

Panel: Hybrid Tabletop Games

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FOCUS OR TOPIC OF THE PANEL

In the past five to ten years, the number of hybrid tabletop games which combine digital tools with physical components has grown, heralding new forms of hybrid play which combine a physical play space with a digital app or other tool. This is a trend that market analysts have noted as one of the drivers for future tabletop game markets (Technavio 2019). In this panel, we will discuss different examples of games in this space as well as the different lenses through which hybridity can be viewed. We will show that these hybrid games represent a significant, although small, segment of the tabletop game market, and demonstrate their relevance not only for understanding the use of hybrid functions in tabletop games but also more broadly for understanding the value of digital tools and components and their relationship to physical objects.

Hybrid boardgames draw upon the history of replication of analogue play environments in digital spaces. Trammell (2010) looks at the online play of *Magic: The Gathering* (Garfield, 1993). He finds that it is not sufficient simply to emulate the mechanics of a physical game; there is a need to engage with the digital medium and its affordances. Rogerson and Gibbs (2020) found similar issues after reviewing digital

implementations of three games, *Ascension* (Fiorillo & Gary, 2010), *Agricola* (Rosenberg, 2007) and *Puerto Rico* (Seyfarth, 2002). Wallace et al. (2012) show that the level and types of automation provided by an app have profound influence on the players' experience. Paavilainen et al. (2018) use a number of cases to show how hybridity is used in various game and play contexts and what kinds of design rules are related to them.

Researchers have discussed what hybridity is and how it should be understood in the context of play and games. Kankainen, Arjoranta and Nummenmaa (2019) suggest that hybridity should be understood through conceptual metaphors. They argue that hybridity is the blending of different cognitive domains that are not usually associated together. This approach allows discussions to include games that do not rely only on technological compositions. In turn, Jayemanne, Nansen and Apperley (2015) argue that in a post-digital age it is hard to draw a line between analog and digital experiences, and thus to consider something as a hybrid of these. Instead, they propose that hybrid experiences are formed through an "aesthetic of recruitment", where products act as an interface that recruits users into various hybrid activities.

Recent research on hybrid games has focused on design and design space as key issues and is primarily interested in co-located play. Based on broad consultation with academics, game players and game industry participants, Kankainen and Paavilainen (2019) propose a set of 17 generic design guidelines for "hybrid board games" and, building on Heljakka (2012, 2016), propose five different types of hybridity: Conceptual, Technological, Artefactual, Thematic and Functional. They relate these to specific games, illustrating each design guideline with a brief discussion of how it is implemented in a number of games. A different approach is adopted by Rogerson and Gibbs (2020) who are interested in the specific functions of digital technology in hybrid digital boardgames (HDBs). Like Kankainen and Paavilainen (2019), the authors provide rich detail about the specific games which they reference rather than a broad, general overview.

Researchers have also examined how digital technologies contribute to creating and experiencing physical games. Trammell (2019) describes the use of digital tools by designers and publishers, as well as the importance of social media in modern gaming ecologies and gaming communities' uses of tools such as BoardGameGeek. Similarly, Rogerson, Gibbs, and Smith (2017) describe a "digital hinterland" of digital practices which are not themselves part of a game but are nevertheless fundamentally linked to gaming. In both cases, there is recognition that playing a game extends beyond the at-the-table experience to a broad range of ecologies and practices.

INTEREST AND NOVELTY FOR DIGRA ATTENDEES

This panel speaks to interest in modern tabletop games and hybrid gaming experiences. More broadly, however, it is of relevance for the design of games that are wholly digital or wholly set in the physical world, as it sheds light on the practices of design communities and of players. Moreover, it addresses not only in-game practices but also those that surround game play, bringing together the in-game and out-of-game behaviours of players as they relate to hybrid gaming experiences.

CONFIRMED PARTICIPANTS: AUTHOR BIOS

Aaron Trammell is an assistant professor of Informatics at UC Irvine. He graduated from the Rutgers University School of Communication and Information in 2015 and

spent a year at the Annenberg School of Communication at USC as a postdoctoral researcher. Aaron's research looks at the persistence of analog games in today's digital world. He is interested in how political and social ideology is integrated in the practice of game design and how these perspectives are negotiated within the imaginations of players. He is the Editor-in-Chief of the journal **Analog Game Studies** and the Multimedia Editor of **Sounding Out!**

Melissa J. Rogerson (BA(Hons), GradCertSoftDev, GradDipInetComm, PhD) is a Lecturer in Human-Computer Interaction at The University of Melbourne. Her PhD research focused on the play experience of modern boardgames, focusing on the four key dimensions of sociality, intellectual challenge, materiality and variety, which may be realized through physical or online play. She is interested in the ways in which players cooperate with one another as well as with game components during competitive play. Melissa is currently leading a project investigating the functions of hybrid tools in modern boardgames, supported by Game-in-Lab.

Ville Kankainen (M.Sc.) is a researcher and a PhD student in the Tampere University Game Research Lab, with a background in game design. In his dissertation Kankainen investigates the relation of digital media and tabletop-gaming. He has studied hybrid board games in Hybrid Playful Experiences (2012-2014) and Hybrid Social Play (2016-2017) research projects. His research interests are focused on hybrid play, tabletop-gaming culture, game design and game jams. He is currently investigating in an Offsetting Game project how board games can be used to communicate about biodiversity offsetting. Kankainen is the main organizer of an annual Ropecon Academic Seminar.

Tom Apperley (LLB, BA(Hons), PhD) is a Senior Research Fellow (Yliopistotutkija) at the Centre of Excellence in Game Culture Studies. He conducts research on digital games and playful technologies with an emphasis on their impact and influence on culture, particularly areas such as social policy, pedagogy and social inclusion. His open-access print-on-demand book *Gaming Rhythms: Play and Counterplay from the Situated to the Global*, was published by The Institute of Network Cultures in 2010. Tom's more recent work has appeared in *Games and Culture*, *New Review of Multimedia and Hypermedia*, and *Media International Australia*.

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