

Dance Dance Deception

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Keywords

dance, animation, queer, cursed, jank

Format of work

A PC game with X-box style controller input.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK

Dance Dance Deception is a dance simulator game. A group of ravers are preparing for “Rumble at the Rave”, to compete and win a dance competition. They discover however that a curse is spreading, which is causing glitches and unexpected results. The gameplay is like a simplified animation machine, the main gameplay loop lets players compose dances, a progressively build a sequence of dances. This is a game played on PC using a controller. Players also must contend with the game itself becoming cursed, which they can control and fix through minigames, or can embrace to see what happens when the rave demon takes over...

Link to playthrough example: <https://youtu.be/B5sP0GyrHIs>

RESEARCH STATEMENT

Background:

Queer thinking that informed my approach for this project, was ideas put forth by Halberstam (2011), who promotes counterintuitive approaches like messiness, stupidity and failure as radical queer tools for resistance. Ahmed (2006) also provides a uniquely queer take on phenomenology, relating orientation towards object to queer experience and elaborating on disorientation and reorientation as vital experiences.

Writers like Keogh (2018) elaborate on the phenomena of player bodies intermingling with digital game worlds, focusing specifically on embodiment. Keogh asks: “How does our embodied sense of perception constitute—and become constituted by—the phenomenon of videogame play?” He points out that phenomenology is a useful tool as it asks us to become aware of things that are usually in our perceptual background.

To bring all these ideas together, I aimed to develop critical tools and methods, drawing from theories of play that overlap with related approaches from queer studies. Ruberg and Shaw (2017) define queer games studies as “...not so much to the specific topic of queerness in games as to the application of a set of critical tools derived from queer theory and queer thinking” This articulates the approach I tried to follow. Also, while a lot of discussions are about games as artifacts or the playing of games, I extend these approaches to include the making of games and queer playful interactions with software.

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Shmalzer (2020) proposes that jank disrupts the illusion of seamless control and disembodied immersion. Shmalzer argues that such messiness, disruption and odd embodiment can challenge dominant gaming conventions. Shmalzer only discusses jank in relation to control schemes but there are other possibilities for using jank to disrupt conventions of play (Barkman 2021).

Contribution:

This research was practice based; I worked to build on existing ideas from the field of queer game studies through a process of creative experimentation. As my research specifically focuses on experimental interactions with digital media, this kind of practice-based approach proved to be most fruitful. My hope is that this research can serve as useful reference for other academic research that can build on examples of these ideas put into practice, as well as providing some tools for other practitioners interested in experimental approaches to game-making or digital art.

Significance:

The game is an analogy for gate-keeping and exclusionary culture that often perpetuates ways of playing by bros for bros. The core idea is that forms of play can be more diverse and celebrate messiness, unskilled fooling around, enjoying entangled software-human queer expressivity (as opposed to dominating the machine/ beating the game). The game absurdly demands a skillful performance, to compete and win, to control and “straighten out” the odd behaviour of things. While this is a valid way to play the game, it can be exciting for players to explore all the other possibilities and weird results that are possible when embracing the curse of the rave demon.

EXHIBITION

The game can be played on any PC/laptop, using an X-box controller (both of which I am able to provide.)

BIO

Lou Fourie is a Melbourne based digital artist, game maker and academic. They have recently finished their Masters of Animation, Games and Interactive Media at RMIT university. They have previously presented at Freeplay Angles Festival (2024), DIGRAA (2025), and upcoming Queerness and Games Conference (2025).

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