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The Future Is Full of Monsters: Queer Survival One Click at a Twine

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Thesis of 'Aolani N. Robinson

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts Composition, Rhetoric, and Digital Media

Nova Southeastern University
Halmos College of Arts and Sciences

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THE FUTURE IS FULL OF MONSTERS: QUEER SURVIVAL ONE CLICK AT A TWINE

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Composition, Rhetoric, and Digital Media

‘Aolani Robinson

Halmos College of Arts and Sciences

Department of Communication, Media, and the Arts

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ABSTRACT

Spurred by a desire to explore queer rhetoric through interactive forms of media, this project analyzed the game-making program Twine to uncover how independent queer creators use the tool to explore queer survival against time, capitalism, and constrained identities. A more accessible platform than other game-making tools, Twine's unique interactivity puts the ability to make interactive games and stories into the hands of indie marginalized creators who are often overlooked in both mainstream gaming and queer rhetorics (Anthropy, 2012). Thus, this thesis contributes to queer rhetoric, game studies, and trans rhetorics by exploring the strategies indie Twine creators use in their works. Through a detailed case study that analyzes the procedural rhetoric, interactivity, narratives, and character depictions in Twine games by Anna Anthropy (2015), Brendan Hennessey (2017), and TheNamelessOne (2018), themes emerged that contribute to scholarly discourse on queer futurity, queer economic resistance, identity rhetorics, and gender binaries. The analysis showcases not only the existence of advanced queer discourse and rhetorical arguments within these games, but also highlights the potential for Twine to act as a space to explore what comes after queer futurity. This project ultimately argues for Twine's place as a valuable site for the study of queer rhetorics and as a powerful tool that academics can use in widening new media discourse and pushing the limits of what is considered scholarly writing producing new media scholarship.

Keywords: Composition, Rhetoric, Trans Rhetorics, Queer Futurity, Queer Rhetorics, New Media, Games

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2020, *Peitho* released a special issue by editors Patterson and Rawson (2020) focusing on trans rhetorics, a growing branch of analysis that has blossomed recently as explored in the extended annotated bibliography provided as part of the issue. Similarly, in 2018 the journal *Game Studies* released their own special issue edited by Ruberg and Phillips (2018) examining the world of queer game studies. What both special issues have in common is their examination of a rapidly growing subset of composition-rhetoric and game studies.

As these special issues highlight, while both queer rhetoric and game studies have blossomed and become staples in their larger categories, there is still much room left for growth. It is through these gaps that this project is situated. Ultimately, the game making tool Twine, which allows creators to make text-based games with little coding and interactive elements, is an example of one site of study within these gaps. Through Twine, creators are writing and exploring the potentials of Queer survival and existence within the areas of gender, identity, economics, and futurity. It is the examination of how these creators use these areas that composition and rhetoric theorists can find new ways to explore gender identity, discourse, and deconstruction, while also highlighting new representations of queerness. As both the *Peitho* (Patterson & Rawson, 2020) and *Game Studies* (Ruberg & Phillips, 2018) special issues suggest, there is much room left to explore, and Twine is the perfect place for exploration.

What makes Twine perfectly fit within the space of trans rhetorics, queer game studies, and queer game creation is its unique accessibility for creators. Many Twine creators are new to the world of game creation and have never made a game with any other type of tool (Anthropy, 2012). In fact, game creators such as Anna Anthropy (2012) specifically call for such creators to be at the forefront of the Twine independent game revolution. The reasoning behind this call, and the reason Twine became the focus of this project, is this rich untapped creator audience. While

the *Game Studies* (Ruberg & Phillips, 2018) issue put the spotlight on queer game studies, the titles examined within the issue came from either traditionally well-known, influential, and mainstream companies such as Bethesda or from independent game studios with extremely large and influential backings that guaranteed some modicum of success. Thus, the depictions of queerness found within such games are usually limited in their variety to the representation that is most palatable for a larger audience. Similarly, the *Peitho* (Patterson & Rawson, 2020) issue neglected any mention of trans representation within games at all. Through Twine, this project focuses on the niche audiences and representations of queerness that are overlooked in larger titles. These Twine games are often unpolished, raw, unfiltered, and written from the personal experience that the queer characters in larger games often lack. Their audience is small and rather insular, but this group has some of the largest additions to make to the conversation.

Thus, the decision was made to focus on queer identity and rhetorics in particular because of the current moment in history. Twine games are mostly text-based and scholars such as Anastasia Salter (2016) have studied them. Yet, no detailed study that I could find has been done on Twine's use by the growing queer game making community. Thus, Twine allows for the analysis of not only alternative non-academic rhetorics, but marginalized rhetorics as well. Examining the three games by Anna Anthropy (2015), TheNamelessOne (2018), and Brendan Hennessy (2017) allows this thesis to partake in a reconsideration of new media writing and rhetoric as disseminated outside the university by marginalized creators. This exploration ultimately leads to an analysis of the ways these creators examine various aspects of queer existence and survival with a focus on time, economics, gender, and identity.

Twine games made by these small creators allow for an examination of new ways that rhetoricians can write, discuss, and explore gender identity. They showcase personal expressions of queerness untapped by traditional game analysis and markets. Some topics brought up by

these independent creators could be useful for reexamining some of the conceptions of queer rhetoric currently circulating by applying ideas of post-futurity, which I define as the exploration of queerness in a world where queer identity has replaced heteronormativity as the standard, to queer composition within academia.

The aforementioned Twine creators and community are just one example of the potential that Twine holds as a resource. Stunningly, the creators who explore these themes of gender, identity, futurity, and economic survival may not have always been cognizant of the rhetorical meaning packed within their work during their initial writing. This unawareness that game creators sometimes have of the rhetorical work done by their games lends an additional importance to this project as it also serves as a potential roadmap for independent queer creators who may want to illustrate the complex relationships between queerness, gender identity, time, and economics. Twine is not only useful as a platform to be studied but also as a tool that may be used by those within, and outside of, comp-rhet to explore issues that engage multiple modalities and interactivity within their study of queerness.

The rest of this thesis is broken down into six chapters. Chapter two breaks down the various literature that influenced this research. Split into sections based on time, economics and the body, gender, and identity, allows for an in-depth review of the previous scholarship on the themes that were ultimately found across all three games.

Chapter three delves into the methods that were used during the analysis of all three games. This chapter discusses pre-eminent games scholarship such as Bogost (2007) and Sicart (2014), among others, who inform my approach, and explain the step-by-step process I used to find themes within each game. Also included within this chapter is a detailed synopsis of each game's main storyline.

Chapters four, five, and six explore the various themes of queerness and identity inside the Twine games. Chapter four examines gender and identity within the games. Because of the focus on queerness, it is important to analyze how game creators both present queerness as identity and showcase resistance to traditional gender binaries. This chapter splits this analysis into three sections based on character portrayals, monstrosity, and gender.

Chapter five looks at economics and the body. Economic survival and queer resistance to capitalism were important themes shared by all three creators' works. Looking at the distinct possibilities for queering capitalism, this chapter examines the critiques of economics that were present throughout the Twine games.

Chapter six ends the analysis with an examination of time itself. Focusing on the myriad of ways that each game experimented with time, this chapter aims to make clear the importance of queering time. Through these games, this section explores the potentials for time to be reshaped and redefined.

Chapter seven ends with some notable takeaways for scholars. This chapter raises the idea of post-futurity based on what was found in the analysis to posit its potential for academia as a new way of examining queerness. Chapter seven also includes some potential uses of Twine for academics looking to explore the multimodal tool within their own compositional practices.

Through these chapters, this work seeks to examine not just the themes present within some indie Twine games. The conversations begun with Anna Anthropy (2012), *Peitho* (Patterson & Rawson, 2020), *Game Studies* (Ruberg & Phillips, 2018), LeMaster (2020), and others were just the beginning. Through Twine, this project examines the ongoing dialogue that these games add to the mix and showcases how they may pave the way for more growth in the future.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This project examines the growing conversations between gender studies, trans and queer rhetoric, and how these diverse explorations of gender and queerness are expressed within Twine games. These conversations share many ties that bind this project together. The questions of gender binary dissolution, queer time, identity and sexuality, and queer survival come up within both the games under study and the various sub-fields that scholars across composition, rhetoric, and game studies continue to wrestle with.

Gender and Intersectionality

Many scholars have written about gender binaries since feminist discourse began in the twentieth century, with some of the more prominent critics from the 90s including Judith Butler (1999) and bell hooks (2015) who have both influenced feminist rhetoric and rhetorical strategies for research (Kirsch & Ritchie, 1995). As they and others have noted, gender is complicated and comes with several considerations. One of the first struggles about writing about gender comes from Butler's (1999) work in *Gender Trouble*. In this book, Butler (1999) questions and dismantles the idea of a stable gender binary, which traditionally defined gender strictly based on how closely one adhered to male or female gender expectations. According to Butler (1999), feminism at the time was stuck with the very question as to how define "women," in particular. To define the very group that feminism was fighting for, gender binaries that put humans into groups of either man/male/masculine and woman/female/feminine were often relied on. This either/or spectrum no longer fits with current conversations on gender (LeMaster, 2020). These conversations have shifted away from the male and female binary to discussions of non-binary identities that are somewhere in-between or even outside of the masculine-feminine spectrum

entirely. Indeed, modern conversations around non-binary identities showcase how the gender binary that Butler (1999) critiqued has been reformed, stretched, or erased to become more of a flexible spectrum (LeMaster, 2020).

However, some queer activists question Butler's (1999) unstable gender binary due to worries that non-normative and/or non-binary bodies threaten their own claims to normalcy (Breen, 2005). Gender essentialists in feminism also sometimes mimic the same binary thinking that Butler questioned as being potentially exclusionary during her examination of the feminism of the 80s/90s (Roden, 2005). Yet, others within trans rhetorics have picked up the idea of a non-existent binary in their own work on transness (LeMaster, 2020). LeMaster (2020) examines the traditional binary male-female thinking behind gender reveal parties and uses rebellion against them to reject the gender binary in favor of trans monstrosity. For LeMaster (2020), trans monstrosity is the repulsive manner in which transgender bodies are treated by some non-trans individuals. Since transness is outside of the norm, transgender individuals are frequently treated as monsters, similar to the classic monsters of Hollywood such as Frankenstein. Yet, LeMaster (2020) exposit a practice of embracing that monstrous identity. Using the trans monster to critique and destroy the idea of gender reveal parties as absurd, LeMaster's embrace of trans monstrosity signals a subset of the field of rhetoric that not only ignores the idea of a gender binary, but actively works to burn it to ashes as a relic of the past. The gender binary, in this case, is a relic waiting to be destroyed by a legion of trans monsters that are no longer happy to be treated as the other in a binary system that has no room for those who are not either/or. It is the rejection of binary notions of gender that trans rhetoricians often explore that have allowed queer video game fans to rewrite the gender of their favorite characters in fanfiction (Dym, et al., 2018). Through resistance to set ideas of gender as explored by feminist theorists and

rhetoricians, fans can trans characters to build their own representation that defies the traditional binary outlook maintained by the games that these characters originally come from.

Yet, ideas around gender binaries are not the only focus in gender discourse. Another problem feminist scholars wrangle with is the idea of intersectionality (Carastathis, 2016). Although the term is attributed mostly to Kimberly Crenshaw (1989), as Carastathis (2016) analyzes, intersectionality is one term in a rich world of interrelated ideas of multiple jeopardy, matrices of domination, and identity from women of color feminism. The main idea, however, is that intersectionality centers of women of colors' multitude of often-conflicting identities that all contribute to their oppression in various ways. As noted by Nakamura (2012) and hooks (2015), when these marginalized identities of sexuality, gender, and race collide, it can feel as though one is in the "highest difficulty-setting" within life (Nakamura, 2012, p. 4). Indeed, such marginalized identities are even less represented within gaming scholarship than those with only a single jeopardy of oppression to wrangle with (Nakamura, 2012; Carastathis, 2016). Thus, several discussions of gaming representation have begun taking a new approach to analyzing identity that considers this multiplicity.

Identity and Sexuality

Beyond diverse understandings of gender, another key area of discussion is that of representation within not just the larger field of rhetoric, but within games as a whole. Scholars such as Shaw (2015) claim that the current conversations on gaming diversity revolve around consumers wanting to play solely as characters who look like themselves and who will always create such characters in their own games. Shaw (2015) states that these identity-based ideas of representation are flawed as not all marginalized gamers care to play characters identical to their lived experiences. This perspective on representation in games opposes research done by scholars such as Nielsen (2015) who found that queer gamers did care about and want to play as

characters who represent their own realities unlike Shaw's (2015) assertion that this was not necessarily the case. Johnson (2012) has also picked up similar ideas of players exploring their identities through game-based compositions. While Shaw's (2015) work does not completely negate what has been found by Nielsen (2015) and Johnson (2012), she does state from a more game studies perspective that many of the gamer subjects she studied did not necessarily care about playing characters like themselves. Instead, Shaw (2015) makes the argument that discussions should move away from including diverse characters simply to attract certain diverse audiences that will play more games if they felt represented. Instead, she argues for taking the approach that diversity and representation are beneficial for all, even those players that are not currently underrepresented (Shaw, 2015). Within composition and rhetoric, there has also been discussion of the importance of sexual literacy not for queer students and rhetoricians only, but for the benefit of all. For example, Alexander (2008) has discussed the importance of sexual literacy for all, since sexuality is an intrinsic part of the language used to express identity. Yet, queer gamers do not necessarily need queer characters to feel represented within the games that they engage with.

The ability to find representation in untraditional ways coincides with the traditional queer rhetorical analysis of homosexuality in literature. One seminal queer rhetorician, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990), looked at queerness in gaps and overlapping spaces. She explored how queer representation within older literary works was present through what was left unsaid or was implied, even if the literary text in question was not explicitly queer. In place of obvious representation, queerness can be found and made within both literary works and games in other ways. Additional pathways for queer representation in games have been found in everything from coded characters (Chang, 2017) to queer easter eggs (James, 2018).

Yet, scholars have also warned that ideas of good and bad representation need to be addressed, since representation goes beyond strict moral binaries. For example, the queer coded characters in *Bioshock* (2007) were merely a shallow cover for the overall larger limitations of the game's choice system as a whole (Chang, 2017). Schaufert (2018) and James (2018) also found that what queer representation does currently exist in mainstream games tends to be more nuanced than simple good or bad depictions of queerness. For example, while both Schaufert (2018) and James (2018) had critiques of the depictions of queer identity in *Dream Daddy* (2017) and *Final Fantasy VII* (1997), there were also elements of the queer representation within these games that they appreciated. Thus, identity in games is not an easy matter that can be distilled into stereotypical versus polished representation.

Yet, identity cannot be boiled down into only one form of representation, either. The intersectionality highlighted in feminism and gender studies also applies to games, as scholars like Shaw (2015) examine the multifaceted identities of players who came from various sexuality, gender expressions, and identities. Identity separation is a problematic trend that has plagued the work of even Sedgwick (1990) who failed to consider the implications of race within her analysis of queerness (Somerville, 2010). Indeed, this intersectional approach of examining multiple identities through various lenses seem to be growing within gaming scholarship (Shaw, 2015).

The Economic Body

In addition to exploring various aspects of queerness and its relationship to identity, another area of intersectional exploration is queerness and economics. While the relationship between queerness and economic structures seems strenuous at first glance, there is a tradition of scholarship, critique, and discussion of the economic influences on queer identity and history. Historically, there have been contrasting opinions on the relationships between queerness and

liberal capitalist economy (Ferguson, 2018; Davidson, 2016; D'Emilio, 1983). For example, Ferguson (2018) catalogs the initial anti-capitalist and Marxist impulses at the beginning of the queer liberation movement in the 1960s. As the movement grew less radical and became subsumed by capitalism, those who wanted to embrace traditional capitalism worked to create a cleaner and more marketable image of gay and lesbian life (Ferguson, 2018). Some scholars, such as D'Emilio (1983) and Davidson (2016), dispute the anti-capitalist to homonormativity narrative by claiming that capitalism has benefitted the queer community. While Davidson (2016) focuses on the commodification of queerness through gay bars and lesbian clothing signals, D'Emilio (1983) examines the historical destabilization of the family unit in favor of individual worker productivity with capitalism that allowed queers the independence they needed to form gay and lesbian identities in the first place. Thus, according to these scholars, queerness would not exist without capitalism.

Regardless of which theory is correct, queer opposition to capitalism has continued through queer alternative economies that have formed, such as co-ops, group care, and free gaming labor itself (Brown, 2009; Goetz, 2018; Welch, 2018). Through gaming and free physical labor, attention has been placed on not only queer economic survival but also on the relationship between queer bodies and the economy. This is important because games serve as huge revenue sources for capitalism while time spent playing games takes laborers away from working on something that will directly add to the capitalistic machine. Thus, the relationship between economics and gaming also highlights the potential of gaming as another way for queer gaming to contribute to the queer economy.

Queer economy can be defined as economic activities that exist outside traditional capitalistic structures that seek to profit off all aspects of everyday life (Goetz, 2018; Brown, 2009). Gaming and queer economy are seen by capitalistic proponents as being representative of

unproductive labor. Capitalism tends to focus on labor that contributes to the larger economic enterprise. Yet, gaming is an unproductive activity that can be monetized in some ways, such as through esports, but done individually takes the labor body out of the workforce for some time (Goetz, 2018). Instead of working, one is playing games that have already been paid for and are no longer producing any economic value. Thus, Goetz (2018) uses gaming as one example of how economic participation can be queered. Another example of this queer resistance to typical capitalist expectations is showcased in Welch's (2018) discussion of gaming mods that are produced for free to make changes to games to better suit player preferences and interests. Through the production of queer mods that add queer characters and content, modders are yet again engaging in unproductive economic labor. The work they produce is not paid for and is given away for free (Welch, 2018). By choosing to engage in such labor that is economically unproductive, queer modders are another example of the queer potential to resist capitalism through gaming community.

Free labor is important to include a more explicit representation of queerness in mainstream game titles. Twine, which is itself a free tool for independent game makers, also fits within the queer economy by allowing independent queer game makers to use their labor in a manner similar to that of queer modders (Anthropy, 2012). The work of Twine creators is similarly freely produced and distributed, yet it also serves a vital space outside of traditional capitalism for the queer-gaming community. Modders, gamers, and Twine creators thus coalesce to use their queer labor in a way that cannot be sold or commodified and thus exists only in a free online queer economy.

Another example of the queer relationship to capitalism is through queer bodies. Queer workers' abilities to produce economic value through their bodies was how they achieved freedom through capitalism (D'Emilio, 1983). In contrast, the way that queer bodies are viewed

by capitalism is not always very fortuitous. Queer and disabled bodies are always a site of contention, as they are used to prop up or in opposition to heteronormativity and able-bodiedness (McRuer, 2006). Indeed, many only tolerate the queer bodies they work with due to their economic value. Even digital game bodies cannot escape this fate of reproducing heteronormativity as Youngblood (2013) found in *Persona 4*, where queer bodies were ultimately saved and used as a metaphor for proclaiming heteronormativity's continued success. Yet, McRuer (2004) has argued for the place of queer theory and disability studies as one way to help students, among others, go through "de-composition," which is the process of questioning the corporate capitalistic values that McRuer (2004) claim inhabits modern composition studies (p. 47). Outside composition and rhetoric, games serve as another space where queer bodies are studied and appropriated for corporate capitalistic goals.

Perhaps the most explicit example of queer bodies becoming appropriated within games as mechanisms to reproduce capitalist goals and hetero/homonormativity are in Youngblood's (2018) analysis of the *Mass Effect* (2007) series. In this analysis, Youngblood (2018) found that the queer characters heralded for their representation served a nefarious effect. As with the disabled bodies that McRuer (2006) examined in their explorations of "crip theory" and rhetoric, the queer bodies in Youngblood's (2018) *Mass Effect* (2007) analysis were ultimately capitalist sacrifices. These queer bodies were given literal values in the game and propelled the games homonationalistic interests further in a way similar to that of heteronationalism, where one works for the capitalistic and militaristic good of their nation. These characters were only valuable as long as their labor was valuable.

Time and Queer Futurity

One notable thread in queer theory revolves around the relationship between queerness and the future. There are two main scholars who tend to be cited when examining the

relationship between queerness and time. Edelman (2004) posited that since normative time uses reproductive cycles of childbirth and growth of children as markers, queer individuals are not a part of the future. Since children are considered the future and queerness is traditionally linked to the absence of any ability to produce children and thus participate in the future, then queer individuals should eschew the future entirely and only exist in the present (Edelman, 2004). In opposition to the lack of future for queer individuals due to queerness existing outside reproductive time (Edelman, 2004; Gogul, 2018), Muñoz (2009) claims that queerness only exists in the future. Muñoz's (2009) queer futurity takes the opposite approach to Edelman (2004) by claiming that queerness is a mentality that is never fully realized in the present. Instead, for Muñoz (2009), queerness always lingers in the future as queer potentiality. In the present, queer individuals, ideas, and existence are limited. The present is still limited due to heteronormative ideas and structures. It is only in the future that queerness can be fully realized and that queerness itself can become the norm. For Muñoz (2009), queerness is something to strive toward, like ideals such as world peace. The ideals have not yet been achieved, and it is only through the promise of a future where such ideals can be realized and queerness can move forward.

This idea of utopia and alternatives to the present has also popped up in the world of game scholars such as Stone (2018), Knutson (2018), and Wood (2017). These scholars all examine how time can be queered and distorted. In one of the games Stone (2018) analyzed, players were forced to revisit the same game in small increments of time over the period of 30 days. Through this time cycle, players were forced to consider time both in their day-to-day life and in the main characters' constant fluxing between the past and present to make vital decisions. The negative memories and past treatment of Stone's (2018) main character served as a determining factor into players' daily decision to either have the main character save the world or

allow it to be destroyed. Thus, the queer past was directly connected to the ability to imagine or even create a better queer future (Shahani, 2013). This idea of looking toward the queer past instead of the future is one that has been picked up within composition and rhetoric as well by scholars such as Bessette (2017) and Alexander and Rhodes (2012) who have examined queer and lesbian archives.

By examining the past, retroactivism or the reclamation and resurrection of the queer past to create new histories and understandings of identity in the present is forwarded (Bessette, 2017). Going back to the past to rebuild the future is a direct theme in games such as Dontnod Entertainment's *Life is Strange* (2015), which features a main character who gains the ability to time travel and uses it to solve the various in-game puzzles. Knutson (2018) builds on the concept of chrononormativity, borrowed from Elizabeth Freeman (2010), which are traditional conceptions of time that follow ideas of progress and milestones such as the teleological life stages of birth, graduation, career success, and family building. Knutson's (2018) analysis of *Life is Strange* (2015) uses the game to demonstrate how returning to the past becomes an important strategy of resisting the demands of the present to create the promised for queer future. It is *Life is Strange's* (2015) shifts between the past, present, and future and the absence of traditional linearity that Knutson (2018) argues makes the game the anti-thesis of chrononormativity. Indeed, it is the queering of time in place of non-linear and shifting time progressions that allows games such as *The Binding of Isaac* (2011) to become sites of queer representation (Wood, 2017).

Conclusion

The conversations both past and present within composition, rhetoric, and game studies continue to highlight the importance of gender, identity, survival, economics, and time. Not only do various scholars continue to discuss the best ways to examine queerness and its relationship to

unstable binary conceptions of time, gender, and economic productivity, but these ideas are also present within games themselves (Knutson 2018; Stone, 2018; Goetz, 2018). Both games studies and composition and rhetoric scholars in the twenty-first century continue to identify new understandings of how gender, queerness, and other societal systems can be broken down and reshaped for better understanding (Muñoz, 2009; Shaw, 2015; Youngblood, 2013; LeMaster, 2020). As these scholars show, the conversations are timely and important to the still growing fields of gaming studies, queer rhetorics, trans rhetorics, and independent queer creators themselves (Anthropy, 2012; Shaw, 2015; Dym, et al., 2018; Alexander & Rhodes, 2012). The deconstructed gender binaries, unproductive economic labor, and non-chrononormative time these scholars explore were ultimately used to better understand the themes that appeared in the games analyzed for this project. These themes directly correlate and showcase many of the same ideas expressed by scholars such as Butler (1999), LeMaster (2020), Muñoz (2009), and Welch (2018) among others.

Chapter 3: Methods

While many connections can be drawn between the worlds of rhetoric and game studies, one area of tension comes from the analysis of games themselves (Salter & Murray, 2019).

Those within rhetoric may favor analyzing the textual components of the games that they study (Paul, 2012), however, game studies scholars privilege other aspects of the artifacts they research (Bogost, 2007). Recent methodological scholarship has begun bridging the gap between textual analysis and game mechanics and demonstrates new perspectives on game analysis that cater to both interests (Paul, 2012). It is these newer analytical methods that have become the foundation for my own methods.

While my methods draw from an array of scholars such as Bogost (2007), Sicart (2014), and Upton (2015), there are two main texts that I use as the foundation of my analytical approach. These sources are Flanagan and Nissenbaum's (2014) *Values at play in digital games* and Paul's (2012) *Wordplay and the discourse of video games: Analyzing words, design, and play*. Both texts advocate for a holistic approach to game analysis that considers the underlying mechanics, space for player interaction, and narrative/thematic elements. They also bring a renewed focus on analyzing the textual and narrative components of games alongside procedural mechanics, which allow for an approach that incorporates both rhetoric and game analysis.

In order to achieve this intersectional approach that combines mechanical and rhetorical analysis, I examine the essential game elements that Flanagan and Nissenbaum (2014) note in their work. These elements include "Narrative Premise and Goals, Characters, Actions in Game, Player Choice, Rules for Interaction with Other Players or Nonplayable Characters, Rules for Interaction with the Environment, Point of View, Hardware, Interface, Game Engine and Software, Context of Play, Rewards, Strategies, and Aesthetics" (p. 33-34). These elements are significant because they encompass all aspects of a video game. They include the components

that allow players to interact and make choices, the mechanical components, and programming that relates to game function, characters, and the written storyline. For my analysis, I interpreted a selection of these elements, which can be found in Table 1. Some of the non-selected elements focus on games that can only be played in certain environments or with others, in contrast to the solitary experience of Twine. Table 1 lists the elements that I used and includes the Twine game features or functions that I analyzed based on each examined element.

Table 1

Game Elements from Flanagan and Nissenbaum (2014) and In-Game Correlation for Personal Analysis

| Game Elements (From Flanagan and Nissenbaum, 2014) | In-Game Correlation (Personal Interpretation and Use) | Category |
|--|---|---------------------|
| Narrative Premise and Goals | Game's plot, storyline, and the main goals of the principle characters. | Textual Rhetorics |
| Characters | Main characters, their personalities, relationships, and depictions. | Textual Rhetorics |
| Actions in Game Player Choice | Actions the player can take inside of the storyline. Freedom players have in choosing between actions, locations, and in deciding when the plot will progress. | Play |
| Rules for Interaction with Other Players or Nonplayable Characters & the Environment | Game mechanics that give players freedom or restriction. Game mechanic allotment of player choices. | Procedural Rhetoric |
| Point of View | Particular character perspective that the game is told through. | Textual Rhetorics |
| Hardware/Interface/Game Engine and Software | Technical details of the game's creation and the effect it has on how the | Procedural Rhetoric |

| | | |
|------------|---|---------------------|
| | game runs, player freedom, visuals, etc. | |
| Aesthetics | Visual appearance of the game and the way that they coincide with the other themes. | Procedural Rhetoric |

Elements such as Rules for Interaction and Narrative Premise and Goals are significant because they focus on the individual components that are most associated with indie Twine games, including the ability to give players choices, the use of code by certain developers to prevent players from making certain choices before they have completed particular in-game actions, and the heavy focus on a cohesive narrative.

Using the chosen eight game elements as a guide, I break them down further into three main categories for each of the three games that will be analyzed. These categories include Procedural Rhetoric, Play, and Textual Rhetorics (see Table 1). These additional categories are chosen based on Bogost (2007), Sicart (2014), and Paul’s (2012) work. While the game elements describe the most common meaning-making features of games, these scholars’ approaches give specific methods for examining the elements (narrative premise, characters, actions in game, player choice, rules for interaction, point of view, hardware/interface/game engine and software, and aesthetics) that I chose and the way that they create meaning. Thus, the game elements provide a guideline for examining in-game features while the three categories look at the elements’ rhetorical meaning. Procedural rhetoric was selected due to the importance of understanding the coding and behind-the-scenes rules and variables set by developers that allow their games to behave in a particular manner, such as with the game elements’ rules for interaction and game engine (Flanagan & Nissenbaum, 2014). Play was chosen because one of the characteristics of Twine games is the choice feature that allows players to “play” and have freedom in altering their gameplay experience to some degree by making choices throughout the

game as showcased by the game elements of action and player choice (Flanagan & Nissenbaum, 2014). Finally, textual rhetorics is another essential lens since most Twine games eschew expansive graphics in favor of a heavy focus on the text that the narrative is told through, which covers the game elements of narrative premise and characters (Flanagan & Nissenbaum, 2014).

Procedural Rhetoric

Procedural rhetoric includes the design/mechanics of a game, which are essential to have a fully fleshed-out analysis. The game mechanics determine the unique features of the game system, limitations of the game software, rules imposed on players, and the rules that players must follow while interacting with the various characters and actions. Bogost (2007) focuses exclusively on game mechanics in *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*, where he defines the term procedural rhetoric as the ability of computer systems to mimic various processes and procedures to critique them (p. 3). Specifically, procedural rhetoric is used by game mechanics to create rules or procedures that force games to work in set ways. It is by playing games under the confines of the rules that game designers can transmit certain critiques of real-world processes to players. For example, in his analysis of *The McDonald's Game* and *America's Army*, Bogost (2007) examines how such titles use in-game rules to limit progression, success, awards, and game completion. Through limited rules that only allow success under certain conditions, Bogost (2007) argues that *The McDonald's Game* and *America's Army* forward specific arguments about the real-world processes that make up the fast-food industry or military-industrial complex that they emulate. Through rules that govern how players interact with one another, a specific set of actions that players are forced to choose from in the game lead to rewards if players achieve the game's version of success. Bogost (2007) argues that games can use mechanics to make powerful arguments about anything from militarism to consumerist exploitation.

I use procedural rhetoric for my analysis of Twine games. At their most basic incarnation, Twine games require no coding and present only a black screen with white text and blue links that allow players to move forward. However, in most Twine games, including the ones that are analyzed in this project, the creators need to use more advanced coding to add pictures, sound, change backgrounds, and make other alterations. Some Twine games also use coding to make larger changes, such as by adding an HP bar to their games. Even a Twine game with no additional coding besides the basics must provide players choices in the game, and determine where those choices come in during the narrative, and how they ultimately affect the player's decisions. Thus, it is essential to analyze both the visible Twine mechanics and the additions to understand how queer rhetorics are being expressed. Through mechanics that govern how players' choices influence the game and the overall limitations placed on those choices, one can gain an idea of the intent behind the designers' choices.

Play

While Bogost (2007) focuses on the rules and procedural rhetoric of video games as being the most essential element of a game's meaning, Sicart (2014) sees play as another essential aspect of game analysis. Bogost (2007) suggests that it is the rules that limit and constrain players to suit the game developer's goals that give computer games their powerful rhetorical potential. While Sicart (2014) does not completely negate the importance of procedural rhetoric, he does refute procedural rhetoric as the most important component of game analysis. Instead, Sicart (2014) suggests that without play, and thus players, there would be no meaning making. In Sicart's (2014) perspective, it is the players who decide the meaning of a game and not the game developers. While the procedural rhetoric and play approaches may be placed in opposition to each other, some scholars like Paul (2012), use both methods to analyze

how games impose limitations on players and how they bend and circumvent those limitations, which allow for a more comprehensive understanding of a game.

Sicart (2014) defines play as “a form of understanding what surrounds us and who we are, and a way of engaging with others” (p. 1). Conversely, Upton (2015) calls play “free movement within a system of constraints. Play is a process, not a thing. It is a series of moves, either mental or physical carried out by the player” (p. 15). This differs from the computer-based processes described by Bogost (2007) as Upton (2015) focuses on the process of play through human actions. Basically, play is the way that humans interact with the world and each other within certain contexts and under specific rules. The beauty of play is in the ability to break those rules and continue to form new ones. For the sake of this project, play is how the players themselves engage with the game. This approach to play can be found in the game elements I chose to analyze, which included actions in-game, player choice, context of play, and rules for interactions. Whenever players pick up the controller, move a character, and make important in-game decisions, they engage in play, which makes it necessary to focus on the ways that the game makes room for play.

Twine is defined by its ability to facilitate play since it uses its limited built-in rules and systems to force players to engage with various choices in game while also giving players the room to test the limits of these choices just as Sicart (2014) and Upton (2015) noted. Players are often given choices, but they do not get to decide what the options given to them will include or when those options will come up during gameplay. Additionally, players have the option to experiment with different options, refresh to change their answers, or even ignore the rules of success in a game by only selecting the choices that do not lead to an ending. Thus, players engage with Twine games by using the characteristic choice system to “play” under the rules and limitations set by the game creator.

To analyze play within the selected games, I analyze the choices that are presented; the number of choices and number of endings; differences between endings; the potential for other interactions, such as naming or relationships with Non-Player Characters; and ability to fail or lose the game. Specifically, during my analysis, I noted the choices I was given as a player, the amount of times that I was allowed to make a choice, the introduction of other possibilities for interacting with the game besides selecting hyperlinked choices, and other features. Looking at play through the context of the chosen games allows for the discovery of how queer Twine game makers use certain limited choices and in-game flexibility to give players room to explore time, queer economy, and identity within their games. Analyzing the choices and freedom players have within the bounds of the Twine game world showcases another way that these games force players to reconcile and question identity, time, and economy through the use of play alongside the other categories of analysis.

Textual Rhetorics

The third section of analysis focuses on textual rhetoric, or specifically, the narrative elements of each game. Some examples of the areas covered under textual rhetorics for this project include character descriptions, dialogue, and other written game components that would be studied in traditional rhetorical analysis. Paul (2012), emphasized the words used in gameplay and when discussing games. Through this combination of mechanics with words, Paul (2012) creates a methodology of game analysis that “moves rhetorical analysis forward by focusing both on the elements of a text that are a comfortable fit for rhetoric, such as words and images, and on the crucially important structures and technologies underlying media forms, like design and play” (p. 12). As Paul (2012) proclaims, text is a vital element to all games to communicate dialogue, background information, character details, item descriptions, and other data. Thus,

since Twine games are distinguished by their emphasis on text, this analysis examines the words and textual components included within the games. Some of the game elements most prominent in this type of analysis are narrative premise and goals, characters, and actions in-game.

For the three Twine games, I utilized a detailed textual analysis of the game's narrative and character presentations. Specifically, I examined how the game presents certain themes through the main and side characters, the goals of the characters, and the plot line that the characters face. This analysis covers the main themes of queer economy, time, identity, and gender that were found across all three games.

Through this analysis of the procedural rhetoric, play, and textual rhetorics within each game, I create a comprehensive overview of some themes that exist in Twine games and discover the methods used by queer game makers in order to input these themes, both intentionally and unintentionally. Drawing from such a large variety of theories on game analysis (procedural rhetoric, play theory, and textual rhetorics) allows for the complete methodology possible in order to discover how queer Twine creators create meaning and disseminate arguments about queer life and existence through their works.

Analytic Process

In order to complete the games analysis, I relied on a two-fold process. First, I began by playing each game at least one time fully through while taking my time to pay attention to the game elements that I highlighted above. In order to ensure my gameplay was thorough, I relied on think-aloud protocols. Think-aloud protocols have a history in game research. For example, May (2019) analyzed Let's Play videos which is a common video genre popular with several large game creators on YouTube. May (2019) highlights how these videos involve content creators playing video games while speaking their thoughts aloud as another method for teaching students about think-aloud protocols for games as the creators in such videos spend the majority

of their time verbalizing their thoughts about the games they play in real time. In addition, a study by Sargsyan and Madyarov (2020) used think-aloud protocols as part of their research into the applicability of interactive fiction for ELL learners. Following this lineage, I used Zoom to record myself playing the games while speaking my thoughts aloud as a method for capturing both my initial impressions and as a way to ensure that I was able to engage fully with the game without missing details for note-taking. As I recorded, I shared my screen and microphone as I went through each game. After going through the entirety of *A Colour Like No Other* and the first multiple-hour long episode of *Known Unknowns* once and *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On* twice, I went back to my Zoom recording and reviewed some of the themes that had popped up while I was playing. I decided on the themes for further analysis based on my observations during my playthrough and also based on what themes became prevalent during my analysis of the auto-transcript of my think-aloud thoughts that were saved with each recording.

For the second step in my analysis, I drew upon Huckin's (1992) description of context-sensitive text analysis. Each analysis first started with the procedural rhetoric and noticeable game mechanics that allowed each game to function. Then, I examined the use of play by analyzing the available choices that were presented to me inside each game before concluding with a review of the important narrative elements and features of each Twine. For *And Robot Horse You Rode In On* by Anna Anthropy (2015), which included access to its base Twine game file, I then looked at the source file in order to analyze the way that Anna Anthropy used html coding to make changes to the base Twine experience and then decipher the effect that these coded alterations and additions had on the player perception of the game's rhetorical message. For the other two games, in addition to the rest of the analysis, I followed the context-sensitive text analysis protocols of gathering multiple sources of information beyond my own intuition (Huckin, 1992). I did this information gathering by continually going back to the game itself for

reference, checking the game page for notable comments, returning to sources from the literature review for the context of the themes being found, and even searching the author's website for context and additional insight into the meaning and creation of one of the Twine games, *Known Unknowns*.

Description of Games

My study examines three Twine games. The three games were chosen based on a few reasons. One, *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On* was selected primarily due to its creator, Anna Anthropy, being one of the more prominent members of the queer Twine game-making community. The others were selected based on their free availability on the indie game website Itch.io, their tags noting their queer content, and the fact that they were all a length of at least an hour. The other titles were *A Colour Like No Other*, which included the least amount of visuals and was chosen for its prominent transgender main character and variety of choices. In addition, *Known Unknowns* was included as the final Twine for analysis due to its variety of queer identities included and the visuals that were present throughout.

The first game, *A Colour Like No Other*, by TheNamelessOne (2018) follows the player character Lilly and her girlfriend, Iris, who are literally inhuman with Lily being revealed early on to be a werewolf while Iris's identity is kept hidden until later in the narrative. As the two of them try earning money to help out a friend with medical expenses, they find themselves caught up in a quest to rid a couple's new house of a ghost. As players navigate the house, they end up learning more about Lily, Iris, and the world that they live in. *A Colour Like No Other* begins with Lilly and Iris taking false ghost photos to earn money. It is with this introduction that players begin seeing Iris's many abilities, which include being able to morph between a material and immaterial form, alter her body, and change between bodies. Most of the gameplay occurs at the couple's house, where Lilly searches every nook and cranny for evidence of the troublesome

ghost. After several important scenes in the library, bedroom, and basement, Lilly and Iris discover that the “ghost” is actually a former cultist who is familiar with Iris’s past. After a long fight and tearful breakdown where Iris reveals her insecurities to Lilly and players become fully aware of Iris’s monstrous identity as a Lovecraftian-based semi-deity with incomprehensible powers, the two collect their reward from the couple and the game ends.¹

Anna Anthropy’s And The Robot Horse You Rode In On occurs over the course of a day as the protagonist recounts their attempted theft of money from their partner, Diode, who they are linked to through crime and physical relationships. Players navigate as they run, or ride on robot horse, away from their campsite and attempt to hide their stolen goods before Diode catches them. Players must choose between various locations to hide their stolen goods, such as an abandoned mine, cemetery, or robot farm. However, it is revealed that players are recounting a false version of their narrative to Diode, who caught them earlier. As Diode runs off to find the lost coins, the player character (PC) that players themselves control within the game, chases after them to the one location that was not mentioned earlier in the recount, a ghost town. The game ends with a final confrontation gone wrong ending where both the player character and Diode get injured in the fight and fall into an inescapable pit. The scene cuts as they converse while lying at the bottom of a pit.

Known Unknowns is an episodic game by Brendan Patrick Hennessy (2017) that takes place in a Canadian high school in 2016. Nadia is the titular character and serves as the newspaper editor for the school’s once prestigious newspaper club. Her best friend, Kaz, is

¹ Lovecraftian references the type of cosmic horror, that focused on horrifying dark deities that destroy humanity, that was initially made famous by the author HP Lovecraft in the early 1900s. More information can be found in Kneale (2006).

genderqueer and supportive of Nadia and her queerness. However, several events related to the breakdown of Nadia's former friendship complicate their final year of school. Years ago, Nadia almost kissed her best friend Summer. Summer ended up transferring schools and completely shutting off her former friends Nadia and Allen. Meanwhile, Nadia and Allen became a couple after Summer's transfer. The story occurs as Nadia struggles to build the newspaper back to its former status, resurrect her friendship with Summer who has switched back to their school, figure out why Kaz's sister Anja wants her to stay away from Summer, and decide whether to tell her boyfriend about her bisexuality. Meanwhile, there is a recurring theme of ghost hunting as Nadia and Kaz both encountered ghost raccoons while in the school late at night and are now searching for the truth behind what happened the first night of episode one. Episode one ends as Nadia has a fight with her boyfriend, makes plans to salvage her relationship with her former best friend, and decides to attend a party that will take place in the second episode.

Chapter 4: Identity and Gender

Characters, the Closet, and Queer Monstrosity

One of the most visible markers of identity in all three games comes through the characters themselves. As noted earlier, some players prefer to play as characters who share similar identities to themselves, while other players do not particularly care about being represented by the characters that they play as (Nielsen, 2015; Shaw, 2015). No matter the preference, video games, and explicitly queer video games allow for the exploration of either players' own queer or non-normative gender identity or for players to explore identities differently from their own (Nielsen, 2015; Shaw, 2015). It is this ability to play as characters with genders and sexualities both similar to and different from that of what a player identifies with that makes games, and queer Twine games especially, such a vital tool for identity exploration (Johnson, 2012).

The naming of characters, or the lack thereof, is one important area to consider when watching how players identify with other characters in games. For example, in Anthropy's *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On*, PCs are not named. Throughout the game, players are only ever referred to as "you," "babe," or a host of other nicknames given by Diode. This means that the identity of the PC is left to be shaped through a combination of the players' gameplay and their conversations with Diode. Names, or the lack thereof, are not the only difference between Anthropy's protagonist and that of other games. In *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On*, the PC is not necessarily depicted as the hero. At a few points, it is even implied that the PC may not be the good guy at all, as Diode notes that she planned to split the money with the PC during the final fight. Instead, the PC is a figurehead for anti-capitalistic queerness.

Throughout *And The Robot Horse You Rode In*, the PC wears the title "bandita" proudly. Anthropy's morally ambiguous PC is in stark contrast to the strict binaries drawn between good

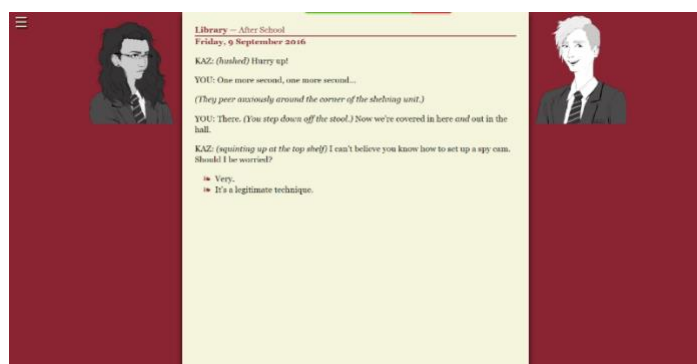
and bad queers in the *Mass Effect* (2007) franchise that Youngblood (2018) analyzed. Unlike *Mass Effect* (2007), where queer characters were either willing homonationalist sacrifices or were sexual monsters whose very sexuality was a threat to society that needed to be neutered, the queer main character of *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On* does not cleanly fit the label of protagonist or antagonist. This morally ambiguous character showcases a different aspect of identity within such games by forcing players to inhabit a character that is not always on the side of righteousness. *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On* leaves room for questioning what it means to be a good queer in the context of a world where the lines are not always easily established. This moral reckoning gives players a chance to realize that just as the main character identifying as a “bandita” does not make them either good or bad, that there are also aspects of their own identities that can be ambiguous depending on the context.

Beyond using characters to explore middle-grounds and conceptions of good versus bad queers, Hennessy uses visual character portraits in *Known Unknowns* to explore identity through images. With the role-playing games that Nielsen (2015) focused on in her research, a large aspect of game experience is customizing a character who may look like the player themselves. The combination of a character portrait, in addition to the use of the second person, allows for a different kind of identification. Specifically, if players are approaching the game as a way to empathize with those from different backgrounds, then the ability to see the diverse cast of characters enhances such empathy by making the difference between the player and character more obvious (Pozo, 2018). Characters that are visually different from the player run the risk of alienating some players who can no longer ignore the fact that the character they are playing may have little similarity to themselves, at least in physical appearance. For *Known Unknowns*, the character portraits allow for both possibilities (e.g., Figure 1). The visual indicators of how characters look make it hard for players to ignore the more obvious facets of each character’s

identity, but they also make the presence of non-binary and racially diverse characters more explicit. For players who do not fit into these characters, it is hard to pretend that a character is similar to oneself when the image shows otherwise. For players from similar backgrounds to the characters, *Known Unknowns* presents a chance for even greater identification by showing a face similar to themselves on every screen.

Figure 1

Character portraits example, *Known Unknowns*



Note. Figure 1 shows the character portraits present in *Known Unknowns*, specifically portraits of Nadia on the left and Kaz on the right. Throughout the game, players see artistic depictions of the characters they encounter on the sides of the screen.

Outside character portraits, all three games delve into identity in various ways. The character Nadia, from *Known Unknowns*, serves as an exploration of identity outside character portraits within Hennessy's game. She hides her bisexuality from other characters throughout Episode One. A core struggle of her story is her constant flux between deciding whether to hide or openly express her sexuality. In contrast, characters such as Lilly and Iris in *A Colour like No Other* have come to grips with their sexuality while sharing similar fears of what it would mean to have their sexuality and relationship exposed to those around them. Alternatively, the characters in *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On* are very openly queer all the time. Thus, the

three titles allow players to examine both hidden and open queer identities while considering the choices and consequences that come with being open or in the closet.

For some games, the question of the closet becomes much more literal as queer identity is not the only secret that some of the in-game characters feel the need to hide. *A Colour Like No Other* has characters that may be open with their sexuality with some characters but not others (like Nadia). These characters are also portrayed as literal monsters alongside this queerness that adds another layer of their identity, which must be hidden. This monstrous depiction becomes a unique way for the game to explore homophobic societal perspectives on queerness. Both Lilly and Iris are monsters in *A Colour Like No Other*, with Lilly presenting as a werewolf, while Iris is a Lovecraftian deity. Due to their monstrous secret identities, they must keep not only their queerness, and thus their relationship with each other, secret from the couple that they are working for, but also their monstrosity. From the beginning of the game, Iris and Lily must explain away their relationship from onlookers to prevent accidental disclosure. In the same vein, in scenes where a werewolf ravaging gardens is mentioned or when Iris destroys a book using her abilities in the library, the characters must close doors behind themselves or carefully talk around their true identities. When the potential exists for other characters to hear or see information that will out them in some way, the narrative shows discomfort and fear of Lily and Iris through dialogue, inner monologue, and the occasional action option. This anxiety is similar to Nadia's own sneaking of her sexuality into hushed conversations with close confidants in *Known Unknowns*.

Other characters also have reckonings due to a fear of being identified as monstrous. For example, Nadia hones in her bisexuality as the main reason for Anja's distaste of her in *Known Unknowns*. Her friend, Kaz, denies that their sister Anja would dislike Nadia for being bisexual, but one line of dialogue from Anja has her remark that, "If I thought I could catch what you

have, I would wear a gas mask!” Nadia remarks that Anja only started treating her negatively after the fall out with Summer from their almost kiss. In the end, Nadia is afraid of being transformed into a monster because of her sexuality and sees Anja’s hostility toward her as proof of this possibility.

Transgender Monstrosity

Besides the implications of monstrosity on identity, characters such as Iris from *A Colour Like No Other* have an additional connection to the monstrous: her gender identity as a trans woman, which is shown both implicitly and confirmed within the game’s comments. In TheNamelessOne’s game, Iris is only ever referred to and presented as feminine. However, through her fear of having her girlfriend, Lily, discover the identity that others have given her in the books they find in the library, her body constantly changes, and she makes a powerful declaration during the final confrontation. Transness is also often equated as monstrous (LeMaster, 2020). Iris is the most powerful and most noticeably monstrous character in *A Colour Like No Other* with her strength and ability to shape and morph her body. One pivotal scene toward the end entails her confronting the ghost antagonist who tries calling her by a name that she is not, and was never, her true name. Iris’s declaration within the game that she is more than a dead name alongside the game’s constant focus on her body’s unique abilities led one anonymous player to comment on the game page that they thought Iris was transgender and TheNamelessOne responded to verify Iris’s gender identity (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Comment example on itch.io game page, A Colour Like No Other

I loved all the creative speculative fiction aspect, like the worldbuilding of how Iris deals with mimicking a physical form she's not used to. That was really intriguing and helped so much to get inside her head!

And I loved that the 'moral' of the whole thing was that nobody is really 'perfect', and that even if you love somebody more than anything else it's not healthy to idolize them as if you're worthless and they never feel pain ever. It really hit me right in the heart when Iris opened up to Lily at the end, yknow? God that was SO GOOD!

Kind of random additional comment: am I just being silly to get a bit of transgender headcanons here? I don't know if I'm imposing my own experiences onto this, but to me it felt like Iris didn't have any big traditional magic reason to hate her 'true name', it just wasn't her 'true name' even though it was what she was born with. And maybe that was intentionally meant to be relateable to trans people, or maybe it was just a coincidence, but it added even more reasons why this story hit me so hard in the emotions. it was just really well made! Thank you so much for this great little slice of an intriguing romance, and I'd love to see more adventures of this amazing couple in the future!

Reply



[TheNamelessOne](#) 3 years ago (1 edit) (+1)

I don't know if you'll see this but: Iris is straight-up, unambiguous, non-metaphorical canon trans so you are certainly not silly for feeling that way.

Thanks for reading! Happy you enjoyed it.

Note. Figure 2 shows a comment made by an anonymous player who has completed *A Colour Like No Other*. They comment that they believe the character Iris is transgender and the game creator, TheNamelessOne, states that this is correct below the original player comment.

Iris's intersectional marginalization makes her the preeminent queer monster in *A Colour Like No Other*, for she is othered, and thus turned monster, by others for all aspects of her identity. Not only does she have to reconcile and hide her queer relationship, but she also has to hide and deal with the implications of existing within the game's world as a trans woman and a literal monster.

Besides the more explicitly monstrous representations of gender, there are other metaphorical depictions of non-normative gender found in characters from the other two games. Kaz from *Known Unknowns* is another gender monster. In fact, it could be argued that Kaz is more of a gender ghost, for their gender does not exist. Just like a ghost, Kaz's gender is a

mirage and outside the bounds of normative definitions of gender identity. They are genderqueer fitting neatly outside the usual gender binary. Just like a ghost that no longer exists in the human realm and thus has no human gender, Kaz also eschews traditional male/female gender descriptions to represent another alternative. This means that gender is a figment of the past for them, just as it is for the genderless raccoon ghosts. Kaz has killed off gender within themselves even as Nadia and the others still retain their own binary presentations.

The relationship between gender identity and sexuality is also present within Anthropy's *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On*. While both characters in the game are coded as female, as evidenced by their use of the term "mommy" to describe themselves, Diode is also given some hints of transgender identity. While there are no comments from Anna Anthropy confirming Diode's gender identity, a few in-game references suggest this to be true. One scene nears the end makes reference to Diode's bulge while an earlier scene has the player wonder if Diode was "jacking off." These references allude to Diode being a transgender woman. Yet, Diode's gender is inextricably tied to her sexually explicit nature, which includes references to a sexual relationship between the main characters among other innuendos and mature humor. This overt sexuality is in stark comparison to the ambiguous and vague nature of the other two games when discussing sexual topics, if they touched on them at all. Indeed, homosexuality is often defined by its queer sexual desire as Alexander (2008) notes in his discussions of the importance of sexual language in identifying oneself. Thus, it makes sense for *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On* to use sexuality to explore the two characters' identities in new ways. By adding sexuality to the mix, Anthropy adds another layer to player identity exploration that was overlooked in the other games by directly connecting Diode and the main character's identity as queer women to their sexual desire for other queer women. Whether it is through monsters,

ghosts, or sexuality, questions of gender and its importance in defining one identity were echoed across all three games.

Through these three games, multiple conclusions can be drawn. The different perspectives, descriptions, and diverse characters show how independent games and game creators can allow both queer and non-queer players to identify with characters from a range of backgrounds. Through this identification process, these three games lead players down a path of exploration that force them to reconcile with the ways that sexuality, fear of being vilified, and the compulsion to hide one's identity all shape players' understandings of their own gender and sexual identities. Not only do these games hold valuable potentials for understanding how games can be spaces for exploring identities and questioning traditional gender binaries, but the methods and metaphors used by these creators also shed light on tools that fellow game makers use as they make identity and gender and prominent themes within their own works.

Chapter 5: Economics and Embodiment

All three titles incorporate themes of embodiment and queer economy, circling around queer participation in capitalism. As D’Emilio (1983) noted, the relationship between queerness and capitalism is often strained due to queer communities and queer labor not always choosing to participate in traditional capitalistic structures. Instead, queer laborers often choose to create an alternative economic system that is not dependent on traditional liberal capitalism and the commodification of products and productivity. Through such labor as the free games under analysis here, queer games can be used to criticize traditional ideas of economic survival while actively working outside the capitalistic system.

In *A Colour Like No Other*, the main protagonists showcase queer resistance to traditional capitalism, which relies on workers’ labor and money being constantly cycled back into an economically productive cycle where nothing is free, and everything has a price (Goetz, 2018). Instead of signing up for a traditional job, the characters attempt to use a fake ghost photo to earn money to pay their friends’ medical bills, reflecting some of the collective social responsibility examined by Brown (2009) as one example of queer economics. After that fails, Lilly and Iris falsely claim to be ghost hunters in order to earn money from the couple they meet suffering from a ghost haunting. This choice to “lie” and take advantage of a situation that Iris herself claims to not believe as real contrasts with traditional capitalistic participation. Their labor as ghost hunters is a job that is unreal and considered unproductive due to the lack of a larger contribution to society compared to other productive jobs. This lack of productivity is one way Iris and Lily resist giving into normative ways of earning income and adhere to the standards set by regular economic structures, like the unproductive nature of playing games that Goetz (2018) outlines.

The two protagonists of *A Colour Like No Other* also offer several additional critiques of the social class differences between themselves and the couple they work for. There are several parts in the story where Lilly mentions how much larger the haunted house is compared to their meager apartment or questions the cost of the books in the library that they contemplate stealing to sell for extra money. Iris's reaction to these class differences is anti-capitalist. In defiance of capitalistic ideas circling around earning a wage and working for those with more economic capital while also worshiping those with more wealth, Iris instead uses the couple's increased economic status as justification for stealing books from their library. This resistance to traditional capitalistic ideas of ownership and class division culminates in a choice players must make as to whether they should take the money they found in a safe in the library that the new homeowners of said library were completely unaware of. For Iris, there is no need to go out and hold a back-breaking job in order to earn the money they need when they have access to a quicker and more efficient source of income right in front of them. There is no right or wrong in Iris's mind. Instead, there are only those who have and need versus those who have more than enough. In keeping with this ideology, Iris even cheers on the PC if they make the choice to take a soda from the couple's mini fridge. The way the game ungrudgingly gives options to the players to take money or other items from the house further cement this queer understanding of the unfairness of capitalism and class differences. These examples stem from traditions of not only anti-capitalism but also the distinctly queer traditions of socialism as noted by Ferguson's (2018) description of the LGBTQ movement's beginnings and Brown's (2009) discussions of queer alternative economic communities that favor collective labor for the greater good. This queer understanding of working against capitalism and using labor to help others within the community is significant given the fact that Lilly and Iris are trying to earn money for their friend and not for themselves.

In Anthropy's game, the economic themes are not always that explicit compared to the blatant anti-capitalism of TheNamelessOne's game. Throughout *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On*, different allusions to economic concerns arise. For example, depictions of closed mines that no longer offer wealth, gravestones belonging to people with no income, and abandoned farms and towns showcase a world of economic struggle and wealth disparity. Where the wealthy have gone is not discussed. Only the two living characters, the PC and Diode, remain in their struggle with each other for survival in *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On*.

It is not only in these subtle narrative inclusions that wealth struggles are discussed. They also come through in the main plotline of *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On* when the characters fight to regain control of a sack full of credits. Indeed, this struggle is the centerpiece of the entire game as players attempt to hide the wealth for themselves. The narrative focuses most of its attention on exploring the intersections between queer existence and capitalistic abandonment. In *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On's* world, participating in traditional heteronormative liberal capitalism is no longer the best option. Instead, this world, and the queer lives surviving in it, have been abandoned by jobs, careers, and other typical economic paths for success. Alongside this lack of capitalism in a lawless world filled with new-age outlaws, the heteronormative expectation of productivity in the service of economy is also diminished. Indeed, in Anthropy's world, queer alternative economic structures are free to reign without judgment. The exploration of a world where capitalism has failed leaks into the player character as well by forcing them to question morality and acceptable behavior in a dystopian future. The world depicted in Anthropy's game is significant because this world distinctly queer and capitalism has fallen apart. The absence of any traditional capitalistic structures alongside the lack of heteronormativity raises an interesting question in the context of *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On's* world. One must wonder whether it was the fall of heteronormativity that led

to the failure of capitalism or if it was capitalism's decline in this world that allowed queerness to become the new ideal. As capitalism and the traditional nuclear family unit are often tied to each other, the answer may be both. The success of the game's praising of queerness and critique of heteronormativity and capitalism forces players to realize how neither capitalism nor heteronormativity can thrive without each other. In a world without one, the other will also perish, just like in Anthropy's game.

As with the other two games, Hennessy's Twine game also focuses on economic struggle for survival and queer alternative economies. Instead of traditional currency, *Known Unknowns*' narrative looks at the economic value of interpersonal relationships, failure, and bodies. However, just as one can fail to thrive in a traditional liberalist economy by being unable to attain the dominant form of currency used to purchase goods and services (Brown, 2009), Nadia's failure to gain the economic currency of new friendships is also explored.

One of the recurring topics within *Known Unknowns* is Nadia's struggle to build new economically productive relationships, relationships that hold some form of value beyond mere companionship such as relationships related to completing some product or other form of labor. Nadia fails to convince her friends and classmates to form new relationships that would provide labor for the school newspaper she desperately needs help creating. Queer community and relationships, as seen with capitalist support of the same sex marriage, are another form of currency (Ferguson, 2018). Relationships signal connections to additional sources of income, whether through new job opportunities, coworkers, employers, or through additional help with physical labor. When Nadia tries recruiting Olivia Kwon to the newspaper staff, she is rebuffed and Summer runs away every time Nadia tries to talk to her. Nadia's constant failure to make new friends and allies is important because the main currency discussed in *Known Unknowns* is social currency. Interpersonal relationships, and the value they bring, are a major emphasis of the

game since the newspaper club Nadia now runs is desperately low on staff. Classmates, and the labor-rich bodies they can bring to the newspaper club, are an economic commodity and her failure to build relationships represents not just social disconnection but economic failure as well. As Welch (2018) noted, when discussing the labor of game modders, volunteer labor is especially queer. Olivia Kwon represents not just a classmate and potential friend, but also a new body that could be used for labor on the newspaper staff. The failure to attain Olivia's body through building a stronger relationship with her is two-fold. Nadia's failure ends up being both economic and social. Her failure to reconnect with new and old friends represents both a social failure to build community and an economic failure to attain the currency, unpaid staff members to work on the newspaper, needed to succeed.

All three games explore different aspects of queer resistance and participation in capitalism. Indeed, through queer bodies and unproductive labor, all three games question what is considered valuable and productive economic participation. The significance of these games is in the way they use the Twine platform to explore these economic themes and the relationship between economics and queerness itself in ways different from that of a paper or book. Through *A Colour Like No Other*, *TheNamelessOne* explores the longstanding relationship between queerness and anti-capitalism as expressed through communal outlooks on resources. In addition, *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On* and *Known Unknowns* force players to question the core relationships tying bodies, heteronormativity, and capitalism together. The value of this analysis comes through recognizing that these games use ambiguous characters, moral choices, and world building to critique capitalism and showcase potential alternatives. They can make players view economics through a distinctly queer lens. This queer lens, colored by both the queer characters' worldviews through which players explore these games, and the queer creators who created these Twins in the first place, harshly critique capitalism and uses these games to

not only highlight problems with capitalist systems but to also offer alternative systems where queerness is the norm, community takes precedent over the individual, people are valued for more than just their labor, and where there is no single right or wrong answer. By highlighting alternative queer economic possibilities and making players identify with new perspectives, my analysis reveals how Twine gives creators more creative flexibility to consider when exploring their own queer titles. In addition, this analysis of economics showcases the potential for creativity outside of capitalism as highlighted by the fact that all three games were distributed by their creators on a free website at zero cost to players. This refusal to charge for their creative labor is another example of the key benefit of moving away from capitalistic systems, which is the potential for pure creation and critique to be made and shared without any expectation of payment and without any associated restrictions that may come. As these games show, without capitalism's restrictions that often bar the creation of anything that will not produce income or contribute back to the system, powerful critiques can be made and alternatives of what a world without capitalism would look like can be freely explored in various media, including the very capitalist site of mainstream gaming.

Chapter 6: Time

Economics, gender, and identity were all explored in unique and insightful ways in *A Colour Like No Other*, *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On*, and *Known Unknowns*. Yet, thematic explorations of time in these games was surprising due to the way that all three titles rebelled against linearity and rigid timelines. In line with many of the arguments made by other queer game scholars in *Game Studies* (Ruberg & Phillips, 2018), time can become another vehicle for queering a game by removing it from the chrononormative standards that are traditional within mainstream heteronormative societies (Knutson, 2018). Scholars, like Edelman (2004) and Muñoz (2009) have hinted at the revolutionary nature of queer time. What ultimately makes exploring the way that time is used and queered in these games important is due to the typical teleological and linear experience of time that is found in most media, including games, and the fact that all three games break this linearity in at least one way (Knutson, 2018). As this chapter explores, these games use visual indicators, journal functions, and narrative descriptions and choices to force players to go back and forth between the past, present, and future in a non-linear manner. This fluidity between different time states provides new ideas for academics, players, and game creators to carry with them as they continue to study, play, and create other queer game media. Specifically, the fact that all three titles diverge from linearity in some way showcase the potentiality for exploring time in queer games as Stone (2018) also examined. Opening up to the possibility of non-linearity creates room for the exploration of how past, present, and future often intersect and influence queerness and identity in general (Bessette, 2017; Alexander & Rhodes, 2012; Muñoz, 2009).

Game Mechanics and Visuals

As noted in the Methods chapter, all three creators use visuals and additional coded features to explore queer existence as linked to ideas around queer futurity and alternate time,

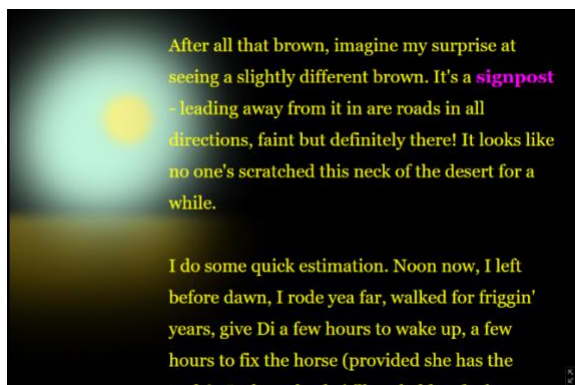
which focuses on spaces outside of the present or typical structures of time and explores what non-normative time means for queerness. In *A Colour Like No Other*, the background changes color only once during a flashback sequence. The use of color to signal shifts between past and present complement TheNamelessOne's use of in-game choices as to what the main characters should do next, such as the option to endlessly continue walking down a road without end, to playing around with the idea of time. In *A Colour Like No Other's* world, the past is dangerous, as it signals a world where Iris and Lilly were once alone without each other and were unaccepted. Indeed, for the two characters, their queer lives exist only in the future (Muñoz, 2009) and the game's coding proceeds to push both players and characters toward this future.

While the final ending of *A Colour Like No Other* remains the same no matter what players choose to do in game, players do have say in how long it takes them to reach the ending, what side actions to take, and how much time they choose to spend on these side actions. These player options in *A Colour Like No Other* can be used to make an argument about the importance of time within the game. The available choices and predetermined ending suggest some degree of chrononormativity while also insisting that how much time it takes to reach one's final result and the time spent on other unnecessary actions is completely up to the players themselves. Thus, while the queer finale is in the future (Muñoz, 2009), there is much play left to be done by the players in the meantime despite the limitations that the game has on this play. By going back and forth and changing the order of actions and interactions, no play through is the same as the other, which furthers the linear non-linearity of the timeline of *A Colour Like No Other*. Since players are unlikely to go to rooms, choose the same dialogue options, or take plot-progressing actions in the same order in each play through, there lacks any standard timeline for progression. Players all reach the same ending, but the path to get there will always vary.

The other two titles also use various strategies to manipulate players' conceptions of in-game time. Anna Anthropy's *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On* follows in TheNamelessOne's footsteps by rebelling against complete linearity. Instead, the game often switches between the present and the past, and between varying times of day. Through different background visuals and changing text colors, the game signals a change between time despite the overall limitations of the Twine platform. Thus, the visuals serve as the main indicator of the time of day within the narrative (see Figure 3). When the final battle happens at dusk, the darkened sun accompanies the darker text. In contrast, the scenes that occur in the middle of the day show a bright sun with neon yellow text.

Figure 3

Time visuals example, And The Robot Horse You Rode In On



Note. Figure 3 shows the visual indicators of time in *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On*. In this example, the text is a neon yellow and the image in the background shows a high and bright sun, indicating that it is currently in the afternoon during the storyline.

Visual indicators serve multiple purposes in *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On*. First, they make time front and center. The bright and bold images with their accompanying text color mean that players cannot ignore the in-game time and always have some awareness of the current stage of the story. In addition to this forced awareness, visuals are used to break linearity.

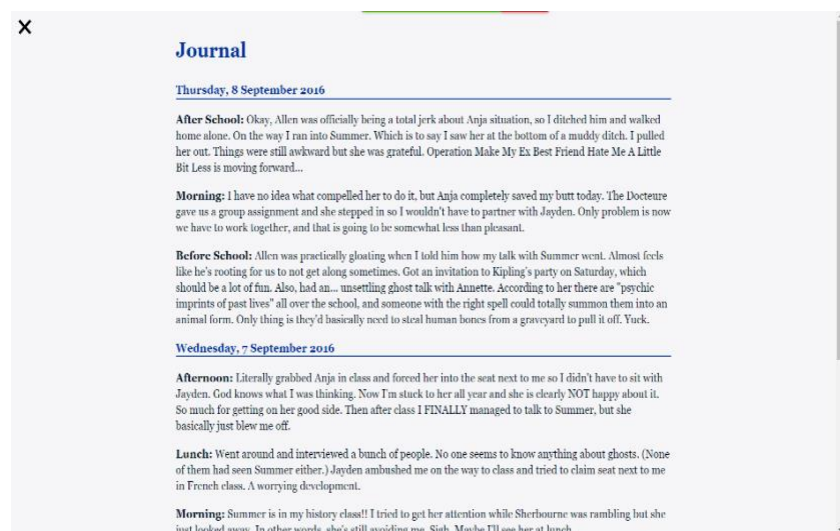
The rapid switch between a bright afternoon sun with neon yellow text to a dimmer morning sun before jumping back to an orange dusk with purple makes the switches between past, present, and future evident. Even if players think that the story is progressing linearly, the visual changes ensure that players are aware of the flashbacks and jumps between different parts of the same day. Here, the visuals become the biggest indicator of the non-linear story progression that Anthropy has programmed.

Coding also becomes a valuable source of time distortion in these Twine games. In Twine, coding can be used to give players the ability to move freely without any time passing at all. For example, in *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On*, the game has a pre-set ending similar to *A Colour Like No Other*, but the path one can take to get there varies as players can use the in-game choices to resist chrononormativity. *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On* is not programmed in a way that forbids players from wandering without progressing further in the story. This ability to move without time progressing means that players can stop time and refuse the linear path laid out for them in the game. Thus, players in *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On* have the choice to remain stuck in the “past” forever, with the past becoming their present. Such a choice means that besides the built-in time jumps, players also have the option to stop in-game time themselves just as they can remain in place without progressing the story depending on the choices they make. This ability to give players the choice to interrupt the in-game time then becomes significant since the disruption of chrononormativity is no longer solely reliant on the game itself. Instead, players are given the option to break linearity and plot progression as much, or as little, as they would like, which makes them directly complicit in the queering of time through gameplay. Players are no longer simply swept away by the game to go on a time-breaking journey, but instead have the chance to pull the lever and disrupt linearity themselves or speed through the correct options to return the game back to its original trajectory.

In addition to using visuals or coding to unsettle player conceptions of time, it is also possible to combine both approaches into one. An example of a mechanic that combines the visual indicators of time with coding is the journal function present in some games. This journal function can be found in Brendan Hennessy's *Known Unknowns*, which can be accessed by clicking on the menu on the left side of the game screen (see Figure 4). This journal changes and adds new entries as players progress through the school day and the entirety of Episode One.

Figure 4

Journal, *Known Unknowns*



Note. Figure 4 shows the journal feature of *Known Unknowns*. In Figure 4, players are able to see the storyline from the past few days with specific mentions of what actions players took during the morning, afternoon, and after school.

The journal in *Known Unknowns* ends up serving multiple purposes in game. First, it serves as a tracker of progress for players. The constant updates allow players to keep track of where they are in each day in the chapter and what they have already accomplished. It also serves as a way for keeping track of the progression of time as a whole. Since it can be confusing

to know when a new day has started, the journal becomes vital for keeping players informed of their place within the story timeline.

Anthropy and TheNamelessOne both eschew any specific dates or times beyond visual hints in their games. In contrast, the clear-cut labeling of dates and times of day through the journal in Hennessy's work diverges from the other two games by keeping *Known Unknowns* on an easy to follow and consistently linear timeline. Within *Known Unknowns*, the journal is used to show how the past constantly haunts Nadia by affecting her present and preventing her story from linearly moving on. Focusing primarily on the past is notable because both *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On* and *A Colour Like No Other* ruminate on the past only as necessary to achieve the future ending. In contrast, *Known Unknowns* spends more time thinking about and confronting the past than the other two games. This emphasis on past reconciliation in *Known Unknowns* stands out because while the game does break linearity through its extensive use of flashbacks and jumps between past and present, part of the game's uniqueness is the concurrent nature of the timeline. Not only does the game constantly return to the past, but the past moves simultaneously with the present in Nadia's case. For example, while the game takes place within the present day for Nadia, the game starts with a flashback. She also frequently talks about the past to her friend, Kaz, in the present allowing both timelines to co-exist together. Hennessy does not completely ignore the focus on the queer future that the other titles share, but instead constantly forces players to reconcile with the past to move forward. Just as the journal cannot be changed or altered as it remains an ever-present reminder of player decisions, so too can Nadia not completely erase or escape the past incident that ruined her and Summer's friendship.

Besides each game looking primarily toward the past or future instead of at the present, the games also give players choices to control their timelines. In the case of *Known Unknowns*, this control is given through a chapter function. This function gives players the ability to return

to or hop between different chapters within Episode One without their choices mattering. The past is still lurking in the background, but this mode challenges the otherwise stable chrononormativity of the game itself. Through this chapter mode, players can constantly move back and forth between the past, present, and future of the game's world while making different choices each time. However, the choices made in this mode are not saved, meaning that loading the next chapter will show a world where the previous choices had no effect. The ability to move across time without consequences is significant because it allows players to escape the linearity of the main game. Instead, players can move between time in whatever order they would like without affecting their main play through. This flexibility allows for additional play, even if the effect of this play is limited to this sandbox-like space where no choices matter. The existence of such liminal space where choices are meaningless, and time does not matter the argument against strict chrononormativity that Nadia's tale invokes.

Narrative and Characters

Outside the game mechanics and visuals, explorations of queer time and resistance to chrononormativity can also be found in the narrative and characters themselves. As Flanagan and Nissenbaum (2014) and Paul (2012) note, much of the rhetorical meaning making within games can be found not just in the coding and choices present, but also in the textual rhetorics as well. As such, the coding and choices in all three Twine games can be used to provide deep analysis of the relationship between time and queerness. Stone's (2018) work provides one example of how characters and narrative can relate to time as it was not just the game mechanics that placed heavy focus on time. Instead, the storyline and its focus on the past of the main character of Stone's (2018) game, also played a key role in how players experienced the progression of time. The mechanics forced players to reconcile with time, while the story was used to explain the

importance of time and place it front and center every time players returned to the game (Stone, 2018).

When it comes to the relationship between queer time and characters, the most prominent examples come from *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On* and *Known Unknowns*. As examples of Muñoz's (2009) queer futurity, *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On* exists in a distant future where Mars has been colonized for quite some time, robot horses abound, and entire towns have fallen into disrepair. In this future, queerness is not explicit, yet it is assumed. In many ways, Anna Anthropy's story examines a world post-queer futurity where norms have reversed and queerness is now the standard. Diode's transness and the PC's queerness does not need to be explained to players because they exist in a world where queerness is normal. There is no need for either character to come out because they are already assumed to be queer through the very rules of the world that they exist within. Similarly, the player does not need to worry about being seen making out with Diode or being overheard discussing their queer sex life. In this queer world, such conversations will not cause homophobic rage or attacks. Indeed, it would be as innocuous as any heteronormative conversation about bachelor parties or spicing up the bedroom that one hears in the real world whenever they turn on the TV or explore social media. Because queerness in *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On* is the expectation, discussions of queer sexual experiences do not cause concern or disdain. Even less so in this case where the only living characters in the nearby vicinity are the two queer ex-partners and lovers themselves.

Since queerness is the default in this world, Anthropy does not have to set aside time to show how accepting or tolerant the game's society is to the main characters. Instead, the game can skip these details and focus on time and economic concerns instead. With queerness assumed, Anthropy is able to comment on the other aspects of queer existence that are not as discussed. Ultimately, the focus in *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On* is not on exploring the

potentials for a queer future. Instead, the game makes explicit its intention is to explore what queer time and relationships with capitalism may look like in such a queer future once the need to defend queerness itself from heteronormativity and homophobia is over.

Gender and sexual identity also serve as another indication of this queer utopia. As with the other titles, Hennessy's characters' queerness is accepted without any questioning or defining within the game. Kaz's gender presentation in *Known Unknowns* is never questioned by anyone in the game. Kaz's rebellion against the binary in a world that still deals exclusively in binaries serves as another example of the queer future. Kaz is important since the unequivocal acceptance of their gender signals that Hennessy also sets their story within a slightly more futuristic setting where queerness, or at least queer gender is normalized to the point that genderqueer individuals can be open about their identity without any fear of judgment. As such, similar to *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On*, Hennessy uses their game to focus on other queer themes without the need to discuss gender norms. Gender is a relic of the past and the game instead focuses on other aspects of economics, time, and identity that are more relevant to its near but very queer future.

Queerness is also normalized similarly, although to varying degrees, by TheNamelessOne. In *A Colour Like No Other*, the queerness of the main characters is not explained, defined, or pacified for players. Instead, queerness is only assumed to be a question for the potentially homophobic side characters within *A Colour Like No Other* that primarily exist to help explore the stories of the queer protagonists. However, unlike the other two titles where homophobia is not mentioned at all or has no relevance to the storyline besides a minor mention here and there, in *A Colour Like No Other*, Lily and her girlfriend still lived in a world where their queerness had to be restrained. While Lily and Iris are well aware of each other's queerness, they still live in a world where they must keep their identities secret since gender expectations are still very relevant to the characters that they interact with in their story.

Despite the limited functionality of Twine and the budget-restraints that indie Twine creators are under (Anthropy, 2012), they continue their exploration of queerness by using time in various ways. The use of visual time indicators, switches between the past, present, and future, and focus on queer utopia is valuable for multiple populations. As Muñoz (2009), Bessette (2017), and others showcase, both past and present are extremely valuable for those within queer communities and those who study queerness and queer rhetorics in various media. Anna Anthropy, TheNamelessOne, and Brendan Hennessy have demonstrated and argued for the importance of queer questionings of time as the viewing of time through a queer lens allows for new understandings of how the queer past continues to affect the future. A focus on queer time also gives space for investigating what a queer utopic future looks like and the ways that will affect other aspects of queerness such as alternative economics, gender binaries, and identity development. The techniques used by these creators are valuable for rhetorical and game studies scholars continuing their assessment of time and its relationship to queerness while also serving as an example for other queer players and game developers to consider while playing and making their own games. By putting all of these themes and games together, additional understandings of the usefulness and application of these findings can be unlocked for game studies, composition and rhetoric, players, and game makers. The ultimate suggestion that can be found through analyzing these games and their explorations of time is that breaking away from expectations of linearity allows for freedom. Instead of focusing solely on the past, these games advocate for integrating the struggles of the past and visions for the future into our understandings of queerness today. It is through looking at the past and imagining the future that it becomes possible to reshape a better queer outlook in the now. The past is inescapable. Instead

of trying to hide from the past, it should be embraced as that is the only way to truly reach queer utopia.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Returning to the special issues of *Peitho* (2020) and *Game Studies* (2018) illustrates the ongoing discussions about queer and trans representation and identity that continue to be relevant to queer rhetoric and game studies. Through the examination of these three Twine games, it was possible to find thematic elements and game mechanics that aligned with these larger academic discussions in several ways. The ways that independent creators such as Anthropy, TheNamelessOne, and Hennessy use Twine are multifaceted. There is no one particular goal for these games, as evidenced by the variety of themes that were uncovered in this research. Indeed, creators seem to address multiple areas of queer life through their Twine games. They explore the many ways that capitalism, time, gender, identity, and more are expressed in both reality and fantasy.

All three titles also shared an emphasis on looking at queer existence and post-futurity. All three works take up the mantle of a world where queerness is the expectation. In all three games heteronormativity becomes the side-character while queerness remains in the spotlight, unlike mainstream game titles such as *Mass Effect* (2007) where queerness serves as a bonus feature while heteronormativity continues to be entrenched firmly as the main part of each game. Such a focus on queerness highlights other aspects of queer existence that are not explored in mainstream titles. By focusing on queerness, all three creators simultaneously discuss both the same and different areas of queer economics, identity, gender, and time through their games. Indeed, it is the ability to examine aspects of queerness not found in larger titles and to analyze how games can aid in identity exploration and queer alternative economics that make this project valuable for different audiences.

Ultimately, it is not just the idea of queer futurity itself that these games took up. Instead, through these games, creators such as Anna Anthropy, TheNamelessOne, and Brendan Hennessy

look beyond the queer utopia that Muñoz (2009) theorized. Instead, they imagine a world post futurity. Once the queer utopia has been reached, queerness no longer becomes a question. In a world where queerness has become the default instead of the non-default option, it then becomes possible to explore other issues beyond queer identity. The possibilities of this queer futurity include further developing the queer alternative economy and the exploration of queer co-ops, community development, and queer labor and creation without the expectation of payment or capitalistic productivity. Another possibility of the queer future is the embracing of the past within the present. In the queer future, discussions of the past might become an intrinsic part of daily life. Reconsiderations of how to integrate and learn from the queer past to improve the present will be vital. Queer futurity also provides the promise of destroying what is left of the gender binary and providing a space to further envision a world that is genderless or where one's gender has no effect on daily life whatsoever.

For the trans rhetoricians that *Peitho* (2020) highlighted, the fact that all three games have trans or gender non-conforming characters itself is revolutionary in the twenty-first century. What is valuable for such analysis of gender and identity rhetoric is the way that these games allow for players to explore both their own and others' identities. Specifically, the focus on characters who break and deconstruct gender binaries is useful for a multitude of reasons. Not only do these games illustrate the potential of interactive game media to give players a new perspective on gender identity, but they also show another method for exploring the future of gender itself. These futuristic exploration and breakdown then is a rich source of analysis for those interested in trans rhetorics and give an idea of how gender can be studied in other indie queer games. As Dym, et al. (2018) showcases, the potential of trans rhetoric is still fully unknown within gaming especially. Yet, Nielsen (2015) helps to solidify the unique space that gaming provides for gender exploration. Games with their unique interactivity and ability to give players

first-hand experience as different genders or as transgender characters, are important to analyze. The implications of such analysis are valuable in understanding the current conversations around gender in independent games while also providing insight into how game developers are creating opportunities for players to explore what gender means. Understanding the modern state of gender within video games is important not just for trans rhetoricians interested in understanding how transness is being represented in the gaming sphere, but it is also vital for showing how this representation allows for a more interactive first-hand experience of what it means to exist as a transgender person in the world.

In addition to the richness of this project for exploring trans rhetorics, it is also important to understand the potentials for the field of game studies as well. As Anthropy (2012), Shaw (2015) and *Game Studies* (Ruberg & Phillips, 2018) suggest, the field of queer game studies has been rapidly growing in recent decades. While there tends to be a focus on AAA titles such as *Bioshock* (2007), there is tremendous value in studying the small, distinct queer, and free games made by independent developers (Chang, 2017). In fact, indie queer games often have the most interesting ideas and potentialities to be explored, as these titles can derive from the creators' unique personal experiences and ideas. Additionally, due to the homemade nature of these games, they can cater to niche audiences and explore the unmarketable sides of queerness that would not make it into larger titles. It is then this small, niche, and personal nature that makes the games studied in this project very useful. By showcasing the rich themes available for analysis in these titles, this project gives room for other game scholars to dive into the under-explored indie queer games. Game scholars can use the analysis of the Twine games in this project as examples of the themes that such indie games delve into while also giving some hints as to how these types of queer games can be studied in the future. Indeed, it is only through the continued study of these types of independently made queer games by other scholars that will allow for a full

understanding of the wide array of themes, techniques, and rhetorical meaning making that can be found within these games.

By studying the rhetorical meaning found within both the narrative and mechanical elements of queer Twine, and other indie games, game creators themselves can also benefit. While creators such as Anthropy (2012) often write about the various considerations and concerns they explicitly attempt to include within their work, other queer game makers may not always be aware of the rhetorical underpinnings found in the games that they produce. Through this analysis, one additional takeaway is the more common themes and areas of concern of queer identity, gender non-conformity and transness, queer economic survival, and queer futurity and time that can be found in the queer Twine game community. While these themes may not apply to all queer game makers, it does provide some idea of how these particular aspects of queer existence can be explored within indie games, which can be useful for game makers looking to incorporate similar themes in the games they create. Also of importance is the focus in this project on not just the themes themselves, but on the way that creators used different game mechanics, characters, narrative settings, and visuals in their works. Examining the tools used by these creators is also valuable, as other game creators can borrow or revolutionize these same techniques to investigate various aspects of queerness in their future games.

Players themselves can also benefit from this project for the same reasons as trans rhetoricians, game studies scholars, and game makers. Perhaps the most valuable takeaway from this thesis is in the way that rhetorical meaning and exploration, game mechanics, and developer ideas were expressed through the Twine games created by Anna Anthropy in *And The Robot Horse You Rode In On*, TheNamelessOne in *A Colour Like No Other*, and Brendan Patrick Hennessy in *Known Unknowns*. It is through coding schemes, visuals, characters, and plotlines that players are given the chance to reshape their understandings of gender, identity, queer time,

and queer alternative economics. Indeed, the themes that hold relevance for scholars and that game developers include inside their games are intended for players to find, notice and consider. For players especially, this thesis project serves as a way of approaching the queer indie games that they play while also making players aware of the underlying rhetorical messages and critiques that can be found within the queer Twine games. This project illuminates the overall value and importance of studying such games in the first place. Whether one is a scholar, game maker, or player, this thesis sheds light on the fact that these are more than just games. Instead, these Twine games, no matter how short, text heavy, or limited in functionality, are an important site of rhetorical meaning, queer exploration, and dialogue. No matter what group one comes from, this project shows that there is no need to wait for the future to find a queer utopia. Instead, it can be found within a small subset of the queer-gaming community using a free tool named Twine and all one must do is start digging deep to find a treasure trove of queer possibility waiting to be discovered.

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