



# Ola De La Vida

A Social Play Game

Lynn Parker, Danny Parker, Alex Pass and Mona Bozdog (2017)

Practice Publication

## 1.0 Executive Summary

Ola de la Vida (ODLV) is a three-player cooperative game which was produced over the course of 48 hours within Global Game Jam in January 2017, at the Abertay University Jam Site.

The Game is a playful intervention (an objects or events which seek to bring people together through play) that aims to invite players to form temporary relationships with their co-players through physical contact, collaboration and coaching during play in a co-located context (i.e. where all players are present in the same play space). The game also seeks to expand the play experience beyond the three players to the wider audience by inviting spectatorship through play as performance.

The game was designed by Lynn Parker, Danny Parker, Alex Pass and Mona Bozdog. Since its inception, it has undergone significant development to enhance its usability (through tutorials) and its features to enhance the development of a community of play, including the introduction of clear player scores and high scores for the game. Lynn Parker contributed to the design of physical interactions within the game, the enhancement

*"I have never felt such joy and anticipation stepping up onto a wii fit board."*

of usability through tutorials and scores and the creation of digital art for the game in partnership with Alex Pass.

Ola De La Vida as a practice as research work offers design insight into use of spectatorship to create a temporary community around a game and to enhance the facilitation of discussion between active players, previous players, spectators, and semi-spectators. The work builds on the varying levels of participation in play, proposing semi-spectatorship: where players are active in a game but have a critical distance afforded to them by the design of the game which offers them and their co-players (where appropriate) potential benefits in play.

## 1.1 Exhibition Portfolio

International Game Developer Association Dundee Play Party. 9th February 2017. Dundee, United Kingdom. 200 Attendees.

Scottish Parliament. 21st February 2017. 150 At-





tendeers.

Games are For Everyone Volume 5. 21st April 2017. Edinburgh, United Kingdom. 500 Attendees.

Game Jam 2. 20th May 2017. Perth Museum, Perth. 60 Attendees.

Futureplay. 2nd - 28th August 2017. Edinburgh, UK. 1385 plays, 826 unique.

Arcadia. 8th September 2017. Dundee, UK.

## 1.2 Awards

Audience Award, International Game Developer's Association Dundee Play Party.

## 1.3 Relation to Research Practice

ODLV allows further study of the formation of temporary communities of play (a group of people who form temporary social relationships with one another due to interaction with a playful intervention). It is a play intervention, an object which redesigns a space and the potential social interactions within that space and thus acts as an active case for discussion and analysis of social play design. Social play design, within the context of this research, is the design of an experience which invites people to form relationships with one another, temporarily, through playfulness to achieve a shared goal.

The technical specifications and custom controllers of ODLV mean that it can only be experienced in specific social play contexts (i.e. a play party or as a makeshift installation in a social event). It has an ephemeral quality which invites curiosity and its form makes it inherently social. In the design process of ODLV, fostering spectatorship to enhance the creation of temporary

communities of play (as previously discussed) played a vital role. In the context of this research, spectatorship is defined as the gathering of people, around a game, to watch it being played, whether to understand the game rules before playing, to enjoy the play experience from a distance, to support their friends when playing the game etc.

Designing for spectatorship supports a social play context, allowing many to 'experience' the game at the same time. We propose that this widens the play community and develops an "arena for exchange" (Bourriaud 2002) where players and spectators share experience, knowledge and collectively elaborate meaning through participating within and watching game play. This sharing demarks the play community from others within the larger social context of the event, as being 'apart together' (Huizinga 1949) from the other people within their current social context. Empowering individuals to shift seamlessly from active play to semi-spectatorship through to spectatorship, we believe widens the magic circle (Salen and Zimmerman 2004), expanding the potential community around a game. In this way, game design is integral in the creation of a space around which a community can form.

ODLV fosters spectatorship in its design in the following ways:

- *The creation of spectacle through playful form and technology*
- *The use of play as performance*
- *The design of game play to promote semispectatorship, camaraderie and cooperation*



*Above: The developers testing out the technical set-up of three projectors, three balance boards, the poncho and the maraca controllers at the game jam*

## 1.4 Semi-spectatorship

Observation of players and reflection upon the game play experience has led to the identification of the potential for what could be called, a 'new' form of spectatorship: Semi-Spectatorship. It is proposed as a point in gameplay where a player is active within the game to some extent, but has enough distance from the action to observe, analyse and critique the game. For example, in ODLV, the players are always 'active' in that they form a circuit which allows play to happen and that their physical form impedes the movement of others. However, the balancing of game play is such that, at times, players have no tasks to complete in the digital realm, and therefore, are able to observe their co-players, either to offer advice, to change their own approach to the game or to physically help their co-players to achieve their goals by repositioning themselves to offer them a little more movement. We propose that the semi-spectator sits somewhere between active player and spectator, having critical distance and interactive potential which can be used to alter player-player and player-spectator relationships.

Semi-spectatorship is analysed from a design perspective and contextualized through obser-

vation of other games in the work-in-progress academic paper in Appendix A. This paper is in development and will be submitted for publication to an appropriate journal upon completion of analysis of user experience in relation to the claims made around semi-spectatorship.

## 2.0 Research Questions

What techniques can be used in the design of a social play game to foster spectatorship?  
Can designing for spectatorship enhance the play community around a social play game?  
In what ways does the level of participation of a player in a social play game change their play experience and relationship to their fellow players and spectators?

## 3.0 Methodology

The research questions were initially explored through practice-as-research where a game was designed that utilised spectacle and performance in order to invite spectatorship. Formal analysis of this process is currently being undertaken through semi-structured interviews with the design team and focus group testing of the game with players.

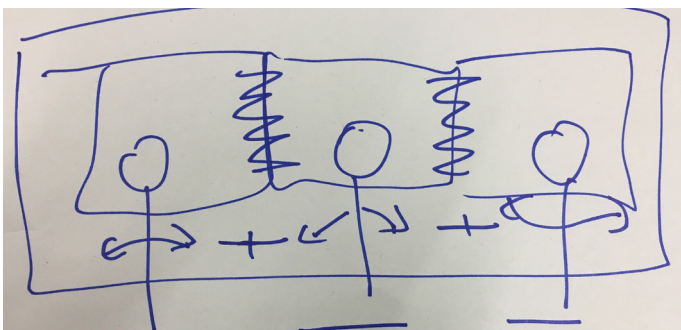


Above: A screenshot of the digital game play. Each mask represents a player and the coloured confetti showcases the part of the wave that they are able to control.

### 3.1 Design Approach

The game was created over the course of a 48-game jam. The designers, due to other commitments, developed for around 20 hours of this time.

The design approach drew from industry practices, using an iterative approach. Key features



Top: rough design sketch of the physical play space drawn at the start of the jam. Bottom: testing the balance boards for the first time with a digital prototype.

were implemented, polished and developed. The most important features (the balance boards, wave and piñata physics) were implemented first, then art added, then visual polish. The human circuit was deemed low priority by the technical team and thus was implemented in the last hour of the jam.

Game feel was very important and thus was tested repeatedly by the team through play testing. The feel focused upon the connection between player movement on the balance board and the reaction of the on-screen wave. The interaction had to be direct to feel purposeful but not so fast that the on-screen wave would 'twitch' and become visually unappealing. This creates a mimetic interface (Juul 2010) which blurred boundaries between physical play and digital play.

The balancing of challenge was also important to encourage teamwork and camaraderie. This was designed firstly through perfecting the number of piñata on screen at any time, secondly through adding dynamic shifts in the position of each player's on-screen wave and thirdly pacing the game to allow for semi-spectatorship.

The technical specifications of the game mean that it has scale with the digital screen being four meters wide. In this way the game tends to be one of the largest objects in the play space drawing attention through its size and performative nature. Logistically, the footprint of the game requires space in the venue (providing space for spectators), demands attention by attendees (inviting spectatorship) and provides comfortable viewing of both the players and the gameplay at the same time all leading to enhancement of the potential for spectatorship of play.

Performance as play was also a central design approach; the layout of the play space effectively places the players upon a 'stage' in front of the digital game play for an audience to watch. This is further supported by the poncho, which masks the individual identities of the players, melding them into one being, unified by costume. The costume was initially designed to address limitations in development time, where there was concern that physical interaction may not be possible, but in turn, became a key actor in promoting the performative aspect of the game whilst also providing the players with a level of anonymity to enhance their comfort in performing in front of an audience.

Forming a circuit between the players emerged as an opportunity to physically complicate the play experience. It also provided the potential to

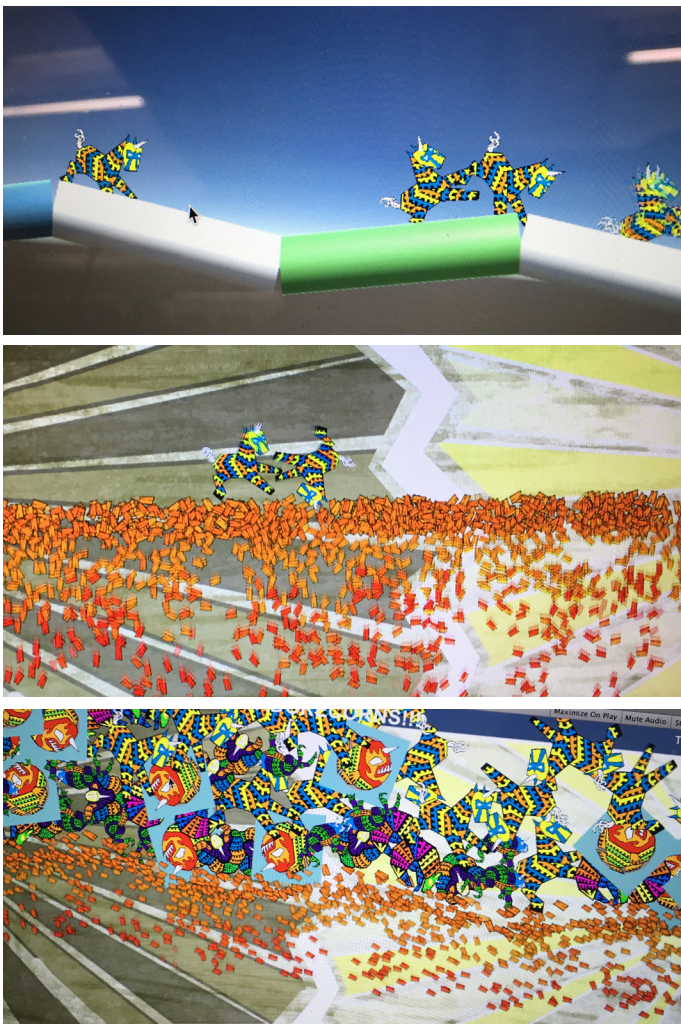
create interpersonal relationships between the players through physical contact and negotiation of physical limitations during play. However, it was given low priority by the technical team due to time constraints within initial prototyping and was implemented in the final hour of the game jam period. Upon implementation, the entire team recognised the significant change to game play from players effectively being 'alone together' (Ducheneaut et al 2006) (i.e. only paying attention to their own play actions) to instead acknowledging their co-players in a co operative play experience driven by physical interconnectivity and reliance. The physical grounding in the world also blurs boundaries between the physical play space and the digital play space, drawing player attention to the physical play space through their use of their bodies as input devices and the impact of their co-player's movement on their physical capabilities (i.e. the extent to which their movement is limited by holding hands with the other players).

For further in depth information on the approach to designing ODLV, please see the the work-in-progress paper in Appendix B.

### 3.2 Technical Specifications

Ola De La Vida is a three-player game which requires players to use their bodies as input devices to manipulate digital platforms within on-screen gameplay. The game makes use of three Wii balance boards and two custom built maraca controllers as input devices. The balance boards are positioned side by side, spread arms-length apart from one another. The maraca controllers are connected to a Makey Makey to form a circuit, which is completed when the three players connect hands to begin play.

The maracas detect physical contact between the players during the game and will pause the game if players lose contact. The digital gameplay is displayed via three projectors which create an oversized widescreen play area positioned in front of the balance boards. Each player has a dedicated screen in front of them driven by a triple Head to Go adapter and game play is continuous from one screen to the next, resulting in a large scale wide ratio projection.



Top image: the look of the prototype 23 hours into the jam. Middle Image: the look at 28 hours. Bottom image: a failed balancing experiment which aimed to best gauge the right number of piñata to make the game fun and challenging.

The scale of the game contributes greatly to spectatorship as it uses spectacle to draw a crowd, requires play space, allowing space for a crowd to gather in and allows the audience to clearly see the players and the game at the same time, allowing them to watch gameplay easily from a number of angles.

### 3.3 Game Play

In preparation to play, the players don an oversized poncho for three and step onto their individual balance boards facing the digital play space. Players then physically form the 'Wave of Life' by holding each other's hands. The player at either end of the wave holds one of the two maraca controllers to complete the wave. The resulting physical contact between the three players complete the maraca controller's circuit and if weight is also detected on each of the balance boards, the game begins.

To play, each player must shift their weight from one side of their balance board to the other in order to tilt their part of the on-screen wave. The player parts of the wave are represented by three platforms, one pink, one red and one blue, each individually controlled by the players. Tilting their bodies to the right will tilt their part of the wave to the right and so on. Each player wave segment is adjoined by physics driven 'connectors' which

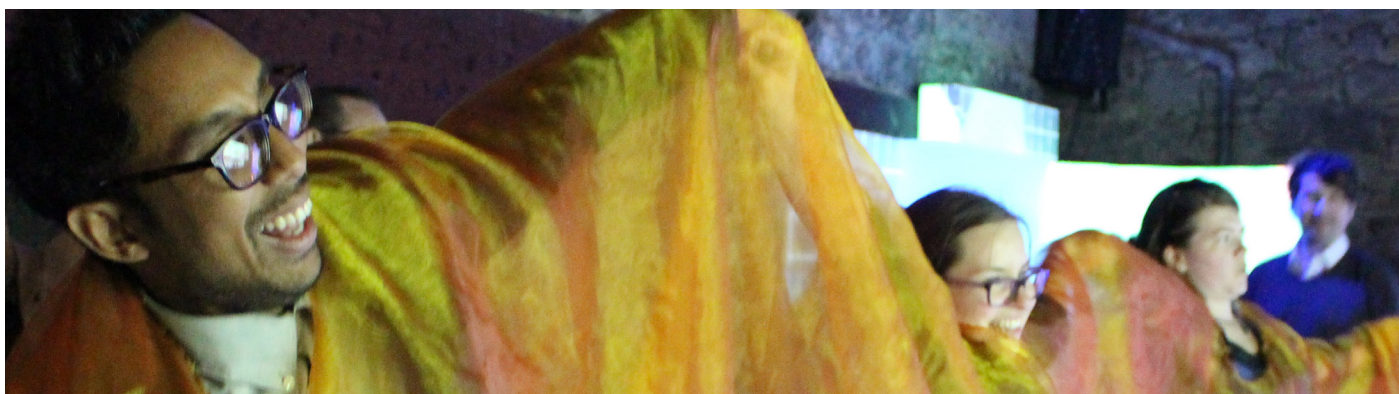
are affected by the tilting action of the two adjacent players (i.e. player one and player two's actions affect the behaviour of the connector which joins their platforms). Together, the players tilt to and fro on their balance boards, whilst holding hands, manipulating the form of the on-screen wave.

Players must work together to use their manipulation of the wave to help piñata to cross safely from one side of the wave (screen) to the other. The piñata are driven by physics simulation and spawn from the left side of the screen. Each player uses their bodies to affect their part of the wave and the negotiated wave space between. They must use in game gravity and real world momentum in their physical (and thus also digital) movements to coax the piñata across. When a piñata successfully crosses the screen, the players score one point. Play continues for one hundred and twenty seconds or until the players let go of one another's hands.

The mimetic connection between player actions and on-screen action also makes the game easy to learn through spectatorship. This physical input into the game also encourages players to use their whole body to play, creating a form of play as performance, which further enhances spectatorship of the game for the audience



Above: The game being played at the IGDA Global Game Jam Play Party in Dundee in February 2017



#### 4.0 Participant Feedback

Players were invited to submit comments on their play experience via e-mail and Twitter. Below are a series of voluntary comments provided by people who have played Ola de La Vida. Respondents were a mix industry practitioners, either working in commercial or independent game development, student games developers and academics working in the study of games.

“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 child like curiosity of wanting to try it out myself.”

“Poncho donned and hand-in-hand with the other players, vibrant and dynamic visuals responded to my swaying as we co-ordinated our move-

ments. Guiding the various pinata-like objects became a focused and rhythmic dance, occasionally disrupted by a small pile-up prompting much hip wiggling and laughter. After some minutes of confetti bursts and luchador outcries we removed our giant poncho and thanked our partners, lively music celebrating our performance.”

“The bright exciting visuals and loud music also added to the atmosphere of playful silliness and made the experience feel a lot more showy almost like a bit of a performance particularly due to the nature of playing it in public and the inevitable crowd of spectators it drew in.”

“Ola da la vida (ODLV) is a game just as entertaining to watch as it is play. ODLV is a intimate and physical game which promotes teamwork and thinking carefully about how you should move your body. Fun, physical and visually satisfying.”



Top and Bottom images: People playing ODLV at Games are for Everyone Volume 5 in Edinburgh in April 2017.



## 4.1 Interviews and Focus Testing

The game was evaluated from a design perspective, utilising qualitative data gathered from an informal semi-structured interview style 'design discussion' which took place between the four developers. Interview questions focused upon the game design process, the individual aims and opinions of the developers within the process and the observations of the developers of the game 'in the wild' (Chamberlain et al 2012) being played. Questions were also asked around the game and its potential for community development. The interview guide used for this interview can be found in Appendix A. The design discussion was audio recorded and thematically analysed using an emergent approach where themes came from the data itself. The emergent themes, in partnership with observations of players at a range of play events were used to identify and discuss key design strategies used within ODLV which w impact upon player experience and spectatorship.

User feedback was gathered via an open on-line appeal for comments online utilising social media, excerpts from which can be found in the Player Feedback section of this document. Formal user feedback is in the process of being gathered through designed user feedback sessions within Abertay University where players participate in a play session and provide feedback in the form of a player and audience focus group. This data will be transcribed and thematically analysed (Braun and Clarke 2006) in order to inform the critique and development of the existing work-in-progress publication (Appendix B).

## 5.0 Dissemination & Impact

ODLV has been exhibited across Scotland and to date has been experienced through play or spectatorship by more than 1500 people (as of 7th September 2017). The game was also submitted to the Amaze festival awards and is showcased on their website alongside all the other submissions to an international audience (A MAZE.



Above: The third iteration of ODLV, in installation format at FuturePlay Festival in the Edinburgh Fringe, August 2017

GmbH 2016).

ODLV was identified by the organisers of the FuturePlay Festival as an ideal contribution to their 'Tech Zone' strand and thus is currently installed at the FuturePlay Festival at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival for the month of August (Assembly Festival 2017). Attendance figures for this event are yet to be provided by the organisers.

This selection of the game by the festival organisers to be showcased to an international audience at a premiere digital media event in the capital, alongside its audience award at the International Game Developers Association Play Party in Dundee demonstrates that this game has been judged by peers and experts in the field of game development and by general audiences to have worth. The team have also been approached by an organisation who wish to license the game to be part of a touring exhibition which will partner conferences and corporate events to promote team building and new technology. The team are in early discussions regarding this licensing opportunity.

Academic analysis of the game is also being undertaken and will be submitted for publication by an appropriate journal once analysis of user

experience is complete.

## 6.0 Conclusion

Player feedback and industry response (i.e. selection for FuturePlay and the potential licensing opportunity) suggest that ODLV is recognised by peers and the public alike as having value as a social play game.

The game has the potential to provide insight into the implications of technology mediated play on social interaction through analysis of user experience through informal and formal user testing sessions. At present, the game utilises design techniques which aim to blur the boundaries between digital play and physical play by using the participants bodies, in relation to one another in the real world, through a mimetic interface, to control the digital world. The extent to which the physical grounding to another player as a key design technique draws player attention to the real world and their social interactions is of particular interest and focus group analysis will provide insight into the potential for physical contact and interaction to achieve social interaction.

The game has also been identified to attempt make use of different levels of participation through its use of three players and reliance upon sequential completion of tasks to achieve



Above: ODLV being played at Game Jam 2 at Perth Museum in May 2017



*Above: The development team celebrating the end of Global Game Jam and completion of the first iteration of ODLV at Abertay University in January 2017.*

the shared goal. From observation of players, it is clear that in many cases, players are aware of each others workloads and react to this by altering their play in some way. User testing will help to further underpin this claim, providing insight not only to what extent players are aware of each other's play situation, but also how they balance individual needs with the needs of the team. The strategies employed by players to manage this key design feature require further analysis through interrogation of formal user testing data and will provide valuable insight into whether players are aware of levels of participation and if so, the extent to which they exploit this in their play tactics for their own or the team's needs.

Lastly, it is believed the ODLV uses design strategies to foster spectatorship and that this is a key feature in building a community around a game. The key design approaches are in the scale of the game, its performative nature (the layout of the play space, the use of costume etc.) and the party atmosphere the game creates. Discussion with players and spectators together will allow

discussion of their roles within game play and the extent to which they felt like they were part of a temporary community of play. Discussion will focus upon the experiences of these groups, rather than the design tenets that sit under the experience, to identify if these techniques or if other serendipitous outcomes influence the sense of community around the game. This will provide valuable insight into social play design techniques and the implications of digital mediation upon social relationships in play.

The testing of design concepts against user experience is deemed central to presenting ODLV as an academic artefact as it provides underpinning for design claims and better illustrates the societal impact of the design techniques at play within the game. The game, however, as a practice-as-research work clearly provides value as a social play intervention as recognised by peer selection and review, and analysis of practitioner reflection and player observation.



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*Top: ODLV being played at the Scottish Parliament in February 2017.  
Bottom: People playing ODLV at Games are for Everyone Volume 5 in Edinburgh in April 2017.*



## Appendix A

### Design Discussion Interview Guide

Interview conducted with Mona Bozdog, Alex Pass and Danny Parker

## Developer Interviews

The developer interview was structured around key themes as detailed below.

What is the game about for you?

Most interesting things for you about the game?

Can you pay attention when you're playing as much as when you're waiting?

Can play lead to relief from everyday work?

What are your thoughts about the relationship between Audience - space - technology in ODLV?

## Thematic Discussion

### CONCEPTUAL ELEMENTS

Socio-political themes - Connectedness - poncho, hands/circuit

### PHYSICAL GAME DESIGN

#### EMBODIED INTERACTION - PLAYER AS INPUT DEVICE

INTIMACY - Challenging personal space and comfort - touching each other and...Negotiating one another's bodies to play the game, Social Awkwardness as a game mechanic - Considering physicality in play design -

RITUAL - poncho, 'pedestal' in the wii board

SPECTACLE - large scale screen, easy for people to watch, bright poncho, maracas, flashing lights - draws an audience, invites spectatorship but also can intimidate?

### DIGITAL GAME DESIGN

#### RIDICULOUS THEME AND VISUAL STYLE

SIMPLISTIC MECHANICS - game complexity versus play experience?

RANDOMISED CHALLENGE as a design approach

Sense of ridiculousness - how does this affect peoples' preconceptions of the game? How does it change the barrier to entry?

### EMERGING BEHAVIOURS IN PONCHO FORMED COMMUNITIES

APART TOGETHER - is this evident in ODLV?

COMPETITIVE MOTIVATIONS - what are your experiences of this in ODLV?