GRASPING

STUDIO 2 MINOR PROJECT
DUNCAN CORRIGAN S3921402

NOVELTY

CONNECTION

HORROR

How can novelty, connection and horror be employed to inspire playfulness?

WEEKLY SUBMISSIONS

MINOR PROJECT PITCH/STATEMENT OF INTENTION/AUDIO STATEMENT –
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1xcsv7AUj_z0Kv30_LTHbt
rif0dUX8Dwg?usp=sharing

WEEK 3 WIP –
https://docs.google.com/document/d/17kFVqLTJpE6AoagxHoIAZD9jH
mtbrlgzio3cMiM0cSo/edit?usp=sharing

WEEK 4 WIP – https://youtu.be/eja1wIu7xDo

WEEK 5 WIP – https://youtu.be/6UfiQQnLbcM

RATIONALE

As Jadd had pointed out after my initial pitch, a large contingent of my inquiry hinged on the creation of an alternative controller. As I was new to both electrical engineering and controller builds, I felt I should begin production by focusing on the feasibility of such a controller.

On top of this, I was planning to use Ink and Inky to implement the dialogue in the game. This was another question mark so I dedicated some time early on familiarising myself with the software and integrating it with Unity.

The plan was to tackle the most unfamiliar aspects first and foremost to ensure a sound foundation for the game to be built upon. Fortunately, both these areas have progressed smoothly and I feel confident in delivering my vision for Grasping intact.

Beyond this, I felt it was important to have some level of visual development completed to convey the tone of the game. To me, the audio visual of Grasping will be paramount to the success of the project. The controller itself too is mostly aesthetic, and it's by leveraging these aesthetics and associations that I can create an affecting experience.

Broadly speaking, Grasping is an enticing project to me because it aims to promote playful engagement through a largely non-playful aesthetic. The visuals are dark and minimalistic, and the gameplay is largely clicking through dialogue, both these aspects would not ordinarily be considered playful. I hope to prove that play exists beyond the formal play aesthetic bringing attention to play's full scope and showcasing the effectiveness of Novelty, Connection and Horror as strategies to inspire playful engagement.

Speaking to each of these elements, I find novelty important as it is a way to surprise a player and engage them with something unfamiliar. I feel engagement changes dramatically between the familiar and unfamiliar. Often our first time doing something can have a lasting impact as we engage more deeply and seek the unfamiliar to fill gaps in our knowledge.

It is this kind of alert and attentive headspace that I hope to inspire with my alternative controller. Rather than mindlessly mashing through dialogue, how can I use novelty to engage the player more deeply.
Horror follows this well as fear will similarly make us more alert, seeking out the unfamiliar for potential threats. I also feel fear is one of the few elements that transfers seamlessly from digital productions to real life. Other such morality systems in games may struggle to convince a player to truly second guess their actions, however, if a player is afraid they may be unable to move. By simply providing a dark corner to turn, you may engage a player for minutes as they overcome their fear and proceed. In an odd way, horror encourages creativity as rather than expecting what we know, we search our deep recesses for that which we can't yet know. Grasping's alternative controller is designed to instill fear in players as they are never quite sure what is happening to their hand. I hope this inspires players to engage playfully beyond the screen, reflecting introspectively on their sense of physicality or their relationship to their body.
Lastly, connection is an important element to me as I feel it affords the player opportunities to act with compassion and integrity. It is my belief that we are most compassionate when we are engaging playfully because we are interested in finding new possibilities, as opposed to filtering down to what we already know and are comfortable with. Connection supplements this well, allowing the player to experience empathy or express integrity with their dialogue choices. My hope is that players will build this kind of connection with the AI entity in Grasping over the course of the game. I then intend to use this relationship as a way to influence player behaviour as well as provide the player opportunities for expressions of integrity.

CONTEXT

My game sits in the field of alternative controller games as well as interactive fiction. I am also inspired by the work of digital media artists as the work in this space often aims to distance itself from formal play aesthetics. Interactive art and alternative controllers both excel at surprising participants and generating a novel experience. I am inspired by interactive fiction in their ability to engage minds playfully and afford the player opportunities to enact their integrity.

I feel a lot of my work revolves around how we inspire playfulness in others. This is also my approach with Grasping, a relatively sparse experience that anticipates (or hopes for) a player to fill the space through novelty, connection and horror. To situate this approach in the field of games allow me to reflect on my experiences in the industry. In commercial game development it is common practice to (perhaps understandably in an attempt to make your product broadly approachable) design the experience to be frictionless and to ensure players can make progress in the game regardless of their level of engagement. This progression obsession ties to capitalistic values that deem making progress as paramount to doing anything. Alternatively, my approach to design aims to give the player friction and the autonomy to use that friction to make fire. I aim to nurture an environment for a player to engage as opposed to trying to lead them anywhere specific. It is not important that the players of Grasping make progress, infact, the design of the controller is notably off putting. Having players too afraid to even place their hand in the controller is a perfectly valid way of engaging with Grasping.
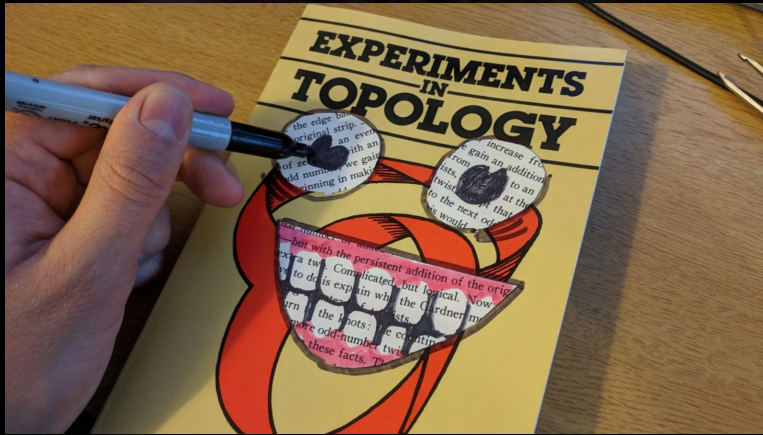
I feel this is another way alternative controllers often succeed in expanding the perceived scope of play. They showcase how affecting an experience you can have just by observing some novel contraption from across the room.

HELL COUCH - Carol Mertz & Francesca Carletto-Leon

Spacebox - the Sandbox Team

The Book Ritual - Alistair Aitcheson

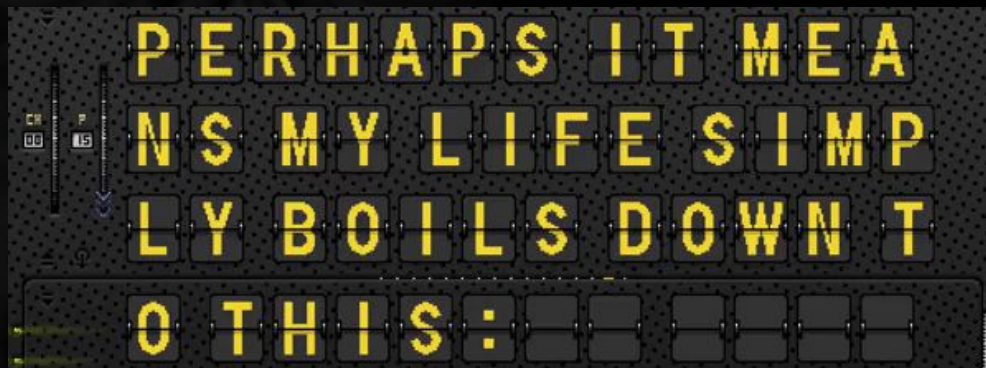Manifestation of Touch - Brianna Shuttleworth & Yuqi Zhu

I AM NOT WHAT REMAINS - ompu co

Please Say Something - David OReilly


NO PLAYERS ONLINE - papercookies

The Wake: Mourning Father, Mourning Mother - Somi

METHODS

One of my first actions in production was to reach out to MAGI Illumni, Helen Kwok, to get some tips about building alternative controllers. She recommended what I am using now, Arduino, which seems to be the practicing standard for alternative controllers. I also reached out to my friend Edison Chen who is an interactive installation artist to inquire about best practices for building installations. Their advice was that you need only worry about materials that affect the experience while everything else can be faked so it's better to choose materials that are easier to work with. These correspondence were invaluable as they demystified the processes of building alternative controllers to something that felt approachable.

As I mentioned in my rationale, I have spent this first leg of production focusing on proving the feasibility of the alternative controller. I approached the controller in steps, starting with an Arduino starter kit and beginner tutorials. Once I had my first buttons up and running I moved over to integration with Unity. This proved to be an interesting challenge as Unity's System Port functionalities have no way to distinguish between received bytes. It was important for Grasping's controls to mimic the player's hand movements to establish a connection between their real hand and the onscreen avatar. This means that Unity needs to be able to differentiate each button and determine the difference between a press and being held down. In the end I solved this by writing to 4 of the bits in the byte, assigning a 0 or a 1 depending on if the button is pressed. With basic functionality in place, I went back to Jaycar and browsed their various buttons to find something that would fit the game. I found these really wonderful switches with long metal buttons that feel like tiny, cold fingertips. Moving forward I hope to expand on the Arduino functionality with vibration motors and lights.

First Test

New Buttons

Final
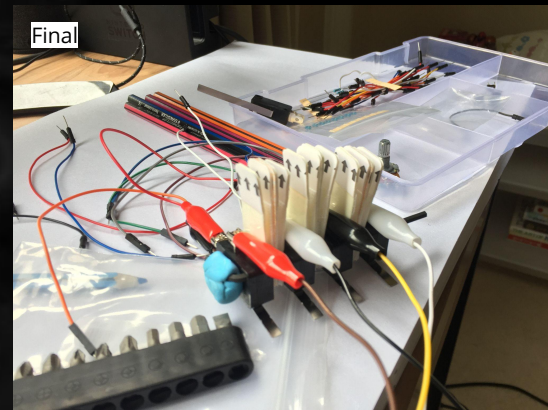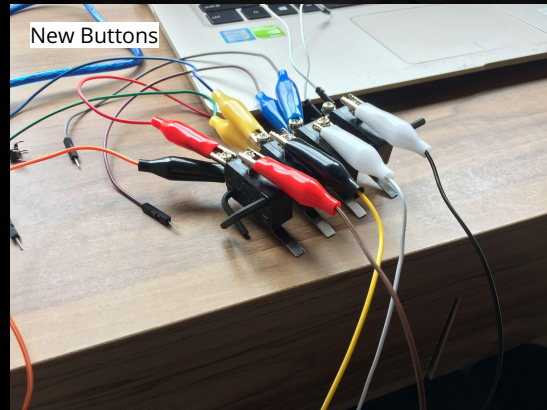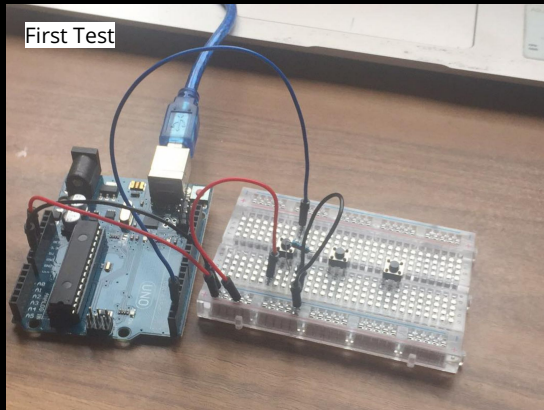
It is important in my practice that I embody the behaviour I hope to inspire. As I hope to aid in the cultivation of a more playful society, I feel I must approach my work in a playful and sustainable manner. Part of my hopes around producing an alternative controller were the new surprising processes in my practice that would emerge. I delight in my trips to Bunnings as it is now part of my artistic practice. From this, an observation emerged. Grasping is interested in exploring our relationships to our bodies and so perhaps it is no coincidence that the building process requisite results in me having a greater sense of connection with my own body as it relates to my practice.
The controller I have built for Folio 1 used PVC piping, rubber and a cardboard box. For the final product, I plan to create a more elaborate housing that generates an imposing and unsettling mood.

PVC Saw Test
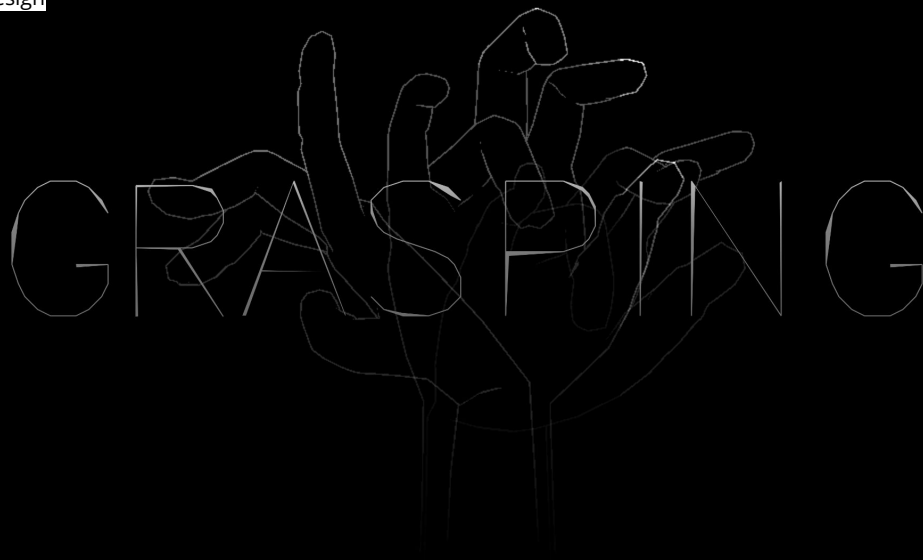

PVC Adhesive Test

Final Prototype
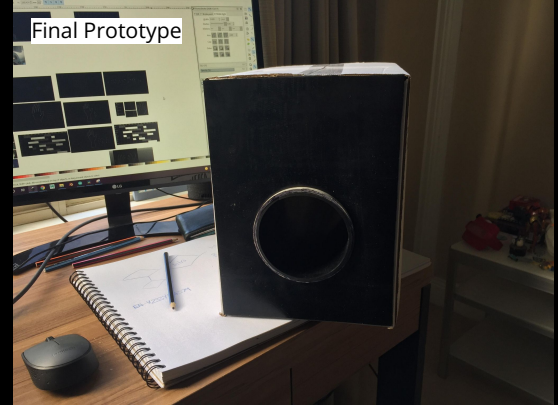
Anytime I work on something, I often find it difficult to start until I have found the right tone. Once established, it is then simpler for me to progress and fill in the details. Take this Folio 1 submission for example, I struggled to write anything until I altered the look and tone. You may or may not have noticed this entity staring at you in each slide. Which entity you might be asking? Look more closely. You'll notice this entity has been there the entire time. To this end, as I make progress on Grasping, I will often finding myself working on these small details to refocus myself.
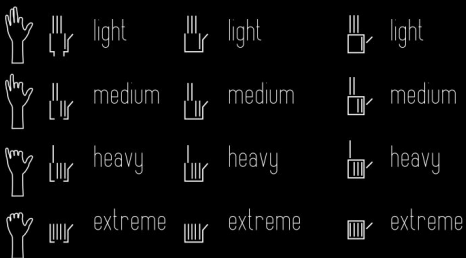
Boot-up Logo Design

|||ORBUS|||ᵣ
| INSTITUTE

Alternative Title Design

GRASPING

Question UI Mocks

light   light   light
medium   medium   medium
heavy   heavy   heavy
extreme   extreme   extreme

For Folio 1 I also built an early version of the hand. It was modelled and animated in Blender and uses Unity's layer masks to enable the fingers to bend simultaneously. The current animations are relatively simplistic and I plan to revisit them over the next few weeks to add greater nuance to better sell their physicality.
Lastly, I have implemented Ink and Inky to my workflow to handle all the written text. I have familiarised myself with the software but have yet to implement anything complex. One of my primary focuses moving forward will be ironing out all the narrative details and creating a script for the game.

BOOT UP
SCREEN

DRAW PLAYER'S
ATTENTION TO THEIR
OWN HAND. MAKE THEM
WONDER IF THEY CAN
FEEL SOMETHING
TOUCHING THEM

DIALOGUE BEGINS
EVOKING BODY
HORROR. SOME
EARLY GLITCHING

SAYING GOODBYE

INTRODUCTION
TO AI AVATAR

DIAGNOSIS
QUESTIONING

NOW ON EDGE
PLAYER IS GIVEN
OPPORTUNITIES TO
LIE IN FEAR OF
UPSETTING
THE AI

CONVERSATION
ON THEMES OF TOUCH
AND LONGING. PLAYER
CAN SHARE THEIR
OPINIONS AND
EXPERIENCE

HOUSEKEEPING
AND EXPLANATION
OF PROCEDURE

CALIBRATING
THE HAND

CLIMAX OF THE
EXPERIENCE. HEAVY
GLITCHING. MAKE THE
PLAYER FEEL LIKE THE
HAND IS GOING TO
GRAB THEM AT
ANY MOMENT

UNDERSTANDING
THE HAND IS NOT A
THREAT. THE HAND WANTS
TO REACH OUT AS
IT LONGS FOR
TOUCH

Production Schedule

Task	Week 1 (February 28)	Week 2 (March 07)	Week 3 (March 14)	Week 4 (March 21)	Week 5 (March 28)	Week 6 (April 04)	Week 7 (April 11)	Week 8 (April 25)	Week 9 (May 02)	Week 10 (May 09)	Week 11 (May 16)	Week 12 (May 23)	Week 13 (May 30)
Planning	■	■					■	■					
Arduino			■	■	■	■	■		■				
Controller Build				■	■	■	■		■				
Programming		■	■						■	■	■	■	
Writing					■	■	■	■	■				
Visual Design		■			■	■				■	■		
Modelling			■										
Animation					■		■	■					
Audio					■	■		■	■	■	■		
Play Testing										■	■	■	■

OUTCOMES

For Folio 1 I created a small prototype of Grasping with a functioning alternative controller.

https://youtu.be/SZy_Oau4GNA