

Tangible Pleasures of Pervasive Role-Playing

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ABSTRACT

The traditional forms of role-playing include tabletop role-playing, larp and online role-playing. In this paper I describe a fourth form, pervasive role-playing, which often follows many conventions of larp, but break out of the magic circle of gameplay in order to interact with surrounding society. The central pleasures of pervasive role-playing are related to playing for real, with the environment and having a tangible, unmediated experience of being a part of a complete and physical world of fiction.

Author Keywords

pervasive role-playing, pervasive game, role-playing game, social expansion, magic circle

TOWARDS A NEW FORM OF ROLE-PLAYING

The history of various forms of role-playing games has been written several times by different authors [1, 13, 15, 17, 25]. The contemporary types used for entertainment, recreation, education and artistic expression evolved since the 70's, when Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson published the first editions of *Dungeons & Dragons*, Roy Trubshaw and Richard Bartle created *Multi-User Dungeon* and the first larps (live action role-playing games) were played out.

The cultural environment allowing the birth of the tabletop, live and online role-playing cultures included many crucial elements. Renaissance fairs, creative anachronism, Tolkien influences, wargamer cultures, assassination games, performance arts et cetera played their parts in the emergence and evolution of role-playing games.

Influences are hard to track, but looking into the history of different forms of role-playing it appears that role-playing is something that is often built "on top" of earlier forms of playful action. Role-playing is not a direct descendant of wargaming or history enactment, but they were central circumstances making the emergence of role-playing games possible.

I have earlier discussed the three typical forms of role-playing: *tabletop role-playing*, *larping* and *online role-playing* [14]. In this paper my aim is to describe a fourth form of role-playing, *pervasive role-playing* that combines the elements of pervasive gaming with those of role-playing, providing an interesting style of play where ludic and

ordinary reality can be seamlessly mixed. Before going into how early assassination games paved the way for pervasive role-playing, we'll have a look at the concepts of role-playing and pervasive gaming.

Defining Role-Playing

I have elsewhere [22] discussed role-playing through the *invisible rules* guiding the social process of play. Interestingly, few role-playing rulebooks actually disclose the rules of role-playing. They focus on algorithmic game mechanics, while discussing the process where they are used only implicitly in sections on "how to role-play" and "what is role-playing".

Analyzing different forms of role-playing, I have concluded that three elements are central to the process of role-playing, whether it is done in verbal, physical or virtual environment – whether it's tabletop, live action or online role-playing.

First, role-playing is based on an interactive process of defining and re-defining an *imaginary game world*. Every player has a subjective understanding of what the imaginary game world is like, and the game consists of creating and communicating those understandings. This defining work can be done through speech, but other methods of representation are also used – larp is based on physical acting and online role-playing games communicate through virtual environments. Background music, cultural references and other allegoric methods are also often used.

Second, all role-playing is based on a *power structure* that governs the process of defining. In tabletop games and larps it's especially critical to establish the limitations of each participant's power: The environment is classically controlled by one player (the game master), while the others take over individual persons within the environment (see [4] for discussion). Often some power is allocated to a ruleset or a digital virtual environment, but even in the virtual worlds the players can utilize make-believe techniques to redefine the game world.

Third ubiquitous feature in role-playing is *anthropomorphic characters* portrayed by players. Classically the player-participants have one character each, and characters delimit their defining power: In a typical game, players have the final say to decide the actions, emotions and thoughts of

their characters, but other arrangements exist as well (see [4]). All characters portrayed by human beings are anthropomorphic – a player can play the part of a stone or a god, but the human interpreting the persona of the character causes inevitable human-likeness.

In short I see role-playing as an *interactive process* of *defining and re-defining* an *imaginary game world*, done by a *group of participants* according to a *recognized structure of power*. One or more participants are *players*, who portray *anthropomorphic characters* that *delimit the players' power* to define.

This definition applies to the three major branches of contemporary recreational role-playing. The following features can be used to distinguish them [cf. 14]:

Tabletop role-playing is mainly based on verbal discourse. Players portray imaginary events of a fictitious world through symbolic interaction: The major part of the interaction is verbal and symbolic, but music and images are used to convey iconic meanings as well.

Larp is based on physical enactment. The symbolic repertoire of tabletop is complemented by strong iconic content as players act out the actions of their characters. A girl dressed in tablecloth can be an icon of an elderly female Roman senator.

Virtual role-playing is comparable to larp in an online environment, where algorithmic rules are implemented in the game code. A digital orc is an index of a program element trying to bash your avatar, but for the player it serves as an icon or a symbol of an orc.

Not all players participating in MMORPGs and tabletop role-playing games *role-play* in the meaning indicated above. Pretence play is not necessary for enjoyment, as the games are entertaining also when played only as regular games; indeed, as shown above, the role-playing forms have evolved from earlier forms of entertainment.

Pervading the Boundaries of Game

In the discussion on pervasive gaming, a plethora of terms have been used to point to a wide variety of concepts. As Nieuwdorp [26] points out, two paradigms exist, one discussing *games based on pervasive computing applications* and the other looking at *games with pervasive gameplay*. The former category includes any games utilizing pervasive computing, while in the latter category the game has to pervade everyday life in some way.

Representing the latter paradigm, I have defined pervasive games as games that have *one or more salient features that expand the contractual magic circle of play socially, spatially or temporally* [21]. This means that the metaphorical magic circle¹ of a pervasive game is blurred

[21, 27]. It can be *spatially expanded*, as the game is played in the spaces of ordinary life; streets, industrial areas, schools or random zones of internet. It can be *temporally expanded*, by mixing game and everyday life, overlapping and interlacing with work, school and leisure. And by consequence of spatial and temporal expansion, the magic circle of a pervasive game can also become *socially expanded*, through involving outsiders during the game in various capacities, such as making them players, play elements, spectators et cetera.

The best-known pervasive games include titles such as *Botfighters*, *Can You See Me Now*, *I Love Bees*, *Killer: The Game of Assassination*, *Majestic* and *The A.I. Web Game*. Alternate reality gaming [9, 16, 29] is the most widely established subgenre of pervasive gaming, but others are evolving as well.

The fact that pervasive games break out of the ritualistic space of game, and pervade the boundary of fiction to the domain of everyday life, has certain implications. First, it means that the first pervasive games were played far before concepts such as “pervasive computing” were coined.

Second, as pervasive games break the boundary of artificialness and non-ordinariness, they lose some of their gameness and need to be understood in a broader cultural context of pervasive media culture. Related phenomena include reality TV, candid camera, invisible theater, scambaiting, 24/7 fetish relationships, fabricated identity play in internet, masquerading in MMORPGs et cetera.

The basic enjoyment of pervasivity is twofold: It brings the fun of game into everyday life, and the thrilling non-safety of ordinary world to gaming. When a player of *Botfighters* goes shopping, the bot moves as well – and if a powerful enemy attacks, she has to face the dangers of the physical world while running from it.

According to many designers and case studies [18, 23, 28, 29], one of the strongest appeals of pervasive gaming is the uncertainty of gameness. As everything might be interpreted as ludic, the ordinary environment is given new meanings. In the eye of a conspiracy theorist, everything is related to the conspiracy – and the player of this kind of pervasive game knows that there is a benevolent conspiracy creating an experience for her.

Pervasive gaming also offers other pleasurable experiences. Spatial expansion allows a look to the backstage of urban environment in the fashion of urban exploring, as well as pleasures of similar to urban sports such as skateboarding and parkour. Temporally the game can coordinate players to interesting places in interesting times; when combined with weather information the game can take the players to see

¹ See Huizinga [10] for discussion on how games are situated in ritually and contractually delimited spaces and

times and played voluntarily. Salen & Zimmerman [27] expand on Huizinga, also bringing in the notion of games that blur this boundary.

sunsets and moonlit areas. Socially the games allow performance, pretence play and social experimentation.

Pervasive Role-Playing

Pervasive role-playing combines the boundary-blurring features of pervasive games with the pretence play, performance and make-believe of role-playing. Typically pervasive role-playing games are larps staged in urban environments.

The central influences on pervasive role-playing come from the pluralistic genre of assassin games that were played on innumerable university campuses since the 60's. These games are played in ordinary environments as a part of ordinary life in a highly pervasive manner; every player is an assassin with a specific target whom they have to kill during the game. These games can take weeks, as every successful murderer typically takes over the victim's mission, until only one assassin is left. The best-known way of playing assassin is the one codified in *Killer: The Game of Assassination* (Steve Jackson Games, 1981) [25, 27, 31].

Tan [31] describes the history of MIT Assassins' Guild, where the assassination games started to evolve into "theater style format" in early 80's. While the competitiveness was kept intact, the game characters were given "more complex conspiratorial, political, technological and fantasy motifs". In a fashion similar to the ones described above, a branch of players picked up the social, performative make-believe play and started *role-playing* their deadly interactions.

Probably inspired by the well-known assassin games, larpers have also explored the boundary of role-playing and environment, but without the explicit competitiveness of assassin games. First street larps are hard to locate, but the popularity of *Vampire: The Masquerade* (Mark Rein-Hagen, White Wolf, 1991) and other *World of Darkness* tabletop role-playing games was a central contributing factor. In *WoD* games the players take roles of supernatural creatures hiding among unsuspecting ordinary people.

As Salen and Zimmerman [27] note, *Vampire* offers a perfect fiction for pervasive role-play: The easiest form of social and spatial expansion is to act in the middle of outsiders, trying to *avoid* any attention. Just like *Killer* referees often punish players conducting murders with eyewitnesses present (with penalties such as losing points), the *WoD* games do the same in a diegetic fashion: The vampire society is sworn to secrecy, and anyone revealing it's existence to mortals is executed.

The invisible rules of role-playing presented above cope well with the expanded magic circle of pervasive gaming.

The game world is still imaginary: The players and the outsiders act in our physical world, but the players still construct an imaginary world that is superimposed on ours. Just like in larp, the physical world just serves as an endless

source of information that is interpreted into the imaginary world.

The power structure is still present for the players. Outsiders do not obey any power constraints, but serve as an uncontrollable variable similar to dice of tabletop role-playing. Of course, outsiders are not players, as they do not construct imaginary personas for purposes of the game.

Looking for New Aesthetics

In the Integrated Project on Pervasive Gaming² new aesthetics for pervasive role-playing has been sought in two experimental games; *Prosopopeia Bardo 1: Där vi föll*³ and *Prosopopeia Bardo 2: Momentum*⁴. These two larps sought to challenge the *Killer* paradigm of urban larping: While assassins and vampires avoid public attention, the *Prosopopeia* series sought to interact with outsiders.⁵

These games were made in as seamless fashion as possible, making the magic circle of gameplay as invisible as possible. The games were designed in a fashion where players, outsiders and even the game masters were left unable to determine the exact boundary of game and ordinary life. David Fincher presented the same ideas powerfully in his movie *The Game* (1997).

Seamlessness was complemented with philosophy of *indexical representation* [14, 23]. In tabletop role-playing games the world is represented through symbols of verbal discourse, and in a typical larp a boffer sword can represent a knight's weapon. But in indexical representation my fake sword represents a fake sword, or even *my* fake sword.

In typical urban larp the *willing suspension of disbelief*⁶ is central; the players seek to interpret all the game-related signs into their diegeses⁷, and to ignore all signs not clearly fitting into their expectations of the game world. *Vampire* fiction allows the players to suspend their disbelief and pretend vampires in a perfect and photo-realistic environment, since they don't need to confront the outsiders who would deny the claim. The friction of ordinary and imaginary still remains and suspension of disbelief is

² www.pervasive-gaming.se

³ Martin Ericsson, Adriana Skarped, Staffan Jonsson & others, Stockholm, 2005. See [23] for full description. Eng. "Prosopopeia Bardo 1: Where we fell".

⁴ Staffan Jonsson, Emil Boss, Martin Ericsson, Daniel Sundström, Henrik Esbjörnsson & others, Stockholm, 2006. See [11] and www.prosopopeia.se for full description.

⁵ For discussion on ethics, see [24].

⁶ The idea of willing suspension of belief is attributed to Coleridge [6]; it means that the audience accepts unbelievable or ridiculous fiction in order to enjoy it.

⁷ Diegesis denotes the subjective fiction constructed by a player through interpreting game-related signs [13].

needed by the ancient vampire refusing to hypnotize the doorman preventing her entry to a classy nightclub.

In *Prosopopeia* series, the aim was to toy with suspension of disbelief, by toying with players' beliefs. As the players are left unsure of what's ludic or ordinary, they don't need to believe; they just need to discern what is relevant for the game and leave the rest.

To illustrate the difference, the rules of a fairly typical urban larp might say something like the following excerpt from *Rikos kannattaa*⁸ rules (my translation):

When playing in an area with lots of people not participating the game or knowing about it's existence, players must play pretty carefully and with respect towards their environment. Even though every heavy immersionist opposes external restrictions, we must accept them because of the play area. If you can't agree with this, you should stay off the streets.

In *Prosopopeia* games the only real rule was that the players should treat *everything* as if it was a part of the game and the diegetic fiction. In fact, *Momentum* lasted for five weeks, and during that period, the players were expected to stay within the diegetic framework 24/7.

In order to allow such playing style, the *Prosopopeia* designers had to create a fiction, which would be compatible with ordinary life to maintain playing. In the game, every player was willingly possessed by a spirit of a dead person, allowing players to role-play both the possessing spirit and the possessed person (latter being essentially a diegetic duplicate of the player). Thus, players could go about their ordinary lives, but when needed, the possessing spirit could take over. Sometimes the spirits were in charge for longer periods, but occasionally the possession could last for just one phone call.

Killer's use of assassins is a similar design solution, where players can play undercover agents until a need to perform game actions arises. *Vampire* is a much worse fiction for such sustained gaming, as player eating food or walking in broad daylight clearly violates the character, and there is no possibility of maintaining the pretence that the activity at least could be ludic.

PLEASURES OF PERVERSIVE ROLE-PLAYING

In order to explain *why* pervasive gaming is a very interesting style of role-playing, I'll now take a look at some central aesthetics and gratifications of pervasive role-playing. All the pleasures listed in this section are based on feelings of tangibility, concreteness and realness of pervasivity. As Martin Ericsson underlined in the design principles of *Där vi föll*, players want to *do things for real*, and that is the major strength of pervasive role-playing.

The following analysis focuses somewhat on the pleasurable tangibility of social environment, because social interaction is somewhat particular to role-playing (as opposed to other forms of pervasive gaming).

Social Playground

Acting like a vampire or a madman in an urban environment serves as an excuse for social experimentation and breaking of conventions. While stressful, social play with outsiders can reward the player with feelings of fun and insight about the social conventions. Quoting McGonigal [19]:

If ordinary people are given *specific instructions* requiring them to take a more adventurous attitude toward public places, they will surprise themselves with their own daring and ingenuity. Moreover, players will discover how surprisingly receptive strangers are to spontaneous interaction, and how responsive non-players are to ludic intervention. In other words, players will learn that there is far greater opportunity for gaming in their everyday environments than they previously suspected.

In other words, socially expanded role-playing provides *empowerment* to act against social constraints. While an ordinary person is bound to follow cultural conventions, a directly instructed player or carefully designed role-playing character can differ from them. After the game the player is left with *insight* on the strength of such conventions and how they operate.

An example of social experimentation took place in *Momentum*, where the game masters donated a painting to an art gallery in Stockholm, saying: "Keep this painting; you're free to sell it if you want and keep the money yourself. Or, if someone's really interested in it, you can just give it away".

The next day half a dozen oddly costumed players entered the gallery, showing interest towards the painting. Their task was to obtain it, but they had no idea whether the gallerists knew about the game or not. As the only solution, the players ended up trying to persuade and fast-talk the gallerists to give the painting out for free, a task, which was done with an increased difficulty level due to their suspicious behaviour, incredible names and weird clothing.

Both the players *and* the gallery personnel found the encounter pleasurable and interesting⁹, although it must have been a stressful encounter as well. According to the gallery workers, the fact that they didn't know the gameness of the strange occurrences was the thing making them fun.

⁸ Konsta Nikkanen & al, Helsinki, 2006. Eng. "Crime Pays".

⁹ According to interviews (conducted by Jaakko Stenros) and player feedback.

Finnish artist and role-player Juhana Pettersson reminisces¹⁰ his experiences of playing a character with no manners in an early pervasive larp *Isle of Saints*¹¹:

I behaved really badly in posh restaurants. One guy in our group talked our way into a packed restaurant, in which I was combing my hair with a fork, acted as an utter dork towards waitresses and other patrons. I ate with my bare hands and messed up the whole table.

For me, doing that wasn't very difficult or immoral. Basically what it takes is a lot of pretended regression and the feeling of freedom caused by the fact that you're not present as yourself.

I found my limits when I went into toilet, and wondered whether I should pee all over the place, like my character would have done. As I was in there alone, I didn't feel any particular reason to perform, and behaved myself for the moment.

Role-playing has been analyzed with frame analysis [5, 8] and other ways of social layering [15]. According to Fine [8], three frames are particularly relevant to analyzing a tabletop role-playing situation: The *diegetic frame*, where elves, agents and other game world things exist, the *game frame* where players negotiate their interactions through rule systems, and the external *social frame* where people meet up to play a role-playing game.¹² In the examples discussed above, the players interacted with outsiders through *fabrication* [5, 23]: The players acted in the diegetic frame, but they led outsiders to believe that they were acting in the social frame. The loss of this empowering mechanism shows in Pettersson's remark, where he switched to the social frame as well, as there was no-one else to sustain the diegetic frame. As a player of *Där vi föll* wrote it:

We were always moving as a group, which created a zone for playing.

Social playground approach is especially valuable tool for a designer wishing to use game as a political or artistic tool: For example, Boal's [3] group did *invisible theatre*¹³ with the theme of sexual harassment by having actors harass each other in public, trying to find out if the outsiders would intervene. When they did, other actors joined in, provoking political discussions.

¹⁰ Personal correspondence, January 2007.

¹¹ Jukka Koskelin, Mika Lopenen and Mikko Rautalahti, Helsinki, 2000.

¹² The italicized names of the frames are author's.

¹³ Invisible theatre is drama staged in public space, without denoting it as a performance. In a sense it is "socially expanded theatre".

Emergent Social Play

No-one can anticipate what will transpire during a pervasive larp. The experiences from *Prosopopeia* series indicate that seamless design leads to unexpected results.

An example from *Där vi föll* illustrates the point. In the story of the game the players had to delve into (real world) history of certain deceased people. In some point, the players decided to explore a graveyard, seeing whether a certain person was buried there and trying to record local ghost voices with their supernatural tape recorder. Quoting written post-game player feedback:

A guy came by when we were using the tape machine [...] 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.

Several participants mentioned the aforementioned event as one of the best scenes in the game; the players felt it was extremely authentic, realistic and intriguing situation. Many players also believed that the person was a game master or a part of the game, while in fact the incidence was completely accidental, random and emergent.

This emergent authenticity is a central pleasure, as it gives a heightened sense of understanding that the urban environment around is real, and the game is real as well.

From the game master perspective, emergence is a free and inexhaustible source of game content, but it also needs to be designed for.

Exploration and Discovery

When players learn to 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 looking beyond boundaries to find how far they can push and still find recognizable parts of the game. The fun of exploration lies in the feeling that the entire world is part of the play and wherever the player goes, more content turns up. In addition to *Prosopopeia* series, e.g. *Uncle Roy All Around You* [2] has experimented with exploration.

Discussing larps played at small spaces but aiming to create an illusion of being parts of entire diegetic worlds, Koljonen [12] points out that the totality of the surrounding world needs to be demonstrated in order to create a good illusion. Towards that end, the organizers of many non-pervasive larps have provided fake telephone connections out from the sealed spaces, brought in new players from the surrounding diegetic world and used other techniques to disguise the practical borders of the game. Koljonen writes:

A plausible universe can 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.

Talvitie [30] follows the same line of thinking in his guide for urban larpwrights, saying that a proficient organizer does not reveal all participants of an urban larp or all the planned playing areas before the game. The thrill of the game lies in the fact that the player feels like a small part of a huge, living environment.

Another form of pleasurable exploration is urban exploration; going into weird and run-down urban areas, both to see interesting sights and to discover set up game content. Again the players are provided with the comforting feeling of good game master planning, and left with intriguing uncertainty on *what more* there is to discover.

Discovery can also take place in the internet. Game-related fake websites can be created easily [9, 29], but two other techniques exist as well. Either the game can be planned around pre-existing (or historical) web content, in order to allow players to research it during the game for real. The third, somewhat questionable method is fabrication; hiding game content within media content unrelated to the game. The two latter methods are, if possible, even more intriguing than the first one, as it ties the game strongly into a larger context.

Momentum used these techniques by including a lot of real history and real world occultism into the game “as is”, in order to allow players to actually research things during the game. This also led to emergence, as the players dug unrelated material from the net and incorporated it into the game, passing it to other players as well.

Coordinated Networks All Around You

In a pervasive role-playing game the players greatly enjoy the feeling of being a part of a larger game. When the player believes that she sees only a small part of the whole, it’s easy to imagine a whole society being a part of the game.

Talvitie [30] discusses methods of constructing social networks in such games. The background philosophy of his approach is based mainly on information flow: If some characters throw a party while others play vampires in the party, the asymmetric information makes dangers and opportunities of vampirism very tangible. Killing a character with actual (role-played) history and existing friends is a deeper experience than preying on a non-player character created for the purpose.

In his design instructions, Talvitie identifies example structures of how to create interaction of player groups within the game in order to create interesting inter-group dynamics through controlling the flow of information and social dynamics. The essential part is designing the ways how players *perceive* the game and environment around them.

In *Prosopopeia* games the players were basically in one a big group, and the illusion of environment was created though game master characters, informed outsiders and

characters played through emails and chats. However, *Momentum* split up the group, by assigning four simultaneous tasks to the 30 players. Each task had to be accomplished successfully and in a temporal sequence in order for the whole group to achieve their goal. As a player reported in a feedback form:

I was really amazed that all the scenario two:s were handled so simultaneously. It was really cool to know that we were all working together at different places at the same time. I really enjoyed that.

The beauty of this example is in the way actual and illusionary was combined. Splitting the players up gave them a tangible impression that the game took place in many places simultaneously, and success of their groups really made a difference. But the players also interacted with many game master characters in the internet, which were illusionary, but the illusion was reinforced through the actual. It was easy to hide the fact that the various non-player characters using different internet messaging systems were played by one person on one computer.

Tangibility of Chained Tasks

If the game includes tasks or puzzles with a possibility of failure, it’s important to communicate the realness of the puzzle and failure in a tangible fashion. The players wanting a real experience have to be forced to solve their problems for real. *Där vi föll* tried out a linear, non-branching task structure with bad results: The players failing to complete tasks can’t proceed in the game at all. Chained tasks still have the valuable feature of tangibility; success is measurable, and accomplishments feel very real.

An example from *Momentum* illustrates an accidentally discovered mechanism providing tangibility to tasks without absolutely stopping the game. The players were provided with mathematical data that could be used to triangulate coordinates of a hidden stash of game props and documents necessary for the success. The players miscalculated the coordinates, ending up in a wrong neighbourhood in a rainy October night. A player wrote:

I didn't participate so much in the decryption and [locating] the area. We went out on Friday night trying to find something we didn't know what it was. And we found nothing but water after ~2h of searching.

Even though the game master characters later on could help the players to solve the problem, there was a twofold price to the failure. The player group lost time due to their error, and the long night wandering in a wrong area made the miscalculation a strong experience of failure.

In chained and coordinated collaborative tasks the whole becomes larger than the sum of its parts. A boring math exercise of decryption and triangulation is given relevance and context, as failure leads to searching for an envelope in a wrong area. Similarly, the task of searching for an envelope is given relevance as the triangulation allows them

to feel that they found the important item in a Stockholm-sized haystack instead of the neighbourhood-sized one.

The coordinated collaboration above adds to the gestalt as four player groups are working simultaneously for a common goal, and the failure in triangulation might mean a failure in the overall goal – which is given added significance through the narrative content of the role-playing game.

SOCIAL PLAY WITH SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

In the discussion on pervasive games it was pointed out that pervasive games expand the traditional domain of games spatially, temporally and socially.

Being a form of gaming based centrally on social discourse, pervasive role-playing is especially suitable for socially expanded gameplay. The elements of emergence, seamlessness and social playground can be utilized in other pervasive games and media as well, but the possibility of rich, inconspicuous interaction is very strong with role-playing. Role-playing and social expansion are both about interacting with other people, creating two-way interactions which offers a much wider design space than the typical forms of social expansion (such as spectatorship and refereeing).

Game design techniques based on spatial expansion are necessary for truly fruitful social expansion, but they also create pleasant and rewarding experiences. Compared to social expansion, however, the similar techniques of spatial expansion can also be used in non-role-played pervasive activities – indeed, as mentioned above, pervasive role-playing borrows a lot from spatially pervasive activities such as urban exploration, parkour and invisible theatre.

Integrating temporal expansion into pervasive role-playing places considerable requirements on the game fiction, but can be done in a rewarding manner (like *Killer* and *Momentum*) demonstrate.

In the discussion about role-playing I noted that the most fundamental part of the social role-playing process is the constant defining and re-defining of the imaginary, diegetic game world. As the gratifications of pervasive role-playing demonstrate, the central value of pervasivity in this process of defining is the content that appears emergent, surprising and tangible to the players.

A clever game designer can play with fabrication and emergence, in order to provide the players lots of material that is easy to interpret into diegeses without exercising significant suspension of disbelief. In creation of the illusion the players need to be given the confidence that their environment provides suitable input for their game experience, even in surprising places. Only after the players are surprised by finding game content from behind an apparently non-game-related door, they learn to interpret every door as a part of the game world.

The second central part of role-playing is establishing a power structure to guide the creation of these imaginary worlds. In pervasive role-playing a lot of this power is given out; if everything happening in everyday environment is interpreted into the fiction, the context wields significant power in the game.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have discussed the three major forms of role-playing games that emerged since the early 70's. The evolving fourth form, pervasive role-playing, combines many features of the previous styles with pervasive gaming, forming novel ways of playing with a new and appealing aesthetic. Whether these styles should be classified as larps or as an entirely new form of role-playing is debatable, but the interesting part is the way new aesthetics can be utilized in conjunction with role-playing.

The selling point of pervasive role-playing is the thrill of non-safe ordinariness combined with game invading the sphere of ordinary. It's not all about the "this is not a game" illusion [9, 18, 29] allowing the players to pretend that the game is real. The attraction is in the pleasure of *doing real things for real*.

An illustrative example of tangible action took place in a small Danish cutting-edge larp *Tre grader af uskyld*¹⁴, where the players had to get rid of crime evidence by actually trashing a car (with hammers) as a part of their Tarantino-style gameplay. According to the players and organizers, breaking something for real in a pulp-criminal style is a really *fun* thing to do.¹⁵ It's not only about pretending to believe a world of fiction, but also about interacting with ordinary world in a novel way.

The concluding lesson of this paper is that doing things for real is fun. It appears that the generations of mediated entertainment can appreciate unmediated experiences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'm in debt to creators of *Prosopopeia* games, especially Emil Boss, Martin Ericsson, Henrik Esbjörnsson, Staffan Jonsson, Adriana Skarped and Daniel Sundström. Also, the comments from Jaakko Stenros, Annika Waern, J. Tuomas Harviainen and Satu Heliö have been very useful. This paper was written in the Integrated Project on Pervasive Gaming.

¹⁴ Troels Barkholt-Spangsbo, Dennis Asanovski & Tim Dencker, Copenhagen, 2006. Eng. "Three Grades of Innocence".

¹⁵ Presentation by Troels Barkholt-Spangsbo and Dennis Asanovski at Knudepunkt 2007 (Helsingør, February 2007).

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