The Magic Circle Inside Out: LARPing to Explore the Future of Social and Emotional Technology

Ferran Altarriba Bertran
ferranaltarriba@gmail.com
Social Emotional Technology Lab
UC Santa Cruz
Santa Cruz, CA

Ella Dagan
ella@ucsc.edu
Social Emotional Technology Lab
UC Santa Cruz
Santa Cruz, CA

ABSTRACT

Here we present our Expression of Interest for the "LARPing as an embodied design method" workshop. We begin by describing our background and research interests. We then outline the reasons why we are interested in LARPing as a design research method, and share our insights on why that can be a useful approach. Finally, we describe True Colors, a social wearable we recently developed with and for a LARP community.

KEYWORDS

design methods, LARP, embodied design, social wearables, play

ACM Reference Format:
Ferran Altarriba Bertran and Ella Dagan. 2018. The Magic Circle Inside Out: LARPing to Explore the Future of Social and Emotional Technology. In *DIS '19: ACM Conference on Designing Interactive Systems, June 23–28, 2019, San Diego, CA.* ACM, New York, NY, USA, 4 pages. https://doi.org/10.1145/1122445.1122456

DIS '19, June 23–28, 2019, San Diego, CA

ACM ISBN 978-1-4503-9999-9/18/06…$15.00
https://doi.org/10.1145/1122445.1122456

Figure 1: True Colors wearable is displaying in-game 'Immunity' status.©SET LAB.

Figure 2: Non-wearer player is interacting with the back interface of True Colors wearable of another player.©SET LAB.

AUTHOR'S BACKGROUND

Ferran Altarriba Bertran is a Computational Media PhD student in the Social Emotional Technology Lab at UC Santa Cruz. His research explores the design space of everyday-use playful technologies, with a focus on their social and emotional value. As part of his PhD, Ferran is developing co-design methods to guide the development of playful interventions. Website: www.ferranaltarriba.com.

Ella Dagan is a PhD student in the Social Emotional Technology Lab at UC Santa Cruz. Her research explores wearable and tangible technology and its potential to enhance co-present social experience and relationship building. Previously Ella worked as a fashion designer in Industry and received her Master's from NYU's Interactive Telecommunications Program (ITP). Website: www.elladagan.com.

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Our research agenda is to design future technologies that respond to people's social and emotional needs. We focus on crafting interventions that afford novel and interesting social experiences in a variety of everyday scenarios. Our aim is to explore designerly ways to promote pro-social behaviours, to help people let go and be playful with one another and, more generally, to enjoy moments of togetherness.

To conduct our research, and to advance our design agenda of supporting increasingly social technology-mediated experiences, we are constantly exploring new methods for playful, social, and embodied interaction design. Following recent calls for new methods in Research through Design [5] and Participatory Design [2], we recently proposed the need for increasingly situated methods in play design [1]. We suggested that when designing for situated and emergent play —that is, playful and social interventions addressed at mundane, everyday scenarios other than games—it is important to figure out mechanisms to account for the singularities of users and their context. To do that, we proposed *chasing play potentials* to guide technology design: engaging with users and context to explore already existing manifestations of playful engagement, and building on those as core mechanics of a technology design.

We believe that LARPing can be a fantastic platform for chasing play potentials, as well as for co-creating interventions that support and augment those potentials. Hence, we are excited to join this workshop and discuss strategies to use LARPing as a playful, social and embodied interaction design method. We hope that the workshop will result in interesting strategies that can help advance our and other people's work.

PERSPECTIVES ON LARPING AS A DESIGN RESEARCH METHOD

Drawing on our previous work, we see three main benefits to using LARPing as a design research method: First, studying the rich and diverse kinds of social exchanges that emerge in LARPing events

to *chase play potentials*: looking how LARPers interact with one another in playful and embodied ways, and using that knowledge as design inspiration in early stages of a design process.

Second, leveraging LARPers and LARP designers' sensibility towards crafting and enacting social experiences, including them in the co-creation of social and emotional technology prototypes.

Finally, we also see a huge opportunity for LARPing as a user study technique. LARPs offer a very interesting in-the-wild-but-not-really environment, where both users and the activity are conducive to the testing of new technolgy artefacts. At the same time, researchers cannot predict how players will use and appropriate a prototype, which opens space for the discovery of new avenues for design. As such, LARPs are a fantastic testbed for disruptive technology prototypes—in our experience, trying out a prototype at a LARP event can help researchers identify desirable design and experiential qualities that can inform the design of future technologies in that space.

Overall, using LARPing as a design research method can help designers craft technologies by exploring the magic circle *inside-out*: chasing, augmenting and testing new forms of playful and social engagement in the semi-controlled magic circles of a LARP, and later on translating that knowledge into an artefact that can targets a specific context of everyday life.

CASE STUDY: TRUE COLORS

Here we present True Colors social wearable [3] , inspired by previous works in this space [4]. We intend to bring the prototype to the workshop and use it in the Test-bed Micro-larp Session.

True Colors is Y-shaped, worn around the upper body, and has a front and a back side interface to distinguish between empowering interaction made by the wearer (front), and interaction made by others (back). We designed it in collaboration with Event Horizon, a LARP production team for their Sci-fi game New Gyr which was played in Spring 2018. It has many features, most of which supported the authentic activities players would actually do in the game, but not all had a prescribed use in the game. We were curious to see how, and if, players would appropriate these features. True Colors affords a variety of social interactions, ranging from friendly, to more confrontational. Please see video demonstration: (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBAlV4MCY04feature=youtu.be).

By designing and testing True Colors through engagement with a LARP community, we learned that embracing vulnerability in technology design for games, has the potential to produce a sense of social empowerment and connection. We identified key design components that supported this outcome in [3]. Further, from our analysis of the collected data a few other themes also emerged: (i) players considered the wearable to be 'interactable', it was easy for them to have interacted with, it felt like a 'real' interface to them, and it also supported their interaction with one another (not always directed to the technology); (ii) it supported identity affiliation by signaling to players information about the type of characters that wore it in the game, they were easily visible, made these characters stand out as another kind of people ('othering'), it signaled in-game group affiliation and signaled their

in-game social status; (iii) it enhanced scene building by making scenes more interesting, and players used it to create scenes and improvised around its interactive features; and finally (v) uncontrollable timing, it's had a prominent feature that was triggered based on a timer which created a lot of interesting moments for players. Players referred to this as serendipitous timing that was perfect for the scene/players (but not necessarily for the characters).

We now move forward to apply that knowledge to design new prototypes targeting everyday scenarios (e.g., interaction between colleagues at work in an office).

REFERENCES

[1] Ferran Altarriba Bertran, Elena MÃąrquez Segura, Jared Duval, and Katherine Isbister. 2010. Chasing Play Potentials: Towards an Increasingly Situated and Emergent Approach to Everyday Play Design. In *Proceedings of the ACM Conference on Designing Interactive Systems (DIS '19)*. https://doi.org/10.1145/1858171.1858228

[2] Susanne Bødker and Morten Kyng. 2018. Participatory Design That Matters—Facing the Big Issues. *ACM Trans. Comput.-Hum. Interact.* 25, 1, Article 4 (Feb. 2018), 31 pages. https://doi.org/10.1145/3152421

[3] Ella Dagan, Elena Márquez Segura, Ferran Altarriba Bertran, Miguel Flores, and Katherine Isbister. 2019. Designing 'True Colors': A Social Wearable That Affords Vulnerability. In *Proceedings of the 2019 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '19)*. ACM, New York, NY, USA, Article 33, 14 pages. https://doi.org/10.1145/3290605.3300263

[4] Elena Márquez Segura, James Fey, Ella Dagan, Samvid Niravbhai Jhaveri, Jared Pettitt, Miguel Flores, and Katherine Isbister. 2018. Designing Future Social Wearables with Live Action Role Play (Larp) Designers. In *Proceedings of the 2018 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '18)*. ACM, New York, NY, USA, Article 462, 14 pages. https://doi.org/10.1145/3173574.3174036

[5] John Zimmerman, Erik Stolterman, and Jodi Forlizzi. 2010. An Analysis and Critique of Research Through Design: Towards a Formalization of a Research Approach. In *Proceedings of the 8th ACM Conference on Designing Interactive Systems (DIS '10)*. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 310–319. https://doi.org/10.1145/1858171.1858228