Chasing Play Potentials in Food Culture: Embracing Children's Perspectives

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Abstract

In this one-day workshop, we will explore how food related culture and traditions can guide the design of playful technologies and experiences. Using food as an accessible starting point, we aim to bring together a diverse set of participants in order to share and make creative use of playful traditions and food stuffs through hands-on prototyping, play and discussion. At the end of the day we expect to further advance our methodological inquiry with insights on how children's natural affinity to play can be leveraged in co-design explorations aimed at chasing play potentials in foods and food related practices as well as expand the repository of play-food potentials we have been curating for the past months. Overall the workshop will contribute to enriching the set of tools available for designers interested in play and technologies for everyday use, in and beyond the food domain.

Author Keywords

Play; Culture; Food; Situated Play Design; Participatory Research through Design; Human-Food Interaction.

CSS Concepts

• Human-centered computing~HCI theory, concepts and models

Introduction

"Play is the space within which we experience the world above and beyond utility" [17]. Food invites play: play with flavours, textures and appearance; play as part of the preparation, delivery and presentation; play as part of the act of eating and drinking; and more. Thus, the consumption of food is far more than a utilitarian act—food nourishes the soul as much as it feeds the body.
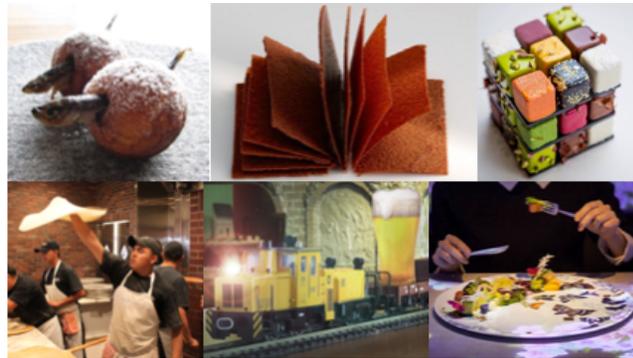

Figure 1: Examples of play with: flavour, texture[1], appearance, preparation, delivery and presentation[2].

Conversely, the consumption of food and drink is bound and regulated by social and cultural norms [19] which at times are in conflict with the notions of play [6]. This is starkly exemplified by the old exhortation to children not to play with their food [12], so as not to waste precious food or time. Thus, outside of the playful flair exhibited by cooks, hosts, and waiters, or where it has become part of tradition (e.g. hiding the Afikoman during a Passover dinner [18]), playing with food has

[1] Mugaritz, Photo by José Luis López de Zubiría.

[2] MoonFlower Sagaya Ginza, Art by teamLab

traditionally been constrained to the (hidden) margins where boundaries are broken, such as the feeding of small children [14] (e.g. "here comes the aeroplane") and parties.

This inherent tension between play and cultural norms in the consumption of food provides a lens through which we can explore the interaction between humans and artefacts (be they the product of technology or not) as well as address the health and nutrition challenges associated with the consumption of food.

In particular, in this workshop we will focus on children's eating practices, where parents face the intertwined challenges of: getting their children to eat at meal times; engaging them with a variety of foods so that they learn to enjoy and appreciate their properties and values; conveying to them the complex set of social norms and cultural traditions that surround the dinner table.

The rituals surrounding the consumption of food [19], the role of food in popular culture [15] and the nature and culture of play [6,10] have long been the subject of study. However, as playing with food has long been a taboo, its study has also been shunned. For the same reason, few elements have been specifically designed to support playing with food. The few examples that exist are limited to: cutlery for the feeding of children; moulds and cutters that shape food in playful ways; and toys that either dispense candy, such as the PEZ dispenser, or are encapsulated in candy like the kinder egg, thus reflecting the marginal nature of the activity.

Figure 2: Examples of playful utensils and moulds, a Kinder egg and a PEZ[3] dispenser.

The advent of digital technology has not bypassed the preparation and consumption of food and has led to the rise of research in Human Food Interaction (HFI) [2,11] and to novel explorations of playing with food and augmenting dining experiences (e.g. [4,5,8,13]). Despite the great diversity and innovation exhibited in these various approaches and applications the majority do not utilize food itself as an element of play [4]. More importantly, those that do, do so in the established paths of the culinary arts and game design, in which the cook continues to play with the flavour, texture and presentation of the food albeit with the addition of

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digital technology and the game designer starts using real apples, straws and chocolates but continues to relate to them as symbolic tokens instead of making use of their inherent potential for play [4].

We believe that much remains hidden in the myriad of playful personal habits, family practices and cultural traditions that have remained largely unexplored. Furthermore, we believe these insights hold a large and untapped potential for the design and development of new forms of culinary experiences, as well as compelling interventions geared towards addressing the feeding, nutrition and other challenges faced by children and adults. In this workshop we aim to uncover that potential, exploring how culturally-grounded play-food can inform the future of Human-Food Interaction design.

Aim and methodology

Our aim is to explore the personal and cultural practices and traditions surrounding the preparation and consumption of food as a means of unravelling the untapped play potential of various cooking and dining practices. The workshop we are proposing is part of a series of initiatives that explore this space. We began exploring the playful personal and cultural practices and traditions surrounding the preparation and consumption of food at a workshop we conducted at the 2019 Human Computer Interaction in Play (CHIPlay) Conference [1]. We invited interaction and play designers to share examples of playful food traditions from their own cultural backgrounds, which we then played with and analyzed to uncover their "play potentials", i.e. "existing playful dynamics that are already meaningful in context" and thus can be used "as a starting point for designing for situated and

emergent playful engagement" [3]. We have since conducted two additional workshops, one at the 2019 Animal Computer Interaction Conference (ACI) [7], in which we sought examples from researchers working with non-human animals, and another in the 2019 International Food Design and Food Studies Conference (EFOOD) [9] where we explored the intersection between play, food, and culture with chefs and food designers. Though they brought together different types of stakeholders with different perspectives and professional interests, all those workshops involved, and focused on, adults. Here we propose to turn to children and their natural inclination to play to expand the palette of play experiences and sensitivities embraced by our research.

Our aim in this workshop is twofold: First, we want to further advance our methodological inquiry of how the notion of chasing play potentials [3] in culture and traditions can serve as a source of inspiration for playful technology design. Here, in particular, we will focus on how children's natural affinity to play can be leveraged in co-design explorations such as FUBI [16] aimed at chasing play potentials in foods and food related practices. Second, by analyzing and playing with playful food traditions provided by the participants from their own lived experiences, we intend to expand the repository of play-food potentials that we initiated at CHI Play '19 and EFOOD '19, in this case with a focus on children-oriented play forms.

To respond to those aims, in this workshop we will unpack and make designerly use of cultural manifestations of play to inspire technology design. Over the course of a day, we will use diverse hands-on co-creative activities to share and analyse playful,

culturally situated food traditions, and creatively experiment with edible and inedible materials to create novel and interesting play-food experiences. We will identify strategies to reflect on the socio-cultural and ethical implications of making design use of cultural play, e.g. how to ensure cultural sensitivity and ownership, and how to avoid over-simplification, stigma and stereotype. We will explore mechanisms through which ideas can be vetted by people from the culture of inspiration and promote discussion of how to avoid distortions in culturally-grounded play design. We will also discuss the ways in which children can be involved in, and even lead, activities aimed at chasing play.

We believe the workshop will be of interest to any scholar interested in designing situated games, play, and playful interventions, regardless of experience with or specific interest in food-related research. Given IDC long-standing commitment to play, games, and design for children we see it as the ideal venue for the continuation of this exploration.

Structure
Our original plan was to hold a full day workshop in London in which participants would have presented their playful food traditions and formed small groups to analyse them using experimental food design methods in the morning. While, in the afternoon, we planned on designing and prototyping new play-food experiences inspired by the play potentials identified during the morning session as well as discussing how playing with culture can inspire technology design.

Due to the global corona virus (Covid-19) pandemic and the virtualization of the conference we have modified the structure of the workshop to address the

challenges posed by the virtual nature of the conference, the vagaries of time zones and the limitations of working from home. The workshop will have the following structure:

1. Two weeks before the day of the workshop we will send participants a video welcome message and set of instructions in which they will be asked to describe their playful food tradition in a short video and complete a set of design prototypes based on a number of play potentials

2. The produced videos will be shared with all participants

3. On the day of the workshop we will have one or more (depending on the vagaries of time zones and participant availability) video conference sessions to discuss the outcomes of the design prototypes, the ways in which playing with culture can inspire technology design and our plans for future work.

Pre-Workshop Plans
We aim to recruit a diverse range of participants by promoting the workshop on a dedicated website, relevant mailing lists and social media sites, as well as harnessing our extensive network of connections. Prospective participants will be asked to submit a position paper in which they will outline: 1. examples of (playful) food traditions involving children and experienced within the context of their family, culture or community; 2. thoughts on how food and cultural play can inspire play design for children; 3. strategies they have used to source inspiration in cultural play; 4. Their time zone and other logistical information that would help us in planning the videoconference sessions.

Proposals will be selected based on originality and relevance to workshop themes, and to ensure a diverse pool of participants.

Post-Workshop Plans
The main goal of the workshop is to explore strategies to chase play in culture to inspire technology design. To that end, our objective is to produce a methods paper that presents and extends the workshop discussions, proposing strategies to identify, unpack and make design use of cultural play. We have started the process with the workshops held as part of CHI Play 2019 [1], ACI 2019 [7], and EFOOD 2019 [9] conferences and aim to continue the process during IDC 2020 and other events. A pictorial publication reflecting the adult-focused insights gleaned during the CHI Play 2019 conference is currently under review for the DIS 2020 conference. As noted above, we aim to produce a more comprehensive analysis that builds on the findings from the IDC 2020 workshop to include children-oriented play forms as well.

Organizers
Yoram Chisik is an independent researcher based in Haifa, Israel and a lecturer at the Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences in Kamp-Lintfort, Germany. His research explores the nature and meaning of technological interactions in the digital age.

Ferran Altarriba Bertran is a PhD student at University of California Santa Cruz. His research explores the design space of everyday-use playful technologies, with a focus on their social and emotional value. ferranaltarriba.com

Marie-Monique Schaper is an interaction designer and a post-doctoral researcher at the Information and Communication Technologies Department of Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain. She focuses on merging playful technologies and design research in different disciplines of interaction and is specifically interested in the exploration of novel strategies for embodied design techniques for children.

Elena Márquez Segura is a Distinguished Research Fellow at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Spain. Elena designs and researches in the domain of movement-based co-located social play. She specializes in embodied design methods that can serve in different stages of the design process.

Laia Turmo Vidal is a PhD candidate in Interaction Design and HCI at Uppsala University, Sweden. In her PhD research, she investigates how to support movement learning processes in fitness activities through interactive technology. Her research interests include embodied design, co-operative social computing and play.

Danielle Wilde is associate professor of Embodied Design at the University of Southern Denmark. She leads critical participatory design research in food and climate futures, social and ecological sustainability, engaging with wicked problems that cut cross disciplines and cultures to rethink practices, policies and technologies through a bottom-up approach. www.daniellewilde.com

Call for Participation

In this one-day workshop, we will explore how food related culture and traditions can guide the design of playful technologies and experiences for children. Using food as an accessible starting point, we aim to bring together a diverse set of participants in order to share and make creative use of playful traditions involving children and food stuffs through hands-on prototyping, play and discussion. Participants need not be culinary experts as we seek to draw on their personal experiences and cultural traditions. Prospective participants should submit a position paper via email to ychisik@gmail.com outlining the following: 1. examples of (playful) food traditions from their family, culture or community; 2. thoughts on how food and cultural play can inspire play design; 3. strategies (if any) they have used to source inspiration in cultural play; 4. Time zone and other pertinent information that would help us in planning the workshop and supporting the planned activities. Proposals will be selected based on originality and relevance to workshop themes, as well as to ensure a diverse pool of participants. At least one author of each accepted position paper must attend the workshop and pay the applicable IDC 2020 registration fee. Further information about the workshop can be found at: https://playandculture.food.blog

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