# game environments

global network player authority PewDiePie guild god Let's Play angel undead wtf authentic mediatization Skill dungeon PVP contest digital
game rule system gameplay avatar WoW blessing noob kills demon race body fight prop spell ingame rebirth PS4 discussion witch clan wedding
religion gamer analysis representation line lore religion o-scape soul diablo class tradition experience priest genesis mage gamer
simulation lol ludology The Last of Us death resurrection funeral rules ritual virtual identity buff immersion community symbols salvation XBox 360 PVE
narrative
hell

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# Gaming and Breaking Binaries in *Immortals Fenyx Rising.* A Feminist and Queer Analysis[i]

Anika Y. C. C. Falkenberg

**Abstract**

This report analyses *Immortals Fenyx Rising* (2020) as an example of queering video games to advocate for the representation of feminist and non-binary perspectives in the English-language AAA games industry. Through a close narratological and ludological analysis, with assistance from literature from gender studies, the public and private sphere, game studies, queer game studies and Greek mythology studies, I explore how *Immortals Fenyx Rising* is a modern, feminist interpretation of classic Greek mythology which disrupts binaries regarding gender by shedding light on what has been deemed too feminine, domestic or non-conforming in our current societies to be discussed, illustrating the possibility of queering video games to expand non-binary representation. In an industry saturated with games inspired by Greek mythology, *Immortals Fenyx Rising* not only represents a feminist perspective in the typically masculine action-adventure genre, but also respects the non-binary experiences in Greek myths that are usually hidden in the patriarchal society.

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**IASGAR PhD Day Report**

The Centre for Media, Communication and Information Research at the University of Bremen, in partnership with the International Academy for Study of Gaming and Religion, held its 3rd Annual Summer Graduate Workshop on September 28, 2024. The workshop centered on Digital Gaming and Values, bringing together early-career researchers and doctoral students alongside invited experts. The program featured collaborative discussions examining research methodologies, study design approaches, and theoretical frameworks that illuminate the relationship between culture and video gaming. Several presentations distinguished themselves through exceptional quality and have been selected for publication in this issue under the Emerging Voices in the Field section.

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Video games have been the subject of feminist discourse in various aspects, from the representation of women to women working in the gaming industry, especially with the controversy known as #GamerGate in 2013-2014. These discussions have led to creative ways of addressing such discourse, including using Greek mythology as a lens to defamiliarise unjust societies. Like other mediums which convey feminist perspectives in Greek mythology, such as the poem *Eurydice* written by Carol Ann Duffy (1999), in the poetry collection, *The World's Wife*, which gives Eurydice's perspective in Orpheus and Eurydice's story, games have done the same, with an added layer of interaction. More recently, a new intersection between games and queer communities has emerged to encompass various disruptions of normativity in society, leading to a deeper and broader conversation about how games can become more queer and accepting of different perspectives, including feminism.

*Immortals Fenyx Rising* (2020) is an action-adventure game developed by Ubisoft Quebec and published by Ubisoft. Taking place in ancient Greek times, it features Prometheus telling the story of the mortal Fenyx to Zeus as she saves the Greek pantheon from Typhon. Though players can change the appearance and gender of Fenyx, the female version has been claimed and accepted as the canononical one, which I explore further in my research. Its gameplay involves exploring the Golden Isle, an open world with seven regions inspired by Greek mythology.

Inspired by the game's premise and feminist's readings of Greek mythology, I inquire: *How does Immortals Fenyx Rising convey the possibility of queering video games and disrupting binaries as they are constructed by the patriarchal society through using Greek mythology as a lens?* I investigate how the game's narrative, gameplay, visuals and sound, also known as audiovisual ludonarrative, interpret Greek mythology from a seemingly completely different time and place, which not only aims to represent women and non-binaries in more prominent positions in Greek mythology, but also in video games. This leads to my thesis: *Immortals Fenyx Rising is a modern, feminist interpretation of classic Greek mythology which disrupts binaries regarding gender by shedding light on what has been deemed too feminine, domestic or non-conforming in our current societies to be discussed, illustrating the possibility of queering video games to expand non-binary representation.*

The following paper is structured as follows: after a literature review of relevant texts, I engage in a textual, narratological and ludological analysis of the game. Firstly, I discuss how *Immortals Fenyx Rising* features a metaphorical conversation between Greek mythology and modern, feminist perspectives to show their discrepancies, which reflects and subverts expectations. Secondly, I view the game as a new form of mythmaking and empowerment that addresses the significance of the domestic

perspective. Thirdly, I elaborate on how the previous two sections culminate in the disruption of binaries through queering the game. Finally, I conclude with demonstrating how the represention of feminist, domestic and queer perspectives in games can be further enhanced in the future, especially when using Greek mythology as a lens.

## Literature Review

Within gender studies, Judith Butler (2006) in her text, *Gender Trouble*, has provided understanding for how gender and sex are socially constructed categories in a patriarchal system and how gender is performative. Language itself also socially structures hierarchies in society. Moreover, gender intersects with other categories in society, such as race, class, ethnicity and sexuality but due to the binary between masculine and feminine:

> "the 'specificity' of the feminine is once again fully decontextualized and separated off analytically and politically from the constitution of class, race, ethnicity, and other axes of power relations that both constitute "identity" and make the singular notion of identity a misnomer." (Butler 2006, 7)

This means femininity as a category overrides other facets of identity, making the feminine a marked category. Gender studies has since grown to illustrate how gender and sexuality perform in different facets of society. For example, Mize and Manago (2018) discovered that men's heterosexuality is more precarious than that of women due to the hierarchy and misogyny in society stigmatising sexual minorities. Hence heterosexual Caucasian men have everything to lose if they stray from the accepted behaviour.

Similar conversations have taken place in what Jürgen Habermas has deemed the public sphere, which is separate from the private sphere. He "understood this public sphere above all as a realm of communication marked by new arenas of debate, more open and accessible forms of urban public space and sociability" (Melton 2001, 4), where anyone could engage in rational debate. However, this public sphere was criticised as being highly flawed, historically and conceptually. As explained by Nancy Fraser (1990, 62), the public sphere "was also a masculinist, ideological notion that functioned to legitimate an emergent form of class rule." This led to the rise of counterpublics, which

> "emerge in response to exclusions within dominant publics, [...] help expand
> discursive space [and] are parallel discursive arenas where members of
> subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in
> turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities,
> interests, and needs." (Fraser 1990, 67)

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She elaborated on how the boundary between *private* and *public* matters is not predetermined but is the outcome of deliberation, leading to matters deemed as too private to be worthy of being discussed in the public sphere, such as domestic violence and distribution of household chores, which are also associated with femininity. Domesticity here is used interchangeably with the private. This leads to how art can provide an alternative experience to people, making "them understand that their living conditions or precarious social environment are far from ideal" (Gielen and Lijster 2017, 53), and this includes games.

Video games have also been the subject of analysis from a feminist perspective. In terms of content, such as looking at representations of women in video games, Eklund and Zanescu (2024) explore how representations of women have improved over time in the *Assassin's Creed* franchise between 2007 and 2024, also published by

Ubisoft, but should not be taken for granted. Regarding production, Weststar and Legault (2018) explain how women working in the game industry are disadvantaged by the inherent hostile working environment of the game production pipeline due to the high barriers to entry and barriers to stay. Reception has also not been ignored by Lange, Wühr and Schwarz (2021) who show that genres have catered to certain genders based on stereotypes which, even if empirically accurate, are still overestimated and used to exclude women from gaming and perpetuate misogyny.

This research leads to the intersection between games and queer studies. Compiled by Adrienne Shaw and Bonnie Ruberg (2017), *Queer Game Studies* describes attempts at queering games as a medium and industry for the sake of diversification. Throughout the discussions of defining queerness in games to advocate for "games to remain deviant, offensive, and queer" (Shaw and Ruberg 2017, xxiii), to how queerness emerges from using "fantasy and its worlds of possibilities" (Shaw and Ruberg 2017, xxiv), to how one could analyse games queerly to highlight the "queer force of disruption" (Shaw and Ruberg 2017, xxv), one theme stands out: queer as difference and disruption of the binary. This identification is of importance to this essay, which aims to show how the representation of feminist and domestic perspectives also disrupt the binary by conveying a different and usually overlooked perspective in the gaming sphere and further by opening the gaming landscape to the possibility of combining what has been deemed diametrically opposed by modern society.

To analyse the game deeply, I apply theories from ludology and narratology . These include procedural rhetoric as introduced by Ian Bogost (2007, 2008), which accounts for how a game's constraints and affordances make up its meanings; visual rhetoric according to Johanson Quijano (2019), which explains how games use visual

representations to express messages; games as simulations according to Gonzalo Frasca (2003), which explores how players are given room for experimentation unlike other mediums; and semiotics according to Michalis Kokonis (2014), which can combine narratology and ludology as players read signs which induce them to further action.

Regarding Greek mythology, I also use knowledge gained from the *Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology* that, despite focusing on literature and film even in its chapter on pop culture, provides understanding on mythography in the past and present and illustrates how to "evoke and construct Greek myth as a living presence and a potent resource for practices of mythmaking in the present day" (Willis 2017, 115). Hence, I add to research on video games, feminism and queer studies by discussing the possibility of disrupting the binary and broadening possibilities for a feminine protagonist in video games today.

## Theory and Methodology

As illustrated in the previous section, I combine theory from gender studies and the public sphere with theories from ludology and narratology to analyse the game. The analysis is also supported by findings from *Queer Game Studies* and the *Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*. These aid me in a close textual analysis of the game, specifically a close ludological and narratological analysis. Treating the game as a cultural text, I closely read it after replaying and rewatching it with assistance from research about its paratexts, such as marketing material and posts online, and its intertexts, such as Greek Mythology and the action-adventure genre in video games. Hence, I provide an understanding of the interplay between narrative

elements, like structure and intertextuality, and game features, like goals and game components.

A mostly isolationist approach is used as it is suitable for comprehending the feminist and queer representation in *Immortals Fenyx Rising*. The approach is also appropriate for providing insights into the cultural meanings and symbols present in the game. Additionally, it is useful to analyse the narrative structure, the themes and motifs, the intertextuality and the historical and cultural context of the game. All of these lend themselves to an acknowledgement of the construction of certain marginalised groups in *Immortals Fenyx Rising*, which then extend to a further understanding of video games today.

To do so, I adapt the Digital Game Analysis Protocol (DiGAP) to my purposes. The DiGAP "guides researchers when conducting a game analysis by raising awareness regarding their own impact on and methodological choices during the analysis" and "facilitates transparent reporting of analysis results", while offering flexibility in analytical tools available (Daneels et al. 2022). DiGAP provides a step-by-step process for transparency, including sections on the researcher's positionality and prior game experiences and the way the game was played and finished.

This method also leads to my positionality. As a gamer, I have played multiple action-adventure games and a few open world games. Regarding *Immortals Fenyx Rising*, I played it on my Nintendo Switch on Normal difficulty and completed all myth challenges and earned all the upgrades for weapon skills before finishing the game. In preparation for my research, I replayed parts of the game in New Game Plus and rewatched all cutscenes of the game.

As a researcher and as a female with an international background from being raised in Singapore and having family in the Netherlands, my views on gender equality and LGBTQIA+ have undoubtedly shaped my experience in both countries. My aim is to further normalise the discussion of these topics and help advocate for more representation of these marginalised communities in the art and media with which I engage.

## Subverting Expectations

*Immortals Fenyx Rising* illustrates how Greek mythology and modern, feminist perspectives converse to reflect and subvert expectations in ancient Greek times and modern gaming. For most of the narrative, Prometheus is narrating Fenyx's story, while Zeus commentates, as she explores the Golden Isle to help the Greek gods and goddesses. This is simultaneously reminiscent of oral storytelling in Greek tradition especially regarding a male narrator, and yet also a subversion of how open world video games progress as open world games typically do not contain narration at all. This illustrates how Greek mythology and modern practices differ, due to differences in the medium. However, the actor, in this case Fenyx, is then in the control of the narrators, which mirrors and simulates not only how in "ancient Greece during the days of Aeschylus and Sophocles [...] the actor remained powerless against the playwright and had no choice but to submit and perform what and how he was commanded" (Thompson 2017, 2). But also it illustrates how "regardless of the size and composition of the group, more stories are narrated by men than women" in Greek storytelling (Georgakopoulou 1995, 462). Further it demonstrates how male-dominated the video game industry is, both in terms of representation and in production. Altogether, it seems that initially, Fenyx's story is not truly hers and whatever she, and hence the player does, is all foretold by Prometheus.

The simulation also conveys the lack of control as despite the game containing an open world and allowing players to accomplish tasks in any way they wish and at their own pace, Prometheus will always have something to say, either about the environment or about Fenyx's thoughts. Simulating means "to model a (source) system through a different system which maintains to somebody some of the behaviors of the original system," "to create an environment for experimentation" (Frasca 2003, 223 and 225). Here, it simulates a typical Greek tale being orally told. Regarding simulations, "Unlike narrative, simulations are not just made of sequences of events, they also incorporate behavioral rules. […] Unlike what would happen in storytelling, the sequence of events in a simulation is never fixed" (Frasca 2003, 227). However, Frasca (2003, 228) clarified that the

> "simauthor always has the final word: she will be able to decide the frequency and degree of events that are beyond the player's control" and they "are not only able to state if social change is possible or not, but they have the chance of expressing how likely they think it may be." 131

Therefore, despite the vast number of possibilities afforded to the player, Prometheus and Zeus's voices constantly remind the player that everything is ultimately under their control or constructed to become their narrative, not Fenyx's. The most telling of this is whenever Prometheus randomly adds obstacles in Fenyx's path to cheer Zeus up, forcing the player into an unexpected battle. Prometheus and Zeus have the final word, adding and subtracting from Fenyx's journey, conveying how any change that Fenyx enacts, no matter how much or how little, is within their control.

However, the narration and simulation forced upon Fenyx and the player is subverted, paralleling how feminist counterpublics can enact change through subverting the system. When players and Fenyx have finally defeated Fenyx's brother Ligyron, who has been a sore subject for Fenyx the whole game as she has been living in his

shadow for her entire life, Prometheus reveals that Fenyx is a demigod and Hermes' child. However, Zeus doubts this, leading to Prometheus admitting that he had manipulated and fabricated parts of the story, including that he arranged for Atlas to free Typhon and shipwreck Fenyx on the Golden Isle and that Fenyx is actually Zeus' child. Fenyx then arrives with Typhon's poison, confirming the entire story was part of Prometheus' plot to have Zeus killed as revenge for imprisoning him. From this point onwards, there is no narration; Fenyx is in control of how the story ends. Despite how Fenyx had been manipulated by Prometheus and Typhon to follow their rules and prophecy, which should have led to Zeus being overthrown, Fenyx refuses, wanting to inspire him to be a better god and father.

The visual rhetoric supports how Fenyx is now the narrator of her own story. Quijano (2019, 10) elaborated that one must acknowledge "the visual depiction of the actions being performed and the ways in which the player might interpret said actions" and a way to do so is by analysing the spatial design. Spatial design can be hallway design, divergent space or open space (Quijano 2019, 113-116). Divergent space is used when Fenyx must solve one more set of puzzles to defeat Typhon once and for all, with some exploration within this dungeon to discover the solutions to the puzzles. Divergent space is described as when

> "(a) there is a single point of entry and one or more exit points and in which there are multiple paths of navigation available to advance from one point to the other, and (b) there is a single point of entry, one or more points of exit, and one route to navigate from one point to the other, but in which there are also several divergent pathways, many of them leading to undiscovered spaces or virtual actors, for the player to explore." (Quijano 2019, 115)

This dungeon seems to be more of the latter, with there being one point of entry, one point of exit, and multiple puzzles that require the player to diverge from the

main path and explore further. There is no turning back and Fenyx must now utilise

all she has learnt to complete the prophecy her way at her own pace. Therefore,

Fenyx deconstructs the story by literally breaking the narration around her and taking

the reins, not fulfilling the prophecy the way others, all of whom are male, forced

upon her. Deconstruction tries to demonstrate "that such an opposition is always

based on a hierarchy" and "that every hierarchy always [...] carries within itself the

material for its own subversion" (Schmitz 2007, 115-116). The hierarchy between male

and female, storyteller and actor, father and daughter, is then deconstructed as

though the males seem to be superior, their dependence on Fenyx shows that

females are not as inferior to men as once thought. Women were seen as being

subordinate to men but this indicates that men actually depend on women to give

them power, exhibiting how this hierarchy cannot exist without the seemingly inferior

pole of the opposition. This can extend to how the hierarchy cannot exist without the

marking of these poles, which are the basis of binaries in society. The disruption of

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the binaries will be discussed later. Fenyx, after winning the battle, promises to watch

Zeus to ensure he is committed to changing his ways, which is especially indicative of

deconstruction. This parallels how feminist counterpublics, which are also subaltern

counterpublics, "are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social

groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to

formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser

1990, 67), because feminists have created their own spaces to debate issues

important to them that the majority group deem as not public enough to be part of

the public sphere. There are new conversations regarding the importance of females

breaking the cycle and telling their own stories. Hence, "exclusion itself might qualify

as such an unintended yet consequential meaning" (Butler 2006, 8), as exclusion can

lead to a forming of new discourses and "new terms for describing social reality"

(Fraser 1990, 67). Creating a space for herself in a patriarchal system, Fenyx, like

feminist counterpublics, has forced and encouraged debates about issues important to her and fellow victims of the system, who have been silenced due to shame and power. Zeus must follow her instructions, listen to his children's private concerns and change. Thus, Fenyx's journey mirrors modern Western women's struggle for control in a patriarchal hierarchical society even though it uses the patriarchy in Greek mythology and games to lure players into thinking her story is a typical tale of a hero.

## Mythmaking and Empowerment

*Immortals Fenyx Rising* encourages a new form of mythmaking in a modern audience through a modern medium that empowers feminists and destabilises gaming tropes and traditions. On the surface, it seems as though Fenyx undergoes a story typical of heroes in Greek mythology and action-adventure games like those of Achilles, Atalanta, Herakles, and Odysseus, who are all present in this game, though as corrupted versions of themselves. She progresses from an amateur in fighting to an expert who defeats Typhon, one of the deadliest creatures in Greek mythology. However, diving deeper into the game's details reveals the true message and antagonist. Fenyx starts as a shield-bearer and storyteller who idolises these heroes by sharing their stories and is thrown into not just a battle amongst the gods, but a family feud. Though she fights to save Aphrodite, Athena, Ares and Hephaistos, she must emotionally connect with them on a deeper level to save them from their dark thoughts, which were caused by Zeus' failures as a father and husband.

This showcases an undermining of the binary between the public and private sphere as the domestic, namely the Greek gods and goddesses as a family and their familial roles, no matter how messy, is being discussed in the public sphere, in and out of the game. In many Western societies, the "rhetoric of domestic privacy seeks to exclude

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some issues and interests from public debate by personalizing and/or familializing them" (Fraser 1990, 73). This is done so as "to enclave certain matters in specialized discursive arenas and thereby to shield them from general public debate and contestation", which "works to the advantage of dominant groups and individuals and to the disadvantage of their subordinates" (ibid.). For example, any matters pertaining to the household are confined to the private sphere, which "serves to reproduce gender dominance and subordination" (ibid.). In the game though, the private matters of the Greek pantheon are put on full display, with them complaining openly about Zeus. Typhon took advantage of their insecurities which were caused by Zeus and it is only after Fenyx counsels them can the gods and goddesses face Zeus and Typhon together, changing Zeus for the better. This demonstrates a new form of mythmaking as it utilises both Greek mythology and modern archetypes and narrative to shed light on a frequently overlooked perspective, that of the domestic, emotional, feminine, in classic and modern times. Hence, it illustrates how

> "the ahistorical use of classical mythology in popular culture is enabled, underpinned, and structured by a particular understanding of mythology not as a body of religious stories but as a mode of storytelling: one that is often female-voiced, always transcultural, transhistorical, and popular – frequently in the strong sense of 'popular' as counter-hegemonic." (Willis 2017, 109)

Though the game is set in ancient Greek times, anachronistic terms, like "non-binary" and "support group" (*Immortals Fenyx Rising* 2020), are constantly used to remind players of the modern times in which Greek mythology is being reinterpreted, to give voice to the female and domestic counterpublic which can now use technology for their purposes. Attention can be drawn to how people in ancient times and in Greek mythology have resisted the patriarchy, encouraging others to expand on this in modern times by employing current abilities and techniques to look back and improve.

To further this mythmaking, the procedural rhetoric simultaneously provides players with freedom and guidance, enough to allow players to create their own narrative and yet still impart the message as they intended. Procedural rhetoric is "the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures" (Bogost 2007, ix), which is done through exploring the possibility space the game offers. As "the gestures, experiences, and interactions a game's rules allow (and disallow) make up the game's significance" (Bogost 2008, 121), the open world gives players the opportunity to become their own hero in a Greek tale while the presence of quests, narration and characters still hang over the players' heads, always reminding them of the characters' goals and personalities and the overarching goal of this adventure. Even though players help the four gods and goddesses in any order they want, not only will Fenyx always end up defeating Typhon and changing Zeus, but also the manner in which she helps the four gods and goddesses with their insecurities is always the same. She connects to them on an emotional level and sympathises with their feelings, a trait that has feminine connotations. Most telling of her femininity is when Fenyx and Ligyron meet for the first time in weeks and Fenyx rushes to embrace him while Ligyron hesitates before returning the hug. This is especially refreshing in the context of female protagonists in video games as they are either sexualised or infantilised. Fenyx is neither; instead, she is a hero in her own right with feminine traits. Moreover, this starkly contrasts the archetypal strong and silent male protagonists in action-adventure games. Fenyx, however, is talkative, witty and fast rather than strong, and is in touch with her emotions. In the DLC, *A New God*, Fenyx is even rewarded with the title of Goddess of Unity, reminiscent of themes of friendship, which is typically associated with girls and domesticity in the Western sphere. This exhibits the process of resignification, where terms or traits initially used to confine women are resignified to empower them instead. As Butler (2006, 185) explained:

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"If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, i.e., new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms, then it is only within the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible."

Hence, through repetition of terms that were used to restrict women but now in new contexts and given new meaning, resignification can take place, leading to a contestation of perspectives on the cultural stereotypes assigned to women. An undermining of the binary is also observed here when the male version of Fenyx is present instead which will be explained later.

Instead, by retaking terms imposed on females, the act of how "one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one" as Simone de Beauvoir (1973, 301) suggested, can be empowering rather than constraining in a patriarchal society, in ancient and modern times. Even though players are able to choose between playing as a male or female, Fenyx's feminine traits remain, supporting a queer reading, which will be discussed later. Gender is then performative, so much so that even with a male body, their personality, actions and place in the world around them has more feminine connotations, leading to more diverse ways of living aside from the masculine. This behaviour is also supported by the female Fenyx being on the box art and in the promotional material. This confronts players with their cultural standards for how femininity is displayed and leads to the disruption of the binary of masculine and feminine as will be explained later. Thus, through being able to take action in an open world with little to no restrictions while still being guided by the voices and characters, including Fenyx herself, players can engage in mythmaking where the feminine is empowered and rewarded for overcoming emotional insecurities, which sheds new light on the hidden feminine and domestic perspective in Greek mythology and modern narratives.

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## Queering Video Games

As hinted in previous paragraphs, the feminist and domestic perspective ultimately serves to queer video games as *Immortals Fenyx Rising* disrupts the binary between masculine and feminine, public and private, rational and emotional, active and passive.

Firstly, the binaries between feminine and masculine, and passive and active, are disrupted through queering the genre of action-adventure games and allowing for an experimentation of queer identities. As explained earlier, Fenyx taking control of the narration is a sign and simulation of the deconstruction of the hierarchy. This exemplifies how "game creators have taken up the question of what happens when we question norms and conventions about […] games, or specific game genres" (Clark 2017, 4), which is an instance of queering the genre as action-adventure games typically do not have narration to trick players into believing that they have the freedom to do anything they want. However, *Immortals Fenyx Rising* is honest about the scriptedness of events and the software behind everything by using narration. The developers "deconstruct existing game genres to find the fundamental assumptions driving patterns of play, then queer the genres by twisting, flipping, or undermining those conventions" (ibid.), because the open world, which usually signifies activity and freedom, is combined with the narration of Greek mythology, which usually signifies confinement, through undermining the conventions of the action-adventure genre.

Another way the genre is deconstructed is illustrated by the main character being feminine and emotional, instead of masculine and stoic, or always angry like their action-adventure game peers. This is regardless of the gender chosen by the player. It serves two functions: showcasing a feminist and feminine perspective and a non-

binary perspective, because the male version of Fenyx still acts in a manner traditionally associated with femininity. For instance, thinking back to Fenyx hugging their brother, Fenyx as a male-looking character would still act this way, showcasing their personality as feminine even with a masculine appearance. Reminding us of Butler's statement regarding gender being performative, the game confronts us with our "reductive thinking and systems of essentialized normativity, particularly in relation to the playful performativity of so much of queer games, gaming, and gamers" (Burrill 2017, 30.) As players see a protagonist acting feminine, they are forced to make sense of it, either by assigning the female gender to challenge what society thinks about protagonists in the action-adventure genre, or by assigning the male gender to undermine what society expects of men. Regardless, the tropes of action-adventure games are flipped as two marginalised parts of society are represented. Furthermore, the option to switch genders in the game and customise Fenyx in creative ways, like having a feminine body with a masculine voice or vice versa, can inspire a disruption in the player of how they perceive the binary and non-binary aspects of gender that are culturally constructed and hence changeable, offering a non-binary perspective. Encouraging players of all identities to experiment with the identity they wish to play with, exemplifying queergaming, is the presence of the "heterogeneity of play, imagining different, even radical game narratives, interfaces, avatars, mechanics, soundscapes, programming, platforms, playerships, and communities" (Chang 2017, 15). Players can experiment, especially through the simulation, with the main character's gender and appearance, allowing them to imagine different ways Fenyx can look and sound and even their backstory before the start of the game. People of marginalised groups in society can better convey how they look while the male heterosexual player is forced to disidentify with themselves and grasp the perspective of someone who is usually overlooked, underestimated and in an unstable position due to society's expectations. Through disidentification,

"we can break up our binary patterns, chart our points of disidentification – the things with which we no longer identify, the things in which we no longer believe" (Burrill 2017, 32). The line between feminine and masculine is blurred, and combined with the disruption of passive versus active, this illustrates to players how someone who usually does not have agency in their world, can actively take back control and counter the hegemony of society through art. Games, through simulation, can allow players to "challenge the heady ideas of society and culture" (Flanagan 2009, 245). Hence, through the disruption of the binaries between feminine and masculine, and passive and active, players can disidentify and experiment with queergaming.

Secondly, queer mythmaking undermines the binary between private and public as it is a disruption of the binary between play and game, allowing taboo subjects like gender fluidity and sex to be discussed in the public sphere. As argued earlier, the use of Greek mythology and procedural rhetoric encourages a new form of mythmaking in a modern audience through a modern medium that empowers the marginalised. This mythmaking for a feminist audience can be extended to queer mythmaking. It acknowledges that our modern "new mythology, this religion of pop culture, needs queerness and the full spectrum of the human experience" (Brady 2017, 67), as the "more different stories that make us up, the more broad our experience, the more capacity we have for compassion" (Brady 2017, 64). This requires disregarding the rules of storytelling and genres, creating science fiction, fantasy and speculative fiction, and challenging the "dominant and common variants" of stories we know, like fairytales and mythology, including Greek mythology of which "their overwhelming signal strength homogenizes our frame for the world and lies to us by saying there is a right story instead of infinite stories" (Brady 2017, 65). The range of stories should be as vast as the range of people telling and hearing these stories. By using "straight-up mythology – modernized, twisted, bastardized, or

restored" (Brady 2017, 67), games like *Immortals Fenyx Rising* can not only motivate players to interpret Greek mythology in a way that speaks to them, showing how modernity "sees myth as a universal, transcultural, and transhistorical stock of archetypes and narratives" (Willis 2017, 110) that can be malleable and hence empowering for players, but it can also enlighten players in the "lesser-known stories in ancient Greek mythology that contain homoerotic undertones and gender fluid characters" (Gilchrist 2024). As such it illustrates how marginalised groups in society can counter the underrepresentation they have been subjected to by revealing what has been hidden by heteronormative and patriarchal societies; what has been othered or deemed as private can be discussed in the public sphere. This mythmaking and undermining of the binary can also be seen in the semiotics of the game, visually and aurally.

*Immortals Fenyx Rising* invokes signs and codes to encourage the outing of the private into the public and make the private a myth in and of itself. Semiotics bridges ludology and narratology as, "When approaching a computer game through a semiotic perspective, we observe that meaning derives or is produced by the process of signs that, when interpreted, induce the gamer to further action" (Kokonis 2014, 179). Hence, semiotics engage the player doubly as they not only allow for interpretation of the plot and surroundings, but also prompt players to act according to or against the signs they see and interact with. Roland Barthes's (1974, 17-20) codes, namely the hermeneutic, the proairetic, the semic, the cultural or referential code, and the symbolic code form a space of meaning for the text to be interpreted. In the case of subverting binaries and revealing the hidden in mythology to empower those who have typically be confined, the cultural code, which references "a science or a body of knowledge" outside the work (Barthes 1974, 20), is invoked through referencing figures and stories in Greek mythology, without hiding the more private

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likes and dislikes of these characters. For example, Aphrodite vehemently denies Hephaistos' advances even though they are married, "Not even if you were Adonis, Achilles, and Herakles having an orgy on a Pegasos made of rainbows" (*Immortals Fenyx Rising* 2020). The definition of *games* in *queer games* has been expanded to include *play*, "bringing to mind not only the structured behavior and seriousness of games like chess, but also the unstructured, creative freedom of 'play' and its assumed lack of seriousness, bordering on frivolity" (Gabel 2017, 70), subverting the binary between serious game and frivolous play. This binary is called *le jeu*, "which is simultaneously an act, an attitude, and a set of rules" (ibid.). The game then not only plays with established rules of games, as stated earlier with the genre and character, but also "describe a particular attitude toward that act: a sense of humor with respect to textual production, which purposefully exploits taboo subjects like sex" (Gabel 2017, 71), even if they are not expected to be discussed in games. However, the sexual innuendos are not just to lighten the mood, they also aim to "investigate taboo subjects and sexual identities" (Gabel 2017, 72). Play and game are not mutually exclusive. Instead, unserious banter can add to serious discussion about what has been deemed private matters but maybe should not be deemed as such. Aphrodite uses sex to empower herself and rebel against the marriage Zeus forced her into, which players would be reminded of through the cultural code relying on players already knowing of the role Zeus had in complicating family matters. The game is not even shy about Zeus' serial cheating with and attraction to anyone of any gender, framing them humorously to start conversations about the importance of family and sex. Therefore, "Cut loose from their anchoring in history-as-truth, euhemerism and etiology become techniques for generating more stories, in the infinitely expandable web of pop-culture mythography" (Willis 2017, 112), offering players a modern interpretation of Greek mythology that serves their purposes of discussing sex and gender in a public setting. This is then queer for giving a safe

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space for conversing about these topics. Thus, *Immortals Fenyx Rising* disrupts the binary between private and public through queer mythmaking and using humour for serious purposes.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, *Immortals Fenyx Rising* can be identified as a way to shed light on what has been deemed too feminine, domestic or queer in our current societies to be discussed. Through understanding its multiple elements, the gameplay, narrative, visuals, mythology, and by applying feminist and queer theories, one can uncover the different ways the game references modern society through Greek mythology as a mediator. In the future, one could continue queering video games, uncovering the arbitrary binaries in them and subverting them, through applying queer analysis. One day, the gaming industry could be more accepting of varying perspectives and identities. In the meantime, we can work to dismantle binaries and uncover more hidden facets to society, making a new normal that represents people from all walks of life.

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*Immortals Fenyx Rising* is also one of the multiple games that reinterprets Greek mythology, alongside games like *Hades* (2020), *Hades II* (2024), the *God of War* franchise which used Greek mythology in its games from 2005 to 2015, *Assassin's Creed: Odyssey* (2018), *Persona 3* (2006) and its remake *Persona 3 Reload* (2024), and many others. Regardless of the innovative and fun stories and gameplay these games provide, it is not lost on me that *Immortals Fenyx Rising* is one of the only games (if not the only game) that uses both the female version of the protagonist on the box art and marketing material and speaks of the Greek gods and goddesses as beings with feelings and private concerns. Important to note: *Hades* is a fantastic

representation of Greek mythology which explores the diverse personalities and sexuality in Greek myths which deserves a paper all on its own especially due to its unique gameplay. However, other games show a lack of representation of feminist and non-binary perspectives, despite using Greek mythology, which contains the possibility of discussing these points of view. Even though *Persona 3 Portable* (2009), a remaster of *Persona 3*, introduced a female version of the main character and included both versions to the box art and marketing material, the female version did not return in the remake *Persona 3 Reload*. Meanwhile, *Assassin's Creed: Odyssey* despite initially intending for the female version of the main character to be the sole playable character, the option to play as the male version was only added to satisfy the demands of the executives and pander to their predominantly male audience (Skrebels 2020), even leading to the male version being the one shown on the box art and marketing material. Ubisoft's "perception that games won't sell without a strong male lead" reveals their internal sexism (Skrebels 2020), which reflects a need for gamers to actively make a stand. This paper is my way of resisting the system and queering video games even if they were perhaps not meant to be queered, especially as *Immortals Fenyx Rising* was created by the same company as *Assassin's Creed: Odyssey*. Hopefully, more games can become inspired to include non-binary experiences, even being more accurate to stories in Greek mythology, respecting vast audiences and the source material. Perhaps *Hades II*, which features a female protagonist, can continue the path of queer rebellion and resistance, undermining the binaries in the gaming industry.

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