3.3 Designing *Jocoi*: A Game about Pregnancy Loss

This chapter addresses the process of designing *Jocoi*, discussing features of the final prototype[1] and the way we got there. In previous write-ups of this process, I have focused on the movement from brainstorming to final prototype in chronological order. This came at the cost of explaining how we actually adapted design devices to accommodate participant stories. To show how the ergodic continuum works in practice to address lived experience, I found it more useful to switch to a structure which resembles the analysis chapters in part 2 of this book. This acknowledges that *Jocoi* exists within a design tradition. It is part of a history of games which have used different strategies to make love and loss tangible.

Based on the women's priorities emerging from the planet models, the game design goal was to respond adequately to these themes through a videogame. This required a balancing of design autonomy, accepting liability for the process and the final prototype but also implementing it in a way that would appeal to the women's tastes. The idea was to continue the muse-based design process in a way that would 'amuse the muses' and lead to interesting observations about designing for grief.

1 *Jocoi* is currently available for MacOS on: https://enibolas.itch.io/jocoi.

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CONCEPTUALISATION

The first weeks of development were used for brainstorming and paper prototyping. Association exercises were used to explore planet features in terms of game verbs: How would activities of looking, feeding, or holding work in a game?

Based on Rusch's (2017) reminder that it is useful to develop a core metaphor as early as possible around which to design the rule, we initially gravitated towards the cave and its clear design vision. In fact, as Anna says, it is "already a game", and as such appeared as the most obvious starting point for the game design. It already comes with a clear starting proposition, a core mechanic, and an end goal: One starts as a multiple-character complex navigating a cave in an effort to feed and thereby help the baby survive. There is a clear sense of progression: The baby is small in the beginning and grows over time as the family learns to organise themselves. There is clarity in the kind of gameplay appropriate for this scenario: a cooperative puzzle mechanic. There is also a central conflict: The baby may not leave the cave, and the protagonists must find the parts of a spaceship which allows them to leave the planet together. The goal is to gain access to building materials by feeding the baby sufficiently.

Paper prototyping this scenario helped expose some questions – and, indeed, challenges – we had initially overlooked. How did one control the characters? Since there were multiple characters, did we want to make a multiplayer game? On the other hand, one chooses the characters in the beginning. This suggested a single-player game with changing roles – a tough technical challenge. How should this collaborative network of people be introduced? What tasks should the characters carry out? They should-shape shift (again, a technical challenge), and feed the baby, but where did they find food? How should the cave work? One should be able to get in and out, but from which perspective, and why? How should the baby be represented? Should the spaceship parts be hidden, constructed from scratch, or found? Addressing each question led to an every-growing feature list and the frustrating insight that we

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had successfully cultivated a brainstorming monster that was about to overwhelm the team and its abilities.

The paper prototype swiftly demonstrated that building the cave scenario was not feasible within the given pragmatic constraints. Furthermore, the organic scene of the cave somewhat disallowed addressing the origin or "history" of the baby in the cave. The baby had been explicitly born there, which meant that attachment was already taken for granted. How could that be communicated? Question after question emerged from the paper prototype, until we decided, not without frustration, that the core metaphor was not clear enough.

Preliminarily leaving the cave scenario behind was helpful to reestablish contact with the other models and investigate their features anew. The students were asked to identify a single metaphor from the planets that resonated most strongly with them. While they discovered a variety of interesting starting points, we were collectively fascinated by the image of the river and its twofold potential to tell a bonding story. First, as a landscape formation, the river-as-grief metaphor contains a notion of historicity: The river had been created over time, and its flowing, constantly changing quality expressed that "grief changes over time" (Marie).

In the workshop before, and in the design team later, this image sparked conversations about past and future: How did the river get there? What had the world looked like before mother and child were separated? Had there been a prelapsarian universe where they grazed together? In the present, what would happen if the sheep walked through the river? In other words, the image allowed us to reflect about all moments in the attachment, loss, and grief journey. Secondly, the river metaphor was part of a fable world; a world in which sheep and tigers negotiated their relationships, and thus symbolically raised questions about the ongoing connection to the dead and the mother's responsibilities in the world of the living. This was the beginning of designing *Jocoi*.

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PLAYING AT MOTHERING: *JOCOI*'S ATTACHMENT MECHANICS

Fast-forward to the final version of *Jocoi* in January 2015. The player enters *Jocoi* through a start menu displaying an animated campfire whose meaning is yet unclear. When pressing 'play', the game starts with a black-and-white tutorial, in which the game's main controls are explained. The game is played as the mother sheep exploring a bright 2.5D meadow with her little lamb. A flock grazes idly in the background. Apart from a meditative forest soundscape, no music is playing.

By pressing the mouse buttons, the mother sheep navigates across the screen, followed by her baby linked to her by an invisible tether. Pressing right and left mouse buttons, flowers and patches of grass can be eaten or fed. This gradually adds music to the game, which stands for the mother-child relationship. Playing around for some minutes, the idyllic atmosphere is suddenly broken by an earthquake, removing lamb and music without explanation. Based on recollections of the soundscape, and aided by hints one can hear when looking across the river, the player engages in commemoration, eventually acquiring the ability to move on with the flock.

Rules

Two aspects from the planets fed into the decision of rules and mechanics: First, in the mother's inner representations, their baby was consistently modelled as the recipient of care or nurturing efforts. This also means that there was a clear boundary between giver and receiver of attention, who is the agent and who is the object of love. In what we have seen in previous games, this would speak most to a dependency device. *Shelter's* representation of nurturing as feeding comes closest to the women's vision of core activities in the game.

However, a second commonality expressed in the planets was the wish for a timeless, carefree place, in which mother and child could celebrate their bond beyond the pressures of lived reality. In gameplay

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terms, this speaks against *Shelter*'s fast-paced action mechanics and the constant peril of a starving, drowning, or attacked cub. More generally, it suggested the exclusion of mandatory game goals as such, even though some planets included at least potential goals.

What seemed most appropriate was an exploration or puzzle mechanic with the central focus of "feeding and caring" (Anna). Since the child is both the object of love and the mediator of a maternal identity, we found it appropriate to make gameplay revolve around building something together. By left-clicking on a flower, it is fed to the lamb, using a mouth-to-mouth feeding action similar to *Shelter*. The consequences of this action are expressed symbolically. By feeding the flower, the player simultaneously selects a music track and a fur pattern, which is added to the lamb. By left-clicking on the lamb, the camera zooms into a close-up of the lamb, allowing the player to take a closer look at the new fur. Simultaneously, the flower's associated music track starts looping as a more subtle illustration that the world has just become a richer place. In this world of unlimited parental control, sounds and fur patterns which are no longer desired can be removed by feeding a patch of grass. This responds especially to Christina's wish for a carefree bonding experience without lasting consequences.

The two devices resonating the most with the women's wish to experience closeness with a vulnerable baby were dependency and synergy: By following the mother and being fed, the lamb is dependent on her service. On the other hand, its fur and the music it 'gives' to the world co-constructs a shared environment which is pleasant to inhabit for both.

The women's inclusion of family and friends as available resources is expressed in the flock's quietly roaming around in the background. In an early version of the game, the flock's only function was to be there, and provide a visible context of belonging. This relative passivity, and their unavailability for interaction, made the flock appear ignorant, even arrogant to some players. This was particularly tangible in the moment of loss, when the flock would graze as though nothing had happened.

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Although this resonated with some player's personal experience of a helpless surrounding unequipped to deal with someone else's loss, the flock should also represent a support network as described by the women. At the same time, a solution for respawning the meadow's flowers had to be introduced in order to provide resources for bonding. This is why when left-clicked, mother and lamb approach the flock and the whole group lies down to doze and snuggle up. The weather animation triggered by this action was based on the mothers' associations to weather change. While cuddling, the sheep can observe, together, how different seasons go by, and decide when to wake up to a desirable weather state.

Another left-click on the flock causes the current weather to freeze and spawns a fresh array of flowers. Four weather types are available, each coming with their unique set of colours and sounds. Since each weather state offers a different variety of flowers, which will again feature different sounds and fur colours, the flock thus stands for the 'safe base' from which these new grounds can be explored.

Initially, we wanted players to discover this option rather than be told about it through visual prompts or head-up displays (HUDs). However, the women's wish to be told about controls beforehand led to the conclusion of explaining this interaction in the initial tutorial.

Apart from the open-ended activity of customising looks and sounds, 'being with' the lamb, there is no goal in *Jocoi*. However, the game's only HUD element, the flower bar on top of the screen, opens the floor for interpretation. Some players have taken this as a hint for a puzzle: Does one have to collect flowers of all patterns or colours to "win" the game? This concern for doing things 'correctly', and gaining control over a situation, in which there is none, resonates well with the project of parenting. *Jocoi* offers space for projecting the wish to objectively 'know' which flowers are the best, and which music tracks are the 'winning' combination. The alternative would be goalless exploration, in which the player listens to what feels right in the moment irrespective of objective external restrictions. In *Jocoi*, like in life, finding 'truth' in parenting is possible, but only through projection.

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On the invisible level of code, the number of times the lamb is fed flowers and patches of grass is added to a counter calculating the moment of separation. We intended to make this moment appear randomly, 'out of the blue', interrupting the meditative, mundane bonding phase.

Controls

Jocoi's simple mouse control scheme responds to two intentions. First, we wanted to reach players beyond an established gamer audience, who might be alienated by complicated controls. In her recent essay *Mouse Power* (2016), journalist Emilie Reed points to the forgotten role of the mouse as a pervasive piece of hardware in many homes and offices. While she identifies the mouse as something which made her feel empowered when first learning about computers, it is consistently rejected by game studies as an inferior entertainment device (Reed 2016: 113).

For my purpose, the ordinary, low-profile status of the mouse becomes an advantage. Since the women know this piece of hardware from contexts other than gaming, it does not pose an immediate 'threat' – as a game console would. In addition, for players like Reed, who is attuned to mouse-based exploration adventures from the 90s, the mouse offers a nostalgic value.

The second intention was to model a sense of the baby's presence in the mother's life, and the mouse allowed us to do so through a simple binary mapping. As discussed earlier in the context of *Ico*'s call/response and *Brothers*' tandem controls, the physical dimension of controllers can play an important role in naturalising a relationship between videogame characters. We adapted this principle of zooming in on a character's needs by representing them through a control element.

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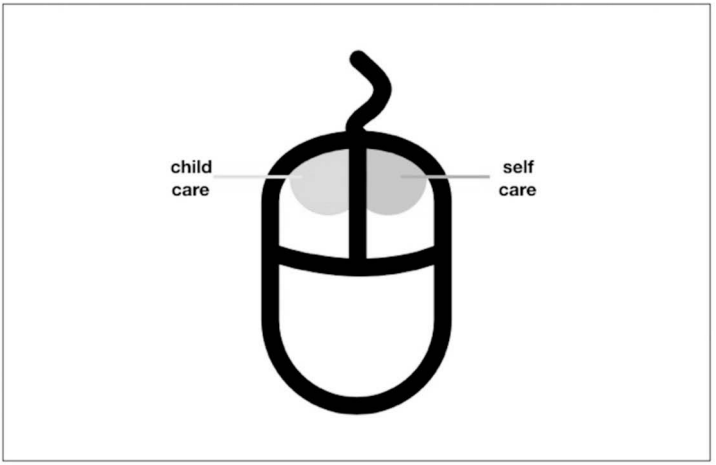
Figure 22: Jocoi's *control scheme*



Source: author

We divided the mouse into two 'hemispheres' representing different needs of the mother sheep (fig. 22). While the left click represents the need to take care of the baby, the right button represents the need for self-care. Most of the actions in *Jocoi* can be seen through either of these lenses. For instance, if one presses the left button on a flower or a patch of grass, the 'nurturing' lens is triggered, and the mother feeds the lamb. Right-clicking on the same object makes the mother feed herself. A similar principle applies when walking around by clicking on the meadow. A left-click triggers a playful, child-friendly skipping animation, while right-clicking triggers the mother's own calmer and slower pace.

In designing this dichotomy between left/right mouse buttons as nurturing/self-care, we aimed at creating an imbalance which invites the player to first exclusively focus on the act of nurturing. This responded to the women's reports that all actions on the planet revolved around the mother-child connection. The deliberate imbalance between child-focus and self-focus emerged as a result of two factors.

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First, rather than a neutral piece of hardware, the mouse controller is constructed according to a dominant hierarchy between 'first' (left) and 'second' (right) mouse button. Using the index finger, we use this 'first' button to open website browsers, applications, and documents, while the right mouse is mostly used to open contextual menus and provide background information. We expected this convention to impact players' relation to *Jocoi* as well, making the left mouse button more important by default. This convention is in line with a visual tradition of framing left and right information as Given and New (Kress/ vanLeeuwen 2006).

In the chapter on *Brothers* (2.4), I have addressed how game controllers translate this visual tradition to the haptic dimension of the controller/hand space. On *Jocoi*'s mouse control scheme, the Given, as the kind of information we take for granted and which is no longer challenged, is mapped to the index finger, while challenged, less established, New information exists in the space of the middle finger (Kress/van Leeuwen 2006). As a result of this visual-spatial regime, we expected the left mouse button to be more in players' focus than the right one.

In addition to being conventionally more dominant, *Jocoi* constructs the left mouse button to mediate more interesting experiences. Mothering activities have a greater impact on the game world than actions of self-care. In fact, eating a flower or patch of grass during the first part of the game seems superfluous, characterising the mother's initial feeling that attentiveness to the child is all that counts.

Over the course of the first minutes, these dynamics reinforce an engagement with the left side of the mouse which teach the players that the left mouse button is all that is required to play the game. In fact, the players may forget about the existence of the right button altogether. As the player is now conditioned to the simple principle of feeding and tending to the child, the mother-child bond has been normalised.

When the lamb disappears, the left mouse button changes its function. Without the lamb, the mother sheep cannot use it to walk or nurture. These were contextual actions focused on the lamb. Instead, the

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left mouse button, pressed on any object in the game, elicits a scream. Based on user testing, this has been an impactful design decision. Players expressed helplessness and a sense of shock when the mother-child controls were no longer available. For a playtester who was also a father, the controls were "too much. This game shouldn't be shown to parents". Most observed players showed a moment of helplessness and frustration when they repeatedly pressed the left mouse button, listening to the same 'bah' sound over and over again. This is an intended moment of control loss, when established mechanics fail to work, imposing a need for adjustment. It is in this moment that the self-care skills mapped on the right side of the mouse come into play. Following a short moment of stagnation, players usually find this option, and 'relearn' the right mouse button.

Mother-Child Space

As mentioned before, the women consistently modelled mother-child space in terms of two priorities, intuitiveness and safety. In three out of four models, the mother's physical presence to the child is a default condition, or a possibility on the planet. Christina reports that the ability to hold and be there with Nino was most fulfilling. Anna defines picking up and holding the baby in the cave as an ordinary, essential activity to help him grow. Even on the fireside planet, where people are not represented, the baby is implied in her mother's arms. In none of the scenarios is this connection threatened or challenged.

We therefore found it most appropriate to use the *invisible bond* spatially linking mother sheep and lamb. As described previously, particularly in the *Shelter* chapter, the invisible bond device defines the space between game characters as given, and therefore as intuitive. It also involves a power divide between leader and follower, nurturer and nurtured, which resonates with the way the women described their connection to the child. In *Shelter*, the effects of the invisible bond are twofold: The connection emerges from their tribe-like presence, their spatial proximity by default, which makes them strive for survival as a

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collective. Although this is not spelled out, players have felt it that way (Walker 2013, Ellison 2013).

While the invisible bond seemed appropriate to frame the mother-child relationship in *Jocoi*, there is also the relationship to the flock. This stands for the support by friends and family members which the women reported to have some importance. In contrast to the intuitive mother-child relationship, however, contact with the flock is voluntary and needs some initiative (clicking). The role of support is expressed through the 'snuggling' mechanic which turns the collective into a temporary union. As described in the analysis chapter on *Passage*[2], the union device eliminates the boundaries between characters and turns them into a single unit. Rather than controlling this unit, however, players of *Jocoi* control the time at which to connect and at which to let go of the collective support. By doing so, new resources (flowers) are spawned, symbolising the nurturing quality of the family bond.

This means that there are two types of inter-character spatiality; a spatiality describing the intuitive, uncontrollable bond between mother and child, and a spatiality describing the wilful connection to a collective in the background. In *Jocoi*, spatial proximity deliberately exists without adversarial aspects. Rather than alert, we wanted players to be relaxed and observant while exploring the affordances of the mother-child bond and the support of the flock, rather than being afraid to lose them. As the women described it, there is time to 'just be', and we focused on this feeling of being by creating an uncontested space. In terms of level design, this is the playing field of the meadow separated from the forest through an invisible wall. In a previous iteration, we toyed with the idea of foreshadowing danger by triggering a growling sound effect when the mother sheep walked too close to the forest. When some test players then identified the game as a horror game, we decided to remove this element, but kept in mind the important role audio can play in framing events.

2 For a more detailed treatment of the union device, see chapters 2.3 and 2.6.

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Visual Design

When it comes to visual and character design, the decision of using sheep resonated with the fact that animals were recurring symbols in most of the women's models. Besides the sheep and tigers on Marie's planet, Anna could hear birds from inside the cave, and compares nurturing the baby to something a bird mother would do. There are wild animals on Christina's planets, including giraffes and elephants. This suggested that animals were appropriate player proxies for the women. Our decision to use simple graphics, made up of similar pentagon shapes responds to the observation that shape seemed to matter: Christina and Anna chose similar rubber plates to represent family members, including the deceased baby.

In both models, the shapes used to represent children and adults are similar, and in Anna's case this is a deliberate choice. Pointing to her key card, which says "gestalt", Anna points to the special meaning of this term, given that her baby was born with a physical difference. Her wish to represent him in terms of a 'normal' shape competes with the wish to acknowledge the form he was born with. Looking "like the others", "looking normal" stands for the wish to include the dead baby among the living and give it equal importance. The development team expressed this wish by making child, mother and flock look alike in the first part of *Jocoi.*

While in the beginning of the game, the whole flock is white, the colourful patterns which form on the lamb's fur are supposed to express the child's individuality in the eyes of the mother. The mother as an agent of attention is further stressed by the possibility to zoom into the lamb's fur and look at it in detail. This means that there is sameness in the beginning, sprinkled with small differences which are explored through the choice of picking up different flowers representing different nurturing styles.

During the first part of the game, the intactness of the family unit is communicated through the sheep form, while in the second part, a transformation of the child happens. This transformation is based on

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Marie's symbolic distinction between the realms of the living and the dead as distinction between livestock (sheep) and predator (tigers). In this metaphor, which resonated with the remaining women as well, physical difference stands for separation. To underscore the difference between the sheep's meekness and the tiger's predatory features, we settled on the mythological sheep/wolf binary. The intention was to communicate the opposite natures of life and death and imply that the mother's yearning for the child was a yearning for something dangerous and transformative. At the same time, the baby wolf keeps the 'customised' fur throughout the transformation. To the mother's gaze on the other side of the river, the wolf continues to be the beloved baby, irrespective of the altered shape.

Apart from the dichotomy of sheep and wolves, we used *age markers,* one of the devices described in previous chapters. Inspired by *Shelter,* we turned the lamb into a miniature version of the mother, hopping to catch up with her. Like the badgers' delightful waddling, we wanted these movements to have a charming effect, to be perceived as cute by the players. Observing that the size difference between lamb and mother effectively communicates who is in charge and who is nurtured, we positioned the lamb as worthy of the mother's/player's unconditional protection.

The size difference responds to Anna's 'Tamagotchi' comparison, in which she identifies the baby as someone who needs to be nurtured without the expectation that it look after itself. This is why we decided to leave the baby small throughout the entire bonding phase. In an earlier build, we had experimented with a growth effect as a consequence of feeding. In some cases, this meant that the baby outgrew the mother, challenging the meaning of vulnerability and cuteness. We decided that it was enough to represent the parenting effects through the introduction of colour on the lamb fur and the changing soundscape.

Gender markers were deliberately excluded for two reasons. First, none of the women had mentioned gender in their models, implicitly or explicitly. If anything, dominant gender assumptions were at work in the way they described their 'mothering' role as nurturing and caring

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(Kaplan 2013[1992]). As we see in *Shelter*, representing such activities in a videogame is enough to establish a consensus among players that they engage in 'mothering', rather than 'fathering', or 'uncleing'. While nurturing activities are enough to spur readings along dominant ideas of 'mothering', this reading is not enforced by gender markers which narrow down the dominant meaning. This is a second reason to refrain from explicit gendering; the possibility to invite alternative appropriations from a father's, sibling's, or friend's perspective. While players have the ability to meaningfully engage with characters who do not share their demographic profiles (Shaw 2013), leaving the adult sheep's identity up for negotiation can invite a multiplicity of contextual player meanings.

Sound and Music

The act of listening, as opposed to watching or acting, requires attention to environmental subtleties which we thought appropriate for modelling the women's focus on being in the moment and paying attention to the baby. This is why music plays a central role in *Jocoi'*s gameplay. Even before the player presses a mouse button, simply wiping the mouse over a flower triggers an animation and a music track. The player can listen to this track for as long as necessary to decide whether to move away or 'commit' to it by pressing the left mouse button. When the flower is fed, we hear two things; a 'being fed' jingle akin to the arpeggio sound in *Shelter*, and the flower's music track, which continues playing until we either feed a patch of grass, or a differently coloured flower of the same pattern.

This means that we used the *synaesthetic device,* defining sound as a stand-in for the instinctual bond between mother and child and for the quality of parenting choices. These parenting choices have a rational and an emotional component. On the one hand, the mother sheep goes out and compares sounds of flowers in order to select the most appropriate one. On the other hand, the selection of a flower is based on a deeply personal understanding of what can count as appropriate. While it is a

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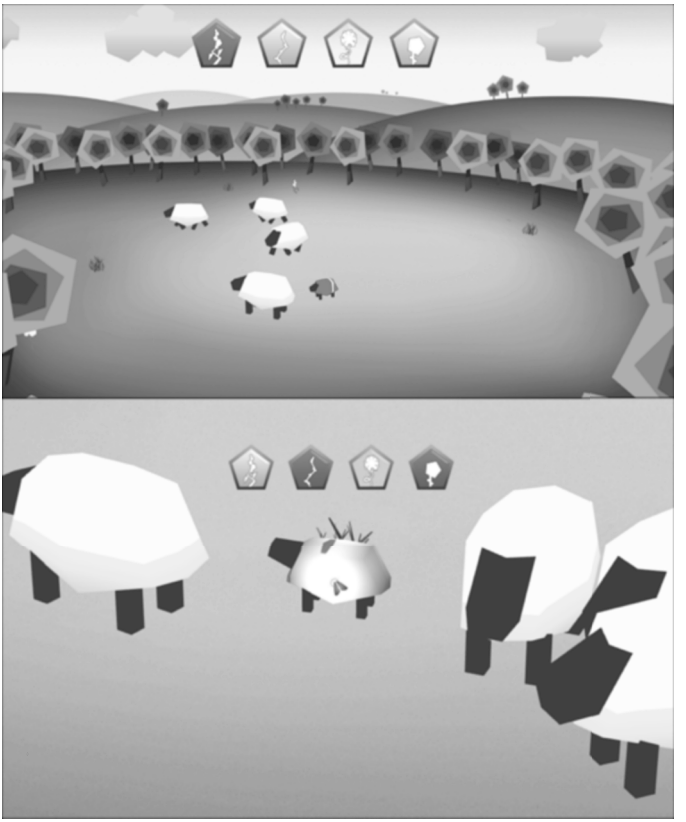
matter of responsibility to engage in the act of nurturing, it is a matter of taste to settle on a particular flower.

Figure 23: Second iteration of Jocoi*, flower bar and 'admiration' zoom function (below)*



Source: author

As the flower symbol bar on the top of the screen (fig. 23) fills up, this subjective emotional space of appropriate parenting choices becomes richer in sound, too. We intended for this richness to have a personal

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meaning for the players, and for the mechanic of composing a soundtrack to be clear enough to make players remember their compositions after separation from the lamb. This turned out more challenging than expected; few players could distinguish different sound layers or memorised the sound of a flower after they had included them in 'their' soundtrack.

This impacted the overall understanding of the second part of the game, which is based on the player's recollection of previously encountered sounds as well. In keeping with the auditory as a symbol for the emotional, we created a sound-based puzzle in which the player 're-collects' the combination of flowers last heard before the lamb's disappearance. When facing the river, players can hear this composition. They then have to go back to the meadow and identify flowers matching the sounds they just heard by means of grazing off the patches of grass covering them. This means that a sound puzzle has to be achieved blindly: The sheep mother does not see the one she misses, but she can make an effort remembering them by listening to shared memories and engaging (eating) with them.

AND THEN THERE WAS THE EARTHQUAKE: SEPARATION

At a random point during this bonding phase, the screen starts shaking, we hear the sound of thunder rolling, and the screen fades to black. This is the moment of an unexplained loss, a moment which was not addressed by the women in detail, suggesting that reasons for their pregnancy loss matter less than its impact. As a metaphor for loss, the earthquake stays ambiguous while clearly communicating a cesura. Players have not seen such a moment before; the black-out breaks with the idyllic, monotonous 'being there', and the growling sound replaces the music which players composed before.

One message we wanted to avoid by randomising the earthquake moment was to blame the player for 'failing' as a parent. This is the case in *Shelter*, where permadeath frames loss as a failure of mothering. A

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more appropriate example for where we wanted to go is *Passage*, where death is defined as a condition of life, as a condition of the gameplay system. However, the space-equals-time logic of *Passage* allows an anticipation of death. We wanted to introduce death as an aspect of the game system rather than a scripted moment, while on the level of player experience this moment should come out of the blue.

Furthermore, players should have had enough time to bond and be engaged in collecting flowers and adjusting their soundtracks or pursuing self-imposed goals. This is why the time of the earthquake was based on two facts: The time since starting the level, and the amount of flowers that had been fed to the lamb. If, at a random moment inside a time window, at least three flowers had been fed the earthquake was introduced.

Testing the first prototype showed that this often led to a situation in which feeding a flower directly triggered an earthquake, leading to an undesired cause-effect narrative. Some players believed that they had accidentally poisoned the lamb by feeding a toxic flower, retroactively reading the colourful dots and stripes on the lamb's fur as signs of illness. This led them to think they were incompetent parents, expediting a reading we had hoped to avoid.

In the next iteration, we worked on discouraging a causal connection between nurturing and loss by defining that loss can never happen directly after a feeding event. Additionally, we changed the colour scheme and patterns on the sheep to hopefully look less poisonous.

The First-Person River

When the game fades back in after the earthquake, we see the mother sheep and the flock in the weather state we have seen them in before, but the music layers, flower symbol bar, and the lamb are gone. Additionally, we see a river in the right corner of the screen, which can be entered with either mouse button.

The intention here is that the loss of the lamb also brings new opportunities: looking over the river and admiring the lamb, which has now transformed into a wolf cub, and, as mentioned, wears the lamb's

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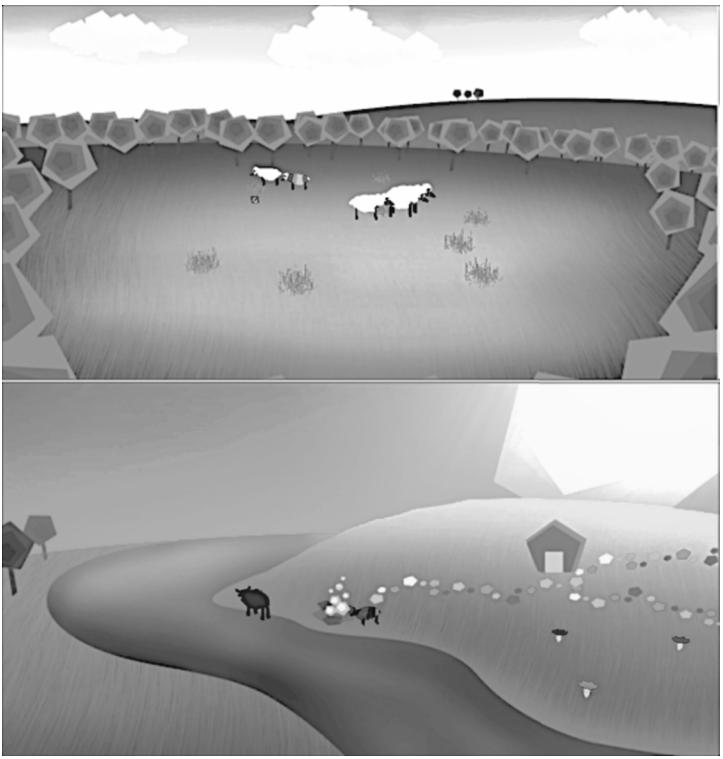
old fur colours. On this screen, the player views the other side of the river from a first-person perspective. This 'first-person river' view (or FPR), as we called it, was supposed to communicate the immersion of the sheep mother when watching her child. On the other side of the river, the wolf cub and an adult wolf – the great-grandmother in Marie's model – sit around a campfire. We see a cave in the background, which might be their burrow, and from time to time, the wolves stretch their legs or howl.

Figure 24: First iteration of Jocoi*, bonding phase (above) and first-person river view (below)*



Source: author

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Furthermore, the moment the player enters the FPR, they hear the last melody before the earthquake, and the symbol bar reappears. Instead of the full flower symbol, only the outlines are coloured. We thereby indicate that the feeling of attachment to the child is no longer the 'full' experience but has become a memory. However, when mousing over the flower symbols, their music is still audible. This is relevant for solving the music puzzle to follow.

Some seconds after they enter the FPR scene, the player sees an arrow symbol, the game's only visual prompt suggesting the player to go back, to leave the scene. This arrow symbolises the common sense voice indicating that in order to live on with the loss, the sheep must leave the FPR and focus on her own life. However, one can resist this voice and instead stay focused on the lamb by holding the left mouse button pressed on it. The camera moves forward, imitating the sheep's walking movements. A prompt appears: "Let go". If the player lets go of the mouse button, the camera zooms back, and the sheep is pulled back to the side of the living. If the player resists again, they have committed to the other side, and the credits roll.

RE-COLLECTIONS

After the player has revisited this memory by looking across the river, they find themselves back on a meadow sprinkled with patches of grass. These patches of grass cover the flowers which spawn on the meadow and stand for the now unavailable 'happy moments' with the lamb. Using the right mouse button, the sheep mother can eat off a layer of grass, uncovering the colour, and later, the shape of a flower.

This activity stands for facing the loss and making oneself vulnerable by peeling off 'protective' layers of memories. The act of eating is at once a symbol for processing ('stomaching') and unpacking themes of the past. That this is a tedious process is expressed by the two layers of grass, requiring repetition to uncover and eat a flower. One also takes a risk by confronting the loss. If one eats a flower which has not been

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included in the soundtrack, the sheep is overwhelmed by sadness and the puzzle resets.

This can be prevented by listening carefully and picking flowers only if one is sure the melody matches one heard in the FPR scene. Anytime during the puzzle, players can go back to the FPR to listen to the soundtrack and mouse over the symbol bar to listen to individual sounds. Back on the meadow they can also listen to flowers even if they are covered by grass.

Re-collecting the correct flowers might require asking for the flock's support. Interaction with the flock works as usual, which has been experienced as callous by some players: The flock seems to be ignorant about the fact that a loss has just happened. Instead of reacting to the mother's helpless calls, they continue living their lives as though nothing had happened and are only available if explicitly asked for support. On the other hand, they never refuse giving help, either. Like on the planets, the women take center stage, while they are embedded in a family-and-friend collective.

Once the players have re-collected the three or four flower sounds that were active when they last saw the lamb, the forest gives way to a path leading the flock to a new meadow. While the flock marches off, the screen fades to white and the game ends. Although this is an open ending – we don't know whether they will just move up the river and maintain a connection to the wolf cub on the other side, or whether they leave it behind – it still invokes the 'grief work' paradigm[3].

3 The 'grief work' paradigm is a dominant way of making sense of grief during the 20th century which argues that grief can only be 'successful' if the griever goes through a pre-defined set of activities. As I have argued in chapter 1.2, this view on grief is potentially disenfranchising since it assumes a more or less successful way of grieving. However, some grievers find the idea of closure empowering, such as Anna, who talks about tasks which must be completed to leave the 'grief planet'. The women agreed that solving a hard puzzle to manage the first intense grief resonated with their experience.

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