

Experiences of Hybrid Space

The Multiplicity of Frames in You Are Near#5

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Due to the locative turn in mobile media, our notion of public space becomes more hybrid. One example of a locative application is the Location Based Mobile Game 'You Are Near#5'. The pervasive or hybrid quality of You Are Near#5 means that a multiplicity of frames exists during its game-sessions. The game allows players to have a mediated, defamiliarized experience of a public space, and their awareness of the game being played allows them to make sense of certain social interactions in public spaces in a different way. In this paper, Goffman's frame analysis is explored and connected to theoretical developments in the field of game studies. An auto-ethnographical analysis is used to gain understanding on experiences of frames during game-sessions of You Are Near#5. This method is particularly adequate for understanding experiences of frames. The dual role of participant and observer is a methodological advantage as it is used to gain a unique vantage point for accessing certain kinds of data. Personal experiences of frames have thus been used to elaborate on theoretical understanding of and discourse on frames and LBMG's. The multiplicity of frames was often recognized and experienced. By negotiating multiple frames in an interaction, tensions could be diminished or even avoided between conflicting frames. Experiences of frames seem dependent on the management of frame tensions and on a degree of immersion felt in a certain frame. Hybrid space is finally understood as a very fragile and temporary experience which exists in the mind of a person after being immersed in the upkeyed frame.

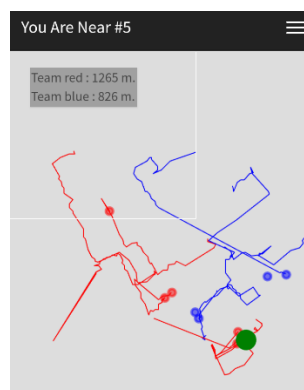
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Introduction and Research Question

"I walked in a small pace towards the big dot [on my mobile phone's screen]. I often looked around to see if anyone was walking nearby. When I came near another dot [an opponent], I first hid myself behind a tree so that no one could see me. When I later came in the same street as my target, I held the camera in my hand and went sneaking through the street very slowly. When I finally managed to take a picture of my opponent I quickly walked away. And then the game was over."

This is how a player of *You Are Near#5*¹ summarized his game-session to me after having played it for the first time. In this game two competitive teams of players try to get as close as possible to a digitally simulated object which is visible on the players' mobile screens as a big dot. Smaller dots on the screen represent two teams of players who leave a digital trace on the map as they move in the physical space. As players are not positioned in the center of the map, they first have to figure out which dot on the screen belongs to them by comparing their walking patterns to the digital traces they leave. In order to win, a team has to get as close as fifty meters to the digitally simulated object, summing up each player's distance towards the object. Meanwhile players have to be on the lookout for members of the opposite team, because they are disqualified when someone of the opposite team takes a picture of them with a mobile phone and posts it in the shared WhatsApp group. When two players of the same team are disqualified, the opposing team wins.



Screenshot of mobile interface

¹ Naomi Bueno de Mesquita, *You Are Near#5* (2015).

You Are Near#5 is interesting because it has the ordinary world as its playground. In the beginning of the game all players are alone and separated. Their digital connection allows them to understand where other players and the big dot should be located, and forms the basis on which to move and act in the physical space. The digital networked space of the mobile interface thus becomes an intrinsic part of the way players perceive and move through their space of play. This blurring of the physical and the digital while moving through space means that players are in a 'hybrid space'. This concept is introduced by Adriana de Souza e Silva, a scholar in digital media and mobile communication, and refers to a mobile space where the physical and the digital networked space intertwine – where the relation between these two spaces becomes symbiotic. As de Souza e Silva argues, it is a social environment created by the mobility of users connected via mobile technology devices.²

A range of mobile applications using location awareness has emerged that people use to play games, socialize, and navigate in the ordinary world. These location-aware applications only recently emerged after artists and game-designers started experimenting with mobile and computer technology. While mobile phones have often been condemned for disconnecting its users from their surrounding space - making public space more privatized and virtualized - these applications rather strengthen people's connections to their surrounding physical space.³ However, by using such location-aware applications, a new or hybrid type of spatiality emerges that has consequences for the way public space is experienced. This seems especially true for the genre of Location Based Mobile Games (LBMG's) - mobile games played in our everyday surroundings that use location-awareness and Internet connection - as players are acting according to game objectives and rules in addition to both formal and informal rules of ordinary life. Because of this 'locative turn' in mobile media, our notion of public space becomes more hybrid.

A different line of scholarship deals with the notion of pervasive games. Scholars in the field of game studies argue that pervasive games have a special relation to the ordinary world since they pervade, bend and blur the traditional boundaries of play.⁴ As different kinds of pervasive games and pervasive play have always been around, LBMG's such as You Are Near#5 are to be understood as a *new genre* of a much older type of games. You Are

² Adriana de Souza e Silva, "From Cyber to Hybrid: Mobile Technologies as Interfaces of Hybrid Spaces," *Space and Culture* 9.3 (2006), 263.

³ Adriana de Souza e Silva, "Location-aware Mobile Technologies: Historical, Social and Spatial Approaches," *Mobile Media and Communication* 1.1 (2013), 117.

⁴ Markus Montola, "Games and Pervasive Games", in *Pervasive games: Theory and design*, ed. Jaako Stenros et al. (Taylor and Francis, 2009), 12.

Near#5 can be understood as a pervasive game because the boundaries of play are blurred on a spatial and social level. Spatial expansion means the ordinary world – including all kinds of ordinary objects - becomes part of the game. As the domain of play pervades ordinary life on a spatial level, social expansion is bound to happen when non-participants are in the same environment as pervasive gamers. They may involuntarily become part of the game, often without realizing it themselves, therefore being incapable to grasp and appreciate interactions that are meaningful for the game being played in their presence.

Although these lines of scholarship have a different focus, they both show how LBMG's have the potential for creating special experiences by blurring these distinctions of the playground and the ordinary world, the online and the offline, the physical and the digital, and the real and the fictive in a special way. Due to this blurring, the new concepts pervasive and hybrid are introduced to approach the somewhat complex nature of these games. The pervasive or hybrid quality of LBMG's allows players to have a mediated experience of a public space, and their awareness of the game being played allows them to make sense of certain social interactions in public spaces in a different way compared to non-participants. LBMG's are especially interesting in this respect because they make clever use of mobile technology. As mobile phones have become part of our everyday life, the use of these ubiquitous devices for playing games in public spaces means players are not easily recognized as players of a game. They're often not dressed in a particular way, and their main instruments of play – their mobile phones – have become a very natural sight in public space as these have more or less become 'glued' to people nowadays. LBMG's make use of these devices so that players do not stand out in public space. On first glance they may look like just any normal person roaming the streets while looking at a mobile screen, thereby remaining anonymous in public space. Their behaviors will at first glance probably be seen in a mundane 'frame' by non-participants. LBMG's thus facilitate interesting frame experiences: they potentially break the frame of mundane everyday life for players and even non-players, they facilitate situations of framing ambiguity and they potentially create frame tensions where players and non-players make sense of a social interaction in a radically different way. This, in my view, is one of the innovative qualities that distinguishes the genre of LBMG's from many older pervasive games.

Frames are defined by micro-sociologist Erving Goffman as schemas of interpretation that people use to locate, perceive, identify and label any arbitrary slice or cut from the stream of ongoing activity.⁵ Frames are heavily dependent on context, they may differ for

⁵ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Massachusetts: Harvard University press, 1974), 21.

various (sub)cultures and often depend on internalized social rules that exist in specific places. Street sociability is an important part of a social framework people have in public spaces, which refers to a particular form of sociability based on trust that allows us to remain anonymous in city spaces. The knowledge that others in the environment behave in a similar way is for many people a comfortable feeling.⁶ Because of this natural tendency that people have in a public spaces, certain behaviors will stand out more than others when they do not fit well with our general understanding of how we should behave in a public space. It is highly unlikely that some people share exactly the same social frame in a shared interaction, but in general people may have a very similar frame for understanding their surroundings. However, *You Are Near#5* complicates this. Multiple frames exist when some people have a radically different understanding of what's going on. A multiplicity of frames exists during *You Are Near#5* because the ordinary world, non-participants and street rules becomes an intrinsic part of the game – or thought in the opposite direction – a digital map, players and game rules become part of a public space. The multiplicity and simultaneity of frames that emerge may cause tensions when players of *You Are Near#5* find it difficult to negotiate the ludic frames as well as the frames of ordinary life.

Besides the fact that *You Are Near#5* has the ordinary world as its playground, there is a more important characteristic that makes it an interesting case. It is a competitive multiplayer game, which means moments of interaction and conflict are likely to occur. These situations may require players to act against the rules of street sociability – as the upper example of *You Are Near#5* illustrates. As a result, tensions could emerge between players' and non-participants' held frameworks, and maybe even within a player's mind when the performed actions that are required in the game are of such a nature that they are very unlike his or her personality.

These considerations have led me to ask the following research question: How is the multiplicity of frames experienced during *You Are Near#5*? Two sub-questions will be addressed. In what situations are certain frames dominant – and in what situations do changes occur? How are tensions experienced that arise because of conflicting frames?

In the following pages, Goffman's frame analysis will be explored and connected to theoretical developments in the field of game studies. An auto-ethnographical analysis will be motivated as an adequate research method for answering these questions. The results from fieldwork are explained and some conclusions are made.

⁶ Adriana de Souza e Silva & Jordan Frith, "Location-based mobile games: Interfaces to urban spaces," in *Playful Identities: The Ludification of Digital Media Cultures* ed. Valerie Frissen et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 175.

Theoretical Framework

Philosophers and sociologists have long recognized the existence of finite worlds of meaning that have the potential for allowing human beings to become encapsulated in them.⁷ These scholars assume a relationship between our focus of attention and our experience of a world as real, while in some situations different worlds compete for our attention.⁸ Our experience of the world can be understood as being organized through multiple frames of meaning. Goffman's *frame analysis* clarifies the skill with which people handle these multiple, interdependent realities. Without the use of multiple frames of meaning our social lives would be messy and incomprehensible as there would be no organization of our experience.

As stated above, multiple social frameworks emerge and possibly clash when some people have a radically different understanding of what's going on. Goffman's concept of the 'key' is relevant here: "a set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else."⁹ A radically different perspective or 'secondary framework' may sometimes emerge, which means the former 'primary framework' no longer applies to the same situation. Following Goffman's terminology I shall address this phenomenon of changing frame by the word 'upkeying'. The opposite phenomenon, a return to the 'primary framework', shall be addressed by the word 'downkeying'. Upkeying happens when we start playing a game. Players of a game have a shared awareness that their actions have a certain meaning outside of the realm of ordinary life. When people start playing a game, a new layer of meaning emerges in addition to some already existing primary framework. Goffman argues that players' engagement (in the upkeyed social framework of their game) acts as a boundary around them, sealing them off from many potential worlds of meaning (or frames).¹⁰ It is no surprise then that for Goffman 'fun' is the most serious thing to consider concerning gaming encounters – a way of thinking reminiscent to historian Johan Huizinga's rejection of the dichotomy between play and seriousness in his classical book *Homo Ludens*.^{11 12}

⁷ Gary Allen Fine. *Shared Fantasy: Role Playing Games As Social Worlds*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 181.

⁸ Ruth Rettie, "Using Goffman's Frameworks to Explain Presence and Reality," *Presence* (2004), 117.

⁹ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 43-44.

¹⁰ Erving Goffman, *Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction*. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1961), 34.

¹¹ Erving Goffman, *Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction*. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1961), 72.

¹² Huizinga Homo, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1949), 5, 6.

Misinterpretations occur when an individual or a group of people do not share the same 'key' as the other individuals in an interaction, and also frame ambiguity occurs occasionally when someone finds it unclear which frame to apply. Tensions occur when a certain behavior is only supported by one frame but not by another, while both conflicting frames could be used in a social interaction. The kind of tension I use here is in line with Goffman's restricted understanding of tension in his book *Encounters* as "a sensed discrepancy between the world that spontaneously becomes real to the individual [the ludic frame in *You Are Near#5*], or the one in which he is obliged to dwell [the primary frame of ordinary life]".¹³ During a game-session of *You Are Near#5* a frame difference to some degree is a constant given as the upkeyed social framework is only shared among players, while both players and non-participants have a shared presence in a public space.

Sociologist Gary Allen Fine elaborated on Goffman's ideas by arguing that the level of engrossment possible within a frame and the external consequences of breaking frame are central to their stability.¹⁴ His ethnographical study of roleplaying culture showed the rather oscillating character of such engrossment, often characterized by a flickering involvement followed by a return to the mundane.

A certain level of engrossment or immersion within the frame is necessary for a frame to subsist. Immersion is by scholars understood as an experience of being surrounded by another reality which takes over our whole perceptual apparatus,¹⁵ as a transition from the immediate physical reality to another realm.¹⁶ I would suggest that this transition to another realm can also happen within the same environment which is seen in a radically different way.

The blurring qualities of LBMG's such as *You Are Near#5* complicate the processes of framing. The field of game-studies has already shed some light on the special nature of these games. Stenros, Waern and Montola argue that complete indulgence would be nearly impossible in pervasive games, as players constantly shift in and out of the play experience and thus have a dual awareness.¹⁷ Eva Nieuwdorp argues that the thin line between the evident 'real' world and the institutionalized fantasy of the game becomes the crux to which

¹³ Erving Goffman, *Encounters*, 40.

¹⁴ Gary Allen Fine. *Shared Fantasy: Role Playing Games As Social Worlds*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 203.

¹⁵ Janet Murray. *Hamlet on the Holodeck*. (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 99.

¹⁶ Erkki Huhtamo, *Encapsulated Bodies in Motion: Simulators and the Quest for Total Immersion*. In *Critical Issues in Electronical Media* ed. Simon Penny (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 159.

¹⁷ Jaako Stenros, Annika Waern & Markus Montola, "Studying the Elusive Experience in Pervasive Games," *Simulation and Gaming* 43.3 (2012), 344.

the pervasive game owes its existence.¹⁸ According to her, the ambivalent wavering between fantasy and reality is at the very core of the player experience of a pervasive game. She emphasizes that "(...) the main facilitating factor in creating and entering the pervasive game world lies not solely within the hard- and software, but also in the player him/herself."¹⁹ To participate in a pervasive game, an 'active creation of meaning' and also a 'necessary reinterpretation of conventions of meaning' is required.²⁰ So even though pervasive games supposedly blur the real with the fictive, or the physical and the digital, this phenomenon may be very dependent on a certain mindset of the player; a willingness to play along.

Emphasis on the player's mindset in pervasive games is necessary because the familiar surroundings of everyday life need to be perceived and understood in an upkeyed way in order for the pervasive game world to come alive. This mode of perception can be connected to literary theorist Shklovsky's notion of 'ostraniene' which he uses to distinguish poetical language from practical language: "a process or act that endows an object with strangeness by removing it from the network of conventional perceptions."²¹ Similarly, a more active mode of perception is required during a session of a pervasive game which would allow players to see what normally couldn't possibly come into view – a vision other than a mere 'recognition' which Shklovsky describes as a very automatized and forgettable experience.²² Pervasive games require an active mode of perception that facilitates not only new ways of experiencing our already familiar surroundings but that also makes unfamiliar things visible in that same environment, that otherwise may not have been 'seen', remembered or experienced at all. The experience that results from this upkeyed perception can thus be described as a defamiliarization.

The active mode of perception that is required to upkey the ordinary environment is perhaps best illustrated by game scholar Jane McGonigal. She argues that, instead of seeing pervasive gamers as naïve and credulous who fail to differentiate the fictive from the real, they should be seen as active, playful and intentional, taking meta-pleasure in *consciously*

¹⁸ Eva Nieuwdorp, "The Pervasive Interface: Tracing the Magic Circle," in *Digital Material: Tracing New Media in Everyday Life and Technology*, edited by Marianne van den Boomen et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 199.

¹⁹ Eva Nieuwdorp, 202.

²⁰ Eva Nieuwdorp, 202.

²¹ Benjamin Sher, introduction to *Theory of Prose*, by Viktor Shklovsky (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 1991), xviii-xix.

²² Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Device", in *Theory of Prose: Viktor Shklovsky*, trans. Benjamin Sher, (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 1991), 4-6.

admiring the game-designer's skill to create interesting experiences and narratives.²³ While pervasive games often toy with a kind of 'This Is Not A Game' rhetoric, players are similarly "playing at not playing a game".²⁴ They maximize their play experience by *performing* to belief rather than actually believing in the permeability of the game-reality boundary, which means the awareness of the game as a game does most of the time remain intact. Psychologist Michael J. Apter has proposed that this 'protective frame' enables and heightens players to experience pleasure during play, as it assures players that real world problems cannot intrude on play and that the game will have no real world consequences or effects.²⁵

What about the awareness of the self during pervasive gaming? Consider this statement by Gary Allen Fine: "The dramaturgical analogy suggests that we are all keyers and fabricators. The person consists of a bundle of identities that are more or less compatible, but which when enacted must presume a lack of awareness that other identities are possible."²⁶ Fine showed that role-players regularly recognized the existence of several selves that had to be juggled, hidden, or exhumed when appropriate, even though their roleplay required them to hide these other parts of their selves.²⁷ The extent of awareness allowed between multiple frames of the self may in this case be kept minimal, but will nevertheless not be nihil. Fine suggests the need to examine the effects of simultaneously activated selves on worlds of meaning (frames).²⁸ It is exactly this simultaneousness of selves that is also relevant to understand the processes of framing in pervasive games.

To summarize, during a session of *You Are Near* numerous frames, keyings and tensions can be experienced. These keyings influence the experienced spatiality of players, which can be physical, digital or hybrid. The upkeying of the ordinary environment can be understood as a defamiliarization – due to a more active perception the environment is seen in a radically different way. At the same time, players might have awareness of the artificialness of the situation and feel awareness of the presentation that they give off themselves in public space that is still meaningful in the downkeyed frame of ordinary life. They have multiple identities that are relevant for social interactions during the act of playing a pervasive game. These theoretical assumptions are useful in thinking and discussing about the experiences of frames.

²³ Jane McGonigal, " 'A Real Little Game: The Performance of Belief in Pervasive Play' " (paper presented at Digital Game Research Association (DIGRA) "Level Up" Conference, Utrecht, The Netherlands, 2013), 8-14.

²⁴ Jane McGonigal, 15.

²⁵ Jane McGonigal, 14.

²⁶ Gary Allen Fine, 195, 196.

²⁷ Gary Allen Fine, 202.

²⁸ Gary Allen Fine, 204.

Method

An auto-ethnographical analysis has been used to investigate frames in the way Leon Anderson has described it.²⁹ This qualitative method is grounded in subjective experience but its ultimate goal is to reach far beyond it. The dual role of participant and observer can be a methodological advantage when it is used to gain a unique vantage point for accessing certain kinds of data. The use of personal experience is essential in my argument as it takes the readers to places they otherwise couldn't go to. Frames are after all an internal, subjective phenomenon that can be understood through our own experiences. The defamiliarizing effects of *You Are Near#5* allow for experiences of frames that aren't often felt in everyday life. Experiencing something extraordinary – by temporarily stepping out of the flow of everyday life – is a good way to become conscious of frames.

The danger of this approach is that it may lead to self-absorption, thereby losing its sociological promise. To overcome this problem auto-ethnography must always engage with other members of the group under study – using subjective experience to engage in a dialogue with data of others throughout the research. In each game session a number of people (total amount between 8 and 24) would participate. These were mostly students, young people in their 20s, of mixed gender, although the male gender was more present. What's especially important to note about these participants is that they - like me - had very little prior experiences with any LBMG, and thus didn't have clear expectations about the kind of activities they would (have to) be doing during *You Are Near#5*. I assume this means that these experiences of frames are more intensely experienced because they are experiencing them for the first time.

My findings are based on four game-sessions of *You Are Near#5*, which have taken place in Utrecht, Delft and Zoeterwoude-dorp. To gain insight in experiences of frames, frame changes and frame tensions, I have continually asked myself questions during these sessions and kept fieldnotes as I was playing the game. How do I feel during the game-sessions? Am I resolute in my actions or do I sometimes hesitate? Am I much aware of non-participants surrounding me, or am I much more focused on things that matter for the course of the game? Does the presence of non-participants influence the way I play the game? When does the blurring of the physical and the digital, or the real and the fictive actually occur, and why in these moments? I wrote fieldnotes during the sessions and complemented these afterwards.

²⁹ Leon Anderson, "Analytic Autoethnography." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35,4 (2006): 373-395.

To gain insight in experiences of frames of other players, I have focused on their behaviors, facial expressions, body language and conversations when I encountered them during the game. Afterwards I have talked to participants individually to find out more about their experiences. All fieldnotes were elaborated on after the game-sessions, and the most relevant and interesting findings were included in this paper to base my arguments on. The data that this method yields is thus of subjective nature: it holds information on the lived experiences of myself and participants, and are interwoven with thoughts and feelings.

The most important characteristic of auto-ethnography is a commitment to analytic agenda. Anderson argues that this data-transcending goal fits quite well with more traditional methods of ethnography. Deeply personal and self-observant ethnography can be valuable on an academic level if it seeks connections to broader theoretical issues. These personal experiences of frames will thus be used to elaborate on theoretical understanding of and discourse on frames and LBMG's.

Results

Throughout the game-sessions there has been an interplay between the downkeyed and the upkeyed experience of space. Immersion played a central role in this interplay, as this would strengthen a certain kind of frame. To understand how this interplay was experienced, two different types of experiences should be differentiated. For both categories I have described my own experiences (*italic*) – analyzing my own feelings, behaviors and awareness - to relate to the experiences of others (quotation marks). In addition I have tried to better understand these experiences using the theoretical framework developed above. Finally I have made conclusions about the implications of these experiences for understanding frames and LBMG's.

Negotiation between multiple conflicting frames

While participants would often say they had experienced greater awareness of their surroundings, they also noted an increase in self-consciousness. Consider the following statement about a participant's game-session:

"Occasionally I felt a bit weird when I came across people who were just walking in their own neighborhood, because when they saw me while I was constantly looking around and sometimes walking back and forth, they would often give me a puzzled look. I think this is even more so because we were playing in Zoeterwoude-dorp, where people in general know their neighbors and where everybody just acts normal. In a city people look less at each other and it's more common that weird things happen that no one really cares about. At least that's how I experience it! [...] Whenever there were other people around that were unrelated to the game, I felt like I was doing something in secrecy." (Participant)

Especially in the beginning of the game I had similar feelings:

I walked at a rapid pace while I regularly stopped to check my position to see if I still went in the right direction. At first I was in an environment where quite a lot of people were around me. I noticed that I walked faster than most people - in general they were casually walking and looking around, often in groups of several people. Later I was in a more quiet area with fewer people on the streets. I still regularly stopped to look at my mobile phone for direction, and I also payed attention to the dots that represented opponents. In this way I just walked while not much of interest happened, as I was still quite far away from the green virtual object and opponents. While I walked through the city in this way, I was much more aware of the people around me that did not play along. (My experience)

During these moments nothing really happened that had an impact on the course of the game; no events happened that were meaningful within the upkeyed social framework of the game that was being played. My experience of the space was not hybrid: I would sometimes pay more attention to the physical or the digital space, but not much interaction happened between these spaces. It was during these moments that I felt very much aware of the people that were around me and I felt conscious of the fact that these people did not know about the game being played in their environment. Not only was I attentive to what was happening around me, at the same time I felt very conscious of myself as being part of this environment. I knew that in just a matter of time, something could happen in the game and that I would need to react in a certain way:

It bothered me that my shoes made so much noise with each step I took (I had recently bought new shoes that sounded much louder than the shoes I was used to). I think this made me more reluctant to run. If I were to run, my feet would come harder on the floor and I would make faster steps. This would make a very clearly noticeable sound that people around me may find obtrusive. If I had worn athletic clothing this may have been different, as people would probably see it in a different frame (who would find it weird to see athletically dressed people running?). I didn't like to stand out in public space. (My experience)

These feelings of self-awareness emerged because of the downkeyed frame of ordinary life, which was in these moments more dominant than the upkeyed framework of the game in my experience. I was aware of the multiplicity of frames and adjusted my behavior in a way that fitted well within the broader social environment of the downkeyed social framework. Because of this self-regulation, it took me more time to get nearer to the green virtual object and opponents, but I did not consider this as a serious threat to lose the game. The awareness of the multiplicity of frames made me negotiate these frames. By self-regulating behavior frame tensions were avoided.

This amplified self-awareness would especially occur during deviant acts. Consider these experiences:

"It was kind of uncomfortable to make pictures on the street while other non-playing people were standing next to me." (Participant)

"I found out that I was really far away from either the virtual object or the other players. I needed to get to the other side of town fast. I tried to run, but sometimes I would lower my pace to do fast walking instead of running when I saw other people in the street. It could be embarrassing sometimes." (Participant)

I just passed cinema 't Hoogt in the direction of the City Hall. I was surprised to see a teammate who came from the other direction. I didn't know him very well, and had barely talked to him before [in real life]. I was conscious of this as I approached him. We greeted each other and started talking about the game. As we were talking, he found out via WhatsApp that he had just now been photographed. A photo of him had just been posted in the Whatsapp-group. He showed me the picture. I was not 'seen' by the camera as I was just around the corner at the moment the picture was taken. Assuming that the photographer knew he missed me [after all, the person must have seen two dots and not just one], I made a split second decision to run away out of the dangerous area. I told my team member that I needed to get out of the street. I had a brief moment of doubt after I saw the picture and before I started running, much like some kind of invisible barrier. I assume that my teammate experienced this too: I base this assumption on what he said afterwards and the hesitation that I believe to have read in his face before he started running. Then he ran after me to a safe place where we felt safe enough to walk at a normal pace. As we walked further we talked again. He told me that he had not expected me to run so suddenly. He seemed surprised at his own behavior. He said: It's weird to suddenly run through the city. When I asked him why so, he said: "It just isn't the kind of thing you normally do in the middle of the city." He looked clearly surprised by our sudden action. (My experience)

Here self-regulation was not an option. I felt forced to step out of anonymity. My behavior would no longer fit well in the downkeyed frame of ordinary life. Because of the dominance of this downkeyed frame I briefly felt hesitation because of this frame tension.

Upkeyed and hybrid experience of public space

Many participants reported a change of perception and awareness:

"I was above all more aware of the people around me, because everyone with a cellphone was a potential threat who could kill you." (Participant)

"I most definitely was conscious of my environment in a different way, because I was constantly looking around to see if there were any opponents. This made me very suspicious. Also I was looking at my environment to see if there were any shortcuts I could take to reach the virtual object faster." (Participant)

A particular interesting experience is the following one, which I will discuss in more detail:

"I saw the streets as a playground, where around each corner an opponent could appear. By using the virtual map I started seeing the environment in a different way. I remember that I mistakenly thought an opponent was behind me. I turned around really fast, much faster than I would normally do, and I still have a very clear image in my head of what that street looked like. I turned so fast because I felt the necessity to stay in the game, and turned with such intensity that I still remember that moment and that street! (...) I don't know if necessity is the right word, it is more about a kind of healthy form of being fanatical, of taking the game seriously, of a desire not to get caught and win the game." (Participant)

An important facilitating factor for this upkeyed perception is a voluntary commitment to the game, being open-minded to and feeling an interest or desire for certain experiences that the game may offer. As the participant put it, it is about being fanatical, of taking the game seriously, and this playful mindset is important for the upkeying of the surroundings. Besides merely seeing the environment in a different way and looking in a more active way, multiple participants noted an immersion within this upkeyed frame. The immersion that the participant felt resulted in an experience of unsafety that remained very vivid to him after the game was over. His immersion in the upkeyed frame made it possible for him to feel in danger, and he felt it was necessary to deal with this in a certain way. It is interesting that he first used the word *necessity* to describe his feeling, but then expressed doubt about it. He clearly wasn't sure if this word truly reflected his experience, and tried to find different words to explain himself. Why would he find the word *necessity* misleading? I assume he was aware of the fact that this feeling of necessity was only relevant within the upkeyed frame of the game, and that he was perfectly aware that losing the game would have had very little consequences for his normal life. This made him doubt about the word *necessity*. The feeling of unsafety and the *need* to deal with this was to some degree not genuine. (If it were genuine it would have been a rather bad and stressful experience.) He talks instead about being fanatical, which illustrates the playful mindset needed to upkey the surroundings and to embrace the feelings that arise in this upkeyed social framework that could not have arisen without some immersion in the upkeyed frame while appreciating the situation as being distinct from the downkeyed frame of mundane life.

In my first session of You Are Near#5 there was a moment where I had a very strong upkeyed experience of my surroundings. Similar moments happened throughout all game-sessions, but this moment was for me the most interesting one because it was the first one and also the strongest one I have experienced:

There were a lot of people around me. I walked on the Oudegracht in Utrecht and was getting closer to the green virtual object. While I came closer I noticed on the digital map that an opponent was moving very close to me. By studying the movements on the map, I figured that the opponent should be located somewhere on the same street. The great amount of people present made it challenging to find the opponent, but precisely this complication turned out to be a quite strange and exciting experience for me. As the Oudegracht exists of two paths separated by the canal, my eyes switched from one side to the other side of the canal. There were several times when I thought I saw an opponent. I would for example see a person standing alone, looking at a mobile phone or looking around in a suspicious way. But when I approached them, while trying to recognize them and observing what they were doing, I would see that they were actually just walking around and minding their own business, their faces would change to mundane and they just went on with their lives. One moment I really believed that there was an opponent on the other side of the canal. It was a girl who was standing still with a mobile phone in her hand. I believed this was the opponent I was looking for because I thought I recognized her face. I stopped walking, and searched for a good spot to make a

picture of her from a distance. But just as I wanted to take the picture, I saw that I had the wrong person. I realized by looking at her face that she was not one of the participants that were taking part in the game, and when I looked at the digital map I saw that the location of my opponent had already changed. After this my involvement in the game faded away.” (My experience)

The awareness I had of my surroundings was of a very different nature in this moment. My perception was heavily focused on seeing opponents in my surroundings, and as a result I was seeing faces of participants in the faces of ordinary people around me. I started to feel more excitement for the game. Without a degree of immersion in the upkeyed social framework I would have never perceived a non-participant as an opponent. Even though the upkeying of my surroundings and the blurring of the physical and the digital space happened throughout the session, the blurring of both spaces was in this moment strongly amplified. The experienced space is this moment much more hybrid, because I was linking the digital spots on my mobile phone to specific people in the physical space. Both the physical and the digital space were of high importance for the experience I had of my surroundings. The strong blurring of the physical and the digital happened in this situation because both spaces seemed to reinforce each other. I was close to other opponents and the green virtual object on the digital map, while I also happened to be in a touristic street in the city center where a lot of people were present, which suddenly made many people suspicious. This has been one of only a few moments where I truly experienced being in a hybrid space, because both the physical and the digital space were meaningful for my perception of my surroundings. After a brief moment of frame ambiguity while I felt doubts about the girl, the downkeyed frame became more dominant again, as I realized the opponent was gone.

Conclusion

In this conclusion I will answer my research questions: How is the multiplicity of frames experienced during You Are Near#5? In what situations are certain frames dominant – and in what situations do changes occur? How are tensions experienced that arise because of conflicting frames?

Many factors influenced processes of framing. While both the physical space and the digital space could have a distracting effect which would make the upkeying of the surrounding difficult, these spaces would in some moments interact in such a way that frame ambiguity and upkeying could take place. This notion of the frame complicates the understanding of hybrid space. In hybrid space, people and things can have a dual meaning and therefore frame ambiguity is always present to some extent. Nevertheless, without a

playful, open-minded mindset of the player this upkeying could not take place at all. It is only in such moments that the spatiality of the players would become more hybrid as they obtained an upkeyed understanding of their surroundings. Hybrid space is thus a very fragile and temporary experience which exists in the mind of a person after being immersed in the upkeyed frame.

The multiplicity of frames was often recognized, and tensions between frames were experienced throughout each game-session. Some behaviors would fit well within multiple frames of meaning, but others would not. By negotiating multiple frameworks in an interaction, tensions could be diminished or even avoided between these conflicting frames. Embarrassment and self-regulation have been quite common experiences during the sessions that emerged as a consequence of the dominance of the downkeyed social framework. Experiences of frames are then also dependent on the management of tensions. Such tensions may have a negative effect on the immersion possible in the ludic frame, resulting in self-consciousness or hesitation. This may happen when players feel alienated from their fellow participants or from the shared interaction which is the official focus of attention. Following Goffman's sociological point of view, such examples during *You Are Near#5* illustrate how embarrassment is to be located in the social system wherein the participant has several selves.³⁰ These can be short, abrupt moments of discomfort, a short downkeying, where after the game can be enjoyed, or a sustained uneasiness throughout the session.

Discussion

Even though the presented findings are not necessarily generalizable to other games, people or places, I have tried to show how subjective data gathered by the autoethnographical method can be valuable for existing academic understanding of LMBG's and frames.

Further inquiry can be undertaken to gain understanding of experiences of non-participants. How do they experience Location Based Mobile Games played in their presence and how do they experience frame keyings?

The mental boundary between play and non-play is often a thin one; the findings of this study underscore this assumption. The implication for game-design has been hinted at by Jane McGonigal. She argued that one of the challenges for pervasive game-design is to

³⁰ Erving Goffman, "Embarrassment and Social Organization", *American Journal of Sociology* 62.3 (1956): 269.

create immersive experiences credible enough to inspire some kind of elevated make-believe, but not so credible that it creates anxiety in audiences.³¹

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³¹ Jane McGonigal, 14.

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