

Scared of My Creation:

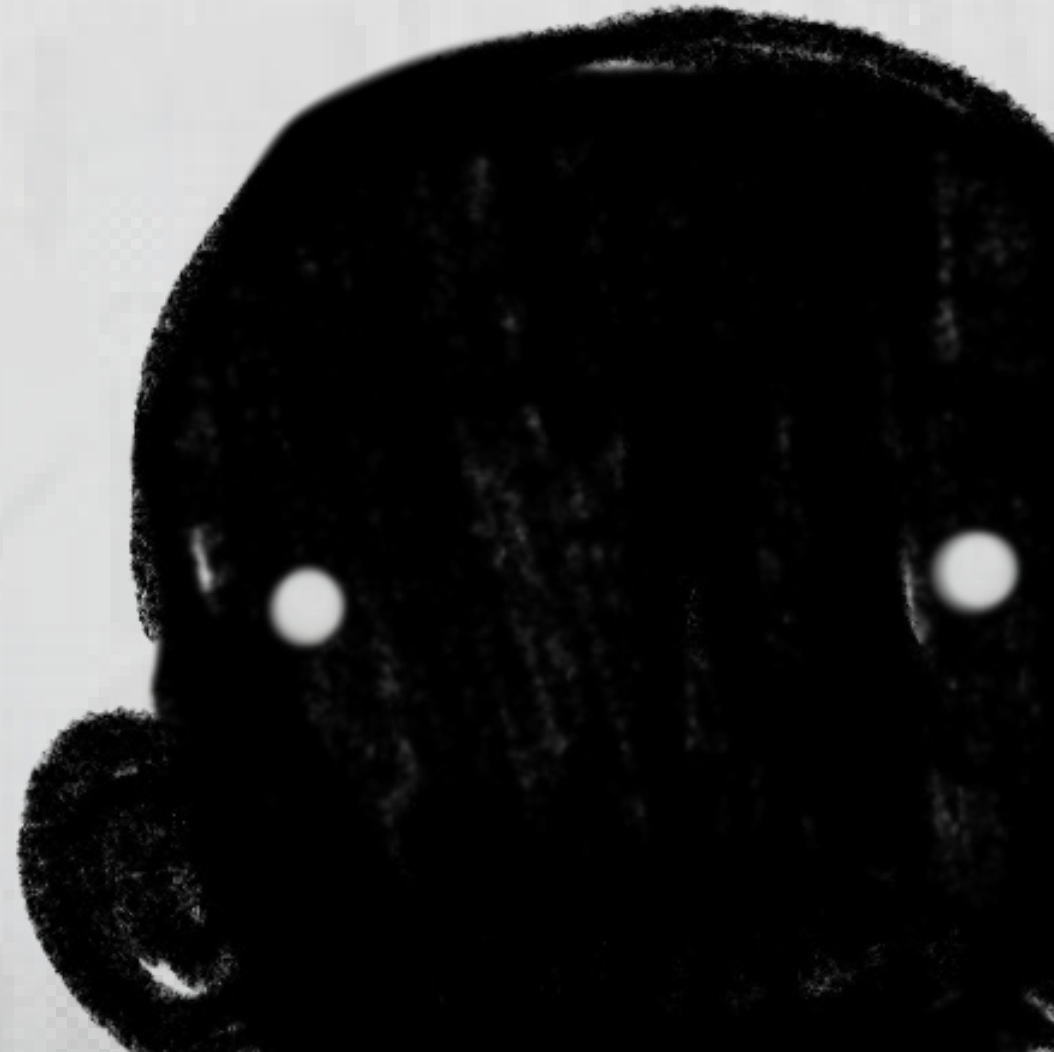
Designing a Game That Frightens Its Creator.

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Abstract

This research and project explore whether the creator can be scared by their own creation, utilising a self-psychological lens and analog horror aesthetics. This research positions the researcher as both creator and player. This research culminates in the digital artefact '*Safety Coffin*'. It emphasises my core fear of death, which was revealed through my autoethnographic methodology of reflection and self-psychology. With the consideration that horror games can be a form of exposure therapy, this project aimed to become a coping strategy for my fears. The development of *Safety Coffin* has demonstrated that not all psychological horror games need to be conventionally scary to be considered frightening, and has the potential to open new paths for designers and game developers to create artefacts that are truly personalised and terrifying to them.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the Acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed
Jade Parkin.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, flowing 'J' followed by a 'P' and a horizontal line.

20/04/2026

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Key Words

Psychology, Horror, Self-Psychology, Fear, Game Design, Analog Horror, Video Games.

My research positions me as a creator and player as I attempt to design a game that scares me. I examine fear as a subjective experience shaped by memory and identity. By confronting my own fears through game design, self-psychology and analog horror aesthetics, I aim to gain a deeper understanding of myself and the fears I carry. This project helps me understand myself better through the context of a self-psychological horror game, enabling me to confront fears within a genre I find both comforting and terrifying. Horror is a core identity marker central to my creative identity and practice. Even as a kid, I've always been captivated by horror. It began, as I can remember, with late-night walks with my Poppa. He'd tell me tales of mysterious creatures that would wander through my mind that I, as a small child, couldn't fully comprehend. These moments were when my fascination with horror blossomed in a positive, creative way. This research seeks to address questions such as:

- What can I experiment with to make an analog horror game?
- How can I influence ideas of fear and self-psychology to develop a psychological horror game?
- Can a game scare its creator?

My research falls within an interpretivist paradigm, in which understanding is viewed as subjective and knowledge is seen as something created through lived experiences (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). I will examine various forms of analog and psychological horror media, such as *The Boy and the Bath* (Doctor Nowhere, 2024) and *Home Invasion* (Darkos, 2022), to guide my research and help me understand how to confront my fears and portray them directly through my game design.

Throughout this research, I have employed iterative design methodologies and developed prototypes, specifically visual and sound experiments inspired by analog media. I have also used autoethnographic methodologies to investigate my own self, understanding my fears and developing fear-driven mechanics to ultimately create a game that scares me. What's compelling about this project is that it's extremely personal: I don't just view horror as a genre I adore; I also see it as a place where I feel most safe, expressive, and creative.

Approaching this project through practice-based research, game design, and self-psychology, I aim to challenge myself and learn new things about myself, exploring what that means and what it reveals. The unknowns about my project are whether it will help me face my fears or make them worse, if a game can capture the intimate nature of personal fears, and whether that will ultimately scare me.

blood sprinkles

Vampire Wedding



Figure 1
My drawings as a child (Parkin, 2009–2012)

Personal Context

My Childhood

Figure 1
My drawings as a child (Parkin, 2009–2012)



Figure 2
My collaboration drawings with my dad (Parkin, 2012)



I was raised surrounded by horror. Growing up with parents who were themselves fans of horror and the macabre, I naturally gravitated towards it. This resulted in many awesome Halloween costumes, a favourite of mine being Leatherface from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974) for my primary school Halloween disco party in 2010. I had never seen the movie, and I had no idea who the character was, but I loved it because my parents were so excited about it. My parents are most likely the main reason why I am the way that I am –showing me all the classic films such as *The Lost Boys* (Schumacher, 1987), *The Dark Crystal* (Henson & Oz, 1982), and *The Goonies* (Donner, 1985), which continue to be my favourites. Being exposed to the media my parents also grew up with has influenced my interest in analog media and my view of creativity and storytelling. In a way, I grew up with one foot in their generation, and that shared connection of nostalgia has become a big part of who I am today. My parents were also the first people to introduce me to gaming, giving me my first Nintendo DS when I was 7.

Art is also a big part of my identity. I didn't get diagnosed with dyslexia until I was 6, but due to my learning difficulties, art has always been a way for me to express myself. My parents would constantly see me with my head glued to a piece of paper, scribbling all sorts of crazy characters and designs, with a keen interest in Gothic monsters such as *Frankenstein's Monster* (Shelley, 1818) and *Dracula* (Stoker, 1897), which continues to this day. Since my dad is a tattoo artist, occasionally I would collaborate with him. Whatever I drew, he'd encourage it and still does. He is the first person I go to for feedback on my artwork and is the main reason I'm so interested in horror-themed media.

Interest in Research Question and Paradigm

My research interest arose during my undergraduate studies. Previously, I have always created games with a horror twist, in the hope of unsettling players or simply appreciating the horror elements and their influence. Whilst developing my capstone *Dear and Departed* (Parkin, 2025) project, I started to gain an interest in psychological elements within horror games; whether the creator can be scared by their own creation, and if there are games made for the creator, developed from a personal place where they're the ones to truly understand what it means for them.

Figure 3
My Undergraduate Games (2022–2025)



Note. Image 1: Big Mouth Little Teeth (Parkin, 2022) - Image 2: Sunscream (Parkin, 2023) - Image 3: SoulFire (Davies, Parkin, Ye & Ruzich, 2024) -Image 4: Dear and Departed (Parkin, 2025).

Interpretivist Paradigm

My subjective work and my value upon its merit align with the interpretivist paradigm, which “is founded on the assumption that people’s perceptions, ideas, thinking, and the meanings that are significant to them” (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022, p. 421). I make sense of my world through what I design.

Research Question

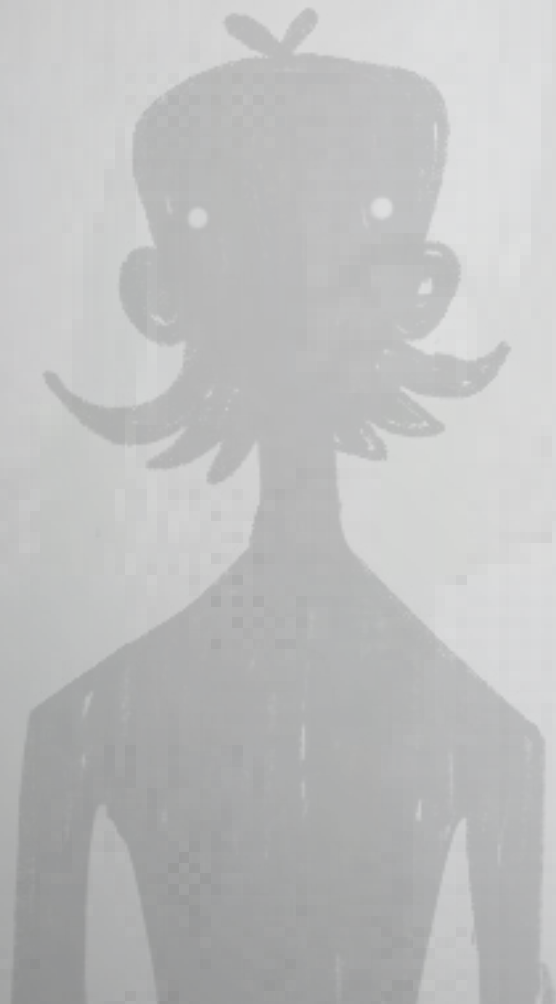
Overall, this research is a way for me to confront fears and scare myself through a psychological horror game. Undertaking techniques from analog and psychological horror media, including self-psychological references to personal fears and real events, are directly displayed within a game. Ultimately, this investigation questions:

“How can I integrate analog horror aesthetics and self-psychology within a psychological horror game reflecting personal fears and experiences to authentically scare myself?”

Chapter 2

Contextual Review:

Contexts from the Dark

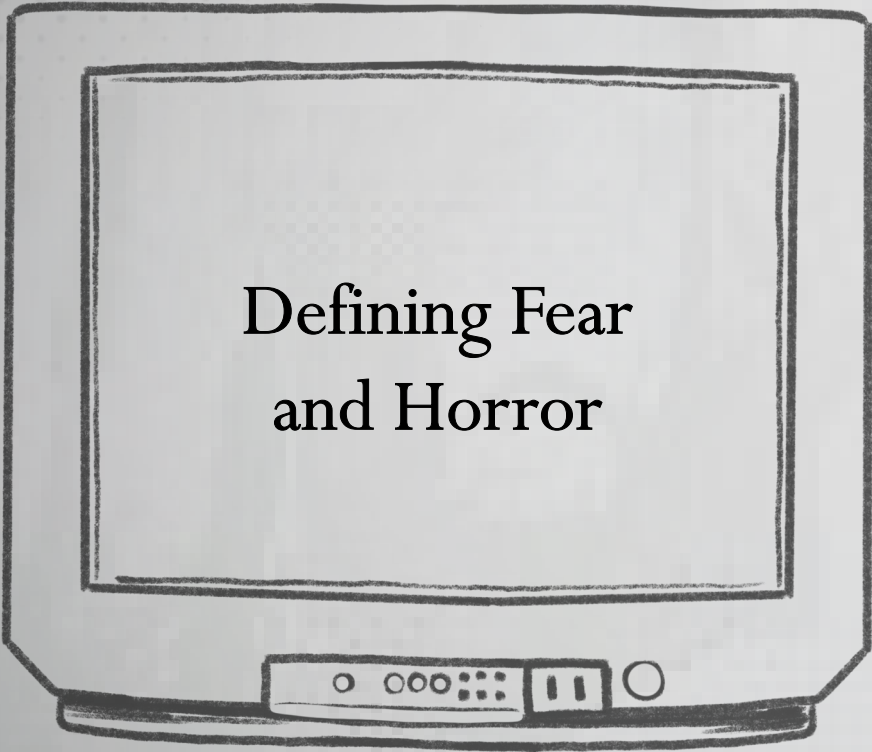


Introduction

In this contextual review, I examine the areas of analog horror media and psychology, and how their combination can be used to create a horror game to scare myself. Analog horror is a subgenre that blurs the lines between fiction and reality, placing viewers in bizarre scenarios and nostalgic or familiar environments.

I will explore the core characteristics of the analog horror genre, examining how it's expressed across different media, such as games, films, and YouTube series. This exploration aims to gain a deeper, personal understanding of why this media style speaks to me, as both a designer and a consumer. As well as analog media, I also begin to interpret my inner workings through a self-psychological lens. Psychology is the scientific study of how people think, act, and feel (Colman, 1999). Psychological horror takes these same ideas and turns them in a different direction, exploring darker parts of the human mind. This mirrors my focus on self-psychology, which examines who we are, emotionally and psychologically. By combining analog horror with psychological theories of self-psychology (Rabstejnek, 2020), I aim to examine how fear can operate externally, through various media and internally. This research will help me create a game that doesn't shock or jump scare¹, but taps into my own deeply seated fears.

¹ "Jump scare refers to a sudden visual intrusion from offscreen [...] to shock, surprise, or otherwise frighten the audience" (Acosta, 2025, p. 1)



Defining Fear and Horror

According to LeDoux, the conventional meaning of fear is “a conscious feeling and to the everyday belief that fearful feelings cause us to respond in a certain way to threats” (2014, p. 2872). LeDoux also mentions that “fear became a behavioural disposition determined by a history of aversive reinforcement” (p. 2872). Fear develops from repeated negative experiences, conditioning someone to respond fearfully to potential threats or harm. The horror genre deliberately stirs fear by presenting media depicting the worst possible scenarios that viewers would want to avoid. As Kawin says, “Horror provides entry to the made-up world [...] where fears are heightened but can be mastered [...] it accesses a core of fears we may share as humans” (2012, p. 20). People willingly engage with horror media to experience fear and to overcome it. I intend to design a horror experience that, as it is curated by me, provokes my own sense of fear. Martin mentions, “those who repress negative affect may nonetheless show high levels of physiological arousal during exposure to frightening films” (2019, p. 10). I want to explore how to instil this fear in a genre I have grown fearless of, as my love of horror grows. It is, currently, a space of security. Looking at the possibilities - can I rupture that safe space? Or possibly reinvent it?

Analog Horror

What is Analog Horror?

Fulbright's interpretation of analog horror is that it "captures our deepest nostalgic anxieties, creating unease through its hallmarks of distorted visuals, multimedia puzzles, and simultaneously intimate and unrecognizable narratives" (2025, p. 76). Analog horror is a subgenre of horror known for its use of outdated media aesthetics. It often uses VHS-style visuals, grainy footage, and distorted audio to place viewers in a distorted version of real life. Long would narrow it down to "uncanny distorted imagery, choppy out-of-order editing, distorted sound design, and video/image filters" (2023, p. 29). Analog horror, in most cases, adds a Lovecraftian twist² by involving creatures hard to comprehend. Long describes analog horror as "taking the gritty horrific narratives and adding a fantastical element of aliens, the supernatural, or some Lovecraftian force" (2023, p. 26).

The specific visuals of the horror subgenre heavily rely on VHS tape aesthetics, static and grain, distorted audio and music to replicate the restrictions of old media and evoke a nostalgic, distrustful feeling toward technology. "Analog horror utilizes that fear of corrupted innocence and security, manipulating your nostalgia and using it against you" (Long, 2023, p. 24). This is usually done by transforming a familiar source, such as government announcements, food ads, or found footage, into something corrupted and unexplainable (Long, 2023). Analog horror media also use older time aesthetics, with the 70s to the 2000s as the most common settings, because that was the peak of analog technology.

However, we see these times as lively and colourful, "analog horror is the opposite. It's desaturated, empty, void of feeling - a place designed for uncomfortable uncanniness and not a warm and fuzzy place that makes you think of your childhood" (Long, 2023, p. 27). As well as using music and media from those specific time periods, it's not only used as a stylistic choice but also as a storytelling tool to create feelings of unease or "false nostalgia" (Long, 2023, p. 22), as if the viewer is observing something that is long forgotten or prohibited.

Personally, I've always loved analog horror, as I find it fascinating how media can be twisted to make you feel uneasy. The lasting horror never fails to leave me with a gut-wrenching feeling of despair, yet also a sense of nostalgia. As Long says, "analog horror utilises that fear of corrupted innocence and security, manipulating your nostalgia and using it against you" (2023, p. 24). Analog horror always has a solid grasp on nostalgia through ambiguous narratives and beautifully horrific visuals, almost using nostalgia as a weapon.

² Lovecraftian twist referring to HP Lovecraft's cosmic horror stories "Lovecraft's cosmic horror stories partake of myth, adopting in particular the latter's universal view and pronounced sidelining of humanity as a whole, which it intensifies to the point of horror" (Wilke, 2021).

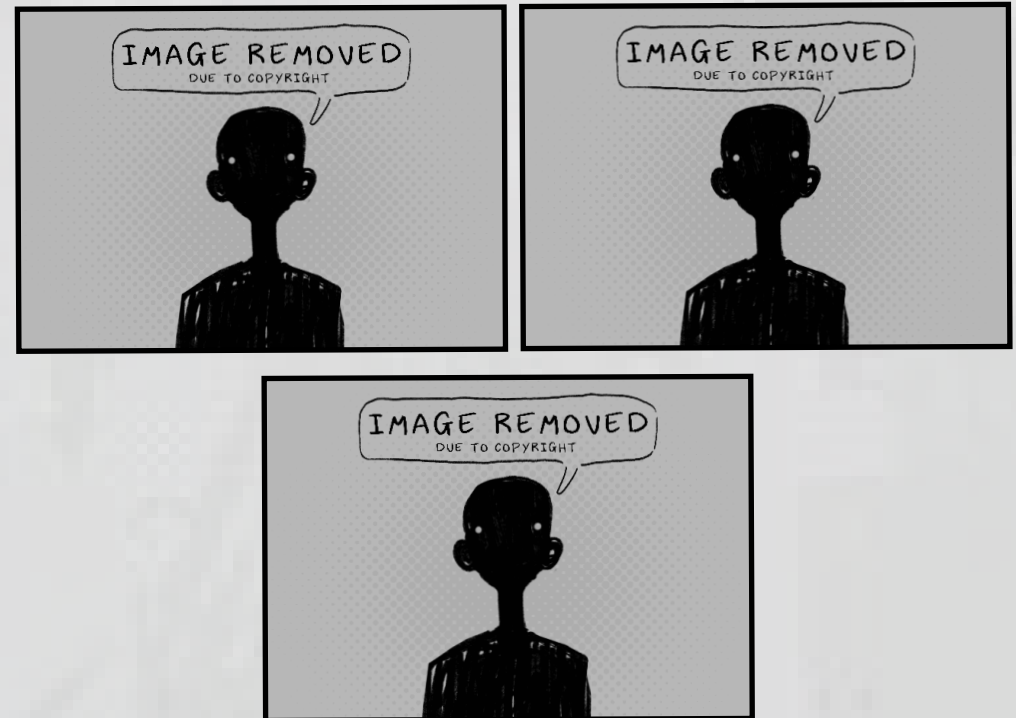
Analog Horror Examples

The Wyoming Incident (2006)

While there are many different analog horror media, I want to discuss.³ I will start from the beginning and talk about the first notable analog horror, *The Wyoming Incident* (2006). It is a TV broadcast hijacking and the first notable analog horror video. The reception of the Wyoming Incident speaks to its effectiveness as horror media. Viewers shared feeling sick with “headaches, vomiting, and hallucinations” (Long, 2023, p. 22). The 6-minute video is very eerie, with slow music and constant, ear-piercing noises. Digital texts, “WHAT HIDES IN YOUR MIND?”, and images of heads would flash on the screen, along with more distorted audio. This, however, wasn’t a real event but a creepypasta⁴ created by multiple internet users, not a single hacker. Of course, *The Wyoming Incident* “wasn’t real, but people still speculated, and, like most creepypasta, it became an internet urban legend” (Long, 2023, p. 22).

This taps into the fear of the unknown, as the viewer is unable to fully understand what this video is, why it’s there, or who it’s for. A lack of knowledge is *Wyoming’s* primary tool for horror, “making the unknown the object of fear” (Carleton & Nicholas, 2016, p. 11). I want my game to be an ambiguous experience, and to achieve that, I’ll be using these techniques: distorted visuals, eerie audio, and lack of context as inspiration and key influences to help with my game.

Figure 4
Images from *The Wyoming Incident* (2006)



Note. Image 1 (Timestamp – 0:15); Image 2 (Timestamp – 0:55); Image 3 (Timestamp – 2:55)

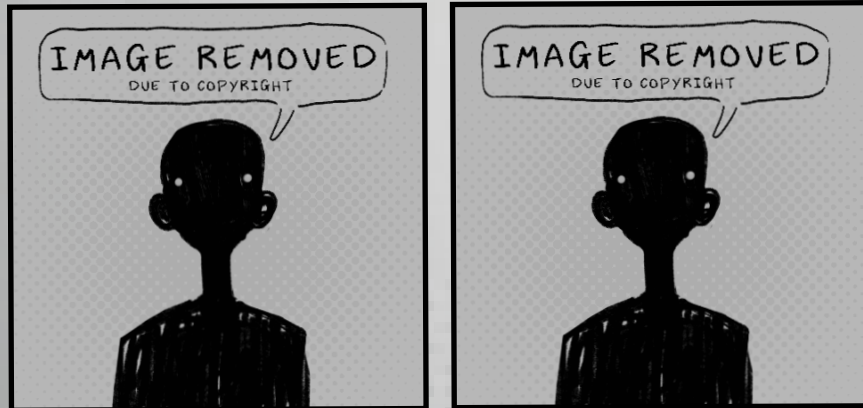
3 Local 58 (@LOCAL58TV, 2017), Gemini Home Entertainment (@GEMINIHOMEENTERTAINMENT, 2019), The Monument Mythos (@evecasanas, 2020), Midwest Angelica (@Midwest_Angelica, 2022), The Mandela Catalogue (@AlexxKister, 2021) and Greylock (@Greylock, 2023).

4 “Creepypasta is a genre of online horror short story that began in the early 2000’s on the forums 4chan and Something Awful” (Ramirez, 2022, p. 4).

Marble Hornets (2009)

Marble Hornets (2009) was a found-footage series about Slender Man, a fictional character who is tall, faceless, and wears a black suit. Sometimes he has multiple tentacle-like limbs and tends to lurk in forests (Tolbert, 2013). Slender Man was created for a Photoshop contest on the online forum, Something Awful (Chess, 2012).

Figure 5
Screenshots from Marble Hornets Slender Man (Chess, 2014)



Note. Image 1: Entry #86 (Timestamp - 5:13); Image 2: Rosswood: Part 4 (Timestamp - 9:45).

Slender Man quickly turned into one of the most recognisable characters in creepypasta media. Chess describes this as, “Almost immediately, an obsessive interest in the Slender Man took over the forum discussions. [...] with new photographs, drawings, short fiction, and even woodcuttings” (2012, p. 2). These early creations laid the foundations for online horror media by blurring the line between fact and fiction, prompting audiences to speculate about whether the content was real. Slender Man’s uncanniness is portrayed as both human and inhuman. Tolbert notes that “Slender Man epitomizes the simultaneous alienness and familiarity that characterizes the uncanny” (2013, p. 2). Slender Man is uncanny because he looks almost human; he wears a business suit and stands upright. Yet his height and limbs are exaggerated, and he has a featureless face. The combination of familiarity and strangeness creates an unsettling feeling that something is wrong.

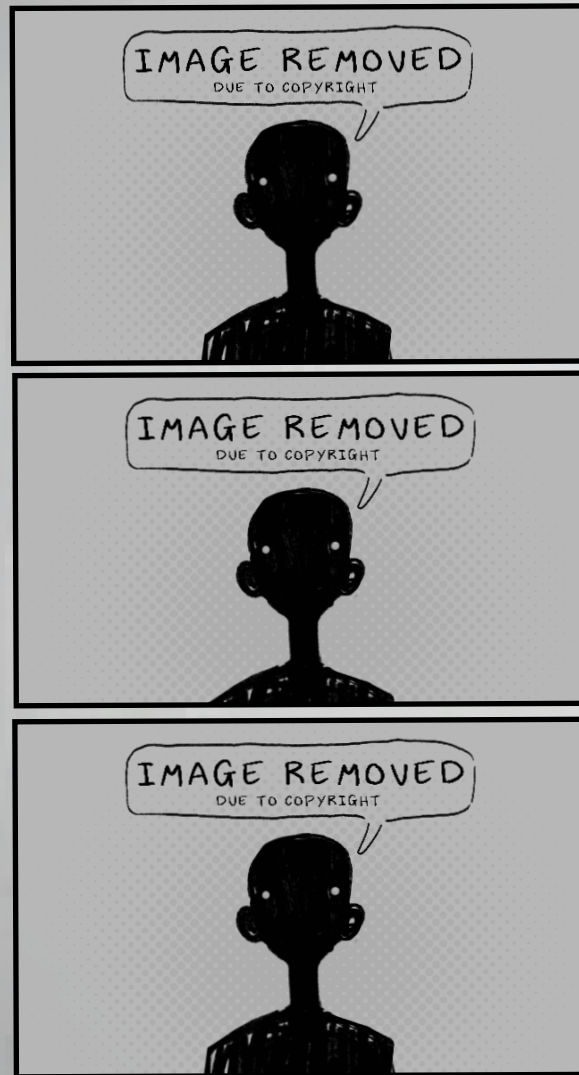
Fulbright explains why people are drawn to analog horror and how this genre uses cosmic-horror elements, often portraying an entity stronger than man threatening humanity, creating “an unending, almost cosmic sense of dread” (2025, p. 24). Analog horrors’ fascination with distorted entities reflects a fascination with the past, especially how popular and well-known media can be distorted into an uncanny, frightening experience. *Marble Hornets* shows ostension, which is “the act of referencing a narrative by providing an explicit, real-life example of it” (Tolbert, 2013, p. 3) was created to make the legend feel authentic and believable, allowing fans to do more than just watch and inviting them to ‘legend-trip’ and interact with the myth, making the story feel authentic. Tolbert discusses that “*Marble Hornets*, whose primary purpose is to interact with that legend—i.e., to legend-trip. [...] as a semiotic process in which fans [...] willingly engage, its purpose is to provide direct access to the narrative” (2013, p. 3). This interactive approach makes the creepypasta Slender Man and *Marble Hornets* feel more real and unsettling to fans by inviting people to step directly into the myth.

5 Legend Tripping is “The act of visiting locations that are identified in urban legends” (Nickell, 2018).

Skinamarink (2022)

Figure 6

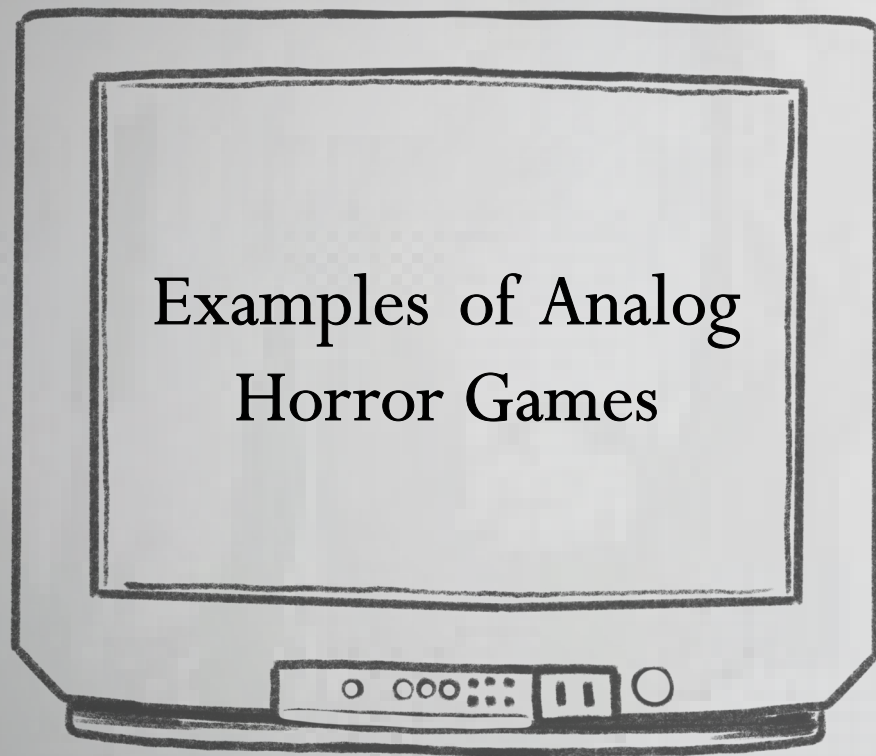
Screenshots from *Skinamarink* trailer (Ball, 2022)



Note. Image 1 (Timestamp – 0:26); Image 2 (Timestamp –1:03); Image 3 (Timestamp –1:42).

Analog horror films are also influential to this project. *Skinamarink* (2022) was filmed in director Ball's childhood home. This makes it more personal, as he turned his home into a space that no longer felt safe, unsettling viewers as "They seemed to have been transported back to their own childhoods, to points where they felt helpless and small in a world they didn't understand" (Fulbright, 2025, p. 24).

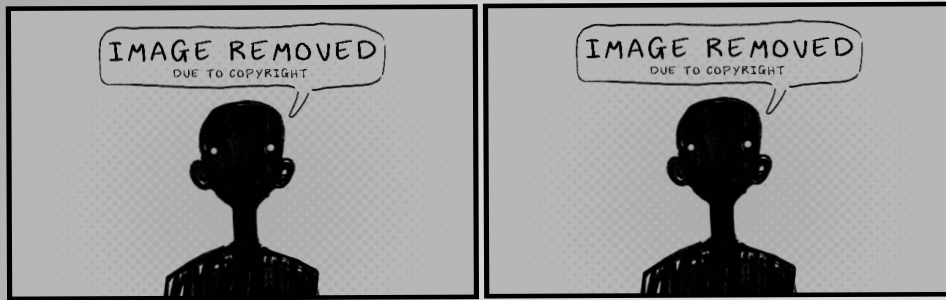
The film is centred around two young kids waking up in the middle of the night to find their parents missing and all the doors and windows in their house have disappeared. This film is very unique and could be relatable to some viewers. Fulbright says, "It is an intensely personal experience for every viewer, and everyone will come away from the film with a different idea of what 'really' happened" (2025, p. 21). *Skinamarink* perfectly captures feelings of childhood fear. As Fulbright mentions, "What scared you as a child? [...] Do you remember gaping, dark hallways and twisting, cavernous ceilings? It's these questions that *Skinamarink* not only answers, but also immerses its audience in" (2025, p. 20). There is always a level of uncertainty, with the only light and sound coming from the TV. This specific hyperfixation on the TV evokes a very nostalgic feeling – I can relate to finding comfort in a screen. As Fulbright mentions, "Anyone can view this film and see themselves" (2025, p. 21).



As my research involves creating a game, I felt it was important to analyse specific analog horror games. I have dedicated time exploring many analog horror games. Home Invasion (Darkos, 2022) proved to be the most evocative and relevant to my work. The game is short , focusing on a single moment from a wider story, limiting what players see and know, its brevity forces attention on the atmosphere and the unknown, allowing the players to fill in the gaps, emphasising tension and unpredictability within a controlled environment.

Home Invasion (2022)

Figure 7
Screenshots from the game Home Invasion (Darkos, 2021)



Home Invasion, developed by Darkos and set in Winchester County, USA, follows the Green family. The game is presented as a found-footage game, featuring atmospheric, analog-horror elements of grainy VHS footage. The gameplay involves the player completing minimal tasks, such as taking photos and answering simple questions, combined with the eerie sound design and underlying narrative. *Home Invasion* uses grainy, distorted found-footage visuals, including timestamps and dates in the top corners of the screen, creating a realistic, unsettling atmosphere as if you are watching real found footage. Developing game visuals of my personal life, such as my bedroom, the found-footage design adds an immersive feel to the overall game, almost as if I'm an outsider to my own game. It's a familiar environment, but something's wrong with it. The pixelated images of my personal spaces evoke a sense of uncertainty, rather than the nostalgia and comfort a personal space is meant to provide. Fulbright expresses, "This distinction is crucial to understanding how analog horror goes beyond an aesthetic into a league all its own as it manipulates the viewer's understanding of time, memory, and what is real" (2025, p.16–17). That's what analog horror design does best: it twists and manipulates familiarity and security into a horror experience.

Sound design is essential as it adds an element of immersion and enhances the overall game experience, as witnessed in *Home Invasion*. Ng and Nesbitt mention "Sound was simply used to increase the immersion of the player. Now there is a growing interest in using sound as a means for providing the player with additional information" (2013, p. 2). It uses diegetic sound, which originates from within the world and is audible to the characters within that world.⁶ In simple words, "All sounds native to that world are diegetic" (Nosal, 2025, p. 10). As in many found-footage films, diegetic sound amplifies the found-footage design, making the scene feel more real. Adding louder sounds, such as TV static or a loud radio, makes the experience feel more overwhelming. *The Blair Witch Project* (Sánchez, Myrick, 1999), for example, features sound design that complements the visuals, often creating dimly lit scenes that allow viewers to listen. This is similarly done in *Home Invasion*: "the viewer is left moving through a dangerous space with a very limited perspective that they possess no control over" (Chinnery, 2022, p. 54). *Home Invasion* jumped between different forms of media, from found footage to a phone call recording between 2 people, then an 80s-themed minigame. It kept me engaged as I tried to put puzzle pieces together. The environments feel familiar, but unsafe, and the whole experience is very draining as nothing you do feels like an escape to victory.

⁶ "Diegetic parts of a film are all those existing in the world of the story [...] and everything separate from that world is non-diegetic" (Nosal, 2025, p. 8)

Criticisms of Analog Horror

UrbanSPOOK, The Painter (2023)

Figure 8
Screenshot from *The Painter* (UrbanSPOOK, 2023)



Note. Image 1: HELL (Timestamp – 9:23); Images 2 & 3: FACES (Timestamp – 0:57), (Timestamp - 2:35).

The Painter (2023) is a controversial analog horror series created by the YouTube channel UrbanSPOOK. I love the series' aesthetics, sound design, and concept. I do, however, question how *The Painter* portrays the story. It feels lacking in substance, often relying on gratuitous depictions of sexual themes and violence for “shock value”. Solomon discussed how we gain “enjoyment from other people’s experiences of horror” (2003, p. 234), but when it comes to implying that children and infants are being subjected to such horrible deaths with no reasoning, I move from feeling fear to disgust. It could be argued that this was used as a narrative device to show the antagonist’s evil nature, but this motivation feels weak to me. I interpret *The Painter* as a cautionary tale about creating a design for shock, devoid of depth or meaning. I intend to design meaningfully.

The use of jump scares

Coltan Scrivener states that jump scares are expected within the horror genre. In his text on *A Very Nervous Person’s Guide to Horror Movies* (2022), he mentions that “Jump scares are a key part of most horror movies, and they show no signs of going away anytime soon”. I’ve always disliked jump scares and always thought of them as cheap and overused. As Fulbright mentioned, analog horror “is more concerned with an atmosphere of dread and remembrance over traditional jump scares” (2025, p. 2). The anticipation of a jump scare is what I find more daunting. The pressure of someone watching is something that I extremely dislike, but it’s something that scares me, which is what I’m aiming for.

The Relevance of Analog Horror to my Project

Analog horror is a unique form that creates long-lasting fear and emotional impact. By blending nostalgia, bizarre scenarios and VHS tape visuals, it taps into my personal anxieties and childhood memories of fear. Including elements of analog horror will allow me to explore in depth feelings of isolation, helplessness, and uncertainty. Analog horror has helped me understand what I find scary and or unsettling, allowing me to create a psychological horror experience that represents what lingers in my mind.

Psychology

What is psychology?

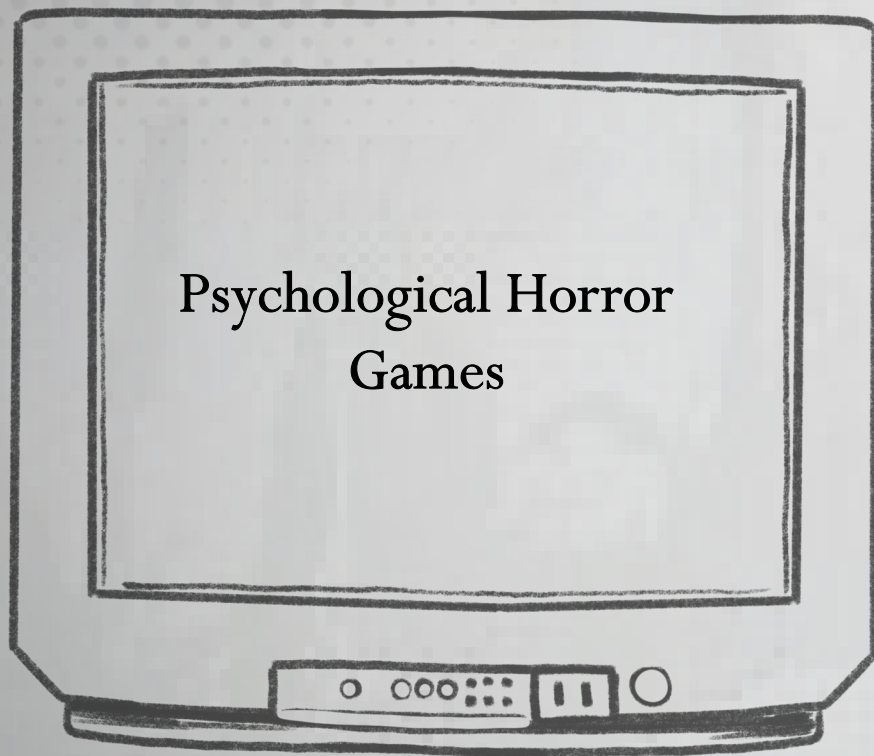
Psychology is the scientific study of how people think, act, and feel. It explores human mind and behaviour, and the factors that shape them, such as environment, personal experiences, and biology (What is Psychology?, 2025). Psychology applies this knowledge of memory and emotion to improve our wellbeing, relationships and mental health. This mirrors my focus on self-psychology, which examines who we are, emotionally and psychologically.



Psychological Horror

What is Psychological Horror?

Psychological horror is a subgenre of horror that combines elements of horror and psychological fiction, manipulating audiences through emotional and psychological states to frighten or unsettle them rather than relying on graphic imagery. The roots of the psychological genre can be traced to Gothic literature of the 18th and 19th centuries. Gothic horror writers such as Edgar Allen Poe (1809 –1849) and Henry James (1890 –1937) are viewed as extremely influential and “provided widely influential approaches to horror with strong psychological dimensions” (Stone, 2025, p. 221). The psychological horror genre plays on ideas such as “human emotions, muddled perceptions, and uncertainties about whether an experience is real or not” (Stone, 2025, p. 224). Using psychological fear, such as guilt, to create a disturbing atmosphere is similarly created in analog horror media. Some notable examples of psychological horror are films, *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960), *The Shining* (Kubrick, 1980), and *The House that Jack Built* (von Trier, 2018), which use themes of emotional isolation and trauma to generate fear and often involve characters who have “personality traits with certain disorders” (Samarudin & Muarifuddin, 2023, p.127). Psychological horror differs from traditional horror, as the genre aims to create unease and discomfort, as seen in analog horror media, where tension builds rather than constantly jump scaring the viewer. These films feature interesting stylistic elements, including manifestations of emotional fear, eerie music and sounds, and a sense of physical yet unpredictable threat.

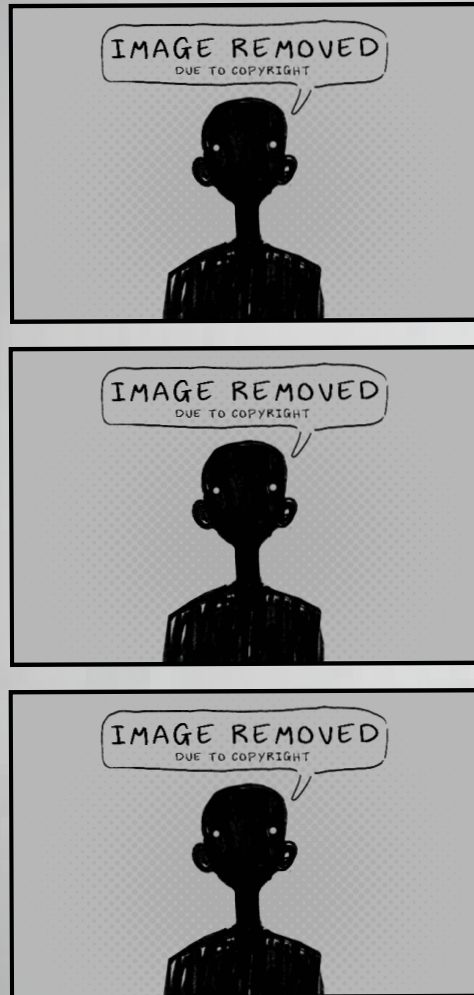


Psychological horror games use the same stylistic elements to generate fear within players. As Marak states, “Psychological horror games constitute a specific subgenre which places emphasis on the emotional and psychological states of the protagonists to achieve the effect of scaring the players” (Marak, 2021, p. 58). Earlier psychological horror games like the *Silent Hill* franchise (Konami, 1998–2025) and *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* (Frictional Games, 2010) feature survival-horror mechanics, putting the player in danger of dying as they face monsters. Whereas the latest games being published today have been described as “walking simulations” (Marak, p. 58), allowing players to collect, solve puzzles, and uncover the underlying narrative as they go. Marak sums these games up as “usually based on a fully linear or predominantly linear story revolving around a character [...] harbouring dark secrets, and confronting the symbolic manifestations of their past” (Marak, p. 58). Walking simulations allow the player to actively walk through and experience firsthand the horrors the character faces; I analysed over 10 different psychological horror games that differ in capturing this. I will be discussing two: *Silent Hill P.T* (Konami, 2014) and *No I’m Not a Human* (CRITICAL REFLEX, 2025).

Silent Hill P.T. (2014)

Figure 9

Screenshots from the game *Silent Hill P.T.* (Konami, 2014).



Note. Screenshots taken from the YouTube channel @Gamegrumps. Image 1 (Timestamp – 10:10); Image 2 (Timestamp – 2:19); Image 3 (Timestamp – 1:53).

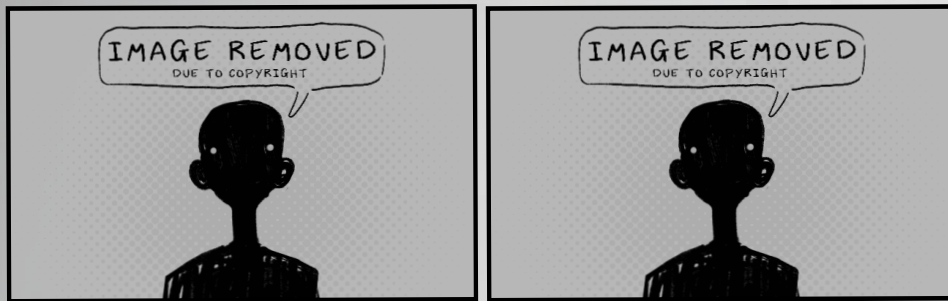
Silent Hill P.T. remains one of the most iconic horror games. As Kalinowski says, “*P.T.* has cemented itself not only as a full gaming experience, but also as a juggernaut in the genre of psychological horror” (2019, p. 1). The main task of *P.T.* is to walk through an L-shaped hallway, investigating and solving puzzles to unlock the door at the end. The player walks through the door, only to end up at the beginning of the hallway. As the player loops through the hallway, small changes occur, being followed by a woman, writing appearing on the walls, and a fetus crying in the bathroom. Kalinowski describes the never-ending hallway as a “deeply psychologically horrifying experience” (Kalinowski, p. 1). Players are left to doubt themselves and become less certain about what may happen next.

The repetitive nature of the hallway creates a perfect scenario for psychological horror to pull the player in (Kalinowski, 2019, p. 59). Kalinowski also says, “This apparent mundanity allows the player to become properly situated in a strange, new environment and to acknowledge one half of the uncanny threshold: familiarity” (Kalinowski, p. 62). While many psychological elements are incorporated within the narrative and game design to create a sense of uncanny horror, the hallway as the centre of attention and the repetitiveness leave it with a gut-wrenching feeling, making it hard to distinguish what’s fiction and what’s nonfiction. “Uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary” (Freud, 2003, p. 150). This blurring of fiction and reality is perfectly represented in *P.T.* and is something I will replicate in my game, as I want to achieve a similar level of psychological depth, especially its themes of the uncanny.

No, I'm Not a Human (2025)

Figure 10

Screenshots from No, I'm Not a Human (CRITICAL REFLEX, 2025)

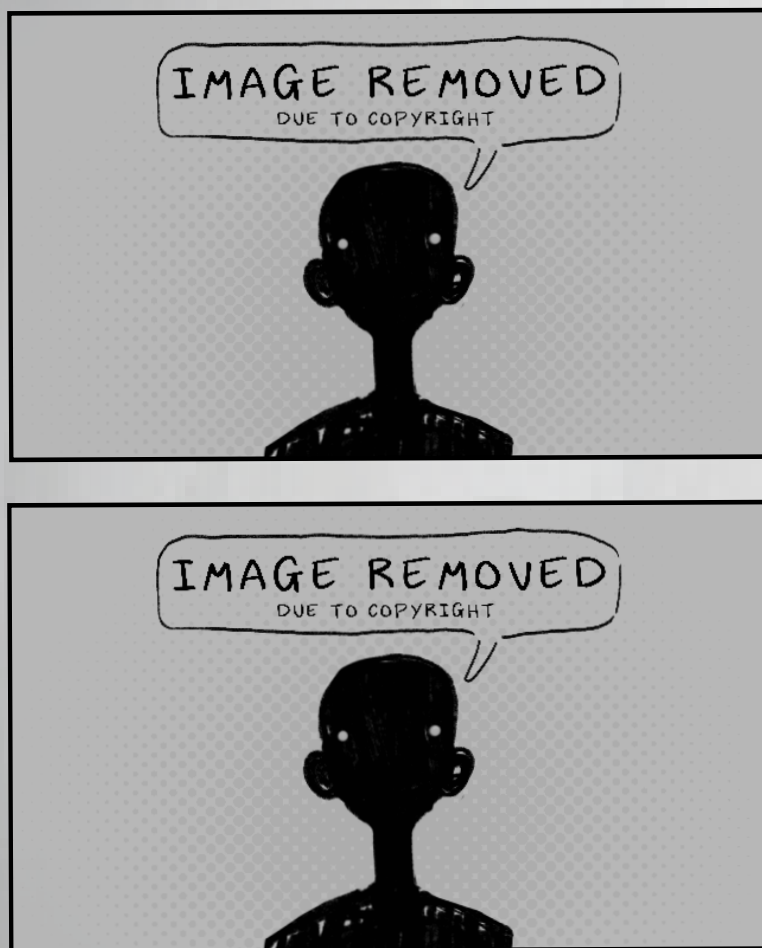


No, I'm Not a Human (CRITICAL REFLEX, 2025). Referred to further as *NINAH*, is a first-person psychological horror game. The player is trapped inside their home during a global disaster. The sun is getting increasingly hotter, forcing people to stay inside and/or seek shelter. At night, strangers arrive at the player's door begging for shelter. Among them, there are dangerous "visitors", creatures that mimic humans and will kill. These visitors are a threat and seem to be a new global disaster that even the government doesn't fully understand. The player must decide who to let in and test them for any suspicious behaviour. *NINAH* incorporates analog mechanics such as news broadcasts every morning and non-playable characters (NPCs) trying to contact the player via a radio. *NINAH* thrives off the fear of the unknown (FOTU). The earliest reference to FOTU came from Lovecraft in 1927: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (Cited from Carleton & Nicholas, 2016, p. 11).

One of the mechanics that evoked the most paranoia and fear is the testing of guests by checking if they have bloodshot eyes, perfect white teeth, or bugs in their ears. These details are revealed slowly to the player through government announcements each day. If guests have any of these characteristics, they may be visitors. This simple mechanic builds tension and makes players paranoid because of the lack of information they're given. The game subverts expectations by introducing a variety of characters, including the Stoner. When the player checks his eyes, they find them extremely bloodshot. This makes sense, as he'll have red eyes, but it could also be a clear indication that he is a visitor. Each day, a news report tells the player a new way to identify the visitors. It becomes extremely hard to catch them because there are so many possibilities and clues. *NINAH* thrives on this paranoid fear. Carleton and Nicholas mention "Consider a person who reports FOTU because it might lead to an aversive outcome feared because of [...] fear of death, or fear of pain" (Cited from Carleton & Nicholas, 2016, p. 12). Human nature is to be scared of what we don't understand; the unknown is immediately labelled as a threat. *NINAH* forces players to confront these threats.

The visual style of *NINAH* is extremely unsettling. The game feels like a Dutch angle (a camera shot with a noticeable tilt) often used to suggest that something is wrong or unsettling (Lannom, 2024). Its art style is disproportionate and wonky (see Figure 11). The 2.5D visual style makes this game unique and visually appealing. Pitko defines 2.5D games "as games designed with the intention of creating a 3D illusion by utilizing 2D assets through the use of design, gameplay, and user experience" (2022, p. 1). The 2.5D style creates what Fenech describes as "the classic nostalgia feeling of older video games" (2024, p. 11).

Figure 5
Screenshots from Marble Hornets Slender Man (Chess, 2014)



Note. Image 1: Entry #86 (Timestamp - 5:13); Image 2: Rosswood: Part 4 (Timestamp - 9:45).

Combined with a strict colour palette of dark greens and blue, and a photobashing art style, which is “a form of digital art that utilises photo editing [...] multiple images are bashed together and painted over” (Heikkinen, 2022, p. 20). Most evident in the game’s character design and 2D environments, photobashing creates a sense of the uncanny by layering and distorting real imagery and textures such as skin, clothing materials, and organic surfaces. Creating a hybrid art form of photography and hand-drawn elements, ultimately giving the final piece a familiar yet fabricated appeal. Uncanny, as Sigmund Freud used the word, is a perfect adjective to describe *NINAH*. Its unsettling familiarity becomes a central design theme, making *NINAH* not only visually appealing but also psychologically disturbing in both its aesthetic and game design. The colour palette creates a melancholy atmosphere. Jonauskaite and Mohr describe the association of “light colours with positive and dark colours with negative emotions” (2025, p. 1), particularly “BLUE [...] linked to sadness and GREEN to envy/jealousy” (2025, p. 16). As I move forward with my project, I will create a similar immersive, psychological experience to *NINAH*, exploring game design elements such as 2.5D level design, character design with a photobashing art style, and a strictly dark palette to evoke an unsettling emotional response in myself.

Self-Psychology

What is Self-Psychology?

I considered the concept of self-psychology (developed by Heinz Kohut), a psychoanalytic theory about how we become who we are, emotionally and psychologically and which differs from psychology, which is the broad science of mind and behaviour (Colman, 1999). Self-psychology emphasises the sense of self and its development through relationships. According to Rabstejnek, “Self-psychology is a positive psychology rather than a negative bio-psychological view of humanity” (2020, p. 3). Relationships, being seen and feeling connected, help create a sense of self; we learn about ourselves by seeing ourselves reflected in others, in the way that children mirror their caregivers or parents to understand who they are, develop a sense of self, and create a healthy self-image.

Self-psychology is used here to highlight the significance of the horror genre in my childhood. Self-psychology can be a way to explore and communicate my unique self, expressing how I perceive myself through creative endeavours, like designing a game. By “making the unconscious conscious” (Rabstejnek, 2020, p. 3), by bringing back my childhood memories and recent dreams and nightmares to understand them. By replicating those moments, they become subjective autobiographies. Some of these fears, of death and the unknown, will be themes I incorporate. Using self-psychology alongside game design techniques (such as analog horror design), I want to make a game to better understand myself, my fascination with horror, to help me feel better about myself and to face my fears.

In Ben Chinnery’s thesis, *Fear, trauma and found footage: How found footage horror can help us feel better*, he discusses how horror can offer therapeutic benefits during moments of anxiety. A way to engage with fear and scary situations without any real danger. “This approach argues that the effects of horror are fundamentally biological and cultural at the same time, and that horror provides an opportunity to vicariously experience and, as such, survive danger” (Chinnery, 2022, p. 2). Watching horror can make overwhelming feelings of fear easier to manage, turning horror into something helpful. Similar to exposure therapy, a therapeutic agent in the treatment of phobias and anxiety disorders (Neudeck & Wittchen, 2012, p. 7), facing fears will help gradually make those fears easier to understand and handle. As Abramowitz explains, “The aim of exposure is to facilitate extinction - reduction in the conditioned anxiety/fear response” (2013, p. 549).

Also known as Thanatophobia, the fear of death, “The extreme and often irrational thought or fear of death [...] Thanatophobia is also known by various other names, such as: [...] the fear of being buried, Dying phobia, [...] Fear of the unknown” (fearof.net, 2013). I can use self-psychology to understand and face my fears; in doing so, I would create both a game that will scare me and also act as a form of exposure therapy. An interesting challenge of mixing two disciplines: psychological horror and self-psychology, one seeking a positive outcome, and the other a negative. According to Carleton and Nicholas, “There is substantial evidence that changing interactions with unknowns has therapeutic value” (2016, p. 38). By engaging with psychological horror, self-psychology and my fears of death and the unknown, my game would become both scary and a tool to help me cope better with my fears.

How can analog horror and Self-Psychology be used to create a Horror Game, to scare myself?

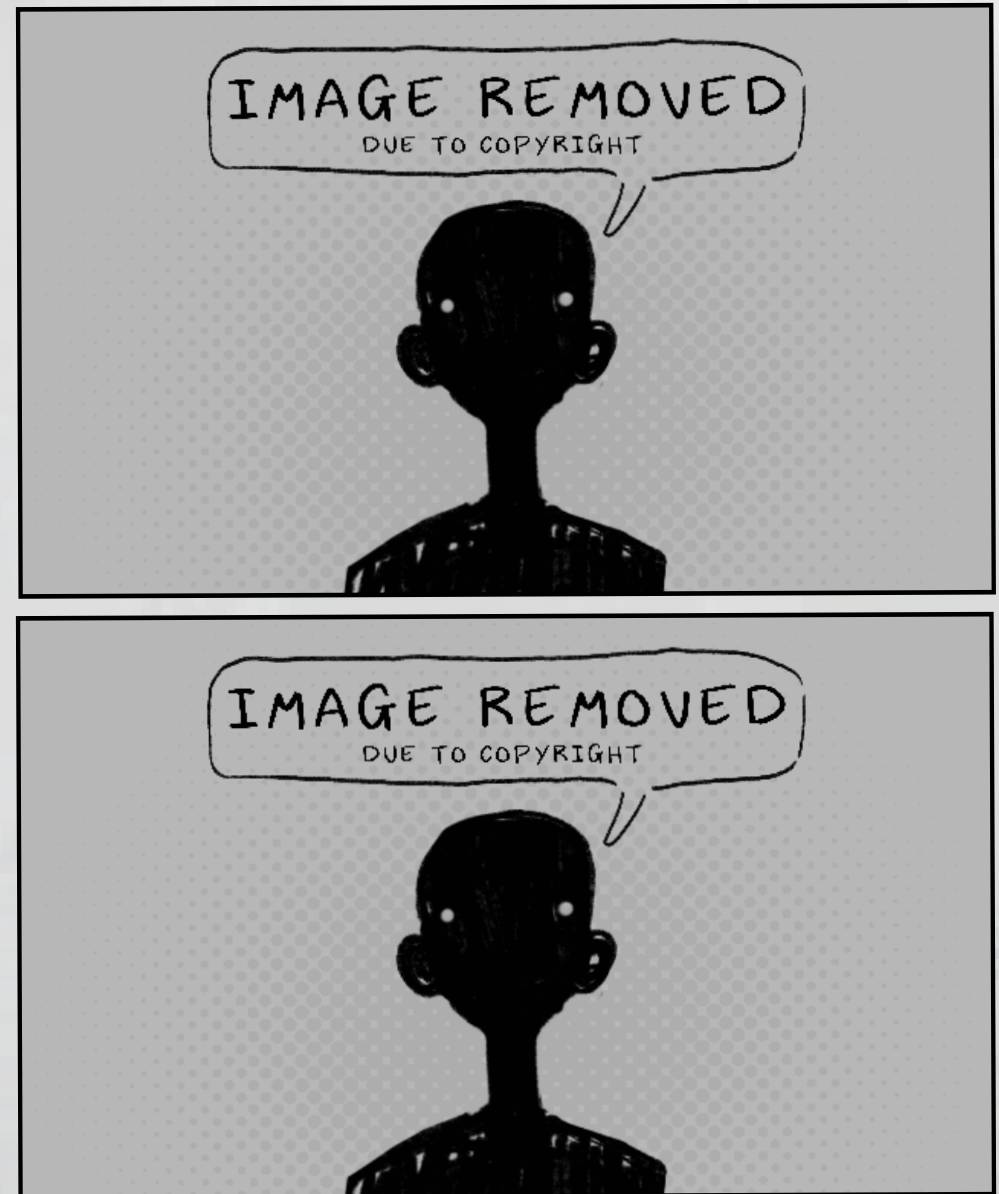
How am I going to combine Analog Horror and Self-Psychology?

Analog horror and psychological themes will be combined in my project to create a horror game that is both aesthetically unsettling and personally psychological. Analog horror provides the atmospheric framework for an immersive experience through retro VHS visuals, ambiguous, fragmented narratives, and nostalgic, uncanny environments. Psychology, specifically self-psychology and psychological horror, will focus on building anxiety by exposing my own vulnerabilities and fears, such as feelings of isolation and dread, rather than relying on jump scares.

I want to create a game that explores fear as a subjective experience shaped by memory and identity. After researching “Video games about the developer”, I couldn’t seem to find anything similar to what I’m trying to do. There was a large variety of similar games, but nothing exactly right. *The Stanley Parable* (Galactic Cafe, 2013) and *The Beginner’s Guide* (Everything Unlimited Ltd, 2015) foster a strong player/creator relationship, allowing players to interact with or get to know the developers a little better. *The Beginner’s Guide* is a game showcasing games created by a developer, Coda, with no real objectives or ways to win, described by the game’s Steam summary: “Instead, it tells the story of a person struggling to deal with something they do not understand” (Everything Unlimited Ltd, 2015).

Figure 12

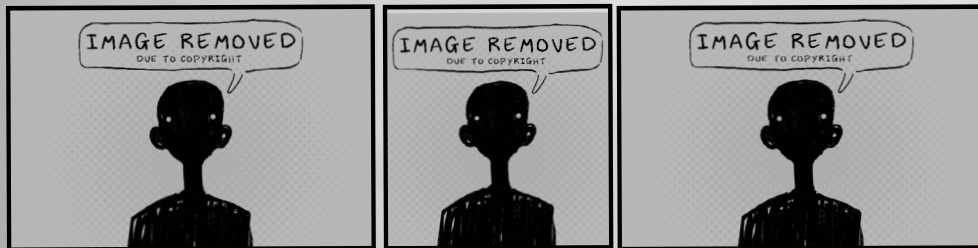
Screenshots from *The Stanley Parable* (Galactic Cafe, 2013), *The Beginner’s Guide* (Everything Unlimited Ltd, 2015)



Note: Image 1 (*The Stanley Parable*); Image 2 (*The Beginner’s Guide*).

Games like *That Dragon, Cancer* (Numinous Games, 2016), *Dys4ia* (Newgrounds, 2012), and *Neverending Nightmare* (Infinitap Games, 2014) use an autobiographical lens to focus on the self and represent hardships through gameplay. *That Dragon, Cancer* is an extremely sad game, based around the Greens' family, experiencing raising their son Joel, who has terminal cancer at twelve months old. Placing the player directly into the narrative allows them to experience it firsthand.

Figure 13
Screenshots from *That Dragon, Cancer* (Numinous Games, 2016), *Dys4ia* (Newgrounds, 2012), and *Neverending Nightmare* (Infinitap Games, 2014).

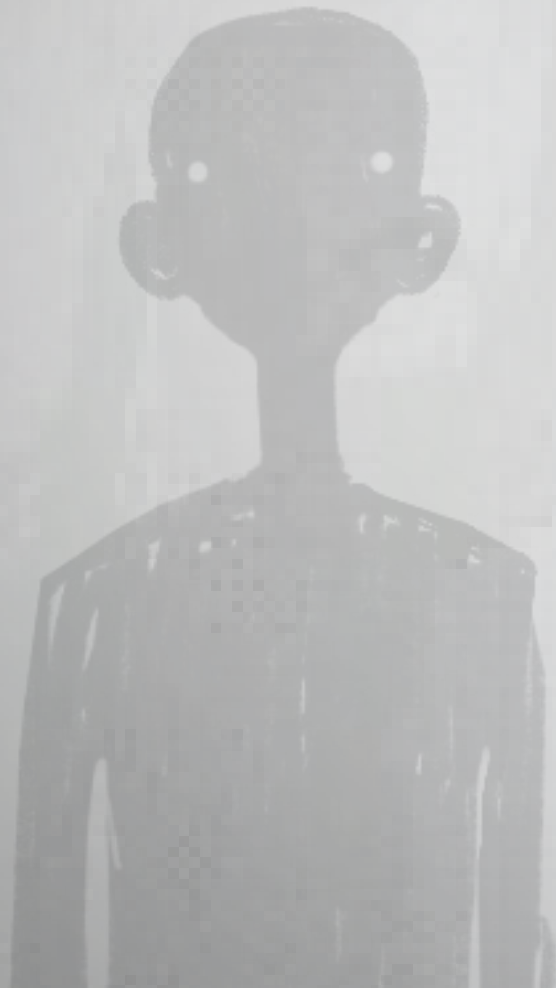


Note. Image 1 (*That Dragon, Cancer*); Image 2 (*Dys4ia*); Image 3 (*Neverending Nightmare*).

My research fills gaps in directly expressing my own ideas, fears, and manifestations, rather than taking inspiration from them. I want my game to be raw and honest, reflecting my mind, rather than it being an influence. This approach to game development builds a link between external jump scare horror and a deeper, more personal horror, aiming to understand. In practice, I will use analog horror design techniques such as VHS effects, distorted audio, liminal yet nostalgic settings and a fragmented story, allowing for interpretation and subjectivity. Alongside this, I will be using game design techniques, including aspects of character and level design, inspired by psychological horror games such as *NINAH* (CRITICAL REFLEX, 2025), and a dull and dark colour palette to create an uneasy atmosphere. Psychological horror elements will shape how tension in the game will build over time as I aim to create feelings of dread (rather than resort to cheap jump scares). Self-psychology will inform game mechanics that will reflect my sense of self, creating levels and scenes that are taken directly from my own dreams and fears, turning those fears into playable experiences.

Chapter 3

Methodology & Methods



I employed autoethnographic and iterative design methodologies, approaches which enabled me to deliver a result that demonstrates both my theoretical understanding and technical skills as a game designer. These methodologies were pivotal in exploring my research question:

“How can I integrate analog horror aesthetics and self-psychology within a psychological horror game reflecting personal fears and experiences to authentically scare myself?”

This project investigates how a psychological horror game, combined with analog horror aesthetics and self-psychology, can create a deeply personal experience, with the key aim of (authentically) scaring myself. Multiple methodologies have informed my research process. I began to consider a phenomenological approach, which would offer interesting and valuable insights; however, I have chosen to primarily focus on autoethnography and iterative design. My understanding and application of these methodologies are subjective and catered specifically to my project. As Gray and Malins discuss, “analysis is not about adhering to any one correct approach or set of right techniques; it is imaginative, artful, flexible and reflexive” (2013, p. 129).

Autoethnography Methodology

According to Gobo, ethnography is based on direct observation (2011, p. 1). Similarly, autoethnography, according to Ellis et al, is “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (2011, p. 273). In the context of autoethnography, it is a framework that uses the researcher’s personal experiences and reflections, making it especially suited for my subjective project. “Autoethnographers recognise the innumerable ways personal experience influences the research process”(Ellis et al, 2011, p. 274). In this research project, the researcher’s personal experience and reflections are used to gain an understanding of a broader topic. Instead of watching or interviewing others, the researcher looks at their own experiences and feelings to gain “data”, exploring how personal experiences connect to a wider social or cultural context. Autoethnography recognises the subjective nature of projects as a strength rather than a design flaw. Fallan and Lees-Maffei mention “The practices of design, our experiences of their outcomes, as well as the narratives we create about them, are all deeply personal—and therefore subjective” (2015, p. 5). Autoethnography uses the researcher’s own voice to drive the investigation, as both the creator and the subject. Cooper and Lilyea explain, “As you develop your autoethnography, it is key to keep in mind that the base unit of analysis is you, the author, and the researcher” (2022, p. 4). This methodology allows me to draw on my relationship with horror as a primary source of inspiration; an autoethnographic reflection on overexposure to horror media in my childhood, transforming these experiences into concepts for developing a game.

Autoethnographic Methods

Autoethnography as a methodology employs reflection and self-journaling, appropriate for my project because my aim is personal: exploring horror aesthetics to create a game that genuinely scares me. Autoethnography methods helped me pinpoint and understand the fears I carry, develop ideas and concepts, leading to design outcomes that felt real to me.

Reflecting on Personal Artefacts and Self

Autoethnographic methods involve examining personal artefacts, such as photos, media, drawings, as data to collect personal experiences and to explore broader identity and cultural themes (White & Beaudry, 2009). Researchers use this method to examine and uncover personal items and how they shape self-identity. However, personal items are often overlooked, and their unique individual meanings are lost or forgotten (White & Beaudry, 2009). I have neglected my personal artefacts, such as old drawings and the media I consumed as a child. According to White and Beaudry, “interest in these artefacts has begun to shift from limited interpretation to more interpretive contextual approaches” (2009, p. 209).

Furthermore, this process offers therapeutic value, perhaps even helpful in overcoming fears through creative expression. The difference between fear and anxiety is important to this project. Posing the question “Are fear and anxiety truly distinct?”, Daniel-Watanabe and Fletcher mention, “The difference is that fear is related to the presence, or imminent presence, of the aversive stimulus, while anxiety is considered the more protracted state produced by a sustained expectation that the aversive event is likely to occur” (2021, p. 1). Fear is the feeling of danger, and anxiety is the ongoing worry that something might happen. For the context of my project, my fear of death is of the inevitable, and my fear of the unknown is an anxiety.

Self-journaling

In my practice, self-journaling served as a valuable source of evidence and examples that could be useful for the development and documentation of the research project (Gray & Malins, 2013). According to Grey and Malins, “‘Reflective journaling’ can provide a purposeful process and framework for contributing to these developments” (2013, p. 59). Self-journaling provided an effective way to explore what was and was not working, make adjustments, and visualise goals through continuous reflection; to “see where you’ve been, know where you are and, most importantly, imagine where you want to be” (Grey & Malins, 2013, p. 64). This method can influence the next step in my design journey. Having established this reflective foundation through autoethnography, this project now turns to an iterative design methodology. I will later explore how autoethnography and iterative design work together, with personal reflections refining each design iteration.

Iterative Design Methodology

Figure 14

Iterative design tornado (Parkin, 2025)



Note. The more the concept rotates through ideation, prototyping, playtesting, and evaluation, the stronger it becomes until it reaches the end of development, when it's at its strongest and most effective.

Iterative design is a key methodology in game development that involves repeating cycles of ideation, prototyping and playtesting to refine an idea until the creation meets the designer's goals. As Wong and Park describe, "Iterative design is a design methodology based on a cyclical process of idea generation, evaluation, and design improvement until the design requirement is met" (2010, p. 1).

Zook notes that iterative game design is considered the best practice among game designers (2016) due to the many aspects that must be considered in game development: art production, writing, sound design, and level design (Macklin & Sharp, 2016). A difficult task – all these elements must work well together. Poor sound design can ruin the immersion and atmosphere, and poor level design can ruin the playability of the game. Instant tweaking is necessary; This way of making, particularly in my solo project, ensures continuous creative experimentation and development.

Iterative Design Methods

Iterative design methodology provides designers with significant flexibility. As Sayre suggests, you can't exactly plan what ideas will arise over the course of your research project; through engaging in it, you will learn new things (2023). Both autoethnography and iterative design emphasise flexibility and qualitative research, embracing reflection and collection of memories and fears to gain new insights and ideas. Sayre notes that in iterative design, ideas naturally emerge, resisting rigid planning. In autoethnography, these ideas manifest in the analysis of personal artefacts and memories, in my case, allowing me to continue through an interactive cycle, while also refining the idea and concept of the game and uncovering personal things. This approach helped me stay flexible and be more critical with my feedback, leading to honest design improvements that felt genuine to me. Utilising these methods played a critical role in achieving an effective game design. By embodying roles and making distinct choices, players experience consequences directly, an interactive quality which gives games a unique power of immersion. As Zubek mentions, "A familiar transformation happens when we allow ourselves to get immersed in a game: for a moment we leave ourselves and become someone else [...]. We embody that role, experience what it is like to act as them, to function in their world" (2020, p. 1). As a result, the goal for game designers like myself is to craft an immersive world where action and players' experiences combine to create meaning.

Ideation

The iterative design cycle begins with ideation, where the core ideas and concepts are brainstormed and conceptualised. “The ideation process has been described as co-evolutionary, with designers iteratively exploring multiple knowledge spaces [...] and creating bridges between them” (Gonçalves & Cash, 2021, p. 2). Ideation is not about coming up with ideas randomly, but intentionally and with a purpose. In my project, I developed concepts that focused on exploring different sources of inspiration and used ideation to pinpoint ideas that aligned with my main goal: identifying my worst fears. I started using elements from my dreams as a creative direction, first as quick sketches and later as 3D models. Ideation allows me to experiment with different ways to present my personal fears and experiences before committing. Creating smaller game ideas allows flexibility as ideas change.

Prototyping

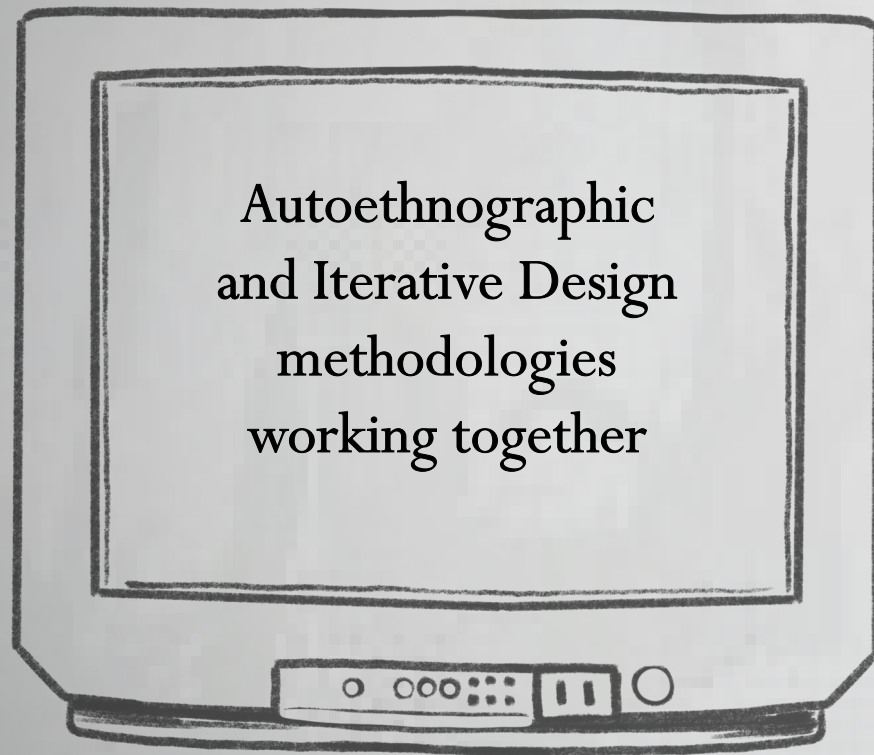
The next method in the iterative design cycle is prototyping, an early version that helps gather feedback and ultimately create better designs (Coutts et al, 2019). Creating prototypes within the Unity engine helps translate ideas into visual and/or playable forms; an extremely helpful method for evaluating and improving designs. Lauff et al. note that prototypes serve to improve communication, learning, and decision-making (2018). Prototyping allowed me to bring my ideas to life and make them playable, albeit in the beginning stages of game development, with simple grey-boxed levels. Interacting with these early concepts helped identify gaps in my project and my strengths and weaknesses, providing an effective means to pinpoint the direction it was heading.

Self-Playtesting

The next method in the cycle is playtesting, according to Mirza-Babaei et al. “Playtesting aims to assist developers to achieve their design intent and help to identify and resolve potential problem areas during development” (2016, p. 1). I used playtesting by playing my own game, which was specifically designed for me, so no playtesters were needed. Having worked on the game for a long time, I didn’t immediately playtest or take notes on my own feedback, but I gave myself a break and played my game with a fresh perspective. As Candy mentions, “This kind of reflection takes place in response to a specific action in fleeting pauses, sometimes in short breaks [...] These moments make space for reflection on the detail of a work in progress and involve working with the ‘material’ of the situation, whether it is paint, musical notes or computer code” (2019, p. 55). It was an effective way to notice and acknowledge my flaws in the work and find areas for improvement, whether in the gameplay or the design. By observing aspects such as gameplay, visuals and narrative, I utilised a series of questions inspired by Gray and Malins (2004).

- How well did you do?
- How valuable was it?
- What did/didn’t you learn?
- How did you feel about it?
- Why did you make a certain decision?
- What was the most difficult thing?
- What would you have done differently?

These questions guided my game analysis and helped me fully understand my true thoughts and feelings towards my prototype.



In this project, autoethnography was used to analyse my fears and memories. Forming the foundation of my game design process, iterative design was used to turn those topics and memories into game mechanics, prototypes, and concept sketches, to explore how fear could be systemised and made interactive. The process wasn't purely about expressing fears, but also about testing them. Each iteration of my game used mechanics, pacing, and specific atmosphere to portray feelings or memories in playable form. Together, these methodologies created a cycle where personal reflection informed game design choices and adjustments. This collaboration supports the deeply personal and reflective process of my project, where playtesting provided new insights into my own interactions, uncovering desensitizations I wasn't aware of. As a result, each new prototype became a psychological mirror and design experiment, testing and understanding how effective my interpretations were in scaring myself.

Chapter 4

Critical Reflections:

Designing Fear

My final artefact, Safety Coffin, was produced as an experimental psychological horror game designed specifically to frighten myself. The game employs a mixed-media visual style that combines 2D, 3D and real-life photography and film, all heavily informed by analog horror aesthetics. All visual content in Safety Coffin is drawn directly from my own experiences, such as vivid nightmares, sections of my home and bedroom and personal legend-tripping excursions. This approach made Safety Coffin feel familiar and personally authentic while simultaneously twisting that familiarity into something uncanny and disturbing. A monochrome colour palette combined with eerie music and sound effects further emphasised a creepy and melancholic atmosphere. My critical reflection shows the process and decisions on how I created my final artefact, Safety Coffin. The game starts with the player waking in a 2D version of my bedroom. The player can explore my room before exiting through a door out into a forest. They follow a distant bell coming from within a locked graveyard. Players need to find a red key and open the gate. Inside, players discover the bell is coming from a tombstone. After interacting with it, players wake inside a coffin and repeatedly pull a red string until the game returns to the tile screen. My game is developed in this section of my thesis, which is structured into three parts.

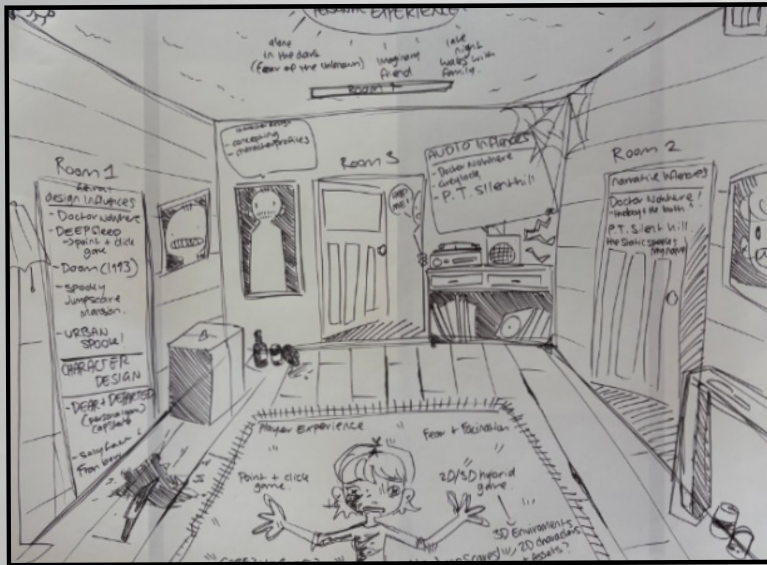
Each addresses a different layer of my research question. In the first section, I address the question directly: What can I experiment with to make an analog horror game? I focus on the practical side of making. This section is about making and testing what I can experiment with in terms of aesthetics, design techniques, mechanics, and sound that feel suited to analog horror, ultimately creating a game that scares me. In the second section, I found that I needed to consider an alternate interpretation: How can I influence ideas of fear and self-psychology to develop a psychological horror game? I look into self-psychology and how my experiences, fears and dreams can be used against me to create a personal, psychological horror experience. These steps aim to answer my question: Can a game scare its creator? From here, I look at what I've created to see whether my goal of scaring myself has been successful.

Part 1: The Initial Haunting

“What can I experiment with to make an analog horror game?”

Figure 15

Image of my conceptual mapping (Parkin, 2025)



This section explores my initial concepts and designs, developed through small-scale game design prototypes. My first idea was to create a simple 2D point-and-click game. That plan ultimately led me to many different experiments of photobashing, distortion, and image practices all inspired by low-poly and analog horror aesthetics seen in games such as *Iron Lung* (David Szymanski, 2022), *Silent Hill 2* (Bloober Team SA, 2001) and independent analog horror media like *The Boy and the Bath* (Doctor Nowhere, 2024), referred to further as *TBATB*. These influences and experiments served as the foundation for my contextual mapping, enabling me to define the tone and visual direction for an analog horror prototype.

Image Experimentations

Figure 16

Screenshot from *The Boy and the Bath* (Doctor Nowhere, 2024)



Note. Image 1 (Timestamp – 0:53).

Starting with experiments in simple 2D imagery, I drew on *TBATB*, a short film by Doctor Nowhere (2024), which is both simplistic and incredibly detailed. This is done through hand-drawn 2D animation and illustrations featuring flat silhouettes and simple, minimalist shapes, with tiny details like dripping water and subtle shading. My goal was to replicate the balance of minimalism and complexity in a way that feels slightly uncanny, translating the same essence shown in Doctor Nowhere’s short film into my own work to create interesting analog horror game concepts.

Figure 17
Images of my game flow planning (Parkin, 2025)

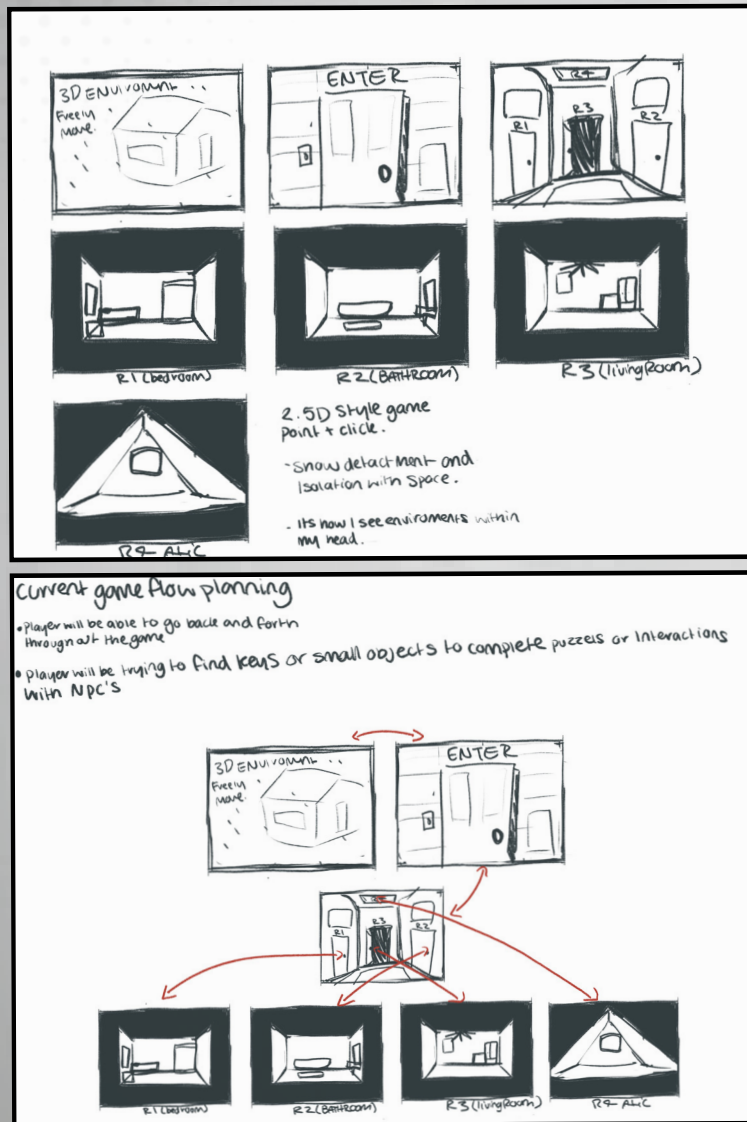
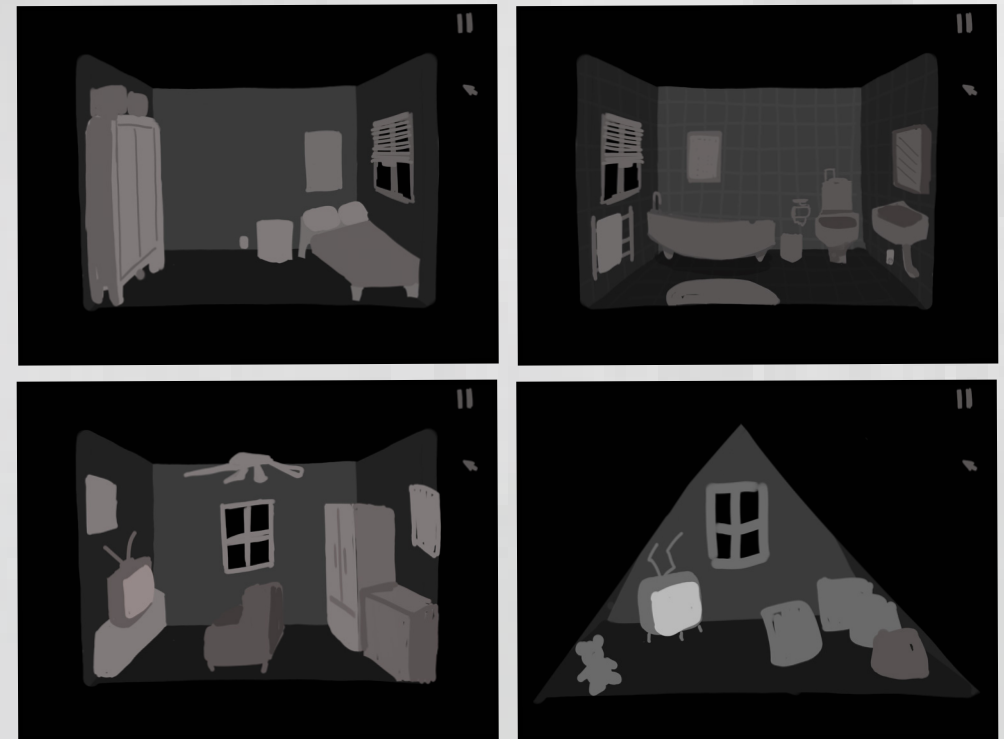
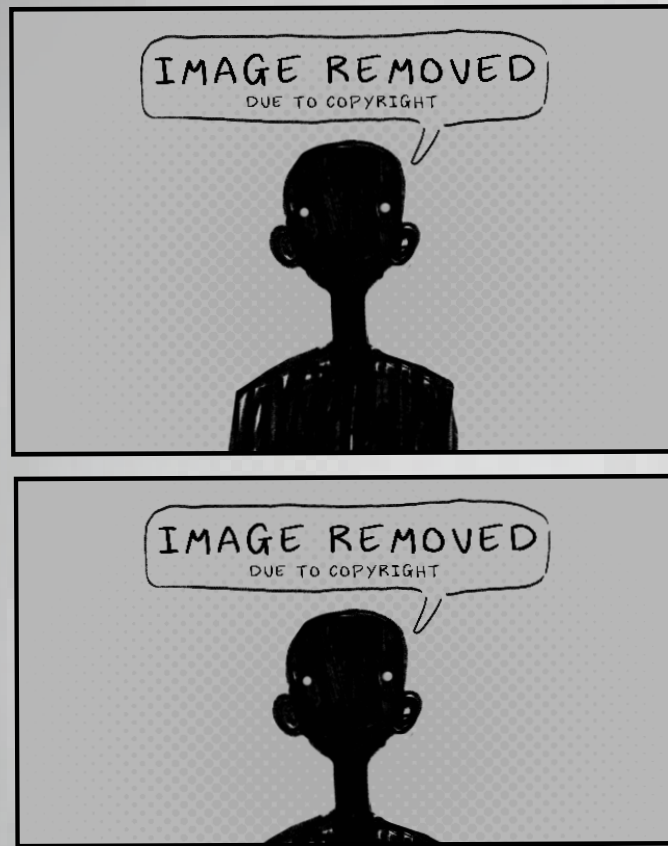


Figure 18
Point and click concept illustrations (Parkin, 2025)



To achieve this, I sketched out various scenes and concepts, and iteratively refined them, focusing on how to convey analog horror charm within a minimal 2D environment. One key decision was to set each scene against a black void. This framing directs the viewer's attention to the central image, making the environment feel isolated. This design choice was effective in evoking an eerie, unsettling, closed-off space, as if the scene were hidden from the outside world. It proposes a way for analog horror games to use tightly framed or minimal scenes to make the player feel trapped or small. Since this game is designed for me, showing game scenes in implied isolation or with a smaller-framed environment proved a helpful way to build an unsettling atmosphere, which resulted in being extremely effective for me.

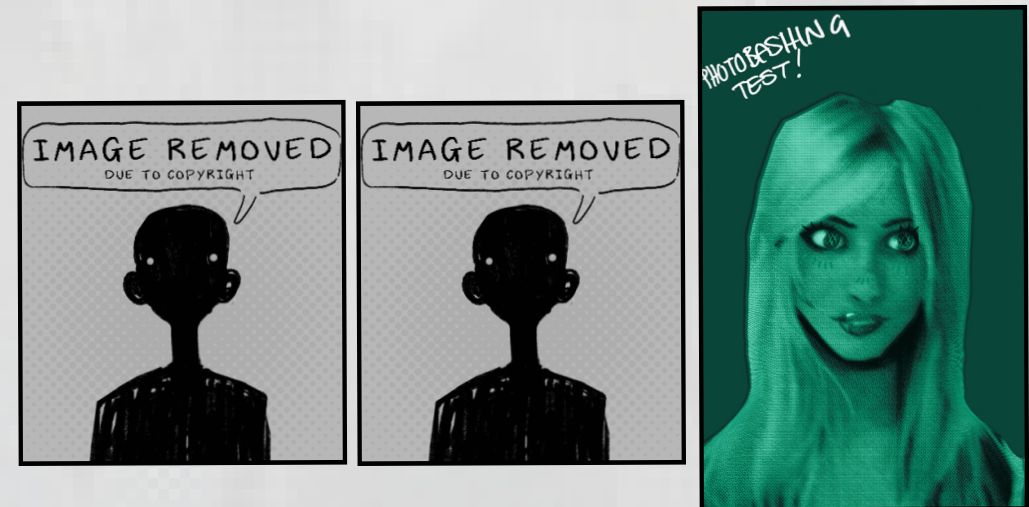
Figure 19
Screenshot from *Home Invasion* (Darkos, 2022), *Incident D1991* (Gorky Cat Studios, 2024)



Although my concept art successfully replicated the balance of minimalism and complexity in a way that feels slightly uncanny, unfortunately, this experiment didn't achieve the result I wanted. It didn't look or feel like an analog horror game to me, possibly because of the lack of realistic elements, as seen in games such as *Home Invasion* (Darkos, 2022) and *Incident D1991* (Gorky Cat Studios, 2024). I do believe this experiment was extremely valuable in shaping my next steps.

Photobashing Experiments

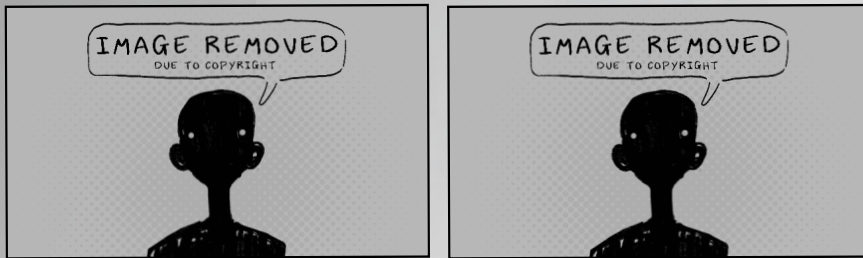
Figure 20
Image of my first photobashing prototype (Parkin, 2026)



Note. The two images on the left were found on Pinterest; I used them to create the image on the right.

I incorporated the artistic method of photobashing to create a hyperreal yet uncanny character. This method is seen as most effective in *NINAH* (CRITICAL REFLEX, 2025). By blending photographic elements with impossible distortions, making them feel life-like yet wrong at the same time. My first experiment wasn't successful; I couldn't grasp a raw, ugly aesthetic from my initial exploration. I decided to push my design further, making it more exaggerated.

Figure 21
Screenshots from No, I'm Not a Human (CRITICAL REFLEX, 2025)



Comparing my first concept to the art in *NINAH*, there are key aspects about their character design that make them unique. Each design features an exaggerated body part or an unusual facial structure, giving it an uncanny quality. Looking back at my research on this game, the hybrid art form of real imagery and hand-drawn elements ultimately creates a familiar yet fabricated appeal to the final piece. In my next attempt, I sourced more images online, including hair, poses, hands, and facial expressions. I focused more on exaggeration than on making the characters pretty.

Figure 22
Images of my photobashing prototype (Parkin, 2026)

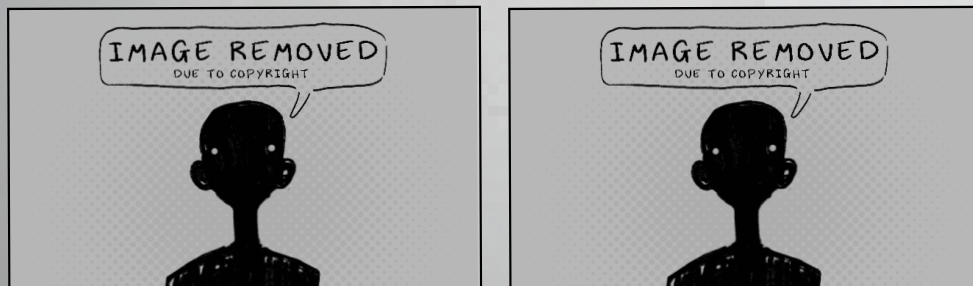


Figure 23
Screenshots of my NPC designs in Safety Coffin (Parkin, 2025)



This outcome fell short of my expectations. In an iterative design approach, the workflow was too slow to iterate quickly and efficiently on NPC designs. The experiment was visually striking, but lacked the dread I was aiming for. Even though I didn't like the outcome, it was a valuable experiment, and interesting to notice how real-life imagery with hand-drawn qualities can produce a compelling, almost real, almost wrong quality, important to analog horror. This experimentation links directly to my guiding question. Photobashing has strengths in evoking uncanniness and show how simplicity and suggestive design can be scarier than highly detailed ones. Photobashing was a fantastic experiment in my game development, but it did not suit the design or overall goal of scaring myself. As a result, I reverted to a simpler NPC design and became interested in the idea of childlike drawings of creatures, trying to recapture the drawings I had made as a child, drawings which represent what's inside my head that no one else can see: I'm limited by my artistic ability, asking the question, what on earth does the actual thing look like?

Photo Distortion Experimentation

To create an analog horror game, I decided to look at analog horror series on YouTube 4. Each of the videos shared some form of distortion, whether in video, imagery, or audio. Distortion is the act of altering something out of its true, natural or original state (merriam-webster.com, 2026). In the context of my project, distortion is used to promote the found-footage or redacted/classified media feel, evoking the top-secret aesthetic of leaked documents or tapes that make the content feel forbidden. Linking back to my contextual review on analog horror, “this genre consists of footage compiled together and edited to look like analog media such as VHS and FM Radio” (Long, 2023, p.19). I began to experiment with different types of media distortion. My first thought was to create a glitchy/static effect across all my media, as seen in the analog horror series.

I photographed my bedroom and other areas of my home and uploaded the images to a website to convert them to a lower resolution. This became a core scene of my horror game to spark fear in me. Twisting this space would be an extremely uncomfortable experience because it’s a place that I love and am comfortable in; the last thing I want is to ruin that sense of security. *Skinamarink* (Ball, 2022), created in the director’s childhood home, was an inspiration. An experience becomes more terrifying when it’s tailored and personalised. To elevate the sense of strangeness in a space once familiar, I photographed my home using low and Dutch angles. Low angles make characters in a scene appear larger, suggesting they’re strong or important. In the context of my game, the found-footage aesthetic I am aiming for makes me, the player, feel small and weak. The distortion and deliberate destruction of resolution further heightened my unease about a space meant to be safe.

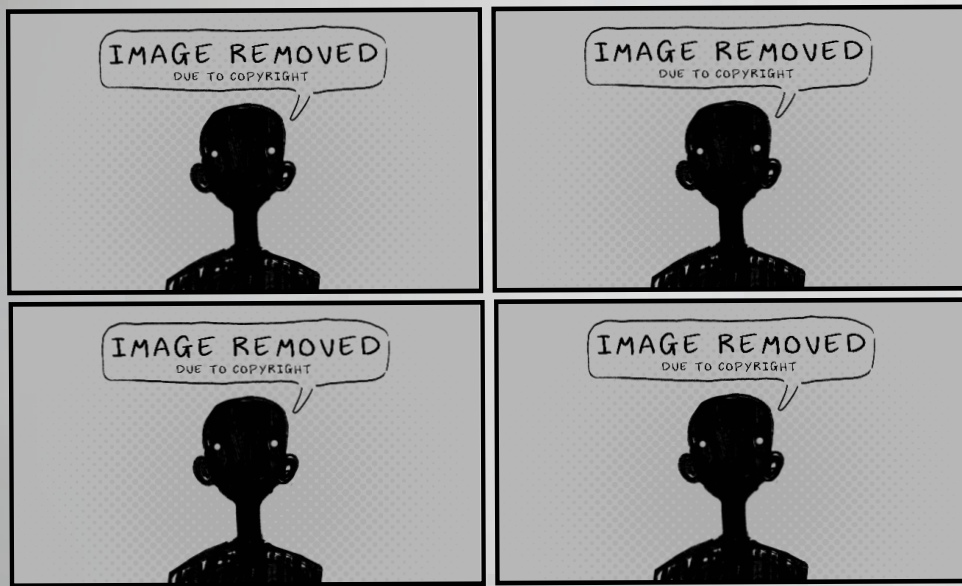
Figure 24

Images of my Bedroom and Home in Safety Coffin (Parkin, 2025)



Colour Study Experimentation

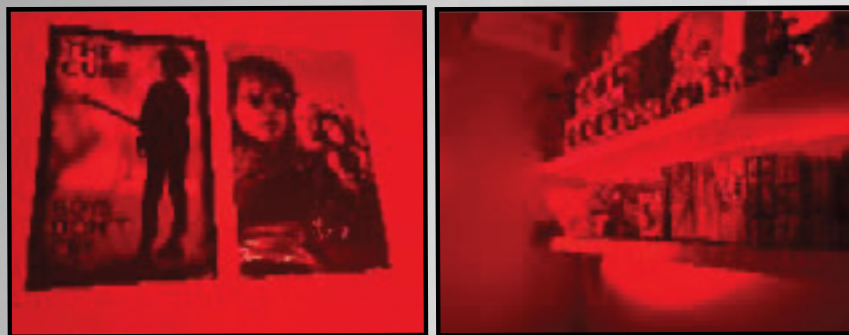
Figure 25
Screenshots from GreyLock (@Greylock, 2023)



Note. Image 1: TAPE 002, (Timestamp – 1:31); Image 2: TAPE 004, (Timestamp – 5:22); Image 3: TAPE 006 (Timestamp – 9:06); Image 4: TAPE 012 (Timestamp – 32:31).

Colours are extremely important to my project; they help create atmosphere and convey emotion. As I mentioned in my contextual review, “light colours with positive and dark colours with negative emotions” (Jonauskaitė & Mohr, 2025, p. 1). I stepped back and analysed *Greylock*’s (@Greylock, 2023) strategic use of the colour red, used to grab attention and draw focus to specific elements, such as blood, alert warnings, and emergency broadcasts, to emphasise danger (without explanation). As McDonnell et al. mention, “Red [is] often associated with danger, hazards and mistakes” (2025, p. 2). This prompted me to ask myself: what does the colour red mean for my game? During gameplay, I am confronted with heavily distorted, bright-red images of my bedroom and parts of my house. A space where I should feel comfortable and safe now feels alienating and wrong. Within my making process, I took the same distorted images and applied a bright red palette. This succeeded in creating an ambiguous, panicky feeling in my images, showing how colour experiments mess with expectations. Applying a danger/anger-associated colour to images of my room makes the overall experience feel wrong, but personalised. Similarly, in analog horror, little intervention is needed to create a scary scene; distorted imagery, colour design, and effective sound design can create a truly terrifying atmosphere.

Figure 26
Screenshots from Safety Coffin prototype, Distortion imagery (Parkin, 2025)



The YouTube series *Local 58* (@Local58, 2018) also offers a variety of colour palettes. The episode that stood out to me the most was *LOCAL58TV - Show For Children*. The black, grey, and white colour palette gave the whole episode a very eerie, unsettling feel, especially paired with occasionally disturbing imagery. This video informed my adaptation of a similar monochromatic scheme for the secondary parts of my game prototype. Looking back at Jonauskaite and Mohr's *Do We Feel Colours?* It was clear that grey and black were associated with negative emotions; grey is linked to fear, disappointment, regret, tiredness, and boredom, black to feelings of fear, evil, hate, and anger (2025, p. 16). This was all taken into consideration when developing the colour palettes of my game.

During the making process, I applied a black-to-white colour palette to NPCs, illustrations, and 3D environments; the monochromatic range created a heightened, eerie, isolating feel in the designs, contrasting with the bright pop-ups of distorted imagery. The extreme contrast of palette delivers an intended jarring effect, mirroring the qualities of analog horror (Greylock, 2023; Local 58, 2017), where colour is used to unsettle and/or convey a message.

Figure 27
Screenshots from Local58 “Show For Children” (@Local58, 2018)

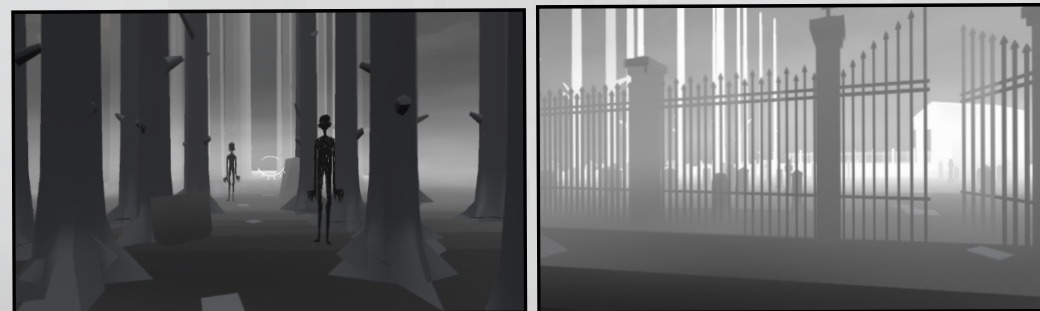


Note. Image 1 (Timestamp – 0:40); Image 2 (Timestamp – 1:03); Image 3 (Timestamp – 2:56).

Figure 28
Screenshots from Safety Coffin prototype, 2D level and Coffin (Parkin, 2026)



Figure 29
Screenshots from Safety Coffin prototype, 3D level (Parkin, 2025)



Sound Design Experimentation

Figure 30

Screenshot from GreyLockTAPE 008 (@GreyLock, 2023)



Note. (Timestamp –16:58)

Figure 31

Screenshot from Audio Experiment Video (Parkin, 2025)



Note: (Timestamp - 0:10); Link – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5Kk3iYM-LF0>

When considering sound design, I was most haunted by *Greylock's* (@Greylock, 2023) overwhelming soundtrack. One scene in particular, purely utilising foley: the heavy, ear-piercing static, along with all the mimicked sounds from a creature just outside the primary character's closet, and the subtly panicked breaths from the man behind the camera, is extremely unsettling. Because the visuals in the scene are minimal, we, as viewers, are forced to rely on audio cues to understand what is happening. My goal for sound design is to create an overwhelming experience in select sections of the game, while building quiet, dread-inducing tension elsewhere.

For my first experiment, I created a living room scene to test how I would approach sound design. I collected different copyright-free audio files from Pixabay; audios such as breathing, loud static, radio sound, crickets and footsteps. I layered all the audio within my Unity scene and played it simultaneously. The minimalist visuals and the fixed perspective of watching a TV forced me to focus on audio cues for clues about what was happening, making this experimentation genuinely terrifying to me.

The last experiment was based on a 3D environment. This provides a different atmosphere from 2D, as the player can walk through it and experience the sounds at different times. Clashing audio of static, loud radio audio and breathing related to distorted 2D imagery pop-ups create overwhelming moments. While quietly breathing, crickets and distant footsteps built a sense of ambient dread in the game's quieter moments. This final experiment was very successful, using audio to amplify the analog horror atmosphere and make the distorted imagery pop-ups hit harder. Creating sound design with an analog horror influence helped me achieve my goal of developing immersive sound design. I experimented with layering audio, turning simple analog horror visuals into a more overwhelming experience. Digitally designed environments make no noise naturally, as Munday states, "hence the importance of music and sound effects is to give them meaning" (2007, p. 2).

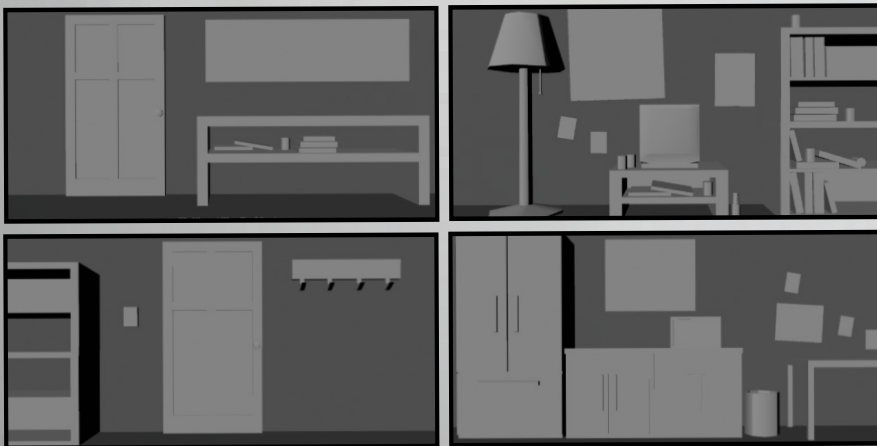
3D Experimentations

As my initial idea was to create a simple 2D point-and-click game with elements of analog horror, and my first experimentation with 2D hand-drawn imagery didn't turn out as I'd hoped, taking inspiration from *Home Invasion* (Darkos, 2022), I decided to create a 3D point-and-click game. The combination of elements (3D mixed with 2D elements) gives the game a visually unique and striking aesthetic, which I wanted to achieve in my own game prototype. Linking back to the self-psychological idea of making my bedroom and areas of my home a core theme of my game, I created 3D models of them from a front-on perspective.

Figure 32
Point and click concept illustrations (Parkin, 2025)



Figure 33
Screenshots from my game point and click prototype (Parkin, 2025)

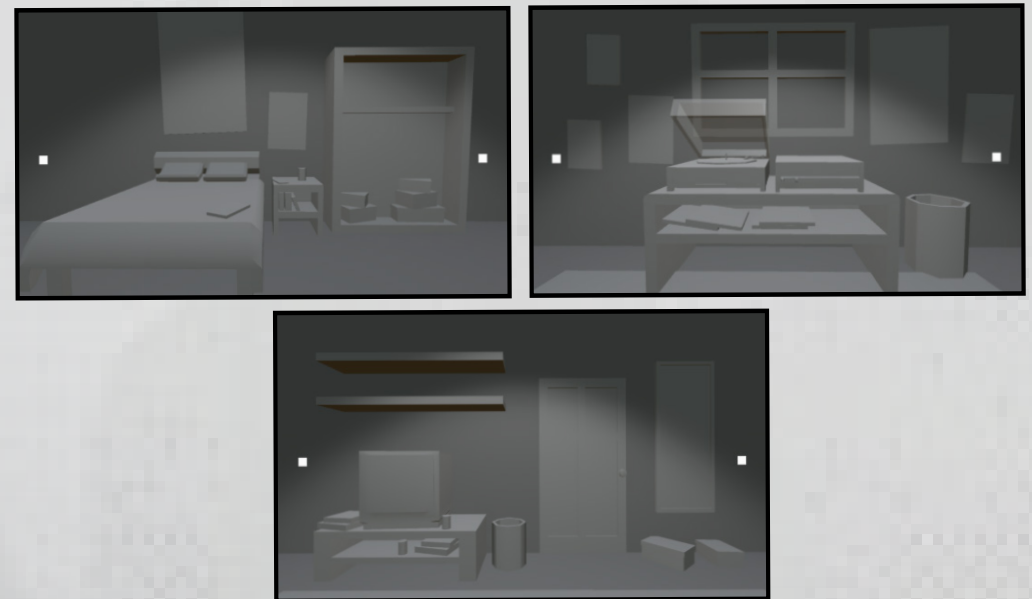


In my first experiment with 3D environments, I created key locations in my home as I wanted them to look. Using Maya, I 3D modelled scenes, including the front door, living room, kitchen, and the door to my bedroom. This experiment wasn't a success; there were too many scenes, they didn't feel personal enough, and I didn't connect with them as much as I'd have liked. I decided to delve deeper into my own personal space, my bedroom.

Figure 34
Point and click concept illustrations (Parkin, 2025)



Figure 35
Screenshots from my game point and click prototype (Parkin, 2025)



I 3D modelled three key locations of my own interpretation of my bedroom, including similar aspects but not exact replicas, and exported the 3D models into Unity to create a prototype of my game environment. This experimentation was also unsuccessful; as before, I didn't connect with these 3D scenes. I didn't recognise this place as my bedroom, most likely because it wasn't an exact replica. I decided it needed to be exact to evoke that uncanny feeling (of familiarity). I wanted to retain the self-psychological concept of my room as a core concept of my game. I photographed my entire bedroom and used it as a reference for drawing, which helped me connect with it, not an interpretation of what I wanted my room to look like, but my actual room. These experiments were valuable in showing that interpretive design can reduce personal horror, while direct reference can increase it, confirming that direct references outperform interpretations of real-life locations in creating an authentic self-psychological horror experience through analog horror aesthetics.

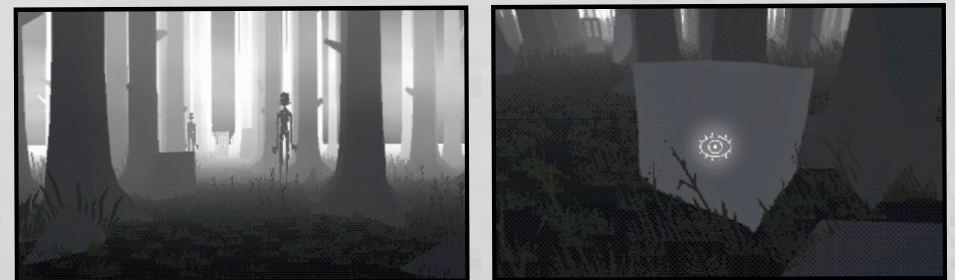
Figure 36
Images of the Safety Coffin concept level (Parkin, 2025)



At this point, I had decided that my prototype wouldn't be just a point-and-click game. There will be point-and-click elements, but include an experience that players can walk through. Here, I created concept art as to what the 3D environment would look like. Taking heavy inspiration from video game styles, such as the low-poly aesthetic of *Iron Lung* (Szymanski, 2022), and similar to that seen in games like *Silent Hill 2* (Konami, 2001). Not only is this a stylistic choice, but it also gives the game a more dated look and feel, as if it were actually created in the early 2000s.

Additionally, I added NPCs and fog, drawing heavily on *Silent Hill* games (Konami, 1999—2015) and their use of fog to evoke an eerie atmosphere. This experimentation was successful in creating an environment that I find daunting, through the lack of light and shadows. Linking back to my Image distortion experimentation, I applied a similar amount of distortion to my 3D level prototype by applying the shader pack from the Unity Store to all my 3D models. By lowering Unity's aspect ratio from 16:9 to 420x240, I reduced the game's display quality, which is exactly what I wanted, as it makes this section of my game look more stylistic and match the theme of my 2D section with my 3D sections. Doing this also utilises the analog horror aesthetics I've been aiming for.

Figure 37
Screenshots from Safety Coffin prototype (Parkin, 2026)



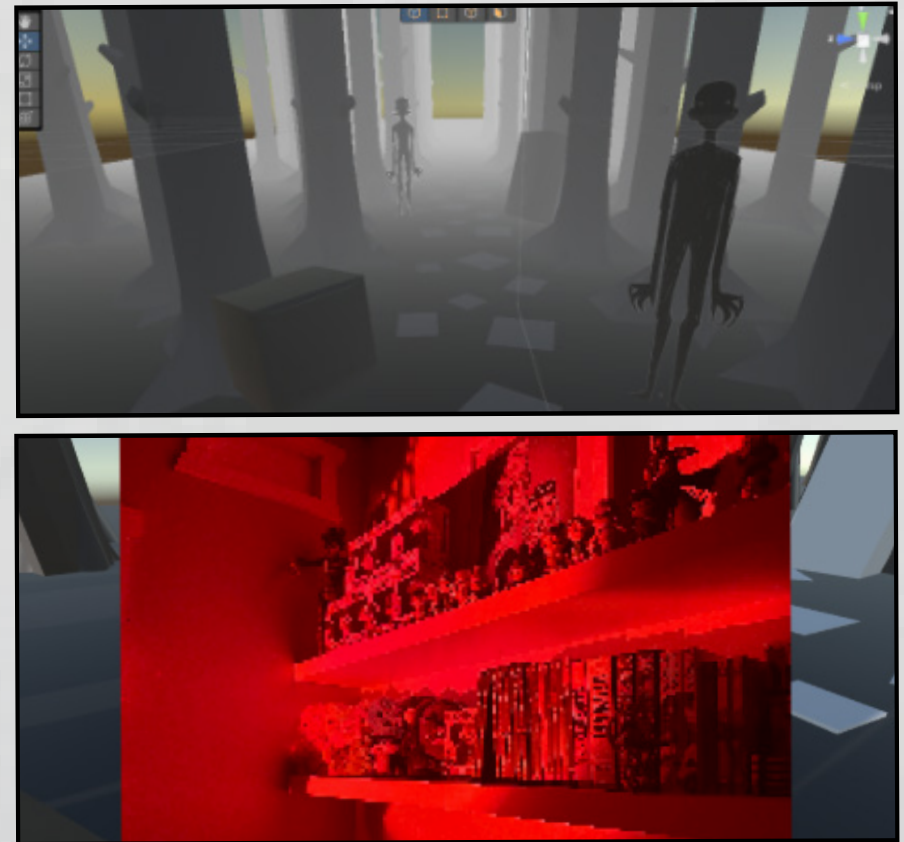
During this time, my friend Drew and I, with a few others' help, decided to join a friendly, competitive GameJam which is “a video-game development event, where game designers, programmer, artists and musicians come together to create a game in a limited period of time” (Farhan, 2015, p. 2). It was a 4-day gamejam; the theme was “death is an opportunity”. Our game, *KILLER Job*⁷, is a dark comedy game about unemployment. You play as an out-of-luck job seeker, scrolling through Ribbet job listings, aiming to summon Death and give him your CV. The game is a mixed-media game, featuring 2D, 3D, and film elements. This gives the game a unique style. This game jam turned out to be a direct prototype of my experimentation with a mixed-media game. I was able to see how the mixed media theme looked, and it was fascinating to see all the elements together.

Figure 38
Screenshot from *KILLER Job* (@druoodle, @Yawnszzz, @Poly_Panda_Ex & @Shmakk, 2025)



I decided to make my NPCs 2D within a 3D environment and to include my 2D distorted-image pop-ups in my game prototype. By developing a mixed-media prototype, this experimentation helped me understand how the contrast between 2D and 3D amplifies the analog horror feel by mimicking the nostalgic feeling of older games such as *Doom* (Nightdive Studios, 1993), where flat 2D distorted imagery disrupts the 3D environments. This mismatch of art styles and additional inclusions of VHS distortion create the analog horror charm I’m aiming for.

Figure 39
Screenshots from *Safety Coffin* prototype (Parkin, 2025)



7 *KILLER Job* (@druoodle, @Yawnszzz, @Poly_Panda_Ex & @Shmakk, 2025)

Part 2: *Fractured Interpretations*

“How can I influence ideas of fear and self-psychology to develop a psychological horror game?”

For this section, I look into self-psychology and how my experiences, fears and dreams can be used against me to create a personal, psychological horror experience. At this point in my game development, I was having trouble advancing my game. This roadblock led me to use idea-generating methods of immersion/exposure therapy and to draw inspiration from dreams I had during this project. This laid the foundation for my game’s general narrative and additional design elements, as well as for incorporating psychological horror into my game prototype.

Media Consumption / Immersion Therapy Experimentation

For this experiment, I leaned more into immersion for idea creation. Linking back to exposure therapy ideas by Neudeck and Wittchen (2012) and immersion approaches by Prawat (1991), informed my goal to consume horror media solely as an intentional immersion method to spark creative inspiration. My making process involved increasing my usual intake of horror-themed games, such as the *Silent Hill 2* Remake (Bloober Team, 2024) and *The Static Speaks My Name* (the whale husband, 2015), rewatching *Skinamarink* (Ball, 2022) and *Hereditary* (Aster, 2018), as well as rewatching analog horror series on YouTube, *Petscop* (@Petscop, 2017–2019), and *Midwest Angelica* (@Midwest_Angelica, 2022–2026).

This did take a toll on my mental health, not due to my overconsumption of horror media, but due to not being able to come up with a steady concept for my game. During this immersion process, I would immediately sketch ideas as they emerged, resulting in intriguing 2D sketches and concept development, such as NPC interactions and potential events in my game. This experimentation partially succeeded, as I did come up with some sketched concepts that had personal and self-psychological themes associated with my own fears.

Figure 40

My experimental game concept sketches (Parkin, 2025)



Dream Experimentations

I experienced nightmares during the development of my game. My childhood nightmares stopped once I got older, and yet while working on this project, they started again. The nightmares I experienced were nothing I'd ever undergone in my life. They felt familiar yet extremely foreign. When I woke, I drew, 3D modelled, wrote, and filmed footage based on them to help capture their essence and how they made me feel, the goal being to help create potential concepts for my game mechanics and narrative.

Nightmare 1: It's Not Your Time

My Note: 6:12 a.m.

I was walking through a graveyard when I came across a tombstone with a massive, glowing timer. The tombstone had my name on it, and at the bottom was a hole with an open coffin. And for some reason, I jumped in. And then I fell from the sky and landed right next to my tombstone, and a loud, menacing voice grumbled, "It's not your time." The whole environment felt off; there was thunder but no rain, and a constant humming sound.

Figure 41

Illustration from my dream created at 6:45 a.m. (Parkin, 2025)



This was the first dream I had, and I was able to draw and write about it. I found this nightmare to be extremely unsettling. Being a place of death, graveyards create extreme unease. Seeing a tombstone with my name on it was gut-wrenching. This nightmare informed my decision to include a dream sequence in my game prototype, allowing me to re-experience it. My goal in this experiment is to replicate the feeling I had in my dream.

Figure 42

Screenshots from Safety Coffin prototype (Parkin, 2026)



The making process incorporated reusing assets, such as trees and tombstones, adding fog, visual distortion, and sound effects, such as grumbling thunder and a hum, creating a menacing, dream-like atmosphere similar to the one I had experienced in my nightmare and definitely succeeded in reliving the emotions I felt while in it. Using my fears and nightmares against myself is an interesting way to psychologically self-torture by actively reliving experiences I would rather forget, pushing the psychological horror game I want to achieve.

Nightmare 2: *The One Between the Trees*

This dream consisted of me staring at a man hiding behind a tree in the middle of the night, and informed my goal of creating a feeling of being watched, fostering constant unease. This dream led me to create the character Peeping Guy, who looks at you from afar. When the player is walking around in the 3D environment, the Peeping Guy spots the player and hides behind a tree, then moves to a different location, where he'll do the same: watch from afar, get caught, and move. This experiment definitely succeeded in achieving my goal of creating paranoia without confrontation. Having to re-experience nightmares is a daunting feeling, as well as the psychological aspect of not knowing where the Peeping Guy is. Simple game mechanics and events grounded in personal experience can create anxiety; blending self-reflection with analog horror imagery ultimately creates an intimate horror experience that I find genuinely unsettling.

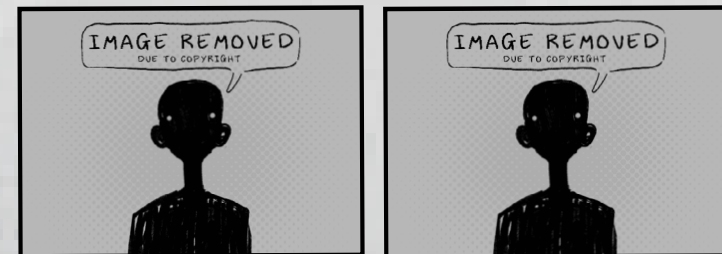
Figure 43
Illustration of my dream translated into Safety Coffin (Parkin, 2025)



Nightmare 3: *Sea of Tombstones*

I barely recall this dream, yet it lingers in my mind, especially the key moments and emotions. From what I can remember, I felt as if someone was chasing me, but I couldn't see anyone, just frantically running through an endless graveyard. This dream reminded me of the *GreyLock video TAPE 002 - to the mountain* (@Greylock, 2023) because of its appearance and how it made me feel. I didn't know how to capture the dream in a drawing or note, so I sought real-life inspiration. This investigation was an interesting experience, as due to my thanatophobia, graveyards make me uncomfortable. This experimentation has allowed me to do my own legend-trip, linking back to Marble Hornets (MarbleHornets, 2009). Instead of seeking out locations identified in urban legends, I sought out locations that related to my personal experiences, so legend-tripped to a graveyard. I did try to make light of the situation, turning the venture into a sort of ritual, asking those who lay in the graveyard for permission to film before doing so. Making this connection to the location made me less worried and helped me come to terms with the negative connotation associated with graveyards (and the inevitability of death). Abramowitz explains that exposure aims to reduce the fear response (2013). This form of exposure therapy, being present within this setting, ultimately helped me film some intriguing footage that felt true to my dream.

Figure 44
Screenshot from TAPE 002, GreyLock (@Greylock, 2023)



Note. Image 1 (Timestamp – 3:34); Image 2 (Timestamp –1:38).

The final footage I created helped develop a core theme throughout my game, confronting fears through the familiar, personal space of my bedroom. Graveyards are still a place I find slightly unsettling. One concept I found was safety coffins. I came across this after overthinking about being buried alive. Safety coffins became popular in the late 18th and early 19th centuries when some people were accidentally buried alive (Klein, 2025). The safety coffin had a string attached to the bell on the grave's surface, and when you pulled the string, the bell would ring, indicating that the person buried was still alive. The concept causes me to break down; I cannot comprehend what I would do in that situation. This discovery became a strong candidate as a psychological game mechanic.

Figure 45
Screenshots from my graveyard exploration video (Parkin, 2025)



In my process, I 3D-modelled a safety coffin in Maya and placed it in a graveyard environment within my Unity scene. I animated and scripted the bell to ring from a distance, and it can be heard as soon as the player leaves the 2D bedroom scene. Continual ringing acts as an audio beacon, drawing players towards the noise. Similarly, in the game *NINAH* (CRITICAL REFLEX, 2025), knocking is heard to lure players into interacting with NPCs, which urges the player to find a key to open the graveyard gates and use the shovel beside the safety coffin to dig their own grave. This experimentation succeeded. It translated specific personal fear into a game with analog horror-inspired elements. The concept was used as both a mechanic and a metaphor, forcing me to partake in my own burial and to sit with the suspense of whether the bell will save me or I will have to face my fears. Reflecting on this, it links to my question by showing how personal fears can lead to research-led concepts such as safety coffins, which can ultimately create personal, psychological horror. Stone mentions, “Psychological horror strikes closer to home than some other types of horror and feeds off of vulnerabilities, anxieties, and experiences of the unknown” (2025, p. 221).

Figure 46
Screenshots from Safety Coffin (Parkin, 2026)



Part 3: *What Stares Back*

“Can a game scare its creator?”

Figure 47

Image of my NPCs in Safety Coffin (Parkin, 2026)



With all of the knowledge gained throughout this research, it is now time to answer my question in the design of my final game.

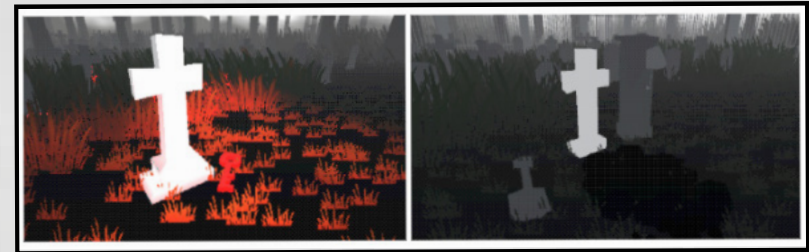
Summary

My final game prototype included many elements, mechanics, and techniques to achieve my goal of creating a game that scares its creator.

My NPC designs became simple yet extremely effective in making my horror experience more personalised. These characters are related to my childhood. I had an imaginary friend who wouldn't talk to me, just stare. Even though these character designs don't resemble him, they do remind me of how unusual he was. Additionally, when the player moves within the 3D environment, the NPCs follow the movement. You are always being watched. This relates to a personal, constant feeling of being watched, no matter where I am, something that I find hard to escape from, even in my dreams.

Figure 48

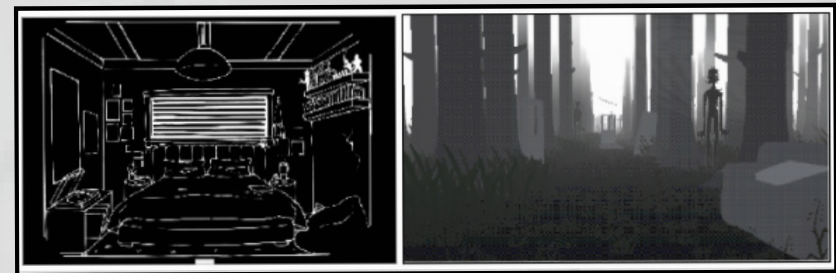
Images from Safety Coffin (Parkin, 2026)



Directly recreating elements from my nightmares was perfect for personalised horror, the sense of self as a game design weapon. My nightmare is symbolic of being trapped within my own subconscious; I will always have my fears lingering within my mind, no matter where I am.

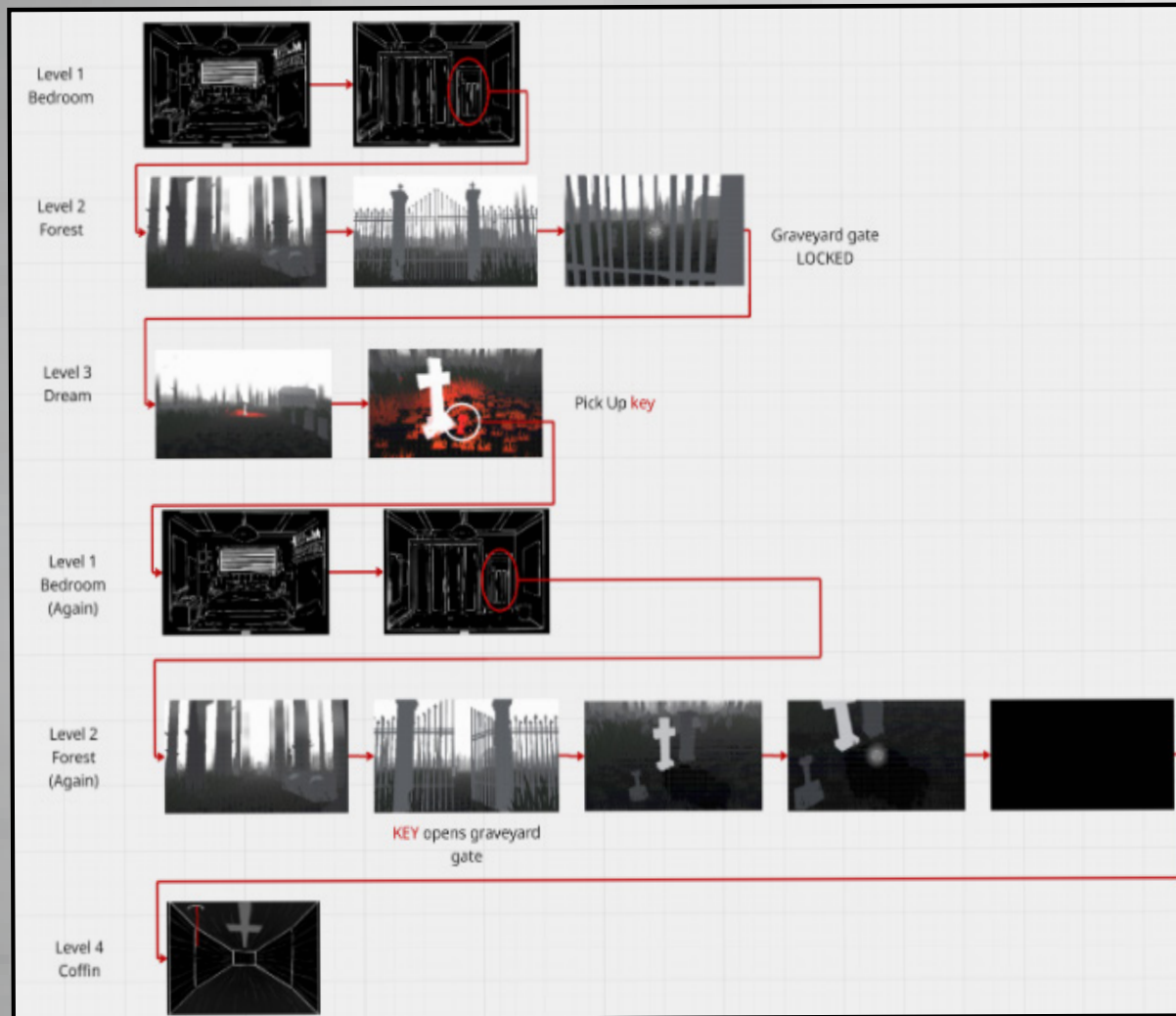
Figure 49

Images from the transition from 2D to 3D in Safety Coffin (Parkin, 2026).



The shift from 2D to 3D mirrors my understanding of how I perceive the world. I see my bedroom as a simple place, whereas any place outside my room feels complex, hard to understand and overwhelming. In combination with analog horror visuals, it supported my feeling of disconnect and distrust with the world.

Figure 50
Image of my game flow (Parkin, 2026).



Even though there were technical limitations with my ability to program in C#, there ended up being 4 levels to my game. My Bedroom (Level 1), Forest (Level 2), Nightmare (Level 3), and Inside a Coffin (Level 4) all relate to personal elements of my life. The repetition of days reinforces this loop of fear and memory, forcing me as both creator and player to confront it no matter where I am.

The player starts in my bedroom. Once they leave my room, they walk outside to a forest where they have to go to the graveyard. A slight ringing sound is heard from within the graveyard, coming from a safety coffin. Once they encounter a locked gate, they're immediately taken to my nightmare, where they must find a key. This key is located within my nightmares, but when taken out, it becomes a way to open the initial locked gate in the forest. The key not only serves as a way to interact with the environment, but also represents how elements within my nightmares can be taken out into the real world with me. Once they open the gate, they go to a tombstone and start digging up the grave. The player gets inside the coffin, pulls the string, triggering a bell to ring, and the game ends, symbolising accepting fear rather than rebelling against it, a hushed surrender rather than a cry for help. No matter how many times I pull that string, no one is going to hear or help me. I have to face my struggles all on my own. The bell has been ringing throughout the game. Leaving the player to wonder if someone has been in the coffin, or if it has been me all along.

This ultimately leads me to my final question: "Can the game scare its creator?"



Yes, but it's not conventionally scary. The process was scary; the fear was nuanced because it was about making the game itself and the memories it brings, which are scarier than the actual gameplay. Memories such as my personal legend-tripping, nightmares, fears, and the stressful moments of my game development are brought back through playing my game; overall, something I do not want to be reminded of. I resent it; I resent my game. I fear my game isn't good enough, not only for myself but for others. I fear I didn't work hard enough to have produced the prototype I have today. The personal dissatisfaction and external judgment boiled down to a case of imposter syndrome. I fear that no matter what I could have created for this project, the ending would have always been the same: not good enough. It may not be scary itself, but the idea of it or its broader uses in my game scares me, especially when showing others. My game can stay as a prototype and serve as a way to vent my problems; I can go back and add new mechanics, narratives, and characters that relate to events or memories I wish to forget, just like a personal diary. In a way, my game has become a kind of safety coffin. Ringing the bell offers me the fantasy of control. An illusion of fearlessness, but in reality, I know my fears control me. This project feels safe because it contains all my struggles and fears, but the more I play it, the more I realise I am buried within it, and I have no way of getting out. It made me realise that my fears are inevitable and unavoidable, and that's terrifying.

Throughout my making process, I was constantly asked the question: "How are you going to scare yourself if you know what's going to happen in your game?" I know what happens in my game, when it happens, and how, but I'm the only person who understands why. I am the person I understand best, and I understand what scares me and what doesn't. Knowing this, I can create a personalised horror that feels scary only to me. Others may find it scary, but I'm the only person who fully understands its context and history.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This research attempts to develop a psychological horror game that scares me. It covers the visual elements of analog horror, delving deeper into understanding myself through self-psychology research, analysing deep-seated fears and experiences, and using them as game design techniques and mechanics. It takes inspiration from various analog and psychological horror media, such as *The Boy and the Bath* (Doctor Nowhere, 2024), *Skinamarink* (Ball, 2022) and *NINAH* (CRITICAL REFLEX, 2025), to create a steady foundation for effective analog horror aesthetics, as well as psychological horror through game design.

Safety Coffin consists of 4 levels, each depicting fears, events and personal locations in my life, culminating in my most feared scenario: being buried alive. It does not allow the player to run, hide, or protect themselves; they simply have to walk through environments, pick up and interact with objects to continue the game. The underlying meaning is open to interpretation, but I'm the only person who knows the game's true purpose. Once an attempted psychological horror game, now a personal outlet to express ideas and struggles.

Both autoethnography and iterative design proved to be effective methodologies for my research. Autoethnographic methods supported my research, allowing me to reflect on and understand myself by examining personal artefacts, such as old childhood drawings, and by reflecting through game development documentation. Iterative design methodologies: ideation, prototyping, playtesting and evaluation allowed me to quickly experiment with mechanics and visual game design techniques to discover answers to my research question. *Safety Coffin* challenged what I knew about game design, as I wasn't creating a game for others; it was for myself, which led to a lot of reflection on every decision made during development. I had to steer away from trying to make the game look visually appealing and concentrate on how it made me feel.

This thesis explores my process, which may in turn serve as a framework for designers interested in pursuing a similar design process. As this thesis leans upon a subjective nature, with methodologies grounded in interpretivism, "it may be fruitful to critically analyse one's own subjective interventions in the research process as well as the participants' data so that the research findings are properly situated" (Madill & Gough, 2012, p.380). I do not offer imperative, instructional advice. The advice I can provide is that the designers' own subjectivism informs their process in trying to conduct a similar design process.

Contributions and further research

This research contributes to the development of new design methodologies for practice-based research. Using a method of personal events, such as dreams and nightmares, as creative inspiration and reference in creating experiences that feel personal or relatable. This could ultimately serve as an interesting genre of horror, a self-soothing tool for understanding oneself and deeper emotions. *Safety Coffin* demonstrates this by including a direct interpretation of what my real nightmare looked and felt like. Not only was this done to scare me, having to relive my nightmare, but also as a way of exposure therapy in the hope that if I play it enough times, I'll get over my fear of death. This could also contribute to future research on redefining or introducing new techniques within a subgenre of self-psychological horror games. Including elements of oneself that only they can see and experience, as in games like the *Silent Hill 2* Remake (Bloober Team, 2024), where experiences are personal to a character but more realistic, without an external force or monsters.

If I were to continue this research, I would consider creating my own design methodology, allowing others to find out more about themselves. Additionally, I'm interested in challenging designers to make games for themselves, not a wider audience. Focusing on creating small demos that don't fit the conventional idea and meaning of a "game".

Through my research into analog horror aesthetics and a self-psychological study, I developed *Safety Coffin*, a walking simulation that draws on personalised experiences from my daily life. It isn't a conventionally scary game, and I don't think it ever will be. It is scary in other ways. I fear my final game isn't good enough; I fear what other

I believe *Safety Coffin* answers my research question, as it successfully scared me, but not in the way I expected. It wasn't a complete game, but it wasn't a failure. Taking an interpretivist approach to this project helped me ask myself what I wanted and expected from a psychological horror game, rather than what a consumer would want. As I cannot stop thinking about this game, in a way that generates more fear, *Safety Coffin* succeeded in achieving the long-lasting horror beyond the experiences, similarly done in analog horror. While it hasn't made my fears any easier to face, it has helped me become more familiar with them, allowing this game to serve as a personal and creative outlet.



Displayed Final Artefact: Coffinished



Figure 51
Photograph of people playing Safety Coffin (2026).

Note. Images photographed by Paul Chapman.

For my exhibition night, I wanted to make the most of the space I had. With my dad's help, we built a life-sized coffin to sit on the table, inviting visitors to step inside and play my game within it (Figure 51). Props and displays were on either side of my table that tied directly to my game's world, such as a big red key, overgrown plants twisting around the table and coffin, dried funeral flowers and a second monitor showing distorted found footage of a graveyard. My dad also helped make a tombstone that read "Here Lies the next player" (Figure 52), creating an immersive experience that felt like stepping straight into my mind. Even though my exhibit setup was small, it stood in stark contrast to everyone else's exhibits. While the other artefacts featured simple yet effective displays within a large white room, mine focused on a dark, funeral-like installation in the middle of the room. This contrast made my exhibit stand out (Figure 54).

Figure 52
Multiple Close-up photographs of my exhibition setup (2026).



Note. Images photographed by Paul Chapman.

On exhibition night, I noticed that not many people played my game, which was completely understandable; I'd be intimidated too if I were to step inside a life-sized coffin and be confronted with the themes of death and being buried alive. The setup itself was intense; people had to physically enter the coffin, put on headphones and stand in darkness while the game unfolded in front of them (Figure 53). It wasn't just a visually interesting experience; it was a deliberately claustrophobic and uncomfortable experience. Those who did play rarely completed the game. From what I observed, their expression shifted from curiosity to unease within moments. Some people paused halfway through the game; others removed the headphones and stepped out quickly as if they needed to escape the atmosphere I had created. A few didn't make it past the first level; this could be because the controls weren't clear enough, or the visitors who showed up to the exhibition weren't usual video game players.

In my conclusion, I mentioned that the broader uses of my game, letting my game be open to the world, scares me. The exhibition allowed me to let go of that fear. Even though my game wasn't meant for a wider audience, the whole exhibition was strangely relieving, and even validating. To see that people found my game genuinely unsettling made me feel a little more confident in my work. It meant that my design choices were working as intended, not just to scare, but to evoke a visceral emotional response tied to mortality and the fear of confinement.

Figure 53
Photograph of people playing Safety Coffin (2026).



Note. Images photographed by Paul Chapman.



Figure 54
Safety Coffin exhibit (2026)

Note. Images photographed by Paul Chapman.

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