THE FRAMES OF PERVASIVE LIVE ACTION ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

A Case Study Applying Frame Analysis on *Momentum*

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1 Introduction

Live action role-playing games are a relative new cultural phenomenon, having emerged in the early 1980’s and migrating to Finland around the end of that decade. Personally I have been involved in live action role-playing games (i.e. larping) for well over a decade. Larping and role-playing games in general have had an enormous influenced on the way I see the world, and I have tried to do my part to enrich the culture that surrounds them by playing, criticizing and finally studying role-playing games.

During the time that I have been a larper a new academic field of studies has started to emerge. Game studies, or ludology, has gained ground as games have become important facet of not just life, but of the culture industry. Though this is by no means the first wave of academic interest towards games, it has been the most proliferate so far. The credo of ludology is to study games as games, instead of studying games as texts or simulation, insisting that knowledge about games is valuable in and of itself.

Though I agree with that vision, I find that studying games, and especially role-playing games, can help in understanding social interaction also in a wider context. Role-playing games take place in alternate worlds which are socially constructed. The rules and conventions of role-playing games often seek to simulate and stimulate human interaction, but in an artificial setting. Constructing these worlds and then living in them primes the participant to see the underlying structures of ordinary life as well. Erving Goffman has written about this in his essay *Fun in Games*:

> Games seem to display in a simple way the structure of real-life situations. They cut us off from serious life by immersing us in a demonstration of its possibilities. We return to the world as gamesmen, prepared to see what is structural about reality and ready to reduce life to its liveliest elements. (Goffman 1961, 34).

Though Goffman writes about traditional games and not role-playing games, what he said holds true. Classical board games such as chess or backgammon
have a limited number of game moves that are available for the player (the white horse for example cannot strike a white pawn in chess). This means that the structure of the game is more limited than the most formal situations of social life. Still, Goffman finds it helpful. Role-playing games do not have the limitations of classic games; anything that can be described – and makes sense in the context of the game – is possible. This greatly increases the applicability of findings form role-playing games to other social situations. Playing role-playing games has made me a better and more observant sociologist.

1.1 **Prosopopeia Bardo 2: Momentum**

In this Master’s thesis I will study what happens when ordinary life and game co-exist in the same spatial, temporal and social context. In order to do so a review of relevant literature on game studies will be presented. Though informed by game studies and the central concepts of game studies, this is a sociological Master’s thesis. The theoretical model, frame analysis, used in the analysis has deep roots in sociology. The analysis builds especially on the works of Gregory Bateson, Erving Goffman and Gary Alan Fine.

A case example of a pervasive larp is presented as well. The corpus of the research data relating to the game consists of participant observation of a five-week game, surveys conducted of the player before and during the game, select semi-structured interviews conducted after the game with roughly half of the players, and other methods.

The game *Prosopopeia Bardo 2: Momentum* was organized as part of the Integrated Project for Pervasive Gaming (IPerG), a three and a half year long EU-funded research project. *Momentum* was the final product of the enhanced live-action role-play (elarp) showcase. The game lasted for 36 days (October 10th to November 5th in 2006) and had thirty player participants. I was part of the evaluation team of *Momentum*. Together with Markus Montola and Annika Waern we have already written quite extensively on the game. This Master’s thesis tackles an isolated research question separated from the larger framework.
building on a theoretical framework developed in the context of IPerG by Montola, Waern and others.

Traditional games, such as *Monopoly* or football are played by certain people at a certain place at a certain time. A salient feature of pervasive games is that they break the boundary between the game and the ordinary world in different ways (Montola 2005), blurring the ritualistic sphere of the magic circle of playing (Huizinga 1938, Salen & Zimmerman 2004).

*Momentum* used all three ways in which pervasive games break the boundaries of traditional games (Montola 2005). *Spatial expansion* meant that the game was played all around Stockholm in everyday environment – streets, cafés, workplaces and back yards (see Image 1). *Temporal expansion* meant that the game was interlaced with everyday life, that it could draw the player in at any time of the day, in any situation – and that all of the player’s life might be part of the game.

Yet the emphasis was on *Social expansion*, meaning that non-players were pulled into the game as spectators and participants (Montola & Waern 2006). Blurring the line between participant and non-participant ensured that the game bled into the ordinary world. The provocative goal was to use real people as an interesting feedback system. The game could have an effect on the world of ordinary life and change it for real as influencing the game world also lead to influencing the real world. In these instances the consciously constructed realities of the players (the diegeses) conflict with the everyday life, the consensus reality of the bystanders.

The aim of the thesis is to contribute to the design theory of pervasive larps, by helping to identify how to develop and stage better games. Additionally this thesis can be seen as a test of how well frame analysis fits with pervasive larps, hopefully identifying some of the strengths and weaknesses of frame analysis. Finally, analysing a game where realities are constructed knowingly, but with
the exact same methods as in ordinary life, will hopefully contribute to the understanding of the social dynamics of reality construction in general.

![Image 1](image1.jpg)

**Image 1:** This promotional image for *Momentum* nicely captures the spatial expansion that the game encouraged.

### 1.2 Structure of the Thesis

The theoretical groundwork for this thesis is laid out in the next two chapters. In Chapter 2 the ludological framework is covered. The concepts of play, games, role-playing games and pervasive games are introduced and discussed. Chapter 3 recaps the sociological work on games that is relevant for this thesis.

In Chapter 4 I describe the work process. The methods of collecting data and the resulting date corpus are described. The methodological questions relating to studying live action role-playing are discussed both from an ethical as well as
practical points-of-view. Finally, this chapter explains how the analysis of the data corpus carried out.

In the three chapters that follow, the analysis of Momentum is presented. Chapter 5 concentrates on describing what frames were used in this particular game. In addition it discussed how remaining in the game frame requires effort and makes some suggestions as to how to support the engrossment.

Chapter 6 is devoted to discussing the movement from one frame to another. The chapter looks at downkeying, upkeying and out-of-frame action. From a theoretical point of view this chapter is the most important as it uncovers some of the limitations of frame analysis.

The final piece of analysis is done in Chapter 7, where the negotiation of correct frames between different actors is discussed. The chapter also presents an interaction model for pervasive larps.

Finally, Chapter 8 offers a brief summary of the key point. In that chapter, the most important conclusions of the thesis are reiterated and and possible future paths are charted.

1.2 Acknowledgements

I have been told that it is uncommon to have acknowledgements in Master’s theses. Regardless, I feel I must thank my fellow researchers in IPerG Markus Montola and Dr. Annika Waern. They have not only built a solid theoretical foundation that I can take for granted, but they have helped me every step of the way. A big thanks also to Professor Frans Mäyrä, J. Tuomas Harviainen and everyone at the Game Research Lab at the University of Tampere. I am also indebted to Professor Anssi Peräkylä, who guided my work first in the pro gradu seminar and later as my supervisor. I owe a great debt also to my family. They made it possible for me to take the necessary time off to finish this work.
2 Studying games

2.1 The Concepts of Game and Play

In order to understand the difference between everyday life and game, it is important to understand the difference. Philosopher, historian and anthropologist Johan Huizinga attacks the problem in his 1938 book *Homo Ludens*, where he describes play as a free activity standing quite consciously outside “ordinary” life as being “not serious”, but at the same time absorbing the players intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings, which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means. (Huizinga 1938, 13)

Play should be always voluntary and non-necessary. It follows then, that interrupting or quitting a game must be possible at any moment in time. Play is also a step aside from the ordinary world, and that it is perceived as less ‘real’, less relevant. This removal from ordinary life is complete: spatially, temporally and socially the game is disconnected from everyday life. It tends to create special play-groups, and is satisfying in and of itself. Finally, play is governed by rules that are different from those that people must abide by in ordinary life.

As playing begins, a ‘magic circle’ is created. What happens within is interpreted playfully and has no direct effect on the ordinary world. Salen & Zimmerman take this metaphor and use it as the basis for their *magic circle of gameplay* (Salen & Zimmerman 2004, 93-99). Magic circle is entered voluntary and it is self-sufficient, it is set apart from ordinary life in locality and duration, and it has rules that differ from ordinary life. In their exhaustive book Salen & Zimmerman (2004, 73-80) discuss also the definition of games. They review eight influential definitions of games and play and finally propose a synthesis of their own:
A game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome. (Salen & Zimmerman 2004, 81)

Thus, according to their definition, the important aspects of games are that games are a system, they have players, they are artificial in the way that they are separate from ordinary life, there is a contest or more generally a conflict on interest, they have rules and there is a quantifiable outcome such as winning or losing. For other definitions, see for example Suits (1990), Juul (2003, 36) and Costikyan (2002).

The relationship between play and games is an important one to consider. Brian Sutton-Smith points out that there are not only a plethora of play forms and experiences, but also a number of diverse play scholarships. In his book The Ambiguity of Play he writes:

For example, biologists, psychologist, educators, and sociologists tend to focus on how play is adaptive or contributes to growth, development, and socialization.
Communication theorists tell us that play is a form of metacommunication far preceding language in evolution because it is also found in animals. Sociologists say that play is an imperial social system that is typically manipulated by those with power to their benefit. Mathematicians focus on war games and games of chance, important in turn

Note that the terms relating to play and games do not always translate directly. The English verb play, when translated to Finnish, can have at least four different interpretation: leikkiä (to play a children’s game), pelata (to play a game), näytellä (play a part in a play or a film), soittaa (to play an instrument). Swedish also makes a distinction between leka (play as in child’s play) and spela (to play a game). Both languages also offer the possibility to choose between the word that describes the act (a game) and the word that describes the act of participating in it (to play). In French a game is “jeu” and play is “jouer”, a verb based on the same word.

No wonder then, that the philosophy of linguistics has also pondered games. Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote in his Philosophical Investigations:

66. Consider for example the proceeding we call “games”. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic Games, and so on. What is common to them all? – Don’t say: “There must be something common, or else they would not be called ‘games’ – but look and see whether there is anything common to all. […] 67. I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than “family resemblances”, for the various resemblances among members of the same family: build, feature, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc., etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. –And I shall say: ‘games’ form a family. (Wittgenstein 1958.)
because of the data they supply about strategy and probability. Thermonuclear war games, it appears, can be either a hobby or deadly serious. Anthropologists pursue the relationships between ritual and play as these are found in customs and festivals, while folklorists add an interest in play and game traditions. Art and literature, by contrast, have a major focus on play as a spur to creativity. In some mythology scholarship, play is said to be a sphere of the gods, while in the physical sciences it is sometimes another name for the indeterminacy or chaos of basic matter. In psychiatry, play offers a way to diagnose and provide therapy for the inner conflicts of young and old patients alike. And in the leisure sciences, play is about qualities of personal experience, such as intrinsic motivation, fun, relaxation, escape, and so on. (Sutton-Smith 1997, 6-7)

Recently this difference between play and games has been a source of a lot of academic discussion; for example Salen & Zimmerman (2004, 72-73 and 302-310) show that descriptively games are a subset of play and that conceptually play is a component of games. They go on to offer a definition of play as: “free movement in a more rigid structure”, which takes into account all possible interpretation of the word play in English. They also offer an interesting categorization of play (see Figure 1). The broadest category is being playful, which refers to all typical play activities as well as being in a playful state of mind. Examples include dressing in a playful manner and insulting in a playful tone. The middle category is ludic activities, which includes not only games, but also all activities generally recognized as “play”, such as tossing a Frisbee back and forth and a kitten playing with a ball of string. The narrowest category is game play, which is “formalized interaction that occurs when players follow the rules of a game and experience its system through play.”
In the end, establishing a clear defining line between play and game is not relevant for this thesis. As Sutton-Smith points out, the subject can be, and indeed has been, approached from a number of angles and disciplines. Furthermore, in many popular discussions, the difference is often in perceived value. Play is seen as childish, something that is of lesser value, whereas games are fit also for adults – and government and commercial grants. For the purpose of this thesis, if such divisions are needed, the one offered by sociologist and philosopher Roger Caillois in his *Man, Play & Games* (1958) is employed. Caillois noted that some games have more structure than others. He saw this as a sliding scale, from structure- and rules-heavy *ludus* to free-flowing *paidia*.

At one extreme an almost indivisible principle, common to diversion, turbulence, free improvisation, and carefree gaiety is dominant. It manifests a kind of uncontrolled fantasy that can be designated by the term *paidia*. At the opposite extreme, this frolicsome and impulsive exuberance is almost entirely absorbed or disciplined by a complementary, and in some respects inverse, tendency to its anarchic and capricious nature: there is a growing tendency to bind it with arbitrary, imperative, and purposely tedious conventions, to oppose it still more by ceaselessly practicing the most embarrassing chicanery upon it, in order to make it more uncertain or attaining its desired effect. This latter principle is

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**Figure 1**: Categories of Play (Salen & Zimmerman 2004, 304)
completely impractical, even though it requires an ever greater amount of effort, patience, skill, or ingenuity. I call this second component *ludus*. (Caillois 1958, 13)

Caillois also presented four categories that games could be divided to. These categories are games of competition where players their abilities under equal conditions (*agon*), games of chance where fate determines the winner (*alea*), games of simulation where players pretend to be someone else (*mimicry*), and games of vertigo where physical sensation of dizziness or delirium is the goal (*ilinx*). It is possible for these categories to merge as well (for example poker combines the fate based starting situation, alea, with the skill of playing, agon). Still, Caillois goes to say that some combinations are not possible (such as alea and mimicry). (Caillois 1958.)

### 2.2 Defining Role-Playing Games

Role-playing games\(^2\) are a special case of games. As Salen & Zimmerman (2004, 81-82) point out, they often lack a clear quantifiable outcome. Still, it would be suspect to define role-playing games as not being games – or actually to construct a definition of games that did not include role-playing games. Role-playing games have a strong historical connection to games (they evolved from wargames played with miniatures in the early 1970’s and have cross-pollinated with digital games, a subset of games that is historically about the same age as RPGs) and linguistically they are identified as games (role-playing game in English, *roolipeli* in Finnish, *rollspel* in Swedish and so on). Salen & Zimmerman (2004, 81) come to this conclusion as well as they state that “RPGs can be framed either way – as having or not having a quantifiable outcome.”

\(^2\) \text{Research on role-playing games is scarce. The most important works are Gary Alan Fine’s (1983) *Shared Fantasy* and the more recent Daniel Mackey’s (2001) *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game*. In addition to these, a wealth of articles and essays are available both from the academic sphere as well as from the expert-gamer hobbyists. The problem with these is that the worth of each article needs to be evaluated separately. Seemingly academic publications, such as *Gaming as Culture* (2006), edited by J. Patrick Williams, Sean Q. Hendricks and W. Keith Winkler, and *Second Person* (2007), edited by Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin, are littered with poor articles, just as hobby-writers sometimes produce excellent material (see for example parts of *Role, Play, Art* (2006) edited by Thorbiörn Frizon and Tobias Wrigstad). An increasing number of students also write their theses on role-playing games. In this Master’s thesis I have tried to critically evaluate the sources I have drawn from as many have not been subjected to peer-review.}
Thus they come to the conclusion that role-playing games are a “limit case” of games.

Danish ludologist Jesper Juul (2003) comes to the same conclusion, though from a different angle. His definition of games is slightly different and has six features that a game must fill (fixed rules, variable outcome, valorization of the outcome, player effort, player attachment to outcome and negotiable consequence). He defines role-playing games (or, more specifically ‘pen & paper role-playing’, which is called table-top role-playing games in this work) as a borderline case. According to him role-playing games lack fixed rules as the rules are governed by a human gamemaster. It is interesting to note that he has no problem with role-playing games having variable and quantifiable outcome.

Juul’s definition of rules is quite strict. He requires that it must be possible to program them into a computer or to otherwise sufficiently well define them so that no argument over them can be raised. Though most attempts at defining role-playing games emphases rules, they do not meet Juul’s requirements as often RPGs have a human rules facilitator. Finnish game researcher Markus Montola (forthcoming, 2007a) argues, that the problem is that the base rules of role-playing games are implicit and thus difficult to grasp. He defines role-playing games through a set of Invisible Rules:

1) Role-playing is an interactive process of defining and re-defining the state, properties and contents of an imaginary game world.
2) The power to define the game world is allocated to participants of the game. The participants recognize the existence of this power hierarchy.
3) Player-participants define game world through personified character constructs, conforming to the state, properties and contents of the game world. (Montola 2007a.)

These rules do not quite meet Juul’s criteria, as he requires that the rules must create the formula by which each play session is generated – an that the number of different play sessions must be limited (though the number is quite different for different games, for example a simple traditional game like Tic-tac-toe and a
digital first person shooter game such as *Quake III*). Montola’s rules define role-playing games as a subset or a genre more than as individual games.

For the purpose of this thesis role-playing games are considered as games. Though they perhaps are a little bit closer to the paidia end of Caillois’ scale than most games, they are still ludic enough for game related theories to apply. It is also interesting to note, that role-playing games seem to prove that all combinations of Caillois’ typology are possible. Role-playing games mix *mimicry* (pretending to be someone else) with *alea* (many RPGs use dice to determine some outcomes), as well as *agôn* (there is a skill to playing) and *ilinx* (the physical high one gets from doing something very much out of the ordinary).³

### 2.3 Three Forms of Role-Playing Games

Role-playing games can be divided to three major categories, *table-top role-playing* (the most classical form of role-playing games), *live action role-playing games* (aka larp, sometimes also called live role-playing or theatre style playing) and *virtual role-playing* (as seen in digital games, played on computer, game console or online). Montola (2007) provides definitions that separate these categories from each other:

1. In tabletop role-playing the game world is defined predominantly in verbal communication.
2. In larp the game is superimposed on physical world, which is used as a foundation in defining the game world.
3. In virtual role-playing the game is superimposed on a computational virtual reality, which is used as a foundation in defining the game world. (Montola 2007)

Montola’s *Invisible Rules* and definitions are interesting and useful analytical tools. However, as a description of role-playing, as he himself points out in the article, they are not very useful. Most commercial rule books for role-playing

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³ According to Heidi Hopeametsä (2008) mimicry is the one central to role-playing games, whereas J. Tuomas Harviainen (2008a) has argued that the basis of role-playing is in ilinx, in becoming-other instead of just the pretence of mimicry.
games (such as *Vampire: The Masquerade*, *Dungeons & Dragons* and *GURPS Basic Set*) contain a chapter with a title to the effect of “what is a role-playing game”. However, these passages do not work as definitions of role-playing games; they are more like general description of how that certain role-playing games is usually played. Academic texts on role-playing games are fairly scarce and so are the definitions. The most oft-cited one at the moment, more like a loose description actually, was put forward by performance researcher Daniel Mackay:

I define role-playing game as an episodic and participatory story-creation system that includes a set of quantified rules that assist a group of players and a gamemaster in determining how their fictional characters’ spontaneous interactions are resolved. These performed interactions between the players’ and the gamemaster’s characters take place during individual sessions that, together, form episodes or adventures in the lives of fictional characters. (Mackay 2001, 4-5, emphasis in original)

Though this works as a description of how the majority of role-playing games look like, as a definition it fails. The concepts that it is based upon (such as gamemaster and rules) are as vaguely defined as role-playing. Also, the definition excludes a number of games that are identified as role-playing games.

This thesis builds more on the Nordic tradition of role-playing studies, which is slowly moving from expert-hobby writings towards academia (see for example Montola & Stenros 2004, Frizon & Wrigstad 2006). In this tradition, role-playing games are defined as a social process. The most influential model of role-playing thus far in that tradition has been the one that I put forward with Henri Hakkarainen:

A role-playing game is what is created in the interaction between players or between player(s) and gamemaster(s) within a specified diegetic framework. (Hakkarainen & Stenros 2003, 56)

In this definition, *gamemaster* and *player* are roles assumed by participants, and it is possible to switch between these during play. *Diegesis*, a term borrowed
from film theory, is defined as what is true within the game. Thus a *diegetic frame* is the game world. *Role* is defined as “any subject position within a set discourse, an artificial closure articulating the player within the diegetic frame of the game or in a real-life situation.” The model makes no difference between roles the player assumes within the diegetic frame and the roles that people assume in ordinary life. And thus a *character* is

a framework of roles through which the player interacts within the game”, and for which she constructs an illusion of a continuous and fixed identity, a fictional “story of self” binding the separate, disconnected roles together. (Hakkarainen & Stenros 2003, 57)

Finally, *player* is a participant who assumes the above mentioned roles within the diegetic frame and *gamemaster* is a participant who assumes the *gamemastering role*, which yields the power to define the contents and state of these contents in the diegetic frame of the game.

Montola’s definition is more elegant and precise and thus is used in this thesis. However, unless otherwise stated, the central terms relating to playing role-playing games are used as explained by Hakkarainen & Stenros.

**2.4 Pervasive Games**

Pervasive games are an emerging field of play. So far few academic books have been published that would generally cover pervasive games. Jane McGonigal’s (2006) dissertation *This Might Be a Game: Ubiquitous Play and Performance at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* and a collection of short essays from a German group of city planners and game researchers which discusses digital games played in physical space called *Space, Time, Play: Games, Architecture and Urbanism* (von Borriers et al 2007) are really the only ones so far.

There is also an annual conference devoted to pervasive games called PerGames which has been arranged since 2004. However, most of the work presented there approaches pervasive games from a very technological point of view and has
very little to offer to a sociological study. Pervasive games are, after all, the ludic offshoot of research conducted in the fields of pervasive computing and ubiquitous computing (for a history of the term, see Niewdrop 2007).

The most extensive work on pervasive games has been conducted within the framework of IPerG. Integrated Project for Pervasive Gaming was a three and a half year long, 10 million euro EU-funded research project that ran from September 2004 to February 2008. The official website lists the aim of IPerG as follows:

The aim of IPerG has been the creation of entirely new game experiences, which are tightly interwoven with our everyday lives through the objects, devices and people that surround us and the places we inhabit. The approach has been through the exploration of several showcase games which come under the description of “pervasive games” - a radically new game form that extends gaming experiences out into the physical world. (IPerG 2008)

Though the project had a focus on technology research, a significant amount of work was committed to furthering understanding regarding pervasive games. The project produced a number of reports as well as scientific publications on what are pervasive games, how should they be designed, what are the relevant ethical questions, and so forth. The work was carried out by nine partners in four countries. SICS (Swedish Institute of Computer Science) was the coordinating partner. Others partners were Interactive Institute (Sweden), University of Tampere (Finland), Nokia Research (Finland), University of Nottingham (UK), Fraunhofer Institute (Germany), Sony Europe (Germany), Gotland University (Sweden) and Blast Theory (UK).

In the context of IPerG an approach to pervasive games was undertaken. The games were analysed as an activity from a ludological standpoint. Pervasive games were defined as games that have one or more salient features that expand the contractual magic circle of play socially, spatially or temporally. These
games blur the lines between game and ordinary life (Montola 2005, see discussion in Salen & Zimmerman 2004, 572-586).

Traditional games are played by certain people at a certain place at a certain time. Pervasive games break one of these limits. For example it is not possible to differentiate between player and non-players, the game field or game board is unlimited or the game runs uninterrupted for weeks. A salient feature of pervasive games is that they break the boundary between the game and the ordinary world in different ways, blurring the ritualistic sphere of the magic circle of playing. These games are perceived as enjoyable because they bring the fun of playing from games to the ordinary life, and correspondingly bring the thrill of the real to games (Szulborski 2005, McGonigal 2003, Montola & Jonsson 2006).

Pervasive games are connected to a larger trend in contemporary popular culture. Pervasive media expression generally is becoming more and more commonplace. Reality television, guerrilla marketing, internet identity play, and alternate reality games (ARG) are blurring the boundary between the “fictitious” and the “real”. At the same time the struggle over public space continues (everything from skateboarding and graffiti to guerrilla gardening and urban exploration). Finally, there is a drive towards a culture of players, a sort of ludic society where playing and gaming are increasingly common. Pervasive games embody there three trends. (Stenros et al 2007b.)

This Master’s thesis mostly builds on the work done during IPerG. The foundations of the theoretical model advanced in IPerG was built by Markus Montola, Swedish computer science and game researcher Annika Warn and others in the public reports and other publications of the project. The definition was put forward by Montola (2005) and then the preliminary genres of pervasive games were elaborated from there (pervasive larp, combining live action role-playing games and pervasive games, is one of these) in Montola et al (2006a).
Other important pieces include the work on participant roles in expanded games (Montola et al 2006b).

I joined the project in the July of 2006 when the grounds had been laid. After that the emphasis was on tackling the ethical questions relating to pervasive games (Montola et al 2006c), developing design theory for pervasive larps (Montola et al 2007) contextualizing pervasive games in larger societal context (Stenros et al 2007b). This thesis builds on the foundations laid down in IPerG.
3 Sociology of Games

Playing games is often a social activity. Games are both removed from ordinary life, and an ordinary part of it. They are, like rituals, both special and yet important in defining what is “ordinary”.

3.1 Metacommunication and Frames

One way of conceptualizing the removed-form-life quality of games is with the metaphor of magic circle presented in the previous chapter. Another one, introduced by sociologist Erving Goffman (1961), is by seeing games as taking place within a metaphorical interaction membrane that delimits them from the outside world. The membrane selects, filters and transforms events, actions and properties outside the game. As a result, for example, the material wealth of a player has no bearing on the status of the player within the game.

Whether a game is seen as taking place in a magic circle (Huizinga 1938, Salen & Zimmerman 2003), an interaction membrane (Goffman 1961) or a protective psychological bubble (Apter 1991), the social contract of setting up the liminal space needs to be communicated to the participants. Anthropologist Gregory Bateson’s concept of metacommunication is pivotal in understanding how the consensus of what is play and what is not play is socially constructed. In his seminal essay A Theory of Play and Fantasy (1955) he describes observing monkeys in a zoo:

I saw two young monkeys playing, i.e., engaged in an interactive sequence of which the unit actions of signals were similar to but not the same as those of combat. It was evident, even to the human observer, that the sequence as a whole was not combat, and evident to the human observer that to the participant monkeys this was “not combat.”

Now, this phenomenon, play, could only occur if the participant organisms were capable of some degree of metacommunication, i.e., of exchanging signals which would carry the message “This is play.” […]

[T]he statement “This is play” looks something like this: […] “These actions, in which we now engage, do not denote what would be denoted by those actions which these
actions denote.” The playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite. (Bateson 1955).

The actions, that would normally be interpreted and understood to denote combat, now denote something else. The context – or frame – of playing is metacommunicated between the participants, and in Bateson’s example it is even metacommunicated to the observer who happens to be of a different species.

Erving Goffman later constructed his frame analysis partially inspired by Bateson’s observations (he even credits Bateson with the term frame in the introduction to *Frame Analysis* (1974)). Instead of metacommunication, he talks about keys and keying.

[T]he set of convention by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else. The process of transcription can be called keying. A rough musical analogy is intended. (Goffman 1974, 44)

Goffman generalizes Bateson’s metacommunication and uses it as a building block. The primary framework that he talks about here is the natural or social frame that is perceived as the ultimate serious context for the actions. For example the queen overtaking a pawn in a game of chess would be perceived as a removal of a piece from a board and it being replaced by another piece from the same board performed by an entity. Keying of these actions “performs a crucial role in determining what it is we think is really going on” (Goffman 1974, 45.)

Keying is not limited to play and games. Goffman also lists make-believe, contests, ceremonials, technical redoings (such as simulations) and regroupings (for example doing things for uncommon reasons, such as a presidential candidate working at a soup kitchen). Once an activity has been keyed, it can be further transformed by rekeying. Furthermore, keying is not the only way that
activity can be transformed. The other possibility is though fabrication, which he defines as

the intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage activity so that a party of one
or more others will be induced to have a false belief about what is going on. (Goffman
1974, 83.)

In Bateson’s terms, the difference between keying and fabrication is that in
keying the frame is correctly metacommunicated to all actors and in fabrication
some of the actors are intentionally mislead. A practical joke is a mundane
example of a fabrication, tax fraud being a slightly more elaborate.

3.2 Frames and Role-Playing Games

Gary Alan Fine builds on Goffman’s work in his book Shared Fantasy. The
book is an ethnographic study of tabletop role-playing games and their players,
conducted in Minneapolis in 1977 and 1978. Based on his observations, Fine
elaborates a model for role-playing, looking at the frames that are used and the
framed selves of the individual. He comes up with a three-tier model:

First, gaming, like all activity, is grounded in the “primary framework,” the
commonsense understanding that people have of the real world. This is action without
laminations. It is a framework that does not depend on other frameworks but on the
ultimate reality of events.

Second, players must deal with the game context; they are players whose actions are
governed by a complicated set of rules and constraints. They manipulate their
characters, having knowledge of the structure of the game, and having approximately
the same knowledge that other players have. Players do not operate in light of their
primary framework – in terms of what is physically possible – but in light of the
conventions of the game.

Finally, the gaming world is keyed in that the players not only manipulate their
characters; they are their characters. The character identity is separate from the player
identity. In this, fantasy gaming is distinct from other games. (Fine 1983, 186, emphases
in original).
Fine stresses that each level has its own structure of meaning, and that these meanings might not be shared by people, players and characters. Engrossment into the game (or immersion, as it has often been labeled later) implies that the participant is able to ignore alternative awarenesses. Furthermore, the participants are able to shift from one frame to another from moment to moment. Indeed, this is exactly what happens in a tabletop role-playing session, where a person is sitting by a table eating, while the player is throwing dice and the character is involved in a bar brawl in the game. (Fine 1983).

The possibility for the presence of numerous simultaneous frames was present already in Goffman’s Frame Analysis. He called the shifting between them upkeying (movement further away from the ultimate reality of events) and downkeying (movement towards the “real”). Fine also used these terms when describing movement between the three frames.

Fine’s tree-tier model has been quite influential in studies of role-playing games – partly, because it was the first such model and for a long time the only one. It is very fitting in analyzing the interaction of fairly compact and homogenous groups of tabletop role-players. However, this work goes back to Goffman’s model as pervasive larps have more participants and they are a much more heterogenous group; there are more possibilities for frame confusion, fabrication and breaking of frames.

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4 The works by Goffman and Fine have influenced a number of role-playing researchers. Lancaster (1999), Lacy (2006) and Brenne (2005) have found the models very useful and Mackay (2001) built his model on top of it. Kellomäki (2003) provides an interesting counterpoint. He arrives at a fairly similar model to Fine – independently.
4 Researching Momentum

The concepts and models presented in previous chapters will now be applied in practice to the case of Prosopopeia Bardo 2: Momentum. Momentum was a pervasive larp organized in Stockholm in the fall of 2006. Momentum was both a pervasive game as well as live action role-playing game. It was a research prototype organized as part of the Integrated Project for Pervasive Gaming. Momentum was the final product of the enhanced live-action role-play (elarp) showcase. The game lasted for 36 days (October 10th to November 5th) and had thirty players.

4.1 Data Corpus

The main data corpus used in the Master’s thesis is comprised of post-game interviews conducted with the participants of Momentum. There are 14 semi-structured face-to-face interviews with players. Three of the interviews were conducted while the five week long game was still in progress, but the interviewees had already stopped playing. All other interviews were conducted during the week after the game had ended. In addition to the face-to-face interviews there are 14 replies to an email survey that was sent to selected players during the game and 8 replies to a post-game email survey that targeted the players who I did not have a chance to interview after the game. One additional group interview was carried out with two gallery workers who came in contact with the game (not being aware that it was a game until the beginning of the interview) is included in the primary data corpus. This primary data corpus is approximately 270 pages (on 11 point typeface).

Prosopopeia Bardo 2: Momentum was created by Staffan Jonsson (producer), Emil Boss, Martin Ericsson and Daniel Sundström (design), and Henrik Eshjörnsson (locations) with the help of a large team including Karl Bergström, Torbjörn Fritzon, Niclas Lundborg, Pernilla Rosenberg, Sofia Stenler and Tobias Wrigstad (scenario design), Anders Muammar (props), Karim Muammar (rules), Linus Gabrielson, Henrik Summanen and Jonas Söderberg (sounds), Anders Daven (graphics), and Moa Hartman (costumes). The game technology team also included Karl-Petter Åkesson, Henrik Bäärnheilm, Sofia Cirverius, Anders Ernevi, Pär Hansson, Niclas Henriksson, Tony Nordström, Erik Ronström, Olof Ståhl, Anders Wallberg, Peter Wilhemsson and Maria Åresund.
The primary data corpus is supported by an undisclosed participant observation of the players in the month-long game: I participated in the game as a player. I was present in Stockholm for 30 of the 36 days that the game lasted. In the middle I had to travel back to Finland to participate in a meeting where the evaluation of the game was discussed. During the month I concentrated on the game, minimizing any other work or hobbies I might normally have and tried to play as much as possible. I was also working as a controller, a player who reports back to the gamemasters on what is happening in the game, so I also had an opportunity to peak behind the curtain. Mostly, though gamemaster observation was handled by other members of the evaluation team.

I played the game just as any other player and wrote a hidden field diary when I was not observed by other players. The participant observation was used mostly to understand the play experience first hand and to come up with relevant question to the participants. It proved to be crucial in informing the interviews conducted later, as well as contextualizing the data collected in other ways. Though the field diary is a used in this Master’s thesis as well, mostly the participant observation was carried out so that the questions posed to the players would be relevant and that I would be able to understand the replies in the correct context.

In addition the data corpus includes player created diegetic game reports, surveys conducted before and during the game, logfiles from the devices used by the players, post game group debrief of the players, surveillance footage shot of the players during play (for an example, see Image 2), some photos taken during the observation and partial gamemaster observation carried out by another researcher. These additional types of data were used seldom. When they were used, it was for double checking and triangulation of the findings.

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6 It is not possible to make notes or ask questions that are not natural to the character during play. This means that field notes were written in secret or when disengaged from playing. The questions were saved until after the end of the game – or answers were sought in other ways. For similar experience, see Brenne (2005, 39-40). However, email questionnaires were answered by select players during the month that the game lasted when they were at their computers, away from other players, not playing the game.
The email interviews that were conducted during the game were sent out by Markus Montola so that I would not be identified as a researcher. The questions were agreed upon by the evaluation team, based on the participant observation. The face-to-face interviews were all conducted by me based on a list of questions and themes selected by the IPerG evaluation team based on my participant observation. The interviews are semi-structured, thematic interviews, as further questions not conceived of beforehand often led to long digressions.

The participants who answered the email surveys after the game had ended faced basically the same base questions as the people in the face-to-face interviews, they just weren’t asked to elaborate on their answers and they were not asked further questions. The survey questions can be seen in appendix A.

Face to face interviews are on average 50 minutes long, with the shortest one being 20 minutes and the longest ones 80 minutes. They have been transliterated (by an external company, Tutkimustie) and anonymized, with emphasis on what is being said as opposed to how it is said. As all the interviews have been conducted in English, which is not the native language of the interviewees, the format of talk is not seen as representative.
4.2 Research Context

This thesis, though it tackles the isolated area of player interaction and is understandable independently, should be understood in the larger context. The game was one of the more ambitious prototypes staged in the context of IPerG. It was designed as an extremely expanded pervasive larp, one that would only attract “hard core” players. The idea was to see how far the concept could be pushed and see if an extreme case would yield insights not visible in less-expanded pervasive games. In a nutshell, the game aimed to blend ordinary life and game as completely as possible.

*Momentum* has been quite extensively presented as well as analyzed already. First the game and the underlying game design were described in Jonsson et al (2007a). The paper, co-written by the evaluators and designers maps the design decisions that shaped the game and shows how the mundane reality was used as a stage for a shared story about personal responsibility, political change and constructed nature of reality.

The second paper (Stenros et al 2007a) describes the player experience: how the various play modes were experienced and how interaction was negotiated with players and non-players alike. This paper has been adapted and incorporated into this thesis as Chapter 7.

The third publication took the form of an EU project deliverable: a public report. *PerG Deliverable 11.8 Appendix C: Momentum Evaluation Report* (Stenros et al 2007c) is the most comprehensive look at *Momentum*. It incorporates and elaborates on the two previous papers and as well as includes a lengthy discussion on the ethics of pervasive larping and an evaluation of the technology used in the game.

The fourth publication (Jonsson et al 2007b) was more technical in its orientation. The paper discusses the challenges of gamemastering a pervasive larp.
Finally, the most concise paper (Stenros et al 2007d) was presented to the largest audience in the most prestigious game conference, DiGRA 2007. This paper concentrated on analyzing *Momentum* as an extreme pervasive game, looking at the challenges of long duration, seamless life/game merger, pacing and gamemastering viability.

Three further publications have built directly on the work done with *Momentum*. Stenros et al (2007b) looked at pervasive games in the larger context of media culture, Montola (2007b) tackled the tangible pleasures or pervasive gaming (this is the only paper mentioned where I was not directly involved) and finally Montola et al (2007) generalized on the finding of *Momentum* (and other pervasive larps) in order to create a design kit for pervasive larps. The work conducted around *Momentum* is also instrumental in informing the forthcoming book, *Pervasive Games*, from Montola, Stenros and others.7

It is also worth noting, that *Momentum* was one of three games set in the Prosopopeia mythos. The first one was a smaller and shorter prototype game organized during the first year of IPerG, *Prosopopeia Bardo 1: Där vi föll*. The third one, *Sanningen om Marika*, was a combination of a television series, an alternate reality game and a pervasive larp staged by the Company P and SVT in 2007.

### 4.3 Meta Evaluation

The participant observation of *Momentum* was carried out without directly informing the participants. According to Arja Kuula (2006), people who are being observed for the benefit of a study in a non public space should not only be informed about the study, but actually their permission should be asked. In

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7 This forthcoming book will package and distil what was learned about pervasive games in the context of IPerG. It covers the theory, history, genres of pervasive games, packages a lot of design knowledge, discusses the business and technological aspects of pervasive games, looks at the ethical questions surrounding the area, approaches pervasive games as art and as political tools, and finally contextualizes pervasive games in larger media culture. The book also has 12 case descriptions, one of which is *Momentum*. 
the players did not know that one of the players was a participant observer. The player agreement form (see Appendix B) that every player did sign did mention that the players would be under all kinds of surveillance, but it did not mention participant observation specifically (this kind of carte blanche approach has been criticized as ethically questionable).

According to Kuula, this kind of observation is acceptable only if the researcher is a researcher only secondarily, that he should be a natural part of the group that he studies. I have a long history of larping in Finland and Sweden, especially in the more avant-garde games that *Momentum* was perceived as. I probably wouldn’t have participated in this particular game if I had not been doing research on it, but I am a familiar face in the subculture that *Momentum* drew from. Thus the participant observation, though not explicated to the players beforehand, can be considered as unproblematic.

A central question is whether or not knowing about the presence of an observer and the identity of that observer would taint the results? Based on *Momentum* this question cannot be answered.

### 4.4 Researching Role-Playing Games

Participant observation itself is quite important for the evaluation of role-playing games and live action role-playing games are no exception. The works produced on this field are not geared towards pleasing an audience since there is no audience but the participants (who can be considered a “first person audience, see Sandberg (2004) for details). Observing and understanding the experience without participating is very difficult. It can be done with technology – at least up to a point – but it does disrupt the game. The difficulty is evident in the precursor to *Momentum*, in *Prosopopeia Bardo 1: Där vi föll* (Montola & Jonsson 2006), where the only non-diegetic piece of propping, the only thing that purposefully broke the illusion, was the movements of the surveillance cameras in one of the central gaming areas.
The ethical questions relating to participant observation of live action role-playing games and pervasive games are quite complicated. There has not been too much discussion on the issue either in academic or hobbyist contexts. Geir Tore Brenne (2005) discussed participant observation and ethnography in larp context in his thesis. His work provides an interesting comparison to my work, both methodologically as well as in regards to the theoretical model he is using. He also participated in live action role-playing games, interviewed the players as well as chatting with them socially. His choice was to inform, when it was not socially awkward, the role-players about his status as a researcher.

However, in the context of the current work it was decided that the participant observation should not be disclosed to the participants. The reason for this was that the games was aiming to blur the line between life and game, and many of the research questions (in IPerG, not necessarily in the context of the current work) dealt with ethical boundaries and blurring of fact and fiction. As the game was organized as a research prototype the players were aware that it would be evaluated. Thus it was decided in the evaluation group that since the players did know that there was surveillance, research ad evaluation going on, it would not be necessary to inform the players about the identity of the observer beforehand. After the game the players naturally were informed and most were surprised. Some even felt betrayed. The players were offered the choice to opt out of the research, not to be mentioned anywhere. None chose this option; in the end the players that felt betrayed voiced that they were mostly just angry at them selves for being duped.

Live action role-playing games are typically neither completely public or public events. Often the games are advertised and theoretically anyone can join. The game organizers can refuse entry or choose their players, but in practise a large portion of the games are open. These games are also performances.\(^8\) The players perform to themselves and to each other; they encourage looking at. Finally,

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\(^8\) There is some debate on this issue. Lancaster (1999) and Phillips 2006 consider that larps are performances. Harviainen (2008b) disagrees. He denies that larps perform for the sake of performance.
pervasive variants of larps are also often played in public spaces, in full view of
the public.

At the same time larps, once they start, are often closed affairs. Either they are
held in secluded or private spaces, or if they are conducted in public, then the
game mechanics hide the game (for example the players are discouraged from
attracting attention). The performances that are put up in the game are also only
aimed at the other participants, not to a passive audience.

Finnish critic Jussi Ahlroth has pondered the ethics of writing about larp in a
journalistic context. Many of the issues he raises apply to research as well:

Is it acceptable for the critic to write about the other players? She has to, since in many
ways, they are the game. But how does the critic write about them and their
"performance?" This is the difficult question, and here the line is drawn between role-
playing games and other forms of art. It is ethically problematic to write about the other
players precisely because they are not, at least not primarily, there to perform.

If role-playing game criticism is to be established, this question has to be resolved, on a
very practical level. I imagine this could be an individual choice for each game
organiser. The organiser must decide how much preparation to ask of their players.
Should the players be informed of the presence of a critic? If there is a critic in the
game, it requires pretty good role-playing from the other players to not let this affect
them. […] Role-playing games demand a high level of trust between the participants. A
public criticism might compromise that. We might not be happy to consider that our
game experience will be referred to in a critique in the morning newspaper. Or if we
were especially happy to consider it, we might be playing for the wrong reasons.
(Ahlroth 2008)

As more and more research on role-playing games and larp is conducted, these
issues will have to be address regularly. Perhaps one way to sidestep the ethical
issues would be that the gamemasters could inform the player prior to the game
that there is an observer present, but not disclose the identity of the observer
until the end of the game.
4.5 Analysis Methods

I started the analytical work of this thesis started in the context of writing a joint paper with Markus Montola and Annika Waern. I started by reading through half of the interviews. All passages that related to descriptions of social interactions were marked. These passages were divided into categories based on who was interacting (player, friends of players, non-participants). A model was built that described each kind of interaction in each category. The other researchers read the other half of the material and checked that the model corresponded with the interactions described there as well. As a result the model was fine-tuned. This research was published as Stenros et al (2007a).

After writing that paper work on the data corpus continued in many forms. However, I did not approach it with this thesis in mind for six months. After that time I was fairly familiar with the data, but approached it with new questions. I re-read though the whole data corpus and marked the passages where the interviewees talked about identity and the game experience, as well as the spots where they discussed their attitude toward the experience or described being in the game or in ordinary life.

I then approached these passages armed with Goffman and Fine. I first dug out all the passages that could be understood as describing a frame and divided these into different frames. What was left, the breaks in the frames, I tried to categorize with Goffman’s concepts, but they proved to be insufficient. Further categories had to be defined as I was determined to develop a model that would explain each and every passage in my data corpus.

Finally, I checked the analysis in the paper that had already been published and reworked it into the context of frame analysis.

My aim has been, as is expected in the kind of qualitative analysis I have engaged in, to put forth a model that considers and fits all of the data. This means that the model presented here fits both what the players said themselves
in interviews as well as what was perceived in the participant observation. Still, as a major part of role-playing is comprised of the inner workings of a player, I have not constructed a model that explains each experience. Instead, I have tried to create a model that describes the visible interactions – and I have offered some postulations on the possible internal processes of players.
5 The Frames of Momentum

I will now analyse the pervasive larp *Momentum*. The analysis starts by looking at the interviews carried out with the participants of *Momentum* armed with the frame model of role-playing presented by Gary Alan Fine (1983). The analysis is informed by the participant observation carried out by the author in *Momentum*. Fine’s model fits the experiences described by the participants quite well, but it is not a perfect fit. Thus as the analysis goes on, it will fine tune the model so that it fits the experiences of the player better. The model will also be expanded to cover phenomena not reported by Fine. This is done in the wider context of Goffman’s frame analysis.

5.1 Adapting Fine’s Frames to *Momentum*

The way that the players talk about their game experience fits quite well into the model of role-playing, which Gary Alan Fine constructed for tabletop role-players in his book *Shared Fantasy* (1983), based mostly on Erving Goffman’s *Frame Analysis* (1974). According to Fine, in a role-playing situation, the participant in present on three levels: the primary framework is what Fine calls the “ultimate reality of events”, the real world where the participants are people (or participants); then there is the frame where participants are players, where playing takes place; and finally there is the game world where characters interact.

The way the participants of *Momentum* described their experiences fits this model for the most part. The participants are on the highest level inhabitants of the “real world”. I’ll also refer to this as the primary framework, though it is clear from the interviews that the primary frameworks of the participants are not exactly identical.

Fine calls the primary framework the “ultimate reality of events.” It can be question as the players had clearly different reading of the “reality” based on their personal political, religious and ethical beliefs. Some players participated in the game in order to change reality or learn something new, while other had no
such grand goals. The primary framework is quite different depending on if one is conservative or liberal, atheist or religious. This clearly influenced what is possible and how, for example, the police functions.

Also, both the game designers and many of the players had a fairly postmodern view of the world. They believe that “reality” is a social construct, something that they can change or attempt to change via their actions. Additionally, a few of the player explicitly expressed that they had decided to participate in the game in order to learn more on direct methods that can be employed to change the world. Finally, some player reported that participating did change their view on certain matters, in effect changing their primary framework.

[..] I am very much too afraid of law enforcement. I feel like that’s one thing I wanted to work on [by participating in the game], that direct action part, I wanted not to be afraid of law enforcement. (player interview, male)

Well, I have been questioning the, the struggle for let’s say economic growth. And I have been thinking about.. Sort of I have organisational ideas, since, well, people have been, the people that have made the biggest impression on me, have had anarchistic views, and I’ve started to see, to try to implement them, in, well, just say organisation-wise things down at the reactor. And oh, I don’t think it worked, but that doesn’t mean that the anarchistic views were wrong, might’ve been that my interpretation was wrong.. (Player interview, male)

Yeah, [the game] influenced my real life in the way that I opened my eyes and I.. Perception to a lot of things that I hadn’t sort of understood from that point of view for, when I did the whole research thing, I studied a lot about islam for example, because [my character], she [had] converted to islam and later became a Sufi adept. And that was really interesting, because that is a topic that is relevant today, with the whole situation in the world and everything. (Player interview, female)

Nevertheless, the primary framework is considered more or less shared by the participants. In the primary framework the people who participated in _Momentum_ were humans, engaging in numerous activities in and around

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9 The quotes from the players have been slightly edited to ensure anonymity in the eyes of the people who were not at the game. In some cases typos (email interviews) and grammatical errors (face-to-face interviews) have been corrected to increase readability. The quotes are presented in a different typeface to distinguish them from quotes from academic sources. For the sake of brevity, when there were numerous examples to choose from, I have tended to go with the quotes from the email interviews. They were much more concise in their expression.
Stockholm in the fall of 2006. Sometimes they worked or studied, met with friends and relatives, and generally lived life. In addition to these activities they also participated in a pervasive live action role-playing game called *Momentum*. Some of them told their friends that they were playing a game that required them to pretend to believe in magic for a little over a month, some of them didn’t. Yet all of them realized that the game was just one aspect of their life during the month.

The second frame, *the playing frame*, is where the participants actively participated in the game. In this frame they are the players of a certain, specific game. The game has certain explicit rules (you are supposed to play as if everything was real, you are supposed to believe in the possibility of magic, you will be possessed by a spirit of a dead revolutionary, saying the safeword ‘prosopopeia’ will stop the game and return you to the status of a player instead of a possessed person and so on). In this frame the participants are players, and they submit to the ruling of the gamemasters, the people who organize the game. The most important action in this frame is the act of playing, and that is carried out mostly through pretending to believe in the actuality of the game world.10

In regards to the outsiders, people who did not participate in the game, the players often informed them that they were participating in a game that would last a month. In many cases they refused to disclose what kind of game they were participating in or what they were doing in the game, but they had told that play was involved. This is important as many friends and family members of the participants expressed worry over the manner in which the participants sometimes acted during the five weeks. Still, the frame of playing was important not just for the participants but also for their friends and relatives as they could at least “file” the weird behavior of the players under playing.

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10 It is interesting to note that Brenne (2005), who has also used frame analysis to pick larp apart, does not identify the playing frame as a separate frame. In his analysis playing happens in the context of the primary framework.
My boyfriend asked about [the game] once, and then I.. First of all told him before the
game that it was a game and what it was about, the things I knew then, which wasn’t
very much. And that I wouldn’t be able to talk about it at all with him for a month, and
I promised to tell him anything, everything afterwards. And he has asked like one
time, and then I have said that we’ll discuss it in two weeks. (Player interview, male)

My mother asked me so how was the game, then I was more like well, yeah, it’s going
great, I really don’t wanna talk about it, but yeah, you might wanna call it a game, you
can call it a game if you want to. (Player interview, male)

As the game rules stated that the game should be treated as real, it basically
meant that the existence of this playing frame was denied. The players were not
allowed to acknowledge the act of playing. Still, as the presence of the safeword
testifies (which was used about a dozen times during the five weeks), the players
were aware of this frame.

If the act of playing takes place in the playing frame, the actual game is situated
in the third frame, the game frame. In this frame the game world is the real
world. This is what is called diegesis\textsuperscript{11}, all that what is true/real in the game
world. In this frame the players are their characters. They are the host and the
spirit, the willing participant who shares his body with the visitor and the
possessing ghost. It is important to note that the game frame was consciously
constructed. The rules were stipulated and agreed upon, and all the participants
interviewed afterwards conceived of it as a separate, fictitious, shared construct.

The interviewees would refer to the event that took place in the game frame
casually and call their fellow players by the names of their characters. The
events that happened in the game are “real” in the sense that the players (or
maybe their characters) experienced them and shared them with others.
However, the meaning of these events changes depending on the frame: in the
game frame they are the literal truth, in the playing frame they are game actions
and in the primary frame they are stripped of the supernatural and bracketed as
fictitious. For example when Mr. Lindroos (a possessing spirit, a character)

\textsuperscript{11} The term diegesis is borrowed from film studies (see for example Bacon 2000, 26-27).
The concept is quite established in the Nordic role-playing discussion (for example Hakkapain
performs a purification ritual in the game, in the game frame this is the literal truth. He is channelling power to the afterlife. In the playing frame the person who plays the character, Helen, is making a game action (ritual) to reach a game goal (channelling energy). In the primary framework Helen is chanting and waving a knife while standing inside a chalk circle.

I tried to be as close to the original [meaning the person who lived, who the character is] as I could, but it is always, I mean in the end your own interpretation. And, the funny thing was that from the beginning when I had just read a few lines about her, I immediately fell in love with her and pictured her in a way that I then realized later on she wasn’t. (Player interview, female)

And when you want to believe, you believe, and that makes it real. I mean, that’s the way it works. (Player interview, female)

Image 3: Characters engaged in a heated discussion in the game frame. The one player who looks into the camera may be employing dual vision, wondering if taking the photo is happening in the digesis, in the game frame, or outside it.

Many players also underline, that the experience is different in these different frames. The player is able to do thing that she otherwise wouldn’t do. This supports the concept of a magic circle, an interaction membrane or a protective frame.
Lindroos got a great hold on me and sometimes it feels like he really is there. For example, I am very afraid of the dark and EVP but he just doesn’t care about that and drives me into the darkest of pits. (female, email interview during play)

Another one was when I as my vessel, left Gullmarsplan to go “home” to HQ to get some sleep and climbing down those dark stairs alone totally tired from walking the whole day, discovering the HQ to be completely deserted, strange writings on the floors, some rooms were messed up and not a living soul exempt for me in the building. It was kind of scary with all those strange noises and not knowing where everyone else was or why they left. Then I decided to bring back Rottweiler, and as soon as I did that, I was totally cool with the situation again. He was like: "Hey hey! Where’s the party?” and just jumped from room to room shouting and singing until he found two more people in the HQ that were doing something with the computer. It was so cool how I was a little freaked out about being alone there, and how Rottweiler just not cared at all. (female player, email interview during play)

In the context of the primary framework the only thing that changes in these examples is the attitude of the player towards herself. Yet for the player that change is radical. What was first frightening is now exiting. Psychologist Michael J. Apter (1991) has discussed this in the context of his reversal theory. Play and games offer a protective bubble. That which would be frightening in a serious (telic) mindset is exiting in a playful (paratelic) mindset. Similarly that which is boring in a game is suddenly relaxing outside it.12

5.2 Further Frames

In addition to the three frames that Fine has described, there are other frames that emerged from the data. Showing what the game frame discourse looks like cannot be done with excerpts from an interview conducted after the game has concluded. The interviews were conducted in yet another frame, the interview

12 Philosopher Bernard Suits (1990) has postulated about a similar internal position, *lusory attitude*, that is integral to playing a game. According to him this attitude explains why a player is prepared to follow rules that make achieving a goal more difficult. If the goal of golf was simply to place a ball in a hole the player wouldn’t try to strike the ball towards the hole from considerable distance. Suits writes:

The attitude of the game player must be an element in game playing because there has to be an explanation of that curious state of affairs wherein one adopts rules which require one to employ worse rather than better means for reaching an end. (Suits 1990.)
frame, where the player were interviewees, encouraged to reflect on their actions, where they could speak freely and anonymously about the event with a person who had participated in the game as well. This is to certain extent a problem with all frames. Yet it is most striking when it comes to the diegetic world. The players no longer pretend to believe in the magical world of Prosopopeia and they are not possessed. When they describe the events, they can frame them as real in terms of the game, but they are obviously narrativised, turned into a story.

On the sidetrack adventure in Katrinaholm we did a sort of improvised shamanistic ritual that really peaked, we had a sort of a collected idea of what we were supposed to do, but hadn’t really planned anything specific, so we were just improvising and following each other, and it had a wonderful flow from starting to dance and call the shaman, we were going to please him with some gifts. (Player interview, female)

The same applies to the field notes written as part of the participant observation. Notes about the game are automatically outside the game frame. Only the diaries, reports and other things written as a character are part of the game frame.

The interview frame cannot be trusted completely. Events are both narrativized and trying to communicate an experience in a different frame can be problematic in and of itself. Some of the players were interviewed via email during play. Thus this frame, a reflective frame, was present already before the end of the game. Still, articulating what had been experienced in a different frame was difficult for even these people as strong moments seemed “real” and not just “play”.

When I think back on the hours of intensive playing I’m not really sure on what was real and what was not. In my memory I can’t really tell which experiences were real and which weren’t. Logically I know, but my memories of the play could be real. (male player, email interview during play)

The players had two identities in the game frame, themselves in the magical world possessed and the spirit that entered their bodies. Thus the players not
only played the character they were assigned (the dead revolutionary), but they also played a different version of themselves.

The funny [thing] was that I actually realized, and I think I shared this experience with at least some other people I talked to, “I actually realized I started to play myself, just to get the, make the separation [between the spirit and the host] more clear. (Player interview, female, emphasis added)

The gamemasters had not outlined a division to three personas in the pre-game workshops and communications. Yet this realization emerged time and time again as players were interviewed. Many (though not all) did experience that they were alternating between three personas during the game.

I felt that there is three of me in this larp. It’s me that is just me who thinks of all this as a larp. Then there’s me playing the vessel who is accepting the organizers wish of seamlessness and believing the larp not existing and the project to be for real, then there’s me as the vessel being taken over by Rottweiler. I’ve been Rottweiler for most of the time, and my vessel for a little bit when I needed to relax for a while, and then just me when going to sleep and waking up. (female, email interview during play)

I don’t see the purpose of seemlessness. If the world really were comming to an end, no way I would have gone to work, doing my other commitments and so on. Three personas manifest. One is the me me. One is the seamless transition me, the me that would have to “fake it to make it”, that is, the person I would have to be to accept this. The third me is the character. So, basically, seemlessness is trying to call off-larp in-larp. A wish to escape the non-magical reality that we live in. A feeling that it is not enough to larp. (female player post game email interview)

Readings differentiated between players as to how the combination of the spirit and the host was supposed to be played out, but for the most part this was not a problem. The game instructions (in the playing frame) did not specify how the interaction between the spirit and the host would happen, and diegetically the explanation was that possessions are different. Still, some participants had constructed a fourth frame, the possession frame. In this frame they were the ghosts that they had been possessed: they acted differently and preferred to interact with the other participants only when they were performing the ghost and not the host.
Nicki's character called me with my real name, and I don't know why, and I have always looked at her as a very good player, I don't know if she's, didn't like the game or something else, or if she used some, like complicated game technique or shit, I don't know, but she called me with my real name once. (Player interview, male)

In the fiction of the game, the third frame, both the hosts and the spirits existed in the same body. Yet as they were possessed by the ghost (i.e. playing their character) some players only wanted to interact with other characters. This is probably due to experience in other games, where the “mythical player”, the player who is possessed by the ghost-character, doesn’t exist in the diegetic world.

It is important to note, as Goffman (1974) has stated and Fine (1983) has emphasised, that these frames exist simultaneously. The participant is able to shift her attention between them instantaneously, even within one sentence, should she choose to do so. To a certain extent, she is aware of all of them, though her actions are situated in just one of them (usually; for exceptions, see next chapter). In the narrativized accounts of the game, as they are told to a person who is knowledgeable of game, the description shifts easily from description of what the participant did to what the players did to what the characters did. During play, the participants showed that they were quite capable of performing acts and saying things that could be interpreted in a number of frames. This was a source of humour at times (when people said something that would mean a completely different thing in another frame), but mostly the participants were able to conduct themselves in a way that controlled the conflicting readings in all frames at the same time.

So that was very frustrating in that sense that I [referring to the character], I mean didn't know how to help her. I [character] wanted to help this girl, but I [character] couldn't really give her the answer I think she was looking for. And, it was frustrating for me as a player in a way, because I [player] didn't know if it was this someone that Javier DeMedeiros [the character] had a really close relationship to me [character], was I [player/participant] making a fool out of myself here. (Player interview, male)
Additionally, it is equally important to note that I am not claiming that these were the only frames present in the life of the players during the month, far from it. However, these are the frames that, from the point of view of the game, organized the life and the game for the participants. There were, of course, a number of other frames present in the game. Just as a person shifts from one frame to another during the course of one day, the participants, players and characters did that as well.

As a fairly extreme example of how there are numerous frames within frames within frames, consider the following description written by a player. He is describing an astral journey that a group of possessing spirits embarked during the game:

Shit man! It’s gonna take time to describe that journey. I really enjoyed it. It was a good mix of a ceremony and a role-playing session. And it was lead by a fantastic magician. It started in the cellar of the headquarters. In an empty room, just mattresses and candles. We had prepared for hours and the energy was good, we were focused. It started at ours favourite location, there we left our bodies and took a step throw a mirror to the first dimension - a place like Stonehenge. We had to answer some questions before we entered the second - a desert. This place was ruled by a desert man on a horse. We drank some fire-drink and were burned down to a personal hell. The dimension (third) gave time space to everybody to act the moment of rebirth. The fourth dimension was the river Styx, we find a place there we could pass it. A city of commerce and the holy garden was the fifth dimension. We was guided by a enemy’s assistant to the mirror image of [advertising space agency] Clear Channel’s office in Stockholm and found a big damage - cool. We went down throw a hole the damage had occu meet some friendly guys who guided us to sixth dimension. A meadow high up on a mountain. We took a step out in air and fell down to seventh and last dimension. We guided ourselves by the map to the target space (I have forgot the name). At this moment we were tired - the journey had be going on in 6 hours... So then we reach the target we follow the instructions from the tall man wearing a hat. And token the life of Victoria without any thoughts. Then we went back very fast as Victoria told us. (male player, email interview during play)

The players are taking part on an astral journey as the spirits who have possessed them. The astral journey is conducted as a séance – which takes the form of a

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Brenne (2005) has paid attention to the complex keying that happens in the context of live action role-playing games and has discussed first, second and third order of keyings in the context of larp.
tabletop role-playing game (*the séance frame*). The possessed spirit, Victoria, is leading the group on this mission (acting as the gamemaster of the trip – she was one of the game organizers who played characters in the game) and describes how the trip progresses. She also describes the adversaries on the trip, facilitating the actions and considering the game mechanics and dramaturgy – in effect fabricating situations for the player-spirit-astral travellers (*the astral administrator frame*). The trip is guided by a painting the player earlier received from an art gallery. Though the séance has the form of a role-playing game, it is not pointed out. After this first astral journey the players realized that they could embark on such and set up their own journeys without the help of the gamemasters.

### 5.3 Engrossment

The ultimate goal of the participants, it seems, in the experience was to reach a feeling of “pure” feeling embodiment in the game, a total immersion in the diegetic world, the game frame. This meant that the participant wanted the game frame to feel natural, wishing it to be (experienced as) the primary frame. Some talked about forgetting the real world. It seems that the wish was to see the mediation of the consciously constructed frames to disappear, to collapse, so that only the game would be felt. The ideology of the game seemed to be that if everyone pretended to believe hard enough and the gamemasters did their job, then the game would not only be indistinguishable from ordinary life, but the game would be life.

This is reflected in the stories that the interviewees tell of their best and strongest moments in the game:

> There was, we were actually standing in the middle of the forest. We have nothing on the [upper part of our bodies] and no shoes, and we're just dancing and screaming. And it was lots of lights and wine and, well, we weren't thinking really, but we were just taking this wine. We felt some sort of can and tipped it over, and then we took the wine and spilled on earth, and was just grabbing ourselves with it, and it was a

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14 Pohjola (2004) has discussed this pretending together in a believable world until pretend becomes belief as *inter-immersion*. 
very, very strong experience. Totally wild, totally improvised, and of course it was cold, it was freezing cold, and the rain was pouring down as well. (Player interview, male)

[The strongest moment was so strong because] I really reached ritual sort of ecstasy or that felt real, because a lot of the rituals were sort of bleak actually (player interview, female)

In the very, very beginning of the game, at the first Sunday, when we first came in contact with our spirits, so to speak. We had taken these [placebo sugar] pills, so we were doing, chanting stuff down under the church. I had, I actually broke down in tears and cried like for an hour for reasons I didn't know, I didn't know why. I didn't feel sad at all, I just couldn't stop crying. And I didn't feel happy either, it was none. And that made me question, if this really was a game.. (player interview, male)

It was a ritual, and I think it was either the one at Kungsträdgården or the one at La Mano. The one at La mano was very moving for me as myself, as it was something I care about very much. (Player interview, male)

My own experience in the game reflects this as well. One excited night I wrote in the following in my field diary:

Just got back from [abandoned, half-finished subway station, not open for public] Kymlinge Station. We spent four hours there looking for the place, then dodging trains, then - after we were spotted on the platform - running around in the woods (though no guards showed up), trying to get Omax to work (we failed, no signal was found), going back to the platform, looking for the node for quite a while (it is a huge place), finally finding the tag, dodging more trains (including a sound manifestation (we were too spooked to look) of the [local occult urban legend] Silver Arrow!!), putting together a ritual (based on the idea that we want to assure that souls will be able to pass through here to the world beyond, that connex will not close down this line, forcing the angel that has been Earth's Bitch since the beginning to do the work, offering our spirits' own existences here as a sacrifice (we will not try to stay behind when our time is up) and paying for our and others' journeys with a few coins), the finally performing the ritual on the platform (at which point the glove would not work on the tag, we decided to continue anyway and instantly as we had drawn the circle with salt water and cigarette smoke the glove started humming, reacting to the lesser banishing, as did the shifting tracks in the tunnel). It was awasome, the adrenaline that was pumping through my at that point frost bitten body was amazing. [...] So far my coolest moments in the game hands down. (Momentum field diary.)

As the exited tone reveals, this was one of the high points of the game; indeed, I was still so exited about the events that it is not self-evident where the shift from ludic to ordinary events happens. Most players had a handful of moments that
they described as their best and strongest moments and all of these involved the collapsing of the insulating frames between the participant and the character. But achieving that was difficult. Just maintaining the game frame required effort.

Goffman and Fine both refer to this as *engrossment*. As already mentioned, in the Nordic larp culture the term *immersion* (see for example Pohjola 2000, 2004) is often used. The difference is that immersion is often seen as something that a player does, she immerses into a character, a reality or a narrative (Harviainen 2003), whereas engrossment is something that happens to a person.

> It should be stressed that the matter of being carried away into something – in a word, engrossment – does not provide us with a means of distinguishing strips of untransformed activity from transformed ones: a reader’s involvement in an episode in a novel is in the relevant sense the same as his involvement in a strip of “actual” experience. (Goffman 1974, 347)

Goffman discusses this as *downkeying*, breaking the frame, moving towards the primary framework. This is discussed in the next chapter.

### 5.4 The Effort of Maintaining a Frame

Engrossment was the goal, but it was not easy to reach. Staying in the game frame requires effort. In the interviews the players did not directly talk about a conscious effort, but in many places it seemed to be the underlying idea. They used ritualised behaviour, specific vocabulary, performative actions, meaningful props, scenographed or selected locations and other methods to support the illusion of the coherent game world, the game frame.

Some of the player constructed tiny rituals that they enacted when they became their characters. They might chant a little bit or meditate for a moment. The gamemasters had introduced some elements that were supposed to make this easier: the players were give pills that “contained a molecule that eases possession” (they contained sugar) which they were supposed to take daily. Many players did incorporate the pill taking into their daily life, some even used
it as a tool in their personal possession rituals (see also Image 8 in the next chapter).

Personally I have a very short ritual with light, sometimes [incense], I have a large cup of water, I put my head in, poured out all the air and I waited, waited, and started going rrrrrrr, (---) people like.. I was doing this at [the centrally located cultural centre] one time, people outside in the toilet queue, what was going on? Bil-bil-bil-rr-ahh-boomboosh, so then you are Rebecca. (Player interview, male)

Image 4: The headquarters of the players was staged in a former Nuclear facility 30 meters under a technical university in Stockholm.

Some players also had character specific clothes (shoes or dresses, for example), that they only wore when they were being posses by the visiting spirit. One male
player dressed up as a woman always when he was possessed (the dead revolutionary was a transgender activist). The game also provided the players with military style dogtags (with herbs and crystals to add an occult touch), which the players were not supposed to remove during the five weeks.

And then afterwards I’d do the mantra for every clothing that is his and mine, as with shoes, I will always switch shoes, c’mon, that’s like.. People always should switch shoes when they switch character. (Player interview, male)

Similarly some characters used other props, not just clothes, to stay connected to their characters. The equipment, when it worked the way it was supposed to, also enhanced the game frame. The game designers had included a lot of interesting technology the players could use. Unfortunately a lot of the time the technology did not work and that disrupted the immersion in the diegetic world.

The locations that were scenographed, prepared for the game, or specifically chosen also fostered immersion in the game frame. R1, the headquarters of the characters, was a real life retired nuclear reactor 30 meters under the Royal Technical University of Stockholm. It was fitted with computers, occult communication devices, a gym, rooms for each of the elemental factions, and a library where each book was chosen so that it would fit and enhance the feel of the realness (see Images 4 and 5).

The chosen locations were places that the game took the players around Stockholm. Most of them were chosen based on historical merits and the players had to understand the significance of each of these places. Some of the places themselves were very fitting to the general aesthetics of the game, but in most places it was the understanding of the meaning of the place that made them the strongest places for the game frame.

I had sort of a very fluid relationship to the character, because I felt he was hard to conjure up. And also my wardrobe is in Skåna, which means I didn’t have a lot of clothes to use for him. And so it was easier down here [in R1] to be clearly Scott Logan [the character] (Player interview, female)
Maintaining the game frame was also easier when the player was engaged in an activity. As long as something was happening, the game felt like it was on. Boredom was something that only the player could feel, not the character. This is interesting, because the character could be frustrated, angry or tired, but never bored.

The game, it’s never been boring for me actually. I’ve been going to LARPs and stuff like that for over eight years now, and if I’m bored, it’s only because of me, it’s not because of the game. It’s me, and I have to find something to do. Which mostly consisting in pissing some people [other players] off and yelling at people, and telling them how stupid they were, and stuff like that. (Player interview, male)

Worst [thing about the game]: Sometime during the last weekend I was totally bored and hungry for an hour or so, and had no inspiration whatsoever. But then I ate, and

Image 5: The important gaming locations were chosen with the general aesthetics of the game in mind.
got some new energy and everything was fine again. (female player, email interview during the game)

Worst [things about the game]: Must be the mornings when you just have waked up and no one else in HQ is awake and you just sit there with no idea of what to do. (male player, interview during game)

Not surprisingly the frame was easier to maintain also when it was done together, as a collective, social effort. The players do not just play for themselves; they also play for the benefit of others. Some described that they tried to perform their possession rituals so that others would see or hear them. In two of the above quotes the player goes looking for other players to interact with. This was also one reason why the players preferred to play in R1 or some of the specified locations: there were other players there. Though there were many instances where players did play alone, it seems that being cut off from the other players easily translates into being cut off from the game.

The weekdays, my internet at home is gone again and I can't really focus on writing long emails or writing in that diary that we were supposed to write in on that forum while at work. (female, email interview during play)

[I did not play much] at all, I was in Germany for vacation. I had some phone calls that kept me updated though. (female, email interview during play)

Interestingly, as each player had two characters, the “mythical me” and the possessing spirit, they could have pseudo-interaction inside their own minds as well. Surprisingly many players did report that these discussion or interactions were fun and/or important parts of their experiences. One player decided that she could only communicate with her possessing spirit by writing. So the host would write something in a note book and when the spirit was in change, she would read it, reply by writing in a different handwriting style and so on. Others performed whole scenes when no-one was watching.

And one of the funniest things I think during this whole thing was, because I was vegetarian for one month [because the character was vegetarian], and one evening I came home very late, and wanted to do some pancakes, and I used some eggs, and my character Garcia 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 for anybody else, but for myself to keep the feeling that I really was two persons, and it helped me. (Participant interview, male)

The players report that these kinds of activities helped them stay in the game. This cannot be verified with the participant observation, as the players were alone in these situations. They are only made visible for other participants when they are talked about. The player who threw the eggs on the floor told this story in the game as a funny incident, as an example of how he and his spirit were not really seeing eye to eye. Thus, in a way, it was also performed – or at least narrated – for the benefit of others.

The game frame was also supported by specific slang, vocabulary that made sense to the characters. They could talk about EVP (aka electronic voice phenomena, basically dead spirits communicating through audio recordings), ghosts and spirits (the character), vessels and hosts (the mythical versions of the players), Prince Hutt, Adam and Ingela (characters in the game mythos), Omac, Thumin, Urim, Steele (occult technology) and so on. These words worked as strong markers that all those present were solidly in the game frame.

Staying in the game frame, being engrossed in it, was helped by things that were clearly connected to the game frame and only to the game frame. Things such as specific rituals (both in the frame as collective efforts and as rites of “passage” when entering and exiting possession frame), diegetic vocabulary, scenographed locations and thematically fitting props all helped. Yet the strongest supports came from other players – and from action. Being engrossed together was easier than being engrossed alone – even with great props – just as being engrossed while doing something was much easier than while doing nothing.

Staying engrossed in the game frame did not always work. Blurring, breaking and playing with the frames were something that happened in the game frequently. That is the focus of the next chapter.
6 Breaking the Frames

Goffman’s Frame Analysis offers two ways of looking at disruptive actions that are relevant for the matter at hand. One is breaking frame and the other is out-of-frame activity.

An activity is considered out-of-frame if it deviates from the central “story” of what is happening is a given location (Goffman 1974, 201). In the context of live action role-playing game, this basically means off-game, non-diegetic actions that happen while the game is running. It might be a car that passes on a dirt road near a fantasy game (activity in the primary framework) or game mechanics such as throwing a tennis ball instead of a fireball spell (which occurs in the playing frame, for the problematic semiotics of larps, see Loponen & Montola 2004). The out-of-frame activity is ignored, it does not happen in the frame, it does not influence the game.

In the context of Momentum, all actions were defined as being in-frame. The game rules explicitly stated that there is no line between life and game and everything should be treated as-is. Naturally this did not happen in practice, but it was both the aim of the playing as well as an aesthetic design choice. Though extremely scarce in comparison to usual larps, there were nevertheless all kinds of out-of-frame activities in Momentum, such as safety concerns, gamemaster involvement, game mechanics and technical problems.

Looking at the times when frames were broken is a bit more complex. Goffman introduces the terms downkeying and upkeying to explain these action. He defines them as follows:

Perhaps the most obvious example of the process of downkeying occurs in regard to playfulness that gets, as they say, out of hand, as when mock acts become real ones. (Goffman, 1974, 359).

The contrast to downkeying is upkeying: a shift from a given distance from literal reality to a greater distance, an unauthorized increase in lamination of the frame. For
example, in gambling games when stakes are pitched low in relation to the “gamble” of the players, betting sometimes degenerates; larger and larger amounts are bet based on worse and worse risks, to the accompaniment of increasing laughter. (Goffman 1974, 366).

Fine (1983, 196-200) is on similar ground in using the terms upkeying and downkeying in the context of role-playing games. A step towards “reality” is downkeying and a step towards the ludic is upkeying. However, in the context of Momentum this division doesn’t seem very revealing. Downkeying happened when player became extremely exited about the game and “forgot” that they are playing. However, a bored player who “slips” out of the game and, though still acting as a character, is looking at the event from the “outside”, would also count as downkeying. Basically this difference could be characterized as play either becoming “real” or in play becoming “work”.

Correspondingly the concept of upkeying contributes very little to the analysis of Momentum. Very little of it happened; the game was one for five weeks and thus it was supposedly not possible to interpret something as in a too ludic manner. Of course, after the game had ended there has been numerous occasions when the players have reverted to the game frame, but that falls outside the scope of this thesis. Thus the interesting difference is not so much between upkeying and downkeying, but the different types of downkeying.15

6.1 Out-of-frame action

As the game tried to blur the line between ordinary life and the game, the only way to clearly and noticeably break the game frame was to acknowledge the ludic nature of the game. Calling the game a game, or insinuating this in some way was thus the most frowned upon thing a player could do. One player did

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15 Brenne’s (2005) analysis on Norweigian larps using frame analysis offers an interesting comparison here. He differentiated between four types of upkeying (external sensory stimuli, outsiders entering area of play, unintended upkeying, intended upkeying), downkeying and in-frame paradoxes. This division is problematic. Brenne does not distinguish between out-of-frame activity and upkeying, which is a shame as often his example cases would be understandable if conceived as out-of-frame activities. Also, in-frame paradoxes are situations where the game starts to feel like just a game – and thus would fall under downkeying in my division.
this a number of times during the game, and all the players who had played a lot with him and who were interviewed expressed in strong terms how this angered them. They were also frustrated as they could not reprimand the player without breaking character themselves – and they were unwilling to do that.

[...] I can't take this like social personally, like "Prosopopeia you're a bad player, get a grip", maybe I should. But I don't know, I didn't do that shit anyway. So that was, that was a problem. (Player interview, male)

Using the safeword ("prosopopeia") was the blatant and explicit way of situating the action outside of the game frame. It was designed for situations where a player was in danger. The fact that one player abused it frustrated a lot of players. As a safety mechanism the word was rarely used. In the observation and interviews only one instance was uncovered. One player was portraying being unhinged so well that her fellow players became afraid that she was no longer playing. This prompted one of the players to check, with the safeword, that she was feeling fine:

Yes, I broke the proposal two times during the five weeks, once to check if Helen really was okay and wasn't being mind-raped by Mr. Lindroos and once to have an open conversation with my girl friend. (male player, post game email interview)

We had the prosopopeia word as a kind of an emergency, and I didn't need to use it, I was okay. Somebody used it on me a couple of times, and it was like, Helen, are you okay? 'Cos you have to play, not only Lindroos, but you had to play yourself as well. And that became a problem when Lindroos pushed Helen down to her knees, and she was crawling actually and was feeling really bad. And then someone come to me and was like prosopopeia, Helen, are you okay? And I was yeah, no problem! Everything's fine, I'm just playing the game. (female player, post game interview)

Once it was established that everything really was fine everyone acted as if the scene had not been broken and the game continued. The action took place outside the game frame. As the safeword was used in the manner it was supposed to, no one criticized this. On the contrary, the moment was used as a proof how “real” the game is and how convincing the player of Mr Lindroos was.
Similarly discussions with the gamemasters took place outside the context of playing. The players could contact the organizers, and vice versa, and this was treated in the same way as using the safeword. Indeed, the gamemasters would say that the prosopopeia protocol was interrupted. The applies to the email interviews that were conducted with select players during the game.

"I was called once by [gamemaster] Roger and I called Roger once to discuss the journalist situation just after the violent accident in R1. It was OK, but I felt uneasy. It really broke the illusion and it took a day or two to get it back." (female player, post game email interview)

There were other actions that took place out side the game frame, but they weren’t as explicit. Though the game denied its game-ness, the players were often aware of the game mechanics. The clearest example of this is the concept of the magician’s curtain. The term is used in the vernacular of players of alternative reality games, and it means that the gamemasters create an illusion for the players to immerse themselves in, but the players shouldn’t try to pull back the “curtain” to reveal the strings that make it all work. In essence everyone knows that it is done with smoke and mirrors, but the players should not try to solve the mystery how this is achieved.

In Momentum the aim was to create a game where the players never came in contact with the magician’s curtain. Everything was supposed to work as-is. That did not succeed completely. It was possible to run into a gamemaster out on the town (though diegetically they were supposed to all be hiding), sometimes the technology simply broke down (which frustrated players, though diegetically it was suppose to be interpreted as tech breaking down in the game as well) and at times people did things because they knew that was the way the game was supposed to be played (three weekends in the game were designated as important ones everyone should be present, the possession ritual was a certain time and so forth). In the end this meant that the characters made a number of choices based on what the players knew. Or, to be more precise, the participants made choices as players and not as characters.
But we need to remember that we don't want to look behind the curtains and it is not always easy to know where the curtains are and what is just a little more hidden part of the game. (female player, email interview during play)

Whenever the GMs secretly managed to get info on things they couldn't possibly have a clue about I felt “how on earth did that happen”? It kind of mentally kicked Ralf out of me (without making any signs to others) since it was some sort of "behind the curtain" mystery that was really very obvious and that woke my curious mind up. Not a big deal. (male player, post game email interview)

Still, most player reported that they did not think about the structure of the actions they had to carry out during the game as structured plot or quests (for example one should do A and B in order to do C which must be immediately followed by D). This suggests that though the players had access to the playing frame, it was not something that the players used continuously.

The reactions that the technology brought about are more complex. The game used a large amount of technology. Some of it was off-the-shelf technology used in new ways (Skype chat, cell phones, terminal connections), other pieces were prototypes (the Thumin glove was actually a RFID tag reader, the Steele was a GPS locationing device), some of it was new (Bluetooth enabled phones), others were old (matrix printer from the 19080’s), some of it was small (RFID tags hidden in dogtags) and other were large as a room (the EVP rig used to communicate with the dead). The players were supposed to treat all the technology as-is, but in practice the players had very different attitudes towards technology depending on how predictably it functioned, how well it was accounted for in the diegesis and how well it fulfilled its role. When asked to describe the equipment as a set of game props, communication devices, or tools useful in the game one player replied in a particularly telling way:

That little pyramid lamp [steele] is a prop, the mobile [phone] is for communication, the [thumin] glove is a tool useful in-game. (female player, email interview during play)
The players’ attitudes towards the technology seem to be a place where the frames bleed into each other. The actions that they prompt are at times out of frame, but more often it seems that the attitude (or knowledge) of the player influences the character. That falls under downkeying.

6.2 Upkeying

Slipping further into the ludic and the “fictive”, is called upkeying. In the context Momentum this was supposed to be impossible. The game did not pause and thus the ludic was constantly present. In practice the game was anchored in the primary framework and there were moments when the players had to take safety precautions. As the game wanted to push the players as far as they were willing to go (in terms of direct action activism and urban exploration), there was a possibility that the players would lose sight of what they were doing and in the heat of the moment go further than they normally would. On the whole this did not happen.

The players were asked if they broke the law more than they would have during a similar five week period. Almost all replied that they had not broken the law more than they would have normally done. The ones that had transgressed more than usual were quick to point out that they were solely responsible for the “extra actions” they had taken.

I’m not sure that I did broke the law or not. Have to think that for a while, but I can say if I were entertaining myself without this game, I would break the law twice a day. Wait, hold on, I was at [the half-constructed and abandoned subway station] Kymlinge once, that’s illegal. [...] [I’m] kinda disappointed about [the game not encouraging illegal activity]. It would be a political game, c’mon.. (male player, post game interview)

I broke the law a few times, but not more than I would have done a regular month. I think the game discouraged to break the law. There were never the reason for me to go somewhere, in character, where I shouldn’t be. (female player, post game email interview)

[A]t first I felt that the game encouraged [breaking the law], during the first preparation weekend, that like the organisers said, you can, it’s your personal choice
to break the law and stuff, but it felt something like that you need, you should break the law or something. We expect you to do it, more or less, but then I didn't, I felt like later in the game they tried to stop us more or less, and not, to discourage us more than encourage us to break the law. (post-game player interview)

It is questionable if the interview data can be trusted. Possibly the players felt that even in an anonymous interview they owe it to the gamemasters not to “expose” them, or they were trying to save face by claiming that they were in control all the time. Perhaps the game changes some players’ attitudes towards the acceptability of, for example, trespassing on private property if no harm is allowed to come to the place. Yet nothing in the data really suggests this kind of reading.

There are examples of pervasive games that have fostered this kind of upkeying. In mobile phone based variant of the pervasive game classic Killer (Johnson 1981) called Botfighters players were willing to push the pedal while driving a little harder just to score some extra points (Bjerver 2006). Similarly in Wanderer, a game where the players move in city space according to instructions they receive on a mobile device, the players who tested it were willing to risk being hit by a car to perform better (Hielscher & Heitlager 2006). It seems unbelievable that if simpler games were able to evoke this kind of behaviour that Momentum would not have.

There is one case in which the characters staged a ritual outside the United States embassy. Some characters/players felt that this was a bad idea; it is stupid to go stand around an embassy of a country that is afraid of terrorists with weird technology. The characters/players who felt this way did not participate in the ritual. The ones who did had a run-in with the police – and the police had arrived heavily armed (more on this below). Did they not take the situation as seriously as they should have? The players argued after the ritual (and actually already before it) that they are perfectly within their rights as Swedish citizens. Perhaps the players have clearly different primary frameworks. Perhaps this is rationalization. Perhaps the players felt protected as most participants, if not
indeed all, are part of the comfortable middle class. Perhaps this is all speculation.

There is one clear and documented case of upkeying. The characters were supposed to meet a homeless person at a public square. Unfortunately as the players were not progressing as fast as the gamemasters had anticipated the person playing the homeless person had tired of waiting for the characters to arrive after sitting in smelly clothes on the cold concrete inside a “protective circle” he had draw with chalk. The actor went home. Some hour later the characters arrived at the scene and found a woman who seemed to fit the description that they had – passed out inside a chalk circle. The players thought that the actor must really be into the role and performed a number of rituals around the woman in order to wake her up – their reading was that this was a puzzle in the game they needed to solve. They considered the woman an excellent role-player, as she very convincingly ignored them. As she was sitting in a ritual circle that had Enochian marking the possibility that she was not part of the game was not voiced. The player even went so far as to go through her personal belongs (acceptable within the game, illegal outside it) and even stole a few Swedish crowns.

Finally most of the players abandoned this pursuit (the homeless person they had been looking for had been found in a different place – the gamemasters had woken him up, put him in the costume and driven him in the right place). Most player left the scene, though a few who had realized that this woman was not a player but someone who needed help, saw to it that she received it. Still, even after a few days some of the players still did not know that this encounter was not supposed to happen. They still though that it was part of the game. In an email interview on the next week, when asked about the event by the evaluators (who had found out about the event), one player remarked:

Aha! You must be talking about the homeless person [my character] stole money from. Until now I wasn't sure that she was a part of the game, so that was a bit strange. She
must have been so cold from drewling all that much, and she was impossible to connect to. (player, email interview during play)

When the player was informed that this was not the case, the tone changed dramatically:

Oh my god, I really thought it was a part of the game, since she was sitting in front of the circle which we thought she wrote. (player, email interview during play)

After this incident players seemed to be much more careful. The game evaluators and gamemasters also sent an email to the players – designated as an out-of-game email – that reminded the players about not breaking any laws. For some players the incident did change the experience.

Yes [the game encouraged breaking the law]. I did. Or rather not encouraged it, but it sure as hell didn’t say you can’t do it either, not until we got the e-mail from [a person in the game organization who sent an email to the players during the game to remind them not to break the law]. Eh.. I felt that breaking the law made the game feel more real, Manuel wouldn’t have cared. And it was just such petty law breaks, then.. Didn’t hurt anyone, I wouldn’t have dreamed of doing anything that could really have.. (male player, post game interview)

There is a further problem with the concept of upkeying in the context of Momentum. The players were explicitly instructed to treat the whole world as a game (or, actually, to treat the game as real). This means that when players see a vehicle of a private security firm drive past and they hide it is unclear if they are upkeying. In the game frame they are supposed to treat the (real) security company as a threat. Yet simultaneously they are treating something that is “real” in a playful manner. The argument can be made either way.

The problem is that suddenly, if the players react to a car driving slowly as if it were a game element, the difference between upkeying and staying in the game frame is if the gamemasters have planned for that encounter or not. As the gamemasters fabricated quite a lot of situations, sites and background knowledge (there were numerous fabricated websites, fabricated posts on “real” webforums, staged encounters in a real hospital with a fabricated nurse, fabricated encounters
with people who had been tricked into interacting with the players but who did not know a game was in progress, etc.), it is very hard to make the distinction.

### 6.3 Downkeying: Flow and Engrossment

Downkeying means that a player has moved from the game frame towards the primary framework. In the context of *Momentum* there are two types of downkeying. The first kind of downkeying happens when a player is so exited about playing that she forgets that a game is in progress and she starts to treat the game as “real”. The second alternative is that the player is confused or bored and starts slipping out of the game. The former is a positive version of downkeying (in the context of *Momentum*), it is what the gamemasters were trying to foster, and it is what the players strived for. The latter is detrimental for the enjoyment of a game. I will discuss both of these types of downkeying, first the positive part and then the negative one.

The engrossment of forgetting that one is playing was what the game was trying to induce. When the frames collapse in such a way that the game feels real and gripping.

> [There were lots of times [when it was unclear whether I was playing or not]. When it really feels like [the character] is taking over my body. For example the ritual in for NANTA. He dog his fingers deep in the soil and screamed as the energy channelled thru my body down and to the other side. It was amazing and quite scary. As well as the ceremonies that I have a hard time remembering, he did something to me, bound my will to his throw a ritual for the angel of Will Power. Scary stuff. (female player, email interview during play)]

> There were some occasions when I didn’t know what was real and what was unreal, when it really felt like I was possessed. I’ve got some scary memory gaps from one of the weekends and my girlfriend swears that she’s been hearing me talking Italian during my sleep. (male player, post game email interview)

These moment present a challenge for frame analysis. On the one hand the players are downkeying and treating the game as real. Yet they are still taking risks that they might not take in “real life” since at least on some level they seem to be inside the protective bubble of play that Apter (1991) has talked about.
I don't know if I really understand the question. If you mean that I thought everything was really really true? The answer to that is no. Sometimes, however, Ralf [the character] had a very strong grip on my body and did pretty much what he wanted. These situations were only in connection with either Magic rituals or consumption of alcohol (Ralf is an alcoholic).

At those moments I was less “hanging in the back looking out through Ralf’s eyes, listening with Ralf’s ears, experiencing what he experienced” than usual. It was more or less like a small part of me blended with him (keeping the memories, at best, of what happened) but that he was in absolute control. I was him. Some of those moments I can't even really remember. (male player, post game email interview)

These are instances of downkeying where “mock acts become real ones”, but (at least some of) the players are still, on some level, aware of the ludic nature of events. The breaking of the frame is not complete. It almost seems that what happens is that the players are aware of the primary framework and the game frame, but the frame of playing that usually is situated between the two disappears. The players are aware of the fictitious nature of the game frame, but they do not think about their actions in the context of playing.

These positive, sought after instances of downkeying, are helped by intense emotion. As players become excited about the ludic events, they forget about their “real world” problems and are absorbed deeper into the ludic world.

When playing intense the play becomes for the most part the real. The problems you face ingame seem like real problems after some intense playing and occupy your mind as a real problem would do. (male player, email interview during play)

One way to approach this experience is through the concept of flow. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1975) came up with the term to describe the mental state where one fully immersed in whatever one is doing at the moment be it reading a book, dancing or playing a game. In the field of digital game design theory the concept of flow is held in high regard: basically it is the dominant design paradigm (Salen & Zimmerman (2004), though reserved, offer a good example). A good game is seen as creating a flow experience, and there
are long chapters devoted to teaching digital game designers how to balance between ability level and challenge in a game.

The concept has also been applied to live action role-playing game. Heidi Hopeametsä (2008) has postulated that though role-playing games do not offer repetitive tasks, it is possible to achieve flow through immersion. By surrendering to the game (i.e. immersing into the game) it is possible to achieve flow. Hopeametsä applies the gameplay experience model developed by Laura Ermi and Frans Mäyrä (2005) to explain the different types of immersion that can foster the flow experience in a role-playing game:

Sensory immersion is achieved through the audiovisual aspects of a game. In larp, this would be everything we experience through our senses; the physical surroundings and the characters of the fictional world. Challenge-based immersion is achieved when one has a satisfying balance between abilities and challenges related to motor and/or mental skills. In larp this includes mental, social and motor skills; from emotional challenges to fights and succeeding in plotting, for example. Imaginative immersion is the experience of becoming absorbed with the stories and the world, or identifying with a game character, which is exactly the same in larp. These three dimensions of immersion usually mix and overlap. (Hopeametsä 2008.)

The players often recall the moments when they were completely absorbed in the game as the strongest ones. The rhetoric of the character taking over and the player either just sitting back and watching what is happening or the player completely disappearing is common. Most of these descriptions can be understood in the context of flow. Csikszentmihalyi has stated:

Perhaps the clearest sign of flow is the merging of action and awareness. A person in flow has no dualistic perspective: he is aware of his actions but not of the awareness itself. (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 38)

However, conceptualizing flow in terms of frame analysis is harder; flow is a personal experience whereas a frame is a social construct. Still, in order to describe flow it is not enough to remove awareness of the primary frame or the
playing frame, it seems that if such a thing as the experience of flow does happen, it must be understood as a separate frame. A smaller, tighter frame, that closes in on the activity that induces flow.

The players can get carried away and do things they wouldn't normally do as they think they are completely protected by the magic circle. Different rules apply. In the case of the homeless woman, (some of) the players were excited and experiencing positive downkeying. As they found out what really happened, this changed. Some where disgusted by what they had done.

The feeling of that everything is real and that I can’t tell fiction from reality, like with the homeless person. The feeling of seeing things differently, seeing other people on the street that look like they are possessed too, after spending so many hours on the street of the city starting to feel like a part of it. It’s nice to act like a man for a while, not caring about your hair, clothes, face or anything. (female player, email interview during play)

In a similar situation in the first Prosopopeia game, *Prosopopeia Bardo 1: Där vi föll*, some players run into a new person at a graveyard during the night. They had a long chat about themes related to the game even though they did not know if the person was involved in the game or not.

A guy came by when we were using the tape machine at Skogskyrkogården. We talked to him for a while, but couldn't figure out if he was involved in the game or not. This I think is the best part, where you have no way of knowing if a person or experience is created with intent or not. (Player quoted in Montola & Jonsson 2006.)

The good kind of downkeying, taking the game as real, is experienced as positive if either a sense of flow is achieved (individual) or joint understanding of the situation and the playing style is fostered (social). However, if there is confusion as to how the game should be played (i.e. How one should act in a given situation), or there is a lack of stimuli, then the player may become bored or confused and this lead to the negative downkeying.
6.4 Downkeying: Boredom and Confusion

Downkeying was experienced as negative when the players became bored and confused and thus started to think about the game as a game. Basically this means that they downkeyed from the game frame to the playing frame. This is actually quite similar to out-of-frame activity, as the players did pretend for others that they were still in the game frame, but they were actually viewing the action in the playing frame. The difference between out-of-frame activity and downkeying is that out-of-frame activity is conducted by an individual and the rest of the people present in the social situation regard the action as out-of-frame. Downkeying is something that happens socially, something that happens to the group as a whole.

The reason that these instances of boredom and confusion are discussed in this thesis under downkeying and not out-of-frame activity is that in most cases the boredom and confusion seemed to have been shared by the players. Though the players continued to act as characters it was now “only” calculated acting, not being a character. The players were distanced from their characters – or they simply were unsure as to how they should be acting, as players or as characters.

Mostly the players slipped out of the game frame when they were unsure how to act. If the diegetic world was perceived as inconsistent, if the other players were acting in an (contextually) unexplainable way, if they were unsure whether the other people present were playing at all etc.

I am not very interested in reporting bad things but will heed to your question anyway: [the worst experience was] the ritual where the spirits was brought here. It was probably great. The problem was that a megaphone (?) or something was used to create a tense atmosphere but the result was that I didn’t hear anything. Trying to repeat after someone chanting a magical ritual is basically impossible without notes. Hence you stand there trying your best to repeat stuff but knowing you are failing. Then the only thing that filled my head was doubt. How can this work if I don’t even say the right words? It can’t. I had agreed to being under the protocol. I believed in magic. But I didn’t believe magic would work when the magic instructions weren’t being followed. I wasn’t following them (I couldn’t hear them!) and thus I wouldn’t be ‘besatt’. The ritual was taking me further away from becoming ‘besatt’ rather than
actually possessing me. I was very close to leave the ritual entirely (I am happy I didn't). (player, post game email interview)

Off and In game, it was really frustrating when I and Pasi (Rajput) walked from KTH to Olof Palmes gata just to find out that our equipment was faulty. From an off[game]-perspective I understood that the equipment might be very sensible and that everyone makes mistakes but Mario (with little or no patience what so ever) soon came to hate and doubt everything that Metatron handed to us. (male, post game email)

Yes, some of the other players didn't make the difference between the vessel and the character clear, and it have been difficult to know which one you're acting with, made me feel off sometimes. (female, email during play)

The game world can be as fantastical as possible, but it needs to be coherent. Actually, the world can even be incoherent, as long as it is incoherent in a coherent way. When the story world, the diegesis, the player's perception of the game frame becomes inconsistent, the player is often jolted out of the game. She is reminded that it is only a game she is playing. The player needs to renegotiate the “rules” of the game world – or ignore the inconsistency in the game world.  

In a study about children's digital gaming, Laura Ermi, Satu Heliö and Frans Mäyrä (2004, 98) found out that a coherent world is one of the requirement for mental immersion. The findings in Momentum seem to support this in an adult context and in a live action role-playing game.

The single biggest frustration in the game was caused by the malfunctioning technology (see Image 6). Though in the mythos of the game it was explained that magic and technology enhance each other and as magic is fickle, so is technology, most player did not interpret the problems with the prototype technology in a diegetic fashion. On an explicit level – in the talk of the moment – they did pay lip service to the mythos, but at the same time the players started to look for excuses not to use the technology. In those moment when the technology broke down at a pivotal moment every player still pretended to be the character. But they were not playing the game, they were a group of disappointed players going through the motions of their characters.

Montola (2003) has gone so far as discussed role-playing as interactive construction of subjective diegeses.
First, we must separate EVP from Enochian tech (Steile, Thumin, Urim). The latter was obviously more modern tech dealing with mobile phones and what not. They were more props to me – we could do just as well without them – since they were only (?) enhancing rituals. EVP on the other hand was an old technology, perhaps more advanced in R1, that was absolutely crucial to uphold the illusion of another side, the side of the dead. (male player, post game interview)

To the members of the water element technology seemed somewhat overrated from the very beginning, we did have enough faith to work the magic anyway. The breakdown (not that I understood to what extent things worked or didn’t work) just increased the feeling that we could do magic on our own but that the other elements might have some troubles getting magic to work. (male player, post game email interview)

Some instances of frustration when the tech stuff broke down for the umpteenth time, when I was tired, cold, wet and generally not feeling well. (player interview post game email)

Second the problem of not knowing whether the tech has broken down in the first place. (This problem is closely related to the first.) As I didn’t know what the stuff was supposed to do in the first place it was very hard to know if there was anything wrong at all or if we were just in the wrong place. For example I learned after the game that the omax was supposed to play several different sounds at the nodes. This should have given us some clues as to what to do with them, but very often we got no sound at all, or just one small unintelligible fragment. Very often these problems were solved in a very good role-playing way, i.e. by ignoring the tech and just keep on playing. (player email post game email interview)

Image 6: Thumin glove, Omax phone and Steele.
Though mostly the faulty technology was viewed as a nuisance to be ignored, there were a few scattered players who did maintain the “correct” view of technology as described in the mythos.

All the tech breakdowns I experienced were dealt with purely in game since there was never any reason to break for something like that - tech goes fubar even in a story. This - to me - added to the whole game experience. (player interview, post game email interview)

Luckily, as the players who were disappointed in the technology found diegetic reasons for not using it, this did not cause problems. Everyone was able to have a similar enough reading of the diegetic world for a shared game frame to be maintained.

However, not all technology was viewed as flawed. The elaborate EVP rig (see Image 7), which was built in the space where the reactor had been when the space had been a nuclear reactor, was perceived as atmospheric, functioning and integral to the game. The difference is that the EVP machine functioned as it was supposed to for most of the game (the gamemasters did maintenance work on the machine during the game at a time when players were not allowed to be at the headquarters for diegetic reasons).

The EVP rig was a terrific prop. I really did feel right and set the scene in an almost perfect way. In a sense it made the HQ what it was. (As well as working as a very good in-game communication device.) (player post game email interview)

Those pieces of technology which functioned in the correct way (and which looked the part as well – aesthetics are a big part of how a prop is perceived) were seen as parts of the diegetic worlds where the player does not need to think how something happens really in the primary framework. The pieces that did not work as expected were seen as props. With these items the players had to constantly think about how they function (in the primary framework) and how they are supposed to function in the game frame.
The faulty technology was a bane that all the players faced. Yet when they succeeded at negotiating how it should be interpreted the technology (or aversion towards the malfunctioning technology) may even have fostered a unified playing style. The technology was a common enemy uniting the playing style. However, a unified interpretation of the game world did not emerge fully formed. It had to be negotiated and renegotiated time and time again. Different interpretations of the diegetic world and the correct style of playing frustrated all players.

One source of confusion was magic. It had been specified by the gamemasters before the game started and again at the beginning of the game by a teacher character who was played by a gamemaster, that Enochian\textsuperscript{17} magic functions. However, towards the end of the game all kinds of other, more freeform, types of magic were interpreted by the gamemasters as functional magic. This created confusion as some players held that only Enochian magic functions, whereas

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{17} Enochian is supposedly an angelic language that was revealed to John Dee in the late 16\textsuperscript{th} century and later rediscovered (and “completed”) by the Hermetic Order of the Golden dawn in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. The magic system used in the game was thus a “real” historical magic system which players could study from books and online. A historical system was used to, again, blur the line between life and game, just like EVP is a phenomenon with a real history.
\end{flushleft}
other felt that Enochian is only one of the many magic systems that can be used in the game.

There was a short incident late game (the storm created at Hansta) where the calling upon Nordic gods without tech caused problems. Not that I know if tech would have helped us. Afterwards I feel that the storm in Marduk caused by Water-spirits was a questionable decision on behalf of the GMs. Who knows what gods are easier/harder to invoke or control? Once the GMs decided upon using existing magic (Enochian) instead of their own (made up by themselves) the reasons for things to happen must follow that same logic. No matter what gods were being called upon, water should have about the same chances to succeed if, and only if, they themselves felt there was no reason to think otherwise. Why would Freja, Tor, Oden, Loke be tougher to pray to (it has been done for a long time in Scandinavia) than the Enochian angels? As I said, I don’t know if this really had anything to do with tech, but it turned into a heated debate among the players and quite a lot of that discussion touched the tech breakdown issue. (male player, post game email interview)

When using a know magic system you get the benefit of increased trust: ”people have been using these things for 500 years, hey, they could be right you know”. BUT when you do use it you must stick to it. Having heard of rituals where nothing was made in the right way created some kind of Magic anarchy – everyone his own way – which, unfortunately, created a feeling that anything worked. (male player, post game email interview)

I think that the Enochian is wrong for this type of game, and it feels that without the Urim-boards [technology that was removed from the game after a week] it’s unnecessary. The second ritual we improvised and used the humming of angelic names as a canal for our own energy, and it worked better. (female player, email interview during game)

Tech Enochian: Doesn´t really fly.

Free form Enochian: Works, but the dramaturgy is hampered by the script. The ritual doesn’t really fly, I’ve discovered that words are infernal to drama and when it comes to the strength of a ritual.

Free form non-Enochian: Several, the best being Brå in Katrineholm. No script, half-nudity, smearing wine on each other, heavy rain and shamanism made us fly. (male player, email interview during game)

Again, the fact that the game did not function as the players expected, moved them from the game frame to the playing frame. This time, however, the source was not the technology, but the different interpretations that the players had.
When the game did not function as expected, the players viewed the game as a game, from the outside, instead of as characters from the inside.

Some of these problematic situations were created by the gamemasters. At one point in the game, a journalist was supposed to join the action in order to see what was going on and to be able to write an article about the project. The problem with larps in general is that they are not performed for an audience and in order to understand and appreciate them, one must play them. The problem in the context of *Momentum* was heightened: the gamemasters did not have a good enough cover story for the journalist, who attempted to join the game for a day or two at the middle. Most players were suspicious of the journalist, since they had no good diegetic reason to trust him. The gamemasters had not communicated out-of-frame that the players were supposed to play along with a journalist. As a result the situation created a rift between the players who were suspicious of the journalist and refused to treat him any differently in the game frame because he was a journalist in the primary framework, and the players who try to include him in the game frame as they acknowledged his role as a journalist in the primary framework.

When many players got very angry with me and Bengt for taking in the journalist, it was hard knowing if they were playing/acting in the situation or if they didn't understand that he was part of the game. My role in R1 became very uncertain and people wanted to take away my keys (!) and shut me and Bengt out from our intern-forum. (female player, email interview during play)

All about the journalist have been kind of hard. I had to pressure my group to accept him, many of them wouldn't, if I hadn't begged them. It was hard to know if people understood that he was a player or not. (female, email interview during play)

During the third week the [journalist]-issue arise and shadowed all other activity for a while. That whole mess made some characters and (!!) role-players hostile towards each other. (female player, post game email interview)

At heart the problem was with treating the game as a game. The game had been advertised as indistinguishable from reality and that was the design ideology of the game designers. Some players played along, which meant that they did not
want to acknowledge the ludic nature of the game. Others were willing to pretend that the game was not a game, but they had no problem relating to it as a game. The situation with the journalist was one example of a situation where these two interpretations clashed. One player objected loudly to the fact that the game was being treated as a game – and that the gamemasters weren’t being harsh enough on the players who took advantage of this. He felt that the players who took too big risks should have been punished, in the context of the game, or even “died” and removed from the game.

Why [certain things happened even though they were illogical in the game frame]?
Because everyone act according to some "democratic utopia" that no one can really be harmed in the game. That this goes for the vessels is true, but why on earth would it be true to the spirits? Because we paid 1.000 SEK? It is silly. (male player, post game email interview)

Similarly, there were some gamemaster decisions which were criticized as they were not sufficiently explained in the diegetic context. The Urim computers were removed from play after two weeks as the technology did not function. The diegetic reason for their removal was flimsy and illogical. Most players accepted the reasoning without too many objections as they got rid of the broken technology. Yet there were those who objected to this as the reasoning was too flimsy.

The disappearance of the Urim-units was worse. There were lots of discussions whether this was a result for us not typing reports in Putty. That became a discussion that wasn’t really "in-game" when I think about it. Would the spirits be punished for the vessels lack of discipline? Not likely. Still it was the only explanation that came up that was likely. Or that we needed to do something, god knows what, for Metatron. (male player, post game email interview)

For the most part the players had to have all three frames, primary framework, playing frame and game frame, at their disposal at all time. When something unexpected happened the players had to have a “dual vision”, thinking what it meant in the context of the game (the game frame) and what it means outside the game (playing frame and sometimes even the primary framework). (See also Image 3 in previous chapter.) Perhaps this is Csikszentmihalyi’s non-flow state,
where there is action and awareness of the action. When the players were uncertain as to which was the correct interpretation, there was internal uncertainty – which would lead to frame negotiation.

Maybe [I was unsure whether or not I was playing] when switching from my vessel to being me and not really knowing how I should react to stuff happening, like is this a little scary or is it just cool? (female, email interview during play)

I know to many of the people involved and have done too much gamemastering myself to be fair to them. From time to time I hear a voice in the back of my head with different suggestions to gamemaster solutions, what I've would have done differently and so on. I recognize the problems associated with this form. At the same time, I now see that the use of tech in this form should concern game flow control, not nifty handouts. It is a disaster that the gamemasters cannot get audio from us out in the field. (male player, email interview during game)

As everyone treated each other as if they were possessed becoming possessed wasn't a problem. The problem arose when I encountered another spirit when I was planning on not being possessed. I usually solved this by becoming possessed. (player interview, post game email interview)

This internal uncertainty lead to negotiation. The players would have to follow the situation both within the ludic context and in an ordinary context – or within dissimilar ludic contexts. Goffman has talked about the perfectly normal doubt one may have in regards to what is going on using as an example the pictures where one can see either an urn or two faces and Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit (Goffman 1974, 302). In a pervasive larp that blurs the line between life and game the player is sometimes asked to see both the urn and the two faces and proceed in a way that is compatible with both. The next chapter looks into the negotiation that takes place in the context of a pervasive larp.

6.5 Migration of Knowledge and Attitudes

Another interesting question is how knowledge and attitudes are transferred from one frame to another. Theoretically the characters know less about the world(s) than the player, as she has no knowledge about the game that is being played. Similarly, it is possible in a role-playing game that a character knows more about the diegetic world than the player and then that knowledge is
simulated with game mechanics or the player consulting a book. The latter did not happen in the context of *Momentum*, as it was difficult to simulate in a pervasive larp, but theoretically the characters (the possessing spirits) knew more about themselves and their worlds than the players. This is fairly common in role-playing games in general.

In practice some knowledge slips from the participant to the player and to the character – and vice versa. Fine (1983) has tackled this issue somewhat. According to him, this division of knowledge is what is difficult about role-playing:

> [T]he player must block information about the game and the contemporary world that the character would not know, while simultaneously not letting his own ignorance of the fantasy world affect the successful action of the character. Using awareness effectively is intimately connected to the keying of social worlds. (Fine 1983)

Usually in role-playing games there is a thing Toni Sihvonen (1997) has termed *role-playing agreement*. It stipulates, that a player should not make assumptions regarding the player based on the character she portrays (and, implicitly, vice versa). In practice confusing the player and the character obviously happens all the time, but it is considered bad form in the Nordic live action role-playing community.18

In *Momentum* there were times when attitudes would bleed from one frame to another. The attitudes that players had in the primary framework would bleed

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18 It is not just the knowledge of other players that one shouldn’t trust when exiting a larp, but all knowledge learned in the game. The migration of knowledge is complex, as Harviainen has pointed out, because all information is filtered through the by the interpretive frame of the character persona:

> Another variable that exists in some LARPs is the acceptance of mundane information sources as diegetic sources. In such a game it is, for example, possible for the characters to perform online searches. Again, those sources are appropriated into the diegesis through the characters' personas, making the results different from their real-world counterparts. (Harviainen 2007.)

Harviainen (Ibid) further points out that as pervasive larps dilute the magic circle, then from the point of view of library and information science pervasive larps are a variation of normal-life practises and not unique information systems like traditional larps.
into the game frame. This was barely mentioned in the interviews, probably because such a confusing of the player and the character is frowned upon. However, it did happen at least a few times.

Worst was being around a vessel I just can't stand for personal reasons. (female player, email interview during play)

Image 8: The players/characters spent quite a lot of time learning Enochian magic and solving complicated puzzles. In the background some of the pills players used as a ritual that strengthened character immersion.

If it is possible for knowledge and attitudes to transfer form one frame to another, then it is also possible for role-playing games to be used in learning (see Image 8). Indeed, this is a possibility that has been explored somewhat (see Hyltoft 2008, Henriksen 2004, Larsson 2004 and Harder 2007). *Momentum* was not designed as an educational game, but it did have a strong political message. One player commented that the game did change his view of the world, at least a bit.

I have been surrounded by players who have a political viewpoint that differs from mine and that has had greater impact on me than the themes of the game. I have started to think more about getting involved personally in political issues as opposed to just discussing them with my friends. I was before the game somewhat interested in magic and how it can be applied to my life. The magical themes of the game did help
me to expend this view. It is probably something I will go deeper into. (male player, post game email interview)

Most players, however, denied that game had any impact on their world-views.

No, political larping is an issue of aesthetics, not of changing people. Political issues work as genres. “Larp doesn’t change people, people change people.” I have gotten insights of larping in public places, I realize now that it’s less of a problem then I first thought. (female player, post game email interview)

Based on this study it is impossible to say which one is more common. The players were interviewed right after the game based on their experience and there was no attitude test conducted before and after the game that could be compared. The possibility of persuasive larps remains an interesting dilemma.

* * *

Breaking the frames happens in four distinct ways. It is possible for an activity to be out-of-frame. In the context of Momentum this meant clearly stepping out of the game frame. Downkeying happened when one of the three frames dropped away: positive downkeying (an experience of flow or engrossment) happened when the playing frame faded away, and negative downkeying (boredom, frustration) happened when a player slipped out of the game frame.

Upkeying happens when something that happens in the primary framework is interpreted incorrectly in the ludic context or when layers treat the everyday world in a ludic manner. Momentum was, to a large extent, an exercise in upkeying, however the cases that are marked as upkeying in this thesis are the moments when non-ludic content was interpreted as ludic with negative results. This is a very problematic way of looking at upkeying. Unfortunately the data does not provide a better way to approach upkeying.

Bleeding of attitudes from one frame to another (or from one awareness context to another) does happen. In the case where the relationships of the player
influence the relationships of the characters, the bleeding of attitudes is happening as in upkeying. The opposite, the attitudes of the characters influencing the players also did take place. The migration of knowledge and attitudes from one frame to another creates the opportunity to use games for learning – though how to do this well remains an open question.

The interesting thing is that for the player of a pervasive game upkeying and downkeying are the reasons for playing. Pervasive games bring the pleasure of gaming to ordinary life and the tangibility and thrill of everyday life to games (Montola 2007b). This could also be expressed as pervasive games downkeying game as life and upkeying life as game. Of course, the fact that this is expected and what is supposed to happen, then the whole thing becomes more muddled. If the whole point is to break the frames, then is that really breaking a frame – in the frame of pervasive games?
7 Frame Negotiations

This chapter looks at how players interacted with each other and with non-players. As Momentum had so many different frames that players had access to, they had to constantly negotiate and renegotiate which one to use. One of the challenges was that some of the frames that the players could use were explicit and shared (the game frame), while others were implicit (the playing frame) or contested (the possession frame), or even forbidden (the primary framework).

After discussion of the player-player interaction types, the interaction with outsiders is considered. These have been divided into three sections, interaction with friends and relatives, interaction with strangers, and playing in public. After that an interaction model is built based on the discussion as well as the division of non-players into unaware, ambiguous and aware participants.

7.1 Player-to-Player Interaction

As discussed above, the interaction between the players could be as players, or as different sorts of characters. The character-to-character interaction was complicated by the fact that all players played two characters, the host and the spirit. Thus the character-to-character interactions can 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 were experienced and often also expressed differently.

In a situation where a player was unsure if another players was playing a host or a spirit, some players often would approach the situation in a way that left a possibility to be interpreted as either.

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19 This chapter is based on the article Post Mortem Interaction. Social Play Modes in Momentum (Stenros et. al. 2007a) I wrote with Markus Montola and Annika Waern. It has also been published as chapter 3.3 of Momentum Evaluation Report (IPerG Deliverable D11.8, Appendix C, see Stenros et al (2007c)).
Yes, for some reason I want to play me with other players and my ghost with other ghosts, this has lead to some “being both” until I’ve understood what is going on. (male player, email interview during play)

Other players had a clear idea whether they were playing a host or a spirit and made this apparent through mannerisms and clothes. 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. This was mostly due to the lack of clear instructions on how the possessing spirit was supposed to be played. 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.

I want it to be visible when I am my guest and when I am my vessel, but it’s not always clear to me when the other players are. Ewan-Andreas and Garcia-Daniel is playing a little like me, with changing their mannerisms when being the guest. (player email interview during play)

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)

I needed to speak to another ghost, but the person just said that the ghost was unreachable at the moment and it was the vessel I was talking to, it was no big problem and I just talked to someone else instead. (female, email interview during play)

The negotiation would happen when encountering a player or a group of player in everyday playing situation. It is important to note that this negotiation happen non-verbally, non-explicitly, through metacommunication and tuning of one’s playing to the style others are expressing. Players who played too extravagantly, or too low key were noted, but there was no explicit sanctioning of players who played in the wrong style (with the singular exception, described above, of the
player who used the safeword for the wrong reasons). However, outside of the
game frame (and after the game) the game the players would berate the players
they thought were lousy.

The person teaching us magick wasn't very good, thou. (male, email interview during
play)

In addition to the everyday encounters between players, there were temporal
zones where negotiation was more prominent. The most important was the
beginning of the game. During the first week the players were encountering each
other for the first time and a common playing style emerged.

The first days: Getting to know your spirit and fellow spirits. Get to know how to
interact with everyone and modify your own character to fit the pattern. (female
player, post game email interview)

My personal experience also reflects this. Though I have played in Sweden
before, my playing style has been developed mostly in a Finnish context. In the
beginning of the game this created so friction, which I have noted in the field
diary:

Another interesting thing was that I played in [an immersionistic Finnish style that
undervalues dramatic acting style]. [...] This means that I looked like I was bored out
of my skull and that I hated the game. At the same time I'm fully immersed in the
moment and just feel that things are spinning out of my control. At least Ragnar
though that I had stepped out of the game at one point, and possibly also Roger. [...] The only moment that I broke character was when I had to tell Ragnar that I'm
actually revelling in the moment and not, in fact, off-gaming. (Momentum field diary.)

Another difference was between the weekend and the weekdays. The weekends
(especially three of them) were considered high intensity play time, and all
players were expected to be playing. The weekdays were low intensity play time
and then there was more negotiation that took place. One special case was phone
calls: The player calling never knew if the person answering the phone was a
spirit or a vessel.
If I compare high- and lowplay days there is a big difference. The weekends I have played I have used all time to play. When at work or other things I have been restrictive, maybe being scared that the game will intrude too much to my personal/professional life (male player, interview during play email)

Well, the trip into Stockholm wasn't always a pleasant one. And I did not always feel delight about everything Momentum. In some cases it felt like something I needed to do because I had signed up and promised to participate. I never considered to drop out of the game though. I called some of my fellow players on a few occasions when I don't think they were expecting it. I asked a few game-related questions but was rather brief. I don't think they regretted answering the call. (male player, post game email interview)

Between player the negotiation mostly happened between host and spirit, between the player playing herself (the game frame), or the player playing herself being possessed at that moment by a ghost (the possession frame). A few players also played an amalgam of the two, which further complicated the situation. Still, as soon as a player realized what personas are present (or what frame the others vision themselves in), the interaction became sustainable.

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 gamemasters.

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 gamemaster] 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)

[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)

The players who did discuss the game as a game with their fellow players had even more interaction styles to choose from. Mostly this happened only between
players who already knew each other, possible because they knew each other well enough to know when it was appropriate to step outside the game frame – and since they were familiar with each other metacommunication and could thus give and receive permission to step outside the ludic frame.

7.2 Playing with Friends and Relatives

The most common way of interacting with non-players was interacting with friends, relatives and colleagues at the workplace. For the most part the players still played ‘by the rules’ and pretended that the game was real. What separates the relatives and other associates of the participants from complete strangers is that most of these people were aware that the players were going to participate in a game as it had been discussed in advance. They were aware that a game was in progress and were able to interpret the actions of the players in that context. They could have a winking relationship to the game, pretending along with the players that the game was real. Many pretended to take it seriously while the game was running as they knew it would end at some point. This was yet another frame, the aware frame, where all the participants were aware that a game was in progress even if they weren't playing the game themselves.

With larping friends who is dead curious about what we are doing, a couple of times a week. We talked about the game, people in the game, how stuff works like the HQ and how the seamlessness is meant to work, everything that has happened in the larp and how my character is like. Basically everything and my friends thinks it sounds very interesting, just like I think.

With non larpers, just explain very brief about the larp. It’s a larp in Stockholm and I play being taken over by a ghost for a while. We larp in our everyday clothes on the streets of Stockholm in the world as it is today. A couple of times, maybe a couple of times a week as soon as someone is asking why I am traveling to Stockholm "all the time". (female player, email interview during play)

My mom is nagging me but I have told here that its more than a game and she is on my back anyways. There have been some friends but I don't talk off game, just around the game. Try to explain that its not always me. So when I think about it I think I have had three off game situations. All with the same player, he has come to me and asked me stuff. (female player, email interview during play)
Hm. I told my family about the project as it unfolded from live to real spirit project. They have had lots of fun of me saying "is it you or that other fellow" when calling me on the phone. Ralf has not met any of my family though. (male player, post game email interview)

I involved one non-playing friend before the possession ritual. At that time I described the events taking place in Sunday 30th. I explained that I had signed up for a game and that it was supposed to be a pre-game seminar but then tried to convince my friend that something really strange/bad had happened to the organisers during the previous night. It felt a bit like outright lying but my friend didn't try to call me on it. Maybe she was feeling a bit uncomfortable about me acting so strange. (male player, post game email interview)

However, some people really disliked the way the game affected the players and refused to play along and acknowledge the game as reality. For example a girlfriend of a player threatened to end the relationship if the player (acting as his character) continued to refuse to acknowledge her.

In Goffman’s terms, when the players were playing with their friends and relatives, all actors in the interaction were able to key into the right frame. Even if the non-players did not know what the game was about, what had happened in it, what the rules were and so forth, they still understood that a game was in progress. They were aware of the playing frame even if they did not have access to it. The players did not have to lie to these people, and they did not have to fabricate the game frame for the non-players.\(^{20}\)

Generally, even if the friends and relatives were not aware of the game, most of the players tried to avoid fabricating the game frame for people they knew. Avoidance of the people not related with the game or avoidance of the subject of the game were both common strategies. 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 could not really talk about and that they were willing to talk about it afterwards. Others simply refused to discuss the subject

\(^{20}\) Fine (1983) mostly discussed keying, not fabrications, though he does point out in a footnote that fabrications are possible in the context of drama and stories – which is in a way the context in which they were applied here.
of the game. They said that they 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.

The player would explain this to herself as being a participant playing a game, playing at being possessed, pretending that the game was real and in order to protect the “secret society” she was a part of in the game she would lie (i.e. fabricate) to her friends that she was in fact playing in a game. Which of course was exactly what she was doing in the primary framework.

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)

The seamlessness has worked god althougt i have "pretended" to be in a game versus my friends who know what i was doing. The same goes for my family. (male player, post game email interview)

A few players also decided to break the rules and disclose the nature of the game while it was on. Mothers, best friends and people distant enough from the Stockholm larp scene were mentioned as example of people that players talked with outside the playing 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 ‘treat the game as if it were real’ -rule with were carefully selected.

I only broke [the proposal] while discussing with people that either were part of the gamemaster 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)

In some cases the friends and relatives weren’t that interested in the game. Sometimes that just wanted the player to acknowledge that they were acting in a weird way and that there was an explanation.

Trying to explain it to a non-larper is like, "Yes, and where shall I begin?" I just say it’s a larp and it’s in Stockholm and it’s great fun, that’s usually how long people can listen, the rest is a little complicated. (female player, email interview during play)

7.3 Playing with Strangers

As the larp was played in and around the city of Stockholm, the players would frequently encounter people who were neither players nor gamemasters. Sometimes these meetings had been staged by the gamemasters; 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 meet up with an art gallery worker, 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. Of course, most frequently the interactions the players participated in were with complete outsiders, e.g. to buy food or ask for directions.

Rather than deciding if an outsider is part of the game or not, the players were supposed to make up their minds about how much of the “truth” of the ludic frame an outsider needed to know and could 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 gamemasters? Many players showed a willingness to act out much more with the people that they assumed to be plants deployed by gamemasters. 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. 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 instructed actors planted by the gamemaster.

The division to keying and fabricating offers an obvious explanation here. The players felt uneasy playing with people who were not part of the game. Just like with their friends and relatives, most of them disliked fabricating the game frame for outsiders. This underlines the most failure of the play the game as if it were real ethos of the game rules.

To me there where no bystanders, just as you don't think of people in the background of a movie as extras, everyone was in the game and I felt sure enough in my gameplay that I could deal with all and any while in character. (player interview, post game email interview)

I did not feel that I invited bystanders into my game, that much. I mostly treated them as nuisances and distractions that needed to be dealt with as quick and painless as possible. During the last party I did involve one of the players sister into a plot line I had devised.

I claimed that she reminded me of this girl […], who was trapped in a cavern and had told me this during a EVP session, and that I needed her (a player's sister) to trust me in order to save [the trapped girl]. I was rather persuasive and finally managed to convince her to dance with me. I'm not sure that she enjoyed to be dragged into play like this. (male player, post game email interview)

The two above quotes illustrate well the two attitudes that players most often had towards the outsiders. Either the players claimed that they made no distinction between players and non-players, or the players only truly played with people who they regarded as safe: people who seemed to be fellow players, seemed to be planted by the gamemasters or people who where in spaces where the game was truly one and most other people were players (and thus the outsiders were probably aware of the game).
7.4 Playing in Public

Though playing in public is technically playing with strangers, it is differentiated here as it is a very specific way of playing with others. At times when the players entered the public space, their performative gaming attracted audiences. The rituals staged by players commanded interest, 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.

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)

Some of rituals were conducted in central places during party nights. By-passers ran into some of the rituals and at times they expressed their puzzlement vocally. People who were going home from a bar stopped to look at and sometimes talk with the players who were “cleansing the place of mammon” or “commemorating the triumph of environmental activists”.

Looking at these rituals from the point of view of fabrications is not very revealing. It is more fruitful to regard them as frames devised by the players that are then imposed, keyed, on the public. The spectators were not supposed to look at the rituals as a game, but as rituals and at certain times also as political actions. Though the players were playing a game and fabricating a ritual, they were also communicating a political/occult message – one that was not fabricated. The rituals, though part of the game, almost took place in a separate frame, a political/ritual frame. This frame is a loose one and was not shared by all players (they had different convictions and levels of political involvement),
but many players were pushing for this interpretation (and they were encouraged by the gamemasters).\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{Image 9:} The demonstrators walked through Stockholm finally ending up in Gamla Stan.

This is also how the law enforcement officials interpreted the more elaborate rituals. In some ways the climax of the game was the demonstration march for the dead, staged by the players on the last Saturday. The demonstration (see Image 9) was escorted by several police vehicles. From the point of view of a spectator this helped to integrate the game into everyday life. From the point of view of the players (and observers who were aware of the ludic nature of the event) it strengthened the magic circle of the game frame 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

\textsuperscript{21} Mike Pohjola (2004) has applied Hakim Bey’s concept of \textit{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.”
within the zone of play, clearly approaching the demonstration or the ceremonial circle.

The police had been informed about the demonstration and it is their duty to show up and oversee that kind of public expressions of opinion. It would have been interesting to know how they would have reacted had they know that the demonstration was part of a game as it was a legal demonstration in the primary framework.

The other time the police got involved with the game was when a ritual was interpreted as potentially dangerous. One of the ritual demonstrations staged by the players took place in the front of the United States embassy. The technomagical equipment used by the players caught the attention of the embassy guards, who alerted the police. As the police showed up with a riot vehicle, 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.22

[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)

While some of the players were excited that the police had intervened, others thought that it was childish and stupid to stage the ritual in a way that attracted attention. The ones that were excited seemed to enjoy using the game as a cover for political activism. Some had joined the game specifically for that purpose:

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 questionnaire)

22 For an interesting comparison, see Jane McGonigal’s (2006) description of an incident in Ravenna, Ohio, where five teenage girls faced potential criminal charges for placing Super Mario-style yellow bricks in a public space. Cultural context is extremely important.
In a way this creates a circular chain of frames that some of the participants inhabited. They started in the primary framework, using the playing frame to get into the game frame, which was then used to set up a political/ritual frame, which was supposed to question or alter the primary framework. Again, all players did not share this wish.

The police, of course, do not have the luxury of picking and choosing frames. Their job is to interpret events in the primary framework. A demonstration is a demonstration and suspicious individuals outside a foreign embassy are just that.

### 7.5 Levels of Unaware Participation

From the outsider point of view, there are three rough levels of game engagement. In 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. (Montola & Waern 2006.)

Moving from unaware state to aware state means breaking the fabricated metacommunication and correctly identifying the keying of the frame. *Momentum* was a game that actively tried to invite the outsiders to participate in unconscious and ambiguous fashions. As the players tended to try to avoid fabrication (at least when it was not in the context of the political/ritual frame), this did not happen as much as the game designers had anticipated. However, there are numerous examples of all levels of unaware participation in *Momentum*.

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)

In many cases it would hardly matter for the non-player even if he knew that the player was participating in a game. Often that wouldn’t make any difference. At some point, the fabrication simply loses its meaning.

Creating ambiguous interactions was one of the aims of Momentum, and that did happen quite a number of times during the game. Numerous times the players did things in the public sphere that were 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 gamemasters 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 [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 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)

However, they did offer the gallery as a place for the game on a day when a co-worker, who did not know about the game, was supposed to be working. This was exactly the kind of social expansion the gamemasters 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)

The ambiguity between game and ordinary life was a major source of enjoyment for the gallery workers. This finding is echoed in a number of other writings. The ambiguity 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). Yet it is not known what fabrications will be perceived as benign and which as exploitative.
Finally, 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” (in the context of the game frame) 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 primary framework) 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.

### 7.6 Interaction Model for Pervasive Larp

Above the modes of interactions have been divided 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 Figure 2 it is possible to see the different modes that a person could choose between based on what state or role 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.

![Figure 2](image.png)

*Figure 2: Interaction model for *Momentum* (On the vertical axis we have player A whose perspective is used and on horizontal axis is player B).*
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 (i.e. the correct shared frame). *Momentum* did not offer a ready-made package of interaction codes, so the interaction model presented 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 safeword, 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 in turn led to ambiguousness 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 they 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.

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.

Theoretically it would have been possible for non-participants in an informed state to start playing spirits as well, construct back-stories for themselves and claim that they have been possessed as well. This did not happen, but as a thought experiment it is interesting. Had this happened, according to both the invisible rules of role-playing (Montola 2007) and the Hakkarainen & Stenros (2003) definition of role-playing thought they could have played, they still wouldn’t have role-played in the same game as the other players. In order for that to happen they would have to recognize the power structure within the game (according to Montola) or to submit this character addition to the gamemastering function (according to Hakkarainen & Stenros).

The model presented above can be translated and understood in the context of frame analysis (see Figure 3). It changes the picture a bit. The picture is read from the point of view of the frame depicted on the vertical axis.

A player who is in the possession frame has diegetic interaction with anyone else who is in the same frame. Interaction with someone in the game frame (a vessel) is diegetic as well. For those few players who considered not being possessed the same as not playing, this however required renegotiation of the frame as the interpretations were in a conflict. The same applies to encountering a player or a group of players who were not playing their characters, but were interacting as players. Interaction with people in the aware frame and primary frameworks were also diegetic, as was the interaction with someone who was in an
ambiguous state and thus unsure of the correct frame. The difference here is that
the playing had an element of fabrication when done with people in the primary
framework or with ambiguous people. Basically the possession frame was
compatible with all frames but the playing frame – and possibly the game frame.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possession frame</th>
<th>Game frame</th>
<th>Playing frame</th>
<th>Aware frame</th>
<th>Ambiguous frame</th>
<th>Primary framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Possession frame</td>
<td>Diegetic</td>
<td>Conflicting</td>
<td>Diegetic</td>
<td>Diegetic (fabrication)</td>
<td>Diegetic (fabrication)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game frame</td>
<td>Diegetic (possibly negotiation needed)</td>
<td>Conflicting</td>
<td>Diegetic</td>
<td>Diegetic (fabrication)</td>
<td>Diegetic (fabrication)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing frame</td>
<td>Conflicting</td>
<td>Conflicting</td>
<td>Conflicting</td>
<td>Non-diegetic/Ludic</td>
<td>Non-diegetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware frame</td>
<td>Diegetic/Ludic/Conflicting</td>
<td>Diegetic/Ludic/Conflicting</td>
<td>Ludic/Conflicting</td>
<td>Ambiguous/Ludic/Conflicting</td>
<td>Ambiguous/Ludic (fabrication)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
<td>Ambiguous/Oldinary Life</td>
<td>Ambiguous/Oldinary Life</td>
<td>Ambiguous/Oldinary Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary framework</td>
<td>Ordinary life</td>
<td>Ordinary life</td>
<td>Ordinary life</td>
<td>Ordinary life</td>
<td>Ordinary life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Elaborated interaction model for Momentum based on frame analysis.

On the vertical axis we have player A whose perspective is used, and on the
horizontal axis is player B.

The game frame is similar to the possession frame. The only difference is that a
person in a game frame might have to negotiate with a person in the possession
frame if the possessed player was interpreting playing a vessel as not playing.

A person, who was in the playing frame, viewing the game as a game, was in
conflict with everyone who was in a ludic frame and in non-diegetic interaction
with everyone who was in a non-ludic frame. A special case is interacting with
other in the playing frame. In this case the interaction could be ludic, but not
diegetic (thus it would be meta gaming or handling game mechanics).

Persons in the aware frame had the widest array of interaction possibilities
without switching frames. They could play along or not play along, fabricate for
others, or not fabricate for others. However, their interaction with the players can
be considered ludic instead of diegetic as we were not really aware of the whole backstory of the game. They were playing a game more than playing a role-playing game.

The ambiguous and primary framework categories are basically the same as in Figure 2.

Based on *Momentum*, it is possible to categorize the interaction modes of pervasive larp in general. In Figure 4 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 (or pervasive larps that contain no social expansion), 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player/aware playing (game frame)</th>
<th>Player/ aware not playing (playing frame)</th>
<th>Ambiguous</th>
<th>Unaware (primary framework)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diegetic</td>
<td>Ambiguous/Conflicting</td>
<td>Diegetic</td>
<td>Diegetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous/Conflicting</td>
<td>Non-diegetic &amp; Ludic</td>
<td>Non-diegetic</td>
<td>Non-diegetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
<td>Ambiguous/Ordinary Life</td>
<td>Ambiguous/</td>
<td>Ambiguous/Ordinary Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary life</td>
<td>Ordinary life</td>
<td>Ordinary life</td>
<td>Ordinary life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4:* General interaction model for socially expanded pervasive larps

*Momentum* is a great example of 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.
8 Conclusions

Goffman’s frame analysis offers a fruitful point-of-view to pervasive larp. It can be used to make sense of the numerous different levels of reality that the players must navigate as they play. The three basic levels, as recognized by Fine, of primary framework, the playing frame and the game frame form the core, but many other frames are also present in the course of play.

The analysis method proves especially fruitful when looking at the clashes and negotiations of people who view things in different frames. Frame analysis helps uncover which frames are compatible and which are not, just as it shows that often dual vision is required in determining which frame to adopt in a social situation.

What wider relevance can a case evaluation of a single pervasive larp have for the study of pervasive larps, pervasive games, larps, games or even general social theory? Could there be some implications to frame analysis?

This was not the first time frame analysis was employed in the analysis of role-playing games, or even live action role-playing games. It has now been done so many times that frame analysis has been confirmed as a good fit for generating an understanding of the structuring of social reality in a role-playing situation. However, this was to my knowledge the first time frame analysis was employed in breaking apart a pervasive game.

Based on this one case, frame analysis seems a fairly good fit for pervasive games as well. One game does not yet make for a strong case, but the way the perceived central draw of pervasive games – *pervasive games bring the pleasure of gaming to ordinary life and the tangibility and thrill of everyday life to games* – can be so easily expressed in the context of frame analysis – *pervasive games downkey game as life and upkey life as game* – is quite encouraging. Still, it is quite possible, that frame analysis is not as relevant for games that do not use all
three expansions (social, temporal and spatial). Yet the method is not quite as useful when looking at internalized downkeying and upkeying. Though frame analysis helps understand what happens, it does not differentiate between different types of keying specifically enough. Some downkeyings are desirable while others clearly are not – and this strong preference is rendered meaningless in frame analysis. The reason for this is probably that the frames that are upkeyed or downkeyed are (at least implicitly) in the context of frame analysis thought of as socially constructed, whereas many of the meaningful downkeyings and upkeyings in the context of pervasive larps are personal. They are not always reflected on the level of social interaction.

Goffman (1974, 10-11) defines frame as a situational construct “built up in accordance with the principles of organization that govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them.” Though frame analysis can be used to understand those events that are not social, it seems that it is on much firmer soil when the events are social. Though keying and fabrication are possible also by a person who is alone (and in a social situation internally), they do not really become meaningful in context of frame analysis until they are enacted socially.

The other findings of this thesis are of interest for a much narrower field. The analysis of the player experience of the game Momentum can have (and indeed already has, as explained in the summary of previous work generated by this particular game prototype) implications on the design theory of pervasive games, larps and pervasive larps. This case can help understand the dos and don’ts of game design.

The discussion on the difficulty of maintaining the game frame should be of special interest for researchers of role-playing games, and larps especially. As long as immersion (or engrossment) is seen as one of the keys to a good game, then understanding relating to what hinders immersion and what supports it has important implication to the design theory of role-playing games. The general
interaction model for socially expanded pervasive larps is an example of the kind of design aids that this kind of research can generate.

Either of the paths that these finding plot could be easily elaborated in a further study. The questions proposed in design theory are more practical and potentially bear fruit much faster. What element support and hinder engrossment in a (role-playing) game? What induces boredom and frustration, and do these emotions always happen outside the game context? Yet when one pushes these questions further, the more complex and interesting questions that arise seem to push one towards the area where frame analysis did not offer enough clarity. How does playing a game alter the mindset of a player?

This thesis has mostly been based on the work of Erving Goffman. He has discussed games and play as happening in a certain frame, and as being surrounded by an interaction membrane. Yet, as has been discussed, sociology is not the only field where the specialty of games has been noticed. Huizinga, Salen and Zimmerman have discussed the magic circle, Apter talks about a protective bubble, Suits talks about a lusory attitude and there are probably many others as well. It would be interesting to look at all these postulations of the frame of the game and see if they could be combined. These different models conceive of the ludic frame as a space, a temporal zone, a mindset, and a social construction. Though different definitions of games have been compared (for example Juul 2003 and Salen & Zimmerman 2004), the different contexts have not.

In order to carry out this it is not enough to simply make a few excursions from sociology. No, this work would have to be, as ludology often is, truly multidisciplinary.

* * *
In regards to the relevance of this work in the context of sociology in general I have to go back to Goffman and the quote I presented in the introduction:

Games seem to display in a simple way the structure of real-life situations. They cut us off from serious life by immersing us in a demonstration of its possibilities. We return to the world as gamesmen, prepared to see what is structural about reality and ready to reduce life to its liveliest elements. (Goffman 1961, 34).

I agree that taking part in games such as *Momentum* and analyzing them does make one a better social scientist. *Momentum* also does demonstrate the possibilities of life; by knowingly and explicitly structuring a fabricated reality, superimposing that on the “real” world, existing in both of those while constantly being both a fabricator and someone who is a target of fabrication, *Momentum* teaches skills to its players. In the contemporary western world that is saturated, infiltrated, enveloped by a pervasive media culture, where fabrication is constant, and where contextual identity play is ubiquitous, complex games like *Momentum* suddenly seems like a biopsy of the society being studied in a Petri dish.
9 References


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Appendix A: Post Game Questionnaire

1. Describe your best moment(s) in the game. Why do you think these were the best ones?

2. Describe your worst experiences in the game.

3. Did the game meet your expectations? What did you expect the game to be like?

4. How much time did you spend playing the game during weekdays? How much did you play during the weekends?

5. Construct a timeline of your play. What happened during the first week, second week, and so forth?

6. Were there been times when you were reluctant to play but had to, or, have you pressured others to play when they were out of game? Describe the event and your feelings.

7. Did you experience moments where you were unsure whether you were playing or not? Please describe these situations.

8. Did you take the pills during the game? How did they work for you? Discuss your feelings towards them.

9. How easy has it been for you to switch between the spirit and vessel when the need has arisen? How do you see the connection between the host and the guest?

10. Do you think having bystanders around influences your game? Have you communicated with bystanders while in character? Describe the situation.

11. What do you think about the seamlessness? How has the game influenced you everyday normal life? Have you communicated with outsiders, other players or game masters out of character? Have your friends or family been pulled into the game?

12. Did you break the Prosopopeia Protocol during the five weeks -- i.e. discuss the game as a game. How was it?

13. What technology did you use in the game (EVP, tablets, Steele etc.)? What other tech have you used?

14. Did it feel like all the gadgets were telling the same story, that all of them were part of the same game? Was it primarily propping, communication devices, or tools to enable the game play (e.g. the node capture)?

15. How were tech breakdowns handled in-game and/or off-game?
16. Often in the game there have been chained tasks (task A has to succeed or task B will fail) and coordinated tasks (A and B has to be made simultaneously). Did you notice that? Did it work as a design solution? Describe your experiences?

17. Did you get any insights (for example political, ethical or philosophical) during the game? If you did, please describe them.

18. How did you like the amount of GM control? Were you aware on how game masters kept on top of what's happening in the game?

19. Do you think you were generally aware of where the game started and ended?

20. Would you like to play another similar-scale Prosopopeia game, say, next year? Was the game too long or short?

21. Did you break the law during the game? Describe the situation. Did you break the law more often than you would have during another, non-game related 5 week period? Did you feel that the game encouraged breaking the law? Or conversely, did you think that the player agreement restricted them from activism that they were fully prepared to take responsibility for?

22. When did you seriously start to work on capturing nodes? How did that change the game experience? Was that good or bad?

23. Did you get stressed by the game or feel that low intensity periods were boring? Did you feel guilty over not playing enough, or irritated because others played too little? Do you have any suggestions on pacing?

24. Other feedback on the game or our research? Something you want to put emphasis on?

25. The IPerG business researchers would also really appreciate if you quickly filled out the following web form: http://fit-bscw.fit.fraunhofer.de/pub/bscw.cgi/36989096
Appendix B: Momentum Player Agreement Form

MOMENTUM: PLAYER AGREEMENT FORM
PLAYER RESPONSIBILITY AND CONDUCT
By signing this agreement you expressly acknowledge and agree that you are playing this game at your own sole risk. Every part of Momentum is voluntary and you are personally responsible for any acts you perform during the game. The game is provided "as is" and without any warranty of any kind. If you brake any part of this agreement you will be suspended from the game and your game-fee will not be repaid.

WITHIN MAIN GAME LOCATION

By agreeing to this form you are agreeing to not consume any kind of drugs within the main game location, except for medical purposes. This includes alcohol stronger than 3.5%. Smoking is only allowed in designated areas, which might change or be withdrawn at any time during or before the game.

You are not allowed to change anything permanently (like painting, destroying furniture or props etc.), or open any apparently sealed or closed off area within the game locations, i.e. you will be held liable for every irreversible change to the locations.

The location can be hazardous and you are advised to be careful and not take any unnecessary risks while in the premises.

EQUIPMENT

Every player will be assigned expensive electronic equipment during the game period and are required to handle the equipment with care. You are liable for the equipment during the full duration of the game. You will be held responsible for lost or destroyed equipment.

Technical hazards

The technology-enhanced wearables contain Lithium batteries. If these batteries are damaged or exposed to water they will heat up very rapidly and might explode. Handle all wearables with care. Keep away from water. Do not shower or bath with them, for example. Keep them out of rain. Do not try to open or alter the wearables.

Some technical equipment will issue electroshocks as a part of their interaction. This is off the shelf equipment and are under normal circumstances not harmful in any way. If you have heart problems, a pace make or other medical problems these might be harmful. Please notify the game-master if you suspect that electroshocks might cause a problem for you.

PLAYING IN REAL WORLD AREAS

Environmental hazards
Momentum is played in the real world and not in a pre-staged environment. The locations used and rented for the game are provided ‘as is’ and not guaranteed to be safe. Remember that speeding, trespassing and similar acts are just as illegal within the game as in ordinary life.

RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

Prosopopeia Bardo 2: Momentum is both a technologically orchestrated Larp and an EU-funded research prototype. In order to run the game and conduct our research on pervasive gaming, we will need to subject our players to surveillance and observation for the duration of the game.

By agreeing to this form you allow Momentum organizers to collect technical surveillance data about your gameplay during of the game and store it as long as it is needed it for the purposes of game orchestration, research and documentation. The data will be treated as privacy-protected personal data and not redistributed outside the research group.

Our surveillance equipment includes many sorts of sensors including cameras and microphones; some you will be carrying around while others are mounted in prepared locations. You should understand that the game will be running 24 hours a day, and it will not be restricted to any physical areas. However, the technology enhanced wearables you might wear or encounter during the game do not include active microphones or cameras.

After, or even during the game, we will provide you with a debrief questionnaire and possibly also want to interview you to discuss your game experiences. Expect to spend a couple of hours in providing feedback after the game. Your feedback is critically valuable for our research AND THIS IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO INFLUENCE FUTURE LARP DESIGNS AND FUTURE GAME DESIGNS OVERALL.

As for technically collected data, all player feedback, interview comments and discussions will be treated as privacy-protected personal data. It will not be redistributed outside the project. When cited in public papers and reports, it will be anonymized. Under the circumstances that we want to publish video and photographs from the game we will ask the persons appearing in the video or picture.

We recognize that participating a pervasive game such as Momentum requires giving up some privacy for the duration of the game. This is, in effect, one of the research issues studied in this prototype game.

Practicalities:
If you for unforeseen reasons have to leave the game early, you must contact Staffan Jonsson: 070-XXXXXXX

Whether you accept or reject this agreement, you are more than welcome to provide us feedback by emailing Markus Montola.

More information on the game:
Staffan Jonsson, +46 XXXXXXXXX, staffanj@sics.se

More information on research done in Momentum:
Markus Montola, +358 XXXXXXXXX, markus.montola@uta.fi

By signing this agreement you confirm that you are 18 years old or older at the 5'th of October 2006.

Date:

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Signature:

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