

Making Space for Grief: Conclusive Thoughts

In this study I have used a multidisciplinary lens to investigate the expressive possibilities of videogames when it comes to representing bereavement.

I first conducted five analyses of single-player games and their portrayals of attachment, loss, and grief in inter-character relationships. The analyses were conceptually rooted in the idea that games exist on an ergodic continuum (Newman 2002), involve players in interreactive ways (Smethurst 2015), and invite metaphorical projections (Rusch 2017). The goal was both to learn from the nuanced ways games have portrayed psychodynamics of bonding, separation, and grief in the past, and to critique limitations and problems with the chosen examples.

I then applied the learnings from the analysis to a participatory design study on pregnancy loss. Using muse-based design (Khaled 2012), this case study investigated how underrepresented grief narratives can be included into game design. Four Austrian bereaved mothers were invited to inspire the ideation of the game *Jocoi*. They participated in the metaphorical modelling workshop *Trauerspiel*, for which I adapted strategies from expressive art therapy (Potash/ Ho 2014, Levine 2014) and personal game design (Rusch 2017) to the needs of the participants.

Harking back to the question of how videogames can make space for bereavement, I will review my findings along three spaces of impact.

crafting or poiesis (Levine 2014) and receiving attention by empathetic listeners (Thompson 2003).

The development team started in the role of such active listeners, engaging with the evocative planet models in an attempt to formulate a respectful response. This process came with two benefits for the design team. First, the recurrent wish for ‘timelessness’ and ‘goallessness’ challenged established ideas about video games and inspired unorthodox thinking.

Secondly, engaging with griever’s emotional landscapes meant to make a gift for someone whose tastes had previously been off the radar for videogame designers. This came with small surprises for the design team, such as the fact that the women enjoyed sharing stories about their children and imagined their grief worlds in colourful ways. The planet models are a far shot from the widespread idea that bereavement is the end of care.

