

JC Ryan

FMX 499 – Senior Project

Santiago

Artist Statement

I made this game with the core intention of attempting to understand the technical proficiency necessary in making a game and the perseverance necessary to pull all the elements that define a game into one. I tried hard to wrap my head around the fundamental elements that define the creation of a *good* game – one which is both fun and respects the dignity of the player. First, I tried to learn the rhetoric underlying games that grab a person’s focus and tempt them to keep playing, but I also wanted to respect their time and their perception of the real world. My hope for the game was that it could evoke genuine ‘creative intensity’ from the player – that they would feel compelled to learn the more complex mechanical elements of the game despite the inherent difficulties - but I made sure the first modes of play were approachable and easy to understand.

I made the game approachable by, first, making the game familiar and readable through the borrowing of traditional concepts usually present in top-down rogue-like shooters. The game for all practical purposes reads as a basic top-down shooter; except that the object shooting is a disconnect little cube, and it moves with a strange kind of physics-based behavior. In the tutorial, I made sure the first time the player sees the cube (I call it an assistbot in the game), it would spawn away from the player and deal damage to objects as it makes its way to its ‘heel’ position near the player. This way, the player knows that if they can get the assistbot to move at a certain momentum, it can do damage. I made sure that the assistbot in club form does a lot more damage than the bullets; so although it’s more difficult to learn, using the assistbot as a damage dealing

club will reward the player. This mechanic was also simple to understand, but invisible opportunity it provided was left up to the player to discover. I made it comparable to the hat-throwing technique present in Super Mario Odyssey. What I especially embraced about this mechanic style was that it's benefit doesn't occur in a way that is necessarily number-crunching or can be measured easily. Its strength lies in an invisible space removed from clear axioms and depends mostly on experimentation and intuition. That is, the game-feel caters towards the player utilizing creative intensity in order to overcome challenges that otherwise would feel near impossible if they thoughtlessly tried to approach the main elements of progression in the game without being curious about optional mechanics. They also would not properly approach the mechanic if they tried to optimize the game according to specific number-relations inside a spreadsheet. They would have to creatively define new gameplay axioms to measure – and this is much more easily done with intuition, and so compliments creative intensity.

However, I did not want to game to be demeaning. I tried to make all the dialogue with failure to be opportunistic or to not even reference failure at all; this was to suppose that failure is a necessary element of growth and that it doesn't have to be ruminated on. The great joys of my experience working on this game involved the failures and crises I had. It made me rethink what communication was. It made me consider with urgent curiosity what kind of Wittgensteinian-language-games were allowed by gameplay mechanics and puzzles and articulations of virtual space. And it makes me feel like it's just the beginning of what I'm trying to understand. In trying to clarify to myself how to sort the relationship between code and gameplay, I encountered a moment of clarity when I encountered this quote by Blaise Pascal:

“[Philosophers have] *confused ideas of things, and speak of material things in spiritual terms, and of spiritual things in material terms. For they say boldly that bodies have a*

tendency to fall, that they seek after their centre, that they fly from destruction, that they fear the void, that they have inclinations, sympathies, antipathies, all of which attributes pertain only to mind. And in speaking of minds, they consider them as in a place, and attribute to them movement from one place to another; and these are qualities which belong only to bodies. Instead of receiving the ideas of these things in their purity, we colour them with our own qualities, and stamp with our composite being all the simple things which we contemplate.”

I realized that what games tend to do is sometimes intentionally muddle the ‘ideas of things in their purity’. This, at first, disturbed me greatly – but it challenged me to realize more fully how interesting and mysterious it is that there is a disconnect between the experience of a game and the literal underlying systems driving that experience. And that games offer a dialogue between specific logical axioms and the wholistic axioms of being and existence which can lead to results that are very interesting and – if the dignity of the player is taken into account and not exploited in pay-to-win or micro-transaction based game systems – potentially horizon opening in terms of artistic conception. I think it’s important in terms of analytic philosophy to be clear about the differences between types of ideas – but games are about fragmenting the world in ways which are interesting. In ways that are conducive to ‘play’.

However; exemplifying this realization of this wasn’t the goal of this project. It’s just the course I’ve set into over the process of burdening myself with developing every element of a video game starting from the ground up. I believe I accomplished what I set out to do though – which was utilize a unique core mechanic that could provide depth of gameplay, to draw the player in and make the game inherently fun, and also to respect the dignity of the player and their perception of the real world by demanding creative intensity.