

ABSTRACT

The aesthetics associated with play (Upton, 2015) are often conflated with our understanding of the driving mechanisms and techniques that we might employ to inspire playful behaviour in our audiences. *Grasping* (Corrigan, 2022) aims to employ elements such as novelty, horror and connection to inspire playfulness while leaning away from the common aesthetics associated with play in both the visual styling and forms of interactivity. With this approach I hope to help promote the radical plasticity of play (Boluk & LeMieux, 2018) and clearly reify some mechanisms and techniques that can help inspire playful engagement.

Grasping is an experimental video game inspired by the field of alternative controller games. Alternative controller games use custom made controllers to introduce novel forms or new interactions into their game design. *Grasping* uses a novel controller with horror elements that requires a participant to place their entire forearm into a foreboding and mysterious device. From here, they can interface with Mortalis Institute's (MI) patented helper bond system to receive diagnosis on their arm through an unsettling conversation with an AI therapist. *Grasping* explores how novelty, horror and connection can inspire playful engagement, and how this playful state affects the audience's meditations on the game's themes. Additionally, the tactility of the controller and use of evocative body imagery aims to draw the audience's attention to their own bodies and to explore how this self-awareness may also augment the game's themes of longing and connection.