

# Philosophies and strategies of pervasive larp design

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The majority of live action role-playing games are enacted either within a strictly confined area or in the middle of nowhere, in wilderness. However, there is also a minority of larps that are played in the streets, amongst unsuspecting bystanders. This minority has recently been gaining wider recognition. These *pervasive larps* are played all around a city, they invade players' everyday lives, and involve outsiders.

This paper maps the design space of pervasive larp. Firstly, we discuss different philosophies of pervasive role-play, looking at desired game experiences and cultural conventions of different forms of pervasive role-play. Secondly, we present a list of strategies that have been used successfully to realize such games.

Pervasive games are games that break the usual boundaries of games. While regular games are played at a set place and time by certain volunteer participants, pervasive games are different: These games are either played out in the open, or they invade players' everyday lives, or they can involve outsiders and bystanders. In our earlier work (Montola, Waern & Nieuwdorp 2006) we have defined a pervasive game as a “game that has one or more salient features that expand the contractual magic circle of play socially, spatially or temporally”.

This blurring of the traditional boundaries of games usually leads to the point where players are unaware of where the game ends and ordinary life begins; they often are unsure about whether a certain object, place or person is related to the game. While this is often a source of pleasurable gameplay, it can also occasionally be a cause of significant problems in the game.<sup>1</sup>

Numerous larps and other games have influenced this paper. As these games are generally poorly documented and mostly exist in oral tradition, we have not provided references to exact larps.<sup>2</sup> This paper is based on a report originally produced in the IPerG project (Montola, Stenros & Waern 2007).

## Pervasive larp design philosophies

Larps can be designed in order to meet a number of goals and purposes. In order to inform design, we first need to create a rudimentary classification of larp design philosophies: These philosophies are holistic approaches to larp organization, addressing both the form and the function of the game. While the vast majority of larps are conceived for recreation and entertainment, other uses include education, simulation and artistic expression. These functions can be further analyzed: Recreational larps, for instance, can produce plea-

<sup>1</sup> For a reader unaware of our views on pervasive games in general, we recommend having a look at our work discussing pervasive games in general (Montola, Stenros & Waern forthcoming, Montola 2005, Montola, Waern & Nieuwdorp 2006), the ethics of pervasive games (Montola, Waern, Kuittinen & Stenros 2006) and pervasive games in a larger cultural context (Stenros, Montola & Mäyrä 2007).

<sup>2</sup> We have used the following pervasive larps as background information: *Det længste dag* (Denmark 2005), *Europa* (Norway 2001), *Ghost Express* (Finland 2001-2002), *Helsingin Camarilla* (Finland 1995-2004), *Helsinki FTZ* (Finland 1997), *Isle of Saints* (Finland 2001), *Neonhämärä* (Finland 2008-), *Pimeyden maailma* (Finland 2004-2005), *Prosopopeia Bardo 1: Där vi föll* (Sweden 2005), *Prosopopeia Bardo 2: Momentum* (Sweden 2006), *Rikos kannattaa* (Finland 2006) *Sanningen om Marika* (Sweden 2007), *The White Road* (Denmark 2007) and *Tre grader av uskyld* (Denmark 2006). Many non-pervasive larps also provided insight for this report. These include *Amerika* (Norway 2000), *Carolus Rex* (Sweden 1999), *En stilla middag* (Sweden 2007), *Hamlet* (Sweden 2002), *Mellan himmel och hav* (Sweden 2003), *Panopticon* (Norway 2003), *Pelageya: Clarissie* (Finland 2005), *Pitkä perjantai* (Finland 1997), *Ringblomman* (Sweden 2004), *System Danmarc 2* (Denmark 2005) and *The Executive Game*-series (Finland 2001-2003). In addition, many pervasive games and research prototypes have influenced our work: *Uncle Roy All Around You*, *The Beast*, *vQuest* and *Epidemic Menace*, by way of example.

surable play through physical exercise, social play, mental challenges and so on.

Most of the design philosophies discussed in this paper are applicable to regular larp as well as to pervasive larp. Going pervasive is one way of creating strong experiences, but closed larps (which Martin Ericsson (forthcoming) has called *ecstatic furnaces*) have their own advantages. For example, the 360° illusion larps (Koljonen 2007) have worked out very well in creating visceral experiences. Then again, some of the philosophies (like hiding in cityscape) are very particular to pervasive larp.

Some of these philosophies can be combined with each other, whereas others have conflicting goals. Below, we also discuss how we believe the different strategies would work together with the more detailed design strategies.

## City as a backdrop

Urban pervasive games always have a relationship with the surrounding city. Yet the attitude towards the city needs not be active: The city can just be something in the background. Games that are not specifically designed to be played on the streets and just happen to take place there belong in this category, as do games where the designer simply treats the city as a setting, a backdrop.

City as a backdrop is closer to a lack of philosophy than to a full-blown design attitude. These games are pervasive by accident, not by designer intent. Often the players choose an attitude towards the city from the other philosophies – one that suits their character.

Most of the city games that were played in the Nordic countries in the 1990's belong in this category: The games just happened to take place in the street.

**Supported by:** Design strategies that do not rely on a factual world and that clearly define the game as a game, e.g. Scene-to-Scene Play, Ludic Markers, and Ensemble Construction.

**Conflicts with:** Design strategies that require players to take an active attitude to the surrounding world, e.g. Double Life Roletaking, Reality as a Sourcebook, Social Playground, Play as If It Was Real, Performative Play, and Outsiders as Obstacles.

## Hiding in cityscape

Many pervasive larps aim to hide themselves in cityscape. They prioritize a way of playing that does not interfere with the outside world and avoids causing public disturbance or involving outsiders. The advantage of this design philosophy is that it allows the excitement of play in public places, while keeping the social weight of gameplay low. Many people may consider public pretence play embarrassing, or find transgressive public play immoral. Thus, larps that hide in cityspace offer the most casual form of pervasive larp.

Typically, the larps hiding in cityspace utilize settings where hiding is an intrinsic part of the play. The wizards of Harry Potter refrain from magic in presence of muggles, the vampires of *World of Darkness* mask their true nature from mortals, spies and agents hide from everyday people – as well as from each other. Thus, bystanders are seen as a challenge, an obstruction that needs to be avoided.

**Supported by:** Strategies that create a hidden layer to society, e.g. Double Life Roletaking, Ludic Markers, Indexical Propping, Runtime Game Mastering, Unfamiliar Surroundings, Urban Exploration, and Outsiders as Obstacles.

**Conflicts with:** Design strategies that require social interaction with outsiders, e.g. Social Playground, Pronoia and Exploration, and Performative Play.

## Altering perception

Games can be used to show a familiar environment from a fresh point of view. The players become tourists in their own town as they start perceiving the world in a different way. Often the players are encouraged to visit places they would never venture into on their own, and to have a different type of agency and empowerment in the cityscape; they are trained to look for openings, entrances and exits.

These types of games often draw on urban exploration and other public space movements, but they can also be used to re-enact and teach history. The philosophy is similar to that of societal dialogue (see below), placing larger emphasis on city space and de-emphasising the artistic or political message – these games can be about teaching or entertainment.

Games that have used this philosophy have included the *Prosopopeia* series (looking behind the scenes of a city) and *The White Road* (hitchhiking and roads).

**Supported by:** Design strategies that emphasise alien experiences in everyday life, e.g. Linked Tasks, Coordinated Social Networks, Extremely Long Duration, Onion Model of Participation, Reality as a Sourcebook, Social Playground, Pronoia and Exploration, Unfamiliar Surroundings, Urban Exploration, Emergent Play.

**Conflicts with:** Design strategies that separate game space from real space, e.g. Scene-to-Scene Play, Ludic Markers.

## Doing things for real

Doing things for real is entertaining, fun and insightful. Many larps look for visceral, tangible experiences as their central source of pleasure. In a traditional fantasy larp physical experience is created by simulated combat and playing outdoors in wilderness. *Hamlet* served players with extravagant banquets; *Carolus Rex* was played in a real submarine to create a holistic 360° illusion of *being there*.

Whether it means crawling through tunnels in urban exploration style, talking with homeless people, conducting realistic crime-scene investigation with floating condoms in the toilet or trashing cars with jackhammers, doing things for real creates a pleasurable sense of physical immersion.

**Supported by:** Design strategies that emphasise physical and social activity in real or realistic settings, e.g. Indexical Propping, Sensory Pleasure, Reality as a Sourcebook, Social Playground, Pronoia and Exploration, Unfamiliar Surroundings, Urban Exploration, Play as If It Was Real.

**Conflicts With:** Symbolic design strategies that tend to emphasize distance from the action, for example Performative Play may conflict.

## Merging game with life

Seamlessly merging larp and life, intertwining the players' ordinary lives with content created for the game, can lead to deeply engaging pervasive larp. In pervasive larps this has mostly been explored in the *Prosopopeia* series.

Merging game and life creates a hardcore game experience. When playing the game, players are toying with their real lives. If the concept of the game is “play yourselves but you are all highlanders, like in the movie *Highlander*”, you may have to be prepared to fight a deadly duel at any time.<sup>3</sup> These games cannot easily hide from bystanders: if another highlander attacks you in broad daylight, the hiding phase of the game is over.

In a game that merges game and life, it is crucial that all the constructed parts of the game seem natural. If the scenography, the supporting characters and the props are not authentic, the players will detect (and sometimes get irritated by) the seam between the ordinary and the ludic dimension. Subscribing to this philosophy constrains the game fiction.

<sup>3</sup> While at first it would appear that merging life and play is only relevant for larp, tabletop role-players have produced similar experiences as well: For example players might play a tabletop role-playing game, appearing “as themselves” in the diegetic world.

**Supported by:** Design strategies that strive to blur the border between game and life, e.g. Extremely Long Duration, Double Life Roletaking, Indexical Propping, Sensory Pleasure, Reality as a Sourcebook, Social Playground, Pronoia and Exploration and Play as If It Was Real.

**Conflicts With:** Design strategies that separate play from life e.g. Scene-to-Scene Play, Ludic Markers, Performative Play.

## Societal dialogue

Some pervasive larps seek to engage in active dialogue with their social environment. The purpose of such dialogue can be politically or artistically motivated. These games have a message that is aimed either at the players, at bystanders, or society as a whole.

Larp is an involving and participatory form that allows players to experience the message of the game. In traditional larp the dialogue with society is created through the discussion generated by the game. In pervasive games the characters can engage the surrounding world, and bystanders can have direct access to the game.

Recently, the politically aware larps have discussed issues such as societal inequality (*System Danmarc 2, Europa*), gender (*Mellan himmel och hav, Ringblomman*), recent history (*Ground Zero, 1942 – Noen å stole på*) and societal control (*PanoptiCorp, .laitos, Momentum*).

**Supported by:** Design strategies that emphasise social interaction with the real world, e.g. Extremely Long Duration, Reality as a Sourcebook, Social Playground, Emergent Play, Performative Play.

**Conflicts with:** Design strategies that hide the game such as Outsiders as Obstacles

# Strategies supporting the design philosophies

In this section, we will look at a palette of more detailed design strategies that can be used to produce pervasive larps. The strategies have been divided into four groups: *structure*, *play attitude*, *ludic environment* and *ordinary environment*. This does not mean that a designer must choose one strategy from each group – many in the same group work very well together. It is probably also possible for an inventive designer to combine those which are seemingly incompatible.

## Structural strategies

First, we will look into the strategies addressing structural issues of pervasive larps. These strategies illustrate how players are divided into groups, how they work through the plot and how the game is paced.

### Linked tasks

Linking tasks means that players must have succeeded with one task before they can address another one. In linked collaborative tasks the whole becomes larger than the sum of its parts.

In *Momentum*, a group of players were provided with mathematical data that could be used to triangulate coordinates of a hidden stash of game props. However, because the players did their math wrong, they ended up searching in vain in the wrong neighbourhood in Stockholm on a rainy October night. A boring math exercise of decryption and triangulation is given relevance and context, but at the same time the task of searching for the hidden stash is enhanced by the successful triangulation, as it creates a sense of accomplishment.

Yet if the game includes tasks or puzzles entailing a possibility of failure, it is important to communicate this eventuality as well as the actual failure, to the players in a concrete way. It is important to design

the result of failure as well, and not only what will happen when the players succeed.

In the *Momentum* example there was a twofold price for failing: The player group lost time due to their error, and the long night wandering in the wrong area created a strong experience of failure. In *Momentum*, which strived for a feeling of ‘playing for real’, this added to the experience of realness. In a less realistic game, this would probably have been a very unsatisfying experience.

A failure should not entirely stop the game’s progression, but at the same time it must mean something to allow the players to realize that their actions actually do have effects. Furthermore, linked tasks should be related to each other. The triangulation task would not have been a linked task had it been followed by a completely unrelated decryption task. The interrelated and interdependent subtasks contribute to the feeling of tangibility.

### Coordinated social networks

Pervasive role-players seem to greatly enjoy the feeling of being a part of a large network of players. Since an individual player has a very limited view of the game, it is quite easy to create an illusion of a large network of players. A powerful tool to arrange this is to coordinate the game community with other social networks. For instance, when the player of a petty criminal realizes that both her victims and pursuers are actually played by other players, the illusion deepens, but when she realizes that there is also a game-related wedding party going on that she has no role in at all, the game world becomes all-encompassing. The player understands that she does not know just how large the game really is.

Talvitie (2006, 2007) discusses methods of constructing social networks in games. The background philosophy of his approach is based mainly on information flow: If some characters throw a party while others play vampires at that party, the asymmetric information makes dangers and opportunities of vampirism very tangible. Killing a character with an actual played history is a deeper experience than preying on a non-player

character created to be killed. Through controlling the flow of information and social dynamics in a game, it is possible to design the ways in which players *perceive* the game and the environment around them.

In *Prosopopeia* games the players were basically in one big group, and the illusion of a bigger social environment was created through game master characters, informed outsiders and NPC characters accessible through emails and chats. (The mediated communication made it easy to hide the fact that the various non-player characters were played by one person on one computer.) However, *Momentum* split up the group, by assigning four simultaneous tasks to the 30 players. Each task had to be accomplished successfully in order for the whole group to achieve their goal. The beauty of this example is in the way actual and illusionary networks were combined. Through splitting the players into smaller groups, the players received a tangible impression of the game taking place in many places simultaneously.

### Scene-to-Scene play

Pervasive larps, or larps in general, do not have to be continuous. Though this is not common practice, there have been a number of games where the action is broken down into shorter scenes that are staged at different places or times. This brings larp closer to theatre, as each scene is much shorter than an ordinary larp. Scene-to-scene play can enable high intensity playing, with continuous emotional and physical engagement by the players.

There are two ways of creating scene-to-scene play: continuous and interrupted. In continuous mode the players never go off-game, but travel from one place to another to stage the scenes at suitable places. Most pervasive larps that take advantage of the city actually use this mode – the game is in the background when active play is not taking place. Examples of this kind of playing include many Finnish city games such as *Neonhämärä*, *Pimeyden maailma*, *Rikos kannattaa* and *Ghost Express*. In interrupted mode the playing stops between scenes and the players are not in character as they move from setting to setting. This also enables

breaking up the temporal structure of the game. Games that borrow elements from freeform role-play can use these methods; one such game was *En stilla middag med familjen*.

The essential aspect of scene-to-scene play is that the players must be willing to adhere to the plot. These games are heavily game-mastered and if the players do not play along, the game collapses.

### Extremely long duration

Typically, the shortest larps run for one evening, while long games need a weekend or a week to be played out in full. With pervasive games, there has been experimentation with very long larps, games that run for months and possibly indefinitely. Temporally expanded role-playing is appealing, as it can create a strong illusion of reality.

The most significant issue pertaining to extremely long durations is that players need to be able to fit the game together with their ordinary lives. They need to manage to navigate somewhat easily between the game and the ordinary. Depending on the double life strategy chosen, outsiders and family members may become a central part of the game.

Another difficulty entailed by this strategy is the huge effort required. The game masters need to produce a lot of content and prepare to be actively involved in game mastering for long periods. If the players feel that they could have received the same game experience in a shorter time, their motivation to play will decrease. The players also need to invest a lot of effort, time and money to participate in the game. Player investment in general is a challenge – the game needs to be interesting enough for players to sacrifice such a large part of their life to it. Finally, the game masters – if they are running the game in real time – need to be on call almost around the clock. The workforce required to do that, not to mention the information system that ensures that whoever is on duty knows all plot threads, requires a lot of dedication.

A practical approach is to segment long duration larps into high and low intensity periods. If participants know that weekends are the most active times and that nothing much happens on Wednesdays, they can

plan their time use, both in order to avoid stress and in order to be present when the interesting stuff happens. The most common long-duration larps are campaigns with set game days when playing is intensive, with far less intensive play between games.

If the game is played between prepared larp sessions, the social networking sites of the internet can turn out to be very valuable: *Neonhämärä* for instance utilizes Facebook as a valuable communication tool, both between characters and between players.

### Double life roletaking

When a game merges with life or goes on for a long time, there is a risk of the game world getting in conflict with the real world. This conflict needs to be mitigated in order both to maintain the enjoyability of the game and to not interfere excessively with ordinary life.

Double life means that while on a surface level players seem ordinary (perhaps they are even playing themselves in a fictional context) but they have a secret identity. For instance, a spy game could start with an email from a (fictional) intelligence agency that recruits the player as an agent. This way, the player becomes a character in the diegesis of the game. In *Killer* the player is also the character.

*Prosopopeia*-series used a Possession Model to create double lives. In these games, the players played themselves believing that it is possible to be possessed by ghosts, and they *also* played a ghost possessing them. The diegetic duplicate characters were possessed by ghosts of the long-dead people. This allowed the game to hide while still merging game with life: When a player went to work, she could just suppress the spirit for the time being. When the player focused on playing, the possessing spirit gave her goals, motivations and character to be role-played.

Many pervasive larps are played with vampire characters, as inspired by White Wolf's *World of Darkness*. Contrary to the first impression, these characters are always based on a very different philosophy: If your diegetic duplicate is turned into a vampire, the change restricts your everyday life

so much that the benefits of the double lives are lost. Especially a lethal allergy to sunlight makes hiding in plain sight very difficult.

### Onion model of participation

Larp is a demanding form of play and expression, involving and initiating new players in challenges. The onion model of participation is one solution to the problem: In this structure the pervasive larp is surrounded by games and mass media offering other less demanding play modes. (See Dena 2008a, 2008b for tiered participation in alternate reality games.)

For instance, the outer layer of *Sanningen om Marika* was a television series shown nationally in Sweden. A small fraction of the viewers also participated in an alternate reality game played on the Internet, and a tiny cluster of alternate reality gamers participated in larp-like live events.

The model allows the organizers to stage real world events with a manageable number of participants while still offering content to a much larger audience., This is possible especially since some of the online content can be recordings and recounts of the live events. Another advantage is that the model allows participants to choose their own level of involvement and mode of participation.

### Ludic environment strategies

The strategies relating to ludic environment explicate design approaches to the diegetic game world. How is this world built? What is the driving idea behind it? As these games take place in the vast ordinary world, the game world often consists of ludic bubbles spread in the environment – bubbles that require constant engagement and maintenance work.

### Ludic markers

One of the central decisions of a pervasive larp is whether to use ludic markers or not, and which ones to use. Ludic markers are symbols that explicitly denote some object, person or place as a part of the game.

*Rikos kannattaa* required all players to constantly show a badge and all the *Neonhämärä* players have to use white armbands, making sure that players would always be able to distinguish between players and outsiders. Symbols can be also used to designate certain areas as particular gaming zones: While players of a typical street larp can venture to any restaurant to have lunch, they should be considerate of other people in public and semi-public places. Many players would not even want to play in an overtly extrovert manner in a space where that is frowned upon; it may be thought of as embarrassing or inconsiderate. Therefore, symbols are often used to designate secluded or more permissive areas as game zones, spaces where characters can more liberally act out scenes that would attract attention in other public places. Often these areas are secluded, but in large cities there are also squares, parks or marketplaces where social attitudes are more permissive. These are the typical areas for street artists, beggars, and people handing out flyers. Adding a few pervasive players into the mix will not surprise or shock anyone.

Carefully placed symbols can also serve as game clues. If players are supposed to break down a door, ludic markers can be used to guide them to the right door. It is usually advisable to design the markers in a way that fits the game's theme and content.

The main danger entailed in ludic markers is careless use. Game masters should be extremely careful to remove unnecessary markers and to not put them into inappropriate places. If players erroneously believe that a place or a person belongs to the game, they are likely to take liberties in their behaviour. If players think that game masters expect them to break down a door and this door is marked, they probably will do so. Badly designed ludic markers will also break the illusion of a game world. The off-game rune of Swedish larps fits well into a fantasy setting, but is less appropriate in a modern agent story.

## Indexical propping

An indexical prop is a game object that represents *itself* in the diegesis (Montola & Jonsson 2006). In some game settings, a plastic gun can be a symbol for a robbery, or an iconic representation of a real gun. In an indexically propped larp, a plastic gun represents a plastic gun.

If indexicality goes far enough in both props and scenography, this creates an aesthetics where everything feels like a prop and thus nothing is really considered a prop. A great advantage of this method is that it allows players to solve puzzles and tackle other challenges in a real and tangible way. Players can freely toy with anything they encounter.

In games that merge life and play, indexicality can go even further. Even though in a regular urban larp a jacket may signify another specimen of a perfectly identical jacket, in *Prosopopeia* the jacket signified exactly the same jacket owned by the exact same person: The indexicality included the social and historical context of the “prop”.

## Sensory pleasure

Computer and console games have long strived to produce maximal audiovisual enjoyment for players. Pervasive games should not forget this strategy – a pervasive larp can expand sensory pleasure to all five senses. Sensory enjoyment comes in many shapes and sizes, ranging from a good dinner to a moonlit lake and beyond. Creating sensory pleasures requires considerable effort and resources, but it significantly enhances the experience.

One way to achieve sensory pleasure is creating an overall aesthetics for the game. This would mean that locations would be chosen with the aesthetic value in mind, and all props, scenographed locations and character costumes would have to be designed so that they reflect a coherent aesthetics. If this approach is used, it is important to design also all marketing material – such as the game website – so that it introduces the theme to the players. It should be remembered that emphasizing a genre might conflict with a realistic playing style; if everything looks and

feels like 1980's cyberpunk, then the players are prone to act in a manner stipulated by stereotypical cyberpunk fiction.

Depending on the design philosophy, unpleasant experiences can also be utilized. Finding a game artefact from an actual junkyard or walking through the town in a rainstorm can be enjoyable, though physically unpleasant experiences.

Sensory pleasure is a good choice especially to larpwrights creating events for less experienced players. An inviting aesthetic can soften the otherwise possibly stressful experience, and coax hesitant players into play.

### Reality as a sourcebook

Pervasive games can use the environment they are set in as an endless source of game content. A clever design allows players to use reality as the all-encompassing sourcebook for the game world, inviting them to spend time poring over books in a library or navigating numerous websites. Especially pervasive puzzle games often use reality in this way. Players might need to learn Morse or read up on local history in order to solve a riddle.

One approach is to use historic sources on myths, fables and superstitions and make these come true in the real world. For instance, in the world of *Momentum*, Enochian occultism was real. The game masters had read up on the subject and included pointers to that material in the game, effectively introducing a vast resource for constructing very hard puzzles for the players.

When the internet reality is used as a sourcebook, it can also quite easily be extended by means of fabricated content. It is relatively easy to clone and alter an entire website. A game that relies on both fabricated and real world information blurs the line between diegetic and authentic content – which can be a powerful experience for the players.

## Runtime game mastering

<sup>4</sup> Runtime game mastering is also known as puppet mastering in the alternate reality game culture (see McGonigal 2006b).

Runtime game mastering is the process of influencing the flow of a game in real time.<sup>4</sup> Most larps are game mastered to a greater extent. In pervasive larp, game masters need to use a *sensory system* to acquire information about the state of the game; an *actuation system*, to change the state of the game; and a *decision-making system*, to determine the preferred changes. This can sometimes be done in a very simple way by a game master who participates in the larp as one of the characters. In classic tabletop role-playing games, all three functions are embodied in one person, while pervasive larps often require technological tools.

<sup>5</sup> Jonsson & al 2007b provide a full description of *Momentum* game mastering. See also Jonsson and Waern 2008

In *Isle of Saints* the players were expected to independently report their activities (extradiegetically) to game masters with cellular phones, both revealing their plans and describing the past events. As self-reporting can distract the game experience, *Momentum*<sup>5</sup> selected four players as undercover *controllers* who acted as spies for the game masters and actuated changes by secretly guiding the players. In general, having informants in the player group often proves very useful, as it is very difficult to understand a larp situation through sensory equipment only.

Surveillance technology can be somewhat useful for game mastering. Hidden microphones can provide accurate information on the game, if the microphones can tap into crucial player discussions. Video feeds are less useful, as they mainly reveal which players are in a certain location or when a player arrives or departs. The use of surveillance technology is of course legally regulated.

Online play is an immensely valuable way to create both sensing and actuation. *Momentum* used several online characters played by the game masters, who maintained several simultaneous discussions with players via instant messaging, chats and emails. The players never knew who played these characters, nor that they sometimes were even played by the same person.

## Ordinary environment strategies

A pervasive larp can take very different attitudes towards the public space around it. The relationship between the game and the city is one of the most definitive aspects of pervasive larp design. The everyday environment that envelops the play can be approached as a background, a playground, a feedback machine, and as an obstacle.

### Social playground

Larps that treat their environment as a social playground take an active stance towards bystanders. These games encourage, even require players to speak with outsiders, playing on the conflict between the diegetic world view of the player and the everyday view of the outsiders.

Players can be gently coaxed into interacting with outsiders in several ways. The game masters may plant instructed players among a crowd of non-players, or leave important information with real outsiders. The player character can also inspire players to interact with outsiders: for instance, a detective character might ask people near a murder site whether they saw something strange an hour ago, or an animal-rights activist could engage in a provocative discussion with a bystander wearing a fur coat.

While on the one hand it can be stressful, social play with outsiders can reward the player with feelings of fun and insight about the social conventions. Playing the part of a vampire or a madman may serve as an alibi for social experimentation and breaking of conventions. Jane McGonigal (2006a) states that if people are given specific instructions to act in a certain way in public environment, they will surprise themselves with their own daring and ingenuity, and also find that the environment is surprisingly receptive to these advances. Games offer the possibility to commit the forbidden actions one wants, while still granting immunity against it as “it’s not real” (Porembe 2007). Socially expanded role-playing can provide *empowerment* to act against social constraints. The social playground approach is an especially valuable tool for a designer wishing to use game as a political or artistic device

## Pronoia and exploration

Games where players can never be certain about who is part of the game and who is not, and where the game actively engages players wherever they go, create a sense of positive paranoia, called *pronoia* (McGonigal 2006c). It is the feeling that the universe is plotting behind your back to make your life/game better for you.

When players understand that their game is situated in the social, historical and physical context of a real, living urban environment, they seem to love exploring both content and context to the fullest, curiously disregarding boundaries to find how far they can push and still find recognizable parts of the game. The exploration fun lies in the feeling that the entire world is part of the play and wherever the player goes, more content turns up.

The totality of the surrounding world needs to be demonstrated in order to create a good illusion. As Koljonen (2007) points out, a plausible universe should deliver surprises: “To make the player accept the border of the game as something else than the border of the fiction, it is the duty of the truly illusionist game master to demonstrate that characters, plots and information could, and sometimes will, cross them”. Pronoia emerges as players start seeing the game everywhere.

## Unfamiliar surroundings

People have clear ideas about what is the correct kind of behaviour in a certain public space. Breaking these societal norms can be difficult for many people. If the game design is supposed to support transgressions, it helps if players are placed in unfamiliar surroundings (with people they trust, see *ensemble building*). A player is more prone to act in a weird way in a city that she is not familiar with – and, more importantly, where the bystanders are not familiar with her. Large cities provide a certain anonymity, and that anonymity awards a wider range of agency.

It is also possible to use the unfamiliar surroundings as a starting point; to stage a game in a strange setting, creating the conventions and style of play there, and then move the game to an area that players are

more familiar with. In this way, players would be disposed to routines that they would never have established in the familiar settings.

### Urban exploration

Urban exploration as a term covers all the activities where participants examine the normally unseen parts of human civilization. This activity usually takes the form of infiltrating abandoned structures, off-limits areas, catacombs, sewers and other tunnel systems. The customary rule is to “take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints” (Ninjalicious 2005). Urban exploration and pervasive larp can easily be combined. The thrill of going to places that usually are unseen is transferred to the game.

Urban Exploration is far from safe; visiting many of these places is either illegal, dangerous, or both. Minor bruising is a possible consequence in almost all interesting environments, whereas major hazards include a risk of falling from high places or getting exposed to chemicals in sewers. Consulting guide books (e.g. Ninjalicious 2005), experts, and local authorities is advised. Players need to know what they are signing up for and they need to be properly equipped and prepared – they should have double flashlights, gloves and clothes that stand wear and tear. A compass may come in handy in tunnels.

### Emergent play

Emergent play happens when players take the game to unexpected and unplanned directions. In tabletop role-playing games and non-pervasive larps, emergent play happens only on the players’ initiative. In pervasive games, on the contrary, environment and non-players drive emergence.

From the game master’s perspective, while emergence is a free and inexhaustible source of game content, it also needs to be designed. The designer can try to either curb or encourage emergence by driving the players to think and act outside the box, or by trying to contain the game as much as possible (in *Rikos kannattaa* the players were forbidden from disrupting non-players and thus had limited interaction with them). Especially social play with non-players seems to display considerable

authenticity and realness, and many players have considered it highly pleasurable and thrilling (e.g. Montola & Jonsson 2006, McGonigal 2003).

## Play attitude strategies

Equally important as the approach to the city is the attitude adopted by players towards themselves – and towards bystanders. Players can see themselves as performers, simulators or just players, and the non-players can be regarded as an audience, an obstacle or as co-creators.

### Play as if it was real

Playing the game as if it was real is both an instruction to players and a serious consideration for game masters. The gist of the strategy is that the larp is not a Hollywood action movie but a down-to-earth event: As the players have (probably) never been engaged in a car chase or a shoot-out, the characters probably would not do so either – not diegetically, and especially not physically.

This strategy works well together with indexical propping. Its main drawbacks are the heavy constraints to game fiction and the limits it places on performative character play. In art, realism is just another aesthetic choice. In a film noir setting, it might make sense to beat up a bartender to get him to snitch about someone you suspect to be a spy, but a game may crave a realism that is often out of the question. If the game wants to incorporate elements from genre fiction, surrealism, absurdism or any other unrealistic style, it must be done with care.

### Performative play

Many pervasive games incorporate performative play, playing *for* an audience, e.g. in a fashion explored by street theatre and invisible theatre (see Boal 2002). In these games, the bystanders are not unaware players but just spectators. Performative play ranges from zombie walks and flash mobs to invisible theatre and games like *Pac-Manhattan*. There are times when pervasive role-playing games also adopt a more performative attitude, by

having the characters perform. In *Momentum* the players conducted elaborate and theatrical rituals as well as a fully fledged demonstration, which bystanders could witness.

Turning the whole game into a performance (or an installation), instead of simply treating a single player as a performer, is also possible. *Amerika* and *System Danmarc 2* are examples of games that also were art pieces staged in public in Oslo and Copenhagen. The trick here is to assign a clear role to the spectators so that the players can relate to them. Experiences of staging a larp in public while just telling the players to ignore spectators have not been encouraging.

### Outsiders as obstacles

Using outsiders as obstacles is one of the most basic strategies in street larp. It fits well into fictional contexts featuring agents, supernatural elements, spies, and so on. The basic idea is that such characters want to stay hidden in urban areas. Cold war agents would not start a shootout in broad daylight even if it was important for national security.

There are two ways of using this strategy. The soft way is used in *Killer* assassination games. If a player commits a murder with outsider presence, she is punished by the referees. The latter might form a detective squad and try to arrest the player.

The hard way is to create a game rule that absolutely forbids being seen by witnesses. If this rule is still broken – accidents do happen – the sanctions can be diegetic or extradiegetic. In *Vampire* larps, revealing one's presence to mortals is punishable by death in game, and it is often also considered bad playing by other players.

In order to enforce this strategy, game masters need a way of obtaining information about transgressions. Most of the time, game masters can trust larpers to provide such information themselves.

## Ensemble construction

Playing in public requires more courage than playing in private. It is also easier to slip out of the game when faced with the numerous distraction of a busy street than in an area specifically reserved for playing. Turning the players into an ensemble where they trust each other and actively support each others' play is a common strategy which encourages more liberated play.

One way to create an ensemble is to let the players meet in advance, e.g. in a series of pre-game workshops. In addition to having the function of introducing the players to each other, to the diegetic world and rules of the game, these meetings include trust exercises, discussions, shared character building exercises, etc. Playing a game together always creates a "secret society" of players (Huizinga 1938).

Ensemble construction techniques may conflict slightly with coordinated social network strategies, since trust and familiarity are central building blocks of a good ensemble. Many social network strategies exploit the fact that players have a very limited perspective on the game: Organizing ensemble construction workshops before the game would reveal such secrets to all participants.

## Conclusion

Pervasive larp is a diverse and powerful form of expression that can be used for various purposes, ranging from entertainment to artistic expression and from education to societal exploration. A large repertoire of design patterns has been used in such games, allowing a wide variety of different games to be created. We have here presented several design philosophies of larps that treat their environment in several ways, ranging from indifferent (City as a Backdrop) and secretive (Hiding in Cityscape), to embracing (Doing Things for Real) and involving (Societal Dialogue). We can even argue that there is a certain philosophical progression detectable in the design philosophies from City as Backdrop and Hiding in

Cityscape towards Societal Dialogue: The larp communities wanting to proceed toward the rarer forms of pervasive larps need to both learn new strategies and to unlearn others.

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