

2024 DiGRA Workshop Proposal:

Everything is a Game Mechanic: Repurposing the World for Immersive Game Design.

(Maxwell Lander, New Media, Toronto Metropolitan University)

Augmented and Mixed realities, and their associated games, have largely been limited to conversations centered in bringing the real world into the digital; VR allows us to bring our bodies in 3D + networked space, phones scan walls and overlay digital images on them for us to experience mediated through our screens. Our solutions are largely digital-first and follow the advancement of technology as a jumping-off point for our designs. While compelling in many ways, the term “mixed reality” is not often meant to communicate a space in which the real world and game space overlap, it often implies the digital and technological as foundational for the mixing of realities, but instead I am proposing we consider the game as it’s own inherent technology.

The goal of the workshop is to explore the design space informing contemporary immersive and mixed reality design from the perspective of folklore and analog gaming traditions, such as role-playing and journaling games. While connected to the idea of Pervasive Games, games that take place in real-world spaces (Montola), this practice is more aligned with the trend of solo role-playing games, where the play itself can be an act of reality crafting and mixing. The solo role-playing game, a tradition as ancient as any in the realm of role-playing games, has gained significant prominence in recent years. Titles such as *Thousand Year Old Vampire* (Hutchings), employing journaling, *Lay on Hands* (Valley), featuring coin spinning, *Tunnel Gooners* (Harness), endorsing the use of inhalants, and *Anamnesis* (Leigh), played with a tarot deck, prompt players to engage with mundane objects, physically immersing themselves in a fictional realm. By repurposing everyday and real-world objects and spaces as the tools of our systems, and our mechanics, we can design immersive games that cohesively blend our play space with the world at large. These experiences are that of an alternate or mixed reality play space, but where we expect these terms to necessitate the use of technological interventions to structure the game world, we instead are relying on player divination, interpretation and story-crafting.

The use of existing objects (which could be technological in nature) as the foundations for our rules and systems connects us to a realm of pre-existing meanings and politics that will necessarily impact our final designs. We become cosmopolitical game designers. While cosmopolitics is a term historically used in climate research, Marcus Boon, when adapting its use to the world of sound, describes it as “[attempting] to understand the ways in which different kinds of being in, and knowledge of, the world can negotiate their coexistence [...] a politics that concerns both human and nonhuman actors”(6). What does it mean to try to work in collaboration with reality as it establishes its own impacts on our outcomes? What meanings and impacts are already existent in our objects and how might we harness them in service of immersive play experiences? Using the framework of *Frame 352* (Lander) - a photo journaling game of wanderings, which uses the flipping of pocket change and the act of photowalking as

it's central mechanics - a collaborative playstorming sessions, and an open discussion, the participants in the workshop will design a small set of novel game mechanics centered in everyday and pocketable objects as well as a framework for scaffolding alternative and augmented reality play.

The Workshop format:

1. Guided introduction to the world of solo role-playing games and the organizer's path through VR, AR, XR, and analog game design to a place of understanding the potential of their intersections for immersive design. [30 mins]
2. Guided group play through of Frame352 resulting in short participant presentation of results, experiences and take aways. [60 mins]
3. Collaborative playstorming session "designing from your pocket". The workshop organizer will provide a collection of everyday items for the participants, broken into small working/playgroups, to conceptualize potential game mechanics which will be immediately explored through casual and iterative play sessions. Narrative framings and hooks to be provided by facilitator where needed [60 mins]
4. Participants will share their play and design experiences and be asked to reflect on the everyday object as a site of design intervention for both digital and analog immersive games. [30 mins]

Participants and Outcomes

The workshop is meant for researchers and makers from all backgrounds, but specifically for those with an interest in Mixed and Augmented Reality Games. Participants will be asked to submit a small summary of their research interests in order to help select and align participant goals. The main goal of the workshop is to develop a catalog of real-world responsive game mechanics alongside their fictional and political considerations and strengths, with the extended goal of finding future sites of research into analog game traditions disruption of digital game space.

The workshop is designed to run with 12-16 participants but could be adapted to accommodate more if the interest arises.

Organizers Background

Maxwell Lander (he/they) is a game maker, artist, and assistant professor at Toronto Metropolitan University. Their work has encompassed a variety of mediums including photography, film, interactive media, VR + XR, and both analog and digital game design. They are interested largely in the way queerness and bodies are an informative site of practice and how digital and analog game design should be more in conversation with one another. Most

recently they have released several analog role-playing games including one of Gizmodo's best RPGs of 2022, *Himbos of Myth & Mettle*, and *Frame 352*, a photo journaling game of cryptic hunting and storycrafting.

Works Cited

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