

Play the Knave: Shakespeare Performance Videogame

[Http://playtheknave.org](http://playtheknave.org)

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Play the Knave is a Kinect-enabled game for Windows that offers users an immersive, embodied experience of staging Shakespeare. Users craft their own production of a scene from a Shakespeare play of their choice, customizing music, costumes, and theater space. They then perform the scene, karaoke-style, using their own bodily gestures and voices to animate their on-screen avatars. The Kinect camera picks up skeletal data from users, mapping it onto the 3D avatar on screen so that the avatar appears to mirror each user's gestures in real time. We exhibited an early prototype of the game at the SAA's Digital Salon in 2015, showing its motion capture capabilities with a single scene. We were slated to show an expanded version in 2016, but due to weather-based flight cancellations, the presenter with the equipment didn't make it to the conference in time for us to present. At SAA 2017, we will be able to exhibit the almost complete game, including choices from hundreds of scenes and 30 avatars.

The game provides a way to think anew about a number of questions of interest to Shakespeareans who work on performance: How do digital technologies mediate performance? What is a digital body, and how does it relate to the human body that operates the machine? What sorts of movements or gestures do Shakespeare's plays encourage? How do gesture and voice intersect or echo each other in performance?

In addition to researching these and other questions, our public release of the game (currently underway) aims to reach out to three audiences: theaters and art-technology museums, where the game can be set up as an installation; K-12 and college students, as a complement to their classroom instruction in Shakespeare; and private/at home users, who would play the game alongside other Kinect games, the closest analogs being dance and singing games currently available for play on the Xbox system. We have installed the game at several museums and institutions in the past two years, the longest installation being 3 months one summer at the Stratford Festival in Ontario, where it was available for patrons to play in the Festival Theatre lobby before every show.