Play in Unconventional Spaces

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ABSTRACT
Playful activities generally occur in defined play spaces. In particular, digital play has traditionally been confined to arcades and living rooms. The advent of recent technologies such as mobile devices allows us to play anywhere. However, the spaces in which we play inform the play experience, yet the relationship between play, technology and unconventional play spaces have received little attention so far. Spaces that afford playfulness are seemingly expanding along with our understanding of play in our culture. As a result, designers are required to rethink where, when and with whom we play when designing playful interactions and experiences. We are proposing a workshop to bring researchers and industry participants together to discuss how to design playful interactions for these expanding unconventional play spaces. The workshop will aim to support the development and understanding of future research, work and collaboration in designing playful interactions for unconventional play spaces.

Author Keywords
Play; unconventional play spaces; magic circle; public; game design.

ACM Classification Keywords
H5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

INTRODUCTION
Playful activities generally occur in defined play spaces and are governed by rules. The act of accepting these rules and stepping into the space of play is sometimes referred to as stepping into the 'magic circle' – the metaphorical space in which play occurs (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003). This magic circle often also denotes a physical space, for example digital play has traditionally been confined to arcades and living rooms. On the other hand, the advent of recent technologies such as mobile devices allows us to play anywhere. However, the spaces in which we play inform the play experience, yet the relationship between play, technology and unconventional play spaces have received little attention so far.

Recent work has designed play for unconventional spaces

such as city streets (Benford et al., 2006), public transport (Wilson & Korsgaard, 2009) and shopping malls (Mueller et al., 2012). The spaces these games are played in may alter the way in which players perceive and experience the space, allowing players to re-discover their surroundings (Montola et al., 2009). Many of these spaces are also shared with other non-players, and being exposed to the public may also add to the play experience as players are performing to those that may be watching. At the same time, the viewers can also be engaged, allowing for observation or even participation (Sheridan & Bryan-Kinns, 2009).

As new and rich spaces for digital play emerge so do design challenges. For example, since these spaces for play may sometimes overlap existing spaces, there can be conflict in the purpose of the space's use. This may cause disruptions, discomfort and awkwardness for those in the space. Amongst other topics, in this workshop we would like to explore these challenges, and investigate how they can be treated not as challenges but as design opportunities.

DESCRIPTION AND GOALS
The workshop will provide an opportunity to explore and discuss the contribution that existing research fields and topics can make to designing playful interactions for unconventional play spaces. The goals of the workshop are:

- To provide a space for an exchange of ideas about play, games, and designing interactions that revolve around unconventional play spaces

- To gain a broad understanding of the issues and potential challenges faced when considering unconventional play spaces as a design space for playful interactions

- To raise awareness and appreciation of digital games and playful interactions in unconventional play spaces

Topics and questions that could be addressed within the context of playful interactions in unconventional play spaces include but are not limited to:

- The role and significance of space in regards to play in our culture and society

- How to design playful interactions that do not intrude non-players' spaces, and if they do, how to use it as a design opportunity

- How to design playful interactions that incorporate, invite or engage non-players

- How to deal with ethical issues when designing for unconventional play spaces
- How to design and evaluate playful interactions in unconventional play spaces
- The role of technology in unconventional play spaces

PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE

The workshop will be restricted to participants whose position paper has been accepted by the workshop convenors. The workshop will commence with a short playful icebreaker activity as an example of play in an unconventional play space. This will be followed by short introductions and presentations, and finally followed by discussion. The final program for the day will depend on the contributions received but there will be 4 themed 60-minute sessions, each of which will consist of 3 10-minute presentations with 30 minutes of discussion led by assigned discussants. There will then be a final discussion session that will identify themes that have emerged during the day and plan for further collaboration. In the evening an informal meal will be organized to give the participants the opportunity to network and facilitate future cooperation.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Prospective participants must submit a paper of 4 pages max. expressing research interest and relevant related work in this area. The paper must be formatted using the two-column OZCHI proceedings template: http://www.ozchi.org/cfp/cfp.html.

Submissions should be sent directly to the organisers (chad@exertiongameslab.org). Note that participants must register for the conference. Position papers will be selected on the basis of their relevance, quality and ability to stimulate discussion. The intended audience is both researchers and practitioners working with or interested in the topic.

IMPORTANT DATES

Deadline for submissions: 3rd September, 2012

Notification to authors: 1st October, 2012

Camera-ready copy: 12th October, 2012 (for inclusion on conference memory stick)

Workshop: 26th November, 2012

ABOUT THE ORGANISERS

Cagdas 'Chad' Toprak is a student at RMIT University's Exertion Games Lab in Melbourne, Australia, and specializes in game design. Chad has participated in rapid game development and long-term projects ranging from mobile apps to research games. Chad has been actively participating in projects and activities hosted by RMIT and the Exertion Games Lab, some of which have been exhibited at leading international academic conferences.

Florian 'Floyd' Mueller directs the Exertion Games Lab at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. The Exertion Games Lab researches the future of gaming in order to understand how to design better interactive experiences, in particular games that require intense physical effort from players. His work has brought digital play to unconventional spaces such as basketball courts, running tracks and bicycles.

CONCLUSION

As we expand our understanding of play in our culture a need to consider and discuss the spaces they are played in arises. With the advent of recent technologies, digital play can occur in an expanding range of possible spaces. However, how technology, space and digital play are interconnected has only been explored to a limited extent so far. As such, designers are required to rethink where, when and with whom we play when designing playful interactions and experiences. We are proposing a workshop to bring researchers and industry participants together to discuss how to design playful interactions for these expanding unconventional play spaces. We allow for a forum that exclusively focuses on this topic and will allow for an excellent networking opportunity, which may result in new collaborative projects and a promotion of the field through conceptual papers and book chapters on this topic. The workshop aims to support the development and understanding of future research and work in designing playful interactions for unconventional play spaces.

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