Prosopopeia: Experiences from a Pervasive Larp

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ABSTRACT
Live action role playing, *Larp*, is a play genre that so far has received little attention from the game studies community. However, the Live action role playing community is perhaps the most interesting role play community of all in its intense focus on role-taking, improvisation, and immersion. Furthermore, Larping has been extensively used for serious purposes, both for crisis training and psychological treatment.

In this paper, we focus on *Pervasive Larp*, Larp events that are staged in the real world and where both the people and the objects of the real world have a direct role in the game. This is a relatively novel variant of Larping, which poses higher demands on technology support than traditional Larps. We report on the experiences from designing and staging *Prosopopeia*, a pervasive Larp event based on an alternate reality aesthetics. In this game, every design choice was informed by the wish to keep the game as close to reality as possible. We conclude that the approach is indeed both possible and promising, and identify some suggestions for improvements.

Categories and Subject Descriptors
K.8.0 [**Personal Computing**]: General – Games

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Design, Experimentation, Human Factors.

Keywords
Pervasive Game, Pervasive Computing, Alternate Reality Game, Live Role Play.

1. INTRODUCTION
Live action role playing, *Larp*, is a play genre that so far has received little attention from the game studies community. The primary reason for this is that these games are not computer games. In addition, contemporary Larping is primarily a hobbyist activity, played in closed areas with little or no technology at all.

This might be a mistake, as the Larp community consists of dedicated and highly skilled role players. Studying Larp is a useful way to understand how computer-based role playing can be extended and enhanced. In addition, there are numerous examples of serious usages of Larping, for psychological treatment, management or crisis training.

A domain of special interest is that of pervasive Larp, Larps that are played over vast areas and integrated with ordinary life. This form has great potential for both more casual forms of role-play as well as for serious applications. It also poses high demands on technology support. We have previously discussed the general requirements on technology support for pervasive Larp [18]. In this article, we discuss a specific design approach to pervasive Larp which we call *Alternate Reality* Larp. These games are designed to blend seamlessly into the real world in every detail, including the choice of locations, technology and other props, the story line and the model for role playing. We describe the experiences from designing and staging one such Larp event, and conclude that it is a promising genre but that also needs further development.

2. BACKGROUND
2.1 Larp
Modern Larp for leisure and entertainment (Larp) stems from two origins. One origin is the tradition of reenactment groups focusing on the study and recreation of historical events or specific time periods. The other origin can be traced to tabletop role-playing games. In the early eighties some groups of players, influenced by improvised theatre, started to perform their adventures in 'real life', thereby inventing the modern form of 'Live Action Role Playing' or Larp. The development of modern roleplaying activities has been very rapid. What started as a sub-culture played in Tolkienistic world of fantasy, modern Larp culture includes contemporary and modern history Larp, conceptual Larp (where the focus lies a emotion or moral dilemma, rather than on reenactment) and improvisational theatre. Merging with the earlier tradition of psychodrama [3], Nordic Larp is also rapidly transforming into a form of educational gaming, used in particular in youth schools.

Although Larping is in some ways similar to other forms of role play (such as online role-play), Larp places the adoption of a role as the genre's central focus: in Larp, the primary enjoyment comes from acting and thinking like somebody else. In comparison to table-top role-playing, much more of the game

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experience is created by the players themselves and their ability to act out their role.

Role-players [5,15] have provided useful analyses of role-playing styles designers and players strive for in Larp. *Dramatist* Larp values the way the game action creates satisfying storylines. *Gamist* Larp focuses on setting up a fair challenge for the players. Finally, *simulationist* and *immersionist* styles focus on resolving game events based solely on game-world considerations with somewhat different foci, immersionism having a particular focus on character play. The distinction of these playing styles was originally born from the hobbyists' observation that different players preferred strongly different playing styles, and these preferences need to be addressed in the design. In the normative player debates especially immersionism and gamism have often been considered as opposing playing styles, since "playing to win" has often interfered with an immersionist approach.

2.2 Pervasive Gaming

The term 'Pervasive Games' is typically used to denote games that use computer or internet technology to blend virtual game experiences with game experiences in the physical world. In previous work [10,12] we have also used the term to denote games that take place in the ordinary world and where gaming and real life blend in interesting ways.

Our approach originates in Huizinga's classic analysis of play activity as a *voluntary* and *needless* activity [4]. Huizinga identified a set of properties of playing that are necessary for play to be perceived as such by the players: Play is *self-sufficient* in the sense that it is satisfying in itself and that the activity ends when that satisfaction has been reached, it is *set apart from ordinary life* both in locality and duration – it is played out within given limits of time and space. Finally, since play is governed by rules and challenges that are different from those of ordinary life, *the participants must agree* that the activities within the 'circle' are interpreted playfully as a part of the game, and not as part of ordinary life. Salen and Zimmerman use Huizinga's concept of play as their base for defining a concept of a 'magic circle of gameplay' [16].

Pervasive games are not organised this way. Pervasive games are *expanded spatially, temporally and/or socially*. They are typically played in physically unrestricted or undefined areas, where players constantly run across non-players that may be unaware of the ongoing game. Pervasive games enrich physical game space with virtual content (or vice versa, virtual spaces are adapted to physical phenomena), creating an enchanted space with unknown properties. Pervasive games stretch over time, blending game activities with everyday activities. The perhaps most controversial feature of pervasive games is that they can blur the distinction between players and non-players [13]. When players encounter people on the streets, they are often unsure of who is part of the game and who is not, and the game can offer roles to by-standers, of which they may only be partially aware.

The currently most well developed subgenre of pervasive games is the Alternate Reality Game (ARG) genre [7,8,17]. These are games that are based on hidden clues in the everyday world. Alternate reality games typically use a range of media technology to create the impression that the game content is 'real', and often include real-life events that the players can visit. The perhaps most well-known example is *The A.I. Game* [7] which initially made itself known to the players through a credit text in a movie trailer. The primary media for this game was a host of fake web sites, which contained clear indications that the content was realistic, but in fact fake and part of a riddle-based quest. Once players had found their way into the game, they could also be contacted in numerous ways, including email and postal mail.

3. PERVASIVE LARP

Whereas Larps traditionally are played in closed and heavily propped locations, recent years have seen examples of Larp set in the urban landscape [19]. Especially the World of Darkness campaigns have been taken to cityscape. But so far, city-based Larps have not sought to heavily interact with the surrounding world. The games are limited to their players – if the bartender is not wearing a sign of participation, he is treated like scenery.

As noted by Talvitie [19], pervasive Larps face a set of new challenges. These are closely related to the fact that pervasive Larps play on an expanded 'magic circle'. The first consideration in [19] concerns the reactions of surrounding people. The author recommends a 'hidden' approach, where the game remains unknown to non-players. This has been the normative approach of pervasive Larp to date, as is clear from the World of Darkness example, but as discussed in [13], pervasive games open up a host of options for interacting with non-players.

Players also need to be able to, at any point in time, get in contact with the game masters. The obvious solution is to make them bring a mobile phone. This is however not always desirable from the game design perspective, as a call to the game masters often will break the illusion and force the players to act out of character.

Game mastering is more important in pervasive larp than in ordinary Larp. Montola [9] argues that role-playing games can be designed to be chaotic or orderly. In pervasive Larp, in particular if we aim for full immersion in the ARG style, anything may be interpreted as game-related. This makes for an extremely chaotic event structure where basically anything in the environment can influence the players' image of what is the game and what is not. In order to give any sense to the experience, there is a need for strong integrative techniques. As demonstrated by decades of tabletop role-playing, live game mastering is one of the most powerful options available. One of the strongest reasons why pervasive Larp benefit from technological support is that there is a need for tools that enable the game masters to stay informed about player activities and influence them while the game is running.

Talvitie also brings up the simple fact that pervasive Larps are typically played in large areas where players both must find their way and also be able to get about. There is a significant risk that players get lost, in particular when a game is staged in an unknown city or part of a city. This was a major concern for the Blast Theory city-based game *Uncle Roy All Around You* [1], which required a large number of support personnel with the sole role of keeping track of where players were as they were playing the game. Again, this points towards the need for game masters to be able to supervise player activities.

Finally, Talvitie points towards the importance of selecting the right locations for different player activities. Again, he is primarily concerned with the issue of bystanders and their reactions to the gaming activity, but also about the safety for

players. As we will see from the *Prosopopeia* example, the choice of locations is central for the immersive effects in pervasive Larp; the well-chosen location will affect the mood and play style to fit the emotional and narrative content of the localized event.

4. PROSOPOPEIA

Prosopopeia [11] is a pervasive Larp series developed within IPerG[1] A first game design was staged in Stockholm in June 2005, with twelve players (eight men and four women) lasting for 52 continuous hours. The artistic orchestration was lead by Martin Ericsson, Staffan Jonsson and Adriana Skarped, while the technical and practical production was done in collaboration with IPerG project.[2] A sequel is currently being developed, to be staged in the fall of 2006.

The aim of *Prosopopeia* is to create a proof of concept for a pervasive Larp. The game structure builds upon and extends previous experiences from city-based Larp and pervasive gaming.

4.1 Storyline

Prosopopeia Bardo 1: Där vi föll[3] centered around a ghost story. The players played characters of authentic but now dead people who shared a common background: they had all been friends of a central character a woman now lost between life and death for unknown reasons. She had become a ghost, trapped between our world and the world beyond. As the game progressed, the players gradually understood that the reason was deeply connected to their characters, who all had wronged her in different ways.

For the players, the experience started by a late night phone call, where a strange distorted voice gave them instructions to visit a new age festival. While visiting the festival (which proved to be a real festival where nothing game-related happened) the players' phones rang again. This time the message was only a melody. This tune lead the players to identify a person at the festival playing the same tune on a portable record player, who in turn supplied them with a key to a public locker. This locker finally contained the introduction material to the game: files on 12 deceased persons, one character for each player.

This first event took place ten days in advance of the actual event. In the time between, the players were encouraged to read up on the background story and they were also contacted in by phone, and postal mail. Eventually, they received a synchronized phone call that called them to meet up in a particular place late at night. At this place, they were met by the archetypical mad scientist who hooked them up to a 'Burton bridge', a fictional device similar to some of the parapsychological devices built during the seventies to communicate with ghosts. Through this device, they were told, the ghosts of the dead characters would be able to possess them. p

After this event, the game was on: for 52 hours the players followed the trail of a previous failed agent Adam, discovering his hideouts in this world, finding and scanning through piles of old documents, hacking computers for encryption keys, running from guards and stealing their ghost communication equipment, and in general trying to solve their friend's death. The journey took them all the way from the modern, high tech suburb of Kista to rundown parts of the town; they visited cemeteries, factory ruins and rusty dock areas. Eventually they found the ghost haunting an abandoned mental hospital, traumatized by abuse after being locked in as a mental patient, when she in fact had been a gifted medium. As the player characters all had had part in her undoing, their efforts to find her and talk to her made her able to eventually let go, forgive, and pass to the world beyond. The game ended back in the original location, where the spirits were channeled out of the hosts.

5. An Alternate Reality Larp

The design of *Prosopopeia* was extremely consistent in its use of an alternate reality aesthetics. All the way through the choice of storyline and characters, the choice of locations and propping, the use of technology in disguise, and the model for role taking, the design was informed by the wish to make the game blend as seamlessly as possible into the ordinary world and the everyday activities of the players. In this section, we will briefly outline some of the central design decisions that made *Prosopopeia* an 'Alternate Reality Larp', to our knowledge the first of its kind.

5.1 The Prosopopeia Proposal

The introduction into *Prosopopeia* broke several standard rules for how Larp players are used to approach a game event. When signing up for the game, the players were directed to a web site which contained a very short introduction to the game, ending with a very simple instruction that read

> *"You should now do all you can to forget about this project until it contacts you again. This is the only time the game will be presented as such. From now on everything is real".*

This 'Prosopopeia proposal', the request to *play as if it was real*, was the only instruction the players got outside of the game. At the point in time when they accepted this request, the players had not been provided with any information about the story line of the game, the mode of game play, or the characters they were to assume. As described in the previous section, all such information was supplied 'in game', as part of the preparatory ARG phase of the event. The typical elements of Larp preparations were absent; the players were not asked to prepare their character, create any costumes, or make contacts with the other in-game characters. The only additional information the players had was that they had been recruited to a Larp event, and that the game could enter their lives at any time.

The border of game and ordinary was blurred also in the fashion the game background was constructed. In particular, the 'ghost' characters that the players were assigned were based on authentic dead people. This enabled the players to look up significant information about their characters on the web. Many elements in the fictional story were also adapted to or inspired by the historical backgrounds of these characters, which in effect meant that many important game events had already happened for real before the game began.

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[1] Integrated Project on Pervasive Gaming, www.pervasive-gaming.org.

[2] Full credits: Martin Ericsson (lead design), Staffan Jonsson (production), Adriana Skarped (characters), Holger Jacobsson, Linus Andersson and Emil Boss (writing), Jonas Söderberg (sounds), Karl-Petter Åkesson and Pär Hansson (electronics, surveillance, wireless), and Martin Lanner, Johan Eriksson and Henrik Esbjörnsson (production assistants).

[3] *Prosopopeia Part 1: Where We Fell*

5.2 The Dramaturgy of Space

Prosopopeia was a spatially expanded game [10,12]. It was played in unforeseen areas, and as the players moved around and communicated with the (hidden) game masters, the game articulated these areas into the game.

In a city Larp such as *Prosopopeia* it is impossible to create scenography for the whole gaming area. The approach was instead to prop selected locations, where central scenes were to take place – the rest of the area was used as is.

In line with the ARG aesthetics of the game, the propped locations were selected to represent themselves. For example, the new age festival that the players visited during the preparatory phase was a real and very large new age festival. The possession scene was played out in SICS premises, which were portrayed as being exactly that. This propping style is called indexical propping [6].[4] The design intention was to enable the players to see each place and each prop in exactly the way it would look to an outsider, while player could recontextualise the observation within the game context. The intended effect to create a feeling where everything is prop and thus nothing is prop. One of the core themes of *Prosopopeia* was to encourage players to look at their everyday environment from a new perspective, finding game clues where none existed and interacting with ordinary world in a game-inspired, free fashion.

The use of indexicality in the cityscape allowed *Prosopopeia* interesting opportunities in designing the dramaturgy and the aesthetic of the space used in the game. Discovery and exploration were central themes. Many of the events in *Prosopopeia* took place in desolate urban areas, offering the players a tour into the blind spots of urban landscape. This aesthetic was borrowed from the urban exploration movement [14], for purposes of both adding dramatic tension to the gaming areas, and offering tangible physical action in cityscape. While an ordinary Larp design transforms a private place into a gaming area by the use of scenography, *Prosopopeia* looked for semi-public locations in the urban landscape that already suited the design of the game.

Urban exploration is often done in areas where an ordinary person is not allowed to go, and doing so may require avoiding security guards. *Prosopopeia* exploited this tension related to the forbidden feeling of these areas by introducing game master security guards patrolling some of these areas; for instance the players were expected to sneak into the mental asylum. Even though entering the asylum was legal – since it was rented for the game – the entering was given the tension of trespassing by the introduction of the in-game guard patrol.

5.3 The Possession Model of Role-Taking

One central idea put to test in *Prosopopeia* was a model for role-taking that enabled players to seamlessly alternate between acting as themselves and acting in character. Again, this was a necessary

requirement in order to achieve the seamless integration of the game with ordinary life: How else can you play a Larp in a city, when you at any time can meet somebody you know?

In *Prosopopeia* the players did not role-play characters, but acted as *themselves possessed by the ghost characters*. During the main event, the players had at any time the choice of playing themselves (the 'host', as the role was called within the game context), or as the possessing spirits. Furthermore, in order to succeed in the game, the players had to combine the knowledge and abilities from both roles. The possession model was expected to eliminate the players' need to step outside the game; whenever the game would excessively disturb the ordinary life, the player could quit playing the ghost and revert to playing himself within the game context.

5.4 Temporal Expansion

Prosopopeia merged 'in-game' time with non-playing time in several fashions. Most of this blending occurred before the main event, but through the use of the possession model game time became mixed with ordinary life also during the main phase.

During the preparatory phase the game was in a state of dormancy: players continued with their ordinary life activities expecting that the game could contact them at any time. The players were expected to remember the Prosopopeia proposal if something unexpected happened. When the dedicated game time started, the players were supposed to be ready to become possessed by the ghosts, and actively engage with the game

5.5 Interaction with Outsiders

Prosopopeia broke the limits of traditional games socially, by including outsiders into the game in several ways. Although this approach has been experimented in previous pervasive games [1,17], this is very unusual and also poses particular challenges in Larp [13].

The game used a combination of outsider involvement that has been used before in particular in *Uncle Roy All Around You* [1]. Some people were actively recruited to play outsider roles – the chief example of this was the guard team. Some outsiders that were recruited for minor tasks were themselves. For example, one person met up with the player team in the middle of the night to give them the key to a boat in a run-down harbour in central Stockholm.

[4] The alternatives to indexical propping are iconic propping and symbolic propping [6]. In a basic Peircean fashion iconic prop represents something similar and symbolic prop represents something symbolically connected. For example a plastic gun might be an icon of a metal gun, or a paper slip saying "gun" might be a symbol of a gun.

The players were also on several occasions encouraged to gather information from complete outsiders who were not aware of the game. In particular, each character in the game was also given a mission that involved interacting with bystanders. For example, one of the possessing spirits had regrets about the fact that he had abused homeless people when he was alive. He wanted to redeem this by sheltering a homeless person for a night. As the players were playing according to the possession model of role-taking, it was left to their discretion to what extent they actually carried these missions through.

6. GAME MASTERING

In order to perform runtime game mastering, three things are needed: a system for tracking and monitoring player activities and the events in their vicinity, a processing system which helps the game masters keep track of the input information and construct an overall picture of the ongoing event, and an actuating system which enables them to influence player activity. In tabletop role-playing and in very small Larps in closed spaces, all these three functions can be trivially performed by a small team of game masters present on location. By comparison, game mastering a pervasive Larp like *Prosopopeia* requires considerable technological support. Furthermore, both the surveillance and the actuation needs to be done either invisibly or within the narrative context of the game.

In *Prosopopeia*, surveillance was primarily accomplished through off-the-shelf equipment and direct monitoring. Web cameras were mounted in the most important game locations. Actuation was done primarily through direct interaction with the players through various communication channels, including SMS, recorded ghost phone calls, ICQ on a propped computer within the living quarters, and most notably the EVP machine discussed below.

6.1 The Role of Technology

One important aspect of the use of technology in pervasive Larp is that it must be disguised to fit into the narrative context of the game. In *Prosopopeia*, two pieces of technical equipment were built for this purpose. The most important was the 'EVP machine', an old reel-to-reel tape recorder which was rigged with a cellular phone connected to a ghost voice synthesizer to work as a communication channel to the 'spirit world'. The EVP machine is a good example of the principle of 'technology in disguise". It was designed to look and work like the recorders used by the parapsychologists of the seventies to record ghost messages. The EVP machine was portable (or rather, draggable), and on several occasions the player carried this device to different places around the city to communicate with the local ghosts. As the EVP machine was 'bugged', a microphone was mounted inside it that enabled the game masters to continuously listen in to the players' activities around the EVP, the machine provided a means for surveillance when the players were moving around outside of the main locations.

The second piece of technology in disguise was the 'Burton bridge'. The Burton bridge was used in the initial scene, when the players were possessed by the ghosts, and for the depossession scene. The players were instructed to lay down on the floor and listen to the sound played in head phones. The phones were connected to a strange-looking device rigged inside a large suitcase. The actual technology used consisted of a set of cheap

MP3 players that had been connected to a common off/on and volume control, so that all of the sound channels were synchronized.

7. EVALUATION

The *Prosopopeia* event has been extensively evaluated and the results of these evaluations inform how the game will be changed for the next event. In this section, we summarize the results of the evaluation.

7.1 Evaluation Method

The evaluation used a combination of quantitative and qualitative. As the evaluation was primarily a means to inform the second *Prosopopeia* game, the most important information was however gathered through qualitative means, in particular the very detailed feedback that the players' offered in their responses to the on-line survey. In the following sections, all quotes are taken from these surveys unless explicitly stated otherwise.

The following methods were used.

- During the event, the gamers were observed through video surveillance, and most of the communication between the players and the game masters, such as ICQ chats and email communication was recorded.
- A wrap up session was arranged immediately after the end of the event (this happened in the middle of the night).
- A follow-up questionnaire was distributed on-line. Of the twelve participants, ten persons (four women and six men) handed in the online questionnaire.
- One participant in the game was asked to take notes of the entire event in-game, and produced a kind of an 'ethnographic report' from the player perspective.
- Ethnographic observation and direct interviews with the game masters during the actual event.

Follow-up interviews and discussions with game masters and participants provided additional feedback.

7.2 Alternate Reality Aesthetics

All *Prosopopeia* players appreciated the alternate reality aesthetics elements, and considered them some of the best aspects in the game. In the oral debrief there was also a consensus

agreeing on the opportunities of these methods in the future game designs.

> "When we came to Electrum it was hard to know how much was play and how much was as if this would happen to us for real. I very much liked the idea of this happening to us for real which also made it very easy to play."

> "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."

The value of the alternate reality aesthetics lies in the small coincidences with the real life that often spring up accidentally as the players interact with their environment.

> "It was especially interesting that on our way to meet the police ghosts, we got stopped by the real police. That gave that interesting feeling of signs being there, that the organizers couldn't have been planting."

Ericsson [2] argues that a Larp set in the real world should strive for maximal consistency between the game narrative and the complete experience of the player. The *Prosopopeia* informants seem to agree.

7.3 Social Expansion

Social expansion was one of the most controversial elements of the game. Most players valued this highly: of the ten participants that answered the questionnaire, six agreed completely with the statement 'It was fun and intriguing to play among people who were not themselves in the game". However, two participants disagreed with the statement, one partially and one totally.

Especially the ambiguity regarding to what extent other people were acting was a source of excitement. One player provided the following comment to the question 'how did it feel to interact with a person who was himself or herself, and yet had access to information and a role in the game?':

> "This was the best of it all! I would have liked us to be more like this as well. It would have been great to see how we would have handled it if would have accepted more of ourselves at the same time as we were obsessed. I very much liked the game being on the edge of being for real. I also thought all these people that we met handled it so well."

Players were also mixed on their opinions on whether they actually wanted to interact with people outside the game. Four players totally agreed with the statement 'I liked that the game forced us to make contact with people outside the game', whereas three players disagreed totally. Some players deliberately sought social expansion.

> "I spoke with some junkies about [two game master characters], hoping for some in-depth conversation as my character. Unfortunately, they where all in a hurry and did not want to talk, only sell some drugs."

7.4 Role-taking

As expected, the possession model of role-taking proved useful in order to deal with non-game contacts with friends during the game event.

> "When picking up stuff and printing some files at home, I put [my ghost-character] way back and just met with my flatmates as I do normally..."

The most serious non-game interactions were handled in an off-game fashion, even in the interaction with the other players. This would indicate that even when role-playing the 'player' instead of the 'ghost', some events cannot be handled as part of the game.

> "The first time I was only myself in front of the others was when I got a phone call regarding my dad who had been sent to hospital."

As benefits of the possession model, the players said that the outside interferences (though they disturbed character immersion) did not disturb the game but contributed to it.

> "One big advantage is that it doesn't feel 'wrong' to go out of character when you need to do something private, like removing your contact lenses or whatever. It's just the vessel 'taking over', and that works fine. Same thing with knowledge that I possess that the spirit doesn't. It also opens up interesting viewpoints on identity and acting."

> "You always have "off-thoughts", and it can be disturbing. But in this game it was OK since you were two souls in one body."

It can be concluded that the possession model is a good solution to many challenges of socially expanded Larping. However it is not a generic solution, since it is intervowen into the *Prosopopeia* metaphysics. As an example, its pros and cons provide valuable input into the creation of other role-taking models.

7.5 Gamist, Narrativist & Immersionist Play

Prosopopeia was designed to provide a combination of gamist, narrativist and immersionist play. This structure, where players are expected to solve gamist puzzles in character as a part of a fairly linear narrative, was chosen since it might suit a commercial, mass-marketed Larp-like pervasive game. The gamist orientation is easily adopted by new players, a narrativist orientation guarantees a certain experience for all the players, whereas the immersionist play is likely to appeal to the traditional Larper.

However, many players considered character immersion in *Prosopopeia* particularly challenging. The following factors contributed to the difficulty of ghost character immersion.

- *The problems and puzzles presented by the main story required player skills rather than ghost characters skills.* When communicating on the ICQ or manipulating the computer, the players relied on their real-life skills and not on those of the ghost character. Although this was a conscious design choice, the need for player skills interrupted immersion into the ghost character.

- *The mundane, urban environment.* Unusual physical environments and props, such as clothing, food, and scenery, help players to play immersively in a traditional Larp. As *Prosopopeia* used indexical propping in an everyday environment, the players tended to play themselves in ordinary world, rather than fictional people in fictional world.

- *Interference of the everyday social contacts.* Ghost character play was interrupted if the player encountered her ordinary social life during play. Even though the possession model facilitated the

transition from game reality to ordinary reality, these interferences momentarily refuted the ghost characters.

- *Pressing time-scheduled puzzle quest.* At certain points in the storyline, the players were lured into focusing their efforts entirely on gamist solving of the puzzles. This frequently caused the players to ignore the immersionist character play to enable full concentration on the task at hand.

> "I really loved the intense tempo, the feelings of fatigue and insecurity, the feeling of being herded along on a journey where I had absolutely no control over anything."

> "There was constantly so much "quest-stress" that we didn't have time to interact in or develop relationships, which was really sad."

The design intention underlying the gamist ingredients of the game was to allow the players really *do* stuff in the game. Whereas table-top role-players simulate sneaking by rolling dice, the players in *Prosopopeia* were expected to really sneak past the guards. In sharp contrast to many contemporary Larp events, *Prosopopeia* did not allow players to overcome obstacles through improvisation style play-acting and negotiation, the obstacles were portrayed as 'real', and had to be overcome for real.

7.6 Technological Augmentation

There players were completely discordant on their evaluation of the technology-enhancements used in the game. The statement "The technology worked well" was, on the average, neither agreed with nor disagreed with (average 3,00). On the other hand, the participants agreed slightly (average 2,6) with the statement "The technology contributed to the game experience". Based on the complementing comments, we can conclude that the technology was well designed, but that it could have worked better.

The players clearly preferred when the technology provided play opportunities, compared to such installations that were primarily experienced as special effects. The EVP machine was the most appreciated prop, since it was an integral part of the illusion which the players were able to handle themselves.

> "The tape recorder was great. Using "invisible" technology in that way really added to the experience and made you believe that the machine really worked."

> "The [reel-to-reel recorder] was excellent, it made it so much more close to reality. The technology was physical proof that this was actually happening and we weren't only playing a game."

Another piece of hardware with which the players could interact was the computer installed in the boat.

> "The computer at the boat gave us so much information and a feeling that Adam had been around the boat not too long ago."

By contrast, the 'Burton bridge' installation was seen as a flashy prop, since the players did not get to lay their hands on it.

> "Come on, build some tech that we actually get to use! The tape machine was perfect since we got to use it ourselves, the Burton bridge/giant tech-suitcase we never got close to, since it was guarded by [the scientist] who did all the fidgeting with it.…"

There was some general opposition of augmented Larp and/or Larp design driven by augmentation.

> "the tech-stuff was always in the way and became a burden to the game play instead of the support that I guess was meant to have given."

One of the reasons for this negative feedback was the low usability of the EVP recorder. The interaction model for the EVP machine was dictated by the narrative context of the game; when the fathers of EVP used roll-to-roll recorders to record the phenomena (in real history), the voices were incomprehensible, the work was full of tiresome rewinding, and the recorders were heavy and bulky instruments. This was actually appreciated by the players:

> "EVP machine is real piece of work. At the time it was stolen, my character felt that carrying it around must have been a stupid idea - I'm very glad to see that [I] was wrong on this."

In *Prosopopeia*, the plan was to make initially EVP very difficult to use, to give the players the feel on how it was used by the original inventors, but to gradually enhance its usability. This plan would seem like a reasonable compromise between the narrative context of the machine, and the need to provide a good player experience. However, there were some problems associated to the usage model that had not been foreseen. Unless the players connected a set of loudspeakers to the recorder (which they never did), the machine essentially provided a single-user experience. What had not been foreseen was that the players would adopt a play mode when they almost always played in the full group. This meant that the majority of the players would just be sitting around, waiting for one or two players to control the machine.

7.7 Game Mastering

Almost immediately when the event was running, it became obvious that the video data was practically useless. As the cameras were rigged in specific locations, their usefulness depended on where the players chose to be. The sound quality of the video recordings was also too low, so unless the players were in the immediate vicinity they could not be heard. In most situations, sound (voice dialogue, in particular) provides much more information about what players are actually doing than video.

The perhaps most serious problem with the adopted approach was that a constant feed (especially video) requires constant surveillance, in a way that is extremely taxing to realize during an event which lasts for several days.

In conclusion, it is not really worthwhile to spend the money and efforts needed to obtain good quality surveillance in a pervasive Larp. Although it is possible to achieve this type of surveillance for fixed locations, the *Prosopopeia* event showed that you must plan for players spending much time in *other* locations than the pre-planned ones. For mobile players, the quality of surveillance will by necessity always be low. Furthermore, most of the times players interact with each other and do nothing that require game master intervention. Although game masters may want to overhear such conversations, they are not strictly necessary for the game master role.

There is also a question of player integrity. Some of the players reported feeling as if 'being on Big Brother' even in this setup where supervision was largely ineffective. By introducing more effective surveillance we would trespass on an ethical boundary that we should think twice of crossing.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The *Prosopopeia* event shows that alternate reality Larp is a highly engaging and enjoyable form of gaming. But the event also showed that the genre poses some particular challenges. One such challenge is to create the same level of immersion into a role as is possible to achieve in traditional Larp. Another core challenge is to create better technology support for game mastering, while still keeping all player interactions within the narrative context of the game.

For Prosopopeia two, these challenges will inform both the game design as well as the choice of technology used in-game and for surveillance. In particular, some of the monitoring of player activities will be worked into the game as a player activity. Furthermore, players will be tracked in a more meaningful manner based on sensor and actuator technology. We will use technology that logs specific player activities (entering a specific room, or interacting with a specific object) rather than monitors their full behaviour.

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