

# **A Three Person Poncho and a Set of Maracas: Designing Ola De La Vida, A Co-Located Social Play Computer Game**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Events that bring people together to play video games as a social experience are growing in popularity across the western world. Amongst these events are ‘play parties,’ temporary social play environments which create unique shared play experiences for attendees unlike anything they could experience elsewhere. This paper explores co-located play experience design and proposes that social play games can lead to the formation of temporary play communities. These communities may last for a single gameplay session, for a whole event, or beyond the event. The paper analyses games designed or enhanced by social play contexts and evaluates a social play game, Ola de la Vida. The research findings suggest that social play games can foster community through the design of game play within the game itself, through curation which enhances their social potential, and through design for ‘semi-spectatorship’, which blurs the boundaries between player and spectator thus widening the game’s magic circle.

## **Keywords**

Social play, spectatorship, performance, game design, temporary play communities

## **INTRODUCTION**

Across the UK, Europe and the U.S., play parties (typically events which last for one evening showcasing video games in a social setting) have grown in popularity and number, from Wild Rumpus (2017) and That Party (2017) widely known to GDC (Game Developers Conference) regulars, to L’indécadence in Paris (L’indécadence 2017), Fantastic Arcade in Austin, Texas (Juegos Rancheros 2017), and Games are for Everyone in Edinburgh (We Throw Switches 2017). Play parties vary in scale, curation, format and regularity, temporarily popping up in venues across a city. They can be located in one place (perhaps one dedicated to games like Bar SK (n.d.) and LikeLike (Pedercini 2018)) or can travel

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across the country, as is the case with a train-based jam and play party, Synchrony (Demoparty International) (Montford et al 2018). Each year, this social play movement gathers momentum with the number of indie arcades, play parties and play festivals continuing to increase, suggesting a growing need and audience for social play, regardless of instability of funding (Wood 2016).

With the expansion of social play games events across the world, game designers are beginning to look at ways in which they can design for these particular environments, creating new conventions of design which foster social play and interaction (Dyce and Fairweather 2017). Game design for social play contexts tends to create unique experiences that players could not have elsewhere, perhaps through use of custom hardware, large scale game playing experiences in the form of installations, or massively co-located participative works which would not be feasible in a player's home. *Ola De La Vida* (translated into English as "The Wave of Life") (Smash it Open and See What's Inside 2017) is just one example of a game which is designed for a social play context. It relies on custom controllers, large scale projection and multiple players and is a form of "makeshift installation," which is difficult to recreate elsewhere, a typical identifier of games that are designed specifically with social contexts in mind (Goddard and Muscat 2016). Within this paper, *Ola De La Vida* is analyzed alongside other games designed for social play purposes in order to identify the techniques used by game designers to enhance social play potential. This paper also proposes that design for social play can expand the magic circle by welcoming the audience into the play experience, leading to the formation of a temporary play community around a game, heightening the play experience for all involved.

In recent years, academic attention has turned to social play, with studies exploring play contexts (Wood 2016; Isbister 2010), and the design of social play games (Goddard et al 2016; Goddard and Muscat 2016; Wilson 2012; Wood 2016). Literature in this field is limited, particularly in relation to the design of games that are intended to be played in social spaces (Goddard and Muscat 2016). It is the aim of this paper to build upon the existing literature in this field, further formalizing game design processes for social play in a co-located context whilst also exploring the experiential impact for players within - and possibly beyond - the social play experience. The particular focus on co-located play situations aims to uncover and analyze the affordances of game design approaches supported by the physically co-located playing of games. The design and impact of online social play and play communities has been widely studied academically (e.g. Pearce 2011; Bainbridge 2010; Ducheneaut et al 2006), however, the design and potential for games to promote social interaction within co-located play party settings has received less academic attention.

## **GAME DESIGN, COMMUNITY AND ENHANCED SOCIAL POTENTIAL**

Play parties are designed around a curated collection of games or playful artifacts, either digital, physical or often times a mixture of both, which celebrate co-located social play. Play parties, not unlike arcades, sustain parallel and performative play (Lazzaro 2004). The games selected for showcase often exploit the features of co-located play, making use of multiple players, larger open play spaces or unusual forms of interaction, building upon multi-player party and performative games like *Mario Party* (Nintendo 1999), *Samba de Amigo* (Sega 1999) and *SingStar* (Sony Computer Entertainment 2000) but relocating play from the privacy of the front room into a public setting.

The attendees to a play party are often a unique blend of either active, former or potential players, a series of micro-communities who have been drawn to the event for a diverse

range of reasons, whether an interest in the games themselves, the social interaction of the event or the music and festive atmosphere. In this way, the play party fosters “ecologies of participation” (Fischer 2011) where attendees can interact to a level with which they are comfortable, whether through lower levels of participation such as spectatorship, or higher levels including direct interaction with games and discussion with other attendees. The play party and games which are designed for such spaces, therefore must recognize that “Social play in a co-located setting normally involves players and spectators, whose roles are fluidly interchanged as people move in and out of gameplay” (Márquez Segura and Isbister 2015 p.222). This fluid movement of participants from active gameplay to spectatorship (Reeves et al. 2005; Reeves 2011) and the parallel play sessions happening within a play party space presents designers with new challenges in order to engage player’s interest, communicate the game concept and invite players to step up and into the play experience.

These new challenges in terms of inclusive design are being addressed by emphasizing the performative aspect of games so as to appeal to players and audiences alike (Reeves et al 2005; Reeves 2012). Designing play as a performance enhances the likelihood that watching play will provide a level of entertainment for an audience. This approach widens the magic circle, by providing greater opportunities for spectators to become “in the know” about the game, as can presenting a game in a public space with space for spectatorship or making use of spectacular hardware or play styles to draw attention to the game (Dyce and Fairweather 2017). This not only supports ‘ecologies of participation’ in social play events but can also lead to enhanced interaction between players and non-players within the play space thus widening the magic circle of the game.

The magic circle was first introduced by Huizinga (1949) and developed by Salen and Zimmerman (2004) to acknowledge the demarcation of players from non-players. It is a term which has been debated greatly within game studies (e.g. Stenros 2014; Zimmerman 2012; Consalvo 2009; Juul 2008; Liebe 2008), however, in the context of this research, it is defined as the boundaries of understanding presented by those who are ‘in the know’ in relation to game rules and meanings, and those who are not; this distinction acknowledges that by being involved in play, people develop shared understanding and meaning attached to particular in-game action and ultimately, develop their own conventions, behaviors and sense of value based upon these rule sets. Huizinga (1949) acknowledges play’s ability to create a ‘secret club’ separate from the rest of the world and claims that involvement in such a play experience leaves an imprint upon players beyond the play itself. It is this concept of involvement and participation within the magic circle, or the widening of the magic circle through designing for social potential that is proposed to create this ‘secret club’ or temporary play community.

*Johann Sebastian Joust (JS Joust)* (Die Gute Fabrik 2013), for example, is a screen less competitive multiplayer computer game which places the player as performer in a digitally mediated fusion of arm wrestling and the playground game Tag. The players must protect their motion controller from fast movements, whilst trying to upset the motion controllers of their competitors. *JS Joust*’s magic circle is permeable, with players often spilling into the audience in order to avoid or catch their competitors. Non-players can quickly interpret the meaning of actions and mechanics to become ‘in the know’ about gameplay. In turn, someone outside the “secret club” - on the outskirts of the magic circle - can become an insider through spectatorship and interaction with players and non-players.

From the perspective of ‘object centered sociality’ co-located multiplayer game such as this could be positioned as social objects (Engeström 2005; 2007). Social objects are

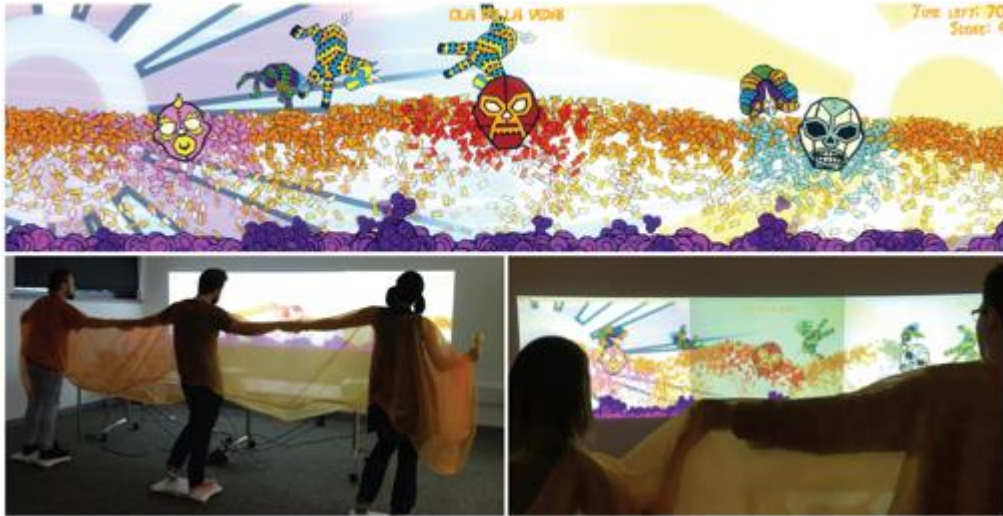
typically discussed in relation to exhibitions in museums and social media platforms where, the social object provides a ‘third’ thing which people can focus on, making interaction (between people) around a shared interest (the object) more accessible for the individual (Simon 2010). Social objects, however, can only reach their potential given an appropriate supporting structure and presentation to an audience (Simon 2010). This is where the play party comes into play, providing a space where objects can be shared and placed as a center point for discussion and shared experience for players and the audience alike, whether these participants have prior social relationships or not.

The players and spectators of co-located social games through shared experience, have the potential to become a form of ‘play community.’ Pearce (2011) and DeKoven (2002) (building on Wenger’s theories of communities of practice (1998)), propose that communities can form through shared play of a specific game. Play is a universally shared experience and because of this, it can bring people together and form communities (DeKoven 2011a). By playing together, people form close communities and develop a group identity and a sense of belonging (Sutton-Smith, 2001). For Pearce, a community of play begins within any given game, but the connection develops to become about playing *together* rather than about the game itself.

Playing together at play parties can similarly create such communities, however, they tend to be temporary in form; people may attend as predetermined micro-play-communities, they may be brought together and remain together for the length of the event groupings or individuals/strangers might group randomly for a single play experience afforded by a game within a space (i.e. if the game requires multiple players/cooperation). Play parties provide supporting structures which invite participants to build temporary relationships with one another through play in a game-centered context.

### **SOCIAL PLAY DESIGN: A CASE STUDY OF OLA DE LA VIDA**

A large group of spectators have gathered behind you, a large screen glows before you, the graphics are blurred, and the colors desaturated. You slip your head through an orange silky material which looks like an oversized poncho and step onto your play platform. You look to your left and see your friend (or a friend to be), who is sharing the same orange cloak. To your left, another friend’s head pops out of the poncho. You are joined together by flowing fabric and shimmering lights, (what you will later recognize as the wave of life). As you take the hands of your fellow players, the screen bursts into color, ticker tape streams from the wave of life, festival music sings loudly in your ears, and you begin to feel the force of your friends pulling you to and fro, as they try to manipulate the on-screen action. Welcome to *Ola de La Vida*.



**Figure 1:** The digital gameplay of *ODLV* (top) is projected before the three players adorned in the play poncho in the play space (bottom left) allowing spectators to view their performance and the gameplay at the same time (bottom right).

*Ola de la Vida (ODLV)* is a three-player cooperative game created for social play (figure 1). The game invites players to use their own and their fellow players' physicality (form and balance) in order to help as many digital characters (in this case, piñata) as possible to safely cross the digital 'wave of life' in ninety seconds. It is a playful experience where players must use physical contact, balance, negotiation of action and perseverance in order to achieve their goal. The game was created by a team of four developers during Global Game Jam 2017 (GGJ). *ODLV* engages the play community by utilizing a mix of unconventional and conventional input devices in a social play setting, along with scale, player physicality and conviviality as central design themes.

To play, each player stands on their own Wii balance board (conventional input device) and must hold hands to make a human chain. The player at either end of the chain holds a golden maraca controller (unconventional input device) which senses whether the players are holding hands. The game begins when the players are in place on their balance boards and are holding hands.

The analysis of *ODLV* is presented within this paper as a case study for evaluating the design and facilitation of social play within a game made for play party events. The design process and final prototype is analyzed by drawing from qualitative data including developer interviews, formal focus group testing and observations of players during social play events. Player observations were made on four instances: during Global Game Jam play party held at the GGJ site, at an International Game Developers Association (IGDA) Play Party held locally just after GGJ, during its installation at the play party, Games are for Everyone in Edinburgh, and during its month-long installation in the Futureplay Festival Tech Zone at Edinburgh Festival Fringe in August 2017.

To provide a basis for developer reflection upon the game, approximately three months after development, a group interview was undertaken, with all four developers, to gather their reflections upon the ideation and development processes, team collaboration and the final artefact. In tandem with this, the developers discussed their observations of players interacting with *ODLV* during GGJ, in GGJ play party and at the local IGDA Play Party. There were 220 participants in attendance to the GGJ site and approximately 129 people attended the IGDA Play Party, however these numbers represent potential audience at each site rather than player numbers. The game has, since this interview, also been showcased at Games are for Everyone (500 attendees) and at FuturePlay (1,000 unique plays recorded), providing opportunity for further player observations to be made. Player feedback from eleven players (to date) who played the game in a play party context has also been gathered via social media. Preliminary focus group testing has also been undertaken, in controlled lab conditions, with a group of eighteen, 18 – 35 year-old students, to test and evaluate the design claims made by the developers.

The group interview data acts as a valuable resource to identify, contextualize and analyze the design methods that contributed to social play, whilst the player experience data provides insight into the implications of the design of the game on player experience and the potential for the formation of “temporary communities of play” around the game in a social context.

### **ODLV & Temporary Communities**

Analysis of designer intentions (drawn from the focus group held with the design team) presents a range of design approaches which embrace the co-located nature of social play situations like the play party, in order to widen the play space and promote temporary community formation around the game. These approaches can be organized into four categories:

- The Curation of Spectacle - The use of scale, novelty and emotional contagion to attract and engage spectatorship
- The use of physical game design to heighten social potential - Utilizing physical contact, costume and ritual to lower social boundaries, promote camaraderie and heighten spectatorship
- The use of digital game mechanics to support internal semi-spectatorship – The creation of in game dependencies and altered player workloads throughout the play experience to encourage team work
- The widening of the magic circle through external semi-spectatorship – The use of play as performance through mimetic interfaces and gestural excess to promote spectatorship and invite player-spectator interaction

The following section analyzes the social design approaches utilized to achieve these four outcomes, linking their level of success to player observations and feedback. The use of these design techniques in other game examples is also explored and contextualized in light of the broader academic context of game design and games studies.

#### ***The curation of spectacle***

*ODLV* is a whimsical game. In order to be played, the game requires 3 Wii balance boards and 3 short-throw projectors to create an exaggerated wide-screen digital game play area,

in addition to utilizing a custom-built maraca circuit and poncho. Its technical specifications mean it can only be played at a play party and thus it is staged as an event, gaining an aura of ephemerality. *ODLV* makes use of colorful design, loud sound, fantastical lit-up costumes and props to make the game spectacular and emphasize its performative aspects. Everything about the game is loud, not only to draw audience attention in the busy setting of play parties, but also to promote positive connotations around the game with almost every aspect of the digital design promoting positivity.

The scale and whimsical nature has been acknowledged as providing draw for many players, with one social media respondent commenting that “When I first saw *ODLV* being played it looked ridiculous hilarious and a lot of fun. Its extremely unique method of interaction was something I had never seen before and instantly sparked a childlike curiosity of wanting to try it out myself” whilst another believes “The aesthetics of the game also make for a fun atmosphere in and out with the game. The poncho adds to the fun!” The game also won the audience award at the IGDA play party, suggesting it has ubiquitous appeal.

Positivity was core to the development process and design of *ODLV* which, in turn, reinforces positive play between the players and instills positive feelings in its audience. Isbister discusses emotional contagion, and observes that “In social play situations, this means that if the designer can get some players feeling happy, that others are more likely to follow along and feel that same way, creating a sort of snowball effect among the group. It helps to explain why party games can be so fun.” (2010, p17). For spectators, watching the players engage with the game and having fun with each other, is fun to watch regardless of in-game performance or results. Both Lazzaro (2004), and Márquez Segura and Isbister (2015) have noted the emotional contagion and emotional snowballing effects associated with co-located social play, even when the backs of the players are turned to the spectators (as is the case in *ODLV*).

This sentiment was eloquently described by a focus group attendee who said that at first, they had been laughing at the people who were playing, thinking that they looked like “dafties” (a Scottish term for being an idiot) and then acknowledging, “after you’ve actually played it [the game], you’re like ‘nah, that’s actually quite cool.’” The embodied knowledge of playing thus, can be seen to shift the potential interpretation of the spectacle and spectatorship for previous players, reframing the experience through play and promoting emotional contagion.

### *The use of physical game design to heighten social potential*

The game challenges traditional social boundaries in digital gaming by introducing physical contact as a mandatory element of the play experience. This is by no means a new concept (see *Fingle* (Game Oven Studios 2012) and *In Tune* (Tweed Couch Games 2015)) but is recognized as leading to the development of social connections between players within social play contexts (Goddard et al. 2016). Márquez Segura and Isbister have observed the role of non-digital factors in diminishing social anxiety and proposed some strategies for developing a “a safe feeling among strangers” (2015, p.232). In designing *ODLV* some of these strategies are applied, firstly encouraging players to not take the game seriously through use of costumes, props and an audio-visual style that embraced the ridiculousness of aesthetic clichés. One social media respondent notes that “The game was lots of fun ... it took us a while to get the hang of the game and stop giggling about wearing a giant shared poncho! But when we did it was great.”

The poncho amplifies the comedic effects of gameplay by hiding the individual bodies of the players and morphing them into a 6-footed, 3-headed, protean blob. *ODLV* literally re-configures player's bodies in space, creating a co-dependent physical chain of players, who are reliant upon one another to achieve digital gameplay goals. Players widely acknowledge (across the focus groups and social media responses) the importance of the poncho noting that it encourages their "enthusiasm" to play the game, that it helped them to embody a character when playing the game (taking on a role in a performance) and for one focus group attendee that:

The fact it is one big one [poncho], it makes you feel as a whole, so you have to work together as a team rather than as an individual because you're thinking "okay, I'm linked, I'm bonding with these people" this is one big poncho, so this is my team and we all have to work together, to the same goal.

The poncho, as well as diminishing social anxiety, clearly communicates the collaborative nature of the game. However, it is also seen by some to act as a barrier to learning from others by studying their bodily posture in relation to the on-screen reaction/response. One focus group player noted that "you can't really copy best practice because you can't see."

*ODLV* aims to de-emphasize score-led gameplay by not having a win condition, players achievements are celebrated with a fanfare and confetti explosion at the end of the game. Developer observations also indicate that the third player is most likely to celebrate successfully rescuing a piñata by enthusiastically shaking their maraca, adding to the celebratory festival atmosphere of the game. The game does not encourage comparison of play performance from play experience to play experience, choosing to celebrate each play experience in and of itself. In play party contexts however, many players ask for information about the high score or whether their play performance was 'good' in comparison to others. This tendency suggests that when interacting with an unusual or new play experience, players need some way to understand their level of achievement in the play performance. Results of focus group testing supports this observation, with a number of the participants asking about the score and two groups returning to play again, motivated by an interest in "beating" the current session's high score. Where versions of the game have been showcased with a high score system, social media respondents acknowledge that "the team aspects of the challenge seem to bond strangers and friends as they aim to beat the highest score."

The game also employs a form of de-familiarization through ritual-like actions: putting on the poncho, stepping on the boards in unison, taking the maracas and holding hands. Loke et al. (2012) note the double importance of ritual and ritualized performance. Ritual is a special event shared with a community that affirms group values and strengthens group identity. Ritualized performance also privileges ways of participation based on proximity, the sensorial and visceral, therefore it challenges distant or unengaged habits of spectating. The staged introduction to the game (putting on the poncho, stepping on the pedestal, taking one another's hands etc.) creates an interaction structure for the game as a social object (Engeström 2007), introducing the players to one another and increasing their social discourse in a staged and supported manner.

### *The use of digital game mechanics to support internal semi-spectatorship*

The players of *ODLV* have to work together to achieve a shared goal and score points. Each player 'manages' a section of the wave of life. For the player on the left, the workload is the highest, as the piñata spawn within their play space. The player on the right must wait



until both the player on the left and in the middle have been able to guide the piñata into their screen space. Within play, therefore, the workload of players will differ, as one player successfully moves a piñata out of their play space, they are given respite to review the actions of other players, transitioning from active play to temporary ‘internal semi-spectatorship’; they do not become merely spectators as their body is still affected by their co-players and they are still powering the game by holding hands. During these moments of internal semi-spectatorship, the players review their progress, devise strategies to help or hinder their co-players activities and have the ability to counsel their co-players, offering guidance and advice. In this way the play space has potential for exchange between players, where they can make sense of and strategize in relation to the game.

The creation of a collaborative communicative game experience along with embodied play can “lead to a sense of togetherness and intimacy in play, creating a richer social experience.” (Huizinga 1949, p7) and ultimately help the players to achieve “coliberation”, where the needs of the individual are balanced with the needs of the team (DeKoven 2011b). Internal semi-spectatorship does not undermine the input of each player or the collaborative elements of the game, rather it recognizes that the game is designed around dependencies between players, and that game play itself is only possible due to the ongoing collaboration afforded by the game design.

When discussing the concept of internal semi-spectatorship with *ODLV* players within focus group testing, the ability of the game to foster spectatorship whilst the player is actively involved is acknowledged, but the extent to which it is a positive state is unclear. Players to the left of the screen felt a level of control: they could manage the pace of the game and workload of the second player by blocking or holding piñata (figure 2). The player in the left and middle positions widely suggested that they did not communicate with the player in the right-hand position, rather that they would negotiate action between themselves to deliver the piñata for the player on the right. The player on the right’s ability to achieve their task of scoring points by delivering the piñata off screen was never questioned by the other players. Players in the right-hand position report varying experiences within focus group testing, some players acknowledge frustration in not being able to help and having the ‘wait’ for the other two players to deliver a piñata, whilst others recognize satisfaction in that they are the ones who actually scores the point and that “everything else is just a setup.”

In discussing the potential for internal semi-spectators to coach the other players, many of the focus group players reported that they would not want to offend another player by telling them what to do or that they would not appreciate being told what to do themselves.



**Figure 2:** A screenshot of *ODLV* showcasing the effects of internal semi-spectatorship: the player on the left is blocking piñata from entering the wave to allow the other players to manage their workloads.

Furthermore, the physical positioning of players in the play space makes it difficult for the players to communicate along the entire line of play. This design approach, partnered with social boundaries limit the extent to which players verbally coach one another. Players did, however, comment on taking moments to strategize whilst they were playing, with a few pointing towards potentially working against their teammates in a form of dark play. Dependencies between players were an active design choice by the designers and aimed to promote collaboration, varying play experiences across the three player positions (and thus promote players to play again, trying out a different position) and to encourage observation, coaching and strategizing. Social media respondents who played the game in a play party context do not acknowledge issues with dependencies, however, in a focus group setting, some players, as discussed above, describe dissatisfaction or frustration at the reliance upon other players. It may be the case, that there is a difficulty in verbalizing the actions required in order to carry out in game tasks (as suggested by some focus group participants) and that communication within a physical game such as *ODLV* is subtler than explored within this study, relying less on verbal communication and more on physical and non-verbal pointers, as one social media respondent notes:

The game functions via cooperation, with a level of abstractness [sic] that boils communication down to a fundamental level; by connecting all players together, the simplified communication is supplemented by body language and non-verbal cuing of one's teammates/fellow players.

This concept of internal semi-spectatorship can be applied to the study of other social play games. *Hotaru* (Isbister et al 2017) for example, requires players to pay particular attention to one another during game play in order to succeed. The players switch between being active (collecting energy) and being semi-spectators: they monitor their fellow player's energy bar, taking action when necessary. *Proxemic Pong* (Muller et al 2014) similarly blurs the line between spectatorship and active play due to the automatic detection of a player in the play space. When the game detects a player, it creates a Pong paddle with which they can play. However, the player can exist on the fringes of perception of the game, neither taking an active play role, nor purely spectating as their presence in the proxemic zone of play causes erratic behavior in the system. This could be seen as a bug in the system or a playful way of exploring the boundary between spectatorship and active play with the system.

#### *The widening of the magic circle through external semi-spectatorship*

In *ODLV*, shifting one's weight on the balance board from one side to the other triggers a similar movement of the player-platforms on the screen. Continued reinforcement of physical action in the digital realm, in partnership with the exaggerated scale of the digital and physical play space in *ODLV*, not only contribute to the 'pull' of the game through use of spectacle strategies, but also contribute to the game's increased visibility. Mimetic interface games encourage movement in the player's physical space and create the illusion of uninterrupted movement that initiates in player space and continues in game space: the player's physical movements are mirrored in the game by the player's avatar (Juul 2010). This can help explain the game's popularity, the barrier to entry to the game is lowered by facilitating learning through watching which in turn, enhances the social nature of the game (Juul 2010). A social media respondent expands on this idea, acknowledging the accessibility provided by the mimetic interface:

As someone who finds game controllers difficult (I never know which button to press) the instinctive nature of the controls meant I instantly had an idea of what to do and had fun working out the finer moves with the whole team.

This accessibility is promoted by expressive design (types of interactions where both the manipulations and the effects are visible to an audience (Reeves et al. 2005)). *ODLV* makes use of these three types of interactions; those which are directly performed on the controller (balancing on the board), the movement of the performers that is captured by the interface (holding hands which enables the circuit, and the shifting of balance on the boards), as well as other movements that are not directly captured by the technology. This last type of manipulation is of particular relevance to the widening of the magic circle and involvement of others within the temporary community, as it contributes to the player's freedom for artistic expression and shifts the focus from the game as system or as artifact, to the game as a performance (Márquez Segura and Isbister 2015; Reeves et al. 2005; Simon 2009; Wilson 2012). *OLDV* allows for purely functional out-of-game movements (re-balancing), purely artistic movements (making interesting body waves), but most often a combination of both (Reeves et al. 2005, p.743). Observations of gameplay at play parties invariably



**Figure 3:** Players of *ODLV* participating in gestural excess at various play parties

indicate that the players tend to engage in full body movement, “gestural excess” (Simon 2009), and create interesting body shapes with each other, standing on one foot, jumping or stretching out as far as possible, although this does not affect gameplay (figure 3). It is argued that these emergent movements are performed because of *ODLV*’s intrinsic performative nature; the players perform for an audience and for each other in an act of artistic expression that is initiated by the game and encouraged by its social design. Players across the data sets acknowledge that it is as pleasurable to watch the game as it is to play it. Within the data set, there are some references towards gestural excess, within the focus group, for example, some players commented that using their arms and playing with the maracas made the game more fun whilst one social media respondent found “My only ‘concern’ was that I was unable to just move my legs to control the movement i.e. without shaking the maraca (violently) and every other part of my body.” Many other social media respondents however, reference the rhythmic nature of the game where, in play, “Guiding the various piñata-like objects became a focused and rhythmic dance, occasionally disrupted by a small pile-up prompting much hip wiggling and laughter” and in spectatorship, enjoying “when everyone managed to find their required rhythm and carry it across the chain.” Play as performance, for some, enhances the spectacle and spectatorship for the audience and encourages interaction between audience members, and between audience members and players.

Witnessing others succeed or fail is fun and exciting in co-located social play, while performing in front of others can diminish the negative effects of playing poorly or making mistakes (Isbister 2010; Lazzaro 2004; Márquez Segura and Isbister 2015). The presence of an audience makes playing more fun as it allows players to show off their skills, act out or gloat, in other words: play to their audience. In turn, spectators can root for their friends, comment on gameplay, shout out advice or try to handicap or trick the players. All these aspects make co-located play more fun for both spectators and players, widening the magic circle, whilst also creating temporary social bonds between players and the audience during the play experience, further promoting the temporary play community.

Therefore, *ODLV* encourages an active type of live spectatorship, in which “the spectator’s frame of spectating focuses on their own self in relationship to what they view” (Oddey and White 2009, p.8), in the case of *ODLV*, shaped by either the anticipation of participation, or the embodied knowledge of previous participation. This type of spectatorship is pleasurable and fun in itself, as it enables the formation of a support network/community, it allows for imaginative gameplay, reflection and strategic thinking, it acts as a safe space where the spectators can overcome the intimidation of participation by watching others play, and finally it acts as a tutorial - learning by watching.

The ability for a game (or any experience) to activate spectators in the play experience in this way is proposed as ‘external semi-spectatorship.’ In social play design, designers can create spaces which enliven the audience with further participative potential whether this be using play as performance to allow spectators to devise strategies about how they would play or allowing them to learn by watching others or inviting them to impact the gameplay through ambient support or direct interaction with active players through coaching and so on.

Within *JS Joust*, for example, active players may choose to use members of the audience as ‘human shields’ or ‘buffers’ and thus casts them into an external semi-spectator role - neither truly active nor passive. It can also be a way of inviting spectators to activate themselves within gameplay. Such a mode can be seen in *Clash Royale* (Supercell, 2016)

for example, which although not a co-located social play game, offers interesting affordances to external semi-spectators using the fireworks to congratulate players they are watching and also, in a form of dark play, to give one player hints on the other player's strategy as a form of competitive edge.

## DISCUSSION

*Ola De La Vida* has proved to create interesting social dynamics between players and audiences acting as a social object: activating relations between individual players but also between the players and the audience. It does this through scale, conviviality, play as performance, dependence in game design and by orchestrating emotional contagion. These design elements lend themselves well to co-located social play and the social contexts of a play party and, it is proposed widen the magic circle around the game.

Many games have qualities that make them social objects, whether through inviting active participation of multiple players, through inviting spectatorship through performance as play, or through inciting intrigue through unconventional controllers, play styles or content. *ODLV* was designed to be staged and intended from the onset to enhance spectacle and social potential as widely acknowledged by social media respondents, including: “*Ola de la Vida* was instantly eye-catching and inviting, commandeering a large play space with unusual controls.” Enhancement of social potential, however, is most commonly applied to games which foster unusual physical control systems, are multiplayer or which are convivial in nature. Co-located games can (and often do) embrace performance as play, using physical movement to blur the boundaries between the player and the spectator creating a form of external semi-spectatorship. This may be achieved through scale and staging, as in *ODLV*, by freeing players from a limited play space (as in *JS joust*), or through physical game mechanics (such as *In Tune*). Supporting spectatorship allows active involvement for the spectator in influencing and shaping the gameplay in subtle but meaningful ways for all involved. The blurring of such boundaries can help to create a cohesive temporary play community driven by camaraderie.

The design of the digital game, although deceptively simple, provides a beneficial rhythm to gameplay which allows the players to shift between active play and internal semi-spectatorship. The rhythm in *ODLV* is driven by in-game dependencies where play is sequentially driven, and players rely on one another physically *and* digitally in order to achieve the goals of the game. Such a rhythm is key to creating connections between players in a multiplayer social play context because it can allow for greater collaboration, exchange between the players, and can strengthen the bonds within a team. For example, within the focus group, one team referred to themselves as a “production line” with a pattern, whilst a social media respondent noted that “Using tactile props allow its players to gradually feel like one fluid entity, even when hitting impediments or particularly challenging portions of the gameplay.”

It is often the case that players in multiplayer online games are ‘alone together’ and although they engage with one another socially, they do not necessarily engage in meaningful play (Ducheneaut et al 2006). Internal semi-spectatorship, where a player is active in the game to some extent, but still has enough distance to observe the needs of others, is proposed as an antidote to the issues of being ‘alone together,’ allowing for meaningful connections to be made during active game play and in no way diminishes the input of the player upon the play experience. Rather, it provides them with a unique opportunity to appreciate the game play from a distance, to strategize and to explore how to better achieve (or rather, for some, disrupt) their shared goals as a team. Within focus

group testing it is clear that some teams were able to find critical distance and to strategize during gameplay, but the controlled nature of the testing session and social politeness (as acknowledged by the participants concerns over offending someone by telling them what to do) limit the conclusions that can be drawn on this element at present. Further studies in authentic social play party contexts are needed in order to fully assess the potential of this element within *ODLV*.

Semi-spectatorship, as a concept clearly exists but may be enacted by players (internal to the game) to varying degrees depending upon the setting, social relationships and experience levels of each player and may be enacted by the audience (external to the game) in how they interpret, support and strategize in relation to gameplay.

## **CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK**

Social play environments are encouraging new approaches to game design which place social interaction at the center of the play experience. The growing number of play party events around the world suggests that these practices are successful in promoting game playing practices as a social activity and are widening the audience for games and play through leveraging social contexts for play.

Co-located social play games exist only temporarily, as do the communities around them. This temporary nature may be beneficial, perhaps inviting them to throw away fears about participation as this is an opportunity not to be encountered again, an invitation to join Huizinga's secret club and become part of something temporary in time and space, but a permanent shared social experience nonetheless.

It is proposed that the social potential of videogames can be enhanced in the design process, considering how gameplay in the digital and physical space can invite spectatorship and audience involvement. It is also proposed that designers can create internal and external forms of semi-spectatorship, to widen the magic circle and promote social interaction and temporary play community formation around a game. Both internal and external forms of semi-spectatorship blur the boundaries between play and spectatorship and aim to widen the magic circle around the game, creating shared investment and meaning between players and spectators in achieving gameplay outcomes. Being part of such a temporary play community is proposed to enhance the play experience for everyone through emotional contagion, camaraderie, and coliberation, creating a memorable experience and potentially promoting more positive connotations around computer games for those involved.

The concept of semi-spectatorship is evident in *ODLV* player experiences and acknowledged by players in their dual role of playing and watching the game and also of trying to learn how to play through watching or enhance the gameplay through in game communication. However, the impact of semi-spectatorship upon the play community as a whole is not wholly clear from research data and requires further investigation in order to fully assess its potential for temporary community creation. Further player studies of social play games in social play contexts are needed in order to fully investigate and formalize the different facets and implications of semi-spectatorship upon the social play experience moving forward. This study does, however, take a small step towards acknowledging the blurring relationships between players and spectators and their relation to the processes of game designers.



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