Queerness

In Games

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Abstract (English)

The theme of this bachelor thesis was Queer Games. We discussed how queerness is applied in video games for queer people. We made some observations on how LGBTQ characters were represented within a few games that had representations of Queer experiences. We explored the topic of Queer Mechanics as presented by game creator Avery Mcdaldno (2014) and we researched discussions about Queerness in games by a select number of scholars. Namely, Bonnie Ruberg (Campus Gotland GAME, 2017), Naomi Clark (2017, Chapter 1) and Edmond. Y. Chang (2017, Chapter 2).

We explained why we used Gay Memes as our anchoring topic for our Queer Game design and then we went through the methods and design process that we had while developing our Queer Game. These methods included Innovation By Boundary Shifting (Löwgren and Stolterman, 2004), Design Pillars (Max Pears, 2017) and The Crystal Clear method (New Line Technologies, 2018). Then, we broke down the design process starting with how we came up with the game concept, what design pillars we used and the programs and tools we used in the development of the game. We also explained the relation between our design process and the information we learned from the previously mentioned scholars and creators.

At the end of this bachelor thesis, we discussed the effectiveness of the chosen methods, the results we found through research which included questioning the role of empathy and fun in games, putting less focus on superficial forms of representation and creating game mechanics that are queer. We described the finished video game we made and we introduced our ideas for future research on Queer Game Design.

Keywords: Queerness, LGBTQ, gender studies, queer mechanics, gay memes, video games.

Abstrakt (Svenska)

Temat för detta kandidatarbetet var Queer Spel. Vi diskuterade hur queerhet appliceras i digitala spel för HBTQ personer. Vi gjorde några observeringar kring hur HBTQ karaktärer representerades inom några spel som innehöll representationer av queer upplevelser. Vi undersökte ämnet "Queer Mechanics" som presenterades av spelskaparen Avery Mcdaldno (2014) och undersökte diskussioner från vissa forskare om Queerhet i Spel. Nämligen,

Bonnie Ruberg (Campus Gotland GAME, 2017), Naomi Clark (2017, Kapitel 1) and Edmond. Y. Chang (2017, Kapitel 2).

Vi förklarade varför vi använde "Gay Memes" som vår huvudämne för vår Queer-Spelgestaltning och sedan tydliggjorde våra metoder och designprocess som vi hade under utvecklingen av vår Queer-Spelgestaltning. Dessa metoder inkluderade Innovation By Boundary Shifting (Löwgren and Stolterman, 2004), Design Pillars (Max Pears, 2017) och The Crystal Clear method (New Line Technologies, 2018). Sedan bröt vi ner designprocessen till sina olika steg från hur vi kom fram till spelkonceptet till vilka "Design Pillars" vi använde och vilka datorprogram och verktyg vi använde för att utveckla spelgestaltningen. Vi förklarade också relationen mellan designprocessen och informationen vi lärde oss från de sistnämnda forskare och spelskapare.

I slutet av detta kandidatarbetet diskuterade vi hur bra de valda metoderna fungerade och resultaten vi hittade genom vår undersökning. Dessa inkluderade att ifrågasätta rollen av empati och vikten av att ha roligt i spel, att lägga mindre fokus på ytliga former av representation och att skapa spelmekanik som är Queer. Vi beskrev den färdiga spelgestaltningen som vi skapade och introducerade våra egna idéer för framtida undersökningar om Queer Speldesign.

Nyckelord: Queerhet, HBTQ, genusstudier, Queer Mekaniker, Gay Memes, Digitala Spel.

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1. Background

In this chapter, we explain why researching Queer Games matters and we give some examples of Queer Games that have led our attention to this topic and other mainstream games that had some elements of Queerness.

In this study, we used queerness to describe various non-heteronormative ideas and approaches that in this case were brought up to represent LGBTQ people in video games. We wanted to explore how representation of LGBTQ people in games can be improved not by only using more LGBTQ characters in games, because that would not nearly be enough, but by creating game mechanics and features that help reflect LGBTQ experiences in video games.

Why researching queer games matters

When queer characters or behaviors are brought up in video games they are sometimes portrayed in bad lighting, as The Game Theorists (2014) on YouTube explain, Queer characters in video games are often portrayed as villains and sometimes even as sexual predators as in the case of Cloud from Final Fantasy VII (Final Fantasy VII, 1997) where in one scene he finds himself in a hot-tub with a group of men and the game's dialogue suggests that the men are sexually abusing Cloud and that scene is intended to be comical. These types of representations only empower toxic behaviors towards queer people within gaming communities. But even when it comes to good LGBTQ representation, Ruberg and Phillips (2017) believe that games offer high potential for more than just representation. They encourage studies and research in the field of Queer Games. They also propose approaching games from a queer perspective and encourage the exploration of alternative ways of being, and a norm-breaking way of thinking. This topic becomes increasingly relevant today as the queer gaming communities' growth in visibility continues.

The video games industry to this day has evolved to the extent that it has become very big. One article on Forbes reports that there are 2.5 billion gamers around the globe (Koksal, 2019). This indicates that video games are currently a huge form of mainstream entertainment media. Over the last few years, more LGBTQ themed games started to gain noticeability. Examples of such games are Dys4ia (dessgeega, 2012), a game about its own developer's

experience with gender transition. The game can no longer be found on its creator's original blog page but is referred to in many places online. One article on The Verge recommended the game back when it was available (Souppouris, 2012). Another game is Mainichi by Mattie Brice (2012) which is also referenced very often in discussions about queer games online and is about a day in the life of Brice and how people treat her when they realize that she is a transgender woman. Other LGBT games are Coming Out On Top (Obscurasoft, 2014) and Dream Daddy (Game Grumps, 2017) which are both about a male player character that dates other men. These two games have arguably found even more popularity than the two previous examples.

In contrast, mainstream video games usually only have LGBTQ characters if they are optional or hidden in one way or the other. For example, in the video game *Bully* (2006) the main character can kiss other teenagers. However, kissing teenage boys is never shown in the game's main missions. This means that kissing a guy in this game is treated as what is called an "Easter-egg" in video game terms which means it is a feature that is hidden in the game and left for the player to discover with no clear previous indication that points towards it. Furthermore, in the RPG life simulation video game *The Sims 2* (2004) by Electronic Arts for PC, a male sim can be abducted and impregnated by another male alien sim. While this game feature is based in science-fiction, it is visibly non-heteronormative. This game mechanic is however also an easter egg. The sims 2 does allow for same sex romances, but just as many other RPG games, as long as the player does not actively make same-sex sims date each other, then they do not exist in the game's world by themselves.

In a study conducted by Ida Lahti (2016) on bestselling games between 2007 - 2016, nearly half of the characters in those games were heterosexual men. Almost all of the characters showed signs of being heterosexual or had no signs of what sexuality they had. One noteworthy observation the study made was that many of the representations of LGBTQ people in games existed in the RPG genre where the player could customize their own game character. Outside of that genre, there were not many well-known characters that could be mentioned. This means that those RPG games were not designed with LGBTQ characters as the default in mind, but rather exist only if the player wants them to, which also means that these characters are completely avoidable. So, in conclusion, even in the RPG genre where LGBTQ characters exist, their story lines are defined by the general default perspective and not by a specific Queer perspective, which leaves few genuine LGBTQ perspectives in video

games.

Summary of Background

Between avoidable LGBTQ characters and queer experiences that are hidden as easter eggs, it seems that the mainstream video games industry has little interest in allowing LGBTQ characters and stories to take the main stage. This is where a dedicated Queer Games genre could shine in contrast. Especially one that is backed up by dedicated research as proposed by Ruberg & Phillips (2017). With that in mind, it cannot be easy for developers to create queer games as there is no clear definition of what a queer game is. We need to be able to define queer games if we are ever to learn how to make them out of intention and not out of coincidence.

Co-writing

Writing this thesis was an iterative process, where both of us researched, discussed and referred to the same information. This information was then compiled and refined along with the ongoing process and discussion. We used Google Docs to write this thesis, which meant that the document was online and changes could be made to it in real time. We both had access to the document and could see what each of us added, removed or suggested and accept those changes or change them once more. In short, both of us were present through the whole writing process and approved each other's added content when it made sense.

Question

How can queerness be implemented in a game to define it as a queer game for queer players?

Aim

Even though discussions about LGBT+ representation in video games are growing, representation remains only one aspect of characters in game media. Creating games that are queer at their core is not the same thing as creating games where LGBTQ characters are represented, regardless of whether it is good or bad representation. Therefore, this study aims to explore the work of queer game designers and queer-studies researchers and how they have

created queer games or what ideas they have about them. And then, with that knowledge, contribute to the discussion by giving answers on what queer games are and how to make them. Creating a queer computer game of our own with the help of research on Queer Games is the intended result in the design project of this thesis and that helps us understand how to and what it means to create a Queer Game.

2. Past and current research

In this chapter, we explain what our understanding of the term Queer was, based on a Queer Studies perspective, we explore the ideas of Queer Game researchers, we explain Queer Mechanics (Mcdaldno, 2014) and we introduce Gay Memes as a thematic topic for our game design.

Definition of Queer

*"**Queer** is an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities who are not heterosexual or are not cisgender. Originally meaning "strange" or "peculiar", queer came to be used pejoratively against those with same-sex desires or relationships in the late 19th century. Beginning in the late 1980s, queer activists, such as the members of Queer Nation, began to reclaim the word as a deliberately provocative and politically radical alternative to the more assimilationist branches of the LGBT community" - (Wikipedia, 2019)*

Judith Butler (1990, Identity, Sex and the Metaphysics of Substance) talks about the relation between identity and sex. She explains that "Identity" is assured through traditional concepts of sex, gender and sexual practice and a coherent relationship between them. Identities where the sexual practices, gender and sex align coherently and maintain those relations have "intelligible" genders as Butler puts it. However, the notion of "the person" comes into question, as she explains, because of the existence of "gendered beings" whose sex, gender and sexuality lack coherence. Those "gendered beings" as she puts it, are persons who seem to fail to conform to the social standards put in place for sex, gender and sexuality.

Following the line of ideas explained by Butler about identity, we can understand unintelligible identities as identities of queer people. Queer people, or "beings with unintelligible genders" are for example men who have sexual relations with men and therefore fail to perform a man's role according to societal expectations. That role being the

social understanding of men being persons who have sex with women, then have biological children with them and then act as fathers for those children...etc.

To sum it up, a queer person is a person whose gender, sex or sexuality does not conform to what is considered a "normal" relation between gender, sex and sexuality.

Queerness in games

The question *"What is Queerness in Games, Anyway?"* is asked by Naomi Clark (2017, Chapter 1, p. 3) in the book Queer Game Studies. She argues that there are two currents of thought which try to answer that question. The first is concerned with diversity of marginalized groups within game content, while the second is concerned in "queering" the game structures themselves. For the question on diversity in video games, Clark references a conference panel by game scholar Todd Harper. He argues that more diverse voices, stories and characters in games gives an increase of possibilities of empathy in games. He says that empathy helps us understand what matters to people that are not us and that empathy is like a muscle, we have to use it regularly to keep it strong. In relation to queering game structures, Clark goes through several examples of queer games, one of which is called *Dys4ia* made by queer game creator Anna Anthropy. Clark describes the game as such *"It's presented as an autobiographical story, but one in which situations from life are represented by systems that the player must understand in order to navigate"* (Clark, 2017, Chapter 1, p. 6). She then points out that games such as Dys4ia and other games with Queer themes have got a lot of critique and have been attacked for *"not being real games"* as some have called them. That argument, as she explains, is based on reducing the game to its formal elements in order to critique it. In this process of critiquing games, the content of the game is removed and its relation to lived experiences is disregarded in the process. Reducing the game to its formal systems of interaction. That according to Clark, leads to viewing queer games as identical to older interaction forms such as some have described Dys4ia to being just similar to a PowerPoint presentation.

What Clark is telling us here is that games are more than just the mechanics. To explain mechanics in simple terms: mechanics in games are the actions that can be made by the player/players or the computer. So, for example, jumping, walking or even marrying if we are talking about a game where relationships are a game feature. So, reducing a game like Dys4ia to its mechanics and seeing it simply as 2D objects moving on a screen while also completely

disregarding the story and the visuals and judging it based on that is an unfair judgement to make when it comes to these types of games. The game creator's main aim may have been the story from the start and not necessarily how one interacts with the game, so reducing such a game to it is formal elements (the mechanics) without considering the content of the game (the story for example) does not mean that we have objectively measured the game's quality, but rather means that we have actively skipped out on what the game was trying to convey.

In the book *Queer Game Studies* Edmond Y. Chang (2017, Chapter 2) argues that the challenge of new game design requires radical gaming and not just radical graphics. Chang believes that to create new games, we need to think about the parts that games are made of and re-configure more than just pixels, graphics, code and controls. Queer-gaming according to Chang goes through the possibilities of non-competitive, non-judgmental, unproductive gaming and sees in queer worlds a chance to discover new rules and goals and also to find potential in failure. Chang says, *"representation must inform mechanics, and mechanics must deepen and thicken representation"* (Chang, 2017, p.18). This is important because, as he has also explained, games of our time focus on superficial concepts of representation of same-sex relationships. The representation in such games becomes just a choice of one side within a binary. Gay or heterosexual. Same-sex marriage or heterosexual marriage for example. Instead, the games should represent deeper experiences that queer people live through.

From what Chang and Clark explained, we can understand that there is an emphasis on rethinking the importance of representation. Queer representation in games needs to be seen in a new way, where it is backed up by authentic queer experiences. Game mechanics don't have to be the main elements that define the quality of a game, but they can have an important role if reconfigured to deepen and thicken representation when it comes to Queer Games.

Designing a Queer Game for a queer audience

Dr. Bonnie Ruberg (2017) a film and media professor explains that games as many believe are about having fun. People believe that a game that is fun is a good game and a game that is not fun is a bad game. With this basic way of thinking, we get to the belief that the main focus for a game designer should always be ensuring that the games they design are fun first. Ruberg argues against this basic way of thinking about games. In their (To be clear, Ruberg

uses singular they/them pronouns to identify themself) talk "Interrogating Empathy: Models of (Queer) Feeling in Games" Ruberg argues that reactionary gamers think that people should not talk about identity within video games because video games are just for fun. That perspective as Ruberg explains does not shut down all discussions on identity in video games, but rather often shuts down specific voices such as those of women, queer people and people of color.

Ruberg continues then to talk about empathy in games and explaining that queer games are often talked about as empathy games. Those games are talked about as empathy games not by the people who make them, but by others. So, these games generally become understood as a way for non-queer people to experience what queer people experience in life. This way of thinking incorrectly assumes that Queer Games are made to educate straight/non-queer people. Furthermore, Ruberg points out that if Queer Games that are empathy games (which means they are made for straight people so they can understand queer people) are good games, then that would mean that Queer Games that are not empathy games (Which means they are made for queer people and not for straight people) are bad games. To explain it in two short and simple lines:

- Games for queer people are bad

- Games for all other people are good

And that is an unintentional heavy judgement that is made about queer games, explains Ruberg. So, to clarify, Ruberg argues against this judgement and believes that queer games should not be designed as empathy games.

Queer-mechanics

Avery Mcdaldno argues in her talk in Malmö (Spelkultur i Skåne 2014) that Queer representation alone in games is not enough because Queer people are not well reflected in more traditional game design frameworks. Just as sexual minorities (LGBTQ people) do not fit in or feel welcome in a society where its structures are based on heteronormative expectations, Queer personalities do not fit into these conservative systems without being restricted in a way. Her talk was about *"Queer systems"*, to which queer-mechanics are the building blocks. "Queer systems", in Mcdaldno's interpretation, are designs where mechanics are designed around Queer structures which also means that they repeatedly challenge the

status quo. Mcdaldno takes up several different examples of games that have used queer-mechanics and created something interesting about it. Here are some of them:

The Fruitful Void

"Games are about whatever the mechanics point toward and circle around without actually defining it." - (Mcdaldno, 2014)

This is a great short description of the idea that was first proposed by Ron Edwards and then further extrapolated by Vincent Baker in a heated discussion board with other passionate board game designers. (Edwards & Baker, 2005). It is addressed in the discussion how Baker's game, *Dogs in the Vineyard* has a Fruitful Void in a way that the games' mechanics revolve around an intentionally "invisible" faith system in a western-setting world where the player tries to convert as many people to their religion as possible. This is to make the player have to think more deeply about their decisions and plans as the game progresses. If the game would have had a counter for how many "faith-points" the player had, the player would assess the situation more securely and take a step back and think about their past actions in relation to the situations they have to face.

Mcdaldno explained that we can use the fruitful void intentionally in the making of queer games. She takes up a game she designed called Monsterhearts as the next example. In the game, the player is a teenager that is coming to terms with themselves being a monster and is trying to make sense of it, at the same time they are going through puberty. In the game the player gets power over other players by turning them on. Each player's power is represented in what is called "strings." The fruitful void here is sexuality as Mcdaldno explains. Nowhere on the character sheet do players have a place to write if they are gay, straight, bisexual...etc. but, the game circles around sexuality without outright saying it.

Mcdaldno presented the fruitful void as a queer-mechanic because according to her, queerness is generally about exploring fruitful voids, despite our love of complicated identity labels. She explained that being an LGBT-person in a society with heteronormative structures is a life where one constantly deviates from social constructs that are deemed "normal" to stay true to oneself in an honest, non-pretentious way.

Fluid Characters

"Queer lives are unexpected, fluid, changing, multidirectional, cloudy and ever-changing." - (Mcdaldno, 2014)

As Mcdaldno explained, fluid characters are game characters that have different functions in relation to one another. In other words, fluid characters are not simply different 3D models or figures with varying levels of the same stats, but each character has its own characteristics that the other characters do not have which impacts the game in a unique way. Mcdaldno made the observation that an interesting way of doing this in games is when characters can also switch between those roles. As an example, she talked about a board game called Kingdom. In this game everyone has one of three different roles, but each player can also take a role that another player has from them.

An example of a videogame that has fluid characters is *The Lost Vikings* by former *Blizzard Entertainment (1992)* where the player controls three completely different players that function in considerably different ways. The player has to use these creatively in order to progress in the game. The game is a platformer where the player is only able to control one of the characters at a time, while the others remain idle on the spot the player previously left them on, creating a certain layer of character fluidity by making the player switch between different roles in order to get past different situations.

Enshrining the preposterous

"Games don't need to be physics engines. We get to decide how our worlds work - no matter how weird, liminal, subjective, or preposterous." - (Mcdaldno, 2014)

Another queer-mechanic that Mcdaldno talked about was Enshrining The Preposterous. She explained that an absurd idea does not necessarily have to be bad. Many games have started to strive more to become "reality simulators" that are looking to reflect reality as accurately as possible. For example; what would a realistic zombie invasion look like? How can we depict the atrocities of war crimes from a first-person perspective, etc.

In his book, Gaga Feminism, Jack Halberstam (2012) a professor on ethnicity and gender

studies explains that the goal of gaga feminism (which is his vision of a modern feminism) as the following: "Gaga feminism, after all, wants to incite people to go gaga, to give up on the tested, and instead encourages a move toward the insane, the preposterous, the intellectually loony and giddy, hallucinatory visions of alternative futures." (Halberstam, 2012, p. 25-26).

Enshrining The Preposterous can be linked to Gaga Feminism's embrace of creative anarchy. For example, just because a game idea about a post-apocalyptic Queer-utopia where everyone is vegan is a highly unlikely one is not a reason to dismiss it as less-valuable or useless. When we enshrine the preposterous as Mcdaldno said, we train ourselves to take diverse lived experiences more seriously. This can be done according to her through "camp" or through taking things very seriously even when it makes zero sense. We can understand that enshrining the preposterous means honestly expressing our visions no matter how absurd they might sound to someone who does not relate to them. When we apply that to Queer Game design, we express our thoughts, interests and emotions through the games we create.

Our Game's Queer topic inspiration

A Queer Game has to be about a Queer topic. In the following short paragraphs, we introduce the topics that our game design was centered around.

Gay Language - History

Polari is the name of an old secret language that was spoken by gay men. As professor of linguistics Paul Baker (2017) reported in one article. He said that this language was used in a period when homosexuality was illegal. Making it a way to communicate with other gay men without alerting others about the speaker's identity as a gay person. It was also used by gay men to identify other gay men as Baker explains. For example, if a gay man used the Polari word Bona (which means good) in a sentence and another person understood it, that would help them identify each other as gay men. Polari as Baker explained, was full of camp, irony, innuendo and sarcasm.

In a different article on out.com, Chadwick Moore (2016) explained that Polari was rife with She-ing. She-ing means using feminine terms and pronouns to describe things and people. As the article explained, this practice is universal among many gay people across different cultures. Moore reported that gay language in LGBT studies is now called Lavender

Language as the term was coined by Bill Leap a linguistics scholar who is the creator of the Lavender Languages and Linguistics Conference.

Gay memes: A modern gay language

In one article by Vice discussing the creation and the current state of what is called Gay Twitter, Tom Rasmussen (2020) explained what Gay Twitter is and gives some examples on some of the memes in it and how they were made.

> Gay Twitter takes the smallest moments in normative culture and appropriates them into something world defining, something for us, a kind of Polari—the secret gay language used by homosexuals to communicate pre-1967 while our identities were still illegal—with which we all communicate. (Rasmussen, 2020)

Rasmussen explained that Gay Twitter is about making icons out of ordinary things, out of things that others may have just disregarded and about giving unexpected things a proper icon status when that was not the original intent.

Summary of past and current research

We've explained what the term Queer means, introduced Queer Mechanics and explored researchers' perspectives on implementing queerness in games. In the next chapter, we introduce the methods we used to create a Queer Game with the information we found in our research.

3. Methods

In this chapter, we introduce the design methods, project methods and programming methods we used for our project work for this thesis and we explain how they are used in general. Because our intended design project for this bachelor thesis was a Queer Game that is playable on the computer, our chosen methods were methods that are used for software design and video game design. In the chapter after this one, we explain how our research comes into play with our chosen methods.

Design methods:

Innovation by Boundary Shifting

Innovation by boundary shifting (also "Att flytta gränserna" in the source's original language) is a method fit for designers who seek to find and transcend either explicitly or tacitly assumed problem boundaries (Löwgren and Stolterman, 2004, Chapter 4.2.4). It involves four steps that are useful to get a better sense of what should be prioritized, what to keep in mind during the progression of the project etc. Mainly to identify and prevent current and coming problems that might turn up. Since we wanted to address several ideas and issues that differ in broadness of context and complexity, we thought this method could be a good way to keep the project scope concise.

- **Identify the essential functions -** By finding out what a system needs in order to achieve the desired objective.

- **Identify conflicts -** Finding the conflicts between existing ways of achieving the important functions within the fixed boundaries of the problem.

- **Identify resources -** Finding different resources outside the fixed boundaries of the problem that could be used to transform the problem.

- **Seek compatible sub-solutions -** Find compatible sub-solutions to the problem that would enable the use of the newly identified resources.

Design Pillars

Design Pillars is a method that game developer Max Pears (2017) wrote an article about where he used The Last of Us and Zelda: Breath of The Wild as examples, breaking down their respective core pillars, explaining why this method is useful when wanting to cohesively design a game. He believes that outlining 2 to 5 elements or emotions that the game is trying to convey can help keep the game coherent, because if a developer tries to do everything in one game, that might cause the player to get lost and the game will not be able to deliver all its many emotions and elements in a high standard. He also explains that this method helps the game development team understand the overall picture for the game.

User interface sketches and written scenarios

Löwgren and Stolterman (2004, Chapter 4.3.2) advise using these two methods together to express what the design in mind would look like and how it would work. They mostly describe how these methods would be used in designing computer programs, so it seemed at first as though these methods were not fit for video game design but, they were actually quite effective for this purpose. We needed a written scenario to describe the game's rules and the reason we needed that was because we needed a document from which we could take information and translate it into goals that would fill out our Trello board (Atlassian, 2020), (More on this in the next paragraph) and with those goals defined clear enough for each of us, we would know what the next step was when it came to programming, modelling and designing. As for the user interface sketches, we actually needed sketches that would describe what the overall game levels would look like, not just the user interface and that is one big difference between specific use computer programs and video games. In computer programs, the program on screen consists mostly of the user interface, but in video games there is a lot more happening on screen, so for this method, we had to consider the game levels as equal to the user interface and sketch them as well. So, we made very simple and low resolution sketches on paper on how our game levels would look like (See figure nr. 2).

Project methods:

The Crystal Clear method

According to one tech blog named New Line Technologies (2018), Crystal Clear is part of a family of methods called Crystal. Each of these methods suits a different size of teams. Crystal Clear being the one for smaller teams that consist of 2 - 8 people. According to the article, there are three main properties in this method, and they are:

- Frequent Delivery - Frequently review each iteration of the game as we move forward with the project.

- Improvement through reflection - Discuss solutions to problems.

- Personal communications - Keep each other updated throughout the process.

The article says that this method does not have any strategies and techniques, so they suggest a few other strategies. One of which is called "Information Radiators." The information radiator as the article claims is a sort of display for information which would be available to everyone on the team and has the most important information for the project.

We decided that the Crystal Clear method was the most fitting for us since we were just a team of two. As for an Information Radiator, we used a Mindmap (See figure nr. 4). We also used Trello (Atlassian, 2020), (See figure nr. 1), which is an online Kanban Board, to keep each other updated regarding our responsible parts in the project.

Programming methods:

Unity scripts:

By default, the Unity game engine (Unity Technologies, 2020b) supports the programming language called C# (to clarify, we used Unity to create our game). The files that run the code that is written for games that are created in Unity are called Scripts (Unity Technologies, 2020a). Scripts are pretty much what make everything happening in the game function.

Visual programming:

Visual programming is a way of programming where the programmer uses graphical elements rather than writing code textually (Visual Programming Language, 2020) many visual programming languages (also called VPL for short) use the idea of boxes and arrows to represent relations between events.

Idea generation methods:

"Yes and" method:

The "Yes and" method as Chauncey Wilson (2011) explains it is taken from improvisational theatre. The way it works in theatre is that one person says or does something, like for example giving an imaginary flower to another person. The other person has to interact with that by taking the imaginary flower and continuing from there. The scene keeps getting redefined by whatever the actors come up with. Wilson suggests that this method can be used to explore user scenarios, generate requirements and brainstorm ideas for UX design. In the

same sense that this method can be taken from improv theatre to be used in UX design, we figured that using it to generate ideas for game design should be just as useful and straight forward.

Summary of methods

We've explained which methods we used in our design project. Some related to programming the project, others were intended to create the design and plan for it. So now that we have our methods introduced, it is time to explain how we applied them in our design process.

4. Design Process

In this chapter, we explain how the methods we used worked in our design. We also explain how our research on Queer Mechanics and LGBT language and Gay Memes came into play in our design process. We close this chapter with a description of the Queer Game which we have created.

Using the "Yes and …" method:

In the application of the Yes and method (Wilson, 2011), we wrote down possible game ideas that portrayed LGBTQ experiences. We decided that it would be best to come up with game ideas in cooperation. That is why the "Yes and" method was useful for us here. This meant that one of us would come up with one design idea and the other would build it up from there. The base design idea we landed on was as follows:

We wanted to visualize a Queer experience in our game. LGBTQ people's lives are constantly debated in real life societies and therefore we came to the idea that we would create a game where the player has political debates with people on LGBTQ issues. When the player successfully debates someone, that person becomes a follower for the player, meaning that they agree with the player character's positive view on LGBTQ people. This however meant that the game would gain quite a serious tone and it would become more of a reality simulator and that did not align with *"Enshrining the preposterous."* (Mcdaldno, 2014) which was a game mechanic that we had intended to use. So we added Gay Memes to our design. Instead of winning debates with serious politics, the player had to share gay memes with people to win them over to their side. We realized that we could still give the game a stronger sense of *preposterousness*, so we decided that the main player character would be an

angel, sent by gay gods who spread their beliefs on earth using gay memes. At that point we had come a little far from the original design that had to do with political debates, there was no opposing side for our main player character. So, we added an opposing character. Another angel who shows up in the game and tells people not to take any Gay Memes from our main character. The player enters the game and navigates through a level, filled with different groups of people to "Influence". The player can then "influence" them by giving them enough Gay Memes. Once the player has won one person over, that person will then start following the player and help them "influencing" others, so the player can now influence groups of two, then later three or four etc. The more followers the player has, the higher the strength of influence the player has. The higher strength of influence the player has; the bigger groups of people the player can attempt to "Influence" at once.

The player can also "Distribute" one follower to continue influencing off-screen, this to add a small percentage to a continuous influence power build-up.

Design Pillars

To come up with a cohesive game idea and understand the overall picture for the game, we decided first on which game pillars (Pears, 2017) we wanted to include in our design. We used both design pillars and the "Yes and" methods at the same time. So, we decided on the first pillar and used the "Yes and" method to decide on the other ones. Of course, those pillars had to include elements from our previously mentioned research on queer games and queer topics. Those pillars were the following:

- Queerness

  - This meant that the game we designed needed to have queerness be visible as the main theme. This was the most obvious one to us since Queerness is a main topic of this thesis.

- LGBT Language

  - LGBT language meant bringing gay memes and gay language into the game mechanics.

- Enshrining the preposterous

- As explained by Mcdaldno (2014), our game had to be absurd and take things seriously even when they did not make sense. This meant having the freedom to creatively move toward the chaotic nature of the visions of alternative futures.

After setting down the basic game idea, we continued with the principle of the "Yes and" method to add more details into our pillars:

- **Design pillar - LGBT Language:**

  - As we mentioned, the game would depict debate in a way. We decided that that way would be through the sharing of gay memes. Our player character had a book full of popular gay memes that we have found online. In the game, every meme has a certain amount of points, the characters in the game require a certain amount of points that those memes provide. Once the character being debated is presented with the correct amount of gay memes, they become a follower. Gay memes are the modern gay language as previously mentioned. The same way Polari (Baker, 2017) used to be a language that spread amongst gay men, gay internet memes (Rasmussen, 2020) are a modern gay language that spreads among LGBT people and it was only fitting that they would be the main representation of LGBT language in our game's design.

- **Design pillar - Queerness:**

  - As explained by Ruberg (2017) in their talk about empathy in games. Queer games should not have to be empathy simulators. They should not need to focus on making straight people understand the lives of LGBT people. Therefore, we created a main character that is empowered by gay memes and god given powers that would help in their mission to share memes with everyone they cross paths with. We named our character Boyle. The Reason their name was Boyle was because it is a play on the word "Boil" and that is because of a popular meme, namely "spilling the tea" which is popular in online LGBT spaces and means: to tell the truth about something or to gossip about something. Boyle in our game is the angel of tea, and therefore they Boil the tea and serve it hot.

- **Design pillar - Enshrining the preposterous:**

  - While the absurdity of playing as a queer angel character that debates people with memes, being able to play (literally) around with the thought allows us to think about games outside of the box instead of viewing them as reality simulators. So we wrote a game document or a written scenario as Löwgren and Stolterman call it (2004, Chapter 4.3.2) where we described our main character as an angel sent by "The Gay Lords" and our main character's holy mission is to bring as many people as possible to their faith using gay memes. We also made early sketches for our player character and enemy character (See figures 5 and 6.) Giving the player character this background story about angels and gods fulfills the purpose of taking things very seriously even if it makes zero sense as McDaldno (2014) proposed doing when using "*enshrining the preposterous.*"

Applying "Innovation by boundary shifting":

- **Identify the essential functions**

  To identify the main functions for our game we had them written in our information radiator (New Line Technologies, 2018) which was our Trello board (Atlassian, 2020). These functions were things such as programming the way the player character moves in the game, the way the character animations play and when they played and what game levels needed to be designed. Different cards containing descriptions, checklists and reference images for every function and asset we would need for our game.

- **Identify conflicts**

  As our main functions were outlined using our Trello board, the conflicts were whatever stopped us from achieving the intended functions we had there. For example, we did not have much experience with creating 3D character animations and our game had characters that needed to be animated. We also wanted to make levels that were somewhat big and that meant filling them up with many 3D game objects that we did not have enough time to create ourselves.

- **Identify resources**

  Our resources were the tools we knew we could use to develop our game. We chose Unity Engine (Unity Technologies, 2020b) as the game engine as we both have experience in creating games in it. For character animations we used Mixamo (Adobe, 2020a), which is an online library that contains readymade character animations which can be used in different types of projects. As for programming languages we had C# and PlayMaker (Hutong Games LLC, 2020) which both work in Unity. We also had to stick to external software to make the graphical elements of the game. These included Adobe Photoshop for 2D-illustrations, Blender (2020) for 3D models and Substance Painter (Adobe, 2020b) for texturing.

- **Seek compatible sub-solutions**

  When we needed to create character rigs to make their animations work, we used Akeytsu (Nukeygara, 2020). Rigs are digital skeletons for 3D characters. They help in creating more realistic and complex animations. We also used Mixamo (Adobe, 2020a) to acquire said animations for our game characters. Luckily, Mixamo also automatically creates rigs for characters, but that did not work for all of our game characters, so we still needed Akeytsu for some of them. We also used a selection of free 3D asset packages from the Unity Asset Store to be able to put more time on creating more different levels than on reinventing the wheel by making a lot of models and textures.

Iterations

As the game creation process progressed, new goals came up. And those new goals were all documented in our Trello board (Atlassian, 2020), (See figure nr. 1). In the board, we would create a new card where we wrote a description of what was to be created next and to support the description, we added lists where it said in more detail, what each part of that creation was (See figure nr. 3) sometimes it was enough to have a list with no description as the items in the list had enough information. The information in the trello board was not exactly how things were to be programmed, designed or modelled, but rather what they were. How they were created in terms of programming and modelling was to be done in the moment, as that

allows for more creative freedom and left us with many options to achieve our desired technical goals. In the Trello board there were four columns. Those worked as follows:

- To do: In this column, we added cards with information on the next thing to be designed.

- In progress: Once we started working on a certain design part, we took its respective card and placed it in the In Progress column and there we added a deadline if it was possible to estimate one.

- Finished: Once a design was finished (programmed or modelled...etc.) we moved its' card to the Finished column.

- Archived: In this column we simply placed the cards that were once in the Finished column and have started to cramp up that column.

Usually, design teams use a column named "In Review" to place a member's finished work up for review, but we did not deem it necessary, considering we were only two people and could make those reviews fast enough to not need to place them in a list first.

We also had a shared document of a mindmap (See figure nr. 4) where the main methods we were using were written. That helped us have a quick look on what to think about during the design process and reminded us of what needed to be explained in this study in relation to the project. This was part of our two information radiators with the Trello board being the first one. The information radiator itself was an idea taken from the Crystal Clear method (New Line Technologies, 2018) as explained earlier.

Design Techniques

Game Engine

To create our Queer Game we decided to use Unity (Unity Technologies, 2020b) as our game engine. Unity is a free to use program that allows people to create video games for multiple platforms. It is easy to learn how to create games with it as there are online community boards and tutorial videos that users can learn a lot from. It also has an online asset store where a wide selection of tools and game assets are available for purchase, while many others are free of charge. This helped us speed up the game creation process as there was no need to

create every small object, effect or tool by ourselves when there were already other creators that had created them and uploaded them for general use.

Graphics

While most of the assets we required to make the different city areas Boyle (the main player character) would visit were available at the Unity Asset Store, building a Park, a Suburb and a city Mall included a lot of modeling and texturing work that we had to do ourselves, not to mention all the characters as well, which were all based off of the same basic template character to save time to make more. The modeling was done in Blender (Blender, 2020) and texturing was done in Substance Painter (Adobe, 2020b). We also made the game's graphics look better with what is called, "Post Processing" and we used two common effects:

- Bloom - Reproduces fringes that stretch from borders of bright areas on the screen like on a real-world camera.

- Screen Space Ambient Occlusion - Makes the areas around surfaces that are close to each other (like corners and cavities) darker. A simple way to make the games' shading look considerably more visually appealing, by calculating pixel-depth on the screen.

Some different areas of the game were made to feel bigger than they are. Unfortunately, this meant that we had 3D spaces that were too big for our game's needs when making the Mall, which consisted of four entire floors with five huge store sections each, that is 16 stores not counting the main area that intersects them. That was a huge amount of empty space to be filled, so we came up with the clever solution of filling ten of these spaces with stores and just having the others closed down.

Animations

We used an online browser based program by Adobe called Mixamo (2020a). In Mixamo, we can upload a 3D model of a character we have created and then it automatically sets it up in a way that enables us to animate it much easier. This set up process is usually called Rigging and takes some time when done manually, but Mixamo does it in under 2 minutes.

Mixamo also includes a big library of premade animations that we were able to use for our game characters. For example, we used animations for walking, standing still, talking and running and they all already existed in Mixamo in different variations. The animations themselves could also be adjusted in certain ways right in the browser where we were viewing the program. I.e. if our character's arms were too relaxed, we could adjust them so that they are held further apart from each other. Not all characters worked correctly with Mixamo, as it was not able to do its rigging if the character did not have a typical human-like body. Therefore, for our two game characters which had human bodies but with wings attached to their backs, we had to create our rigs manually in a separate computer program called Akeytsu (Nukeygara, 2020) and then took these 3D characters back to Mixamo where it then recognized the human-like parts such as the head, spine, legs and arms and was able to apply animations to those parts.

Programming

As mentioned previously, we used the Unity engine (Unity Technologies, 2020b) to create our queer game project. The scripts we wrote for the game controlled a broad range of game mechanics. For example, when the player presses down the W button on the keyboard, the player character moves forward. That is a movement mechanic that we programmed into the game using a C# script.

Besides C# scripts we also used visual programming provided by a tool called PlayMaker (Hutong Games LLC, 2020). PlayMaker is a tool that can be found in the Unity Asset Store and it makes programming modular in the sense that developers can place what are called "Actions" in visual boxes that are called "States". These boxes can then be attached to other boxes that contain other actions and they can be connected in any order the game designer wants to make things in-game happen in the order that is intended. This system of rearrangeable actions helped us create the tutorial for our game project as we wanted the tutorial to have instructions that teach the player how to play and we wanted those instructions to show up in a certain order so that the player gets to learn how the game is played without feeling that there are too many things happening at once and that was most convenient to do in a tutorial game-level.

Music and Sound

Neither of us is experienced with any professional music and sound software. So for BGM (Background music) we used Bosca Ceoil (Cavanagh, 2019). A free, surprisingly simple and user-friendly tool for creating musical loops. Since we wanted to have background music that fit the different stages of the game, this was the best option. This software provides the user with a library of different instruments and soundbites that derive from classical video game consoles. As for SFX (Sound effects) we relied on royalty-free sound files from a website called ZapSplat (2019) which has a wide variety of short sound bites and background noise from different locations.

The finished design:

The game starts with an introduction tutorial level where the player is introduced to the main characters and gameplay mechanics. Those mechanics are movement, usage of meme cards to influence people and usage of meme cards to freeze enemies.

In game terms, every character that is not the player is called an NPC (short for nonplayable character). In our game, we had two types of NPCs, regular NPC characters and the enemy NPC character. The regular NPC characters exist in every level, they wait for the player to approach them, once that happens, the player can open their "Holy book of memes" and start using memes that have the corresponding amount of points that the NPC requires.

Every meme card has a different value of points. Those memes are of course direct references to real memes that exist online and are often used in LGBTQ online spaces. Every meme card has a picture and a description with fictional information about what that meme means. The reason the descriptions are fictional is to make them more related to the fantasy of the game world rather than explaining where they come from online in a dry direct way. They do however retain the names they are popular as online, so if the player is interested in looking up those memes for themself, they still could.

When an NPC gets the memes they require, they start following the player character and every meme in the holy book of memes gains an extra point, which means that the player gets the chance to influence other NPCs that had higher requirements. The player can also choose to send the NPC they had just influenced to let them go on their own and influence other NPCs. The game also has an enemy character called N-Amy whose mission is to tell people

not to follow Boyle (the main player character). If N-Amy speaks to an NPC before the player, that NPC can no longer be influenced by the player. Our player character, Boyle the angel of tea has a set amount of NPCs that they need to influence in every level to please the gay gods who sent them on this mission. If N-Amy gets to them first, the player loses the game. Also, every level has a timer, if the time runs out, the player also loses the game. The player finishes a level successfully by gaining the amount of followers that are required by the gay gods (The required amount is shown on-screen during gameplay).

Boyle, the angel of tea is a genderless angel (note that he/they pronouns will be used interchangeably when referring to Boyle) driven by their gay gods' desire to spread their beliefs on earth. Boyle's aesthetic design is largely inspired by Yoshitaka Amano's (1987) concept paintings for the Final Fantasy games, specifically for their usually androgynous look. The hair obviously resembles a rainbow pride flag. He gathers followers with the help of his Book of Tea, a compendium filled with gay memes. Instead of through traditional means of dialogue the player wins over followers by using memes. The villain of the game is called N-Amy and she opposes Boyle and wants to stop the spread of gay memes. She is inspired by a meme often called the *"Karen meme"* or *"may I speak to the manager"*, a well-known meme about a stereotype of a middle-aged woman with a short haircut who often wants to speak to the manager because she disapproves of what others are doing even when it does not actually concern her. The game's design included a queer protagonist and an opposing antagonist to portray the opposition that LGBTQ people often face. That opposition is represented in N-Amy. Her design is also inspired by modern Drag Queen fashion (See figure nr. 7). She makes it her mission to speak to everyone she can and stop them from listening to Boyle.

Summary of design process

We used the "Yes and" and Design pillars methods to design our game both through the general concept and the detailed design. We applied innovation by boundary shifting to identify our essential functions, resources, conflicts and compatible sub-solutions. We used sketches and written scenarios to plan our design and we used a variety of different computer programs to create game objects and bring them together using the Unity Engine and program them with C# and Playmaker to create our Queer Game. Our game's name is Boyle's Queer Quest for Tea and it's about a genderless angle that spreads the gay gods' beliefs on earth by sharing Gay Memes with people.

5. Result

In this chapter, we answer the thesis question and collect the information we found through research and through our perspective after having created a Queer Game and present them to you, the reader.

Agreeing upon what the term Queer meant for this thesis was the first step to answering the question *"How can queerness be implemented in a game to define it as a queer game for queer players?"*. The term queer has somewhat of a broad meaning and that could create confusion for some people. In this bachelor thesis we used the words Queer and Queerness to refer to LGBT+ people, narratives and experiences. We did not use it in the general meaning of strangeness or non-normativeness unless that was also in relation to LGBT+ topics. Otherwise, the meaning of the term Queer would have become too general for the purposes of this thesis.

When it came to queer representation in games, it became clear to us through the opinions of several Queer Game designers and researchers that representation of queer people by itself was not seen as enough. Chang (2017, Chapter 2), Mcdaldno (Spelkultur i Skåne, 2014) and Ruberg and Phillips (2017) all shared that opinion and Mcdaldno suggested using and creating Queer Mechanics as a way of making Queer Games that are not fixated on representation only. We learned that different Game Mechanics can be centered around Queer ideas and made into Queer Mechanics. These mechanics help in creating queer experiences in games, not just queer representation. Ruberg (Campus Gotland GAME, 2017) highlighted the need of interrogating empathy in Queer Games and creating Queer Games that are for queer people instead of making empathy games that aim to make players empathize with queer people. Ruberg also made the point that fun should not be the main goal for games. Games are allowed to convey different emotions; they do not have to make players feel fun at all times. Queer games can benefit from that and aim to make players feel different emotions that are not necessarily fun.

As Clark (2017, Chapter 1) explained, reducing a game to its formal elements to critique it results in removing the lived experiences that are portrayed in it in the process. That form of critique only helps in seeing the interaction forms that exist in a game, but it does not give us a fair judgement of a game as a whole. Queer Games can be designed to have portrayals of the lived experiences of Queer people and sometimes those portrayals might be a bigger

focus than the Game's mechanics. We learned that this is acceptable and should not be viewed as a weakness in Queer Games. We also found our way into Queering our game design by implementing queer ways of expression in the form of gay memes. Which could be seen as a modern extension of Polari, the old gay language that was used by gay men as explained by Baker (2017).

We applied the ideas we found from our research to our game design project and that can be seen in the focus on gay memes and the queer mechanic "Enshrining the preposterous". We also leaned away from any empathy-based narratives. Gay memes were the game's relation to queerness. They were also the game's relation to queer players because the memes were borrowed from internet LGBT spaces and reimagined in a fantasy game world. Furthermore, "Enshrining the preposterous" was portrayed in gaining followers through the use of gay memes and that was the queer mechanic in our game.

The answers our research led to for our thesis question *"How can queerness be implemented in a game to define it as a queer game for queer players?"* can be summed up as the following:

- By including LGBT+ characters to start with.

- By making Game Mechanics that are inspired by or centered around Queer narratives and experiences. Those are called Queer Mechanics.

- By not seeing empathy as the main goal of the game or (Interrogating Empathy). Queer Games are not required to make people feel empathy. They can be about other things.

- By not worrying about the game being fun (Interrogating fun). LGBT+ topics in games get judged for ruining the fun in games, but games are not just for fun and implementing queerness to a game does not have to be centered around fun.

- By not discarding a Queer narrative in a game, just because the game's mechanics are deemed too simple.

These answers are not definitive requirements for Queer Games. Some might even contradict each other at times. But they are good to keep in mind for Game Designers who are interested in creating Queer Games and want to design them through perspectives that they might not have thought of before. Our results can probably be expanded upon if more research were to

be done on the topic of Queer Games and therefore, we would say that our results are not conclusive, but satisfying enough for this bachelor thesis.

Summary of Result

With all the previous in mind, we should point out that representation of queer people in games on its own does not automatically mean that the game in question is a queer game. However, queer representation coupled with Queer Mechanics, interrogating empathy or interrogating fun and not viewing the game's mechanics as its' main source of quality are some approaches that can be used to implement queerness in games for queer players.

6. Discussion

In this chapter, we review our research results, methods and design process one last time in relation to the aim of this bachelor thesis. We end this chapter by giving our thoughts for future research on the topic of Queer Games.

The purpose for this thesis was to explore the work of queer game designers and researchers and how they have created queer games or what ideas they had about them while also creating a Queer Game ourselves with the help of that information. Creating a Queer Game helped us partially in answering the thesis' question and that was because we wanted to answer it from a Game Designer's perspective. We learned that empathy and fun should not always be seen as the goal of every game. We also learned about new concepts such as Queer Mechanics. Furthermore, we found out that representation alone is not what makes a Queer Game queer. The work of Queer Games creators continues to grow, and more games are made every day. This makes it hard to cover all of them in this thesis, but it also means that future research on the subject has a lot more to explore. The games' topics themselves can be explored rather than focusing on what Queer Games are and how they are made in the first place.

The methods we used for the creation of our game project were general methods for software and game design. So, they were not methods that were specifically for Queer Game design. **Innovation by Boundary Shifting (**Löwgren and Stolterman, 2004, Chapter 4.2.4**)** was a good method for our team of two to scope out the boundaries the project had. It also worked quite naturally with the flow of our project work even when we were not aware of it. For

example, in the "identify the essential functions" stage those were already identified once we have planned the gameplay elements. Using a Trello Board (Atlassian, 2020) as an information radiator was the optimal way for us to keep each other informed about what has been done so far with the help of checklists, reference images, and short descriptions of the needed features. Identifying conflicts and resources early on so that we could adapt and prepare in time. Innovation by boundary shifting worked hand in hand with the **Crystal Clear** (New line technologies, 2018) method, because in this method, there was emphasis on personal communications and the information radiator (The Trello board) from the innovation by boundary shifting method was helpful in keeping each other updated on the project's progress and requirements.

Design Pillars (Pears, 2017) was a valuable method to outline the core elements of the game and make sure every decision was in line with the game's intended features. We switched back and forth between a selection of possible themes at the beginning for a while before setting them in stone, this is arguably an important decision to make since it is the core elements of a game's concept that help shape the rest of it. We also used the **User Interface Sketches and Written Scenarios** (Löwgren and Stolterman, 2004, Chapter 4.3.2) method. Sketching game characters, places or events and writing game events as a text is always useful because it helps us as designers know what we are going to create based on a separate reference material (the sketches and written scenarios) that we have created beforehand. We also used the "**Yes and**" **Method** (Wilson, 2011) to generate game ideas. This included general game ideas before landing on the one that we actually designed and created, but also ideas around how the game works and what gameplay elements would be in it. In addition to this, having the creative freedom that comes with using Avery Mcdaldno's **enshrining the preposterous** (Spelkultur i skåne, 2014) as one of the design pillars was a big help in the process of "queering" our game *Boyle's Queer Quest for Tea* because of the fact that it allowed more creative freedom within the bounds of this bachelor thesis.

We used several computer programs to create our game. Those were Blender (Blender, 2020) to create 3D models, Akeytsu (Nukeygara, 2020) to create animations, Mixamo (Adobe, 2020a) to find readymade animations, PlayMaker (Hutong Games LLC, 2020) to create a game tutorial using visual programming and Unity (Unity Technologies, 2020b) to put all of these things together into a video game and program it with the C# programming language.

Thoughts for future research

If we were to view Queer Games as a game genre, that could help us understand them a little better. To explain this better: if we take the game genres "First person shooters" and "Horror Games" we can see Queer Games as being more in-line with horror games than First person shooters. The reason is that the genre of First-Person Shooters dictates some shared mechanics across most, if not all games in this genre, those are shooting mechanics and first-person perspective camera control mechanics. Meanwhile, the genre of Horror Games only dictates the general theme of the games in this genre, that theme being Horror. There are no specific game mechanics that need to exist across all horror games to define them and unify them as "Horror Video-Games". The same can be said about Queer Games. Queer Games do not have shared mechanics that define them as Queer Games, but they all have a relation to Queer topics.

During the design period, we often had long discussions about what made our game's design relevant to Queerness. We regularly disagreed with each other's ideas on things like, what the memes meant for the game's world, what the character's represented and what message the game conveyed. Which lead us to believe that Queer Game Design can be quite a personal process. The ideas or messages that a Queer Game conveys cannot be disconnected from the designers' politics considering how LGBTQ+ people and their lives are often politicized. That means that these politics show up in the game's design as mildly or as firmly as the designer deems appropriate or relevant for the game. Which can mean that multiple designers sharing one design can sometimes become complicated to work through. After all, as we said earlier, Queer Game design is quite a personal process. However, we would also like to point out that making a Queer Game for the purposes of an academic thesis creates certain constraints that otherwise would not have existed and that certainly had a role in how complicated working through the design became. Having unconstrained freedom to create Queer Games with inconsistent design and/or uncomfortable stories and gameplay could allow for more genuine games and discussions of different and specific topics. We would also like to note that it is important to acknowledge that having the freedom of exploring light and joyful Queer topics is as equally as important as exploring serious and emotionally complicated Queer topics when designing Queer Games.

Summary of Discussion

We did research on the topic of Queer Games with the intention of finding out what researchers and creators in the field had to say and teach us about it. We also had the intention of creating our own Queer Game based on what we learned from our research. We found several discussions that led to interesting results. We then took those results with us to our design project. We chose several software design methods because our design project was intended to be a computer game. We applied those methods to plan and design our game's ideas and then we used many different computer programs to develop our Queer Game. We learned that Queer Game design can be quite a personal and political process. In conclusion, the results of this bachelor thesis were satisfying but we believe that more in-depth research can be done on the topic of Queer Game Design.

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Glossary

Enshrining The Preposterous - A queer mechanic (according to Avery Mcdaldno) that encourages creative freedom, no matter how absurd an idea may be.

Fluid Characters - A queer mechanic (according to Avery Mcdaldno) that includes any game mechanics that put the player through different playstyles with different priorities and functions.

Fruitful Void - A queer mechanic (according to Avery Mcdaldno) that affects the player's behavior without being practically implemented within the games' mechanics.

Gaga Feminism - A political idea created by Jack Halberstam. It generally revolves around modernizing the criticization of gender norms.

Game mechanics - The core parts that make the specific rules of the game.

Gay memes - An image, video, piece of text, etc. Derived from modern gay internet culture, that is copied and spread rapidly on the internet, often with various adaptations.

Heteronormative - That which is considered normal through the perspectives of heterosexual/straight people.

LGBTQ/LGBT+ - Stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and other sexual or gender identities excluding straight, heterosexual and cisgender.

Polari - An old language used by gay men to keep their sexuality discrete in the old days.

Queer - Was a derogatory word for LGBT+ people but is nowadays often used in academia to refer to LGBT+ people.

Queer games - Either tabletop board games or digital video games (regardless of the medium) that touch Queer subjects.

Queer mechanics - Game mechanics that are based on queer ideas.

Queerness - Themes and attributes that derive from Queer lifestyles.

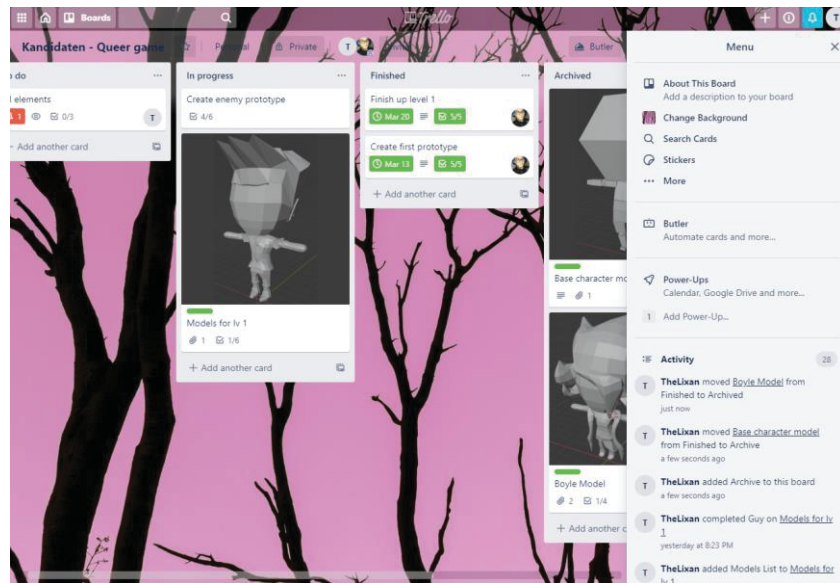**RPG genre -** The game genre of role-playing games.

Images for reference:

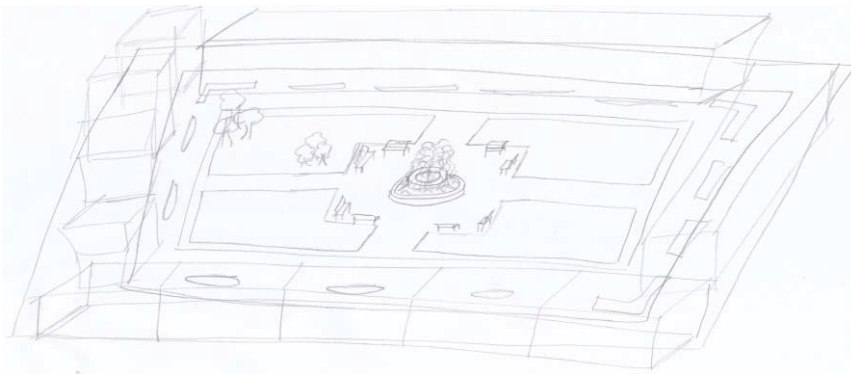Figure 1: The game project's Trello board.

Figure 2: a sketch of a level from the game used in the early stages of designing that level. It was hand drawn on paper with no specific measurements in mind and was meant to be Lo-Fi
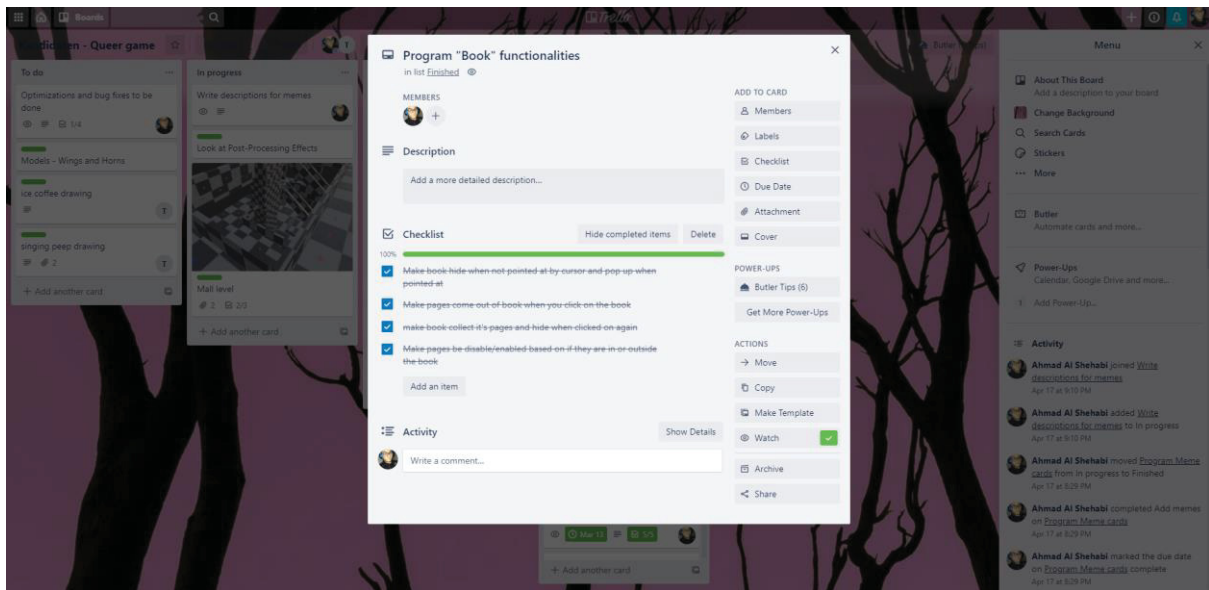
Figure 3: An image of a list of things to be programmed for the "Book" in the game (within a card in the Trello board)
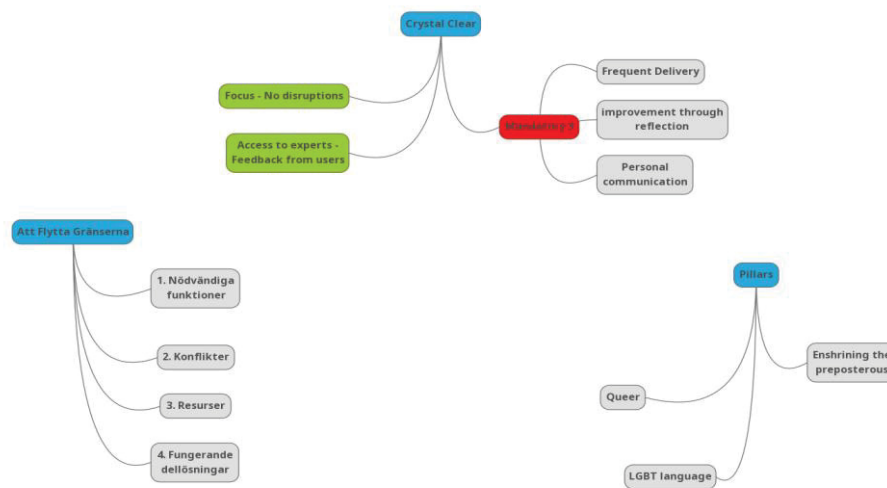

Figure 4: The information radiator mindmap with three methods and their components placed in it

chosen by the gods!
~~Boi~~ Boyle has
some tea to spill
to the commons folk.
Boyle is always boiling
new fresh tea for
the spilling.

Player
character

N-Amy is a
very mean person
they don't want
you to spread
your message and
instead they want
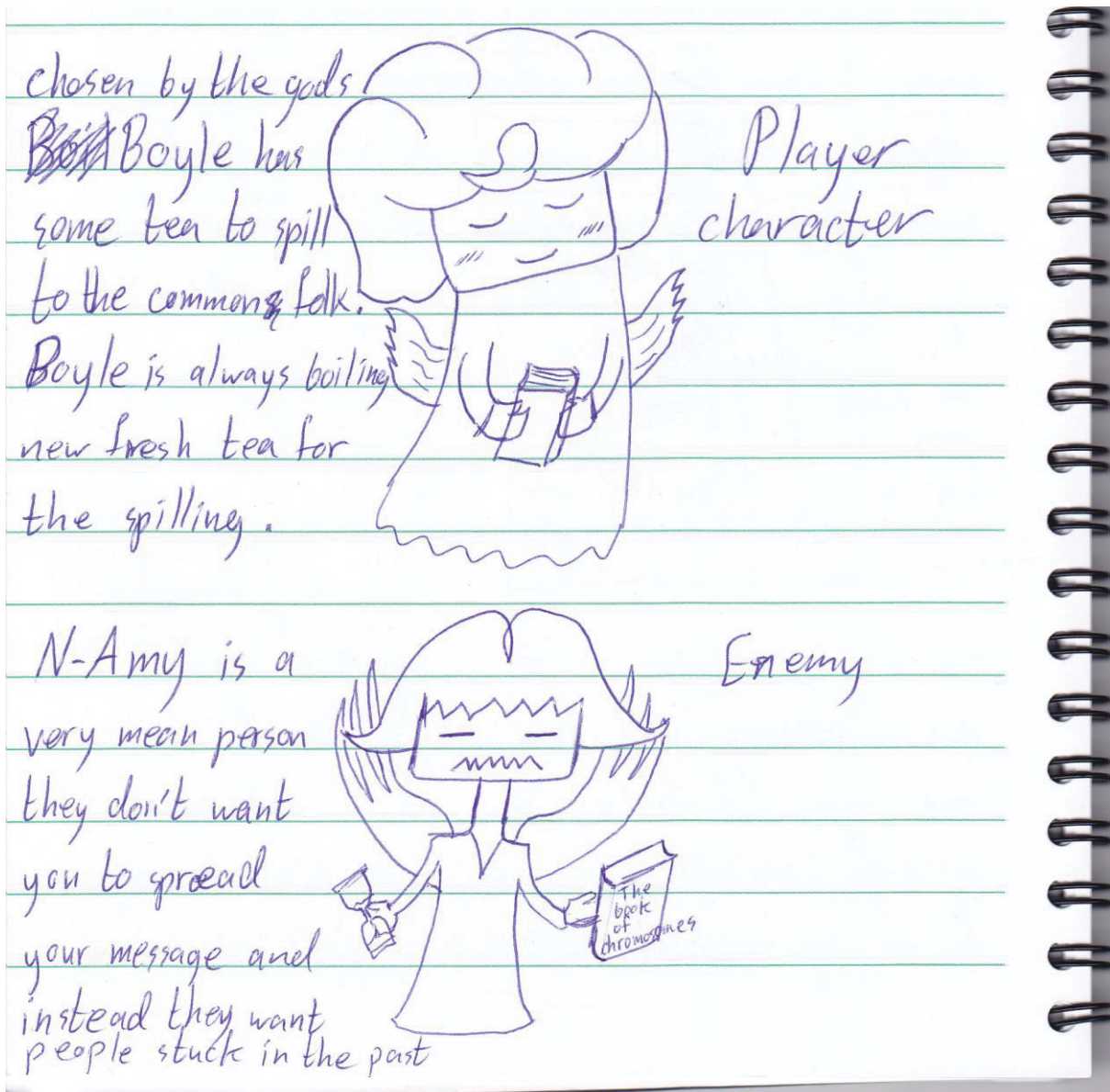people stuck in the past

Enemy

The book of chromosomes

Figure 5: Very first sketches of the player and enemy characters. Drawn simply with pen and paper to lead the start of the character design process. They each have short character descriptions written next to them.

Figure 6: Improved character sketches (not final) with the player character on the right and the enemy character on the left.
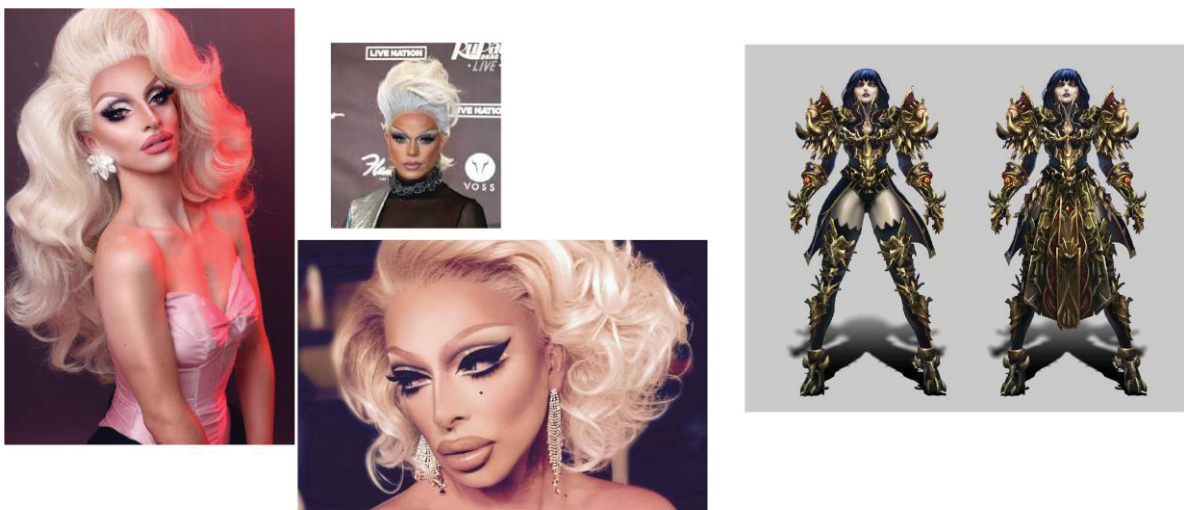

Figure 7: Moodboard for N-Amy.

Figure 8: The finished version of the first stage.

Figure 9: The finished version of the second stage.

Figure 10: Four images from the third and last stage.