daughter had her hair and nails done for the dance, but the clinic picture remained a problem. In the end, we found a picture on Google Maps which I screen-grabbed and inserted straight into her story.

This was not the only time Google's comprehensive catalogue of South Africa's streets proved useful. Anele Kalipa found a picture of her childhood home, Zizipho Somtsewu chose a picture of her hometown's main street and Phulula Sidlayi used a satellite image of the valley of eTsitsana where she spent some of her childhood.



*Figure 6.6: Google Street View provided a safe way to acquire a picture of the clinic at Nomzamo*





*Figure 6.7: Cotiyana was able to photograph the outside of the salon, not the inside*



*Figure 6.8: Portrait of Nontsikelelo Cotiyana, shot by me outside the Museum*

The more I have sat with this collection of images, the less my original idea of explaining them in terms of origins, of “where they come from”, has made sense. Their origins, if not lost, are obscured and complicated by their migrations. They have been produced in networks and relationships among and between humans, places and tools that are widely dispersed in both time and place. The visual elements of each digital story begin to look less like a carefully planned representation and more like a fragile and temporary assemblage, brought together just in time and against the odds by dint of labour and luck. The work done to bring

all this together, and hold it together, echoes the work done to hold together the digital ecosystem discussed in Chapter 3.

The precarity and need for improvisation also suggests an answer to a question I have long held about why the practice of creating storyboards in a digital storytelling workshop, before diving into video editing, has never quite worked for me. It seems like an entirely sensible and best-practice thing to do—but it rests on assumptions about the abundance of images, and the level of pre-planning that is possible before the edit starts, that have not landed well in the South African contexts I have experienced as a facilitator of digital stories. If new images must be made, it is very difficult to conceive of them in the abstract, on paper. Once participants have begun to grapple with their stories as a visual sequence unfolding in real time, it is often much easier for them to see what work they still need to do, and to generate ideas.

There is one final set of visual transformations I wish to consider before closing this chapter with a consideration of how unconscious factors are at play within the workshop space. These are the transformations mediated by editing software and facilitation within the space of the workshop itself.

### **Transformations 1: Zizipho Somtsewu**

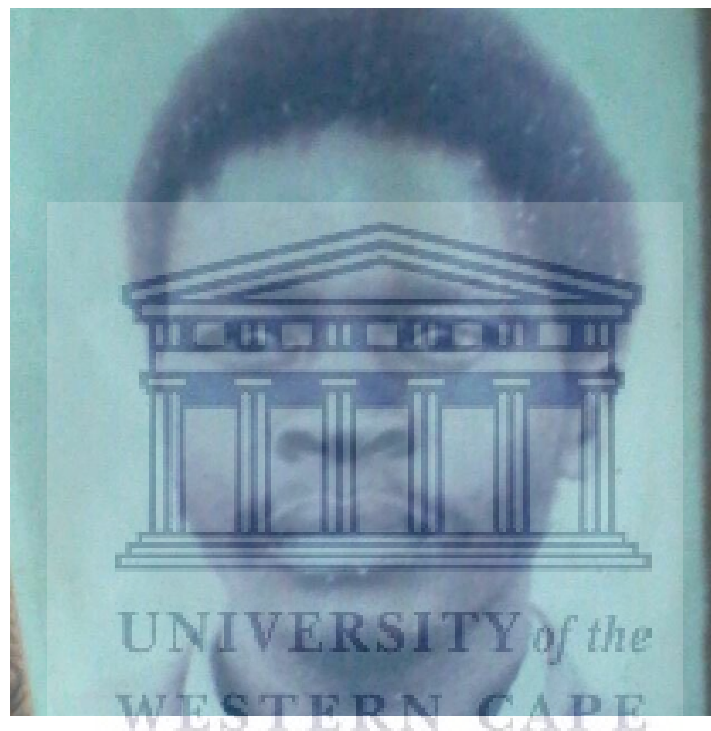
Zizipho Somtsewu's story is an entirely typical South African one of multiple losses and migrations. Her father died in her early teens and the father of her child was no longer part of her life by the time her baby was born. She was raised in the Eastern Cape, amaXhoseni, but moved to Cape Town to seek further education and employment. Her family is split, like very many families, between Cape Town and an ancestral home in the Eastern Cape—they have not moved, they are constantly in movement. In this movement, things get lost and left behind: in the present case, notably, pictures.

Her digital story is in large part a tribute to her parents—but offering visual representations of her parents was not easy. She does not have printed, physical photographs of them; there was nothing available to be scanned or re-photographed in high resolution. What she did have were a smartphone, WhatsApp, and, thanks to the museum's wifi network, the ability to send and receive pictures. She also had the resources I had introduced with the workshop: an iPad, iMovie and my own knowledge of how the ecosystem worked.



### **Father: Making an image that fits**

The image below is the picture of her father that Somtsewu wanted to use in her story. It is the only photograph the family has of him. She says it was taken while he was working in Gauteng, and the print hangs in a frame on the wall of her mother's home in Zangwa. At some point she took a square-format photograph of it on her phone, and she keeps it with her. She notes that her sisters do the same: "We all have it... it's the only picture that we have... he never changes. Forever like this." She jokes about remembering his hairstyle.

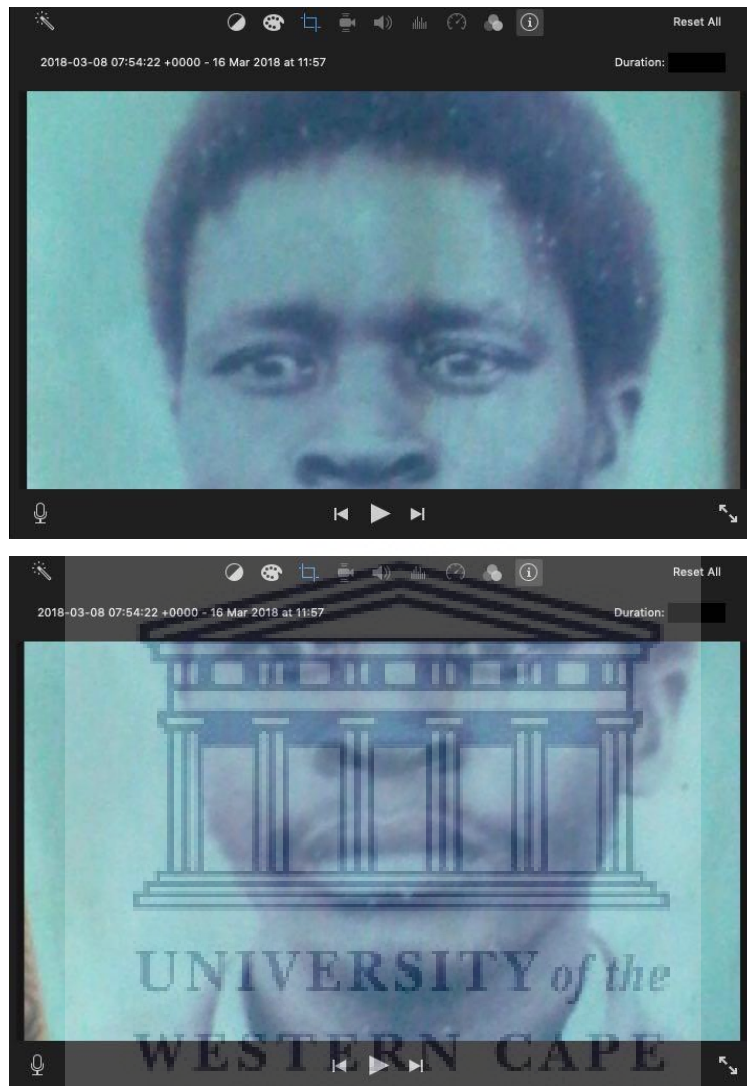


*Figure 6.9: Zizipho Somtsewu's photograph of her father as it was stored on her phone<sup>34</sup>*

During the workshop this photograph underwent a series of movements and transformations across networks. From Somtsewu's phone it travelled to my laptop using Android File Transfer and a cable; then it was Airdropped, using the museum's wifi network, to the iPad she was using for the workshop so she could add it to her story in iMovie.

<sup>34</sup> I have recently become aware that many homes across South Africa have portraits like this, created by photographic studios as enlarged and tinted versions of ID photographs, which were often the only images available. Ruth Sack, "Picture Perfect: Multiple Layers in the Imagery of Airbrushed Photographic Portraits in South Africa in the 20th Century." Paper presented at Other Lives of the Image International Workshop in Visual History, Cape Town, October 4, 2019. See also Institute for Creative Arts, "Great Texts/Big Questions: Ruth Sack & Lisa Espi," 2015. <http://www.ica.uct.ac.za/ica/news/GTBQSackEspi>.

iMovie then made an automatic and uncomfortable transformation of its own, imposing a combination crop and pan:



*Figure 6.10: The photograph of Somtsewu’s father at the beginning and end of iMovie’s pan effect*

The first of the dual transformations at work here is an automated crop. To show this square photograph in iMovie’s 16:9 widescreen aspect ratio without cropping it, it would be necessary to add vertical black “pillarbox” bars on either side, analogous to the horizontal “letterbox” bars used to display widescreen footage on less-than-widescreen displays. iMovie instead helpfully crops every image to the “correct” dimensions for the video project, regardless of what may be lost in the process.

It is possible that this reflects a common approach in software and web design, which is to offer users a very limited range of choices as a way of reducing cognitive load,<sup>35</sup> which in turn is believed to increase efficiency and user satisfaction. The developers of iMovie for iOS appear to have decided that the “best” result is delivered by ensuring that every picture uses every available pixel on the screen,<sup>36</sup> so Somtsewu’s square picture is automatically cropped to fit.

Every artefact, including software, inscribes a particular kind of user and a particular set of uses.<sup>37</sup> Our problems arose from the fact that we were being the wrong kind of user (sometimes called an “edge case” or even an “extreme user”).<sup>38</sup> For the vast majority of users, it is possible that this design decision is entirely unproblematic and even invisible. iMovie is not, after all, designed for digital storytelling, or for making video projects based on still images—it is designed for editing video footage, probably filmed on a smartphone that delivers the “right” aspect ratio. By introducing a still image in an unusual square format, we were doing something that diverged from expected, designed-for practice.

iMovie attempts to compensate for lost information with its second transformation, the automated Ken Burns effect,<sup>39</sup> which pans across the image. One of the things these effects do, however, is to focus attention on what is being moved towards—in this case, creating the impression that Somtsewu’s father’s chin has some special significance.

The Ken Burns effect is an option which can be turned off, so we did. But in its iPad version, iMovie offered no way to override the automatic crop (the desktop version does offer alternatives, but Somtsewu had no access to a desktop version). So, as one must do when things veer from the expected into the terrain of the wrong and the marginal, we had to improvise.

Fortunately, I had a precedent to draw on. I had seen digital stories in which photographs were placed on a cloth or other backdrop to be re-photographed digitally. We

35 See John Sweller, “Cognitive Load during Problem Solving: Effects on Learning.” *Cognitive Science* 12, no. 2 (1988): 257–85; Steve Krug, *Don’t Make Me Think, Revisited* (New Riders Publishing, 2014); Sharon Oviatt, “Human-Centered Design Meets Cognitive Load Theory: Designing Interfaces That Help People Think.” In *Proceedings of the 14th ACM International Conference on Multimedia* (2006): 871–80; and Nina Hollender, Cristian Hofmann, Michael Deneke, and Bernhard Schmitz, “Integrating Cognitive Load Theory and Concepts of Human–Computer Interaction.” *Computers in Human Behavior* 26, no. 6 (2010): 1278–88.

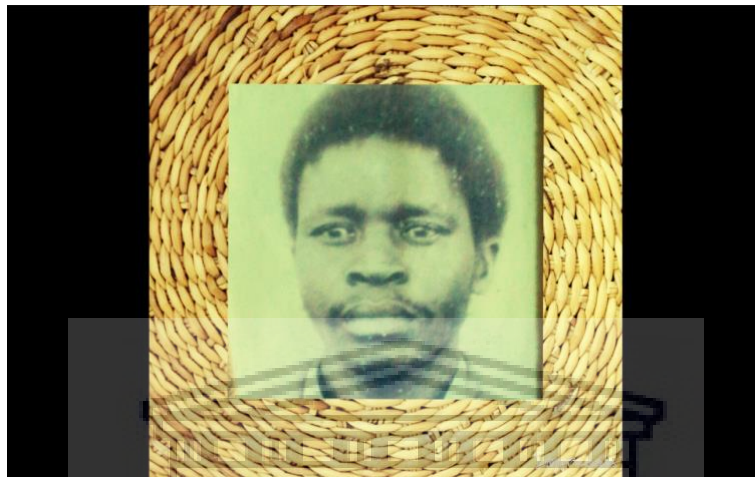
36 I am indebted to Chris Metcalfe for this insight.

37 Madeleine Akrich, “The De-Description of Technical Objects.” In *Shaping Technology / Building Society*, ed. Wiebe E Bijker and John Law (The MIT Press, 1992), 205–24.

38 See for example Asli Kimya, “Thinking like a Developer, Part II: Design the Edge Cases.” *Medium: UX Collective*, March 15, 2018. <https://uxdesign.cc/thinking-like-a-developer-part-ii-design-the-edge-cases-fe5f21516d20>.

39 See footnote 28 in Chapter 3.

didn't have the original photograph, but we could still create some kind of electronic collage. I explained the idea to Somtsewu, and suggested she use the iPad to take photographs of some potential backgrounds around the museum; I did the same thing myself to create a larger selection for her. I also resorted to the networks again, hastily searching for a photo collage app. I found one called Impressia,<sup>40</sup> downloaded it to the iPad, and turned it plus all my photographs over to Somtsewu. The next version of the picture was this:



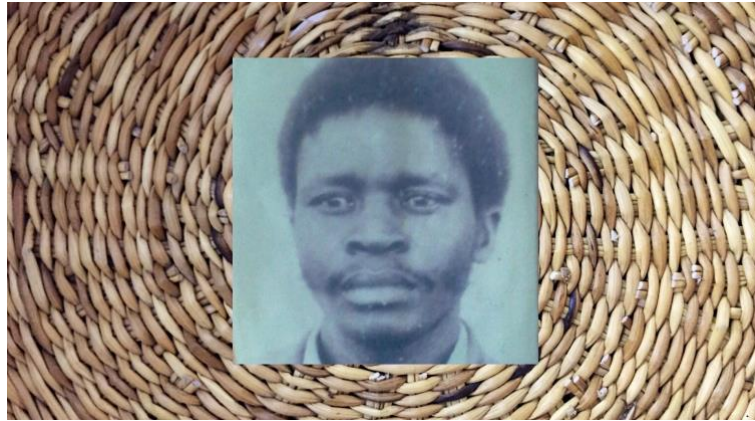
*Figure 6.11: The photograph as transformed by Somtsewu and Impressia on an iPad*

Her father's face is now fully visible, against the weave of a basket in the museum's collection. She has added a warm-toned filter, and Impressia has added a discreet watermark in the bottom right-hand corner.

This might have been the end of it, but I was dissatisfied with the square format (Impressia makes Instagram-ready pics) which still required letterboxing, and with the watermark. So I created my own version of what Somtsewu had done, using the Keynote presentation software on my MacBook, which enabled me to crop the new picture to iMovie-friendly dimensions:

40 "Amaze your friends with beautiful photos everyday. With the photo app Impressia, you will have all the freedom to customize your photos with pretty filters, adjustable effects, stylish borders, fun fonts and gorgeous doodles. Once your impressions are ready, share them with your family and friends through - Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Email. With Impressia app, sharing your life's most beautiful moments is always fun." <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/impressia-photo-editor/id815081599>





*Figure 6.12: The photograph as transformed by me and Keynote on my MacBook*

I didn't add the same filters, partly because in the rush of the workshop and the movement between phone, iPad and laptop, I hadn't fully noticed the difference in colour values between the two versions, and partly because of a personal aesthetic preference for fewer interventions and transformations. Given how many inventions and transformations this picture had already undergone, this seems now to be a rather arbitrary decision on my part. This prompted some doubt later: would Somtsewu's warm filter not have been a more authentic expression of her intentions in this project? To the extent that I (consciously or semi-consciously) rejected it because the yellow looked somehow "wrong" and appeared to me to be an artefact of the software rather than a clear intention on Somtsewu's part, was that not very arrogant of me? Was I guilty of overriding her wishes?

In the event, I was overthinking this. After the workshop I asked Somtsewu directly if she wanted me to restore her colouring, but she preferred the more naturalistic version and made it clear that the original colour changes had been less intentional storytelling than gleeful exploration of the possibilities of the software: "I was so excited about that process of like, editing the stuff and putting the backgrounds... the only thing that I knew was, like, taking the picture and that's all. I didn't know you could edit it and stuff."<sup>41</sup>

### **Mother: Compensations**

Somtsewu's story lingers for a long time on this picture of her mother. Her sister took it while on a visit home and made it her WhatsApp status picture; then Somtsewu took a screenshot and added it to the picture gallery on her phone. The result of these multiple

<sup>41</sup> Interview, 21st May 2018.

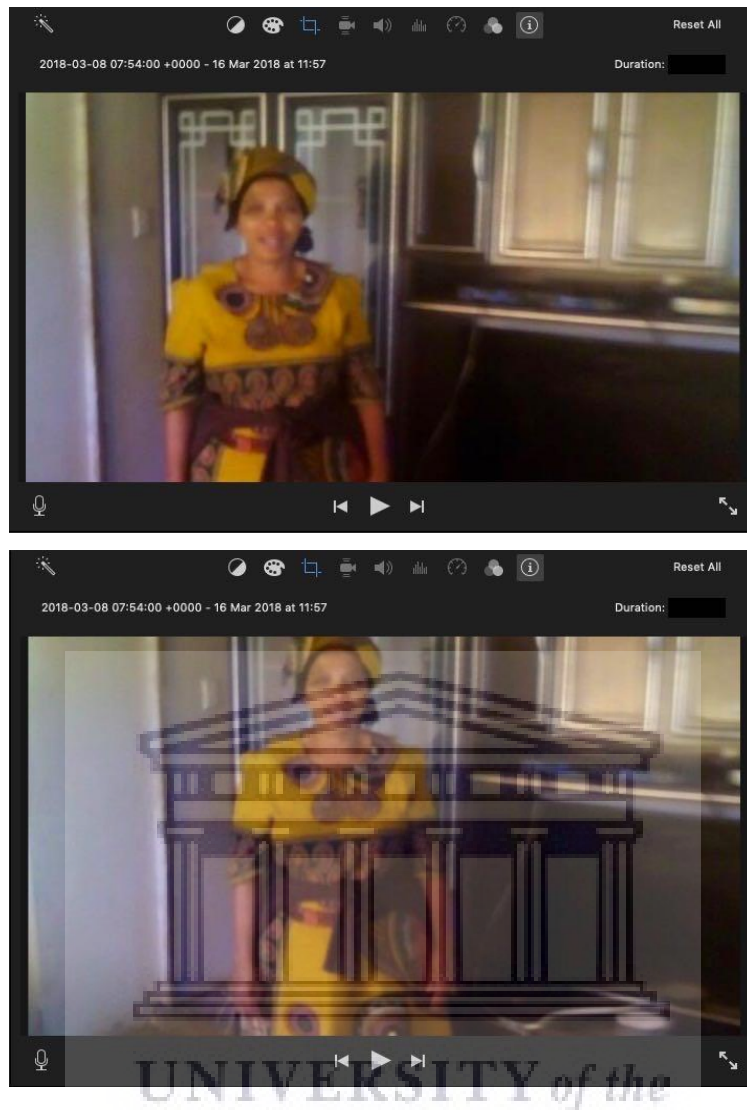


transformations is a heavily pixelated, indistinct image which becomes more unsatisfying to look at the more it is blown up to fill the screen:



*Figure 6.13: Somtsewu's picture of her mother as it is stored on her phone*

iMovie then complicated matters further by imposing the same transformations on this picture as on the one of Somtsewu's father: an automatic crop and pan. The effect was equally uncomfortable, in this case partly because the picture is on screen for so long—53 seconds as opposed to 8 seconds for the father's photograph—that the pan is so slow as to be almost imperceptible. When combined with the grainy pixelation of this tiny (640x640, 37kB) image, I judged, and wrote in my field notes, that this section of the story “wasn't working”.

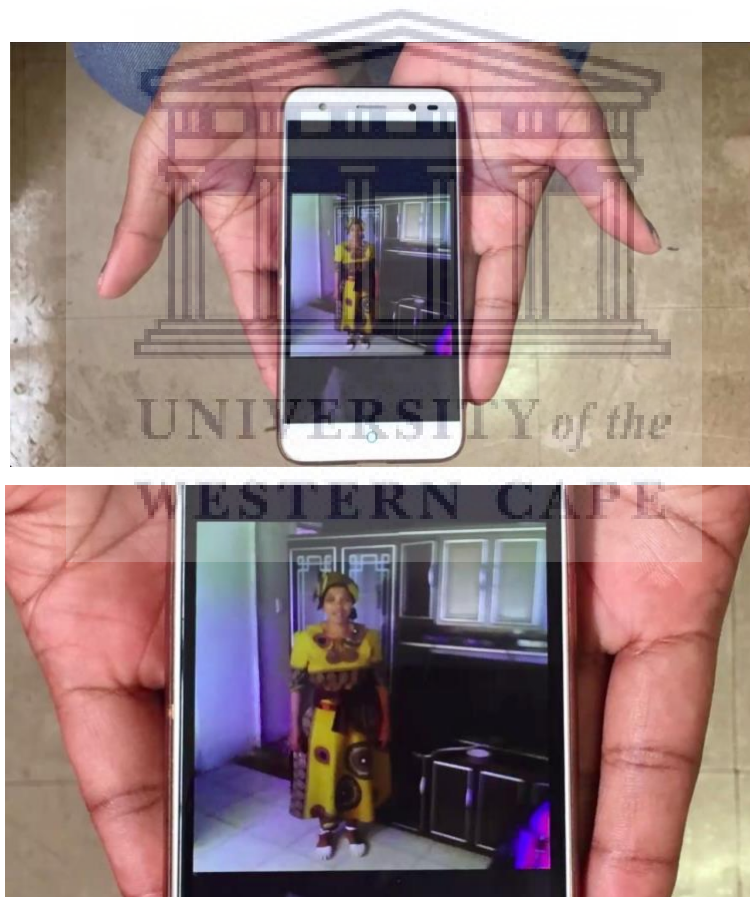


*Figure 6.14: The beginning and end of iMovie's transformation of the picture*

Again we improvised, and I took this photograph of Somtsewu holding her phone, displaying the picture of her mother. I liked this image because it makes obvious some of its own story. I also knew that the high-res image taken by my iPhone would be less jarring to watch when subjected to the long zoom Somtsewu used in her story.



*Figure 6.15: The image taken using my iPhone*



*Figure 6.16: The image at the beginning and end of its transformation in the final version of Somtsewu's story.*

We kept the Ken Burns effect, but edited it so that instead of an arbitrary pan across the image, it creates a zoom into the photograph of her mother.

This was a major intervention by me as a facilitator. I made it believing that it would serve Somtsewu and her story well—but my ambitions in this case surpassed her own. One of the major movements in the dance of facilitation emerges clearly here: On the one hand there is the injunction “not to leave your fingerprints on it”, not to do violence to another’s story by imposing one’s own style, judgements and preferences. On the other hand, to the extent that any digital story is intended to be shared, it will inevitably be judged by its audience—its message, its style and its technical quality will all be up for discussion. Some of the standards by which these judgements will be made are, thanks to the ubiquity of networked media, fairly universal. A crisply focussed, high-resolution picture is likely to be judged “better” than a blurred or pixelated one. A picture that’s left tilted sideways, or cropped so that heads are missing, is likely to lose audience attention even if they aren’t quite sure why this is the case. I take it to be part of my job as a facilitator to guide the stories in a way that will earn them the respectful attention of their audience—some of the changes to be made are obvious, some less so.

When I made my own first digital story, at a workshop in Berkeley in 2010, I faced the “no pictures” problem in talking about a traumatic experience. I collected together some pictures of Zimbabwean stone sculptures that seemed to me to communicate some of the emotions I wanted to express or suggest. Facilitator Andrea Spagat spent a couple of hours in Photoshop, making me a collage that arranged the heads of all those sculptures into a single unbroken line that I could pan across. This was, again, a major intervention, but it was one that I welcomed as a gift. The collage was genuinely useful and enabled me to make a story that did what I wanted it to do, more effectively.

I feel satisfied that my interventions in this case were in fact supportive rather than violent, but in the case of the father’s picture I perhaps skirted quite close to the edge by ignoring Somtsewu’s filter. Feeling out exactly where the border between support and imposition lies requires constant attention.

## **Transformations 2: Mandisa Jacobs**

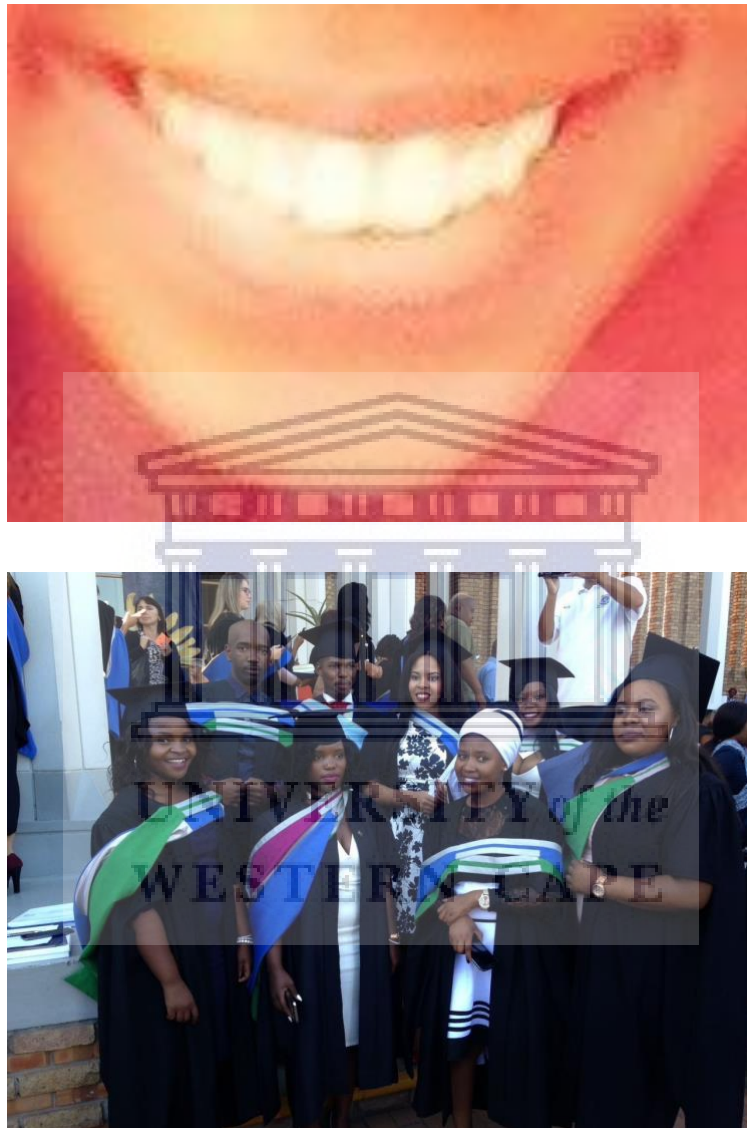
Somtsewu’s transformations were a response to the dilemma created by the combination of having very few pictures to work with and a set of editing choices imposed by iMovie—they were an improvised response to a set of constraints.

Mandisa Jacobs’ story shows another set of possibilities. Before the workshop she was already deeply engaged with images: “I take a lot of pictures on a daily basis and do a lot of



editing on my pictures and so on.”<sup>42</sup> With a more abundant archive and using different software—Vegas Movie Maker as opposed to iMovie—she was able to effect a series of choices, largely to do with colour, that gave a particular emotional tone to her story.

Jacobs used a number of images stored on her phone, many of them already edited by cropping or filtering:



<sup>42</sup> Post-workshop interview, September 20th 2017.





*Figure 6.17: The original images used in Appreciation.*

In her story, about the suicide of a friend, she removed much of the colour:



*Figure 6.18: Colour-shifted images*

She also, at the moment in the film where she receives the news of her friend's death, adds a zoom that strongly suggests both dissolution and ascension:



*Figure 6.19: “The next morning I received a phone call from her cousin telling me that Nokuthula passed away. She overdosed herself with sleeping tablets. She was 22 years old.”*

This was a very deliberate choice: “You know how they say when you die you go to heaven and all those things, and how we expect heaven to be up in the sky, so the sky, like the zooming in to the sky just. you see?”<sup>43</sup>

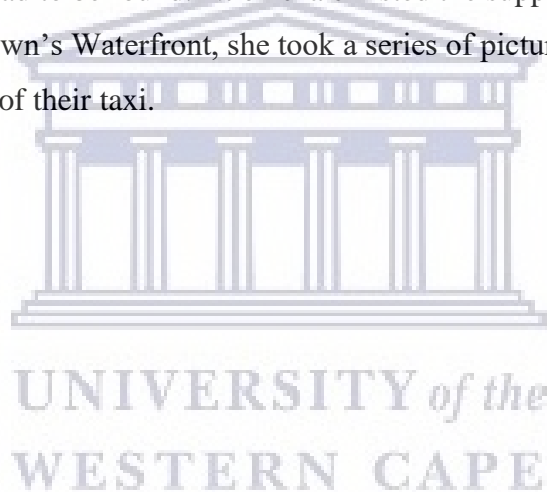
These transformations not only gave additional emotional weight to the story, they also helped to alleviate some of the discomfort that might otherwise arise from a story which uses

<sup>43</sup> Post-workshop interview, September 20th 2017.

such a great variety of image sizes, shapes, colours and styles. When I first saw the story I assumed that Jacobs had taken a lot of images from the internet, but they were all either already on her phone or sent by friends. The diversity (even incoherence) of the original images reflects both the prolific and playful engagement of a curious young woman with the tools of image-making, and her ability to draw on the resources of an extended social network.

### **Transformations 3: Zukile Ntlemeza**

The last transformation I want to examine is in Zukile Ntlemeza's story, which deals with his own addiction and recovery and the death of his brother. He retains very few pictures of his time in Johannesburg—during our interview after the workshop he noted: “I’ve lost a lot of phones.”<sup>44</sup> So, for an extended section of his story where he talks about getting “trapped in the nightlife”,<sup>45</sup> a picture had to be found. Ntlemeza enlisted the support of a colleague: On an evening trip to Cape Town's Waterfront, she took a series of pictures of Cape Town at night through the window of their taxi.



<sup>44</sup> Post-workshop interview, September 1st 2017.

<sup>45</sup> “I got trapped in the nightlife, partying, alcohol and drugs. Still in that motion, I got my degree. Frustrations and depression hit me so hard as life started to be difficult, as I had to feed my habits. I got a job at Smollan Group; then I was mere happy as I was affording life. I worked there for two years and I was still partying very hard. We had our own language, other people which they didn't understand. After some time I was angry and flabbergasted with myself. Decisions I've made, change of personality, peer pressure; that is where I lost a very huge part of me. A lot of things occurred that I'm not proud of - unsafe sex, spending a lot of time with friends; I felt distant from my family. I was empty.”



*Figure 6.20: “The nightlife” as it first appears in Ntlemeza’s story*



*Figure 6.21: The nightlife picture at the end of its transformation*

As with Somtsewu’s story, we had the problem that this picture stayed on screen for a long time, and as a static image rapidly became boring. As a cellphone picture taken at night through the window of a moving taxi, it also was not fine-grained enough to support a zoom or pan effect. So I introduced Ntlemeza to the special effects menu in Movie Studio, which

included a variety of swirl effects. The final 65-second segment features a slow swirl transformation, starting as Ntlemeza says the words “Still in the motion...”

As with Somtsewu later, I worried that I had interfered too much with Ntlemeza’s creative process here, but he reassured me in our interview “I think that one actually represented whatever was going on in my mind. Yes.”<sup>46</sup>

It is of course entirely possible that in these moments Somtsewu and Ntlemeza told me what they thought I wanted to hear. I like to think that by the end of our time working together we had built enough trust for them to take the risk of offending me, but there is no way I can be sure I am not deceiving myself about this. It is just one of the many areas of uncertainty which cannot be definitively resolved, and which I choose to navigate by taking people at their word, having done the best I can to create the conditions in which these words might be accurate.

### **Pragmatic constraints, mystical outcomes**

Finishing a digital story during the limited course of a workshop can be a deeply thoughtful and deeply felt process; but it is also, always, intensely practical. We are engaged in storytelling with images, and so a certain number of images must be found, or created, and this finding and creation happens within very material constraints. I have dealt so far with the deliberate choices people in Lwandle made, and the strategies they used, to create their stories as visual within these constraints. Sometimes, however, something more happens: a series of accidents and contingencies, moments of luck and perhaps grace, that bear on the meaning-making that is going on in each of these stories. It is to this space of unpredictability that I now wish to turn.

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### **Accidents and the optical unconscious**

It is not possible to fully enumerate all the people and things that intersected to enable and shape the particular set of stories produced at Lwandle. As a start, the non-human actors included the Museum building and its exhibitions and furnishings, smartphones and their cameras, operating systems, apps, the data pricing policies of mobile phone companies, the physical properties of SD cards and other storage devices, cellphone towers, wifi routers and their configurations, undersea telecommunications cables, data centres, technical standards,

<sup>46</sup> Interview, September 1st 2017



search engines and privacy policies and end-user licensing agreements, web crawlers, communication protocols and compression algorithms, electricity grids and batteries, and even the weather that created changing patterns of light and shade in and around the workshop venue.<sup>47</sup> All of these constrained and shaped the images available to each storyteller.

Then there were the human actors, starting with me as facilitator and the storytellers present in the workshop, but also including each person's friends and relatives, living and dead, who were photographers, the subjects of photographs and the keepers and passers-on of photographs. There were the strangers whose images found their way onto websites and into databases where they could be found and downloaded, and the other strangers who collect these images and maintain these resources.<sup>48</sup> There are the other digital storytellers whose stories I showed, remembered or drew on for inspiration; the other facilitators in the global digital storytelling network whose conversations and writings shaped my work; and the countless researchers, designers, engineers, coders, marketers and others whose collective work delivered the particular constellation of hardware, software and methods we used in the workshop space.

In any digital storytelling workshop all of these beings, entities, assemblages and tendencies are in constant, unpredictable and often invisible interaction with each other. This interaction introduces an element of randomness into the proceedings that offers rich scope for the intervention of the unconscious.

The phrase "optical unconscious" is Walter Benjamin's:

Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye—if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man. Even if one has a general knowledge of the way people walk, one knows nothing of a person's posture during the fractional second of a stride. The act of reaching for a lighter or a spoon is familiar routine, yet we hardly know what really goes on between hand and metal, not to mention how this fluctuates with our moods. Here the camera intervenes with the resources of its lowerings and liftings, its interruptions and isolations, its extensions and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions. The

47 See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

48 Who was it, for example, who drove the car carrying the camera array that photographed the streets of Eastern Cape hometowns for Google Street View? The company is ubiquitous and the technology is much written about, but the people are invisible (see <https://www.google.com/streetview/explore/>).

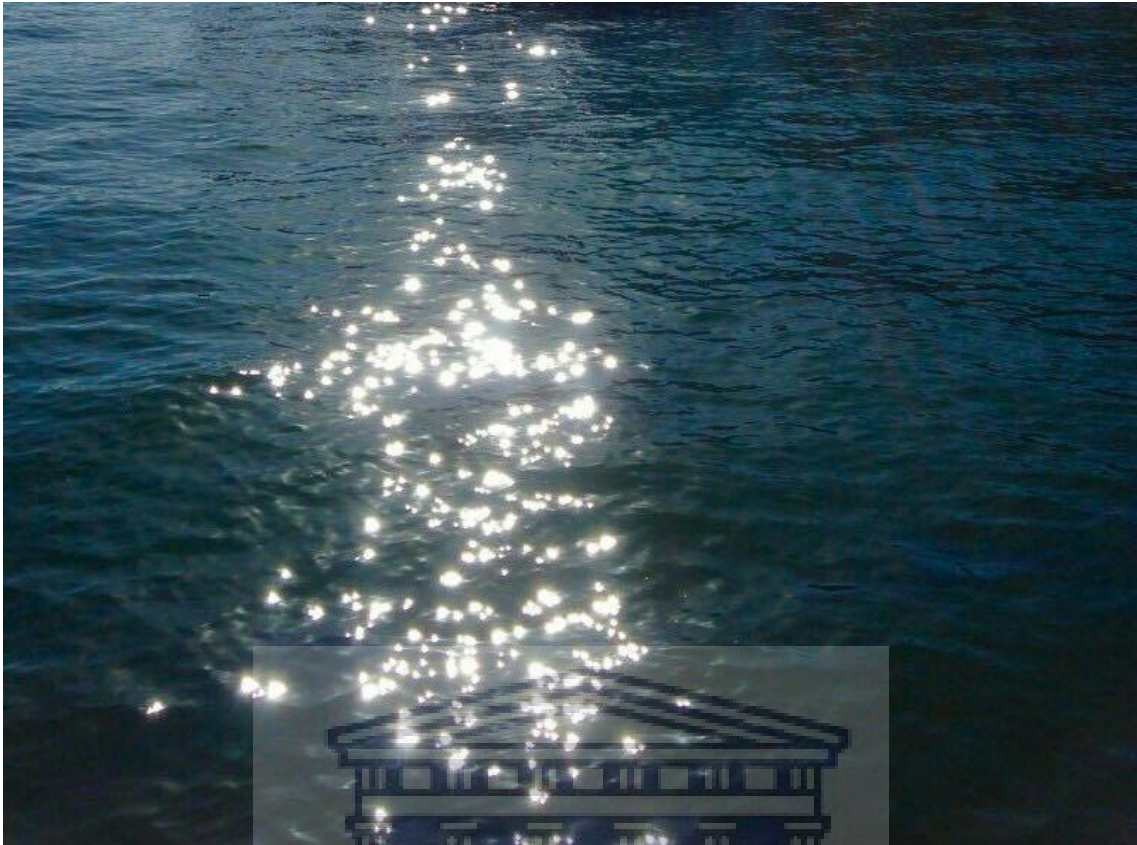
camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses.<sup>49</sup>

There are multiple ways in which we might imagine an optical unconscious working. There is first of all the camera's lack of discrimination, its ability to capture everything that falls within its frame but that a human viewer might overlook—until the photograph affords the opportunity of prolonged or repeated viewing to reveal what was in plain sight all along. Second, beyond plain sight, there is the camera's ability to picture what the human visual system is incapable of seeing: perhaps because it happens too fast, or too slowly, or too far away or at too small a scale or in the dark. This is camera as augmentation or prosthesis, a set of technological extensions of our biological capacity for vision.

Then, beyond the unconscious held within the camera, there are several different ways in which the human unconscious might also be at work. Some concern the unconscious of the photographer: if one accepts the idea of unconscious motivation at all, then it is reasonable to suppose that there will be unconscious motivations driving many decisions that appear on the surface to be purely practical or aesthetic, so that the photographer's careful arrangement or framing of a scene may reveal more than he or she intends. Then there is the unconscious of the viewer: We read or interpret images under the influence of our own unconscious beliefs and desires; but images may also work on us unconsciously, prompting actions or reactions which may never be explicitly connected with the image. Finally, our visual preferences and choices are shaped, often in unconscious or semi-conscious ways, by our environments.

During the Lwandle workshops, the unconscious surfaced into consciousness very forcibly in Jacobs' story about the suicide of her friend. Her story opens with the following image, fading in from a black screen as she says the words "Her name was Nokuthula, a isiXhosa name for quiet or silence."

<sup>49</sup>Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 48–70.



*Figure 6.22: The woman in the water*

Consciously, Jacobs chose this image because she liked the play of light on the water, suggesting Nokuthula's calm and silence. She cropped it from a larger image, taken at Cape Town's Waterfront, that also included boats. When she showed it to me, all I could see was the figure of a young woman, outlined in light. Once I had pointed it out, it was obvious to Jacobs too. Without intending to, she had summoned or invoked a luminous and benevolent presence that frames her entire story.

These moments of surprised recognition are not uncommon. When Hintsabe S'duli and I were reviewing her picture choices for her story *My Degree with Two Eyes*, it took us a while to see, in the background of this picture of mess and devastation, the figure of a small child. The final story draws attention to this with a slow zoom in to the child. The effect, entirely appropriate to the story, is ambiguous and complex—in the foreground is the mess, in the background is the child who, once seen, cannot be ignored.





*Figure 6.23: Foreground, background*

Christopher Pinney notes in his “Seven Theses on Photography” that “the assumption is that if photography can only offer an index it will all be very dull. Foucault, psychoanalysis and all the other antidotes to Peirce (the father of the index) bore the promise of making the whole affair more fascinating through the importation of power and desire. But it turns out that that dreary index infiltrated an even more fascinating richness into the image. This richness can be grasped through contingency and exorbitance.<sup>50</sup>”

He goes on to quote Walter Benjamin:

No matter how artful the photograph, no matter how carefully posed his subject, the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the here and now, with which reality has (so to speak) seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long-forgotten moment the future nests so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it.<sup>51</sup>

In S’duli’s photograph, taken to illustrate an account of a memory which remains charged and unsettled, the present intrudes to interrupt the past. Quite what it has to say is unclear—or rather, I am reluctant to attempt giving voice to this picture because I know that I can do so

<sup>50</sup> Christopher Pinney, “Seven Theses on Photography.” *Thesis Eleven* 113, no. 1 (2012): 148.

<sup>51</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Little History of Photography.” In *Walter Benjamin - Selected Writings, 1927-1934*, ed. Michael W Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, vol 2 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1999), 510.

only by filtering it through my own set of conscious and unconscious lenses, and I have no idea what might be lost in the translation. It seems more respectful to allow it to keep its cloud of hovering possibilities intact and unresolved.

Pinney follows his thesis of the “sticky referent” with another that “photography is prophetic”. In particular, for my purposes, he claims that “photographic self-presentation also seems to often act as prophecy, as a tactic of enquiry and imagination.”<sup>52</sup>



*Figure 6.24: “A part of me knew it was my father. It was like I was born for the first time.”*

Anele Kalipa closes her story about the first time she met her father with this image. Seen one way, this is just a snapshot clumsily posed against a window which yields an overexposed background. Taken as part of her story and placed alongside her words, however, it’s hard not to see the light burst as a halo. And if Kalipa’s story is a claim to her own version of a story which has multiple competing owners in the rest of her family, then the choice of this image becomes an act not just of prophecy but of willing a future into being.

## **Conclusion**

In the story circle, one of the foundational questions is “Why this story? Why now?” It is a question that acknowledges the deep contingency of stories. If the world, and every life

<sup>52</sup> Pinney, “Seven Theses”, 150-151.



within in it, is from a human perspective a dense weave of stories, then the choice to pluck at any one thread, to tell any particular story, is nudged and shaped by a myriad of factors within and beyond the workshop. Yet some stories are more significant than others: the ones most closely entwined with our sense of who we are and what shape our lives may be taking—or perhaps rather, what shape we wish them to take. To tell a story is to engage in an act of self-creation, and in this process all the elements of story emerge as mobile, malleable and contingent.



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## 7. Reflection

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Listen Deeply. Tell Stories.<sup>1</sup>

Narrative is radical, creating us as the very moment it is being created.<sup>2</sup>

Remember that a story does not unwind. It weaves.<sup>3</sup>

It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it.<sup>4</sup>

migrate | maɪ'greɪt, 'maɪgreɪt |  
verb [no object]

**3** *Computing* change or cause to change from one system to another.<sup>5</sup>

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In 2009, a team at IBM Research in Zurich published a paper which included one of the first images of an individual molecule, made using a technique called atomic force microscopy.<sup>6</sup> The image is blurry and indistinct, in part because the team was working at the limits of machine-mediated human vision. But no matter how much the tools of microscopy are refined, we will never see images as crisp and clear-cut as our models of the world make reality appear to be. Eight years later, discussing another dramatic set of images in which a team at the University of Regensburg showed the distribution of electrostatic charge across molecules,<sup>7</sup> a scientist explained to a reporter why the images still appeared so indistinct:

“There’s an inherent uncertainty in the quantum mechanics of these systems,” explains Hoxley. “The images are blurry because of this uncertainty – not because of the lack of resolution.”<sup>8</sup>

1 StoryCenter motto.

2 Toni Morrison, “Nobel Lecture.” Stockholm, December 7, 1993. /

3 Terry Pratchett, *Thief of Time* (Corgi, 2002), 11.

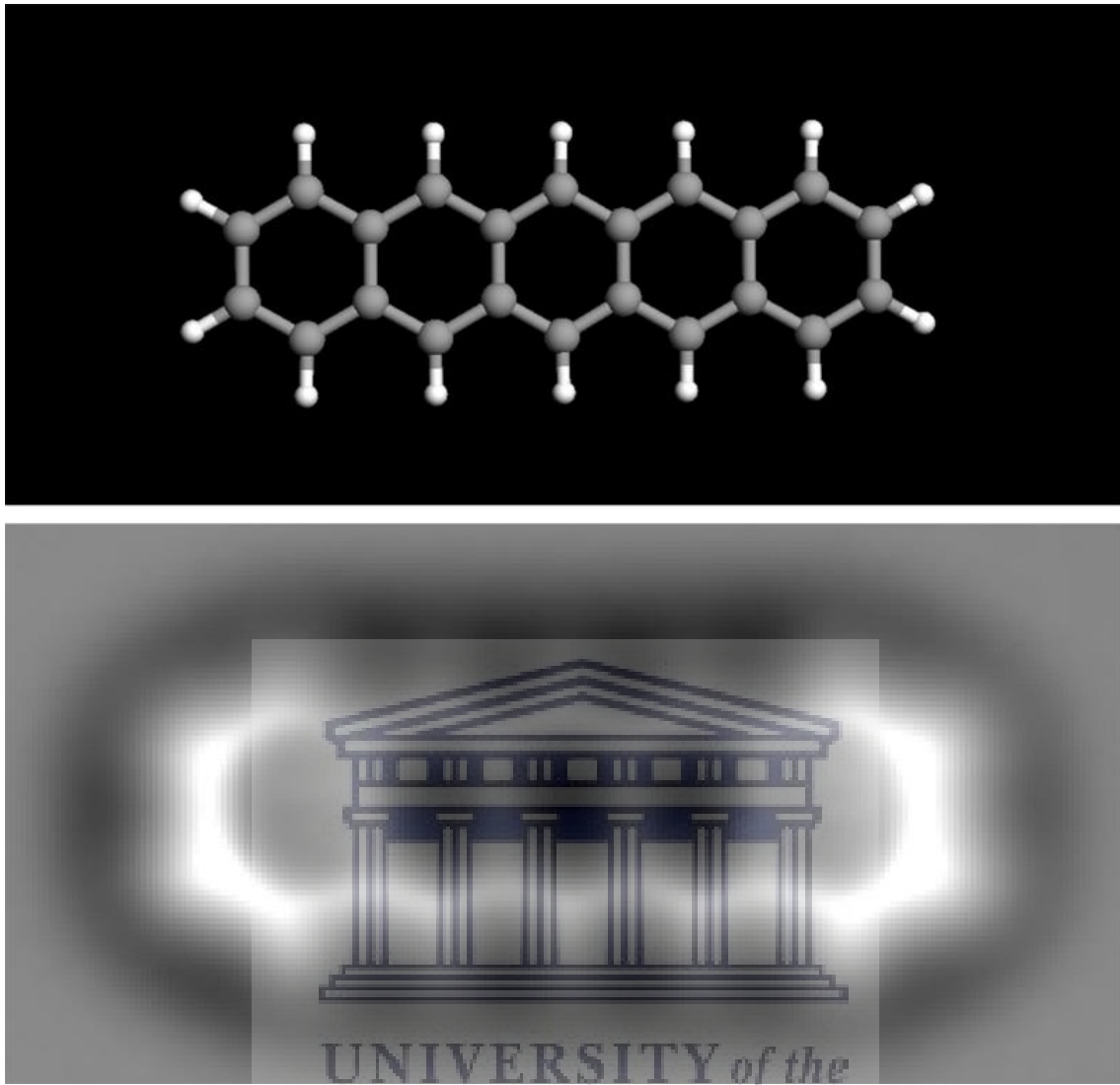
4 *Pirkei Avot* 2:16, Sefaria.org. Accessed November 15, 2019. [https://www.sefaria.org/Pirkei\\_Avot.2](https://www.sefaria.org/Pirkei_Avot.2).

5 Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd ed., (OSX version), s.v. “migrate.”

6 Leo Gross, Fabian Mohn, Nikolaj Moll, Peter Liljeroth, and Gerhard Meyer, “The Chemical Structure of a Molecule Resolved by Atomic Force Microscopy.” *Science* 325, no. 5944 (2009).

7 F Albrecht, J. Repp, M. Fleischmann, M. Scheer, M. Ondráček, and P. Jelinek. “Probing Charges on the Atomic Scale by Means of Atomic Force Microscopy.” *Physical Review Letters* 115, no. 7 (2015): 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevLett.115.076101>.

8 Viviane Richter, “What Does an Electron Cloud Really Look Like?” *Cosmos*, September 21, 2015. <https://cosmosmagazine.com/technology/what-does-electron-cloud-really-look>.



*Figure 7.1: A pentacene (C<sub>22</sub>H<sub>14</sub>) molecule as imagined in a “ball and stick” model, above, and as imaged by the IBM-Zurich team, below.<sup>9</sup>*

Throughout this thesis, I have worked with how this idea—that uncertainty and indeterminacy are irreducibly part of the world—manifests in the field of digital storytelling when it comes into contact (and friction) with the specifically South African constellation of the township of Lwandle and the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum; with explorations of the production of history at UWC; and with myself as a facilitator and researcher. Digital storytelling has emerged as an essentially liminal practice: one that lives in the gaps, in the margins and at the limits. Sometimes this appeared as a wrongness or lack of fit—we were the wrong kinds of users, working in the wrong kind of place with the wrong tools, always on

<sup>9</sup> Image source: IBM-Research Zurich, <https://www.zurich.ibm.com/st/atomicmanipulation/>.

the edge of failure. With a slight shift of focus, however, another set of possibilities appears: What if marginality is not a state to be overcome, but a place to inhabit? Margins are not just edges but also spaces to be written in: zones of communication, transmission, transformation and conversation. The interfaces or contact zones between fields—the spaces where either/or becomes both/and—can become areas of rich generativity.

The metaphor of ecosystem has been especially helpful to me in thinking about margins and contact zones. I noted in the Introduction that an ecosystem is “not a clearly bounded independent whole, but an interacting and interdependent assemblage of entities and energy flows with permeable boundaries, within which stability is sometimes achieved but always temporary.” Achieving these temporary states of stability is work, which requires energy — in the case of digital storytelling, not only the physical energies that power various kinds of computer and their processes, but also the emotional and creative energies of facilitators and participants.

In the global ecosystem of digital storytelling, stability requires being embedded in a smoothly functioning apparatus that includes software, hardware, communications networks, money, skills, leisure for looking beyond the immediate needs of survival, and a particular set of beliefs about the self and how it develops in relation to others. Lwandle exists at the edges of all this: geographically remote, culturally tangential and financially precarious. I was able to import just enough—energy, skill, equipment—to incorporate Lwandle temporarily into this ecosystem, but without those imported resources it rapidly falls back out again.

Until I recognised this, I was unable to understand why the digital storytelling process at Lwandle felt so difficult. In mid-June 2018, as I was working through interview transcripts, I noted:

“Why has everything been so slow and so hard? What is wrong with me?... Possibly because so much negotiating, so much waiting for this and that to happen, so much interdependence of technology and people... the pace in Lwandle is pretty slow, and I have matched it and more.”

I read echoes in this of Hintsabe S’duli’s lament that nothing comes easily to her—and in recognising that her predicament is overwhelmingly the product of her environment, I can see that we were both up against the same overwhelming entropic forces (except that I had the privilege, resources and freedom to be able to travel in and out of Lwandle at will). The energies that must be poured into a place like Lwandle to overcome its inertia and enable anything like digital storytelling are immense. Without a sustained inflow of these energies,

any further unfolding of a project like my workshops, or the arts and photography training that were imagined as being able to kickstart “sustainable careers”, is blighted from the start. This has implications for anyone considering collaborative or arts-based projects in places like Lwandle: they require a long-term commitment to building relationships and delivering the resources that will enable their own survival. In previous projects where I have been retained as a consultant, it has been the client organisation that has supplied these relationships, energies and other resources. I had the consultant’s privilege (and also the consultant’s frustration) of not being responsible for the afterlife of the stories that were created. In Lwandle, with no client and only shallow relationships, I had none of this backup support. One result is that, as much as I wished not to be guilty of doing “parachute research”, I have so far not yet found a way to sustain my own involvement in Lwandle beyond this PhD (although I will not stop looking).

### **Speaking and silence**

The issues of voice and silence, speaking and listening, visibility and invisibility raised by this work in Lwandle are knotty and complex. Voice and silence are mutually constitutive—there can be no speaking without a silence to receive it. The receptive silence of the story circle gave some participants an opportunity to speak things which are not normally spoken of. They produced histories of the everyday suffering of life in the aftermath of apartheid, which reached deep into, and profoundly damaged, the most intimate spheres of family and relationship. The consequences of this “penetration of violence into everyday life”<sup>10</sup> continue to reverberate across generations, an unwanted legacy that cannot be rejected or disavowed. This is Minkley's heritage as tragedy, heritage that is unlikely to be celebrated in museum displays. It is expressed explicitly in stories as well as implicitly in silences and absences, the losses to disease, addiction, abandonment and violence that are the background to contemporary life in South Africa. These are losses not only of life but also of livelihoods, of relationships and of unfulfilled potential. Even as the digital stories assert moments of personal success or overcoming, or a determination to resist passing these legacies down a further generation, the background intrudes. This intrusion is sometimes visual, in images that suggest the barrenness of Lwandle and what remains to be overcome.

<sup>10</sup> Ross, *Bearing Witness*, 48.



It is easy, faced with these realities, to feel helpless and impotent, and thence to surrender to despair and indifference.<sup>11</sup> I want to draw on psychologist and trauma specialist Kaethe Weingarten's ideas of reasonable hope and empowered witnessing to suggest how those of us who are witnesses to suffering—which is, in the end, all of us—can use compassionate witnessing to “transform everyday violence by threading hope into its fabric.”<sup>12</sup> This is not pity, or the sentimental compassion of empathic identification which Marnie Froberg has described as “projection” or “self-involvement rather than actual involvement with another's reality.”<sup>13</sup> Nor is it the “passive and vaguely civic-minded ideal” which has been criticised as replacing ethical imperatives to social transformation.<sup>14</sup>

Rather, the kind of compassion that is useful is a variety of witnessing, of being able to attend to the wholeness of another's being, including their differences from us as well as their similarities. Iris Murdoch calls it “the non-violent apprehension of difference” and “love”.<sup>15</sup> Kelly Oliver likewise refers to love:

Love is an ethics of differences that thrives on the adventure of otherness. This means that love is an ethical and social responsibility to open personal and public space in which otherness and difference can be articulated. Love requires a commitment to the advent and nurturing of difference.<sup>16</sup>

From this starting point of compassion—which includes self-compassion and is “served by complexity and discernment”<sup>17</sup>—we can embark upon the project of building reasonable hope, which Weingarten characterises as an activity, not a feeling. Reasonable hope:

Is relational; consists of a practice; maintains that the future is open, uncertain, and influenceable; seeks goals and pathways to them; and accommodates doubt, contradictions, and despair.<sup>18</sup>

Reasonable hope, then, occupies the marginal spaces of uncertainty, coexistence and doubt with which this thesis has been concerned; it recognises that hope and despair are not

11 Kaethe Weingarten, “Reasonable Hope: Construct, Clinical Applications, and Supports.” *Family Process* 49, no. 1 (2010): 8

12 Kaethe Weingarten, *Common Shock: Witnessing Violence Every Day--How We Are Harmed, How We Can Heal*. (Dutton Adult, 2003). 227.

13 Marnie L Froberg, “Manifestations of Idiot Compassion.” Accessed April 11, 2016.

<https://enlightenmentward.wordpress.com/2010/04/28/manifestations-of-idiot-compassion/>.

14 Anna Poletti, quoting Lauren Berlant: “Coaxing an Intimate Public: Life Narrative in Digital Storytelling.” *Continuum* 25, no. 1 (2011): 80. There is a false binary being set up here.

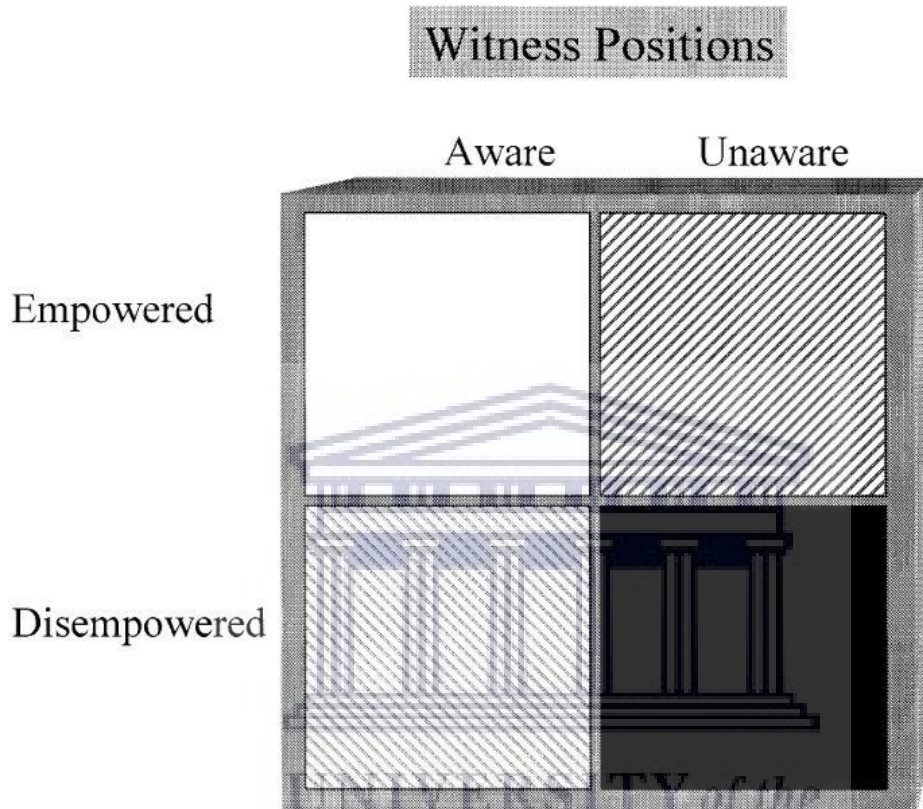
15 Iris Murdoch, “The Sublime and the Good.” *Chicago Review* 13, no. 3 (1959): 54.

16 Oliver, *Witnessing Beyond Recognition*, 20.

17 Weingarten, *Common Shock*, 171.

18 Weingarten, *Reasonable Hope*, 8.

mutually exclusive. One can experience both simultaneously, or in succession, or oscillation; reasonable hope lives in the indeterminate both/and blur between hope and despair.<sup>19</sup> It is something one *does*, or performs, or produces—and this doing both supports and is supported by the ability to act as an empowered witness. Weingarten characterises witnessing positions along two axes of awareness and empowerment:



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*Figure 7.2: A typology of witnessing.*<sup>20</sup>

The two most dangerous positions in this schema are to be a witness who is either unaware and empowered, or aware and disempowered. A person in a position of power who is unaware that they are witnessing injustice or violation—a teacher who is unaware of or indifferent to bullying in their classroom, for example—is likely to condone or perpetuate this injustice, or to become a perpetrator in the future. A person who is aware they are witnessing injustice but feels powerless to do anything about is vulnerable to depression, burnout, victimisation, or simply switching off—moving into the position of both powerlessness and unawareness. To be both aware and empowered, however, is to feel that that one is working within a field of possibility.

<sup>19</sup> I am tempted to call it Schrödinger’s hope but that is perhaps too flippant.

<sup>20</sup> Weingarten, Kathy. “Witnessing, Wonder, and Hope.” *Family Process* 39, no. 4 (2000): 396.

To be an empowered and aware witness does *not* mean one is necessarily in a position to fix anything. The challenge is to recognise what cannot be fixed and yet not to turn away. As Fiona Ross notes, there are occasions when “the narrator-witness pleads for attention even when the story carries no hope, only the recognition of damage and the limitations of efforts to heal.”<sup>21</sup> Doing reasonable hope, in a situation like this, sometimes amounts to no more than the giving of this attention, recognition and affirmation. Yet this is not nothing—if we are human only by virtue of our relationship with other humans, then acknowledgement is life and rejection is death,<sup>22</sup> and the transfer of affective energy that occurs in the moment of giving regard to another can be life-sustaining.

There is also power in the ability to become a compassionate witness of oneself, which is something digital storytelling can make possible:

When we hear our voices coming from outside ourselves, we have a moment of seeing ourselves as someone other than our Self. In that moment we can experience the kind of empathy and compassion for ourselves that we would feel for another person who might be telling this story. We are taken outside of our own heads so that we can see and hear ourselves as one who is worthy of compassion and understanding. This is an empowering experience of affirmation.<sup>23</sup>

Both Hintsabe S’duli and Mandisa Jacobs spoke of experiencing something like this. S’duli’s burden of guilt and shame about her desire to terminate a pregnancy shifted so that “it feels like it’s not part of me anymore”. Jacobs “came to realise that it wasn’t actually my fault” when a friend died by suicide.

The process of story-making, then, can help to shift people to more empowered and aware witness positions, in relation to both their own lives and the lives of others to whom they are connected. This process is especially powerful when it is possible to see one’s own story as part of a larger pattern: “When we begin to witness patterns and opportunities, it shifts us from stagnancy to being active bystanders and interventionists”.<sup>24</sup> Stories like Vinnida Davayo’s and Lupho Mzamo’s show an acute awareness of the macronarratives against which their lives are framed, in which black men appear all too often only as absences or

21 Ross, *Bearing Witness*, 5.

22 Thirusha Naidu and Andiswa Mankayi, “The Khumbul’ekhaya Phenomenon as Symbolic Suicide.” *Mail & Guardian*, 2015. <https://thoughtleader.co.za/psysssa/2015/09/29/the-khumbulekhaya-phenomenon-as-symbolic-suicide/>.

23 Marsha Rossiter and Penny A. Garcia, “Digital Storytelling: A New Player on the Narrative Field.” *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, no. 126 (June 15, 2010): 43.

24 Marqez Rhyne, personal communication.

violent disruptions. Their reframings of themselves as caregivers—which were noted and affirmed by women in their story circles—opens a different field of possibility.

Story telling and story sharing enable us to acknowledge that any of us, at any time, may simultaneously occupy positions as witnesses, victims and (potential) perpetrators. This exposes us not only to the dangers of trauma and vicarious trauma but also to the possibilities of resilience, and vicarious resilience, found in solidarity.<sup>25</sup>

### **A question of audiences**

Several of the storytellers—Davayo, Mzamo and Sidlayi in particular—expressed a desire that their digital stories would reach a wider audience than the workshop and “have an impact”. This proved difficult. It took three attempts before a planned public screening of the stories could happen, and the reasons are revealing. The first screening was postponed because, according my notes, “things weren’t ready”—the available energy had not been enough to shift the system out of its inertia. The second was postponed because two young people from Lwandle had died, one violently, and a memorial service had been scheduled. Eventually, the screening was held on May 15<sup>th</sup> 2018 as part of a combined Africa Day celebration launch event for the Museum’s new logo. The event also included drama and poetry (one poem, by the storyteller Mzukisi Makhanya who had been unable to complete his story, nevertheless referenced a conversation we had had about the way Lwandle was pictured in public media—so the idea travelled).

Mzamo and Sidlayi, however, were not there to see their stories screened—they had not come back to the Museum, email and phone messages to them had not been delivered and I had no other way to contact them. During the workshops, our ability to piggyback on the Museum’s resources had obscured for me just how tenuous their connections to the digital ecosystem were.

The Lwandle stories, then, have not—or perhaps not yet—been able to travel as far as their makers hoped they would. This dissertation provides one means of transport, but it is a medium that translates the stories out of the environment of their production into an entirely different one. It was not academics or a global audience of digital storytellers that the Lwandle storytellers had in mind, but their contemporaries, neighbours and peers. I was careful not to promise wide circulation, but I nevertheless feel that I have left an ethical duty

<sup>25</sup> Wheeler, “Troubling Transformation”, 10-11.



unfulfilled here. If it is possible to assemble the resources, providing an afterlife for these stories remains as a task for the future.

The imperative not to let these stories of Lwandle languish unheard is all the more urgent given the extent to which places like it are abandoned and neglected by the state. I noted in Chapter 4 that images of Lwandle, apart from those generated by or in association with the Museum, are dominated by pictures of protest and violence. There are regular waves of protest about access to land for housing in particular, with protestors occupying vacant land and then being evicted.<sup>26</sup>



*Figure 7.3: Photograph by Ayanda Ndamane accompanying a Cape Times story about protests in Lwandle. The curved roof that can be seen in the background on the far left marks the aquatic centre belonging to Reddam House school.<sup>27</sup>*

Lwandle is not alone in this: around South Africa there are several protests of one kind or another every week, although exact numbers are hard to pin down.<sup>28</sup> What many of these protests have in common is a sense of deep frustration; that there is no other way to be heard.

<sup>26</sup> See for example: Ludidi Velani, “First Shacks Demolished in Strand Land Occupation.” GroundUp, April 11, 2019. <https://www.groundup.org.za/article/first-shacks-demolished-strand-occupation/>, and also Jared Sacks, “Avert Forced Removals by Giving the Rich’s Land to the Poor.” Mail & Guardian, June 6, 2014. <https://mg.co.za/article/2014-06-05-avert-forced-removals-by-giving-the-richs-land-to-the-poor>.

<sup>27</sup> “Violent Protests Close N2 between Strand, Somerset West.” Cape Times, September 11, 2019. <https://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/news/violent-protests-close-n2-between-strand-somerset-west-32795115>.

<sup>28</sup> Vinayak Bhardwaj, “This Is How Many Protests There Are per Day in South Africa.” Africa Check, June 9, 2016. <https://businesstech.co.za/news/general/126243/this-is-how-many-protests-there-are-per-day-in-south-africa/>.



There is a widespread sense that the mechanisms of public participation in governance are broken and that authorities will not pay attention until protests escalate into violence and destruction and the barricades are burning: “Violence works because it draws the attention of the authorities to our problems, in fact they even come to address our concerns.”<sup>29</sup> This is not a failure of speech but of listening, suggesting to me that the work of supporting listening is possibly even more important than the work of supporting voice.

In my negotiations of what it means to facilitate stories, rather than to extract them, it is listening that has emerged as the most important way to maintain a balance of power between myself as the facilitator/researcher and those who agree to share their stories with me. Listening well requires, paradoxically, both a setting aside of the self and bringing one’s whole self to bear on the task. This listening presence becomes a way to witness the tragedy of Lwandle and its foreclosed possibilities without surrendering the possibility, and the reality, of hope. Attending to the multiplicity of Lwandle’s digital stories shows them as complex and subtle histories not only of difficulty but also of resilience, solidarity, relationship and triumph: In the indeterminate zone of the margin, tragedy and hope coexist.

Digital storytelling is an inherently optimistic practice, but it need not be naive. Perhaps it is possible that working in the margins, in the aftermath and the ruins of violent destruction, we may be able to achieve “not reconciliation or restoration, but... the more modest possibilities of partial recuperation and getting on together.”<sup>30</sup>

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29 Ntuthuko Albert Mchunu, “The Link between Poor Public Participation and Protest: The Case of Khayelitsha.” (Master’s thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2012), 142. See also Kevin Allan and Karen Heese, “Understanding Why Service Delivery Protests Take Place and Who Is to Blame.” Municipaliq.co.za, 2011. [http://municipaliq.co.za/publications/articles/sunday\\_indep.pdf](http://municipaliq.co.za/publications/articles/sunday_indep.pdf), and “Protest Nation: Government Needs to Listen Better.” *The Daily Vox*, May 12, 2017. <https://www.thedailyvox.co.za/protest-nation-government-needs-listen-better/>.

30 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2016), 10.

## Appendix A: Story Transcripts

The following are transcripts of the final voiceover recordings made for each digital story. They have been punctuated to reflect as closely as possible the performance of each story. In the case of stories that were performed in isiXhosa, the original and translated English versions are presented side by side in a table format that reflects how the translation appears in subtitles.

### Growing up without a father

I grew up in King William's Town, in Zwelitsha at Zone 10, without a father; knowing that my grandfather is my father, and my grandmother is my mother.

When I was nine years old, I saw a man coming to visit us often. He usually brought us toys and food, and I was relieved, thinking that this could be our long lost father of me and my elder sister.

I found out, when I was 15 years old, that the man who used to visit me and my sister is my sister's father; and my father is in Cape Town; and my mother was in Cape Town, married when I was 11 years old to her husband, who didn't want to see us.

And we only saw our mother when she come to visit us from Cape Town. And she never came often.

When I finished college, I decided to take a journey and find my father. His aunt lives nearby our house, so I went to them and then they told me a lot about him. His aunt had his number.

I called him and told him who I am, and I'm on my way to Cape Town. I will be staying in Paarl. He said: "It's ok. I will see you when you get to Cape Town."

I arrived in Paarl and spent some few days thinking: What is it going to happen? How am I going to feel when I see him? I was nervous; a bit excited that I have a father that I'm gonna see; and a bit hurt — where was he all these years? I had a lot of questions on my mind. I needed a lot of answers.

And the day arrived, and I took a train to Langa for the first time in my life. It was a long journey, as it was a long journey to find my father.

When I reached Langa, I was nervous, I couldn't hold tears when I was on the train. The train stopped and I had to get out of the train and walk to the police station.

I arrived at the police station, walking with my friend. I saw a man coming from the left. And he came close by and he said: "*Iza ntombam*" — come here my girl — and he smiled.

A part of me knew that it was my father.

It was like I was — I was born for the first time. He hugged me, just everything was so fine. The part of me that was missing was filled.

That's how I know my father.

### My graduation day

I am the fourth child out of seven siblings. I was raised by a single mother, who supported us through selling smileys and opening a shebeen. We used to help her around the shop and I sometimes had to sell amanqina wegusha to have some pocket money. She did not have much, but she was able to support us all and provide for us all, even though there were times where I had to choose between having grey pants or long socks for school; the tracksuit was not an option because I knew she could not afford it. I told myself that I am here to learn, and I did not care what I looked like going to school, as long as I would come out with new information learned.

Out of the seven siblings, I was the only one who went to varsity; and there was so much pressure for me to do well. Transport became a huge challenge and I had to travel to campus daily. Sometimes I would walk to the train station in the morning to catch the train, and late in the evening I would walk home. My mum would sacrifice her last money so that I could have taxi fare... money set aside for electricity. We sometimes spent our evenings in the dark, bathing with cold water, so that I could go to school the next day. When those results came to confirm that I have passed, excitement was everywhere in the house. Everyone wanted to be part of the graduation day.

We spoke about it for months: what dress would I wear, the hairstyle, the shoes, and of course the car that would take me there.

The 12th of March 2012 finally arrived; my name was called on stage, and just when I went up to accept my degree, I heard my mum's voice at the back of the hall screaming: "Halala halala halala usana lwam!" followed by ululating from other women in the crowd showing support. Knowing how much she sacrificed for me to have this moment, I held back the tears and smiled while walking across the stage.

My heart was overwhelmed and I was happy that I made my mum proud — the first graduate in the family. I will never forget the look and joy that was on her face.

## Ukuba ngumzali oyedwa / To be a single parent

Ndinabantwana ababini, ULuyolo no Likhona	I have two children, Luyolo and Likhona
ULikhona yintombazana, uLuyolo yinkwenkwe	Likhona is a girl, Luyolo is a boy
Kukho ubunzima ukuba khulisa uwedwa	To raise them alone is kind of difficult
Kubuhlungu ngamanye amaxesha	Hectic, painful and sad at times
Kakhulukazi xa ungenanto yokubanika,	Especially when you don't have something to give them
Xa befuna imali yokuphatha esikolweni	Like when they need to take money to school
Xa kufuneke baye kwagqirha	Or when they are sick
Begula ngamanye amaxesha unqwenela ukuba ungabasa kugqirha	And you want to take them straight to the doctor
Straight not ekliniki.	Not to the clinic
Kodwa kuba ungumzali oyedwa awukwazi ukuzenza zonke ezo zinto.	But you can't do those things because you are alone.
Awunaye omnye umntu wokuncedisa.	You don't have anyone to support you.
Enye into enzima kakhulu	The other very difficult thing
Xa ukhulisa abantwana wedwa xa befuna impahla ezibizayo ngamaxabiso	When you raise children alone is when they want expensive clothes
kuba bona bazifanisa nabantwana abanabazali ababini,	Because they compare themselves to others with both parents
akonelike ukubanika ukutya okanye ubathengele impahla ifikelelakuyo	It's not enough to give them food and buy clothes you can afford
Kodwa kufuneka ubathande	But you need to love them
ube yitshomi kubo, ubeluncedo,	Be a friend to them, help them
ube nguMama ube nguTata	Be a mother and father,
kuba uzama ukuvala indawo katata ongekho	because you're trying to close the gap of a missing father.
Ndicinga gexesha lokuba uLikhona aye kuMatric dance	I remember when my daughter Likhona had her Matric dance
kwakunzima kuba kwimali endandiyisebenzela yayincinci kakhulu	It was difficult because the money I earned was too little
Ndaxineka kakhulu engqondweni ngamanye amaxesha uziva unomsindo	I was very frustrated and stressed
kodwa ndahlala phantsi ndacinga	But I sat down and thought

ukuba ndizakwenzanani	How am I going to do this?
ukuze afumane ilokhwe ayifunayo, izihlangu, kunye nayo yonke into awayeyinqwenela.	To get her the dress, the shoes and everything that she wanted
Kodwa ndakwazi ngoncedo luka Thixo,	But I tried with the help of God
ndaye ndamane ndigcina kwimali endandiyifumana ngeloxesha, ukuze afumane yonke into ayifunayo.	I saved the money that I earned at that time To get her everything she wanted.
Wayifumana.	She got it all.
Kwabamnandi kakhulu kum	I was so happy
ukuba ndizibone ndidlale indima enkulu kuye	To see myself playing a big role for her
kuba yabaziziphumo ezihle	It was a big achievement for me
ukuba ndimbone emhle	To see her so beautiful
kwaye yonke lonto yabe yenziwe ndim isetyenzelwe ndim	I did it all, and I worked hard for it.
ndibe ndingumzali obakhulisa ndodwa	Being a single parent, raising them alone
kulapho ndazixelela khona	That's when I told myself
ukuba ayikho enye into enondohlula noba inzima kangakanani.	There's nothing I can't do, no matter how difficult it is.

## My degree with two eyes

It was in February, on a very hot Saturday afternoon. I was half asleep when on the floor I heard my mother vividly saying, "imithi lenja" ["this dog is pregnant"].

Later that day I overheard her telling my sister that she is going to get a pregnancy test for me. With hundred percent certainty that I knew I was not pregnant, I just felt like bursting out of laughter. I had this abdominal pain that I felt I would be getting my periods anytime soon, so that put me at ease.

I told my friend what I overheard and she advised me to get the pregnancy test before they would. She walked with me to the cosmetics shop to buy this thing. And then we rushed back home. I did the test and this self-diagnostic tool showed two blue lines.

No. It can't be. I took another R20 from my piggy bank and I ran, and this time alone. The second one also showed positive.

This was not the life I wanted after matric. I felt hurt, disappointed and confused. I wish I could turn back the time and have protected sex.

For that moment, and that moment alone, I thought I had to be smart about the whole situation and deal with it silently. The following day I asked the friend which I did the pregnancy test with, for sanitary towels and later that day I asked my mother for money to buy more. I had to pretend for days that I'm having menstruation, while I knew there was nothing coming out of my uterus.

Then days later, I went to Choices. It's a crisis pregnancy centre. On my way there, I was sitting in the taxi. Next to me was this young lady that had a baby on her lap. My heart started beating fast and my mouth was dried up. I felt so guilty and ashamed.

While sitting in the waiting room, I kept consoling myself by telling myself that this is something that I had to do. I can't disappoint my mother, I'm her last hope and I'm not ready to be a mother at 19 years of age. All of a sudden my life was on slow motion. I felt like I'm in this dark rolling ball that I can't escape from it. I couldn't see what's coming or going.

I was then booked for termination of pregnancy the following Wednesday at HH Hospital. I couldn't find inner peace. Every soapie on TV had someone that was pregnant and the comments from my mother didn't sit well with me.

The best decision was telling my neighbour while I couldn't live with the guilt inside of me that I'm pregnant, and she told my mother.

Nine months later I gave birth to my now three-year-old son... my degree with two eyes.

## Zukile's story

I was born in Gauteng, and grew up in Vosloorus, the east of Gauteng with my mum.

My father passed away when I was one year, four months. I lived with my mum as a clutch bag. When I was six we moved to the Eastern Cape in the place called Tsomo, not far away from Queenstown. That's where I was studying until Grade 12. In between I would visit Joburg during holidays.

I moved to Joburg permanently in 2007. It was exciting and adventurous to explore the world that was different compared to Eastern Cape, as I was not limiting myself.

In 2010 I studied at UNISA doing BA in Communications Science. I had to adapt and tap in the world of new age and information era. Then I was able to make friends. I started to be wild as I met a lot of interesting people. As I was living a good life, it was the best time of my life.

I got trapped in the nightlife, partying, alcohol and drugs.

Still in that motion, I got my degree. Frustrations and depression hit me so hard as life started to be difficult, as I had to feed my habits. I got a job at Smollan Group; then I was mere happy as I was affording life. I worked there for two years and I was still partying very hard. We had our own language, other people which they didn't understand. After some time I was angry and flabbergasted with myself. Decisions I've made, change of personality, peer pressure; that is where I lost a very huge part of me. A lot of things occurred that I'm not proud of - unsafe sex, spending a lot of time with friends; I felt distant from my family. I was empty.

Suddenly my brother died. Subconsciously I thought I was coping, but I wasn't. It hit me so hard as I had to move after his funeral to Cape Town to look after his house and belongings. I felt lonely, guilt, and quivery during that time. I've beat myself up for not being there for my brother in his worst time that he need me in life. People would remind me how look-alike we were and it was killing me.

I got in Cape Town, meeting new people. It was boring and slow as I'm used to fast life in Jozi. There's no swag at all.

On that note, a wake-up call hit me: to start afresh and do better and right by myself. I learned from my mistakes and moved on. I let bygones be bygones. I am working, very balanced and getting back to my old self that I know. I am inspired by a lot of things. I am striving and hungry for success.

Part of me still misses Joburg but I believe this is the best decision that I've ever made for myself and my family. I want them to be proud of me.

If I were to go back in Joburg, I would be more cautious and wiser to make sound decisions, without distraction as I've learned that friends can demolish you. Don't give it all to them. I still love Joburg, it's in my heart and I will go there once the time is right. Now I'm one year two months clean of drugs and I'm proud of who I've become as I'm working hard to be the best version of myself every day.

## Ovuyo's story

Ndizo theta ngokuba ngu tata okokuqala,	I am going to tell you about being a father for the first time
xana uzokuba ngu tata okokuqala uye ungazazi ukuba uzive kanjani...	When you are going to be a father for the first time, you don't really know how to feel
Uyavuya kuba uzoba nomntwana	You are happy because you will have a child
kodwa uphinde ucing indlela ubomi bakho obuzothi butshintshe ngayo.	But you also think about how your life is going to change
Ndikhumbula imini yokuqala ndimbambha umntwana wam ngezam izandla esibhedlele,	I remember the first time I held my child with my own hands at the hospital
ndavuya kakhulu!	I was so happy
Kodwa ke ngosuku olulandelayo ndababuhlungu zindaba endathi ndazifumana	But the news I heard the next day made me very sad
zokuthi uweliselwe kwicala lase ICU ngenxa yokuba yena wayengakwazi ukuphefumla kakuhle,	She was transferred to the ICU because she couldn't breathe properly



Kuba waye selusana oluseluncinane futhi keyena elusana oluzelwe phambi kwexesha	She was a tiny baby who was born prematurely
Saahlala emnhandazweni ke mna no mama wakhe kwade kwafika ithuba lokuba bamkhulule kwicala laseICU.	We prayed for her, me and her mother, until she was brought out of the ICU
Abuyele apho ebekhona kuba ebeselulamile encono	Back to her ward because she was recovering and getting better
wahlala ke esibhedlele kuba waye ngumtwana osemncinci ozalwe phambi kwe xesha	She stayed longer in hospital because she was so tiny and premature
Kwanyanzeleka ukuthi ahlale inyanga yonke,	She had to stay in hospital for a month
emveni kokuba ehleli inyanga yonke kwafika ithuba lokuthi	After that month the time came
Akhululwe	For her to be discharged
nyani ke sayomlanda sabuya naye	Then we went to fetch her and came back with her
Hayke yayi mincili nemivuyo ekhaya mhla sibuya naye esibhedlele...	There was joy and happiness at home the day we brought her back from hospital
Wonke umntu wayegcwele yimivuyo nemincili kukuba befumana olu sana lutsha	Everyone was happy and full of joy to welcome a new baby
Ewe bezama ukumnika amagama	Yes, they tried to give her many names
koko ke usisi wam waphela esithi unguOvuyo	Eventually my sister named her Ovuyo (Joy)
Ngoba wonke umntu wayemvuyele	Because everyone was so happy to see her
Ewe nam ndandonwabile ngalo mini ngoba usana lwam lwalubuyele ekhaya	Yes, even I was happy that day because my baby was home
Kodwa ke ndandihleli ndinomva ndedwa ndinemibuzo endizibuza ndiziphendula yona	But I was anxious, asking myself a lot of questions
kwa kukho umbuzo uthile owawu hleli kum enqondweni...	There was one question that remained in my mind...
"Ewe unomtwana kodwa uzomondla ngantoni lomntwana nje ungaphangeli?"	"Yes, you have a child, but how are you going to feed her? You are not working."
Ndacinga ndizi buza ndiziphendula	I asked myself over and over again
kodwa ke nakananjalo ifemeli yam yamsapota umntwanangandlela zonke	But even then my family supported my child in every way
Namhlanje ukhulile ungakaya ngenxa yoncedo lwabo	Today she is grown because of their help
noxa ke mna nomamakhe sasivana kakhulu	Even though her mother and I got along well
kwafikela kwixesha lokuba sihlukane	The time came for us to separate
Ngoba njengazo zonke izithandane	Because like all relationships
sadibana namaginxigixi apha endleleni yothando	We met some challenges on our journey as lovers
Kodwa ke kwafikelela kwithuba lokuba side sihlukane sobabini	That led to us eventually going our separate ways
Ewe intliziyo yam yayi buhlungu kuba ngoku izinto zazi ngazu kufana	Yes, my heart was broken because things were not going to be the same
Nalapha emntwaneni izinto zazingazukufana	Even to the child, things were not going to be the same anymore

Ngoba asisahlali sonke	Because we were no longer staying together
kodwa ke noko yena umntwana lo wam waa khula waqina	But even so my child grew, she became very strong
nalapho ke kunzima ukuba ngumzali	Even that was hard for me as a parent
ingakumbi xana ungasahlobenanga nomama womntwana	Especially when you are not together with the mother anymore
Kodwa mna nonina kaOvuyo siyasebenzisana ekukhuliseni umntwana wethu	But me and Ovuyo's mother work together to raise our child
Ngoba sifuna ukumbona esonwabile ngalo lonke ixesha	Because we want to see her happy all the time
namhlanje mna noOvuyo usana lwam	Today me and Ovuyo, my daughter
sivana okwaba hlobo	We get along as friends
kodwa sihloniphana ngengomzali nomntwana	But we respect each other as father and child.

## Appreciation

Her name was Nokuthula, a isiXhosa name for quiet or silence.

Nokuthula was a naturally humble person; she was friendly and she always put other people's needs before her own. As her friends we always went to her for advice and she was always willing to help.

Never for once have we as her friends asked her about her personal life. She never came to us for advice or any help. She always had a smile on her face.

We never paid much attention to her.

On this one Sunday evening, we went out as friends. Nokuthula wanted to tell us something. She was crying that night, but we never even attempted to find out what was wrong. At the end of that night, we dropped her off at home. Later that night she texted us all, telling us she was tired of life. We ignored her once more.

We never paid much attention to her.

The next morning I received a phone call from her cousin telling me that Nokuthula passed away. She overdosed herself with sleeping tablets. She was 22 years old.

It was a sad time for us as her friends. We were going through mixed feelings: the feeling of regret and sadness. We blamed ourselves for being so selfish. All the signs were there.

We never paid much attention to her.

A simple what's wrong question would have saved her that night, but selfishness got ahead of us. I guess it's true what they say: People only care about you when it's beneficial, or when you are no more.

Nokuthula's suicide taught me a thing or two about appreciation. It has taught me to appreciate the people and things I have in my life. Today I live my life appreciating everyone and everything I have.

Rest in peace, my friend. Rest in peace, Nokuthula.

## Your help can change someone's life

I met this friend, through a friend.

She was a loving young girl and she had a dream-- being a doctor. So she was looking for a job that could help her with her study fees.

But instead she found love with a man who promised her a job that could help her with the fees. The love was so strong that she even forgot about her dreams.

Whenever we met she had a big smile, and she was active, and we would go out and she would be the only one talking and telling jokes.

She became my close friend, and she loved this man's two children; she was like a mother to them, she was cleaning the house and cooking food for the family.

Years went by. The man started losing love. He was shouting every day. My friend was starting to act different, not talking and she was not happy. I knew something was wrong.

I asked her, "what's wrong?"  
 And she said no, everything is fine.  
 There was that one day she came to my house, started crying, telling us about the man shouting, telling her she is lazy.  
 Then she got a job where I was working, at the food factory. I was happy to see her at work; we thought the problem was solved and the man is happy.  
 But no.  
 One day she came to work with a different face. Her face had scratch marks and a green eye. I could see the pain on her face.  
 I asked her what happened.  
 She said, "the man did this me."  
 I told myself she needs help and someone to trust, and it was me. It was so painful to see my friend with a different face.  
 I told her, whenever she needs help she must come to me. I helped her with the finance problem, I was doing everything she needs from me. The pain she had, I could feel it.  
 The man got arrested and she was free.  
 But it was not that long, the man came back.  
 But the girl was no longer around the house.  
 She saw a better her.

## AmaXhosa Am

Where are you from? *Aphi amaXhosa akho?* I never know how to answer that question: Is it where I was born, or a place called home?

My mom says I was born in a hospital in Carletonville, Johannesburg, in 1994; but growing up I had to move around quite a bit.

My early years were spent in the Eastern Cape, eMount Fletcher. That is where my parents are from. The houses are made of mud and thatch; the rivers long, stretched, and the pastures green, the roads rough with gravel; a very beautiful village.

However, it could not sustain us. We had to move. I thought moving around was a way to get a better life.

When I arrived in Cape Town I was only three or four, and I had to quickly adapt. We had to share a small unit *emaholweni*, in the Lwandle hostels, with about 32 other families, migrant workers from different places.

This was my new home. I had never seen a flushing toilet before, I had to learn English and many other new things.

I grew up to understand the importance of family, because to me, family is home. And no matter how times we moved around, we would always go back to our small village, usually for holidays, funerals and other ceremonies.

So where am I really from? Where is my home?

At the pinnacle of our talks as a country there is this issue of land reformation, everybody is talking about it. But how do I even begin to fight for land when I still don't know where I actually belong? Which land are we fighting for? Is it our farms, or country, or the whole of Africa?

I remember in 2010 there was an outbreak of xenophobic attacks throughout the country. I saw, experienced this in my own community: People from other parts of Africa who had come to find a better life in South Africa being chased away, out of their homes.

It was hard for me: these were my neighbours, my mates, but they were called foreigners.

I was confused. I asked myself: What is a foreigner? Not even the dictionary could give me a satisfying answer, because a part of me resonated with them.

Am I a foreigner? Is it a matter of race, culture, or where you were born?

And even today, when somebody asks me where I am from, I say I am from eTsitsana, that small village that still has no toilets or running water.

*Amaxhosa am apha.*

Amaxhosa is not just a place. Amaxhosa is my people, my family  
 And that for me is where home is.



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## Amahlandenyuka obomi nokungalhlitemba ngamaphupho akho

### The ups and downs of life and not giving up on your dreams

Igama lam ndinguZizopho wakwa Somtsewu	My name is Zizopho my surname is Somtsewu
Ndineminyaka emiyi26 ndikhulele eEastern Cape kwilali yakuZangwa eGcuwa	Im 26 years old I grew up in the Eastern Cape in a village called Zangwa in Butterworth
Ndikhuliswa ngabazali bam boba bini uNokwanele kwakunye noMgcineni	I was raised by both parents Nokwanele and Mgcineni
uTata wam ibingoyena mntu ebesebenza for ifemeli yam	My father was the bread winner for our family
uMama ke yena ke ebesigcina nje singabantwana bakhe	My mother took care of all of us as her children
Mna ke ndingowesine kubantwana basekhaya abahlanu	I was the fourth child out of 5 siblings
Uthe uTata wam akutshona ngonyaka ka2005	When my father passed away in 2005
Bendisenza ibangalam lesihlanu ugrade 7 ke bendina 13	I was in grade 7 I was 13 years old
Emveni koba etshonile	After he passed on
ndiye ndathatha isigqhibo sokuba ndikhathalele ifemeli yam	I took the decision to take care of my family
Kange ndiye ndihlale ke nomama wam phantsi okanye ndimazise	I didn't sit down with my mother or tell her this
Ndigcine esosithembiso entliziyweni yam,	That promise stayed in my heart
ndakhathalela iincwadi zam	I studied hard
Ndiye ke ndagqiba ibanga lam leshumi ngo2011	I completed my grade 12 in 2011
Emveni kokuba ndigqibe ibanga lam leshumi	After completing grade 12
bendinethemba loku buyela esikolweni	My hope was to go back to school
eUniversiti ke ukutsho	to University
ndizamile ukuaplaya kwi Universiti ezininzi	I tried applying to a lot of universities
kungekho mpendulo	They didn't respond
Emveni kokuba ndinga thathangwa kwade kwazofika ooFebuwari	After not being accepted until February
Usista wam uye wathatha isigqibo sokuba ndizokuhlala naye eKapa	My sister took the decision for me to come live with her in Cape Town
Ndaye ke ndajonga umsebenzi ndawu fumana kwiCampus Bakery,	I looked for a job until I was hired at Compass Bakery
kwi nkampani ke ekwakuthiwa yiCampus Bakery	Compass Bakery was the name of the company
Lo kampani ibisebenzela uWoolworths sirapha imuffins sizifaka ibarcode kwakunye neeprice	That company worked for Woolworths wrapping muffins, placing barcodes and pricing
Bendine themba ke lokubuyela esikolweni ndiphangela njalo kulokhampani	I still had the hope of going back to school whilst working for that company
Ndiye ndagcina imali ethile	I had to put some money aside



ndabuya nda aplaya kwisikolo ekuthiwa yiCape Peninsula University of Technology	Then again I applied at Cape Peninsula University of Technology
Bandamkela ngonyaka ka2014 kwicourse yePublic Management	They accepted me in 2014 for a course in Public Management
course leyo ithe yandithatha iminyaka emine	It took me 4 years to complete that course
Kuthe ke kwi course yam kunyaka wam wokugqibela	While I was doing my course, during my final year
ndafumanisa ukuba ndikhulelwe ngoOctobha	I found out I was pregnant in October
Ndahlala ke ndiyi fihlile lonto leyo kwifemeli yam	I decided to keep it a secret from my family
ndixelele nje abahlobo bam ababini uVuyelwa noLusanda	I only told my two friends Vuyelwa and Lusanda
Kwakunye nomfana ebendi ncumisana naye	As well as my boyfriend
Kuye kwafike ke umhla wokuba ndigrede ngo2017kunyaka ophelileyo	The day of my graduation came in 2017, last year
ibi nge14 ka Disemba igraduation	My graduation was on the 14th of December
Ndikhatshwe ke ngusista wam ukuya apho	My sister accompanied me, she was there for me
ngokuba umama azange akwazi ukuphumelela	Because my mother could not make it
Ngenxa yee nxaki zemali zase ndlini	Because of financial problems at home
Kubemnandi ke ngomhla wam wegrad	I was very happy on my day of graduation
kwadlula uDisemba kwafika uJanwari	December passed, then January came
Ndamaziza umama ukuba ndikhulelwe ndisoyika ndinjalo	I decided to tell my mother that I was pregnant even though I was so scared
Kange ke impendulo yakhe ibengalendlela bendiyi cingela ngayo	Her response did not come as I had expected
Uye yandixelele ukuba ayikokuphela kobomi	She told me that it was not the end of the world
Ndabe ke ndimxelele namgomfana loo ndincuma naye ngoku	I even told her about the guy I was seeing
Ngoba asisavani	Because we were not seeing each other anymore
kodwa ke ayonto ke ingamadla kum leyo	But that is not important to me
Ngoba isapoti ndisasifumana kwifemeli	Because my family supports me
and ke ndifumene umsebenzi	And I also got a job
KwiLwandle Migrant Labour Museum eStranti ndiyaziphangelela	I'm working at the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum in Strand now
Ndifuna nje ukubulela kuMama wam kwakunye nefemeli ngento yonke abathe bandenzela yona	I just want to say thank you to my mother and my family for everything they've done for me
Ndizaba ngumzali kumntwana wam namhlanje	I am going to be a mother to my unborn child today
futhi andoyiki ndikulungele ukuba ngumzali	And I am not scared; I am ready and prepared to be a parent
Enkosi	Thank you

## **Appendix B: Ethical Practice and Storyteller's Bill of Rights**

These guidelines for ethical practice have been developed by StoryCenter and the full text is available in pdf form on their website. The last section, the Storyteller's Bill of Rights, has also been published in modified form as an appendix to the 2013 edition of *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*. They are reprinted here for ease of reference.

### **Introduction**

We recognize that the ethical considerations arising within each project are unique. The following principles are intended as an evolving set of recommendations for ethical practice in storytelling and participatory media approaches. We invite readers to engage in a dialogue with us about how best to ensure the safety and dignity of storytellers and audiences worldwide.

### **The first principle centers on storyteller wellbeing.**

Storytellers' physical, emotional, and social wellbeing must be at the center of all phases of a project. Facilitators must have expertise in group process facilitation and must be committed to an approach that views the process of creating stories as important as the end products (media pieces). Facilitators should be attentive to how culture and power can impact relationships, working from a stance of cultural humility. [1] Facilitators need to maintain appropriate boundaries at all times while remaining open to processes of listening and understanding.

Strategies to ensure the wellbeing of vulnerable participants are particularly important; personal storytelling is generally not appropriate for individuals currently experiencing strong symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. If trauma is a potential topic, a licensed clinician (e.g. social worker, counselor, therapist, etc.) should carefully screen potential participants to assess their readiness to share their stories and should be present during the workshop to provide any needed emotional support. Facilitators should support those storytellers who are sharing stories about especially painful life experiences in approaching their narratives from a position of strength rather than from a vantage point that reinforces victimization, and mechanisms for post-workshop debriefing must be in place. Read more about digital storytelling and trauma.

**The second principle expands conventional practices for requesting “consent” from storytellers, when there is a desire to publicly share their stories.**

Storytellers must have the ability to make informed choices about workshop participation and the content, production, and use of their work. Facilitators must provide storytellers with the information they need to make these choices and must make it clear to storytellers that they have the right to withdraw their stories from public circulation at any time (recognizing the constraints of withdrawal from Internet forms of distribution). Facilitators must be equipped to offer guidance in these decision-making processes in a way that protects the dignity and safety of storytellers. Above all, consent must be viewed as a process, not as a one-time activity.

**The third principle centers on the multiple connotations of knowledge production and ownership.**

Storytellers have the right to freedom of expression in representing themselves, in their stories. Facilitators must provide storytellers with the space and flexibility to describe what they have experienced, within the parameters or thematic concerns of a given project and without being coerced or censored. Facilitators should support storytellers in sharing stories in the languages of their choice, through the involvement of skilled interpreters and translators. Facilitators must be able to assist storytellers in determining whether or not it is safe for them to attach their names to their stories and whether images of themselves or others should be blurred to protect their privacy and maintain their safety. Storytellers and facilitators must agree to maintain confidentiality about information and materials that are revealed in a workshop but that may not make it into publicly circulated stories. Facilitators should engage interested storytellers in outlining context and discussion points for their stories and in determining where, why, and how their stories will be distributed.

**The fourth principle emphasizes the need for local relevance.**

Projects must be sensitive and appropriate to local contexts and needs. Facilitators should work with local partners to develop and carry out realistic plans for storyteller recruitment and advance preparation. Where possible, facilitators must engage the assistance of local teaching assistants to provide culturally appropriate support. Facilitators should conduct

workshops in local languages, with assistance where necessary from skilled interpreters and translators who are “cultural insiders.” Facilitators should adapt workshop methods to fit local technological resources and capacities, emphasizing always the importance of first-person voice, group process, and participatory production.

### **The fifth principle acknowledges that ethical engagement is a continual process.**

Ethics must be viewed as a process, rather than as a one-off occasion of “gaining consent.” Ongoing dialogue between storytellers, staff members, and partner organizations or institutions about how best to design and implement an ethically responsible project is key to ethical practice. This includes the development of: project goals and objectives, storyteller recruitment and preparation strategies, privacy guidelines, strategies to ensure emotional support for storytellers during and following workshops, and story distribution strategies.

### **The sixth principle addresses ethical story distribution.**

Story distribution strategies must first and foremost be rooted in the needs of, and designed to benefit, storytellers and their local communities, rather than only serving the agendas of distant viewers or funders. Storytellers must be provided with copies of their finished stories before those stories are distributed or displayed in any setting. Viewing audiences should be advised in advance when stories contain deeply sensitive material, and should be provided with opportunities to talk about what they have seen and heard. Stories about highly sensitive / stigmatized topics should be shown only in carefully facilitated venues and with the involvement of a licensed clinician or an individual knowledgeable about the issues portrayed, who can debrief audiences and provide referrals to support services, if necessary. If sensitive stories are being shared online, appropriate viewer advisories and background context should accompany their presentation.

### **Conditions for Ethical Practice**

- Facilitators and partners must have clarity about project goals, methods, and story distribution intentions.
- Facilitators and partners must be transparent with storytellers, about workshop and story distribution goals and methods. This transparency must be woven through the life of a project, from storyteller recruitment, to workshop implementation and eventual story distribution.

- Facilitators must have the skills needed to lead workshops with a high level of competency (for leading group processes; supporting writing and story recording activities; teaching technology skills; addressing emotionally difficult subject matter; and engaging with groups from a position of cultural humility).
- Facilitators must be committed to assisting storytellers in making decisions that will ensure their safety, and, where needed, protect their privacy.
- Project partners must maintain ongoing communication with storytellers, to address any concerns that may arise for them following a workshop.

### **Storyteller's Bill of Rights**

In relation to a workshop, you have ...

The right to know from the outset why a workshop is being carried out.

The right to assistance in deciding whether you are ready to produce a story.

The right to understand what is involved in the process of producing a story.

The right to know who might view your finished story, after the storytelling workshop.

The right to decide for yourself whether or not to participate in a workshop.

The right to ask questions at any stage of the workshop, before, during, or after.

The right to ask for teaching instructions to be repeated or made clearer.

The right to skilled emotional support, if your experience of making a story is emotionally challenging.

The right to tell your story in the way you want, within the limits of the workshop.

The right to decide whether or not to reveal private or personal information to fellow participants and instructors, at the workshop.

The right to advice about whether revealing your identity or other personal details about your life, in your story, may place you at risk of harm.

The right to leave information and/or photographs that identify you or others, out of your final story.

The right to reject story feedback (about words and images) if it is not useful or offered in a spirit of respect/support.

The right to decide what language to use in telling/creating your story.

The right to be respected and supported by capable workshop facilitators.

The right to a written consent form, if your story will be shared publicly, including a signed copy for your records.

The right to know what contact and support you can expect after the workshop



In relation to sharing your story after a workshop, you have ...

The right to decide with project partners how your story will be shared.

The right to view and retain a copy of your story before it is shared publicly in any way.

The right to know who is likely to screen your story and for what purposes.

The right to know who is likely to watch or read your story and when (e.g. rough timeframe).

The right to counsel on the potential sensitivities of sharing your story in public.

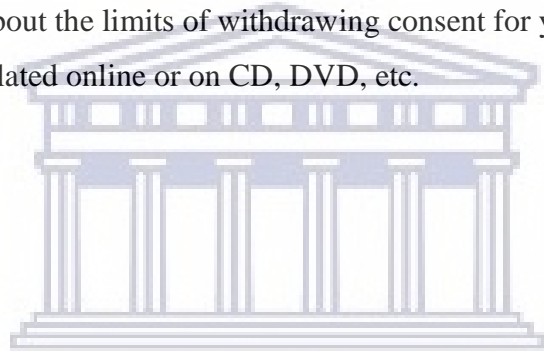
The right to emotional support if you are present when your story is shown in public.

The right to demand that no one should be able to sell your story for profit.

The right to know if any funds will be generated as a result of your story being shared (e.g. to support not-for-profit human rights work).

The right to withdraw your consent for the use of your story at any time.

The right to information about the limits of withdrawing consent for your story to be shared, if it has already been circulated online or on CD, DVD, etc.



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