

# Press Play and Record: *Poinpy*, juice 'em ups, and frame-by-frame analysis

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

*Poinpy* (Moppin 2022), the spiritual successor to Oji Fumoto's earlier and critically acclaimed mobile game *Downwell* (Moppin 2015), was released 10 June 2022 under Netflix's gaming subscription service.

This paper is presented in two parts. First, to describe how *Poinpy* remediates the language and logic of animated cartoons (e.g. Wells 1998) to effectively communicate gameplay goals to its player (following Ward 2002; see also Manning 2012). Second, to explicate on its method of study: to consider the benefits and limitations of studying videogames through capturing and playback of gameplay footage. Herein, this paper suggests screen-captured recordings enable the player/researcher to gain the critical distance necessary to (re)examine the circuits of effect and affect produced during gameplay events (Giddings and Kennedy 2008).

Within game studies, to use video capture is by no means a radical proposition -- many extant player studies' utilise this method (e.g. Giddings and Kennedy 2008; Begy et al 2017). Yet critical attention to the audiovisual feedback of a game is often overlooked (Keogh 2018). Herein, this paper presents a method for analysing videogames that capitalises on the ubiquity and prevalence of screen capture and video editing technology and as a critical aid in the dissection of videogame play.

The practice of scrolling or scrubbing through sequenced imagery is a core technique within animation if not moving image practices more generally.<sup>1</sup> Traditional animators create meaning by manipulating the timing and spacing between images (Whitaker and Halas 2002). Within videogames, animation techniques can be used in significant ways. For players, understanding timing information or framedata is essential in 'high performance play' (Lowood 2006) pursuits such as competitive fighting games and speedrunning for example. Swink's (2009) original treatment on 'game feel' considers millisecond delays occurring in supposedly "real-time" experiences in the design of responsive systems. Rogers' (2010) celebration of 'sticky friction' provides a detailed empirical account of the almost imperceptible pauses added between frames. Games do not simply allow players to navigate through space rather are often about movement itself (Giddings and Kennedy 2008; Swalwell 2008).

Many extant studies on game feel, juice or polish recognise the importance of providing contextually appropriate audiovisual feedback to the player.<sup>2</sup> However, early (albeit

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tongue-in-cheek) claims to “juice it up” regardless (e.g. Jonasson and Purho 2012; Nijman 2013) led many to apply audiovisual effects without discretion. As Juul and Begy (2016) discovered, however, there is no “out of the box” solution to enhancing player experience. Designing games holistically requires subtlety and nuance (Brown 2016). As such, rather than attempt to further codify game feel and its effects (cf Pichlmair and Johansen 2022; Hicks et al 2018), this paper provides a descriptive rather than prescriptive account of *Poinpy*’s design whilst attempting to account for the benefits and limitations of adopting this frame-by-frame analysis approach. This paper concludes with a brief consideration of how frame-by-frame analysis may translate to other gameplay situations and contexts highlighting future work to be done.

## BIO

James Manning is a researcher, game maker, and Lecturer, Bachelor of Design (Games) at RMIT University, Melbourne Australia. His research interests extend across videogame design, media fandom, play cultures and digital cultural heritage. Recent publications include writing on videogames, livestreaming, and archiving digital play practices.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> I consider film editing to be one such example.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent and highly detailed overview and summary, consider Pichlmair and Johansen (2022).

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