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post mortem interaction: social play modes in momentum

Abstract

Prosopopeia Bardo 2: Momentum was a five-week larp featuring double-layered character model. Every player was expected to larp a diegetic copy of himself, and the spirit of a deceased revolutionary possessing the diegetic larper. The combination of these twin roles, long game duration and a design where players had to interact with non-players lead into interesting types of social interaction in the game. In this paper we describe how the players experienced some of the various play modes provided, and introduce a model for interaction modes in pervasive larps.

Introduction

Prosopopeia Bardo 2: Momentum was a pervasive larp organized as part of an EU-funded research project into pervasive gaming (IPerG) that lasted for five weeks in Stockholm in October and November of 2006¹. Much of the game was played on the streets of the city, and thus the participants interacted with a lot of bystanders. This paper concentrates on the different modes of play that players participated in with each other and with non-players.

Creating player/non-player interaction had been one of the design goals of *Momentum*. The goal

had been to break the magic circle of gameplay², drawing outsiders into the game. In comparison to regular games that are played by certain people at a certain time in a certain location (think *Monopoly*), pervasive games can expand in spatial, temporal and social manner (Montola 2005). The aim on *Momentum* was to employ all three dimensions of expansion. In this article we will concentrate on the social aspect. In a nutshell, the game sought to blur the distinction between players and non-players.

Momentum also employed a number of methods developed in the field of Alternate Reality Gaming (ARG) (see e.g. Szulborski 2005).³ Namely, the game was framed as reality. After the first workshop, where game mechanics and the theme were explained for the participants, the *seamless* phase of the game started, where the seam between game and ordinary life was obfuscated: the game was officially cancelled and the players were told that everything would be real instead of being a part of a game. As one player reported⁴:

The game started for me on Sunday the 30th October when the boys from SICS told us that they had been forced to leave their premises in Kista and that the funding of the project was in great jeo-

pardy. That was when I first took the leap of faith that has been discussed. I chose to accept that the events they were referring to actually had happened. (player post-game interview, email)

The seamlessness was achieved through a number of methods (such as indexical propping, see Montola & Jonsson 2006), but from the point of view of the players the most important aspect was the *Prosopopeia protocol*.

Explicitly the Prosopopeia protocol means that the participants are supposed to “play the game as if it was real”. Implicitly it also meant that content that could be generally interpreted as ludic should be interpreted as real. Whenever players encountered something that *could* be interpreted as supernatural, magical or occult in nature, then that *would* be the correct (“real”) interpretation.

Another feature of *Momentum* was the *possession model* of role taking. As the seamlessness of the game lasted for five weeks and the participants were supposed to be able to also work, study and carry on with their everyday life during the game, it was important to use an immersion model that supported this. Basically it means that the participants role-play two parts, themselves and the character. The player was then able to choose which one to play at a given moment. This meant that the character could be pushed to the back of the head when working at the office. The possession model was first introduced in *Prosopopeia Bardo 1: Där vi föll*⁵ (see Montola & Jonsson 2006), and revised for *Momentum*.

Together the seamlessness, the possession model, the extremely long duration and the Prosopopeia protocol created a basis for a number of interesting modes of interaction. In this paper we divide the interaction modes into four groups and look at how they work. The findings presented in this paper are based on ethnography (participant observation the players were not aware of) as well as numerous email

and face-to-face interviews conducted during and after the game.

Playing with Other Players

The most common way of interacting in a larp is with other players. This character-to-character interaction within the diegetic⁶ game world is the core of a role-playing game. In *Momentum* the game world was the everyday world with the addition of certain magical and occult ingredients, but basically the game world was built on real world history.

The character-to-character interaction was complicated by the fact that all players played two characters, a carbon copy of themselves in a magical world (the host) and the dead revolutionary possessing them (the spirit). In the beginning the host was almost identical to the everyday self of the participant (the player). The only real difference was that the player was playing a game and that the host believed in, or at least was receptive to the existence of, supernatural phenomena. Yet, as the game progressed and the hosts had strong supernatural experiences the difference between the host and the player grew.

Thus the character-to-character interactions could be further divided to host-to-host, host-to-spirit, spirit-to-host and spirit-to-spirit interactions. All of these are characters, of course, but they felt different. Especially those players who had a background in larp sometimes felt that playing the host was almost like stepping out of the game, off-gaming, and thus interpreted the spirit-to-host interaction as non-diegetic.⁷ This was mostly due to the lack of clear instructions on how the possessing spirit was supposed to be played. In *Momentum* the game organizers had left that up to the participants and some of them aimed at playing the spirit as much as they could, some played the two characters equally and some constructed an amalgam of the two characters.

As the Momentum guidelines suggested: Always assume that people are possessed, so this I do, or

at least I assume they are playing their vessels [aka hosts]. So I approach players with the name of the guest [...] and with their own name, if I know that they are their vessels right now. If I need to talk to their guest [aka spirit] I just ask if they can try to call for their guest, and it has worked out just fine. I speak some English and try to change my body language and behaviour when being [possessed], to make it easier for others players to see whom they are talking to. (player post-game interview, email)

Most players followed the Prosopopeia protocol completely and did not talk about the game as a game. Some used the opportunity offered by the possession model to talk about the events of the game as the hosts, thus discussing the game on a meta-level even if they never explicitly articulated the ludic nature of the game.

The word “prosopopeia” did not exist in the game-world. Instead it was the safe word that could be used to step out of the-reality-that-is-the game into the everyday world. The word was used a few times during the game, mostly to check that the players who were playing very intensively were not hurt when their characters were, and to convey meta-information. These occurrences were very rare and many players played the whole five weeks without ever hearing the safe word.

Some players talked about the game as a game with other participants, but only with people they knew in advance, people they knew wouldn't mind the off-game discussion and people that they trusted. Also, some people talked with the controllers and game masters.

Yes, I broke the proposal *two times during the five weeks*, once to check if [another player] really was okay and wasn't being mind-raped by [her spirit] and once to have an open conversation with my girlfriend. (player post-game interview, email)

I was called once by [a game master] and I called

[him] once to discuss [game events]. It was OK, but I felt uneasy. It really broke the illusion and *it took a day or two to get it back*. (player post-game interview, email)

The players had a special kind on relationship to one NPC that was played by one of the game masters. This NPC showed up during the first week to instruct the players. He was basically there to disseminate information. Many players saw this character for what he really was, a game mechanic. Some even compared him to the mentors encountered in digital games. This was a strategy consciously chosen by the game masters (jokingly called the *tutorial mode*). Most players regarded this NPC as a guide who could and indeed should be milked for information. Very seldom was any of the information given by him questioned, mostly because he was played by a game master and because he filled the stereotypical mentor role.

Adam talked a lot, and we asked a lot, and I don't believe we understood half of what he said, and I don't think we remembered more than 25 % of what he said, but still, it was okay. He talked a lot, yes. He could've been more efficient at this, but still, it's not as (-) a seminar, there's no need to be efficient. If Adam is a character that is inefficient, he's inefficient, it's not a problem. Okay, you can get irritated at him, so what, it's in-game. (player post-game interview)

Playing Alone

One of the most interesting elements of game play in *Momentum* was the emergent *selfplay*. Many participants reported that they had gone through a number of meaningful “interactions” with themselves. As the host and the spirit occupied the same physical body for a long while, after the game had been running for some time the differences between these two personas started to demand addressing. This inner conflict lead to a number of cases where the host and the spirit carried a conversation or even fought outright.

One player reported that the spirit carried out a ritual to rob the host of all willpower. Another told that the two personas were only able to communicate through writing and thus she wrote long discussions were the handwriting would change as a different persona took over. A third player engaged in a shouting match with himself alone in his apartment after the vegetarian spirit protested the use of eggs in pancakes and so forth.

And one of the funniest things I think during this whole thing was, because I was vegetarian for one month, and one evening I came home very late, and wanted to do some pancakes, and I used some eggs, and my [spirit] didn't like that, so I was actually screaming at myself in my apartment. I knew that nobody would have really seen it or listened, but I was screaming at myself and arguing with myself and even throwing the egg shells on the floor and stuff like that, and it was. Of course it was part of the game, and afterwards I know that it didn't much [matter] for anybody else, but for myself to keep the feeling that I really was two persons, and it helped me. (player post-game interview)

Again, the possession model that could be interpreted in a number of ways, created the stage for these "interactions". Basically this meant, that suddenly it only "took one to tango", showing that some forms of role-playing alone are possible and make sense to the players.

Role-playing alone has been a widely debated question on the email lists and conventions of Nordic role-players for years. *Helsinki FTZ* (by Panu Alku), an early street larp played in Finland in 1997, created debate about the possibility of playing alone while out on the town. *Helsinki FTZ* was a spatially (and thus socially) expanded larp before the term was invented, and in this context playing alone meant playing with non-players. If a character goes shopping for clothes for two hours, is he playing or not? Is the player role-playing alone when interacting with the clerk? Now, ten years later, interaction with non-players is not seen as playing alone.

In the discussion that followed the publication of *The Manifesto of the Turku School* (Pohjola 2000) the proponents of immersionist play declared that it was possible to role-play alone in a closet even if there was no interaction with the rest of the game world. Many recent definitions and descriptions of role-playing are based on a process involving at least two participants (Fatland and Wingård 2003, Mackay 2003, Hakkarainen & Stenros 2003, Montola 2007 in this book), and thus playing alone (without even a potential co-player or a gamemaster) has been branded as not being role-playing.

The problem has been how to distinguish between daydreaming and role-playing.

I spent the first night, around 10 hours, meditating together with my spirit to get to know her, and for her to get to know me. I knew quite well how she would like me to act and she knew my preferences. We weren't always acting accordingly. (player post-game interview, email)

It is impossible to draw that line based on *Momentum*, but it is evident that selfplay is something that does happen, something that the participants interpret as part of the game and something that can be supported with the right game design decisions. However, in order for the selfplay to be "meaningful", the context that the game provides is needed. That is, self-play is daydreaming that becomes meaningful in, and because of, and adds to the meaning of, the game context of which it is part. The game is what enables the interpretation and assigning of meaning in selfplay. Even though the players were alone at the time, the collectively constructed game world was present for them. Also, the players knew that they would later interact with other players and the events that took place during selfplay could be relevant.

Playing with Friends and Relatives

The third mode of interactions happened when participants interacted with people who were not part of

the game but who already had a personal relationship with the participant. Roughly this meant playing with friends, relatives and workmates.

The most common way of interacting with friends was to use the Prosopopeia proposal and talk about the game as if it was real. What separates the friends of the participants from strangers is that most of these people knew that the players were going to participate in a game as it had been discussed in advance. Thus they could have a winking relationship to the game, pretending along with the players that the game was real. They pretended to take it seriously while the game was running as they knew it would end at some point. However, some people really disliked the way the game affected the players. For example a girlfriend of a player threatened to end the relationship if the player continued to refuse to acknowledge her.

Avoidance of the people not related with the game or avoidance of the subject of the game was another strategy that was often adopted. Some players effectively cut down their interaction with friends and relatives during the game. They said that they are involved in a project that they couldn't really talk about and that they were willing to talk about it afterwards. Others simply refused to discuss the subject of the game. They said that did not feel comfortable talking about it "in these terms" (as a game) yet and that after the game they would talk about it. Some also referred to the game as a game as that was an excuse that the players were instructed to use when talking with outsiders. The game was real to the players but they could pretend that it was a game.

I tried to keep my family and friends out of the game. But this proved difficult, since they started to worry, and ask questions about what I was doing, and why I never was at home. After a while I came up with the perfect lie: Its all just a game. Although my game-self didn't believe it, it was a very good, and seamless, way to relieve others. (player post-game interview, email)

A few players also decided to break the Prosopopeia protocol with certain people. Mothers, best friends and people distant enough from Stockholm larping scene were mentioned as example of people that players talked with outside the game context. Some felt that they wanted to get away from the game and do so with people they cared about, others said that they felt that it would be dishonest and disrespectful toward people they cared about to pretend that the game was real. In all cases the players insist that the people they decided to break the Prosopopeia proposal with were carefully selected.

I only broke [the proposal] while discussing with people that either were part of the game master team or with non-participating friends wanting to discuss the game as a game. (player post-game interview, email)

I felt a need to talk about it and my feelings and such involving the game. So I talked to my boyfriend. And felt that it was necessary to do that. Otherwise I wouldn't have been able to play normally for such a long time. (player post-game interview, email)

Playing with Strangers

As the larp was played in Stockholm, the players would frequently encounter people who did not belong to either the player group or the game masters. On some occasions, the game masters had staged such meetings; for example, one of the player groups was instructed to meet up with a nurse at a hospital. On this occasion, the woman they met was a specially instructed player who did not actually work as a nurse in the hospital. On another occasion, the players met up with a gallery owner, who was supposed to hand out a painting to them. By contrast, this gallery owner was authentic and, although given a specific task, had no information about the ongoing game. Finally, the players would frequently need to interact with complete outsiders, e.g. to buy food, ask for directions, etc.

The reason why the game design included all these modes of interaction was to implement a tight integration between the real world and the game world. The Prosopopeia proposal provides an adequate framework to interact with all outsiders in a consistent manner. Rather than deciding if an outsider is part of the game or not, a player decides how much of the ‘truth’ that an outsider needs to know and he can be told. However, in practice many players tried to second-guess the status of the people encountered during the game. Were they complete outsiders, or specially instructed by the game masters? Many players showed a willingness to act out much more with the people that they assumed to be plants deployed by game masters. They would also be quite quick in assuming that the plants already knew much of the story context and uncritically relate it to them. The most critical side-effect was that the players treated assumed plants with different morals compared to outsiders – as an example, a character might be willing to steal from a plant (as a part of the game), but not from an outsider.

This is perhaps the most obvious way in which seamlessness failed to manifest in the game, and against what the game masters had intended. It is important to note that the players did not always guess right; they probably were able to spot almost all fully informed plants, but sometimes bystanders were thought to be NPC:s.

From the outsider point of view, there are three rough levels of game engagement. In the unaware state the game around the outsider goes unnoticed or is interpreted as ordinary everyday events. In the ambiguous state the outsider suspects that something is going on, but what is happening is uncertain. Finally the outsiders can enter the conscious state, where the game context is entirely accessible. (See Montola & Waern 2006.)

Momentum was a game that invited the outsiders to participate in unconscious and ambiguous fashions.

Unconscious interaction happens for example when players go shopping during the game – the clerk hardly realises that someone is shopping as a part of the game; the player appears as just another customer, even if for the player the interaction might be very meaningful.

I was dressed as [my spirit, who is] a transvestite – maked up and wearing a wig. The time was after 01.00 Friday night and I was looking for a cab. When I jumped in the driver gave me the girl-rate (it is a lower rate for girls during night time). It took maybe 5 minutes before he recognized that I was a transvestite. It was difficult for him to handle in the very first – but in the end he opened his heart and started telling me some personal problems. A reality moment. (player post-game interview, email)

Creating ambiguous interactions was one of the aims of *Momentum*, and that happened a lot during the game. At numerous times the players did things in the public sphere that was difficult to understand in the context of everyday life. It is difficult to evaluate how these events influenced or were interpreted by the bystanders, because most of the time they cannot be tracked down after the scene has ended.

At one point the game took the players to an art gallery. The game masters had planted a painting in the exhibition without telling that the proprietors that the picture would be a prop in a role-playing game. The gallery had only been instructed to “give out the painting to someone who really wanted it”. The next day a number of players showed up to look at and ask about the painting. When introducing themselves they gave the names of their characters. After awhile the people at the gallery started suspecting that something odd was happening and they started not only writing down the names of the people interested in the painting, but to also googling them – effectively starting to play a game of their own.

I tried to look up Ingela [the person credited for creating the painting], and I couldn't find anything except she was mentioned in like a blog. They were [also] talking about a journalist that was killed, [...] they mentioned her name there. And it seemed to be like about all these conspiracy theories and all of these UFO's and all that, so I was like, it was intriguing that these were the people that they were doing. [...] It was definitely something to do that day, yeah. (gallery worker in a pair interview)

When they were interviewed a few days later and the ludic nature of the events was disclosed, they reported that the ambiguity of not knowing what was happening had been fun and that the experience had been a positive one. When asked if they would like to continue to participating in the game after they had been informed that it was a game, they declined:

I don't know if that would work, because it's funnier when you don't know. Cos if you know, then... That wouldn't be fun. (gallery worker in a pair interview)

This was exactly the kind of social expansion the game masters had wished to create. Yet it is probable that the fact that the people had background in arts made them more receptive to weird artistic events. Still, the occurrence shows that the kind of positive social expansion often sought after in pervasive games is possible to achieve.

- 1: Yeah, it wasn't upsetting enough to feel like an invasion. Looking back, it doesn't, it didn't matter at all really. If they had played a different prank with someone more, something more serious, but maybe that would've been. But now, I still don't think that was [an invasion].
- 2: They could've taken it even farther I think, like it ended kind alike oop, okay, I guess it's just over now. Like they're not gonna come back, like no-one's come in angry like where is the thing!
- 1: Yeah, once we started to feel it was a game, we

kinda, we were waiting for like..

2: We were ready.

1: Maybe like a big polar bear walking in! You know, like something. [laughs] (gallery workers in a pair interview)

Whether *Momentum* invited any outsiders to participate on the conscious level, interacting with the game as if it was a game, remains up to debate. No outsider was really provided the entire ludic context (except some friends and relatives), but many players lied (inside Prosopopeia protocol) to outsiders that their actions were parts of some game. The point of this lying (which was a lie in the game, but truth in the ordinary world) was more to get rid of the outsiders rather than to invite them further into the game: Telling that something was just a part of a game erased the curiosity-inspiring ambiguity drawing some outsiders towards the game.

In *Momentum* the ambiguity of division between game and ordinary life was a major source of enjoyment. This seems to be a major source of enjoyment in many other pervasive games as well (see for example McGonigal 2003, Szulborski 2005 and Pettersson 2006), and bears repeating as one of the central attractive properties of the form.

Playing in Public

Even though playing in public is technically playing with strangers, it's differentiated here because it's a very specific way of playing with others. With public play we mean the scenes of *Momentum* where players entered the public space and their performative gaming attracted audiences. The rituals staged by players were a central form of performative gaming, but during the game the players were also expected to stage a demonstration through downtown to honour the dead, and to run a party where they could invite their friends. (See for example Benford et al. 2006).

The game served as an empowering mechanism for redefining the rules for the environment; the players

could use the game as an excuse to act against social expectations and conventions. One player reported the following.

When acting among bystanders I realized how assimilated I had become to the alternate reality of Momentum. When I performed the ritual at Olof Palmes gata, I just thought that the bystanders were weird, because they didn't understand the importance of my work. It didn't really occur to me that I was the strange one. (player post-game interview, email)

In some ways the climax of the game was the demonstration for the dead, staged by the players on the last Saturday. The game masters only provided the players with the information that police had been notified of the demo, but the details were left for the players to sort out. In the end they paraded through the downtown with torches, escorted by the police.

Observed from a distance, the parade and the subsequent player ceremony displayed the typical signs of slightly embarrassing outdoors performance; as an observer commented, "you could almost see the magic circle" due to players being in a round, introvert formation facing in the middle. This reinforced the observation from the first *Prosopopeia* game where the players tended to move in groups, in order to establish a zone for role-playing in order to both reinforce the illusion of role-playing and to cope with the social pressure of engaging in performative play in public.

The demonstration was escorted by several police vehicles. On the one hand this helped to integrate the game into everyday life. On the other hand it strengthened the magic circle by creating a boundary for the ritualistic space where (carnivalistic) demonstrations are held. Still, the players did actively interact with the passers-by, at least when they wandered within the zone of play, clearly approaching the demonstration or the ceremonial circle.

Pohjola (2004) applies Hakim Bey's concept of *temporary autonomous zone* to larp, claiming that the fictitious realities created in role-playing serve as a structure that has the potential to empower and enable the players to "comment on real-life societies and even change them".

At other times bypassers were stopped by player activities and were wondering them aloud. Some rituals were conducted in central places during party nights. People who were going home from a bar stopped to look at and something talk with the players who were "cleansing the place of mammon" or "commemorating the triumph of green activists".

Occasionally the actions of the players were also interpreted as dangerous. One of the ritual demonstrations staged by the players took place in the front of the US embassy. The techno-magical equipment used by the players caught the attention of the police, who showed up with a riot vehicle.⁸ The players explained that they were performing a perfectly legal ritual of symbolic resistance as part of a game, and the police could do nothing about it.

[The police] came with, you know, a whole strike force, you know, these buses, it was a full bus, but only the two people in the front came out, because the other, they were suddenly in there prepared with submachine guns and everything, in the car. [...] And, and they came out with you know their hands on the guns and walked up to us [...] [T]hey were really jumpy, and they started to explain that this is a game, and of course that was the easiest explanation. It, we didn't break the *Prosopopeia* proposal, but we explained it to the cops that this is a game, because it's an easy thing to say. (player post-game interview)

This incident serves as an interesting example on how ambiguous playing is culture-dependent: Mc-Gonigal (2006) reports an incident from Ravenna, Ohio, where *Super Mario* –style yellow blocks were

distributed in urban areas as a part of an art project in spring 2006. According to McGonigal the 17 yellow Mario-themed box installations lead into bomb squads being called and subsequently into criminal investigation. “Five teenage girls from Portage County face potential criminal charges after attempting to play a real-life version of *Super Mario Brothers*”, McGonigal quotes the local news. Obviously, what is doable and acceptable in Stockholm and Ravenna is very different. The police in Stockholm was also aware of this:

So I started to explain [to the police] our equipment [which had piqued the guards’ interest]. And they were like, you can be shot for having one of these things. *In Israel you would’ve been dead by now*. Yeah, sure, I think you have watched too many movies, that was the thought in my head at least. (player post-game interview)

The Prosopopeia Proposal and Seamlessness

As discussed above, the players were not primarily guided by the Prosopopeia proposal, “play the game as if it was real”, in their interaction with outsiders. Similar behaviour occurred with their play in the environment.

There are a couple of reasons why this happened. One reason was that there were some very obvious plants in the game that were exposed very early. A couple of players ‘died’ during the first weekend, and one traitor was discovered within the player group. One group of plants, the ‘Kerberos guards’ followed the players throughout the game, imposing a threat to capture them and dispel their spirits. Thus, the players were well aware of the existence of plants.

The interaction with the real world was influenced by similar design choices. Not only were the headquarters of the game a pure game arena, complete with extensive propping, but several of the tasks set out in the real world required the players to interact with specially propped diegetic artefacts. On one

occasion, the players had to seek out and destroy a set of magical antennas. To avoid the risk of players destroying real antennas, the objects to destroy were clearly marked as ‘game props’. On one occasion, the players entered a church to retrieve water from the baptismal font. Again, the fact that the church was open and that there was small glass bottle made them conclude that the scene had been prepared for them (in collaboration with the local staff).

One player reported on a specific interaction with the game master, which made him select a ‘reality as a backdrop’ approach to the whole game. During the first weekend, his subgroup formed a plan to enter a subway train and rob it of all advertisement. Since one of the game masters were participating during this weekend, he informed the game master about the plans and got feedback that made him interpret this as unsuitable within the game.

[W]hen [a game master played NPC] came in and said we shall not use reality in this game, we shall have reality in the background, playing as [backdrop], scenery. And that was.. I, I’m not disappointed, but I’m sad that happened, because I think I would’ve had a better experience had I not ceased my ambitions to make direct actions and to really try to get political. (player post-game interview)

These examples illustrate well a central problem for games that blur the borderline between the game and reality: games become games precisely because they offer the opportunity to go outside of what is acceptable in the ordinary world. Prior to the game, several players also stated this as their main expectation of the game:

I expect to be forced by something that isn’t me to do subversive things, and by that force non-players to question their reality. (player pre-game interview, written on paper)

How far will people push their boundaries for a game, however merged and pervasive? (player pre-game interview, written on paper)

The game feels really exciting, and I hope that it will drive me towards exciting happenings that I would not normally do. (player pre-game interview, written on paper)

These expectations cannot be met unless the game offers activity that is not commonly accepted (or even legal) in real life. Unless these activities are identifiable for the players, they might not dare to engage in them. In *Där vi föll*, players were more dependent on game master interventions to progress in the game. Although this behaviour had several contributing reasons, we believe that one of them was an uncertainty of what they were intended to consider being part of the game. If the borderline is too fuzzy in this respect, the play may become conservative no matter how engaging the setting is.

A problem that adds to this is that the game organizers have responsibility towards players, authorities, financiers and outsiders to ensure the safety and legality of the game. As an attempt to solve the issues of responsibility, the *Momentum* player agreement stated that the players were responsible for all of their activities just as they would be in normal life. Thus, when a game master was asked about the appropriateness of a particular activity (the aforementioned subway action), he was forced to discourage it: by asking the players transferred responsibility for the action from themselves to the game master.

To sum up, the Prosopopeia proposal did not provide a sufficient context to create real-world gameplay, and *Momentum* used a lot of cues that separated gameplay from reality. The effect of this was that for some players the ordinary world became a backdrop rather than a seamless game board.

Yet even with that in mind, many game masters and players longed for a real possibility to step outside of the game. In *Momentum* the only way to fully exit the game mode was to invoke the safe word, but few people were willing to do that. The de facto lack of an off-game mode in a game this long made game mastering very challenging as all information and instructions had to be communicated in a diegetic fashion. Some players also wished for a way to reflect on the game with other players while it was running. This kind of non-diegetic interaction should not be forced on the players, but a possibility for that should be provided in future games.

[I don't like] that you can't discuss the game with any one who's in the game. An off game area where you can have reality checks would be great. (controller-player post-game interview, email)

Thus it seems that in some ways *Momentum* was not seamless enough, and in other ways it was too seamless. The magic circle was visible between the game world and the ordinary world as some of the game mechanics were visible. At the same time the players were hesitant to step outside of the game and break the seamlessness. In practise this meant that the players could encounter the seams of the game and even be confused by them (or their implications), but they had no way of addressing or discussing these on a meta-level.

Interaction Model for Pervasive Larp

Above we have divided the modes of interactions into four rough groups based on situation and level of involvement. This can be used to construct an interaction model on how players interacted with each other and to fine-tune the interaction modes. In Table 1 it is possible to see the different modes that a person could choose between based on what state they were in and the state they presume the person they are interacting with is in. It is important to note, that the decision on what mode to use was very often based on a hunch as participation in the

game, or choice between spirit and host was not visibly communicated.

Eirik Fatland (2006) discusses this challenge in the context of live-action role-playing by introducing the concepts of interaction codes and improvisational patterns:

Whenever two players facing a similar situation in a similar context will tend to make similar decisions, we can talk of an improvisation pattern. “Context”, here, will need to be understood broadly and flexibly: the character portrayed, the larp it is portrayed at, which other characters are present, the social situation, etc. In some cases, a “similar context” will mean the same character at different runs of the same larp. In others, it is enough

that the characters belong to roughly equivalent cultures at larps in somewhat related genres.

We can take for granted that such patterns exist—if not, then we should see peasants using pacifist tactics against invading orcs as often as they brandish swords and pitchforks, or often experience role-played businessmen converting to Zen Buddhism in the middle of a management meeting. (Fatland 2006)

These improvisational patterns can be expanded to apply to pervasive larps as participants and non-participants struggle to find a meaningful context. *Momentum* did not offer a ready-made package of interaction codes, so the interaction model presented

	<i>Spirit</i>	<i>Host</i>	<i>Player</i>	<i>Aware</i>	<i>Ambiguous</i>	<i>Unaware</i>
<i>Spirit</i>	Diegetic	Diegetic	Ambiguous/ conflicting	Diegetic	Diegetic	Diegetic
<i>Host</i>	Diegetic	Diegetic	Ambiguous/ conflicting	Diegetic	Diegetic	Diegetic
<i>Player</i>	Ambiguous/ conflicting	Ambiguous/ conflicting	Non-diegetic	Non-diegetic	Non-diegetic	Non-diegetic
<i>Aware</i>	Diegetic/ ambiguous/ conflicting	Diegetic/ ambiguous/ conflicting	Ordinary life/ ambiguous/ conflicting	Ordinary life/ ambiguous/ conflicting	Ordinary life/ ambiguous/ conflicting	Ordinary life/ ambiguous/ conflicting
<i>Ambiguous</i>	Ambiguous	Ambiguous/ ordinary life	Ambiguous/ ordinary life	Ambiguous/ ordinary life	Ambiguous/ ordinary life	Ambiguous/ ordinary life
<i>Unaware</i>	Ordinary life	Ordinary life	Ordinary life	Ordinary life	Ordinary life	Ordinary life

Table #1:

Interaction model for *Momentum* (On the vertical axis we have player A whose perspective is used and on horizontal axis is player B).

here is a coping strategy where the participants look for correct state for themselves and the correct interaction mode.

The interaction modes for the spirit and the host are the same. In *Momentum* all the interaction that they participated in was diegetic, as long as they were not addressing a player outside the game. Officially the only way to do this was by invoking the safe word, but at times there were situations where it was uncertain if the person a spirit or a host is addressing is actually the player. This led to ambiguity that had to be negotiated. If it turned out that a host or a spirit was addressing a player, then a conflict emerged, which had to be resolved.

Some participants also reported that at times it felt that players who were playing their hosts were “off-gaming”. Though these interactions were diegetic, the players did not experience them as such. These are examples of situations where the participant misread the state of person they were interacting with and saw a conflict. It is noteworthy again, that the other person

in the interaction may not have noticed this conflict if his interpretation of his own state was different.

According to the rules the player-level interactions were only allowed in a case of emergency. Still, many players reported that they did discuss the game with outsiders as a game. Depending on the case, that might be diegetic (diegetic lying about the diegetic reality) or non-diegetic interaction. In most games the division of non-diegetic interaction to game related and non-game related would not be relevant. In *Momentum* almost any comment could be interpreted as diegetic and thus there is no real distinction between non-diegetic, non-game related interaction and diegetic interaction.

The non-players who were aware of the ludic nature of the event had the widest selection of modes available. They could basically decide if they played along with the diegetic world or if they just pretended to be oblivious to it. Still, whatever choice they made was conscious. In many ways they were able to either act as players or as (unpossessed) hosts.

	<i>Player/ aware playing</i>	<i>Player/ aware not playing</i>	<i>Ambiguous</i>	<i>Unaware</i>
<i>Player/ aware playing</i>	Diegetic	Ambiguous/ conflicting	Diegetic	Diegetic
<i>Player/ aware not playing</i>	Ambiguous/ conflicting	Non-diegetic	Non-diegetic	Non-diegetic
<i>Ambiguous</i>	Ambiguous	Ambiguous/ ordinary life	Ambiguous/ ordinary life	Ambiguous/ ordinary life
<i>Unaware</i>	Ordinary life	Ordinary life	Ordinary life	Ordinary life

Table #2: General interaction model for socially expanded pervasive larp

Only conscious role-players participating in the game construct imaginary worlds. Thus diegetic interaction was not possible for non-participants in an unaware and ambiguous state form their point of view, as they are not aware of the existence of a game. Unaware participants spent the entirety of their game-influenced life in the “ordinary” world, outside magic circle of gameplay. Still, ambiguous participants could start to construct some kind of “proto-diegesis”.

There were two types of ambiguous interaction in *Momentum*. For an aware non-participant and player participants the ambiguousness emerged when they did not know who they were interacting with. For the unaware non-participants the ambiguousness came from encountering the game and starting to suspect that something out of the ordinary was taking place. The clearest example of this was the art gallery example, where the people working at the gallery started playing a game of their own (even if it wasn't a role-playing game). They did not engage in diegetic interaction, but were questioning the applicability of everyday life rules to the interaction with the players.

For the non-participants, who came in touch with the game and did not suspect that something ludic was taking place, the interactions carried no meaning beyond that of everyday life. Thus applying the concept of diegetic or non-diegetic has no relevance to those interactions. Still, from a third party point of view these interactions could still be interpreted as diegetic, if the observer was in a host or spirit state.

Based on *Momentum*, it is possible to categorize the interaction modes of pervasive larp in general. In Table 2 the number of states is reduced from six to four. As an aware non-player can actually act in a similar manner to a player, these two categories are combined. Also, host and spirit are combined as a more general character state, which is here called the playing state. For non-pervasive larps, only the upper left corner is relevant. The way the size of the table swells when non-participants and multiple levels of

character immersion are added illustrates how pervasive expansions complicate things that are quite simple in non-pervasive larps.

Momentum is a great example how complicated the interactions can become when a live-action role-playing game is expanded socially. The two levels of character immersion also contribute to making the situation a bit hazy. Thus, as the seamlessness was not complete and players played differently with participants and non-participants, there was a lot of the guessing going on regarding the state of the person they were interacting with. In games as complex as *Momentum*, in the future it would make sense to develop ready-made interaction codes for the players.

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Notes

- 1 For a full description of the game, see the Jonsson et al (2007) article in this book.
- 2 The *magic circle* used by Salen & Zimmerman (2003), as inspired by Huizinga (1938), “is where the game takes place. To play a game means entering into a magic circle, or perhaps creating one as a game begins.” It separates game from *ordinary life*.
- 3 Alternate Reality Games are games that pretend to be real. Typically they are internet-based, but playing may involve using telephones, fax machines, meeting people et cetera. Even though ARGs pretend to be real, they are typically designed to fail in that, disclosing their gameness but allowing the player to pretend the game is not a game.
- 4 The citations are from the player interviews that were carried out before, during and after the game – or from interviews with other people who were involved with the game. They have been edited for clarity, and the emphases are ours. Names of players and characters have been changed or omitted.
- 5 *Prosopopeia Bardo 1: Där vi föll* was the first game in the *Prosopopeia*-series. It was played in June 2005 in Stockholm and organised within IPerG by Martin Ericsson, Staffan Jonsson, Adriana Skarped and others.
- 6 *Diegesis* is the constructed, fictitious reality of the game. Everything existing within diegesis is *diegetic*. We use the word in the fashion it has been applied to role-playing earlier.
- 7 Multi-level character immersion models have been tried out before *Prosopopeia* series at least in two Finnish games. *Pitkä Perjantai* (eng. *The Long Good Friday*, 1997, by Arkham Paradox) used the method to create a horror game and *Wunderbar 2: Kuumempaa kuin helvetissä* (eng. *Wunderbar 2: Hotter than Hell*, 1996, by Panu Alku and Tuomas Lähdeoja) played it for laughs. In both games players portrayed larpers who were larping.
- 8 This is an example of the problem with professional involvement: the guards at the embassy must be wary on anything strange going on outside it. So even if they suspected a game or a prank, they can't turn away from it but must call the police. And the policemen are still annoyed because they have been called out unnecessarily. For professionals, an 'invitation to refuse' participation is not available. We have earlier discussed ethics of pervasive gaming in Montola & al (2006).