

Role, Play, Art

*Collected Experiences
of Role-Playing*

*Published in Conjunction with the
10th Knutpunkt Convention*

Edited by *Thorbiörn Fritzon & Tobias Wrigstad*

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Collected Experiences of Role-Playing

Thorbiörn Fritzon & Tobias Wrigstad (eds.)

April, 2006

This book is typeset by the editors in L^AT_EX using t_EL_AT_EX, Emacs and T_EXShop. The font is Minion.

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The book is published by *Föreningen Knutpunkt* with financial support from *Stiftelsen framtidens kultur*. Stockholm, 2006.

PREFACE

“The foremost goal of [this] book is to press ahead, to raise the bar of role-playing.” This is a quote from the call for papers for this book, in which we called for, among other things, “Visions and Goals for the Future” and “Techniques and Best-Practises”. The way we see it, this book is as a collection of experiences of role-playing, trying to build a strong enough understanding of this medium, hobby, art, to facilitate this, maybe in the next Knutpunkt book. Maybe it is not yet time to press ahead as hard as we wanted to, but to better understand what it is that we have today, and what makes it work the way we want it to.

In terms of collecting experiences, Role-playing on the Danish convention scene has come a long way, much thanks to sites like alexandria.dk, an Internet movie-database like web site with scenarios from most role-playing scenarios from the last 20 years, and rlyeh.trc.dk, a collection of 100 Danish convention scenarios, free to download, experience and steal from. There is much to gain from such practise, and we suspect there is a lot of knowledge to be harvested by going through such a large body of individual games in a systematic fashion, or even by introducing such a simple thing as having a standardised form for recording actual play. (On a side-note, there is no reason why table-top, freeform and larp role-play would not benefit from similar systems, preferably a cross-country, “cross-scene” collection, that could re-close the gap between the various forms of role-play once and for all.) The articles in this book provide short cuts into a body of knowledge such as the one mentioned above. They represent hundreds of hours of playing, reading, thinking and analysing role-playing.

An important goal has been to make the book accessible enough to be read by all Knutpunkt participants. We have worked to achieve this in two ways. First, we have kept the book delightfully thin. Second, we have urged the authors to write shorter rather than longer articles, use accessible style and stay clear of cryptic references and terms without providing a proper explanation. We believe that we have fulfilled this goal, and that the articles are generally “readable, inspiring and practically useful”, just as we stated in our original call for papers.

Technical Notes

The articles are sorted alphabetically on the last name of the first author. The book is short enough not to need a system of categorisation for the articles. To conserve space, we collected the references in a single chapter in the back. This should also make it easier to find.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Martin Brodén, Olle Jonsson, Markus Montola, Jaakko Stenros, Anna Westerling and many others for insightful comments, help with editing, reading and discussing. An especially big thanks to Johanna (Joc) Koljonen for lending us her exceptional editorial skills. This book is published with financial support from Stiftelsen framtidens kultur.

Kista, April 2006

Thorbiörn Fritzon and Tobias Wrigstad, editors

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A Short Comment On the Compatibility of Immersion and Narrativism

Martin Brodén

This article is a (very) brief comment on the compatibility of immersion and narrativism, spurred on by reading some recent writings on role-playing theory by J. Tuomas Harviainen and Andreas Lieberoth. I claim that immersion is not a question of annihilation of the person behind the mask or of disguising our surroundings into another reality, but a question of finding the flow of the story, invoked in the self as a persona.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Classic larp theory uses the following model: The self is divided into a person and a persona. The person is the participant, the persona the role. In classic larp theory, two polarities often emerge, immersion and narrativism. According to immersionists, the self should not experience the person at all. The persona exists for the session only, and it is through imagination alone that the persona can stay in existence. According to narrativists, the persona is the interface to the story, a somewhat abstract term that tries to reference the existence of something that is happening between the participants but is still in some way outside of ordinary reality.

In his article *Defining the In-Game State: A Field Study on Player Perceptions of “Self” during Live-action Role-play* [45], Harviainen suggests a third possibility which he calls “perikhoresis” and which, according to Harviainen’s own definition, “presumes that character and player are complete, individual selves that exist in a state of reciprocal interpretation”, which would make sense in classic larp theory.

Analysing his statistical material, Harviainen comes upon a paradox while examining the “type two player”, a type of player characterised by an interest in the narrative

assumptions and with a theatrical view of the game: “What is extremely interesting is that a small correlation [...] exists with this player type and experiencing character-reflexive behaviour, which is normally perceived as one of the hallmarks of immersionist play.” In other words, there is a kind of player that finds it possible to improvise in character and yet do this in accordance of some external process that we may call story. If classic larp theory fails to explain why this is possible, perhaps looking at the alternative might help?

1.2 COGNITIVE ROLE THEORY

Having had the opportunity to review Lieberoth’s article in this book, *With Role-Playing in Mind—A Cognitive Account of Decoupled Reality, Identity and Experience* [Ed. Included on p. 67 in this book] I can refer to it as an alternative model of the self during larp. My interpretation of Lieberoth is that the self has, amongst other things, two tools applicable in larp: *theory of mind*, that is, the self understanding the existence of separate selves in other people, fundamental in understanding a diegesis, and *simulation theory*, that is, the possibility of the brain to process thoughts about imagined sequences of events as if they were real, fundamental in imagining alternate realities.

In addition to the before-mentioned, Harviainen also talks about immersive disturbances: “All information that comes from unwelcome sources [...] breaks the continuity of play and forces the game participant into conflict.” If immersion is indeed a process experienced by the self, what constitutes a break in that continuity would be different to different styles of players. Thus, immersion is not a question of annihilation of the person behind the mask or of disguising our surroundings into another reality, it is a question of finding the flow of the story, invoked in the self as a persona.

1.3 CONCLUSION

In my mind, no matter what happens in your head, you will still be you. You may perceive yourself as having an identity other than what you usually have and that feeling may be sincere and intense—*this is immersion*—but to the other participants, you might be the same as always.

Games and Creativity Learning

Thomas Duus Henriksen

Learning games are facing a new challenge if it is to meet the educational demand for creativity training. In the article, it is argued that reflection is the key to teach creativity, and that we have to reconsider our current approach to creating educational role-playing games in order to meet this demand. The article presents a number of challenges to accomplishing this, as well as a number of tools for designing and using creativity facilitating games.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

It has been a while since focus moved from teaching facts to facilitating processual¹ knowledge within the Danish educational system. The system is slowly complying with this change, but is now facing a new challenge: Teaching creativity. This new challenge is a product of the threats that the globalisation constitutes to the Western nations. The question on what our future source of income should be has been nagging political and economical thinkers, and the only answer they have been able to come up with so far, is creativity and innovation. Question is how we are going to integrate this into our current schooling system.

Being creative today is basically about being able to use knowledge across contexts, applying knowledge successfully to contexts for which it wasn't meant (see Seltzer and Bentley [84]). According to economist Richard Florida [31], most inventions today are the result of creative application of existing knowledge and technology to new problems. Such deliberate developments and applications are what we today call innovation.

In order to teach creative thinking, we must learning and train to use our knowledge cross-contextually, meaning that we have to think outside the topics and boxes that our knowledge normally is organised in. We also have to accept that learning not

¹Processual knowledge refers to knowledge on *how* to do something, rather than knowing *what*.

only takes place in schools, but in society as a whole, and the modus 2 way of thinking knowledge, as something not restricted to universities, but as something that exists between people everywhere in society (STL-Group [91]). In order to facilitate the creative thinking, we must seek to employ a reflective approach to thinking, generating ideas and evaluating them, and this seems to be a hard nut to crack for the existing school structure.

Question is if games can help the school system to comply with this challenge, and it seems likely that they might. In order to participate in a role-play, one must explore and adapt to the challenges presented by the game context. This process is similar to the process of learning [36], as it requires the learner to examine a given problem and adapt to it, which again isn't too far from the process of creatively applying knowledge from one context to another. In order to increase the effectiveness of the application, several learning theorist have stated the importance of reflective thinking as a crucial factor (see for example Bateson [7]). Reflection is seen as a mean for transferring knowledge across contexts, thereby forming the basis for the creative application of knowledge onto new problems, and games clearly have a potential for meeting this purpose. It is therefore relevant to investigate what challenges such objectives places onto the designers of learning games, and how they can be overcome.

In order to use games for facilitating a reflective way of thinking, it is necessary first to understand games as a learning activity. Due to the fact that we are not trying to integrate the participant into an established context (due to the fact that we are trying to create creative application of knowledge), it seems insufficient to base such understanding on a practice orientated approach to game based learning (see Henriksen [52]). The radical constructivist approach to thinking and learning is interesting, as it manages to grasp those individual constructions, which the game experience is all about.

To address the challenges this task proposes to the leisure orientated approach to learning games, a constructivist approach is applied, tapping into the use and consequences of assimilative and accommodative learning. The issue of perturbation is addressed as a proposal on how to use the game based process for developmental purposes. Finally, question on how games should aim to motivate participation in the learning process, and how this affects the development of reflective thinking. In order to bridge the game-based learning process to the constructivist thinking, it is necessary to introduce some of its key elements.

2.2 A RADICAL CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH TO LEARNING

The main issue of the constructivist thinking is the claim that we do not have objective access to the world, stating that we each for ourselves construct our own way of understanding and perceiving the world. This implies accepting the materialistic statement that reality exists independently on how we perceive it, but also that we do not have any objective means of perceiving it, only our own subjective understanding. This understanding creates a major epistemological² problem, as it denies the existence of objective knowledge. Piaget's constructivism tries to grasp this point, as it denies the existence of objective knowledge, stating all knowledge as constructed by its possessor, and that the quality of knowledge is dependent on viability (see von Glasersfeld [97]).

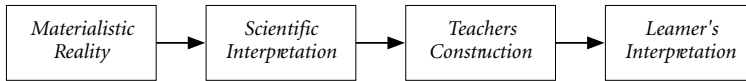
Instead of seeing learning as an acquisition of objective facts, knowledge is seen as a personal tome of knowledge and actions, which have proved themselves useful and viable under specific circumstances. Through the concept of viability, knowledge is seen as context specific (or situated) and temporary, "...relative to a context of goals and purposes" [97, p. 8]. Knowing that a game based learning process is based upon elements of fiction, simplifications and often also added motivational drivers. The concept of viability is quite descriptive to the benefit of a learning game, as it only has an immediate relevance to the game itself. An often addressed question here is whether this knowledge is transferable or viable outside the game. This classical concept of thinking knowledge as transferable has been challenged by the situated approach to knowledge, proposed by Lave [60]. By accepting the ultimate statement of the situated approach, stating that knowledge is context-bound, the foundation for using learning games would be totally undermined (alongside schools). The solution to this must be to acknowledge that knowledge may have a cross-contextual viability, as well as accepting the fact that this transfer is not an automatic process, but a question of reconstructing knowledge to attain viability to other situations.

2.3 CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE

By accepting the notion of constructivism, it becomes relevant to address the viability of communicated knowledge in a learning situation, as the communication is based on constructions and re-constructions. The chain of knowledge in a learning situation

²Epistemology refers to the philosophy of knowing, addressing the way we understand the concept of knowledge, mainly concepts of truth and belief.

can be viewed as several steps of construction based on a material reality. This can be illustrated as the following:



For example The laws of Newton: Let us assume that gravity exists in reality. This phenomenon is interpreted by a scientist (Newton), who defines his theory. This theory is then interpreted by a teacher, who teaches the laws to a student, who constructs his own interpretation.

A similar process is seen with learning games, as the game designer interpretes a phenomenon, which he designs a game from. By simulating a practice through the use of fiction, a validity issue needs to be addressed [51, 52]. By accepting the constructivist approach to knowledge, the validity issue becomes even larger. A way of reducing it may be to reduce the number of interpretative steps away from reality, and to focus on observable, simulative processes, rather than trying to communicate both facts and processes.

An easily overlooked result of a learning environment is the benefit spread in the individual benefit. This issue is addressed by the constructivist perspective, as it recognizes that the produced benefit is the result of an individual interpretative process. According to Piaget, this produced benefit is the result of the two interacting learning processes assimilation and accommodation [98], of which the accommodative is the most relevant when investigating the benefit and use of learning games.

2.4 ASSIMILATION AND ACCOMMODATION IN LEARNING GAMES

According to Piaget, the participant's existing knowledge is the crucial factor in the learning process, as it determines how and what is learned, as well as what is overlooked and therefore discarded and how the participant is affected. This is usually understood through the processes of assimilation and accommodation.

2.5 ASSIMILATION

The term assimilation is originally borrowed from biology, where it describes how an object is processed by a system. A common misinterpretation is that the object is

converted to fit into the system. Rather the term covers a process, in which only parts of the object is recognized by the system, and where the system only processes those parts into its system [98].

Such process is concerned with adding facts to existing mental structures or schematas, only letting the participant benefit from those parts which are recognised to fit into the participant's existing knowledge. It is concerned with *what* the participant knows, rather than on *how* it is used or understood. Such knowledge is subject to interpretation and re-interpretation according to the participant's overall understanding or interpretative frame.

A very easy, but not very effective way of designing learning games, is to fill a game with educational material (for example historical facts), which the participant can explore during the game. This is often more fun than effective, as the game structure does not guarantee that all students meet or notices all points (this reliability issues are discussed in previous work [52]). Another limitation to this design is the general validity problem presented by inductive learning designs, as the participant often lacks an external anchor point for his constructed understanding [20]. A more beneficial design seems to be a game, which allows the participants to reconstruct their existing knowledge, thereby creating a coherent or new understanding of a set of knowledge elements. Such games are called process-games (in contrast to fact-games), according to their focus.

The primary argument against basing game based learning on assimilation is that we already have proven methods for teaching facts, and that doesn't call for a method where facts are mixed with fiction and similar game mechanical elements. Another argument is based upon the presence of freedom of choice in a game; according to the circle model [52], a game consists of a number of potential situations, from which only a limited number are realised though the gaming experience. A consequence from this is that only a limited part of the game's knowledge actually is perceived by the participant, thereby loosing the remains. As this forms the base for a huge variance in the learning benefit, such practice is not recommendable.

2.6 ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation is often viewed as the opposite of assimilation, giving a rather misleading view on the process. The accommodative process describes the process of changing one's personal interpretative frame when it has become perturbed with knowledge that renders it invalid [98]. This process is often frustrating, and we tend to hold back in order to prevent the load from tipping. But that is actually what the

game should attempt to facilitate under safe conditions. Stepping into a learning game is *not* an accommodative learning process; when we play, we accept a temporary, already invalidated discourse for interpreting our immediate perception. Not until our personal understanding of reality becomes so challenged that it evolves do we have an accommodative learning process.

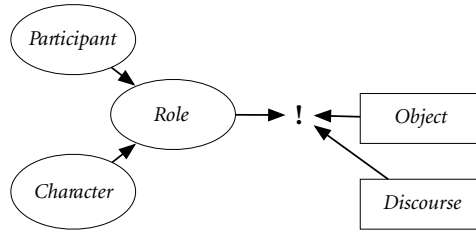
The process of accommodation is somewhat more interesting to learning games than assimilation, and can easily be stated as the purpose of learning games. Games have the ability to give us access to an otherwise inaccessible situation. According to the structure model [51], role-play allows the participant to take on a different perspective, creating a whole new approach to a situation. This can be highly profitable to a learning process, as it allows simulated practice participation to be brought into the classroom [50] (see for example *Medicon Game* or *Homicide*). This opportunity to try participating in and experimenting with knowledge across contexts creates opportunities for restructuring existing knowledge into action schemes, or into creative applications.

The main argument for using learning games lies in their ability to create accommodative learning processes. Whereas we have plenty of methods for creating processes based on assimilation, the Danish school system is seriously lacking methods for rocking its students existing structures of knowledge. This gives learning games a window of opportunity to fulfil a specific educational need within the system. And that might be worth running for, but to fill the need, we have to be able to rock the participant's existing knowledge. The key in doing so is perturbation, which is addressed below.

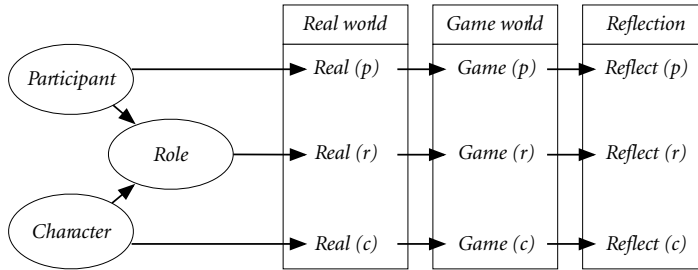
2.7 CREATING PERTURBATION THROUGH THE GAME EXPERIENCE

In order to analyse the game based perturbation process, the interpretative model [52] is used for structuring the analysis. The model consists of a left side, illustrating the participant and the creation of a role-based perspective, whereas the right side illustrates the object of the game, as well as the discourse, under which the object is to be understood during the game.

The left side of the model is relevant to understand the perspective of the participant in the role-play based learning environment. According to the interpretative model, the character holds the primary and secondary fiction to be used for shaping the participant's perspective into that of the role. In a learning setting, the character



would hold the new perspectives to be tested, and the participant the existing knowledge. Such learning setting can be illustrated as in Model 3:



If we explore the content of the participant (p), the role (r) and the character (c) across three settings: 1) the participant’s daily practice (where he usually encounters a given problem), 2) a game world (game based learning setting), and 3) a reflective sphere (where the participant reflects on the differences between the real and the game setting), 9 elements of situated knowledge appears. These elements are interesting for exploring the viability of knowledge in and across practices, whereas the reflective sphere is seen as the transfer-facilitating link between the two previous.

In the Real world setting, the participant is likely to find his perspectives adequate (Real-P), whereas the introduced perspectives are likely to be seen as too cumbersome (Real-C) (remember that a character merely is a given set of perspectives and knowledge). Merely placing the participant within a game world, in which the participant’s knowledge is proven insufficient (Game-P), and the (Game-P) successful, is most likely to be perceived as manipulative and result in two different outcomes; either the learning environment as a whole is rejected, or the perturbation is rationalised away by attributing the (Game-P) insufficiency to contextual drivers. The combined perspective (Game-R) may result in ownership of eventual successes achieved in the game world, generating acknowledgement of the character’s perspectives. The task for the reflective

process is then to evaluate on the viability of the perspectives of the participant, character and role across the contexts, eventually creating sufficient perturbation leading to a change in (Real-P) behaviour.

What happens during such process is basically allowing the participant to experiment with an alternative and temporary way of experiencing the world [51]. During the game, the fictional element is used for easing the transition from one understanding to another. The game world remains fictional, which means that it is based on perspectives applied to practice, rather than derived from it. It is never viewed as a representation of the real world. The perturbation arises in the participant's reflection of the three levels. The learning benefit thereby becomes an offer, rather than something manipulated into the otherwise volunteer participant. By basing the learning process on reflection, a more ethical approach is allowed by letting the participant create his own understanding, rather than taking the essentialist approach by dictating what the participants should learn.

There is an ongoing discussion on whether students should be taught what is essential to them according to society, or if they should be allowed a more existentialistic approach, letting them decide for themselves what they want to learn. Such questions are usually outside the game-designers competence, as learning game designers often are issued with very clear learning objectives (referring to *how*, rather than *what*). This expands the game-design challenge from not only encouraging reflection, to also being able to shape and direct the content of the reflection.

2.8 AIMS FOR THE GAME BASED LEARNING PROCESS

One might argue that if we allow the participant to create an understanding, based on his own constructions alone, we risk creating idiosyncratic knowledge, which only is viable to him. In order to avoid such solipsist³ “anything goes” approach, we need tools for directing the participant's constructions towards something that is socially acceptable.

The major difference between Piaget's radical constructivism and Vygotsky's cultural-historic approach is a question of where knowledge is created; in the head of the participant, or between the participants. According to Cobb [13], the two perspectives can be understood as separate contributions to understanding the learning process; a cognitive and a social-anthropological. Where as the first is useful for understanding

³Solipsism refers to the epistemological belief that the only thing one can be certain of is one's own consciousness.

the focus for learning games, the latter is relevant for solving the intriguing problem of reflection in the learning process.

2.9 THE PROBLEM OF MOTIVATION AND REFLECTION

Games have often been adapted into educational settings due to their means of motivation. This has throughout the past years resulted in the concept of edutainment [58], which with diverse success attempts to combine the fun of games with the benefit of learning (see also Egenfeldt-Nielsen [24]). Educational role-play is often being thought of as an entertaining break-away from traditional teaching, a perspective I find undermining for the concept of learning games. The main purpose of a learning environment is to facilitate learning, not to entertain.

However, games are being legitimated in the educational setting as a motivator in order to create engagement in the learning process. Along with the growing interest in creating a flow experiences in learning (see Csikszentmihalyi [18, 19] and Andersen [2]), games have been looked upon as a mean for doing so, which has provided interesting perspectives on the connection between facilitating reflection/creativity and pleasurable learning environments, such as edutainment.

Flow is characterised by a pleasurable, emotional state, where time passes by and the participant experiences a driving feeling of success [18]. Among the interesting conditions for the experience are the experience that one's skills are adequate to cope with challenges at hand, in a goal directed and rule bound (rule obvious) setting, and that the participant is allowed to focus on the task at hand [19, p. 71].

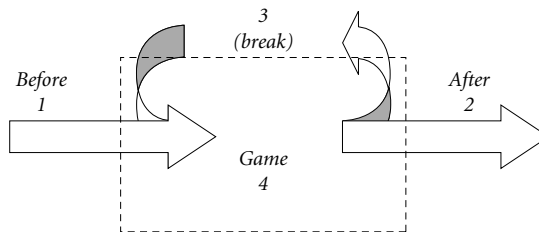
There should be little doubt that role-playing games can create such flow experience (as well as boredom and anxiety), but the question is whether it is beneficial to the reflection and learning process.

The main problem in creating flow is that it is not normally compatible with the process of accommodation. As the process of flow narrows the participant's attention down to focussing on a few variables, the experience becomes so immense that the reflective process required for accommodation is left unaddressed. Flow has often been presented as beneficial for assimilative learning (see for example Andersen [2]). The intuitive, automatic behaviour displayed during flow is often measured as a good performance, but it is important to keep performance and learning apart when trying to create a reflective understanding of a topic. Just because a student performs doesn't necessarily mean that he understands what he is doing (or is able to do it elsewhere).

Because participants push their skill to the limit, reflection is inhibited during flow [76], other means for creating this learning process are required. One way is by

forcing reflection by using time-outs. This may sound beneficial in a theoretical sense, but is in practice more likely to give an experience of contrast; the feeling of having to abandon the pleasant and self-directed flow experience in order to do a forced reflective process. To my experience, this contrast creates resistance, both towards the learning process, and towards the instruction given. This cannot be solved by making the game funnier or improving the conditions for flow—this merely increases the contrast. It seems relevant to explore alternative incentives, which do not contribute to this contrast. A way of doing so is to abandon the effort to please the participants, and instead using frustration as the primary driver for creating engagement. In order to facilitate engagement, the game designer must be able to utilise the desires and needs of the participant [53], and to integrate these into the structure of the learning game.

Another interacting factor to the problem of contrast is where the reflective element is placed in the game based learning environment. The model below identifies four positions in the game based learning environment, where attempts on facilitating reflection can be made:



The four positions each gives their distinctive impact on the learning process; whereas the first implies an introduction of the game points and objectives, which in practice reduces the learning game to an example, eliminating the explorative element. Placing the reflective process afterwards (2) is recommendable (see for example van Ments [96]), but is often overlooked, neglected, or looked upon as including a separate, game external learning environment. Some facilitators fancy using time-out or reflection breaks (3). The result is a broken game experience, reluctance towards the instruction to facilitate, and most likely also an unsatisfying result. The ultimate goal for the game designer must be to create a game, in which the reflective element is included in the game (4), independent on game-external initiatives.

Game-design at its best manages to implement the learning objective into the game mechanics, thereby encouraging a reflection-in-action process. This does, however neither guarantee learning nor the ability to apply the benefit outside the learning environment. Alternatively, the reflective process can be integrated into a debriefing,

where the reflective process is facilitated along with a decontextualisation of content and an explicitation of points from fictive elements. Such debriefing is quite context-specific, for example through cultural bias [14], which merely creates an additional level of construction to the produced benefit.

2.10 THE HISTORIC-CULTURAL CO-CREATION OF KNOWLEDGE

An interesting, but not very far fetched method for facilitating in-game reflection is offered by Vygotsky and his cultural-historical approach to learning. In contrast to Piaget, Vygotsky believed that knowledge could be constructed between individuals through the negotiation of the social setting. This particular difference has been debated thoroughly, as some claims the two are incompatible (see Lerman [61]), whereas others saw them as integrateable (see for example Steffe and Thompson [90]). Rather than integrating the two as theories, Cobb [15] suggests an integrative use of the two in order to achieve a better understanding of practice.

By collectively exploring the social setting, its norms, values, means and believes, the individuals could collectively negotiate the setting in order to adapt, participate and evaluate according to the setting. By doing so group wise, grounds for evolving a far more adaptive understanding than they could have achieved individually. My point is not to reinvent group work, but rather to state its potentials within the area of learning games.

If we return to the interpretative model, the right side consists of the game object and the discourse for interpretation. A common practice when designing learning games is to create challenge by issuing the participants with a too-short discourse, only giving them a partial understanding of the game object, leaving the rest for exploration. While doing so, participants must negotiate meaning, values and other relevant characteristics in order to understand the object. How this is done practically is a matter of game design, but the facilitation of a reflective process can be furthered by dividing the participants into basis-groups. By participating in groups with coherent, supplementing goals, the reflective process is more likely to occur than if the participants were on their own.

2.11 VALIDITY ISSUES IN LEARNING GAMES

The issue of validity is a well-known problem in learning games. As stated previously, mixing fact and fiction constitutes a problem for the participant [52], as well the constructivist point that we teach the interpretations we find to be viable. What is viable in the game might not be viable when confronted with the materialistic reality.

One might think of two different approaches to creativity teaching learning games; through closed and open frames:

The closed frame The closed frame utilises the mechanics above, presenting the participant with context and discursive knowledge to act within it, creating a reflection on the difference between the game and the real world situation. Such approach utilises a fictional frame, a diegesis, stating how the participant should act within the game, encouraging them to stick to it.

The open frame The open frame uses similar mechanics in creating a fictional frame, but instead of telling the participants to stick to their characters, they are encouraged to draw upon knowledge, which is not part of the frame. Reflection here is created by encouraging the participants to ‘cheat’ and bring in solutions and knowledge from their personal repertoire, thus allowing a wider array of solutions to the game.

An open framed approach clearly places the game design under much more stress, as it requires it to being able to respond to more or less predictable solutions from the participants. Right or wrong becomes a question of viability, rather than the game designers planned outcome. Still, tools are needed to assist the participants in navigating past the holes where viability in the game design differs from viability in the reality.

To my experience, players like to test the validity of the game, especially on where it breaks. Games are never complete representations of reality, and it is always a challenge to the game designer to make the participants run around in circles, thereby keeping them on safe grounds. Going through the ice allows the participant to dismiss the game experience as a whole, thereby preventing this experience from perturbing the participant’s way of thinking. Caution should be taken when using open ended learning games that do not make the participants run around in circles.

2.12 CHALLENGE TO THE LEISURE-ORIENTED APPROACH

The previously stated aim, to create a learning environment that facilitates reflection in order to further the degree of knowledge penetration between contexts, is obviously a prerequisite for teaching creativity. Without the incentive to apply knowledge cross-contextually, the creative thinking or application is unlikely to occur. If the game can be utilised to facilitate cross-contextual application, this innovative application of role-play technology onto the learning setting can be used as an educational tool for teaching creative thinking through reflection. This might prove to be the launch pad that game based learning has been looking for to get seriously into the market for learning.

Such use of role-play constitutes a major challenge to game designers; in leisure role-play design, the designers often use a narrow fictional frame or universe, using a lot of secondary fiction to make a tight frame. Such design is often used to prevent the participants to draw upon their existing knowledge, thus sticking to the means of the frame. While trying to teach creativity by encouraging the participants to draw upon their existing knowledge, this constitutes a major challenge to the game, which must be designed to meet and react to a much wider array of actions and interpretations. Even though some games already do this, a mechanic for handling such loose ends must be developed.

Another challenge is constituted by the shift from entertainment to learning; instead of seeking to entertain the participants, the learning-game designer must utilise other means for creating participation in order to facilitate the reflective stance required to teach creativity. It is therefore a necessary qualification for the learning-game designer to be able to tap into the participants needs, desires and frustration in order to find alternative, non-entertaining means for facilitating participation.

All together, the role-play based learning environment seems to hold the potential to teach creativity, which in Denmark is a sought after competence. Radical changes to our normal approach to understanding game design is required, but the challenges seems manageable if adequate attention is invested in handling creative in-game use of off-game knowledge, to finding entertainment-alternative incentives for participation, and in applying the game-based learning environment to teaching processual, rather than factual knowledge.

Interaction Codes—Understanding and Establishing Patterns in Player Improvisation

Eirik Fatland

Some, not all, of player improvisation at live role-playing games follows identifiable patterns of similar responses to similar situations. While not all of these patterns can be easily explained, many of them apparently originate in genre conventions, role-playing tradition, and with explicit and implicit communication before and during a larp. A set of improvisation patterns and their establishing sources can be described collectively as an “interaction code”—a network of related patterns originating from related sources.

The model of interaction codes is both an analytical tool and a source of larp design methods—by understanding this aspect of role-play behaviour, we are also able to better control or influence such behaviour. While the players often originate interaction codes, they may also be intentionally established by a larpwright. Two groups of methods are discussed in the article—derivation from references, and larpwright authorship. The first group taps into works (literature, cinema) and situations with which the players are familiar, while the latter group uses more direct approaches to encourage improvisation patterns.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Imagine a larp that is marketed as “Science Fiction”, featuring characters who are the staff of a large military space ship, but without any further context supplied.

Imagine further that the majority of players at this larp are fans of *Star Trek*, and approach the larp looking for the familiar thrill of the series. In this case they are likely to do a number of things derived from that series—they are likely to speak in a manner similar to that of *Star Trek* scripts (“Beam me up, Scotty!”), to assume their characters are the “good guys” and that non-player characters who oppose them are “bad guys”, and to play their characters as *Star Trek* stereotypes. They are likely to attempt to make moral choices in conflicts, to be tolerant of aliens, to be friendly, optimistic and jovial towards each other, and use a large degree of casual (body-)language. And they are likely to remain optimistic and jovial even in the face of grave danger—after all, the typical *Star Trek* story ends well.

If, on the other hand, we imagine that the players’ associations to a military organisation in “Science Fiction” derive from authoritarian dystopias—like Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the Empire of *Star Wars* IV-VI or the “peacekeepers” of space opera *Farscape*—they are likely to approach the larp in a very different way. Their characters may as well be the “bad guys”. They are likely to deal out harsh punishments to their inferiors, and to speak in authoritarian language (“Activate the teleporter, that’s an order!”). They are likely to make immoral decisions in the name of “greater good”, and to be intolerant of opponents, especially those that look different. They are likely to treat each other roughly, not shying away from fighting with or even murdering an opposing member of the crew, and their characters may become complex examinations of the personalities of fascism. Since this kind of story usually ends in tragedy, they may approach the event with a high degree of fatalism.

Of course, these examples are hypothetical. Most larps will be marketed with at least some references to similar works, or with the larpwright having some knowledge of what the players will expect. But these examples illustrate how players’ knowledge and expectations, and their assumptions about how these apply to the larp, impact on their dramatic improvisation while role-playing. When taken together, such assumptions and the patterns they create form what I will call an “interaction code”. The *Star Trek* reference, above, forms one interaction code, while the references to militaristic dystopias form another.

3.2 PURPOSE

According to most definitions free, dramatic improvisation is integral to the form of live role-playing. This freedom is never without constraints—players are always expected to follow sets of implicit or explicit rules, including that their improvisation occur in the context of portraying a character—but neither is it ever entirely gone.

This license to improvise makes authoring larp a complicated affair. Unlike, say, a theatre or movie director, a larpwright cannot pre-plan her larp and simply have it played as planned. Players may, and are expected to, exert a great deal of freedom in determining the course of their characters and the larp as a whole. Some dramaturgical methods (such as Fateplay and rail-roading) allow greater control over the development of the larp—yet these are both controversial, and allow only limited control over the major events. A well-scripted fateplay of *Macbeth*, for example, cannot prevent the players from playing it as a slapstick comedy rather than the Shakespearean tragedy intended by the larpwright, even if the fated events are acted exactly as described.

The concept of “interaction codes” is intended as a tool for larp analysis and design. It is a model meant to accurately describe forms of behaviour present at every larp, everywhere, and help us understand both functional role-playing and the reasons some larps become dysfunctional. While the model can possibly be applied to other forms of role-playing (“tabletop”, on-line, freeform) or even other collaborative cultural forms (fan fiction, re-creation and re-enactment, theatre sports)—these will not be explored in this article.

This model may still be tested in two ways. First, by application: if the concept of “interaction codes” proves helpful in analysing and designing larps, it is a strong concept, otherwise it is a weak one. Secondly, this model could also be tested by extensive player interviews pre- and post-larp, examining which assumptions were present and whether they influenced player decisions. Having the resources to conduct such testing is every larp theorist’s unattainable dream.

3.3 KEY CONCEPTS

Sections 4-6 will examine the practical applications of interaction codes, but first it is necessary to take a closer look at the concepts underlying the idea of “interaction codes”: patterns, their sources, decision-making, functional role-playing and interaction rules.

3.3.1 Patterns of Improvisation

Whenever two players facing a similar situation in a similar context will tend to make similar decisions, we can talk of an improvisation pattern. “Context”, here, will need to be understood broadly and flexibly: the character portrayed, the larp it is portrayed at, which other characters are present, the social situation, etc. In some cases, a “similar context” will mean the same character at different runs of the same larp. In others, it is enough that the characters belong to roughly equivalent cultures at larps in somewhat related genres.

We can take for granted that such patterns exist—if not, then we should see peasants using pacifist tactics against invading orcs as often as they brandish swords and pitchforks, or often experience role-played businessmen converting to Zen Buddhism in the middle of a management meeting.

An improvisation pattern can be described through three components: Context, problem and outcome(s):

<i>Context</i>	The situation where a pattern appears.
<i>Problem</i>	The issue requiring a player decision.
<i>Outcome</i>	The likely player reaction or set of reactions.

Two simple examples:

<i>Context</i>	A space ship in a <i>Star Trek</i> universe.
<i>Problem</i>	Character requires transportation to planet surface.
<i>Outcome</i>	Character may use intercom to order teleportation.

<i>Context</i>	A Norwegian fantasy larp, the forest.
<i>Problem</i>	Character meets a stranger on the road.
<i>Outcome</i>	a) character assumes friendly intentions, says “Vær Hilset!” (Be Greeted!), or b) character assumes hostile intentions, draws sword.

Patterns can apply to at least the following aspects of role-played behaviour and society:

- language/dialect/manner of speech
- body language/physical expression

- etiquette, customs, morality and law.
- characters
- narratives

The notion of “improvisational patterns” is inspired by design pattern languages (see Alexander et al. [1]), but differs from the latter in important respects. Design pattern languages, commonly used in architecture, design and computer programming, are a practical method for writing down the “common knowledge” of a community and its connections. Improvisation patterns, on the other hand, are ways of describing behaviour and their apparent sources. Structurally, they are similar. Functionally, they are not.

3.3.2 Sources of Patterns

Patterns do not appear from nowhere. While the sources of some patterns are questions best treated within the disciplines of psychology, sociology or anthropology—a number of patterns are obviously the result of previous player knowledge and the assumption that this knowledge is applicable to the larp situation. The assumption that one may teleport (above) comes from watching Star Trek or similar science fiction. The assumption that “Vær Hilset!” is a good way to greet a stranger is learned at previous Norwegian fantasy larps. Once a pattern is used, it may spread easily. The first-time larper, uncertain how one says “Hello” in this world, needs only to hear “Vær Hilset!” once before using the phrase himself.

Patterns and their sources can be seen to form networks, patterns of patterns. From the assumption that “this is a typical Norwegian fantasy larp” follows the patterns that “Vær Hilset!” means “hello”, that the orcs will attack around midnight, and that few people are who they say they are. A network may be accessed equally well from any node—a player who hears “Vær Hilset” may make assumptions about the orcs’ battle schedule, just as a player attacked by a orcs at mid-night may make assumptions about how to say “hello”. It is these networks of patterns, their sources, and their assumed relations that I call “interaction codes”.

Some patterns are also established by explicit instructions—for example “Theft is illegal and punished by 3 years of jail time”. But it is impossible for the larpwright to explicitly provide every piece of information about the diegesis that will be required during the larp, and so the rest is handled through assumptions and on-the-spot improvisation. We know that theft is illegal and punished by three years of jail time, but what are the standards of evidence? How is prosecution handled? If a thief is caught

and prosecuted, such questions will normally be handled through assumptions or pure improvisation, usually by players of characters who are seen as authorities on the question. Only in a minority of larps will a larpwright have the power and opportunity to instruct players on such details after the larp has begun.

Each and every player brings to the larp a vast array of cultural ideas and knowledge—learned from personal experience, from books, from playing games or watching films, from prior role-playing experience and everyday observation. Improvisational patterns are drawn from this pool of knowledge, and the assumptions that the patterns are relevant to the larp. If our thief is put to trial and a prosecutor and defendant are appointed, the assumption behind is that the legal system of the larp's society is similar to present-day Western legal systems. That might not have been the larpwright's intention, but lacking explicit instructions or alternative sources of patterns, the players will improvise according to what they know.

3.3.3 Decision-Making, Options and Interpretation

Given that role-playing is entirely improvised, it follows that players continuously make decisions as to the appropriate courses of action within the larp—to fight or flee, to propose a toast or not, how to answer a question, whether to run for president, how to seduce that guy, how to greet a stranger, what would my character do now... These decisions need not be consciously made, in fact most of them are made in such a short time-span that it would be impossible for the player to make anything but an intuitive or sub-conscious decision.

Player decision-making is, or should be, a central concern for larp theory. The discussion of *eläytyminen* (character immersion) versus *dramatism* (see Pohjola [79]) is essentially about the mental state underlying decision-making. The threefold model by Kim [57] discusses criteria players use when taking decisions—will it advance the story? (*dramatism*) Will it seem plausible? (*simulationism*) Will it aid me in overcoming the challenge? (*gamism*) The player's interpretation and identification with the character (what would my character do?) is another kind of criterion. Purely out-of-character concerns ("If I do that, she'll be hurt for real") also form criteria for choosing in-character actions.

Interaction codes cover two other parts of the decision-making process: *options* and *interpretation*. During the seconds or micro-seconds where decisions are made, which options will the players invent or remember? Which option will seem the most appropriate? And given that decisions are based on the preceding situation: How is the behaviour of other roles understood? In which context are their actions interpreted?

To illustrate: the hero who arrives discreetly and un-announced may, inspired by Aragorn/Striders entry in *The Lord of the Rings*, choose to sit secluded in the corner of the inn looking for hobbits in need of help. The players memory of *The Lord of the Rings* and his *assumption* that it is appropriate, provides an option for playing the entry of a hero.

For the other guests of the inn, however, the mystical stranger in the corner may be *interpreted* as a possible hero (assuming *The Lord of the Rings* is appropriate), or as a probable spy (assuming spy novels are appropriate), or perhaps a smuggler with the potential to become an ally of the good guys, assuming *Star Wars* is appropriate.

3.3.4 Functional and Dysfunctional Role-Playing

Because of this doubleness of options and interpretations, interaction codes become useful only when their assumptions are shared between players. Conversely, non-matching interaction codes bring with them the risk of dysfunctional role-playing. The hero who disguises himself as a ragged ranger in the corner will not have many opportunities for role-playing if the hobbits interpret him as a scary lunatic, and take their chances fighting ringwraiths instead. And one could well imagine the possible confusion and conflicts of the military space-ship larp where half of the players played according to *Star Trek*, while the other half followed *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

SPOCK: Beam me up, Scotty!

SCOTTIE: “Beam” is an un-word. Report to room 101 for interrogation.

“Functional”, in this context, means it works according to the stated plans, goals and expectations of the larp, and “Dysfunctional” means it doesn’t. Dysfunctional role-playing is not necessarily “bad” role-playing. In some cases, dysfunction may introduce interesting surprises and “creative chaos” that add to the larp experience—a mechanism that may even be exploited consciously by players or the larpwright.

Still, most cases of dysfunction in larp are unpleasant ones, events that break the flow and immersion of role-playing and bring its social contract in doubt. Dysfunction in the explicit structures of a larp, such as with players cheating or speaking out-of-character when they are expected to role-play, are easy to spot and deal with. Dysfunction in the implicit structures, such as the interaction code or creative agenda expectations, are harder to spot but may be just as disturbing.

3.3.5 Interaction Rules and Their Implications

The basic unit of an interaction code is the interaction rule, a single pattern and its source. Interaction rules can come in many shapes and sizes—a principle of body language, an assumption about how to relate to a superior, a guess about the geography of the in-larp location.

A piece of information is an interaction rule only if it provides associations and implications beyond those of its factual content, and only if these go beyond the direct diegetic relevance of the rules. “Strangers in the corner are usually heroes in disguise” is not an interaction rule, while “The tavern is similar to ‘The Prancing Pony’ in *The Lord of the Rings*” is. In other words, interaction rules are inherently vague, allowing them to be applied to unforeseen situations. Each interaction rule has a number of possible implications. For example, the Prancing Pony rule may have the following implications:

- A stranger in the corner is probably a hero in disguise.
- Telling tales and singing songs from your home village/place will be welcomed by the locals.
- Spies for the bad guys may be present.
- The beer comes in pints rather than half-pints.

Interaction rules can be general or more specific. More general interaction rules can often be seen as clusters of more specific ones. “The village is similar to those described in ‘the Lord of the Rings’” includes interaction rules such as ‘taverns are lively places with much song and chatting’, and ‘villagers gossip a lot, but are generally good-hearted’. In other words, the implications of interaction rules may themselves be interaction rules, with further implications.

The rule that the world of this larp is similar to that of *The Lord of the Rings* has implications such as “villages are similar to those of Lord of the Rings” and “battles are bloody affairs, but affairs where men and women get to display valour in the face of an unbeatable enemy”, with further implications such as “when a warrior is mortally wounded, it is appropriate for him to recite poetry”.

Out of necessity, I have used written examples above. But the “information” contained in interaction rules may just as well be non-written and non-verbal—for example a way of walking, with implications for status and etiquette, or the aesthetic style of a culture.

3.4 INTERACTION CODES BY CONVENTION

3.4.1 Conventions of Genre and Reference

More often than not, larps are announced as belonging to a literary or cinematic genre, such as “murder mystery”, “fantasy”, “dystopian science fiction”, “soap opera” or “Swedish art house larp”. This practice serves to establish interaction codes by reference—a single explicit instruction (the genre) encourages the player to assume that all and any patterns found in the genre are applicable to the larp. What literary critics call “clichés” and “genre conventions” we can treat as potential improvisation patterns. The mechanism at work is possibly the same: the hack writer using clichés to finish the work quickly, and the improvising actor with very little time within which to make a decision.

Because the conventions of a genre are often familiar to players, they need not consciously be aware of them in order to act on them intuitively. The character of a hard-boiled detective may begin telling the bartender his personal problems over plenty of whisky without risk of inconsistency, even though this behaviour is not established in his character description.

Likewise, interaction codes may be constructed by giving familiar works (for example *Star Wars*, *Ulysses* or “the novels of Knut Hamsun”) as a reference. The larp may or may not be an adaptation of the specified work, what matters is that the patterns of the specified work are used in the larp. As an example, the Swedish larp *Röd Måne* (Red Moon) [74] was set in *Star Wars*-derived setting with three factions: rebels, imperial troopers, and cute indigenous aliens. During the larp, the Imperial troopers managed to capture a rebel base. They then set out to play as drunk as possible so that the expelled rebels would have a chance to ally with the indigenous population and re-take the base while the troopers were sleeping and hung-over. According to players of Imperial characters I spoke to, they did this since having an alliance of rebels and locals win the day was “an appropriate *Star Wars* thing to do”.

Larprawrights may also specify combinations of works, genres or both from which to derive the interaction code. A larp could be announced as “a film-noir space opera”, “a murder mystery in a TV sitcom milieu (canned laughter provided by the organisers)” or “*Star Wars*, played as a Greek tragedy”.

Genre-derived interaction codes, to be functional, require that the majority of players are familiar with the specified genre. “Fantasy”, like most genres, may be divided into many sub-genres. If the players share a familiarity with only one of them the word “fantasy” alone would imply a precise interaction code. More often, players will have different ideas of what “fantasy” means, depending on the literary and

role-playing works they are most familiar with, and it becomes necessary for the larpwright to be more specific—“Daoist fantasy, inspired by LeGuin’s earthsea books, not Dungeons & Dragons fantasy”.

A useful tool in narrowing down the interaction code (as well as a number of other parameters of player behaviour), is the “Yes and No” tables often used in marketing Swedish larps. Here’s an example taken from the marketing of Swedish larp *Moira* [95], which gives Neil Gaiman and Clive Barker as it’s interaction code references:

What we want *Moira* to be

Grotesque carnival atmosphere
 Plots on an epic scale
 Deadly serious
 Heartbreaking beauty
 Mouldy velvet
 Horror and delight for the soul, eye and palate

What we don’t want

World of Darkness-vibes
 Plot obsession (we’re here to play, not debate)
 Cute fairies in pink
 Comical gnomes
 Obnoxious egomaniacs
 Orc masks
 That old tunic from your last fantasy larp

3.4.2 Conventions by Situation

Another kind of convention is that which is tied to specific real-life situations and traditions—for example the school yard, a family dinner or a job interview. Interaction codes derived from such situations are often quite detailed and easy to follow, since players not only have a clear idea of the conventions involved but have personally lived and experienced these situations. *Tony and Tina’s Wedding* [16], an “interactive theatre” which is a larp by any definition, is a good example of this—actors play the lead roles of Tony and Tina, the “audience” are the wedding guests, and the audience are encouraged to play their parts and interact with the rest of the wedding party. Despite attracting a paying audience with zero experience of role-play or acting, *Tony and Tina’s Wedding* has been a major success, and has been played non-stop since 1988 on three continents.

A relatively recent larp style in Norway relies on situation conventions and only these. Larps such as *Thirteen at the Table* (a family dinner), *The Crisis Meeting* (in an office) and *The Re-Union* (of high school friends) specify only the first name of characters and the situation. Everything else—including back story, last names, personal relations, and which crisis exactly we are talking about—is improvised.

3.4.3 Conventions of Larp Scenes

Finally, larpwright troupes and communities of players almost always have conventions as to what a “larp” is and how it usually is played. In ongoing larp series, interaction codes may develop over time and be easy to pick up for new players who enter the series. In communities where larps are fairly similar, the interaction code of the previous larp easily enters the next one. Whether this is a good or a bad thing depends entirely on what the larpwright desires. If the idea is to provide the local scene with “more of the same”, the scene conventions can be useful and save time in organising the larp. If the idea is to break with tradition, to encourage the creation of content the local scene hasn’t seen before, scene conventions are often a problem that needs to be consciously dealt with.

In Sweden, the country Larpia (“landet lajvien”) describes an interaction code shared by almost all fantasy-genre larps: mysterious strangers with heroic quests sit in the corners of inns, while the peasants happily consume beer and dance the same dances as on the last ten larps they attended, and the Orcs (or whatever name given to the evil humanoids) can be relied on to spoil the party. Once established, Larpia has seemed almost impossible to eradicate no matter how larpwrights specify different worlds, periods, characters, traditions and stories for their larps. At the same time, Larpia allows players to easily join larps with a minimum of preparation.

3.5 INTERACTION CODES BY DESIGN

There are a number of examples of larpwrights creating interaction codes without referencing conventions. While I will list these examples as they relate to specific elements of an interaction code (spoken language, body language etc.), few of the examples mentioned have bothered to define every possible element of an interaction code. Quite often, a single well-defined rule will lead players to adopt assumptions regarding the other aspects as well. An example of the latter is the interaction code of *Dance Macabre* (Solberg and Bardal [85])—primarily established by teaching players Elizabethan ballroom dancing. The polite, codified and subtle movements and atmo-

sphere of the dances ended up pervading the entire larp—including body language (stiff, formal, but gracious), spoken language (stiff, formal with many subtleties), etiquette (with much bowing), stereotypes of narratives (flirtation, a smiling mouth and a poisonous gaze) and diegetic society (formal, gracious, with much going on beneath the surface). The sensibility of 17th century ballroom dancing did not just turn the dance floor into an interesting and unique place for character interactions, but to a certain degree turned the entire larp into a dance floor.

Most interaction codes by design still rely on references, that is they tap into the pool of pre-knowledge that players bring with them, but do so in other ways than by explicitly stating a reference. *Dance Macabre*, for example, was certainly informed by every 15th-19th century period drama the players had seen, and every historical novel they had read.

3.5.1 Spoken Language

The language (including jargon, dialect, slang) that characters speak during a larp can be taught in a number of different ways. One is by simple reference, for example “Cockney”, “Streetwise New Yorker”, “Shakespearean”, “Aramaic”. Another is through dictionaries and language examples—“‘schpaa’ means ‘cool’, as in ‘that movie was soo schpaa.’” Language might also be taught through implied messages—by communicating to the players in the language their characters are expected to speak.

Since languages, dialects and accents are frequently connected to cultural conventions and stereotypes, the impact of using language as an interaction rule goes further than just influencing the actual talking at the larp. English spoken with a strong, but fake, German accent has for a half-century of Hollywood been associated with any kind of devious evil—the Nazis, mad scientists, vampires and international super-terrorists. Cockney brings the mind to the English working-class, with its pub culture and aggressive football fans, while the Queen’s “posh” English conveys the snobbishness, arrogance and dry wit associated with that country’s upper class. The language of Shakespeare and the King James Bible brings epics to mind, pondering existential questions and speaking in metaphor. And so it goes.

A powerful example of the use of spoken language in constructing interaction codes is Orwell’s “NewSpeak”. In George Orwell’s novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, a future totalitarian state changes the English language to become simpler and consist of fewer words. By removing nuance, adding new words and forbidding others, the Party seeks to make it impossible to think, much less express, thoughts critical of the state. The same method has been used in larps—by removing and re-defining words, play-

ers are forced to think, act and express themselves in ways consistent with the diegetic culture.

PanoptiCorp by Irene Tanke et al. [94], set in a satirical present-day advertising agency, used as its pre-larp information only a sign-up form and a dictionary of “CorpSpeak” (office slang). The 40-50 words of CorpSpeak, while providing factual information about the corporation, also made it impossible for characters to talk about anything without expressing the social darwinist world-view of their workplace. Normal people were “munds” or mundanes, “corpsters” (*PanoptiCorp* employees) were by definition not munds but could be sorted into “Hot” (productive) and “Not” (not so productive). Something “now” wasn’t trendy any longer, while “NexSec” (Next Second) was the only acceptable way of talking about hip and cool (“cool” was a really mundy word). The result was a larp described as “a brilliant mindfuck” [101], where players spent days after the larp re-finding their normal pattern of thought [101, 37].

3.5.2 Body Language

Body language may be taught through written examples, though in most cases actual demonstration and practice have proved to be more effective methods to establish this aspect of interaction codes. A successful example of constructing body language at larps could be seen with the aforementioned Norwegian larp *Dance Macabre* (Solberg and Bardal [85]). Another good example from the same troupe was the body language taught to slaves at *Amaranth III: Nemeth* (Solberg, Bardal and Jacobsen [86]), set in ancient Rome. Slaves were forbidden to make eye contact with free people. This made it almost impossible for slave characters to assert themselves in any way, and made it equally impossible for players of slave characters to act anything but submissive.

Another example is *Amerika* (Grasmo and Evang [38]), where players of the central characters developed both their characters and body language both through three weekends of physical theatre exercises. A character, in this system, was initially its movement/body language and its relations to other characters. The character’s history and spoken language were developed at a later point in the process. The exercises allowed for the use of strongly visible body language at *Amerika*, and many interactions were carried out non-verbally.

3.5.3 Stereotypical Characters and Stories

Stereotypes of characters that are likely to exist in the diegesis may both influence a player’s interpretation of her own character, and how she interprets and relates to characters played by others. Such stereotypes are perhaps more easily constructed

with genre references—everyone is familiar with the stereotypical soap opera witch—but can be defined using descriptions of class, profession, nationality etc. For example: “Norwegians are hobbits on speed” or “In this world barbers are both barbers and surgeons, who perform amputations and coarse medicine. A grizzly kind of blood-lust and black humour seems necessary to the profession. Mothers warn their children against spending time with barbers.” The clan “archetypes” of *Vampire: The Masquerade* [41] are a good example of such constructed stereotypes in role-playing.

The word “story” is a mine-field in larp theory, as there are many divergent opinions on what a story is and whether it is desirable for larpers to improvise/enact one (see for example Pohjola [79] and Westlund [99]). I use the word here in the simple sense of “a meaningful chain of events”, where the entire chain in sequence yields a greater meaning than its individual components. The imprisonment of Robert Doe, the discovery of a blood-stained axe, and the murder of Baroness Thatcher yields a greater meaning when Robert Doe commits the murder early in the larp, Sherlock Holmes fiends the weapon in the middle and Mr. Doe is imprisoned in the end. In a murder mystery larp, this story will be stereotypical—murderers leave clues, clues get discovered, crimes get punished. Players will be inspired to attempt to follow this pattern of events by leaving clues, hunting for clues and holding back the dramatic revelation until the end. The example of *Röd Måne* (see “Conventions of genre and reference”, above) shows how players may adhere to perceived typical chains of events.

Stereotypical stories follow easily from references, but seem to me to be much harder to construct from the ground up. Techniques like fateplay or narrative puzzle structures are not elements of an interaction code—they are not assumptions held by players, but structures planned by the larpwright. The pre-larp telling of stories as inspiration to the players may be of use here, as may techniques such as writing a character as a short story—a technique used at the legendary Swedish larp *Knappnålshuvudet* [59]. The overall theme (as opposed to genre) of the larp—is it for example a tragic story? A comedic one? A tale of love and redemption? Of the fall from grace?—may also have an influence on what players see as a plausible and typical story.

3.5.4 Etiquette and Social Rituals

Etiquette is the rules of politeness, of proper conduct, which more than anything exist to save strangers from embarrassing themselves or each other. Friends, in any culture, tend not to worry too much about etiquette, while any more formal occasion—from saying hello to eating a dinner—usually has rules of appropriate behaviour. All cultures perform rituals. Some rituals, such as the hand-shake and the prayer before

eating, also function as etiquette, while others—such as transitional rites (confirmation, graduation, wedding) have a central societal and personal function. Social rituals and etiquette tend to be powerful expressions of the culture to which they belong, and are useful in larps as they establish patterns of appropriate behaviour. Etiquette and rituals are also easy to teach—through written text and demonstrations.

Consider, for example, the manner of greeting. Is hand-shaking appropriate? A bow or curtsy? Which words are said, and what do they imply about the relationship between those who meet? Or the manner of eating—with hands, with knife, with knife and fork? When does the meal begin? Whenever you arrive at the table, or when a specific person (The cook? The head of the household? A ranking guest?) welcomes you?

Etiquette can also be a powerful way of expressing hierarchy. *Wa—Forandinger* (Gunnerud et al. [39]) was a semi-historical larp set in Japan at the time of the arrival of ambassadors from the Chinese T'ang court. Players of Chinese characters noticed how their way of greeting also established a keen consciousness of hierarchy: one held one open hand over the other, a closed fist. The distance between the open palm and the fist signified the distance in rank between you and the one you greeted—the greater the distance between the hands, the greater the formal distance between you. It doubled as a sign of familiarity—even if the difference in rank was great, friendship and kinship would decrease the distance between palm and fist, person and person. The Japanese characters of the same larp followed a less subtle rule : one was never to stand taller than ones superior. Most players became adept at a kind of movement in-between crawling and walking, so as always keep their head low. These codes established hierarchies in both camps, but also visualized the sophistication of the T'ang embassy in comparison with the somewhat less civilized Japanese.

Arriving in contemporary China, I made my first cultural blunder by lifting my glass to toast with a person twice my age. When toasting with someone who outranks you (typically the elder generation), you are supposed to hold your glass lower than the other person. After becoming aware of this rule, I also became conscious about rank, always trying to figure out which of the co-diners ranked higher than myself. After a while, this becomes second nature, and the Confucian hierarchy enters your subconsciousness due to a ritual as simple and informal as toasting. I had absorbed one rule of the interaction code of 21st century China.

3.6 CONCLUSIONS

3.6.1 Fighting Democracy in Larps

The idea that giving an explicit genre or reference will benefit role-playing is certainly not a new one in larp circles. Still, the concept of interaction codes goes further by comparing the play encouraged by references to play encouraged otherwise, by providing conceptual tools to look more closely at what these references do, and by discussing tools to accomplish the same without references.

One practical application of this theory is handling the common problem of “larp democracy”. The problem is that no matter how barbaric and brutal a larp society is supposed to be, no matter how much emphasis is placed on hostilities between two factions, larps that are not played for combat far too often end up finding civilized common-sense solutions to the irreconcilable differences and beliefs that were meant to drive the larp’s dramaturgy.

This problem probably has several causes—but one of them is that players simply lack the fore-knowledge of how to play superstitious bloodthirsty barbarians, any culture other than their own, or indeed any person with a heart-felt grievance against a pretended foe. For example, at every larp I have played where legal issues have surfaced, the legal system takes on an uncanny resemblance to the legal system portrayed in TV lawyer dramas like *L.A. Law* or *Ally McBeal*. That is even if the larp is supposed to be set in Medieval Europe, where enduring prolonged and potentially lethal torture was a commonly accepted way for a suspect to prove their innocence.

Courtroom dramas are watched by many, the courtroom provides excellent role-playing possibilities, and their patterns are easy to adopt to a larp. For this reason, the *Ally McBeal* interaction code comes sneaking in to any larp where a trial occurs. Larp democracy, in this case, can be explained as a function of an interaction code—and can be similarly countered by establishing a different interaction code. Two rules that could help are:

1. You are what happens to you, if someone has bad luck then (neighbours will explain to each other) it’s because they are bad people.
2. Stories of the rightly accused, who reveal their satanic crimes only after sufficient amounts of torture.

The same analysis and solution can be applied to other of our over-Westernized assumptions, such as the idea that majority vote means anything (tell the story of the Serfs who voted to stop planting crops and then starved to death) or the idea of

negotiation as a way to settle disputes (establish the pattern that a negotiation table is usually an excellent stage for assassinations of the gullible).

3.6.2 Why Gygax Succeeded where Grotowski Failed

Interaction codes may also help explain one of the great mysteries of role-playing history. During the last century or so, several avant-garde directors and theorists of the theatre have attempted to break through the barrier between “actors” and “audience”. While these experiments have been more or less successful in artistic terms, none have succeeded in turning their experiments into a self-sustained alternative to the stage theatre.

The establishment of interacting drama as a genuine alternative to the stage or film was first accomplished, with far less resources and recognition, by role-players in the 1970s—people who for the most part were neither actors nor artists but fans of genre literature (fantasy, science fiction) and war-gaming; fans who sought to immerse themselves more deeply in their work of choice, with a community of like-minded people.

What the theatre avant-garde did not have, but the early role-players had, were interaction codes. *Dungeons and Dragons* [40] tapped into the powerful set of clichés, stereotypes and languages of J.R.R. Tolkien and his plagiarists in literature and gaming. Unlike the participants of avant-garde interactive theatres, the early role-players did not need to pause to ask themselves “What is this? What do I do now? What does the director expect me to do?”. The first role-players knew very well what you do when a group of Orcs appear: you shout a war-cry in Elvish, raise your sword, and charge head first into battle.

The Theatre Connection

Kristine Flood

Role-playing games and theatre share a strong connection, not only in the performative elements they both share but in the origins of role-play itself. This paper explores the development of role-play, including the origins of the term “role-play” itself, its existence and meaning prior to the invention of rpg’s, and illustrates the theatre connection. The exploration of the connection between role-playing games and theatre presents benefits to both forms. Role-playing games can be as useful for actor training as well as an entertaining escape from reality. The creative escape, essential to the form, is intrinsic within the dramatic components of role-play. Embracing those dramatic elements can enhance both the artistic and imaginative bounds of role-play.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the creation of Dungeons and Dragons in the 1970’s, the term “role-playing game” has become an established cultural definition of its own. The term can be found in most notable dictionaries and is well known by all those who game, in nearly any fashion, and many who do not. While the “game” half of that title is often the characteristically defining attribute used in discussing role-playing games, my experience and research shows the truly defining aspect lies in the element of role-play over the concept of “game” alone.

Over the past few years, a movement has been growing among dedicated role-players to have role-playing games acknowledged as a social art form. Of course, art, in some manner, has always been present in the development of rpg’s and larp’s, from the illustrations and book designs to the story and world concepts that are present in almost any rpg. Creativity is also a prerequisite of role-playing games, in both tabletop and live action, for players and storytellers or gamemasters alike. This creativity can be said to set role-playing games apart from other, more traditional game styles. In

his book “The Fantasy Role Playing Game” Daniel Mackay [64] examines role-playing games from the viewpoint of the performing arts. He declares, from the title through the end of the text, that role-playing games are a new performance art.

While there has been an increasing academic and theoretical interest in role-playing games over the past few years, the majority of those studies have been from the social or psychological point of view. Only Mackay sought to focus entirely on the performative aspects of role-playing games from a theatrical point of view. Yet the role-play connection to theatre is not new. It is at the very heart the formation of rpg’s, from the term, “role-playing game,” itself.

4.2 THE ORIGINS OF ROLE-PLAY

Role-play itself was developed from drama techniques. The origin of the concept itself may seem irrelevant, however it is vital in reflecting upon the nature of role-playing games and the choice of role-play as the defining aspect of the game type. The original intention of role-play, as a conceptual form, was psychoanalytic based, to allow patients to express feelings or try out new behaviors in a safe, structured environment. The incorporated elements of drama, of theatre technique, provided for an immersion that could make the role-played scene believable at an emotional level. The objective was to create a catharsis within the therapeutic setting [56].

Catharsis was and is a term well-connected with theatre, since the time of the ancient Greeks. Before psychoanalysis adopted dramatic methods, the term was only known to theatre. Catharsis, from the Greek Katharsis, is what Aristotle referred to as purification. In his work, “Poetics,” Aristotle introduced Catharsis as the desired process of experiencing drama in theatre. A sudden emotional breakdown or climax of overwhelming feelings of pity, sorrow, or any extreme change in emotion, catharsis results in the renewal, restoration and revitalization for living [3]. Coined in reference to defining the communal need for fine theatre, as seen by the Greek philosopher, the obviously appropriate necessity of catharsis in psychotherapy became apparent early in its development. This led to the natural adoption of dramatic forms within psychotherapy, creating psychodrama [56].

What does any of this have to do with role-playing games? The creation of the concept of role-play, as it is known today, came from the development of psychodrama. The creation of psychodrama was cultivated from a theatre base [56]. That is where the concept of “structured make-believe” entered the post-adolescent world outside of the theatre. Before then, the acting out of make-believe characters and scenes was seen appropriate only as child’s play or within the realm of theatre. Role-playing games

opened the doors for positive creative expression, for play, in a moderately socially acceptable form beyond childhood.

At its base, the title defines the form. Role-play, as a concept, began with, and originated from, theatre. Psychology coined the term, but the meaning for the expression lies in its original dramatic form. The development of this concept is a fundamental part in the development of role-playing games that is sadly over-looked. Perhaps imaginative games would have evolved, on their own, without the concept of role-play entering the common vernacular. However, the term “role-play” itself, the term giving to describe the concept of adopting imaginative roles, would not have existed without the psychologist adoption of dramatic forms. The history of rpg’s seldom fail to mention a connection to combat simulation games. However, role-play is the primary term chosen to describe the gaming form, and role-play came originated with the theatre form.

4.3 THEATRE GAMES AND ROLE-PLAY

Ten years before Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson published the first edition of *Dungeons & Dragons*, a theatre practitioner; educator, director, and actress by the name of Viola Spolin published her own book on games, namely theatre games. Spolin’s book, “*Improvisation for the Theater*,” [89] published in 1963, included over 200 games designed to encourage a new development in theatre, improvisation. Before Spolin’s work, improvisation was not a word often used in connection with “formal” theatre. Of course, the concept was always there, in some form or another. Since the first child dressed up as some imaginative character to play out the role in front of their friends there was improvisation. But the formalized practice, if it can be called that, of improvisation did not come into being until Spolin codified her method for using games to teach and open creativity within theater and education.

The term “role-play” is synonymous with Spolin’s method of theatre improvisation, and has been so a decade before any gaming publishers connected the term to games. The word “role-play” itself, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* [75], means “the acting out of a given situation...” it is the “the adoption or enactment of a role.” That “acting” and “enactment” are theatre terms, goes without saying. That the creators and publishers of role-playing games chose to use theatre related terms to describe their creation must not be overlooked. Without “role-play” there could be no “role-playing games” and without theatre there could be no role-play.

Of course, I am not the first to suggest a connection between theatre and role-playing games. White Wolf Publishing [100], the publishers of the first marketed set

of larp rules, entitled their publication series “Mind’s Eye Theatre.” The connection there is obvious, and so requires no further examination here. What is important to note, however, is that White Wolf was not inventive or ingenious in their choice of title. They were doing no more than stating the obvious. However, neither the gaming community nor the theatre community seems eager to embrace. One need simply go to a gaming convention and call their event “theatre” to see that reluctance demonstrated. The most common responses can be distilled down to “it is not art, it is just a game,” as if being artistic is somehow shameful. Yet, the same individuals who fight for their “just game” status can spend over a fifth of their week, every week, involved in role-playing persist including writing intricate backgrounds for characters which they must act out to play.

Oddly enough, the theatre community’s opinion is very much the same. Those of a theatrical background that do know of role-playing games, can not take the creativity involved in role-playing games seriously because it is “just a game.” Even among those theatre practitioners that play role-playing games, and there are many, will not speak of their game time with the same respect as the time they spend on numerous and expensive acting classes. This intrigued me as many of the improvisational theatre classes I attended reminded me of role-playing games, in terms of the final results they achieved. So I decided to try an experiment.

Beginning just after the year 2001, I became involved in running a role-playing game that involved several theatre majors in college. As acting seemed the same to me, whether it was on stage or role-playing in activity room at my friend’s apartment complex, I arranged the game I was running to emphasize the role-play and story aspects of the game over the mechanics. After a few months of play, the attendees of my game attained more and better roles through theatre auditions than they had before. Whether or not the game actually had a direct effect, the players attributed their success to what they learned through the game.

This inspired me to perform a more formal experiment in 2005, while pursuing my Masters degree. As part of an experimental theatre class I conducted two games, a Spolin created theatre game and a Dungeons and Dragons style role-playing game. The games were run back to back, with the same group. The group was composed of role-players that were not theatre trained as well as theatre trained professionals. Participants filled out anonymous questionnaires before and after the event for comparison and recording purposes. By reviewing the questionnaires afterward it became clear that, to participants of both backgrounds, the games were not just similar, they were the same. Theatre games are far more structured in terms of rules or directions, and less structured in terms of pre-defined character or dialogue than most

role-players would expect. Likewise, rpg's are less game-like and more creative than those traditionally theatre trained would expect. Essentially, rpg's are theatre games with dice/rules structure to resolve actions that can not be resolved through role-play itself. While the structure of the games themselves vary from formal theatre games to rpg's, the experience itself is the same.

4.4 ROLE-PLAY VS GAMING

The element of role-play is the defining difference between the genre of role-playing games and any other style of game. It is also in role-play that the creative and artistic elements of the style most often assert themselves. Whether it be tabletop or larp, the combination of story and characterization are unique to role-playing games. Most other forms of gaming contain a definite end, a sense of competition defined by a winning condition. Role-playing games do not have such clear guidelines. They are created, in the same manner as theatre games, in a structure that supports and encourages the imagination. "A Game of Thrones" gives an excellent definition of role-play in the introduction to their rpg.

"For many people a role-playing game (rpg) is a 'mature' or 'advanced' version of the games we used to play as kids such as 'House', 'Cops and Robbers', 'Monsters-and-Maidens' or 'Come-into-my-Castle'. Each player creates a character that he or she wishes to play (appropriately called a Player Character), and endeavors to view the unfolding events of the game through the eyes of that character. The character's outlook on life is a separate and distinct from that of the player, though at times they may be similar. Rpg's are not table-top board games - the game takes place in the imagination of the players, occasionally assisted by visual aids such as pictures, figures, maps, and other props. Role-playing can also be likened to improvisational theatre where everyone involved in the game must respond to the actions or decisions of the other players, but must do so from their character's perspective (called playing 'in character'). These character-character interactions are often the primary focus of the entire game, and the heart of the role-playing experience."

The heart of the role-playing experience lies in the character interplay, the acting out of characters, within the course of the game. No other form of gaming strives to develop acting through character interactions. Rpg's do not have a specific end or

winning condition. They exist to engage the imagination, within a structured form. It is, essentially, grown up version of “let’s pretend.”

According to rpg history, Dungeons and Dragons was in large part inspired by the popular war games of the time. The rigidity of the historically based miniature war simulation games restrained imagination. Role-playing games grew out of the desire for more creative freedom. Character and story options grew as the pre-set maps, miniatures, and scenarios were left behind. Re-enactment became less important than acting as story and character became the central focus of the game.

4.5 TO BE THEATRE OR NOT TO BE THEATRE, WHY SHOULD IT MATTER?

Why do people play role-playing games? Certainly, some use it as a creative outlet alone. Many seek the social interaction. Overall, however, role-playing games are attractive because they are fun. Role-playing games allow the participants to escape from the conflict, frustrations, disappointments, stresses, and the various other minor horrors of daily life. It is the doorway through which another world can be reached. A world in which anything is possible and the unsolvable can be solved. It is a vacation from reality that, unlike chemical or addictive escapes, does not hamper or destroy the positive aspects of reality when the escape wears off.

Why do people go to the theatre? Aside from the various social encouragements, the average individual enjoys a movie or a play because it is a departure from reality. It is the doorway through which another world can be reached. A world in which anything is possible and the unsolvable can be solved. It is the catharsis, of which Aristotle speaks, that we humans crave.

That is why the theatre connection is important to role-playing games. Role-play takes the theatre catharsis a step further. Rather than being witness to the story unfolding, as an audience member, in role-play the story unfolds with you. Rpg’s create an environment of total immersion in another world. Just as the actor loses their own identity to the role they play, for the duration of the scene, so too does the player set aside their own personality for the character in the game they play. Embracing and developing the dramatic elements birthed from the theatre furthers the shared escape desirable in rpg’s. The more complete the immersion in the character, the more convincing the portrayal, the deeper the catharsis. Furthermore, such enhanced development not only enhances the game experience, but it also pays tribute to role-play’s theatrical origins, which can aid to further legitimize role-playing games as a socialized art form.

I have conducted games, in which character development and acting were stressed, where players have been moved to tears within their character in a manner in which they themselves would never be so effected. Actors work for years, spending untold fortunes on classes and training, to achieve such a level of character immersion. Role-play lends itself far easier to such an experience because the words and actions come from the character, rather than creating the character, as is the case in most scripted theatre. Rpg's are, at their roots, a structured form of improvisation with a story that is far more intricate and developed than the story elements within more traditionally theatre games.

Recognizing the connection between role-playing games and theatre also acknowledges the demand for creativity within the form. Creativity is essential for a positive, enhancing form of escape. That we are creative, that we can build and develop outside ourselves, is what defines human beings as human. Apes do not build bridges or skyscrapers, they do not invent or create, and that is what defines the human animal. In his book, *On Creativity* [11], David Bohm explores the human need for creativity.

“... the artist, the musical composer, the architect, the scientist all feel a fundamental need to discover and create something new that is whole and total, harmonious and beautiful. Few ever get a chance to try to do this, and even fewer actually manage to do it. Yet, deep down, it is probably what very large numbers of people in all walks of life are seeking when they attempt to escape the daily humdrum routine by engaging in every kind of entertainment, excitement, stimulation, change of occupation, and so forth, through which they ineffectively try to compensate for the unsatisfying narrowness and mechanicalness of their lives.”

Many who play rpg's seek to escape the “mechanicalness of their lives.” Gary Alan Fine reiterates in his book, “Shared Fantasy,” [30] that gamers game to “escape from social pressure,” to aid in “increasing one's sense of personal control,” and to aid “in dealing with people.” As with theatre goes since Aristotle, they seek a catharsis through the process of acting the story rather than just observing it. The more theater aware role-players become, the more creative the outlet can be.

4.6 FINAL SUMMARY

The concept of role-play originated with psychodrama, an outgrowth of the theatrical dramatic form. From its title alone, role-playing games assert their creation connec-

tions to theatre principles. It is the element of role-play that separates rpg's from other forms of gaming, and that separation is bound to theatre principles.

Within this connection to theatre lies an unlimited potential for creativity. Theatre games, which are closely related to role-playing games, have been used to assist corporate development, train managers, teach children, and improve social skills along with their primary aim of training actors. Role-playing games are already in use as teaching aides, the potential to teach acting, in a manner not yet explored with the professional theatre, lies just beneath the surface.

However, just as theatre games are still games, embracing the dramatic creative potential does not threaten the entertainment value of role-play. Quite the opposite is true. Human beings crave creativity. Creativity is what separates humans from all other animals. This is the true gift the theatre form can grant its descendant, role-play. The gift of a readily reachable means to the creative expression humans crave. By embracing its theatre roots, role-playing games identify themselves as a creative escape. Unlike other forms of entertainment, where an audience bears witness to the creativity of others but does not act themselves, role-playing expresses imagination of its participants, making a game of an art form and an art form of a game.

To Live Happily Ever After—Techniques for Ending a Larp

Ada Fredelius

A look at how larps are usually ended, and how they should be ended. This article mainly focuses on larp organisation, but is hopefully interesting for players as well.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Young Romeo Capulet lies stiff and cold in the vaults of the cathedral. Juliet, choking on her tears leans in for a last kiss. Then a guy in a Prince Valiant haircut and a silly white collar enters the scene, shouting: Okay, that's it, the play ends here!

Why haven't anyone seen this version of *Romeo and Juliet*? Simply because Shakespeare, unlike many larpers realised that the best of plays or games can be ruined if it isn't given a proper ending. The goal of this article is to prove the importance of game endings. The beginning of a game is always a critical point. One of the reasons why so many game-starts are postponed might be the simple fact that a larp cannot start to disappoint its players until it has actually begun. The beginning of larps has, on the Swedish larp scene, gone from a simple "the game starts now, start acting!" to a slow descent into the game where the first part of the game often works as a way of letting the players slowly go into character.

The endings of larps are usually not, at least in Sweden, as thoroughly thought through as their starts. For many larp-organisers the ending of their game is the least of their problems. Once you have reached that point, the game is all over anyway, right? True of course, but the ending is also the last chance to make a good impression, it is the part that sets the players' attitude for the after party, the de-roling and their

first judgement of the game. Therefore the endings of larps are just as important to players and organisers as their beginnings.

I will now take you through some of the common ways of ending larps, mainly in Sweden today. I will discuss pros and cons of the different methods and when to use them.

5.2 SUDDEN DEATH

The *Sudden Death* technique is most common in fantasy games, in Norway and Sweden, where it usually isn't combined with a de-roling of any kind. The game ends at an agreed-upon time with an organiser breaking the game by announcing that “the larp is now over”. The players are left to chat, take pictures and pack.

This kind of ending might work at games where there is no need for de-roling and where the players aren't so immersed that they feel disturbed by such a sudden break. If you need to clear out the game area real quick, this might be a good way to end the game. If you wish to have some kind of post game activity, even if it isn't de-roling, this technique is not the way to finish your game. When a game is broken in such a sudden way, the player's concentration breaks as well. With this kind of ending you can't expect your players to stay focused. Also, as recently mentioned in a discussion about larp endings on the Norwegian website laiv.org, this ending might not even reach all the players, because they are out of earshot.

5.3 CHOOSE THE RED PILL

With this technique, the larp ends individually whenever a player chooses to perform a certain action, for example to leave a room. The game will still end at approximately the same time for all players, since the players will eventually be forced to do the action and the action is not possible to perform before a certain time.

This technique was used in the urban fantasy game *Moira* by Karin Tidbeck and Anna Ericson [95]. The game ending was set as a trial where fairies were to decide the future of humankind. At this trial two of the leading characters, Nicor and Nerthus, had died and were laid out on a fairy version of *lit de parade*. The game ended with each player saying farewell to these two characters, laying a vote about whether or not humans would be allowed in the future and finally leaving both the game and the room.

Mika Lojonen, participant of *Moira* says:

For me, as I like well executed transition rituals in fiction, the death rites and the other characters' goodbyes—and quiet leaving of the place—the ending was extremely good. If the characters hadn't had time to bond with Nicor and Nerthus or if the players of Nicor and Nerthus had not been brilliant, the ending would have worked less well; not only the characters had to care about them, but the *players* had to understand their meaning as well.

Another version of this technique was used at *Mellan Himmel och Hav* [102], by Emma Wieslander and Katarina Björk. The players went to bed in character and woke up as themselves. This way each player could stay up until they felt that they were done with the gaming and then round off their larp by going to bed.

A problem which might occur with this kind of ending is that some players will have the urge to squeeze as much time as possible out of a larp. Thus, when they notice that time is running out, they will try to keep the larp alive artificially. If you choose this method, you must find a way to make such players stop on time.

Another problem might be that when players are about to end their larp they go into a twilight zone where they aren't sure about whether or not the other players have stopped acting. Therefore it might be a good idea to leave the larp both mentally and physically. It is easier to draw the line between in-game and off-game where there is a physical distinction.

When using *Choose the Red Pill*, the collective atmosphere of the players is harder to set, since everyone ends their larp individually. If the larp has focused on the experience of the characters as a group, rather than the characters' stories as individuals, a collective ending is a better choice. This method makes the ending slower and can work well as the start of a de-roling. Players are still focused on the game, and since everyone gets to finish at their own pace there is less stress involved.

5.4 TIME TO GO

This technique of ending larps involves a pre-instructed mass scene. One example of this method was the WWII larp *Vreden* [Ed. The Rage], by Emil Boss, Mikael Ericson, Mikael Gillersand and Emma Öhrström [12]. At the game end the soldiers of the Red Army platoon that had been portrayed in the larp were taken outside, marched into the artificial mist and shot.

Advantages of using this method is that the players will experience the ending together, so it is easier to set the collective tone.

“Since *Vreden* was a larp about a group of characters, rather than about several individuals, a mass scene was a good way to end their collective story”, says Emil Boss, organiser. “Also, it was important for the moral of this Stalinist history lesson that no character could reach a happy ending.”

On the negative side, as this game ending might interrupt scenes, it leaves less possibility to round off your own larp than *Choose the Red Pill*.

The *Time To Go* method is an effective way to give your players a last impression of the game that they can all share. Also the “twilight zone” mentioned above will not occur here. The larp ends at the same place and time, so there will be less waiting around. With this method it is easier to smoothly go from game end to de-roling with players who are still focused on the game.

5.5 CONCLUSION

Sudden death is not really an ending, but rather a break with no connection to the game. *Choose the Red Pill* makes individual last scenes possible, but might be confusing since there is no clear end of the acting. *Time To Go* gives the organiser a chance of letting the players finish in the same mood, with the same experience, but might interrupt other scenes or hurry the game too much.

It might also be a good idea to start and finish the game in similar ways. If you’ve used music, monologues or staged scenes for the game start, use them again for the finish. This way the players will feel familiar with the technique and their experience of the game will become more uniform.

No matter which method you use, think it through! When planning the last part of you larp, ask yourself the following questions:

- Should the game end be a collective or an individual experience?
- Which mode do I wish to set for the post-game activities?
- Will my ending clash with the rest of my story?

*For there never was a story of more woe
As this of Juliet and her Romeo.*

Acknowledgements Thanks to Tor Kjetil Edland and Mika Lopenen.

The Character, the Player and Their Shared Body

Tova Gerge & Gabriel Widing

What happens to our bodies when we give them to characters and place them in new environments and situations? Where do these memories go? The aim of this essay is to write a genealogy of muscles and organs; to try out visions and conflicting thoughts concerning the body in play.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Live role-players put their bodies at the disposal of the destinies of the characters. Thereby, their bodies are also at the disposal of the aims of the organisers. New experiences are imprinted onto the organism of the participant, and new desires and aversions are born out of these experiences: the brain is pulling in one direction, the stomach just wants to quit, the heart is rushing. As the motivation for playing lies in the body, so do reactions in the game.

Our starting point is that each player has interests in his or her character—sexual desires, social awards, psychological challenges, need for confirmation, etc. Yet the choice of character is often disguised by false neutrality. A character's choice directed by personal interest, seems somehow dirty and suspicious. “I can play anything” is a common expression when it comes to picking a character. It is shameful to want, shameful to choose.

Within each player culture, there is a norm for what thoughts and variations are acceptable. This norm might be good in terms of controlling and moderating our behaviour. The tradition of some interests, for example “psychological challenges”, being more legitimate than others means that, in practice, a controversial choice of character will only be welcome if the player has a billion brilliant intellectual reasons to explain it with. The success rate in passing this social test is entirely individual,

which is why we wish to describe these interests on a structural level rather than an individual.

If we can identify which desires one might be gratifying by entering a live role-play, we can also produce scenarios that are fulfilling specific needs or interests. In other words: scenarios and characters that make the greatest possible impact on their participants, and vice versa.

6.2 STORIES OF BODIES

Live role-playing has for some years explored the physical limitations of the participant. Fatland's and Tanke's *Europa* and *Panopticon* as well as Wieslander's and Björk's *Mellan himmel och hav* [Between heaven and sea] are examples of scenarios that transgressed physical borders, hence reorganising the body of the participant. Through these examples, we want to show how game mechanics with a real physical effect on the participants can be used to manipulate/change standpoints and living patterns in a very concrete way. Live role-playing is a powerful tool, but despite some radical pretensions, the questions of how and why we use it are still surrounded by silence—especially in the case of so-called apolitical events. Yet, even the sweetest weekend entertainment in the local fantasy world operates on the same physical level as the following examples.

6.3 PHYSICAL POLITICS OF EUROPA

Many of the European wars have been preceded and rendered possible by strong nationalistic movements. *Europa* focused on what would have happened if the Nordic countries and their ethnic groups would have ended up in a conflict similar to the one which occurred on the Balkan countries in the 90's. During the preparation and pre-games of the scenario, national identities were heavily emphasised. The players were encouraged to feel strongly for their homelands. They sang national hymns and made up positively charged memories connected to places and their native language. At the same time prejudice about the characteristics of the other nationalities was enhanced.

Europa began with the escape from the characters' homelands to a peaceful fictive Balkan where they spent four days at a refugee centre. These were days of numb chill, humiliating health examinations and meticulously observed meal times, that could, ultimately be more than two hours postponed. Here, Swedes, Norwegians and Finns were forced together into small spaces. All constructed prejudice in the became real as

the majority chose to trust only their own countrymen, pushing the others away.

The half week at the centre was just a representation of the months and years real-life that refugees spend waiting for an answer from the migration board. But four days was enough to connect language, politics and bodily memories to each other. The players are remembered of their experiences in the fictive refugee centre every single time a press item about increasing waiting times or upcoming deportations appears in the news paper.

The purpose of the game—to direct attention to a Europe where even “legal” refugees are sometimes treated like animals, and where the alternative (escape from the bureaucracy live sans-papier) hardly offers any stability or liberty of movement—found its way in through the very skins of the participants. Exposing themselves to a violence that was consented on beforehand, a direct identification was created between the players and their characters, an affinity rather than feeling of compassion. This affinity was enforced with the tools of fiction.

Europa also worked to create an aversion towards the organisation of societies as nations. It demonstrated with all possible clarity that everyone that does not fit into the picture of “the people” is in a tricky situation where conflict becomes ethnicised. This aversion was coded into the body through experience—an anxiety rising in the stomach when national flags are hoisted or when acquaintances start to talk of feeling pride for their nationality. The politics ended up in the players back-bones.

6.4 EROGENITY DISLOCATED

Mellan himmel och hav [Between heaven and sea] deconstructed sexuality and gender during several preparatory workshops. Individual expression was consciously disguised behind turbans and wide clothing. Hands and arms were recoded into erogenous zones; sexually neutral parts of the body became the only allowed tools for intimate interaction. The players were trained to look at what all people had in common and to find a beauty in every single person through concentrating on bodily aspects less occupied by media images than tits and ass. When a hand touches another hand it does not matter how it looks; when gazes meet, faces blur.

The participants were suddenly thrown into situations where they had physical contact with people they would normally, for one reason or another, never touch. As a consequence, very many of the participants were smitten with a poly-sexual analysis of human relations—and they took it into practise, because they had experienced that these ideas functioned. A big number of break-ups, amorous adventures, and attempts to establish new norms followed among the players. Heterosexuality and monogamy

were undermined among the participants to the benefit of polygamy and a general questioning of gender.

The common experience contradicting many of the unspoken “truths” of this society, created a strong feeling of connection, belonging and insight between the participants—probably something quite like what is felt by people with a new found identity within a cult. A part of this phenomenon was that the ex-participants identified themselves as a homogeneous group; an “ensemble”. Individuals outside the group were sometimes considered as social threats that needed to be checked or approved. The identity trips were many and wobbly, and three years later the consequences of this scenario are as obvious as ever, even if the sectarianism is fading.

6.5 SURVEILLANCE AND PRECARIETY

Panopticon was a scenario taking place in the glamorised advertising business. The players took on roles that had reached the top in public relations, design, copy-writing and lobby-ism. They were all hired by a company—*Panopticon*—which had taken the toyotic production model to its extreme.

As the globalisation of economy progresses, toyotism is to an even greater extent replacing the classic fordistic production model. Toyotism is distinguished by new forms of internal organisation and teams of multi-functional workers with a relatively high level of local influence. Management by objectives replaces strictly hierarchic directives. Repression is disguised behind internal competition between work-teams and individual workers, relating to each other in a shifting system of clients and providers. Permanent employment and fixed wages are replaced by a situation where the payment is related to the profit of the company and the threat of being fired is constantly present. Rankings and transparent structures lure workers to top performance, ideally to the degree where performance and identity merge.

The *Panopticon* narrative hit right at the core of the restless identities of the oo’s, and created a social structure that forced the participants into hectic competition. This included the value of being an effective worker as well as being an object of sexual attraction. To optimise the possibilities of topping the rankings of the day, everyone did everything within the walls of the office; ate, slept, fucked, entertained themselves and worked out. Everything became a part of the job. In a few hours, the participants were transformed from lazy slacker youngsters to super sharp workaholics. Constant sexual confirmation and shots of adrenalin from heavy deadline surfing kept them awake through the nights. They were working like dogs—but for what?

The name Panopticon refers to Jeremy Bentham’s idea about creating humanistic

prisons in accordance to a “panoptic” model. Michel Foucault have written philosophical theories concerning the concept. The architecture of the prisons made it potentially possible for the supervisors to look into any given cell at any given time. Since the prisoners are aware that they might be watched, they internalise the gaze of the supervisor. In the ideal case, the supervisor is no longer needed; the prisoner does the supervising himself. At *PanoptiCorp* the panopticon model was decentralised; the players were surveying each other to the point that they were surveying themselves.

The constantly watching gazes forced a cynicism into the fictive company’s fictive marketing campaigns, a cynicism that few players thought themselves capable of—no strategy too extreme, no cows too holy. As a consequence, the motives behind “real” advertising became highly suspicious to the participants. When the players, unlike the ordinary advertiser, could move outside the mechanics of the office after a couple of days, they experience frustration about how much creative energy had disappeared for no good. It was obvious that anyone who wished could be a young, hot body in the service of new capitalism. Left in the muscles was a feeling that this hot body had been submitted to the production of value, and the understanding that the real world lacks loopholes out of similar structures.

6.6 SACRIFICE TO THE UNKNOWN

Maybe the examples above could be viewed as a sign of a growing solemnity in our movement when it comes to the physical. Or, it could be viewed as an expression of an increasing contempt of the body; a feeling that the body belongs atop some kind of sacrificial altar, political or private. With terms such as “hard-core” a kind of competitive mentality concerning physical limitations has been established in the larp scene. Starvation and cold are talked about with a twinkle in the eye; an almost military attitude.

This element of self-induced punishment is of course not unique to the role-playing world. To begin with, there is the picture of the suffering artist or Christ figure that has been transmitted into our subculture, where it works as a measurement of dedication and performance. Another aspect is the sado-masochism (in a wider sense than just as a sexual practice) that permeates great parts of interaction in our time, both human versus human and human versus society. The context of role-playing employs positions of submission and superiority, but it is hardly a case of a consensual act between lovers. since the play is never allowed to give any impact on reality through making the powers of nature and unknowing co-players our executioners, we remove from our own lives the interaction with, and escape from, the complications of sexual-

ity and the analysis of power structures. The playing demands secrets as well as energy and keeps them within its frames. The role becomes a hole for the body to disappear into.

In the same spirit we choose characters that in a (sexual) fantasy can seem glamorous, but that in our social reality, historical as well as contemporary, are more problematic. Prostitution and slavery are among the themes that—often under the presumption of seriously examining the conditions under which individuals in these domains are living—become a projection surface for the players more or less explicit wishes for an unlimited sexuality, free from responsibility. Questions that could be relevant to reflect upon include : What consequences do these fantasies have for our understanding of physical practises such as trafficking? How is our understanding of the events that have led to today's interaction between poor and rich parts of the world influenced? What follows from the commodification of human relationships? What do these recurrent themes tell us about how gender is perceived?

The given reaction to looking at larp this way, is that always politicise experiences is a fucking killjoy—and furthermore a way to create a distance between mind and body. The consequences of a scenario that changes the position of the body obviously has different long-term effects depending on the values held by the participants. We can, to a certain extent, choose how to deal with our physical experience. We can work on our memories and make them fit personal views and patterns.

Even so, we are playing with powerful tools, tools that reorganise our identities with an impact equal to that of real life. We have the power to change ourselves. Who do we wish to become?

It is easy to end up in the same character, again and again. There are plenty of explanations as to why this is so: wishes, re-enactment of psychological trauma, the self recreates itself, the players defining each others as subjects. This understanding rarely result in any lasting change, even if it can suggest possible measures. If one does not manage to change the position of one's body, one's possibilities will not change either. But if one does indeed succeed to make the body do something it has never done before, this will always bring on multitude effects, for better or for worse.

6.7 THE WILL TO WORDS

In the field of live-action role-play, new books, net forums and articles such as this one, have an increasing tendency to attempt to verbalise the experiences of playing. We meet before the scenarios to develop our characters and afterwards to describe the events that took place. We cut in the middle of the story, step out of the character and

the playing area to discuss what is going on. Considering that we generally have the intention to return to everyday life sooner or later, this is probably necessary; to keep our ordinary identities and protect ourselves from dissolving.

But constantly describing brings on other consequences as well. The dominant interpretations are always that of the the individuals with the strongest social position. The values of our age seep in with the talking, and override physical experiences. As deviation is mapped out verbally, it is rendered harmless. Norms and relationships are re-confirmed, wounds are healed,, but not always cleaned. The mouth says hallelujah to describe the experience while the foot sweeps it under the carpet, to make life proceed as if nothing has changed. Even if one aims to make the norm visible, and demands a self-conscious verbalisation of why players wish to enter certain relationships, it is hard or maybe impossible not to exchange old norms for new or invisible replacements.

Role-players have often been categorised in accordance with their style of playing; gamist, immersionist, dramatist. These categories most likely correspond to our need to be seen and framed as individuals with a certain belonging to a group—but do they correspond to our desires?

6.8 SHUT UP AND PLAY

Role-playing has, despite its potential as a tool for building new, alternative realities, a tendency to primarily, in a more or less conscious way, reflect and comment on the contemporary. We would like to finish this associative text about the role of the body in role-playing by formulating some post-utopian lines of flight and loopholes; an attempt to engage the body in the building of a counter-experience, or an experience that is allowed to leak.

Our best proposition at the moment is the silent game, which we develop below in some different versions. Our hope is of course that you will make these sketches your own.

In the silence there is room for a multitude which speech lacks. The physical movements that speech reduces and frames, become audible in the silent body. The individual gets a chance to handle his or her inner processes without having them reviewed by a collective that, no matter whether it wishes to or not, assesses validity according to a very arbitrary scale. In silence, the story of the collective, the common body that the players have created, is left a little more in peace from the social positioning that breaks up and ranks the narratives.

Play 1—Hunters, hiders Similar to following the fox; one group of people, or one person, leaves a place, and the others are to follow a few hours later and try to find the traces. This is probably easiest to play in a forest, since the chance to feel a smell, read a footprint or hear a small sound is bigger in a calmer environment, but it could probably be done in urban areas too.

Play 2—Contact improvisation A form of dance—spontaneous movement with a group or another person. The people move together while maintaining a connection through exploration of weight, touch and timing. Through contact improvisation our bodies find new approaches to each other.

Play 3—Mask The covered face has an anonymising effect and changes how we relate to the body. The head becomes heavier, the breathing is different, and no previous identity can be recognised. The mask strikes a non-human and mythic nerve; it has a trance to it, and it mutilates the face, which is usually the place where we read and project feelings. Masks make other kinds of stories happen.

Play 4—Nakedness The stripped body is not neutral; we can never undress culture, but some symbols will fall, traces of class and social positions fade. Normally, we only look at naked bodies in the shower or in bed; to put them in a novel context creates an alien surface. The skin without its extensions becomes a new skin.

Play 5—Reduction How dependent are we on our senses? Can we develop new skills by temporarily taking one away? If we blind ourselves, what do we hear? If we mute ourselves, what do we see? If we walk backwards, what happens to our conception of speed?

If we just shut up and play, our bodies will still betray us. Role-playing consists of the torrents of feelings and impulses that pass through our muscles in the situations where we put ourselves. The silent game and the silent parts of scenarios can not so easily be described in terms of politics etc, but it is what we have experienced with our bodies, that is following us out into the ordinary world. It is these physical memories that have the potential to influence and change how we act as continuous identities.

6.9 BODY AT RISK

A world of desires is a difficult world; a world where one risks loosing, colliding and changing in an extent that is not only frightening but also dangerous. With the body

as a destination, we are torn out of context. Reality blows the frames of the subculture. If we search for silences, if we search for desires, we risk our lives; and not just our pretended lives. Things are turned upside down for ever more.

Acknowledgements The authors wishes to thank Kristi Schmidt, Malin Neuman and “The 33”.

Testing Larp Theories and Methods—Results of Year Two

J. Tuomas Harviainen

This article is the yearly summary, not a thorough report, of my continuing program of field-testing the key theories and methods presented by the Nordic larp community. The results are not to be seen as pure or even authoritative, but rather as indicative of general tendencies and utilitarian potential. In essence, they represent solid hints about what is probably useful and what is not. Year two of the project saw a clear improvement in the testing methodology. The main change was in the introduction of recordable game experience data, both qualitative and quantitative. This was achieved through the introduction of the preliminary version of the Harviainen-Heliö questionnaire¹. The primary research targets for this year were the Dogma 99 manifesto [29] and Norwegian-style Fateplay. Collective Larp [92] was added to the list of subjects later on due to a request from the developers of the method.

7.1 ON METHODOLOGY

The primary methods for data collection were an analytic game design process and player feedback. The latter was gathered through the use of second and third stage versions of the Harviainen-Heliö questionnaire, so the first two test games were thus essentially preliminary runs for the questionnaire itself as well (see Harviainen, 2006 for details). The Dogma 99 test had 12 players, of whom 58% (7) returned the questionnaire. All ten of Melpomene: Aiskhylos' players returned their questionnaires.

¹The Harviainen-Heliö questionnaire was a four-page quantitative paper based on a classical Psychology of Religion survey. It was created to study cultural effects on the in-game experience. In addition to providing answers on identity and playing styles (reported elsewhere [45]), it included questions about game quality and enjoyment. The findings here are based on those parts. The questionnaire, with some feedback, is available on-line at <http://www.indie-rpgs.com/forum/index.php?topic=16484.0>.

These two tests were conducted with a completely random set of players consisting of any and all who signed up for the games at Ropecon 2005. Due to research ethics, the players were told beforehand that the games were a part of the research program and that they would be required to provide feedback on the games afterwards. Feedback on the Collective experiment was gathered in a collective debriefing session.

7.2 DOGMA 99

Dogma is a way to experiment with larp as a medium, where all “normal way of conduct” has been erased in order to give room to creativity, self-reflection and diversity.
—Gade & Thorup [34]

7.2.1 The Game

Already during the preparation process of the experiment, it became obvious that creating an actual Dogma larp would not be possible. The Vow of Chastity itself is the cause of this—it clearly prohibits the use of certain creative methodologies, after which it states:

My highest goal is to develop the art and medium of live-action role-playing. This, I promise, will be done through *all means available*, and at the expense of good taste, *all conventions* and all popularity among the so-called LARPerS. (Emphasis mine.)
—Fatland & Wingård [29]

It is quite obviously impossible to limit the game to the proscribed methodology of the Dogma while striving to break those rules. Thus the test project, *Haalistuvia Unelmia* [46] (roughly Fading Dreams), was constructed according to the listed clauses of the Vow of Chastity. The only intentional exception was the mandatory breaking of rule #8, “No object shall be used to represent another object (all things shall be what they appear to be).” It was not possible to stage the game, a Kaurismäki-style larp about waiting in line at the Social Services office, to an actual location of such kind. Thus the playing space had to be simulated thorough the use of a normal room at the Dipoli convention center. Then again, this too reflects the utopian attitude inherent in the Dogma.

Players signing up for the game were given access to a copy of the Dogma manifesto as well as the complete character texts. Due to the ban on secrecy and on pre-scripting of certain dramatic arcs, the character descriptions were very short. The game itself consisted only of two hours of dialog while mostly sitting in one single room. To

facilitate the mood, everyone had to use grammatically proper language and it was not possible to interrupt someone. Note that both of these are setting rules, and thus not subjected to the Dogma's ban on game mechanics.

7.2.2 Findings

From a design perspective, the Dogma 99 manifesto works solely through limitations. It is a list of proscriptions on design traits that its authors wanted to get rid of (at least for the time being). Thus it essentially exists to hinder design, not help it. It also effectively makes several kinds of larps creatively impossible to create—any that need mechanics. Normally this would be clear grounds for dismissal as a valid approach, but the Dogma should be analyzed from another perspective, if we are to see its actual value. As a wake-up call about what had been taken for granted, it is quite significant.

The first nine rules of the Vow of Chastity are essentially ideological statements identifying what its authors saw as “bad things” in larps. While not necessarily incorrect in their assumptions on how certain design elements affect play, the test run shows the rules to be largely incompatible. Each rule limits one form of activity, and they accumulate dangerously. For example, all characters must be guaranteed a leading role in any conflict concerning it (rule 3), main plots are forbidden (rule 2) and no conflict may be written into the past of the character or the event (rule 1). These, additionally complicated by rule 6's ban on “superficial action” essentially mean that the game has to be either nearly static (like *Haalistuvia Unelmia* was) or rely completely on emergent fabula, that is plot-potential elements that only appear within the game and without any scripting whatsoever. It can be argued (see Fatland [27] for a good example) that writing detailed backgrounds is not problematic in this system, but as there is no external intent gauge on why certain elements were included in a character description, one should either leave out all potential conflict sources, or accept that they are working on a self-deceptive level and actually producing incentives and fabula.

Having set out to do as good a game as possible using the Dogma's rules, I did manage to get a very high rate of player approval in the feedback. In other words, players liked the game. Yet this was reported as having more to do with situational content than with any trait produced by the use of Dogma. So the most probable interpretation is that the game succeeded *despite* it being a Dogma-based larp. With some small exceptions, the data supports this conclusion.

The interesting thing to note, though, is that reports on the in-game state of the participants is highly similar to that reported in other larps [45]. Thus, it is very likely, given the extreme brevity of the character material, that having had access to the full

descriptions was beneficial to both the reported incidents of character immersion and game enjoyment in general.

This points us to a secondary finding: the rules themselves appear to be reasonably solid, and experimentation on such self-induced limitations is recommended, if for nothing else then just for the sake of overcoming one's own design habits. It is the cascade effect of the rules combined that truly becomes an obstacle to good larp design, not any of the particular rules.

In conclusion, it must be stated that the creation of a Dogma 99-compliant larp is essentially impossible, and the system itself significantly flawed. As a design method, it adds nothing. It is more useful as a warning sign than as a blueprint for making any kinds of larps, even Dogma(ish) larps. In all honesty, no actual Dogma larps have been made, and even those that claim to have done so essentially err.

There is one notable exception to what is stated above, though: rule number ten.

10. The playwrights shall be held accountable for all of their work.

In stating this rule the authors of the manifesto actually present an objective method for evaluating larp designers as auteurs. By holding them accountable for *all of their work*, instead of just the image they present, the actual worth of individual designs can be seen.

7.3 FATEPLAY

A plot-based LARP may easily survive minor errors in the plots or irrational actions by a player. A fateplay will not survive this, something that places a huge responsibility on all participants and makes the road to a successful play a hard one indeed. —Fatland [26]

7.3.1 The Game

Fateplay was tested by creating a game that would reduce the method to its most basic components, following Wingård's [103] suggestions on keeping fateplay functional. *Melpomene: Aiskhylos* [47] was designed to run purely on minimal incentive structure and public fates: at the end of the two-hour game, every character would have to be dead. The situation itself was a planning meeting for an upcoming episode of a Reality TV show (*SuperWedding*) episode, with the couple being two women who were not present at the meeting. The characters were family, friends and old flames of the couple and TV staff, all with some provocative traits that might have offered incentives for

final action. All control of the events were left for the players to decide, so in essence there was only one trigger (a temporal trigger—a “at time Y, X happens” rule) in use: that of the game’s end time. In all honesty, it functioned very well as a clean and quite reliable test, but was not a very good game².

7.3.2 Findings

The test game produced several significant findings. All players stated that it was extremely difficult and energy-consuming to try and steer the game towards its supposedly inevitable end. Nevertheless, only 70% of the players reported that they allowed dramatic concerns to affect their decisions during the game. Some players reported feeling liberated by the fate, just as the method presumes, but most felt significantly hampered by it. Most of those feeling liberated had also simultaneously felt hampered. So the general feeling for almost all was that the fates worked more strongly against than for the game.

An even bigger obstacle was the taking of drastic responsibility: close to the end, everyone started escalating the problems facing the group, but no one dared make the final move to start actual character deaths. In both written and verbal feedback the players presumed this to be related to the prevalent ideology of respecting the playing experiences of other larp participants. In order for something dramatic to happen *diegetically logically* in a game, one or more incentives of roughly equal strength to the desired event must exist. Essentially this proves Fatland’s [28] assumptions on incentives extremely accurate. Players stated in written feedback that under more directed circumstances (*i.e.*, suitably strong incentives) the method would indeed be very interesting, and that it really does create its very own, functional type of larp.

There were two unexpected side results produced by the experiment. Feedback included significantly strong indicators on players disagreeing with Gade’s [33] expectations on the division between player, role and character³. Game participants reported a very clear division to adiegetic drama concerns and diegetic character goals as the primary reason for creative dissonance. Had there been a mediating concept of some kind, as Gade suggests, that conceptual level would have enabled the players to adapt to

²Nevertheless, nine of the players gave their game experience a “positive” marker, and said they enjoyed the game. The tenth gave it a “negative” and said she did not enjoy the game, attributing the dislike to the chaotic linguistic structure of the game. With almost everyone being very aggressively talkative, she found it hard to participate in the fast-moving discussions

³Note that while Gade uses the words “role” and “character” inverse to common practice, he separates an interpretative role from the conceptual character, and that is the division referred to here. “*In a larp it is important to distinguish the participant (outside the larp), the character (the idea for the role) and the role (the participants’ physical manifestation of the character).*” [33]

the dramatic concerns, in a “I play this character in a game that will lead to her death” way. All reports contradict such a dramatic role’s existence for any of the players.

Furthermore, players commented on the low level of incentives, the resistance to incentives and the situation’s impact on how they felt about their characters. These comments were very much in a manner that is called the “qualitative hierarchy of games” by the opponents of such views. Basically they stated that certain types of gaming were preferable to others, simply “better” by nature of the experience itself. In essence, the players had a clear view of the qualitative hierarchy actually existing, in direct contrast to what has been stated by anti-intellectualist designers⁴ This data, as well as that gathered for Harviainen [45] and at *Sielun/Messu* [49], points towards players perceiving certain types of intellectualist/experimental/artistic games as significantly superior to “common” games, yet there is no evidence pointing to players enjoying such games more than the “common” ones. The logical conclusion is that the situation in general follows a pattern parallel to other cultural expression forms, in that such a quality hierarchy indeed exists, but what players enjoy is not tied to that quality level in any way (excepting certain demographics of snobbery). What follows is that the anti-intellectualist arguments are simple expressions of resistance and the aforementioned snobbery, not valid criticism on supposedly misplaced views of product quality.

7.4 COLLECTIVE LARP

Collective larps place the responsibility of organizing the larp on all the participants, thus the workload gets evenly shared between the participants. The result is that you are freed to realize your vision, even though it could not easily be realized with a small set of organizers. With this method it is possible to create the larps of your dreams. —Svanevik [92]

7.4.1 The Game

The collective experiment was performed by myself, Juha Isotalo, Anni Kauko, Simo Levanto, Raymond Mäkeläinen, Paavo Pirinen, Mike Pohjola and Senni Rytönen. This group was partially pre-selected by invitation and partially through an open ad on the local larp mailing list. The participants’ larp experiences ranged from next-to-none to over a decade of play and design, as did their tabletop rpg experience (there

⁴For a solid, thorough account on such a view, see the arguments by Vuorela (online at <http://www.burgergames.com/notes/>).

was, however, no correlation between the two, making the group suitably diverse.) One other person also expressed interest, but never participated in the design process nor showed up.

In order to secure an objective result, I refrained from the method's normal rules of the initiator setting the scene and time for the game. I did, however, select the space and a rough timetable for the event. The group had one meeting, with five project members being present, and the rest of the pre-game discussion was handled by email and a few personal discussions between some of the participants. During that meeting all the general elements of the game's reality as well as a primary and secondary playing date were agreed upon.

Given that the play-space was a small library, we settled on a theme using the area as it was. The game, *#kotikatu* [48], was low-key science fiction, about a near future where it was not healthy to leave one's home and where everything was normally handled through the Internet. A small group of people from a retro-romantic IRC channel were planning a theatrical play, in order to "wake people up", and had thus come to an unused library for the purpose of finding a suitable play and then rehearsing it.

During the next two weeks, each player mailed general notes about their characters to everyone else, with interested participants using those notes to construct character connections. In addition, extra world material based on what had been discussed during the meeting was also sent to others by those most interested in providing it. I handled the role of the administrator, taking care to see that all that needed to get done got done, but without influencing the process beyond that in any way. There were no open power complaints, very little personal friction and no freeloading whatsoever.

Propping was kept very low-key, consisting mostly of clothing and the real library's books. A very influential factor to the game were sterile gloves and disposable breathing masks provided by one participant, as they allowed us all to emphasize the "dusty, allergenic" nature of the real-world environment the characters were not normally used to. It also strangely affected communication, making it more on-line-like because it was not possible to see the facial expressions of the other people present.

The game lasted 2.5 hours out of the four that was the anticipated maximum running time. The mandatory end clause had been designated as "when the last person leaves the library." No rules were agreed upon nor used during the play⁵. All of the participants said they enjoyed the game very much.

⁵It is highly likely, though, that if mechanics would have been needed, the game would have defaulted to FreeComm.

7.4.2 Findings

By joint agreement, findings were reported to me through normal discourse instead of using the Harviainen-Heliö questionnaire. This was primarily done because of the more holistic participatory nature of the Collective way. At all stages, participants noted key differences in how the Collective method worked compared to more authorial game design methods.

In the early stages, it became clear that since no one had final authority, things started to lag. Social pressure kept anyone from assuming too much power, even though administration was basically agreed upon. Given that there were several experienced larpwrights included in the group, this is very significant: the expectation of equality leads stronger personalities to take a less productive role than they normally would, as they do not want to take actions that may be perceived as overextending their rights as equal partners. It would obviously have been easy for several participants to assume directive power, but socio-psychological limits kept this from happening.

A combination of the lack of central executive power (as opposed to “get things done” administration), coordination problems (time, email access) and typical production delay (activation through event proximity, instead of auteur-style design drive) meant the game was less “complete” when it was played than an centrally designed game would have been. Essentially, without someone in authority and/or a strong personal vision things did not get done as intensely and as early on as in auteur-style games. Especially the world material was left unfinished, because no-one wanted to dictate too much of it, and thus erred on the side of caution. The participants assumed that extra preparation time would have made no difference, but additional planning meetings (or a chance to play an IRC pre-game) probably would have contributed significantly. It is worth noting that all assessment on these points was about the holistic completeness of the material in question, not about its quality.

Character design, in contrast, was highly successful. It produced something that would have been seen as “bad design” in an authorial game: several characters that were very much alike. All of the participants reported enjoying the freedom in character creation, and the ability to alter expected group dynamics as they saw fit. On the other hand, not being able to truly rely on the other guy to pull his or her weight was seen as a hindrance: if the other person suddenly decides not to participate, there is no game master to find a replacement for the game threads lost. Without authority, there is no real way of making sure people stay with the plan. This is actually in direct opposition to what is stated in the *Red Book*:

Organizing a larp the collective way will ensure that all participants are equally inclined to make the larp function. Because all participants are

recognized as organizers, they should all feel the responsibility of that appointment. —Svanevik [92]

One of the participants described the method of social control as one half enthusiasm and one half social pressure created through the shame of being less active than the others, and admittedly this is a very correct assessment. The method, at its current stage, seems to include an innate anarco-leftist view of human nature that may not be accurate enough, especially if the Collective methodology is attempted in areas not sharing the cultural and ideological starting points that have originally given rise to this school of design thought.

Where the Collective's assumptions are highly accurate, though, is the level of realism this method produces. The characters easily become very real-seeming, due to lacking the polar nature usually expected of larp characters, randomization and the risk of similarity. For example, three of the characters in #kotikatu were cultural snobs pretending to know more about theater theory than they actually did. This resulted in very realistic group dynamics, where each of them would try to shine by injecting wikipedia-derived phrases to the discussion. This characterized the whole project (and was extrapolated by players as being probably inherent to the method itself): the Collective way has a tendency to favor down-to earth, almost mundane dynamics that seem very real. This results in games with low-level drama. (Surprisingly enough, only one player scripted any dramatic material in. He also then declined to use that material during play.) Again, group assessment was that even if dramatic material was scripted in by someone, the arcs produced would be more realistic and probably rather non-epic.

Players reported a (perceived) high level of personal character immersion during play, which, given that the characters were self-made, opens up several immersion-related questions worth further exploration. Another effect caused by self-made characters was a significantly increased need to talk about one's character after the game had ended. This was due to participants wanting a chance to tell of the things they had included into the concepts even though those elements were not visible during the game itself.

The participants' joint assessment was that the method was quite successful when applied to the production of low-key material. Strong suspicion was, however, placed on whether it would actually be suitable for more dramatic games. There is a highly idealistic tone to the entire methodology, and it will very likely require a pre-selection of participants to properly work, at least in a repeatedly reliable way. There was a clear consensus on the idea that the role of the administrator should be quite pronounced, and perhaps likened more to a technical producer than a *laissez-faire* overseer who just

makes sure things get done. Without at least one more powerful central figure who has authority over production issues and coordination, the methodology will not be truly adaptable outside its native game culture. Yet if these changes are introduced into the Collective way, it is imperative that the players' creative leeway it now contains is preserved. That is this design method's particular strength, and one that produces games with a social structure that will not likely be at all available in games made through author-centric design.

There is one extra benefit in the collective larp design system that does not come into play during the larp itself. Collective design fosters new, stronger connections between larp participants. Having to design character and setting material with other people means being much more in off-character contact than one would be in a game with hand-down material. And those connections will benefit the entire larp community later on. This positive phenomenon also exists in other design systems that use player-made character connections, such as the Swedish ensemble play style.

7.5 AFTERWORD

It is by now very clear that it is quite easy to construct a reasonably reliable test game following the outlines set out by a game-design school. It is also possible to get enough feedback about the tests for the project to be actually relevant, although factors such as play-exhaustion (see previous work [45] for details) strongly hinder the data collection process. Each test game would essentially demand a report of its own, but that is beyond the scope of this article. For now, let us emphasize such field research as a way of finding out what parts of which theory and methods are usable, or even beneficial, under which conditions. The primary purpose of the test project is, at this stage, the finding of useful tendencies in the creation of larps, not proving someone's view of them true or false.

Acknowledgments These tests would not have been possible without the dedication of the players of the project games and their willingness to give me large amounts of honest feedback. I would especially like to thank the players of Melpomene: Aiskhylos: Tommi K, Raymond M, Juha I, Kerstin L, Maija K, Milla M, Elisa W, Jukka L, Jussi L and Tarja K—all of whom suffered through my lousy game in the interests of furthering role-playing research. An additional, big thank you goes to the Student Union of the University of Turku, for kindly providing us the space used for the Collective Larp experiment.

All research data used to create this summary is freely available and may be accessed by contacting the author.

With Role-Playing in Mind—A Cognitive Account of Decoupled Reality, Identity and Experience

Andreas Lieberoth

While much effort has gone into the systematic study of conduction and socio-cultural analysis of role-playing, little focus has been directed towards the actual role-playing experience, and what human faculties make such fanciful and rather extraordinary abstractions possible. In the existing literature such terms as “immersion” and “diegetic space” fly about, almost taking a life of their own, but no one seems to direct too much interest towards how they are achieved by the human mind.

In some respects, this lack of immediate interest is no wonder, since the ability to picture and act out imagined scenarios is such an integrated part of everyday life; even though it might be one of the truly wonderful and unique aspects of being human.

The paper shows what human abilities are involved in the creation of role-playing experience, how immersion is achieved in terms of representation, and what tried and tested terms can be borrowed from cognitive science to explain these more “airy” aspects of the phenomenon.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Role-playing goes on in the mind of the participants. Even if there can be an understanding of pretend identity and status of people and objects, they do not, in reality, change. A banana is still very much a banana, even though we pretend that it is a gun, a phone or a kiwi. Bernie is still a whiny teenager while he imagines being mighty

Malodorous, the king of all Vampires in Copenhagen. Role-playing is all in the head, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

It is easy to forget that role-playing has no reality or essence in itself. When the game is on, one quickly gets a feeling of entering a different space, another level of reality, a world apart shared only by the initiated few. This, in turn, leads to the conception that role-playing is "something" independent from the participants, not just pretence created between friends; something that one can enter, interact with, and immerse oneself in like a vat of para-real chocolate pudding. However appealing the thought of a shared independent fantastic reality, closer investigation is destined to disappoint the intuition of enthusiastic gamers-slash-theorists on this point. Role-playing does not in fact go on in some kind of metaphysical space, or even in the wood or around the living-room table: It only exists in the minds of its participants, and even more unsettling, each representation of the role-playing "reality" is separate and different from that of the next guy.

Role-playing only exists in the mind of the participants, whether it is live or tabletop. The only true difference is the level of abstraction and symbolic representation. The rest is just regular human behaviour as we see it down at the supermarket or around the office. Therefore the obvious place to start looking for the basic hows-and-whys of role-playing is not in the forest or dice-bag, but inside the human head.

That role-playing exists only inside the mind of the individual is, granted, a steep claim. Of course role-playing also goes on between the players, but the experience of role-playing solely belongs to each participant. Therefore the field of cognitive science is well equipped to analyse role-playing, in particular experience and representation.

Cognitive science is a fairly wide and varied field—particularly because many disciplines have laid claim to it. From neuropsychology to linguistics, anthropology and philosophy, many sciences make use of the cognitive area and provide theory and research, but few are quite able to agree on its exact content and boundaries. It has to do with perception, memory, understanding, learning, thinking, language and other similar areas. For the present purposes cognitive science can be understood as the psychology and cross-disciplinary science concerned with mental processes of understanding, storing and computing data, and how these enter the head and are transmitted outwards through our culture and behaviour. For instance, a tree might be received by our mind through our senses; we may see it from a distance, feel its trunk, smell fresh rain on it, and/or hear the rustling of its leaves. Once sensed, our brain has the astonishing ability to translate the input into an internal representation of the tree, and starts making a host of inferences about it; distance, physical qualities, if it is common to any trees we have previously encountered, and other general ideas about

how trees behave and might be relevant to our present situation. Also the synaptic network in the brain will prepare for a number of different neural firing-patterns in relation to the input, and a lot of associations to the idea “tree” might show up or die out as other inputs reach the brain. Some of this inferential activity is conscious to us, some - usually the quickest - is purely emotional, and some is more subtle and lost in the deeper levels of processing. Further, the linguistic ability of humans makes us associate [the barky, tall, leafy thingy sticking out of the ground over there, that might be climbed or chopped down and transformed into toothpicks] with the word “tree”, and finally allows us to project the data out in a public representation to your friends further back; “Hey, guys—there’s a tree over here!”—starting the whole process over again as soon as the sound reaches *their* perceptual mechanisms.

There is much more to it, but basically the main points of “cognition” are that stuff might enter our mind, and this information might be decoded, processed and saved in a number of ways depending on the individual mind, situation and cultural bias . Still more importantly, we ourselves are creators of meaning, projecting our inner worlds outwards through speech, composition, painting, writing, gesturing, stonecutting and a host of other symbolic representational activities that may or may not be understood and processed by others.

Once an item, for instance a joke, dance-move, value-judgement or the concept of “ghost”, transcends the mind of the single individual through such “public representation”, it may survive far beyond its originator in time and space, and *this* is what we call culture.

The paper presents some areas of cognitive science that I find relevant, and promote the view that role-playing and imagining scenarios is a natural and inherent part of human life, and that these natural abilities should be the subject of further study in the area of game studies. I focus on the areas of pretend play, decoupling and neural simulation-theory, and tell you a little story about evolution and culture.

8.2 PRETENCE FROM CRADLE TO THE GRAVE

Role-playing comes natural to humans. From an early age, the mind is equipped to conjure fantastic imagery and pretend games, and children do this spontaneously and with great joy. Children’s pretence easily involves taking on roles and situations, but it doesn’t need to. Transforming and handling everyday items or copies (toys) as play-elements is also very common and precedes role-transformation [5]. Role-players never stopped playing, and although many tend to over-focus on the role-aspect, play and mental transformations has been with you since you started walking, and is still

an extremely important part of every role-playing game.

Animals play, but only humans pretend. Cuddly lion kittens and adolescent chimpanzees share the instinctive ability to play and mimic grownup behaviour, but it is unlikely that they are aware of the difference. They do not think about thinking like we do, or consciously reflect on their actions. They simply act out impulses handed down since the dawn of time, though our closest primate cousins occasionally imitate their peers in a more complex manner. This, however, does not rival the elaborate conscious pretence that human children display very early on [21].

Pretend play, the formal term given to play-behaviour involving acting “as if”, comes natural to humans. We have the same impulses to wrestle our friends as do cats, but are better at controlling them, and more importantly, our cognitive makeup allows us to make wondrous transformations inside our mind. It is evident from current studies that pretend behaviour can be socially “helped along” by peers and caregivers, but in normally functioning children pretence appears to manifest rather spontaneously in the early years of childhood. This ability steadily develops from very simple handling of play-items, requiring a great deal of index to the real world, for instance using toy cars or dolls, to greater levels of independence from usual contexts, and more extended, suspended and internally consistent play-themes [44].

A lively imagination is widely regarded as a sign of health in western children, and the absence of pretend play is among the prime symptoms for the diagnosis of autism. Children with autism have great difficulties relating to others, and current theory states that the actual deficit is in “theory of mind”—the general human ability for empathy and second-guessing others. The pretence problems of autism-patients may simply stem from a general social shortfall, but some studies suggest that they may actually be rooted in the planning-process where a level of “cognitive fluidity” is essential to the creation of novel combinations, transformations and ideas [44]. Thus, normal children rehearse and negotiate fragments of knowledge and models of real life through pretend play, by exploring reality and creating new combinations, scenarios and ideas of their own.

There is still a lot of speculation going into the hows-and-whys of pretence. To cognitive science and developmental- and evolutionary psychology it is obvious that pretence and imagination must serve some kind of purpose in the development of each human mind and personality, or that the systems used in pretending were developed for something else, but serves pretend play just as well [17, 87]. It is worth mentioning, that the human mind develops hastily during childhood by forging connections between nerve-cells in the brain, strengthening those that are used in conjunction, and discarding those that are unfeasible to retain or disrupt the emerging connections.

Therefore the mind is not per se wired for playing; it is a learning system, and doing stuff strengthens connections, making play an excellent way to practice the infant connections emerging for learned models, conscious thinking and action [23]. We seem to enjoy doing things that challenge us but give us a nice feeling of success, maybe because this is the only way our brains can forge its important connections in interaction with the life-niche.

Humans are immensely social creatures, and our modern brains make social interactions an extremely shrewd and complicated affair. Not only are we experts at recognising different individuals and communicating, but we also maintain extensive “mental files” on each person, and keep track of others’ knowledge and possible thoughts at a given moment. This last ability is sometimes referred to as “mind reading” or “theory of mind”. One influential theory even claims that the development of the human brain to its current size and scope was mainly caused by the need to keep track of larger and larger groups of peers [21]. Thus, keeping score of roles, strategies and relations is a fundamentally human capacity, which makes role-playing seem much more natural than many other human activities.

Obviously, we take on many different roles in our daily lives, which makes it clear that both human society, institutions and the human mind give rise to the concept and negotiation of personal roles. We readily accept the difference between the policeman’s badge and the family-man hanging up his gear and going home at the end of the day, and we change our behaviour accordingly. Religious and cultural rituals may involve an institutionalised and often highly symbolic playing with identities within a liminal space, and *Rites de passage* change the status of their recipients permanently; from boy to man, singles to married, novice to priest, or from grandpa to corpse. We know this, and understand the changes in roles intuitively through contexts and subtle signs, while members of a foreign culture might have trouble grasping differences that seem obvious to us. Most roles are socially anchored and negotiated, but their existence seems universal.

More remarkably still, human children are conjurers and transmuters extraordinaire. Pretend play is, as mentioned, defined by acting “as if”. Reverses in personal role and identity are salient examples, but more importantly still, reality itself and everything in it may be the subject of changes through human pretence. Such scenarios may, furthermore, be shared between participants, so everybody accepts that the little plastic sandbox-shovels are now guns, or that the old tumbled-down barn is a castle [5, 83]. It is conceivable that this ability was derived from an ability allowing us to think “what if”, and thereby act upon events that might not have presently taken place, in effect creating a conscious imagination for us to use and abuse as we do today. This

would have been advantageous in the sense that we could suddenly evaluate for and against the possibility of a sabre-tooth hiding by the watering-hole, but also in allowing us to start thinking in terms of “if I do X, Mary may think Y”. From this, there is not very far to language or acting “as if” with no serious belief in the scenario at hand [87, 17].

Pretence can be seen as something active and transformative on the part of pretenders, whereas I like to think of imagination as something more personal and fluid. Imagination may be viewed as the space where ideas are coined through exploring, breaching and merging of concepts, templates and categories. We can test imagination and its limits by talking to children about “pictures in the head” or having subjects express themselves through, for instance, drawing. In pretence, a toy car may be actively transformed into a real car for the duration of a scenario, while imagination creates the private world (“paracosm”) [54] in which the car drives down a fictive city street, unique to each child. In this imaginative aspect of play-experience, each child may “bring forth” new ideas to introduce to group play or just furnish his own personal game with mountains, pedestrians and dinosaurs. Pretence is mostly related to something (for instance yourself), while imagination is much more fluid. One usually pretends without believing, whereas imagination is always charting new territory to be discarded or saved [10, 67].

I discuss the relation between personal knowledge and the negotiation of dissonance between participants in role-playing games elsewhere [62]. For now, it is sufficient to say, that if role-playing is mostly played out inside the head of each participant, then the individual mind must also furnish out that stage. We do this all the time, to make sense of fragmented inputs from a chaotic world, and every human understands reality a little differently from her peers. This is common to most pretend games as well, for instance bringing up the need for disclaimers and introductions such as “let’s say that”. In a Danish children’s show the puppets used the phrase “then we just said that” when presenting the scope of a pretend game, usually opening up for a small drama when everybody wanted to play the child in “house”. Introducing play-themes in this way is a very common means of aligning shared fantasy. It is probably acquired through situated practise, and is akin to framing of fictional genres [32] and ritual separation/reincorporation. Such failed negotiations might rip a joint pretence apart as everybody needs to be on roughly the same page. This does not mean that every player imagines the same scenario, far from it, but it suggests that the actions and statements of every single individual must be roughly consistent with the inner fantasy worlds of everyone else.

The inner worlds of pretence are thus negotiated through public cues and repre-

sentations, usually causing the inner fantasy to be modified accordingly, but at times opening up for a more explicit social negotiation (for a full discussion of negotiation, see Berger and Luckmann [8]). In situations of wide-spread doubt (for instance, can a spaceship reverse?) the most easily understandable possibility will usually be accepted. This can be understood in terms of a social negotiation in favour of social leverage, the individual confirmation-bias and reduction of cognitive dissonance.

I have attempted to exemplify how the mental mechanisms involved in role-playing are fundamental to being human, and how both children and adults negotiate reality, display and social relations by means of the same cognitive architecture that makes role-playing games possible. There is no “role-playing” module inside the human brain, but we are a race of pretenders, mind-readers and social manipulators; inherent abilities that were developed through natural selection because they were advantageous to our ancestors. We have seen that they exist; now we will attempt to explore their nature.

8.3 ROLE-PLAYING IN MIND

When somebody is talking about “immersion”, the tempting question “into what...?” quietly creeps up on me. I have played on the metaphor of role-playing as a vat of pudding that some players-slash-theorists have conjured up in their mind to visualise the phenomenon that goes on between participants, sometimes called “diegetic space” (from the world of film-theory). Many participants in role-playing—especially pen-and-paper—may have experienced the feeling of being “absent” from the present reality. A feeling that appears and dissipates quite suddenly, but is still quite distinctive and fascinating. The idea that there is a special “role-playing space” at work however, is a figment of the illustrious role-player’s imagination. A useful metaphor, but no more linked to psychological facts than the archetypes of C. G. Jung to the neurochemical causes of mental illness or the Christian doctrine of creation to geology.

When role-playing—especially around the dining-room table—creates wonderful shared imageries, it is an illusion that every players participate in the same imagery. Truly, we have a seemingly great level of correspondence between individual understandings of content, which allows common interactions with the figments, but when prompted individual players give quite different accounts of what they see in their mind’s eye. This is no different from witnesses to a crime that get confused by top-down processing of apparently unambiguous experiences, but in role-playing it is much more obvious, because so many facts are reliant on explicit signification between participants. Only what is publicly shared between individual players through cos-

tumes, verbal storytelling, acting, scale-models, written materials and a host of other signs is actually shared. The rest is “private representation” inside the head of each player reliant on pattern completion, imagination and intuition/knowledge of the individual. One does not need to be told that there are shops, houses, street-lights, occasional cars, and other elements in a city street by night to imagine them; all that is really needed is the explicit signification of “you are in a street” such as a street-sign on the wall of a school hallway or the words of the game-master. The conscious brain (not necessarily the visual systems themselves) is better at perceiving meaningful units than unintegrated parts, and leaves it to us to “zoom in” on details or change focus [23]. Thus, our imagination probably calls up internal representations in the same way, not really heeding details until they are needed.

Since each player creates his own imagery of the role-playing situation inside his head, each representation will differ from the one belonging to the next guy. The only thing actually binding them together is the explicit public representations put “out there” by game-masters and players, and of course the common knowledge and categories carried by all people. When describing a street with houses, everybody knows what streets and houses are. It is also assumed that everybody understands how role-playing goes on. No further need to elaborate. Only when separate mental representations clash at the level of self-furnished details and ideas or when players act in character, are new public representations needed. This public dimension separates role-playing from mere fantasy on this particular level.

The active role-playing process is, in a certain sense, the consolidation of separate imaginative entities into a whole that is coherent, acceptable and meaningful for everybody. The rest is just imagery. Every participant adds bits and pieces in varying detail, which are then integrated with the views of the others. If representations do not fit together, a negotiation will ensue, ultimately arbitrated by social consent or a game master. Normally this is done verbally, but other symbolic modes such as writing and scale-models are also quite common. The key for now is to understand the difference between 1.) “public representation” which are “thrown out” in plenum, such as describing, acting “as if” (for instance in-character) and other explicit signals, and 2.) “mental” or “private” representations which are implicit understandings and multimodal imageries played out on the “inner film-screen” [87]. To use a helpful term from informational psychology, they are knowledge in the world and knowledge in the head, respectively. Even at a high level of realism—for instance historically correct live role-playing—players still need to furnish out some details in the setting and identities of players and props to create their own “paracosms” [54].

My claim is that role-playing is primarily set on the stage of the individual con-

sciousness. Social processes are all-important to the creation of the vivid imagery played out in this inner theatre, but the role-playing *experience* is wholly personal and mental. The individual fills out the blanks, while the social processes, institutions and signs often barely supply the information needed to be in the same game. Therefore, I will now present some established theories from cognitive science that explains the human ability for decoupling from present reality and understanding other minds.

8.4 THE TOOLS IT TAKES

I have tried to single out some important aspects of role-playing, which leads to the obvious conclusion that understanding the cognitive makeup of our mind is crucial to understanding the nature of role-playing. In the following paragraph I try to describe some of the cognitive systems involved in role-playing games and experiences.

Many philosophers, neuroscientists and other clever people have fought over what fundamentally human characteristics separate us from animals or clever apes. Language has often come up in this discussion, while heated arguments over “consciousness” fly about, making the directives on “self-conscious species” in the TV-series *Star Trek* wobble on thin ground. Animals certainly have a conscious experience of the here-and-now (a remembered present [23]), most learn from incidents like we do, and even amoeba can react to their surroundings in a reflective way. These are fundamental survival abilities that have been honed over generations of evolution, and the “step latter”-thought that is so tempting in Darwinian theory, makes it seem that humans, and perhaps our closest primate relatives, are simply more advanced and recent models of life on Earth. We have creativity, auto-noetic memory, metarepresentational consciousness and *Uzis*, while felines only have claws. I will not get into evolutionary theory here, but suffice to say that other animals have developed their minds and bodies in other niches where long necks or great lung capacity might have been more worthwhile investments. Our huge brains definitely give us an advantage today, but the high bodily energy-cost to keep them running, and the fact that a human female simply cannot give birth to a fully developed child because of cranial size, leaving newborns vulnerable and taxing on the parents, may have put our forefathers in a tight spot compared to other animals [21]. We do, because of these sacrifices, now have the ability to think beyond present reality and collaborate in an unprecedented manner, whereas animals live in a world of “naïve realism” where the here-and-now is everything [17]. The “creative” or “symbolic” explosion some 30–40.000 years ago also suggests that our ancestors a while prior became creators and communicators, and thereby externalised their inner worlds for the rest to see [67]. The ability to think

away from immediate circumstances and express our mind is what gives us the ability to participate in elaborate role-playing games today.

Our brain may very well have evolved in a “social niche”, developing many of its extraordinary capacities to deal efficiently with social relations, crucial to survival for the early homo [21, 67]. Hominid skull-size development may even be directly related to the size of social groups, now stabilized around a hundred and fifty. In other words, many of the inherently human cognitive abilities that we take for granted in everyday life may have evolved as a direct consequence of our “groupishness” and need to outsmart each other or create viable social relationships. Thus, the science of cognition often brushes upon the social and cultural sciences, and may be used to explain many complex societal phenomena. One of the most staggering human capabilities is our inherent aptitude for understanding, empathising and second-guessing each other, effectively “reading minds”: this “spontaneous psychology” is commonly labelled “theory of mind”. Some scientists believe that this is achieved through internal simulation, and others that it is done by applying some sort of semantic “theory” [87].

Like many areas of science, several of the central objects in this paper were discovered through pathology. Cognitive neuroscience has made great leaps and bounds due to war and accident, as lesions (inflicted damage to the brain) studies in humans are naturally frowned upon in most circles. The methodical study of Theory of Mind was thus predominately generated from the examination of children with autism and related cognitive deficits [5, 4, 44].

In his introduction to the anthology “Understanding other minds” Simon Baron-Cohen, one of the leading figures in the field, defines Theory of Mind very clearly and simultaneously makes it obvious why it is critical to the study and understanding of role-playing:

“By theory of mind we mean being able to infer the full range of mental states (beliefs, desires, intentions, imagination, emotions, etc.) that cause action. In brief, to be able to reflect on the contents of one’s own and other minds.” [4]

The basic premise of all joint pretend play, including role-playing, is our common ability to establish a shared understanding of the play scenario. The more index in the world (for instance costumes, acting, scale models, vocal statements, etc.), the less role-players need to mind-read their fellow participants, but they always need to be aware that all participate in the same game. This “metarepresentation” of other human minds and intentions is the basic cognitive foundation for role-playing. Metarepresentation means that the human mind can think about thinking, talk about language or

imagine what others are imagining, etc. [87]. It is conceivable that metarepresentation developed in a social arms-race where free-loaders and deceivers could easily tax the whole group, thereby making theory of mind a great advantage as a “cheater detection system”. In singular pretend play, only a certain degree of self-propelled imagination is needed, which doesn’t even need to be completely conscious, but in joint pretence children and adults alike need to keep track of what the others are pretending [83]. This is always done through a measure of social or indexical cues and relation to the (pretend) context. When the thought of a “shared fantasy-world” is so prevalent in role-playing, it is because we fuel it through the notion, that the others share our discreet vision. This takes a lot of metarepresentation! Also, understanding of the workings of other minds in general allows the individual to emulate the behaviour of thought-up archetypes or known models, effectively “role-playing”.

The second important premise for role-playing is the phenomenon that cognitive science labels “decoupling” or “decoupled thinking”—as when a carriage pulls away from the rest of the train [87]. Decoupling is the ability to think above and beyond the here-and-now, and be aware of it. The human mind has a special way of “bracketing off” thoughts and ideas from memory and perceived reality, which allows us to fantasise, tell lies, pretend, guess, listen to stories, etc. without actually believing any of it. Decoupled thinking is a strand of metarepresentation, since decouplers are aware of their own thinking [87]. They might ponder theoretical conceptual problems, vividly imagine themselves in a given situation, or listen to stories and attempted lies, while still retaining awareness of what is actually true and what is not. Humans instinctively understand the premises of fantasy and falseness. Leda Cosmides and John Tooby [17] coined the idea of “scope syntax” as a computational metaphor to explain the workings of decoupling in general. That is, how the mind keeps track of the great amounts of information processed, their value in terms of relevance and plausibility, and how we got them inside our mind in the first place. With this system in place, we can allow our mind to wander off without compromising our grip on reality.

In the framework of scope syntax, every thought and bit of knowledge is fitted with a “value-code” that identifies it to the internal “filing system” in terms of truth and relevance, and a connection to its origin; For instance, for the notion “porcupines lay eggs”: “Who told me that it is so? Is he generally trustworthy, and was he drunk or joking at the time?” This system generally helps keep track of millions of bits of knowledge, and allows us to juggle all sorts of propositional thoughts at a given time, constantly reviewing and re-filing the information involved. My personal intuition and an eye on the somatic marker-theory (meaning that it is physical or emotional rather than higher-level conscious) of Antonio Damasio tells me, that the “value” cod-

ing is probably emotional and/or somatic in nature. Decoupling is what allows us to imagine or ponder something without believing it to be true, thereby creating fictions in our minds. This is also what role-playing is about. It is likely that conscious thinking is actually a remembered present, created in integrated short-term memory, sensory systems and other re-entrant processes rather than a special “consciousness”-module. Thus, memory-sorting and reality-sorting might have many similarities.

“Simulation theory” (Barsalou et al. [6], among others) pins phenomena like decoupled thinking on the fact, that the parts of our neurophysiology that normally controls senses and action, are also active when we imagine those exact things. This points to a direct neural relation between doing/sensing and thinking about those things—the neural structures involved are the very same! Neuro-imaging techniques and other measures have shown that our own repertoires of emotions are highly active when trying to discern someone else’s state of mind, and that our facial muscles ever so slightly mimic grimaces made by others. Thus, theory of mind and empathy in general might be simulation-based as well. Thinking or experiencing by proxy could, in this theoretical framework, be neurally equal to doing or experiencing, only on a smaller scale.

This theory implies that when decoupling our minds are probably still running through the routines that would have been involved in the imaginary scenario, if it was real. Even if role-players think/speak of their character as “someone else” in the third person, the brain would still need to run simulations, because our mind also needs to replicate the actions of others to understand them.

Emotions and somatic markers makes mental action more significant, because we achieve a higher state of readiness, cortical activity and scope-coding, so adding emotion to play should be a good way to achieve further engagement and feeling of “being there”. A theory by Gerald Edelman and Giulio Tononi [23] claims that conscious experience is only achieved by putting a variety of neural circuits in sufficiently high gear together, and I am confident that role-playing adds to this acceleration-effect; the more explicitly you think about something, the more the brain needs to work on it, in effect bringing the subject even more saliently to mind and strengthening the feeling of “as if” through simulation and “higher gears”. More so if one thinks in the “first person”. Following simulation theory the notion of a “screen inside the mind” where all thoughts are displayed to some homunculus-Me, can effectively be done away with, and we may aptly explain decoupling and playing in neural terms. Our brains act “as if” all the time!

Recent theories by Tooby and Cosmides [17] and Daniel Nettle [73] suggests that some symptoms of full-blown schizophrenic psychosis could be understood as a deficit in decoupling-ability and mix-ups the scope syntax that sorts diverse internal repre-

sentations, inputs and memories from each other. Therefore, lacking the brackets that normally helps the mind keep track of reality, the schizophrenic experiences random contemplations, recollections, perceptions and ideas as vividly real, taking form of paranoid delusions, “hearing voices” and more exotic phenomena. An internally vocalised thought might therefore seem to have come “from the outside” and stuff from a fantasy-novel or an unsettling stray idea might seem true, both being worked in to a mismatched plethora of naïve reality and mental representations. Furthermore, since schizophrenia is a hereditarily transmitted disease showing up in only about half the people carrying the genetic potential, Nettle has also suggested that these genes may play a vital role in human creativity and decoupling. The full-blown mental illness only occurs with the right combination of otherwise harmless genes carried by completely sane humans, suggesting that they stay in the gene-pool for a reason. Otherwise, why would they continually be selected for, when so many schizophrenics end their life early and miserably? Thus, schizophrenia might be an instance of healthy ability to play with reality run amok.

8.5 A RACE OF ROLE-PLAYERS?

The ability to role-play, to deceive or communicate, quite possibly existed before language as we know it evolved. Thinking that role-playing is revolutionary and only recently surfaced in human culture is not just erroneous - it is arrogant and naïve. The “modern” forms of table-top role-playing games (or joint storytelling) and live-action role-playing might have a unique forms, making them a genuine innovation of the 20th century, emerging in this particular culture of individuality and personal narratives. There is an extremely relevant cultural and institutional side to role-playing that is already being probed by many others. However, the cognitive makeup that evolution equipped our forbears with also placed role-playing in the cards from the beginning.

The notion that role-playing is an inherently human feature is not new, and in fact seems self-evident to most players. After all, role playing is closely related to many other activities that define us as human; speech, sociability, ritual, imagination, rules and contracts, and a host of other traits that seem closely akin to role-playing greets us at every step of everyday existence. What is it then, that gives role-playing the attraction that entices grown men and women to commit so much time and money to something so utterly useless in life-economic terms?

First of all, humanity spends most of its days emerged in seemingly useless activity. Hedonistic drives and the race for social capital are at the forefront of western society, since economic surplus reached the peaks of modernity, but the little pleasures in life

have always been what kept us going through the long hours [21, 73].

Second, we do what nature programmed us to do. This is a volatile reductionist point, and bucketloads of “free will” will doubtlessly be thrown at me for pointing it out, but when it comes down to it, humans mainly do whatever it is the race have been doing for the past 30 millennia—we just got better at it, institutionalised it in culture, and developed technologies to help us. We can choose not to indulge, and most behaviour is probably spawned in context, but most of us still like food, sex and sociability none the less.

So, what does role-playing have to do with this? Put bluntly, role-playing is nothing but an advanced institutionalised way of communicating, positioning ourselves culturally and committing to a group. And how does cognition come into this picture? Simple; human cognition was most likely developed to its stunning current capacity to keep up with the social needs of our hominid ancestors. Thus, our mind is a social one. The mind was “designed” to make us do things that seem like a good idea if we want to survive; thus, anything we can do and find pleasurable was basically a good idea from the viewpoint of evolution. . . or what?

The observant reader might notice how the chain of arguments above seems to snap at the middle. Most will agree that humans are born with the capacity for intricate social interaction and imagination, but how this should naturally lead to rolling 20-sided dice and shouting “I waste him with my crossbow”, or walking around in a forest, wearing funny hats, going “Greetings!”, is not apparent at all. Obviously, being equipped with a human brain does not lead to role-playing games. If so, everybody would be doing it. All normal humans have the capacity to role-play, but mostly this just emerges in less institutionalised everyday living.

Genes create dispositions, but they certainly don’t care about the well-being of their carriers. Likewise, genetic dispositions may stay with us long after they stopped being necessary. They, frankly, couldn’t care less about the success of each individual human—all they “want”, being quite selfish, is to be carried on to the next generation. They don’t even want to be replicated—they just work that way. A genetic “imperative” doesn’t force us to anything—that line of thought is called the “naturalistic error”. Thus, a peacock’s tail or the peculiar mating habits of the praying mantis is in no way beneficial to the males who mostly end up dead; but to the genes they are just dandy, not caring about the implications of being clumsy or headless for their bearer, once they have been passed on in the great racial race. In other words, evolution may opt to select for features that don’t make us good survivors individually or make us have a particularly good time at it, but attributes that increase our ability to work within the group and thereby secure our procreation and the future for our common offspring.

Being groupish, grooming, displaying ourselves to others and gossiping is one such mechanism [21], and role-playing is one of many modern ways to do so.

Cognitive anthropologist Dan Sperber introduces the idea of “actual”, “proper” and “cultural domains” of mental systems [88] and demonstrates how mental mechanisms evolved in our forefathers (the proper domain) might suddenly find new uses and forms in other niches of life (actual domains). Since humans are producers of our own historical reality, we may also be said to live in “cultural domains” created by society to fit our inherent likings, abilities, needs and shortcomings—for instance music, writing, escalators and sit-coms. To this Cosmides and Tooby [17] suggest to add an “institutional domain”, in which behaviours are practiced out of context, but still under a contract not severing them from their actual domain; for instance teaching or practice. Role-playing could be said to fall under the cultural domains. It uses many of our inherent abilities in a way that we find pleasurable, and through the youth-culture and surplus of the late 20th century, it took on the institutionalised form we see today, hooking up with general tendencies and personal ideals in late modernity. Our minds may have developed communication and decoupling skills to increase procreation chances on the savannah, but we still have them, and may have cultivated them further, using them to dream up new inventions and accumulating personal cultural capital through telling stories, singing songs and acting cool. Adult role-playing is not too different from reading books, attending political meetings or going out dancing, and it seems to fit our minds and current society just as well. We like exercising our mind, exploring roles, models and situations, and we adore safe ways to develop social relations. The more skilled and flexible our forefathers were at negotiating new situations, social relationships or coming up with new ideas, the better, and therefore we might quite naturally have evolved to like doing these things.

Our mind was developed through a complex and as yet not completely understood process, bringing our hominid ancestors down from the trees, into the cognitive and social niches, and finally into “late modern” culture. It is therefore obvious that role-playing games as we know them are made possible—and indeed enjoyable—by features selected for under very other circumstances and for other “purposes”. By looking back on the emergence of the human race and culture, we gain a glimpse of how and why our mind might have developed to start us off role-playing.

8.6 CONCLUSION

I have tried to introduce a few angles from cognitive science, in the hope of creating attention towards some of the useful terms and studies in this area, and to encourage

a further focus on the inner mental workings of the human mind in the study of role-playing.

I have used the very narrative, if at times overly assertive, style of evolutionary psychology to try to persuade you about how and why the mind might have come to be this way, and why we suddenly came up with something like role-playing. One answer is “because we could”. Another is “because it is an efficient way to accumulate social capital, in tune with the cultural narratives and ideals of postmodernity, and much more effective than individual grooming. Also, it fits really well with our mind and stuff we like doing in the first place”.

I do not believe that humans are slaves to inherent physical or genetic imperatives, and I certainly do not think that something has to be in favour of reproduction to be worthwhile. Even if role-playing is a complete waste of time, seen from the point of view of my genes and former student councillors, I can only echo Steven Pinker: “If my genes don’t like it, they can go jump in the lake.” However, I still feel strongly about the human mind, and that it is worthwhile to look to neuroscience for a better understanding of the cognitive abilities that come to light in everyday life and, notably, role-playing.

I have not presented every ounce of cognitive research that might aid the study in role-playing, but I have chosen a few theories that I feel is important. I have also left others out because they are not known well enough to me, too complex, or too far off subject. I have tried to focus on what goes on in the individual mind, to draw focus away from what goes on in the social world, between players. This leaves out a lot of interesting matter from areas such as social cognition, didactics or language, but that is a matter for another time. I focus on representational-negotiation and semantics in a different paper [62].

Many of the views presented here are matters of some debate in the scientific community. We lack concrete neural correlates to the theory of scope syntax, the area of evolutionary psychology is highly speculative, and consciousness is a tentative matter to say the least. I have also oversimplified theoretical frameworks that cognitive neuroscience and other disciplines are just starting to grasp, and I am guilty of using terms in extremely wide and general ways. If you, the reader, have caught the drift of what a cognitive science tells us about role-playing, or if you even see the light and will start using useful terms like “decoupling”, then I feel justified in these slight transgressions.

My main point has been to introduce cognitive science, and in the process, place role-playing in the mind instead of “somewhere out there”. The only thing “out there” between players is the signals and shared representations necessary to facilitate the joint interplay of many separate role-playing experiences. The subject of signification

and knowledge in role-playing should be developed further, and I feel that the explicit nature of role-playing might even be a valuable tool for further research into other fields in the general area as well. “Diegesis” is thus the creation of a common set of references for the individual role-players, while “immersion” is an aspect of decoupling ability, where players try to ignore the scope-syntactical tags placed on the remembered present, that tell us “this isn’t real!”. The paper is not an attempt at a new theory or definition, but rather a theoretical reconstruction of existing knowledge.

I hope that this brief tour de force of some ideas from (cultural) cognitive (neuro) science have been inspiring, a bit entertaining, and hopefully equipped everybody a little better to understand the strange practice that we call role-playing—it’s all in your mind.

Prosopopeia—Playing on the Edge of Reality

Markus Montola & Staffan Jonsson

In this paper we discuss the genre of pervasive larp that seamlessly merges game and ordinary life, presenting *Prosopopeia Bardo 1: Där vi föll*¹, which was intended as a proof-of-concept for the genre. In addition to being a street larp staged in the cityscape, *Prosopopeia* aimed at blurring the border of game and ordinary life by spanning over a long duration of players' lives and by forcing the players to larp with outsiders. Mixing the game content and non-game content turned out to produce a load of engaging experiences and emergent game content.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of *Prosopopeia*² was to create a proof of concept for pervasive larp—essentially a prototypical combination of pervasive gaming and larping. It has been proposed earlier [70, 72] that pervasive games are games that expand the traditional magic circle of gameplay in terms of space, time and social relations: while a traditional game is played in certain places at certain times by certain people, a pervasive game purposefully breaks these limitations. The spatial boundaries are expanded by taking the game into unlimited physical places and to unmarked corners of digital space. The temporal scale is expanded as the games may last long times, being interlaced with the lives of the players and calling them to play at unforeseen moments. And the social limit of participation is expanded, as these games invite outsiders to participate in some fashion, being more or less unaware of the gamic nature of the events. In highly pervasive

¹Ed.: Proposopeia Part 1: Where we Fell.

²Prosopopœia, 1) A rhetorical figure by which an imaginary or absent person is represented as speaking or acting; the introduction of a pretended speaker; 2) A rhetorical figure by which an inanimate or abstract thing is represented as a person, or with personal characteristics (Oxford English Dictionary [75]).

games nothing is certain, as even the gamic nature of the game can be obfuscated. In this paper we describe the prototype and analyze it briefly with these three dimensions.

Prosopopeia was a larp about forgotten and abandoned ideals and about freeing a lost friend who was left stuck between life and death after committing a suicide. It all started with late night phonecalls to players with strange distorted voices from the other side, providing clues that pointed at a new age festival celebrating change in the old Mayan calendar. Quoting a player debrief³:

I was woken up around 01:30 [...] by a telephone call I wasn't able to record. I caught the numbers 12.19.13.9.0 from the telephone call and immediately fired up Google. In an hour I had discovered that this format was a Mayan date.

The festival was just a regular new age happening with nothing special about it, until the players' phones rang. Instead of a message, Nina Hagen's *Antiworld* was playing. A bit later the very same tune coming from a boom-box lead the players to chat with a punk, subsequently taking them a locker in the central station, where they acquired personal files on 12 deceased persons. Quoting another player:

I hadn't realized there were so many people honestly engaged in the Maya calendar, colonial silver, chackra cleaning and so on. I arrived quite nervous not knowing at all what to expect. Would I become possessed at the meditation, and if so would the spirit allow me to study for my exam etc?

Piecing the story together, the players came to understand that the previous agent sent to rescue had failed, and looking for him might shed some light to the problem. The voices kept calling the players during the next week, and further scrutiny calendars lead the players to Kista, Stockholm next Friday. They were hooked up to a techno-magical device at Swedish Institute of Computer Science, allowing the twelve dead to possess them.

I really loved the intense tempo, the feelings of fatigue and insecurity, the feeling of being herded along on a journey where I had absolutely no control over anything. These memories are what will stay with me for a long time.

³The quotes in this paper are used mainly as illustration, they were obtained from the research questionnaire filled by the players after the game. The language in the excerpts has been corrected, and the characters and the players have been anonymized.

The game was on: for 52 hours they followed the trail of the failed agent, discovering hideouts, looking through old documents, talking to strangers, hacking encryption and trying to discover what had happened. The journey took them all the way from high tech areas to rundown parts of the town, visiting cemeteries, ruins and rusty dock areas. Finally they found the missing spirit in an abandoned mental hospital, traumatized by rapes and considered insane for being a gifted medium. After the players talked her out of her personal hell, the helpful staff of *sics* channeled the spirits out of the hosts.

9.2 PERVERSIVE LARP

During the recent years, larp has been increasingly brought from closed spaces to urban areas (see for example Talvitie [93] and Pettersson [78]). Especially the *World of Darkness* larps have been more and more commonly played in the cityscape. In this paper we discuss *Prosopopeia Bardo 1: Dår vi föll*, which was an attempt to exploit the merging of ordinary world and game world to the fullest.

This ambitious pervasivity differentiates *Prosopopeia* from a generic urban larp. While a street game of *Vampire* lurks in cafeterias and alleys, it does not actively interact with surrounding world. The game is clearly limited to its players—if the bartender is not wearing a sign of participation, he is not an equal part of the ludic framework, but is treated like scenery. Characters might buy drinks from him, but the intent of hiding the game from the bartender is deeply written to the game genre—the goal of the vampires is to stay hidden. This approach was contested in *Prosopopeia*, where the players were expected to expect unexpected from the random passerby.

As McGonigal [66, 65] has thoroughly discussed, games that allow the players to see them as part of ordinary reality can produce very engaging and interesting game-play experiences. A game that supports the player in pretending to believe that it is not a game can be very overwhelming and exciting experience. As an experiment, *Prosopopeia* ventured to this area, trying to combine this exciting aesthetic with a larp.

In order to create the spatial, temporal and social pervasive expansions and to merge ludic and ordinary realities seamlessly, three important design solutions were applied: the possession model, the prosopopeia proposal and runtime game mastering.

The relationship of players and characters was defined through the *possession model*. Players played diegetic⁴ versions of themselves, possessed by ghost characters during

⁴We refer to elements existing within the game world as diegetic, or existing within the diegesis. Diegesis is one player's understanding of everything that exists in the game. Off-game elements are thus non-diegetic. (See Montola [68], cf. Hakkarainen and Stenros [42]).

the game. This was intended to allow both character playing and reacting naturally to events not related to the game—like meeting a friend on the street. Thus, the everyday life of a player was taken as it was, changing the ordinary life into game by adding the ghost. All these spirits were deceased people from real history.

“Play the game as if it was real” was the most important rule of the game, labeled the *prosopopeia proposal* by the organizers. The combination of the proposal and the possession model implies that while a player could discuss the game events with her boyfriend during the game, she was not allowed to refer to the game only as a game, since it was to be taken as ordinary reality. In addition to being a playing guideline, the *prosopopeia* proposal was a design principle: it motivated creating scenes where players had to actually do things for real. In practice this resulted in crawling in tunnels and researching real-world sources for game-relevant information.

Runtime game mastering was done through game masters playing out characters in the world in real time, in a fashion adapted from the tradition of tabletop role-playing. Successful orchestration requires the game masters to acquire a sufficient amount of information on the player activities, and to have sufficient means to influence the player activities. Both the sensing and actuating are particularly difficult in a pervasive larp, and thus a multitude of technological solutions were applied, as discussed below.

In summary, *Prosopopeia* was built by adding ludic content to our ordinary reality but hiding the gamic nature of the added element. The players could never exactly say where the game ended and the ordinary reality began: in addition to obvious game elements and obvious unrelated elements, the game experience included many non-game elements appearing ludic and game elements being indistinguishable from the world around.

Our focus is mostly on the designs and intentions of the game organizers, discussing the player feedback and their subjective experiences a little less. This is because we want to emphasize the design lessons of *Prosopopeia* rather than the ups and downs of the unique orchestration of June 2005⁵.

Prosopopeia was organized in Stockholm in June 2005. It was played by 12 players for 52 hours, but the semi-game states that lead into the game lasted for a much longer time. The artistic orchestration was lead by Martin Ericsson, Staffan Jonsson and Adriana Skarped. The game was produced in collaboration with IPerG project⁶.

⁵We plan to report our player feedback elsewhere later on.

⁶Full credits according to the organizers: Martin Ericsson (lead design), Staffan Jonsson (production), Adriana Skarped (characters), Holger Jacobsson, Linus Andersson and Emil Boss (writing), Jonas Söderberg (sounds), Karl-Petter Åkesson and Pär Hansson (electronics, surveillance, wireless), and Martin Lanner, Johan Eriksson and Henrik Esbjörnsson (production assistants)

9.3 TECHNOLOGICAL GAME MASTERING

Montola [69] argues that role-playing games can be designed to be chaotic or orderly depending on the application of dissipative and integrative design solutions applied. Dissipative choices⁷ make unpredictable, uncontrollable and free games, while integrative choices make predictable, controlled and pre-planned games. The *Prosopopeia* design structure, where anything could be interpreted as game-related, is extremely dissipative and chaotic. In order to give any sense to the experience, integrative structures were needed, and, as demonstrated by decades of tabletop role-playing, live game mastering is one of the strongest options available. Thus, technological solutions for runtime game mastering were implemented.

In order to perform runtime game mastering, three things are needed: a sensory system, a processing system and an actuating system—in addition to the infrastructure connecting the three. Sensory system provides the information on player activities, processing system decides what to do with the information, and the actuating system executes activities. In tabletop role-playing and in smallest larps all these three functions can be trivially performed by one person, but game mastering a larp like *Prosopopeia* requires considerable technological support. The players are spread out all over the city for a long time and the actuation needs to be done either invisibly or diegetically.

Sensory information was gathered through video camera feeds, audio feeds, dialogue with characters and direct visual observation. Due to technological problems the main audio feed was unintelligible, and the practice quickly taught that video feeds are extremely uninformative, so the game masters had to rely on direct observation and dialogue with characters, the latter of which was also the sole means of actuation in the game.

All these functions were concentrated to the technological centerpiece of the game, an old reel-to-reel recorder, which was rigged with a cellphone, allowing the communication of the ghosts and the living. In the other end of the cellphone there was a game master control center, equipped with sound scramblers and synthetizers, which was manned for the full duration of the possession. According to the aesthetic of the 60's mythos of *electronic voice phenomenon* (EVP), the players recorded their questions and comments, and after rewinding the tape the ghosts mysteriously answered on the tape. In addition to the EVP machine, many non-player characters were played through the Internet.

⁷Choices pertaining all designed elements of the game, such as plot structure, character goal choices, power division, diegetic culture, pacing, game mastering, random elements et cetera.

In practice, the dialogue of game masters and players formed a large part of the game. As an unwanted side effect, this strongly integrative feature unfortunately led many players to experience the game as very orderly and controlled, a dysfunction similar to “railroading” common in tabletop role-playing. One discernable behaviour pattern was “milking”, which often occurs with railroading—the behavior where the players expect to be led further by game masters, because they have been led by them earlier. Thus, when the players were stuck with their investigation, they desperately tried to pump the non-player characters for extra clues.

The pacing of seamless pervasive larp turned out to be a problem, since the uncontrolled nature of ordinary reality makes it impossible to predict when players decide to spend hours chasing a red herring. Interesting solutions could be found from looking at ways of giving the players transparent feedback when they are progressing in the game. In a game like *Prosopopeia*, the players who are following a game master-designed course of action are occasionally able to confirm that they are on a correct path, as they encounter elements that clearly are game-related. Confirming that a path is incorrect is much harder, as no obvious signals can be found.

The *Prosopopeia* experiment suggests that the challenge of pervasive larp pacing and game mastering is finding the middle ground between leaving the players unguided and dragging them on excessively.

9.4 DRAMATURGY OF PHYSICAL SPACE

Prosopopeia was a spatially expanded game. It was played in unforeseen areas, and the players moving around and communicating to distant places articulated these areas into the playspace. The basic structure of playing larps in closed spaces has allowed a very detailed propping of the game locations, where literally every object can be redefined for the purposes of the game. However, in a city larp such as *Prosopopeia* it is impossible to create scenography for the whole gaming area, so usually selected small areas are propped while the majority of gaming space is taken as it is.

Even though there were certain hotspots of player activity, very few locations were truly redefined to be something that they clearly were not. In the spirit of the *prosopopeia* proposal the game went strongly for *indexical propping*—the players were expected to visit a new age festival that was portrayed by a real new age festival and *sics* premises that were portrayed by *sics* premises. As Lopenen and Montola [63] discuss, props can be categorized into symbolic, iconic and indexic categories, depending on how an object in the real world refers to an object in the diegesis. In a basic Peircean fashion a symbolic prop represents something through a convention or contract, like

when a game rule states that a paper slip with the word “gun” represents a diegetic gun. Iconic prop represents something similar, like in a game where a Finnish pair of army boots represents a German pair of army boots just because they are worn by a person who larps a German soldier. Indexic prop is the third class, where the prop represents itself directly in the diegesis—and this was done a lot in *Prosopopeia*. Instead of redefining objects, the aim was to recontextualize them into the game world. By virtue of the prosopopeia proposal, all real objects were also game objects.

In *Prosopopeia* this was aimed to create a feeling where everything is a prop and thus nothing is a prop. This indexicality went much further in *Prosopopeia* than is usual, as even the social context of the props remained largely unchanged; even though in a regular urban larp a jacket may signify a perfectly identical jacket, in *Prosopopeia* the jacket signified the exact same jacket owned by the exact same person. One of the driving themes of *Prosopopeia* was to encourage players to look at their everyday environment from a new perspective, finding game clues where none existed and interacting with ordinary world in a game-inspired, free fashion. When everything is a prop, this kind of perception and interaction is encouraged.

A great upside of indexic propping is that it allows the players to solve puzzles in a real and tangible way. Players were allowed to toy with everything they encountered, and some puzzles could be solved that way as well. For instance the players could have added loudspeakers to the reel-to-reel recorder in order to make the using of the device easier—the puzzle was to understand this and to acquire some loudspeakers somehow. Indexic propping supported the realness demanded by the prosopopeia proposal: the players could fidget with the recorder just like with any regular 60’s recorder.

In the spirit of the prosopopeia proposal, technological game devices had to be invisible and very convincing in order to fabricate the indexicality. According to player feedback, the rigged EVP recorder succeeded in this, and was appreciated for that by the players.

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

The requirement of indexicality in cityscape allowed *Prosopopeia* interesting opportunities in designing the dramaturgy and the aesthetic of the space used in the game. Discovery and exploration were central themes, and thus many of the events took place in desolate urban areas, offering the players a tour into the blind spots of urban landscape. This aesthetic was borrowed from the urban exploration movement for purposes of both adding dramatic tension to the gaming areas, and offering tangi-

ble physical action in cityscape. While a regular larpwright transforms a private place into a gaming area with scenography, *Prosopopeia* looked for semi-public locations in the urban landscape that already suited the design of the game. The game could only feature a scene in Beckomberga mental hospital, because Beckomberga mental hospital was available for the use of the game. Where scenography was done, it tried to fabricate reality as perfectly as possible—the design goal for the propping was to make the perceived image of the game locations be the same for a player and a non-player, in a way where the player could reinterpret the meaning of the objects through the game filter⁸.

Urban exploration is often done in areas where an ordinary person is not allowed to go, and doing so may require avoiding security guards. *Prosopopeia* exploited this tension and the forbidden feeling of these places by introducing game master security guards patrolling some of these areas; for instance the players were expected to sneak into the hospital rented by the organizers. Even though entering the asylum was legal—the place was rented for the game—the entering was given the tension of trespassing by introducing the guards and by not openly disclosing the legality.

Indexic propping may cause problems of excessive authenticity. Some *Prosopopeia* players reported that they had almost missed the central playing venue, a rusty old boat in a repelling dock area, since it didn't appear to be a gaming area. Obviously the game needs to incorporate failsafes ensuring that the most critical parts of the game are discovered. The players might have refused to enter the mental asylum if they considered it very illegal or dangerous. Also, if representation is largely indexic, the players are bound to be confused when encountering symbolic and iconic props—like the webcams *Prosopopeia* organizers used to monitor the game.

Discovering the prepared locations in *Prosopopeia* was designed to happen in a branching structure, where the players could find and go through locations in the order they wanted. However, players reported this experience as very linear. One of the main reasons of this was that the clues leading to locations were hidden in difficult puzzles, and thus they entered every location as soon as they found a clue pointing there. Another reason was that the game designers had overestimated the players' initiative and competence to solve the puzzles to the locations and were forced to make runtime maneuvers to provide the players with the clues needed for progression⁹.

⁸There was one exception to this rule, one area that was not adequately scenographed. One minor place was used for a brief period only, and thus the limited resources were spent elsewhere. In that area the illusion was severely broken, which might have been a mistake considering the general high-end quality of propping in the game.

⁹Fatland [28] discusses linear, branching and nonlinear plot structures in detail in larp context. The lesson of *Prosopopeia* is that in addition to applying a branching or nonlinear structure, the larpwright must

In the beginning of the game the players knew the overview space of the game, but they only had the access to a limited number of prepared locations. Later on in the scenario they got access to more and more locations, while losing access to some. This kind of location structure can be used as a tool in designing game progression and pacing, while still giving the players a large degree of freedom. The players can explore and move between the locations they have access to at the moment and unfold the scenario in their own way and liking. The information about the next locations could be hidden as a clue somewhere in the locations the players already have access to, hidden in puzzles or provided to the players by the game masters.

Transportation is also an important part of the spatial dramaturgy of urban larp. In *Prosopopeia* it did not include any clues or game content to the players, but it provided them with low intensity gameplay where they could interact socially, explore the possessing spirits' attitudes and feelings for the world today and the situation at hand. Casual everyday experiences gave them the possibility to explore the city from the possessing spirits' perspective, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

The most memorable situation of being possessed around people was our very early morning snack at 7-eleven at 5.30 am the first morning. The whole experience was surreal; the feeling of being alive and open to the world mixed with everyone else's drunken happiness. A completely unknown person (if he wasn't one of yours) actually fed me pizza as I tried to enter the shop.

9.5 LIFE-GAME MERGER

Being a temporally expanded pervasive game, *Prosopopeia* merged the game time with non-playing time in several fashions. Most of this took place before the main event, before the possession, but the game time and ordinary life time were also merged during the main larp phase by the possession model.

In *Prosopopeia* design there were two game modes: ambiguous game time and dedicated game-time. The game began with an ambiguous preparatory phase, and then continued with a weekend-long period of dedicated game time making up the main larp event.

During the preparatory phase the game was in the state of dormancy, waiting to enter the lives of players at planned times. Players were expected to conduct their

ensure that the lack of linearity is communicated to the players. Many players (at least in our sample) strongly prefer the feeling of freedom in the game, and the design flaws mentioned made players lose that feeling in a non-pleasurable fashion.

everyday business, remembering the prosopopeia proposal if something unexpected happened. In the dedicated game time the players were supposed to be ready to be possessed by the ghosts, spending their time quite actively with the game.

For the players of *Prosopopeia* the first entrance into the game was clearly marked on the application webpage, by the following text: “You should now do all you can to forget about this project until it contacts you again. This is the only time the game will be presented as such. From now on everything is real.” Pushing the button meant entering the preparatory phase of the game, even though the player was given no character. The typical elements of larp participation were absent; the only rule provided was the prosopopeia proposal. The players were aware that they were supposed to larp themselves, and that the dormant game could enter their lives at any time without them knowing it.

Weeks later the players were introduced to the game with a series of nightly voice messages from entities beyond death. These messages lead the players to the preparatory new age festival, with almost no specific game content at all. Even this event, where the players met each other in real life was part of the dormant game. Instead of prepared game content, the event was full of real new age mysticism, which players were expected to take for real according to the prosopopeia proposal.

In the end of the festival day the players received the character materials on their upcoming ghost characters. All this material was also diegetic, and available for the players within the game. The players were not given non-diegetic character information at all, along the lines of the prosopopeia proposal integrating everything non-diegetic into the diegesis, but they were expected to work out their characters from the diegetic materials they were given. In a quite unusual fashion, players could have read each other’s character materials within the game, still without breaking the illusion in any way.

The main phase started a week after the festival, with players entering the basement of SICS, where they were infused by SICS staff. Possession was done through a technomystical ritual involving audiotapes where the ghost characters addressed the players directly.

This marked the beginning of the possession. During the main phase the players were allowed to larp themselves, the possessing spirits, or any mixture of the ghosts and the hosts. In order to succeed in the game, the players actually had to use the possession model to its fullest; combining the backgrounds of the ghosts with the contemporary skills of the hosts. Interaction with the world outside was easiest through the hosts, of course, but in some cases the ghosts needed to talk with outsiders as well. For example, one player reported the following:

I did not at any time openly play myself, but at several occasions did my personality shine through quite clearly. Some of the puzzles required my personal skills rather than those of the spirit, and being under constant pressure to solve them created a sort of “quest mode”, mustering all my personal resources. [...] Come to think of it, actually at one point I called [a relative] to find out how to get to Beckomberga, she worked there in the seventies. I then played myself, but probably it was just [the ghost] using my voice.

The possession model was expected to eliminate the players’ need to step outside the game; whenever the game would excessively disturb the ordinary life, the player could quit playing the ghost and revert to playing himself in the game world. However, it should be pointed out that this didn’t work perfectly, and several of the players reported game occurrences where someone had broken the prosopopeia proposal:

But I really can’t say I “played” myself [when I called my girlfriend]. Not consciously that is. Also when I had knowledge that the spirit didn’t have, I used that as myself. Like using the Internet for instance, or my ATM-card.

To further add the confusion, sometimes the events of *Prosopopeia* were also discussed as a game within the diegetic reality of the prosopopeia proposal. For instance, the characters were hinted that in many occasions they might want to lie to the outsiders, claiming that their strange activities were actually a part of a game. In the following excerpt a game master character is found from a tunnel in the game. He’s claiming that *Prosopopeia* is a game, since he has regressed to denial after deeply traumatizing (diegetic) possession-related events.

We found [the agent] curled up in the dark not very far down. We managed to talk him into coming with us. He kept saying “It’s only a game, nothing is real.”

The players also broke the prosopopeia proposal mentally when accidentally peeking behind the scenes, for instance when seeing game masters in wrong places. Curiously, they also occasionally broke the proposal when they mistakenly believed that they had seen behind the scenes—for instance once when encountering a person whom they mistakenly believed to be one of the ghost voice actors. Just as interesting game experiences emerge from the seamless merging of life and game, off-game experiences emerge as well.

9.6 PLAYING WITH NON-PLAYERS

In addition to breaking the boundaries of playing area and playing time, *Prosopopeia* also expanded the traditional social boundary of larp, including outsiders into the game in many ways.

Outsider involvement helped in making the life-game merger more perfect and more seamless. Many strategies were used: game content was placed in the hands of unaware outsiders, some outsiders were given instructions by the game masters, and sometimes the players had to accomplish missions involving outsiders.

The former two strategies both bolster the feeling of realness. The advantage of using unaware outsiders is that they are more real as they are not part of the game. One downside is that as they do not realize the importance of the game content, they might not tell the players the critical information or might not show them the important prop. If the piece of information is vital, the latter strategy of instructed outsiders should be preferred.

Each character in the game was also given a mission that involved the outside world and interaction with bystanders. For example, one of the possessing spirits was a pioneer of free communal housing and wanted to manifest this by sheltering a homeless person for a night. Another spirit was a Catholic Christian, wanting to confess her sins committed in life that had not been forgiven in her life. The player had a mission to go to a mass and discuss with a (non-involved) priest. These missions were both very powerful and extremely demanding; unfortunately, many *Prosopopeia* players left these quests undone, so deeper analysis is not possible¹⁰.

On occasion outsiders became involved in the game accidentally or unpredictably. Mostly these were casual encounters on the streets, but two specific cases deserve mentioning. The first one happened next to a graveyard in Stockholm, where the players tried to communicate with the dead using the EVP-recorder. A player describes:

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

Believing that the stranger might have been involved with the game the players spent a considerable amount of time discussing game-related issues with him. Even though

¹⁰Due to an unfortunate miscommunication, the debrief questionnaire lacked the questions that would have shed light to reasons of not pursuing the tasks.

the discussion never dropped a critical clue to the players, they were afterwards extremely uncertain on whether the encounter was staged or coincidental.

In the second case a player sent some emails to his friend during the game, including some discussion related to the game events. He described ending up in a foreign city after confusing sequence of events, and that he was planning to head back home next. According to his account, the discussion probably was somewhat disquieting from the outsider perspective.

These examples demonstrate that the borderline of a pervasive larp and ordinary reality is uncontrollable to both the game masters and the players. The email in the latter case was completely spontaneous piece of game action from the player's behalf, not provoked by larpwrights in any predictable way. The former incident was also beyond player control, as they were not aware on whether the bypasser had a relationship with a game or not. Even asking the stranger directly would not have confirmed his relationship to the game, as it is possible to involve outsiders even without telling them—*Prosopopeia* organizers planned to have an actor performing game-related activities before the main event in the areas players were expected to frequent, in order to make it theoretically possible to meet witnesses who'd seen the events. Unfortunately this was not done due to unexpected problems with scheduling.

In addition to this direct social expansion of involving non-players with the game, *Prosopopeia* also took the border of ludic and ordinary down indirectly, in game background and reality fabrication. Many elements in the story were fitted for or inspired by the historical backgrounds of the characters, so it can be argued that several important game events had really happened before the game even began. Thus, the players could google up significant additional information on their characters, and find out both important and irrelevant clues about their past. Quoting a debrief:

I read up on EVP in general, the Maya calendar and the spirit world mythos within the EVP context. Some of this was discussed by email [among the players before the possession]. [...] No solid "clues" were found, but a lot of background material that helped explain the game story.

Even this googling was occasionally controlled by the game organizers, as they took many existing sources of information and altered the content for the purposes of the game. For example one website was duplicated in its entirety, hundreds of pages of occult lore, just adding some six pages to it. This reality hacking was used to fabricate substantial amounts of data for the players to scrounge. Also, the chance of randomly finding game-related information was introduced.

9.7 CONCLUSIONS

We have described *Prosopopeia Bardo 1: Där vi föll* as an example of where an ambitious pervasive larp can go, briefly going through the methodology and the philosophy of the game. Although the implementation of the game was far from flawless, it demonstrated the genuine value of seamless merging of ordinary and ludic, as well as ideas such as indexic propping and the possession model. Clearly, such design features have significant potential in creating new kinds of engaging game experiences (also McGonigal [66]).

Prosopopeia experimented mixing of ambiguous content and confirmed game content, creating the certainty of *Prosopopeia* being a game but leaving it ambiguous where the game content ended and real world began. This mixture proved to have advantages, but there are also design challenges that need to be solved in the future.

Prosopopeia also demonstrated that active runtime game mastering is possible even in a boundless open space larp, if sufficient technological and personnel resources are present. Such tools need to be used with care, in order to avoid guiding the game too obviously. Another important technical lesson learned was that surveillance technology has to be applied with care. Even though there were cameras installed in every (private) location the players visited, the utility of the video feed was low, due to bad quality of the image, player movement and labour-intensivity. Assessing the state of the social process of the game by looking at video feed is very difficult, and audio feed suits the task much better. Also, concealing video cameras is a lot harder than concealing microphones. Tools to monitor the state, position, information flow and social dynamics in the player group need to be developed further.

In this paper we have not addressed the ethical lessons of *Prosopopeia*. Obviously, looking at ethical issues is extremely important for pervasive gaming, and the challenges are significant especially for the extreme forms such as *Prosopopeia*. We are investigating issues like player privacy and outsider experiences elsewhere in project IPerG.

The next step is to take this proof of concept to another level, by scaling the larp up in terms of number of participants and duration of the game. In order to accomplish this scaling we will focus on generic, reusable technology, rather than dedicated technology that was used here. According to the plans the next game could be 5–10 times larger, and last 5–10 times longer. Such scaling unfortunately might require downscaling in the detail of background work and authenticity of propping.

Acknowledgements Writing of this paper would have been impossible without the people who created the game, players and organizers alike. In addition to the people mentioned in the game credits, many volunteers deserve a share of credit. We are grateful to Eirik Fatland, Petri Lankoski, Jani Nummela and Annika Waern for commenting our drafts. This paper was written for EU-project IPerG.

The Art of Experience

Juhana Pettersson

What is the core of roleplaying? How is the roleplaying experience put together? What does it consist of? How to talk about roleplaying in a meaningful way? These questions are explored from the perspective of practical roleplaying experience, with the aim of making better games. The article discusses the qualities of in-game and off-game experiences and offers some conceptual tools on how to work with them. I believe that quality games are created only through more sophisticated understanding of what do people do when they roleplay.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

“Very rarely do artists defining art say the same thing.” The quote is from George Quasha’s [81] essay explaining the thinking behind his sprawling project of definition, *Art is* [80]. In his work, Quasha collects statements from hundreds of artists worldwide in video, asking them to define art. The definitions range from the obvious (“Art is beauty,” “art is destruction”) to more personal statements¹.

There’s a distinct difference in the attempts of artists and the attempts of academicians when they try to define role-playing. For the academician, the definition is an attempt at truth², while for the artist, it is a tool³. Quasha writes in his essay that: “In the transition from the ‘Modern’ to the ‘Post-Modern’ it’s often understood that artists tend to abandon eternalistic and universalistic aesthetic claims in favor of the relativistic, the historical, the multicultural, the anti-colonial, the non-hegemonic, and so on.”

I would like my personal definition of roleplaying to be understood in this context. For me, roleplaying is the art of experience, and making a roleplaying game means creating experiences.

¹When put on the spot, I remember panicking and saying something I learned in high school philosophy class.

²For example, “The Meilahti Model” of Henri Hakkarainen and Jaakko Stenros [42]

³For example, the definitions in Mike Pohjola’s “The Manifesto of the Turku School” [79]

I argue the same in my book *Roolipelimanifesti* (the Role-playing Manifesto) [78], sadly unavailable in any other language than Finnish. The reason I keep hammering about it⁴ is because I've come to suspect that it has a descriptive application in thinking about roleplaying games. After laying out his relativistic arguments, Quasha continues on to say:

The effect of this relativizing is sometimes to frustrate one's inquiry into what might be common, if not to all art, at least to a lot of art. To oversimplify a bit, we've learned to love *difference* to the extent of mistrusting *sameness* and *identity*. This can have the perhaps unintended effect of diminishing the sense of connections, commonality, the "authority" of traditional values, and—most difficult to characterize—individual confidence in taking a firm artistic stand, especially when based on "intuition" rather than intellectual reasoning.

I've found that I can apply my experience-based approach to every kind of a role-playing game I can think of with the same beneficial results. Approaching the game, whether as a player or a GM, from the perspective of individual, personal and direct experience of each participant brings to the fore the essential nature of even the most basic *Dungeons & Dragons*-style hack'n'slash game.

10.2 EXPERIENCE—WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The experiences in roleplaying are of a specific kind. You adopt a fictional identity or identities for the duration of the game. The identity may be just the player's proxy in the fiction of the game or a more complex creation suitable for immersion and acting. You act in an environment that has a fictional context related to your fictional identity. You act in the game; you're empowered to make creative decisions. You're a part of a creative team.

These are the details that form the mould into which the roleplaying experience will be cast. They are the framework, but they are not the totality of roleplaying. That is something that resides in the minds of each individual player as they engage with the game.

How, then, does the player engage with the game? How does he navigate between the off-game state and the in-game state?

⁴For example, in my article "Battle Against Primitivism" [77].

Mike Pohjola did a game recently called *Kun soi Jazz (All That Jazz)*⁵, a pulp space opera game. The game was propped in a pretty homemade fashion to look like a space version of the bar in *Casablanca*. What this meant was waitresses who seemed to be only half in-game. Spaces separated with white sheets hanging from clotheslines and a merry band of tough space cowboys eating ice cream from little paper plates.

On the other hand, the players were really into it. The space cowboys were a lot of fun, the people from the casino planet appeared suitably sleazy and the Amazons certainly seemed ready to castrate at a moments notice. All this made for a game experience where I was totally unable to immerse in the idea that outside these walls, there was only the cold, vast expanse of space, and that the bar we were in was the baddest, sleaziest, toughest dive around.

Despite all this, I was perfectly able to embrace the character dynamics. In some areas of the game experience, I was immersed 100 per cent. In others, I was practically off-game. Usually at the same time.

Most of the players in this game were people I know. This had the same effect I've often encountered in larps, where I start seeing characters instead of the players only after I talk with them. I walk into a room and I see my friends Mike, Mika and Jaakko playing their characters. Suddenly Mike approaches me and starts shouting at me, accusing me of corrupting his sister. At that point, he switches from being my friend into being his character, because at that point I have to deal with him in character.

Perhaps because of this, characters with high status in the game generally tend to overcome their players faster, and players who act a lot tend to be lost inside their characters faster than those who have the same mannerisms with every character.

Tabletop games have also often featured highly disassociated and strange concoctions of immersion and non-immersion. In Jaakko Stenros's long-running tabletop campaign *Lohkeileva kynsilakka (Cracking Nail Varnish)*⁶, I play a character physically very unlike me, and I don't have any trouble easing mentally into his body. What I do have problems with are the appearances of the other characters. My character has a relationship with another player character. She's a sporty, blonde conservative. Her player is a brunette with a somewhat different sense of style.

When I play with her, I have to continually remind myself of the appearance of her character. I don't map her appearance onto her character, but neither do I see another face on the character in my head. It seems that she has no operative appearance in my imagination, and neither do any of the other player characters.

I'm not saying that everyone has these complications when they access the fiction

⁵Turku, Finland, 2005

⁶Jaakko Stenros, 2002–

of a roleplaying game. I'm using these examples to explore the strange boundary between in-game and off-game and to argue that a large amount of the things we do when we roleplay are situated on this boundary.

10.3 EXPERIENCES IN PRACTICE

I recently made a tabletop game⁷ with Markus Montola, an experiment or an exercise which I think was good for illustrating a number of the ideas presented here. Montola's idea was to make a game where all of the participants have a very limited idea of each other's plans for the game. The players made characters for themselves without any idea what kind of situations those characters would end up in. I, as the GM responsible for the world, made a scenario which I hoped would appeal to the widest possible range of characters. Montola, as the GM responsible for active plot elements, made NPCs and scenes that would work in any framework.

The basis for the game was basic *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd edition* [55] in *Forgotten Realms*[22], so that every participant would have a common and very familiar starting point for their work. This was done to retain a certain amount of sense in the game and prevent it from becoming so bizarre it would interfere with what we wanted to do.

Running the game, we learned two important lessons. Both have to do with the roleplaying experience as related to the concepts of "In-game" and "off-game". Both cast a critical light on the best descriptive model for roleplaying so far, The Meilahti Model of Henri Hakkarainen and Jaakko Stenros [42].

The Meilahti Model concerns itself with only the diegetic aspects of roleplaying. This has to be seen as a serious weakness, because games such as ours distinctly blur the line between in-game and off-game and function in large part in the sphere of the non-diegetic. The players had talked between themselves and had a functional group dynamic already at the beginning of the game. Their characters were on the lam, or so I deduced, which meant they had a diegetic motivation for revealing as little about themselves as possible.

In practice, I was not able, as the GM, to form a very good idea of who the characters were. I found out what they looked like and saw little details about their habits, but that was it. This meant that as a GM, I was forced to aim my material squarely at the player and not the character. I didn't know the characters, so I didn't know what would work on them, what they would care about, or what would hurt them. But I did know the players, many with whom I'd played before. I had the instincts to play

⁷Underground, by Markus Montola and Juhana Pettersson, 27. 12. 2005, Helsinki, Finland.

on their particular peculiarities.

From the point of view of the player, the game was a rich, character-driven experience. From my point of view, I had the off-game personas of the players running around in my world through proxy characters.

This is not a strange experience. Similar things happen when you go to a larp and have to interact with a character whose player always plays the same way, no matter what he's supposed to be playing. Sometimes a larp has game mechanics that intrude heavily into the game, and sometimes players introduce romantic content into the game with decidedly non-diegetic motivations. In those situations, and in many others, off-game considerations play heavily in the game, sometimes completely obscuring the in-game ones. This means that considering only the diegetic, you end up with a very simplistic view of roleplaying, one that doesn't take into account the full breadth of the experience.

This line of thinking leads us to the second hit the game delivered to The Meilahti Model. The model describes a common diegesis shared by all of the participants in the game. What we had in our game was a situation where the diegeses of all the participants were wildly different. The obvious example is between me and the players. Their diegesis was much richer than mine, because they knew all the character material being brought into the play. Crucially, even if they hadn't been familiar with each others' characters, they saw the inside world of their own character. Things I knew about the game world existed only on the level of potential diegetic information until I introduced them into the game, while secrets relating to the characters the players kept from me were included in the diegesis despite the fact I was unaware of them. I didn't see anything but the surface level of this information, which left me playing around with the aforementioned player proxies [68].

A practical result of this kind of game construction is that my material didn't really engage the characters on a personal level, giving the whole game a strange quality of disassociation.

In retrospect, the second finding was pretty obvious. I'd say that in any larger larp, there are player groups with wildly divergent diegeses, and often they even fail to interact in any meaningful way. The example that immediately springs to mind is the Helsinki city game *Isle of Saints*⁸, where I played a small-time criminal. After the game, I found out that the game had featured all kinds of supernatural elements and had, in fact, been a *World of Darkness* game. Effectively, the people playing vampires had played in a completely different game than I had.

The experiment was also troublesome from the perspective of the idea of the GM

⁸Mikko Rautalahti, Mika Lopenen and Jukka Koskelin, 2000

as an auteur, as seen, for example, in Mike Pohjola's *Manifesto of the Turku School* [79]. In the Game we did, not only was I not responsible for a large portion of game content, I was totally unaware of it. The game was a patchwork of my vision, that of Markus, and those of the individual players. It underlined the fact that a roleplaying game can only be understood as a collection of subjective experiences, where every participant is at least half responsible for what he gets out of the game. I, as the GM, was reduced to the level of scenery in this process.

10.4 OFF-GAME EXPERIENCES

I propose that in the experience of a roleplaying game, the off-game and the in-game experiences are equally important, and if you want to make a good game, you should pay attention to both.

Tabletop games offer a lot of classic examples. I've played in many tabletop games where the game material has been very good, where our characters have been well designed, the game has had a lot of emotion, and everything has flown wonderfully. At the same time, the games have been held in deeply unatmospheric, brightly lit living rooms, with no plans on how the participants are going to be fed, and with music only playing when someone remembers to put something on.

As a result, the game suffers.

I stress that this is really not much of an insight on my part, and I repeat it only because I see it so often held in disregard.

There's a number of strategies that may be employed that are essentially off-game, but have concrete in-game effects. Other strategies aim at the border between in-game and off-game. Christopher Sandberg writes about some of these strategies in his essay "Genesi—Larp Art, Basic Theories" [82], in which he coins the term *Red Field*⁹ to stand for the space on the border of in-game and off-game. At the end of his essay, Sandberg summarizes: "The ultimate task of the Geneseurs¹⁰ is the not to communicate the fictive to the player, or taking the player into the fictive, but to change the soul of reality, delivering the fantastic."¹¹

Thus, in Sandberg's view of larp, the GMs augment reality into a fictive state. This kind of thinking goes rather well with the experience-based approach, because from the point of view of individual participant experience, the lines between in-game and

⁹Thorough his article, Sandberg actually uses the term *Grey Field*, changing it to Red Field only at the end. Nevertheless, it seems that Red Field is the definitive term.

¹⁰Geneseurs is Sandbergs gamemaster analogue

¹¹This is, incidentally, a classic example of an artist defining his own craft.

off-game are blurred anyway. More importantly, this strategy opens the door for a large number of Red Field strategies, because you're no longer troubled by questions of in-game and off-game. Essentially, these strategies are ways to make roleplaying games based on a holistic idea of the in-game and the off-game, where each complements the other.

As Sandberg explains in his essay, one of the classic off-game strategies to enhance in-game experiences is the off-game room. In the off-game room, the player has the chance to unwind a bit, eat something, and perhaps fix his make-up before going back to the fray. The Swedish larp *Moira*¹² used a Red Field variation where in addition to the traditional off-game space, they had a semi-off-game space, where you could remain in-game, but still fix your make-up, halfway in character. Speaking was forbidden, leaving the player alone with his thoughts.

Sandberg himself experimented with Red Field strategies in *Hamlet*¹³, varying the nutrient levels in the food the players ate during different parts of the game. Sugar, especially, had very concrete results in the game. Since the game lasted for days, it was possible plan things in a highly comprehensive manner.

A Red Field strategy I've often used highly successfully has been the rule of normality. The rule defines some inexplicable aspect of the in-game environment as normal and makes it pointless to talk about it in character. In the larp *Luminescence*¹⁴, the players were wallowing half-naked in 800 kilos of flour. Since we were afraid the players would spend too much time talking about the flour in the game, we were going to make the flour off-game at first.

At the last minute, however, we realized that if the flour was off-game, the players would find it difficult to play with it in the game. We had to define the flour so that the players couldn't talk about it, but could stuff it in their underwear. The rule of normality works for all these situations where you have elements in the game that should be in-game, and present a danger of dominating all the social activity in the game. The rule makes them effectively equal to off-game underwear in fantasy games and other elements that are routinely accepted and used in larps despite the fact that they're always non-diegetic.

¹²Anna Ericson and Karin Tidbeck, Sweden, 2005

¹³Christopher Sandberg, Martin Ericsson, Anna Ericson, Martin Brodén et al., *Interaktiva Uppsättningar*, Sweden, 2002

¹⁴Juhana Pettersson and Mike Pohjola, *Solmukohta* 2004, Helsinki, 2004

10.5 IN CONCLUSION

So, what have we learned?

If roleplaying is the art of experience, then what kind of an experience is it, exactly? It is an experience consisting of active participation and creation, of being a subjective spectator, of engaging with both the in-game and the off-game levels of the game. It is an experience of negotiating a large amount of communication and complex, artificial social systems, out of which the game itself emerges.

Furthermore, every game experience consists of in- and off-game elements designed by the GMs, as well as other elements that appear in the game purely by chance. The random element underlines the bizarre relationship roleplaying has with the concept of an author, because when the subjective viewpoints of individual players start interacting, there's no telling what part of the experience was planned by the GMs, what made up by the players, and what appears seemingly out of thin air.

It should be obvious that if this is true, then all the individual player experiences vary wildly in content, also in terms of the cocktail of in- and off-game content in the game. Thus, the only way to truly know what went on in the game is to somehow record the individual experiences of every participant, both in terms of what they did in-game and how they negotiated the game off-game.

For GMs who want to meet all of this head on, there is the option of consciously focusing on the Red Field strategies, thus bringing a more holistic approach to making games. In a game making full use of the Red Field, the player is free to experience the game the way he wants, because he doesn't have to make mental excuses for all the things that are seemingly off-game.

To sum it up, I'd ask the prospective GM to keep his eyes on the ball. This is what the teacher in gym class told us when we were eleven and trying to learn baseball and it applies here equally well. If making a roleplaying game is about constructing individual player experiences, then all other considerations are secondary.

Persona

Ryan Rohde Hansen & Maya Krone

This article presents the larp *Persona*. The creation of the larp was in large parts influenced by theory put forth during earlier Knudepunkts. In the following, this process is analysed to see which benefits can be gained from applying larp theory to real-life cases. Furthermore, the article gives an insight into a lesser known tradition within in Danish larp.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

The larp *Persona* was held at the Danish convention *Fastaval* in Easter 2005. It ran twice with 20 participants, each session lasting 6–7 hours. Each participant was required to read 35 pages of material prior to the larp and to bring their own costume. Each character has a mask associated with it, which was handed out at the beginning of the larp.

The larp was a convention larp, a form with a small but devout group of followers in Denmark. Through our experience with Knudepunkt we have come to realise that this style is closest to the Finnish way of making larps—at least the way it has been explained to us. The convention larp form has strong connections to the RPG subculture and is typically held during a convention which is why these larps usually run no longer than 8 hours and rarely with more than 40 participants. The strong emphasis on the written material enables other organisers both to reproduce the larp and to better themselves through reading the work of peers. A typical convention larp is built upon character interaction with elaborate written characters and relatively simple set design. Most experiments in Danish larp culture are performed as convention larps as the rather small scale lends itself well to testing new ideas. Players are attracted to this novelty as well as to the intensity fostered by fleshed-out characters interacting in a compact time frame.

11.2 THE CONCEPT

Imagine a society where everyone wear masks in order to hide away their emotions and instincts. The mask defines your function within the society. In *Persona* we tried to depict such a society through a symbolic larp, where realism was toned down in order to let the parable shine through. In this conservative and stringent society, no one—not even spouses—ever see another person without his or her mask. Each mask is associated to a societal function and expected behaviour. Wearing the mask of a teacher, the citizen is supposed to be knowledgeable and strict, even when this does not correspond with his personality. The society of *Persona* is prosperous as everyone contributes and no one draws on the resources more than needed. On a spectrum between order and chaos, this society certainly does not hold the middle ground.

Every eight years, a mask change is organised to facilitate elderly people retiring and young people receiving their first masks. Part carnival and part political campaign, this night masks are cast away for one night and everything is open for debate. Towards the end of the night, the masks must be distributed again, but not necessarily to the persons that wore them before. Heady with a few hours of freedom, the citizens try to better their lot in life by getting a mask that corresponds to their dreams of the future. The larp is set during this night of near anarchy to let the participants experience the extreme of this society. When the masks are thrown off, the many hidden stories behind them can also be let free.

11.3 SET DESIGN

The symbolism strived for in *Persona* comes through in full force in the set design. Heavily inspired by the movie *Dogville*, the game was played in a darkened hall with set represented by marks on the floor—full circle from houses marked by cord in past larps but returned to with a defined purpose. To stimulate the senses, each house had a bit of furniture and a small table lamp making a pool of light. The real walls of the hall were shrouded in shadows, focusing the attention of the participants on the city itself. The one end of the hall had a scene which was used as the town hall. Here the ruling elite resided. A plateau jutting forth from the scene became a speaker's podium and was used extensively throughout the larp. Above the main square of the city, where the mask change were to take place, large spotlights were hung. At the time of the Mask Change all other light was shut off, narrowing the play to only a circle of light on the square. Soft music was played to support the mood.

The most important thing in the larp is of course the masks themselves, magnif-

icent props for stimulating the players. We decided to go with leather masks as they were to be worn for up to three hours and needed to be comfortable. Furthermore, if the larp were to be run again they must be sturdy enough to be used many times. They were fashioned as commedia dell'arte masks but with straps resembling those of a gas mask. The colour black was pointedly avoided as not to create associations to fetish leather masks. Each mask was given a colour according to caste (ruler, warrior, or worker), a unique symbol for profession, and stripes to roughly denote age and rank. This way it was possible to read most of the data important for conversation and other interaction directly from the mask.

11.4 DESIGNED WITH RITES

The design of the larp was strongly influenced by the article “Play To Love” by Martin Ericsson [25], where the work of the anthropologist Victor Turner on liminal rites is set in relation to larps. In short, a liminal rite helps people transition from one state of their life to another (limes is Latin for border). Weddings and funerals are prime examples. In tribal societies these always have three phases: Separation from the former state, anti-structure where the participants can play with their role in life and, the integration where the new state is accepted. A later version of the liminal rite is the carnival where the fool is king for a day and vice versa. The carnival helps the lower castes to let off steam to better accept their lot in life. The liminal rite is a precursor of many forms of modern day entertainment.

In *Persona*, liminal rites are present on three levels. The larp itself is considered a liminal rite—as described in Ericsson’s article—which caused us to do a lot of planning for bringing the participants into and out of the larp mind set. They were asked to lie down in the house belonging to their character while the hall was still dark. An imaginary journey was made to help them put aside their everyday role and assume a new one for the larp. This was the transition into the larp state. After the larp had run its course, the lights were slowly put out and the characters went to sleep. The same method was used to help the participants back to their ordinary identities. This was the separation from the larp state. The plot of the larp also has the typical shape of a liminal rite. Here the rite takes the form of a carnival. The Mask Change is a carnival where the usual structure is upended and all the mental steam is let off. In a rigid society like that of *Persona*, this is not only useful but also necessary. Finally, the Mask Change employs an actual rite—held as part of the larp—to help the characters rid themselves of the mask.

11.5 RESPONSE

The intentions of the organisers and the experiences of the participants differ. Before the larp, an unusually high number of participants contacted the organisers, to praise the material. Although a lot of preparatory reading was required, no one complained and rather expressed their great expectations. The amount of material convinced the participants that this was a serious larp worth the effort of preparation.

The larp was run twice shortly after another. The first run was a bit more static and received slightly worse reviews from the participants than the second run—good, but not fantastic. We evaluate this to be mainly due to two reasons: During the first game, the palyers did not receive enough stimuli from the non-playing characters, and an organiser was forced to assume a players character at the last moment. We were afraid to provide too much organiser input, but this rather proved to inhibit the larp: we were to realise that an aspect of pressure was called for. This insight improved the second game but the formula was still not perfect.

The participants very much liked the masks and some even wanted to buy them afterwards. Most were eager to wear them even before the larp and only one participant had severe problems with wearing a mask for three straight hours.

The ritual conducted during the Mask Change also proved popular. Many participants called the moment when they laid down the mask, their most intense gaming experience ever. No participant considered the abstract set design to be detriment to their experience but rather to be improving it. It provided focus emphasised the fictional and narrative aspects of the story rather than its psychological realism.

11.6 CONCLUSION

Using ritual work as the major technique in *Persona* proved to be both fruitful and rewarding as it provided the game with a sense of unity and consistency that may have been hard to achieve otherwise. The rituals also helped adding the flavour of the rigid society that we wanted to portrait. It can from this game safely be stated that Larp theory is not only an interesting research subject but can also be successfully used in creating better games. In our case by using rites as described by Ericsson the playlers could enter a mindset that helped them better embrace the game.

End Note Right now the intention is to translate *Persona* into English as it with its abstract nature is prime for export, but the amount of material (close to 300 pages)

could make this intention a hollow wish. Until then, the foolhardy can endeavour the Danish version at Project Rlyeh [43].

art



Q: is dreaming art?

*A: no, everybody dreams,
only a few can be artists.*

What is art?



Art, as I see it, is all human activities which do not owe to our species primary instincts, survival and reproduction.



All humans
are born
creative

*but only a few are
given the chance
to develop it*



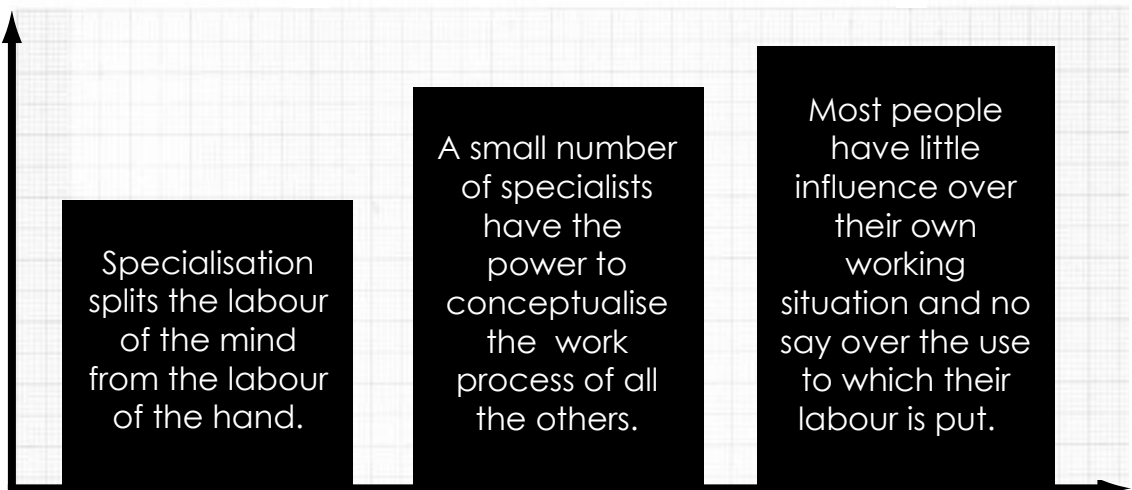
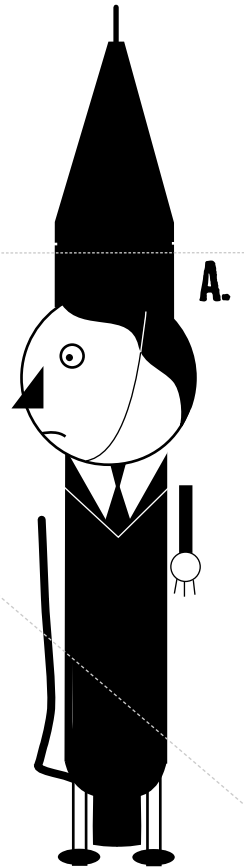
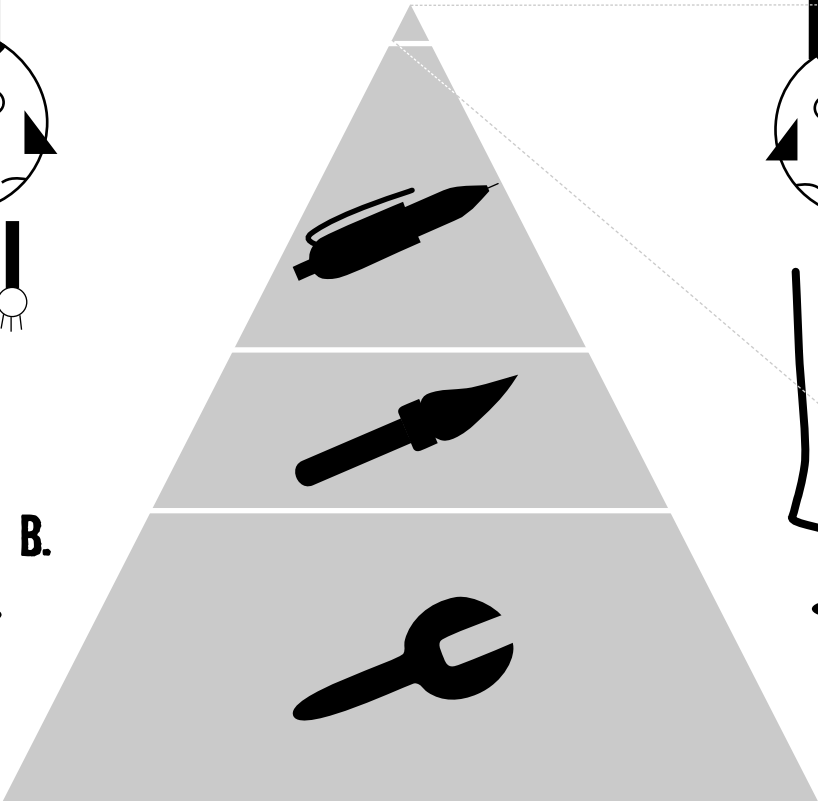
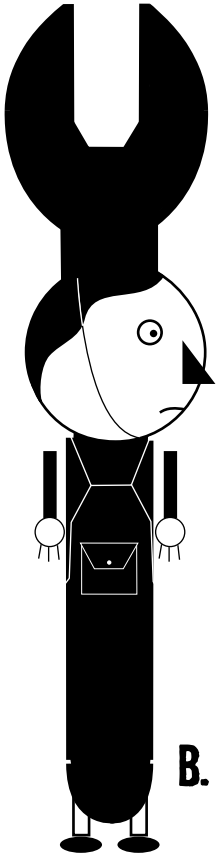
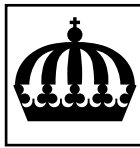
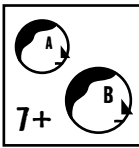
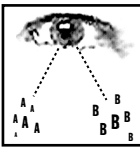
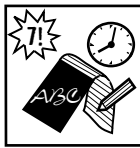
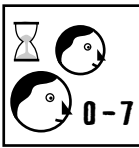


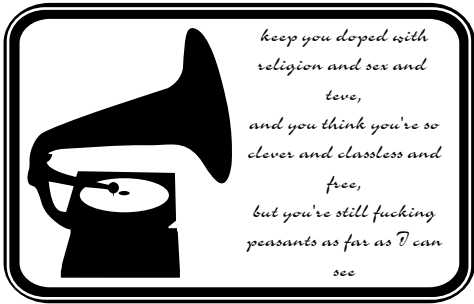
The real question is not what art is but **who is allowed to be an artist.**

The answer is in the social division of labour

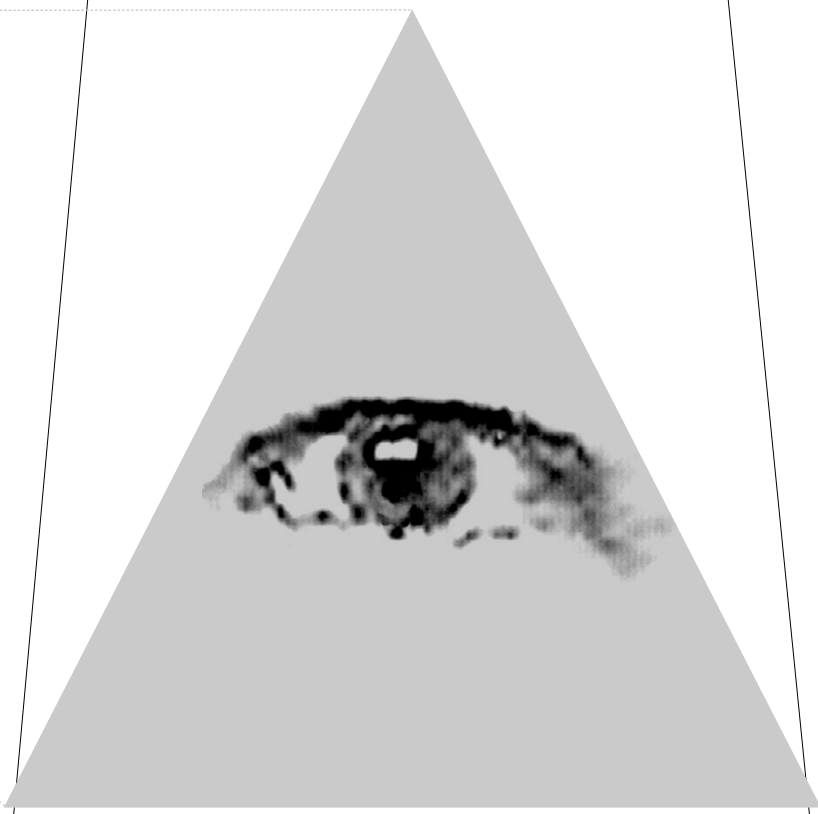


THE
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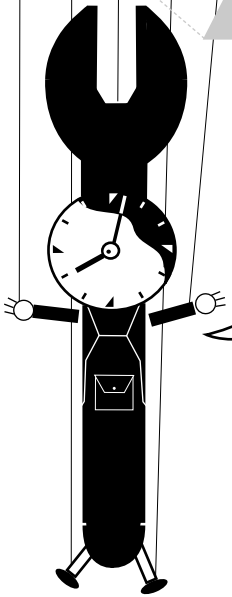
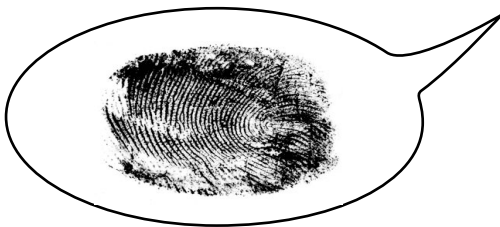


*keep you doped with
religion and sex and
love,
and you think you're so
clever and classless and
free,
but you're still fucking
peasants as far as I can
see*

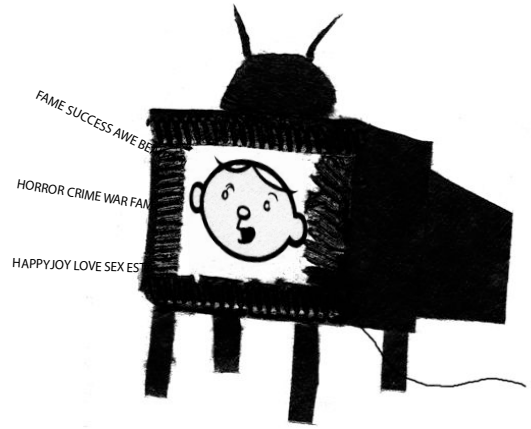
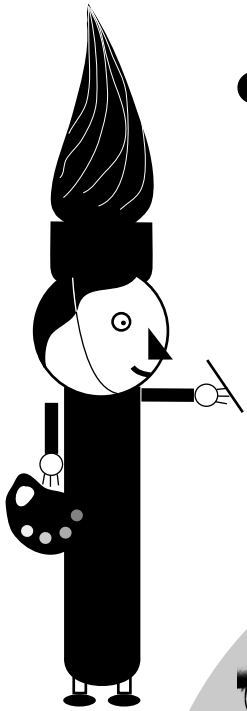


Spectators are linked only by a one-way relationship to the very centre that maintains their isolation from one another.

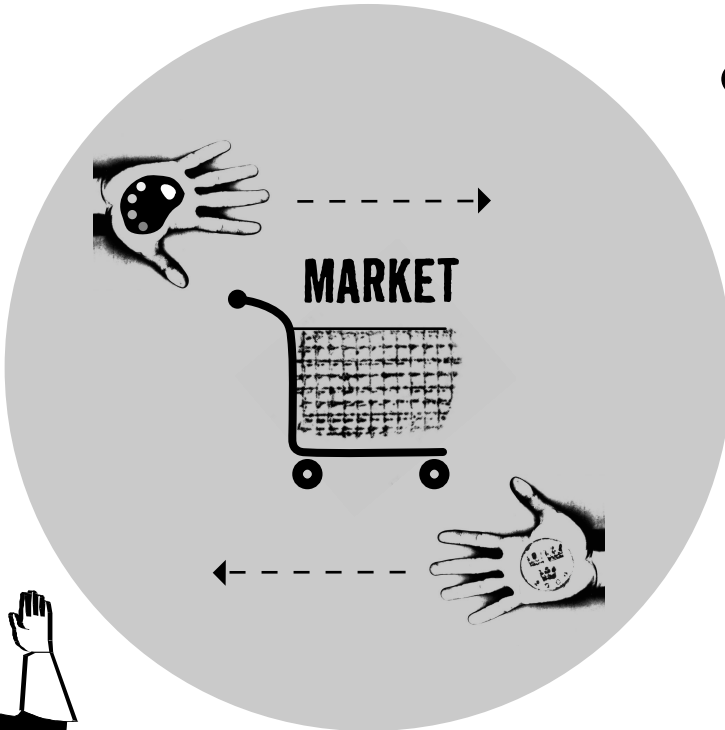
- Guy Debord



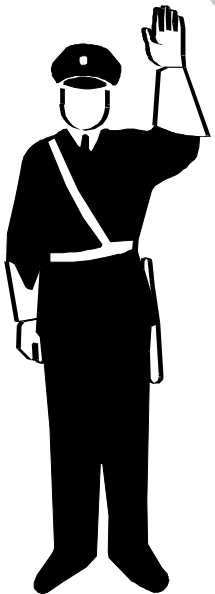
5 A selected few serve the mega-machine with their creativity. Art is commodified. Only by subsuming to the market can they revel in their status as professional artists.



6 Most people only get to experience creativity as consumers. In consumption they forget for a moment the boredom of their own dull work.

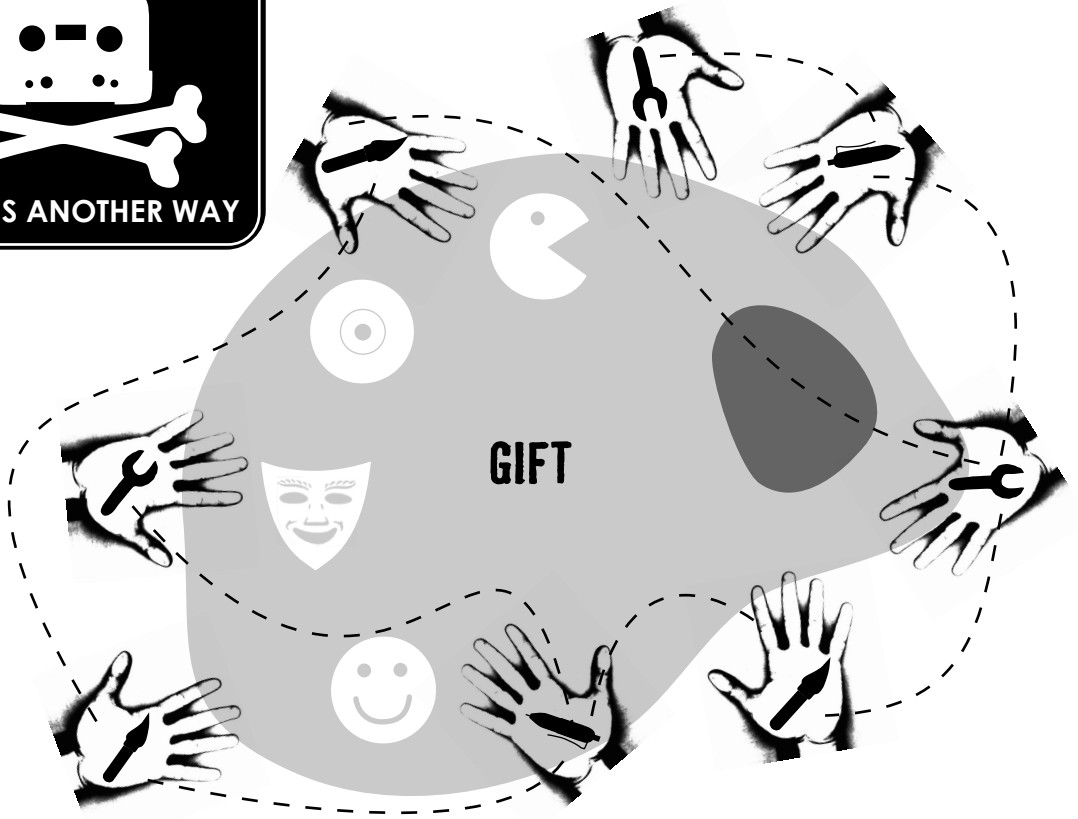


© The consumption of passive art must be supervised by the state to prevent consumers from pirate sharing.

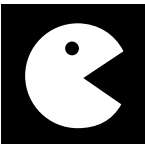


7 And the winner is:

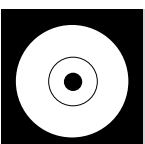




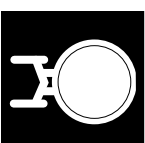
Live role-players stage carnivalesque realities challenging the truth of real reality and the identity of the Self.



Hackers liberate computer networks from the threat of state censorship, intellectual property and surveillance.



Rip, mix, and burn. The pulse of electronic music knows no original source and no final product.



Fan fiction writers expand and subvert copyrighted stories and set free commercial universes for common use.

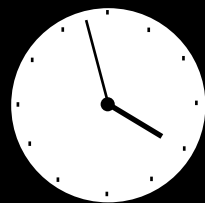
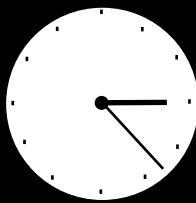
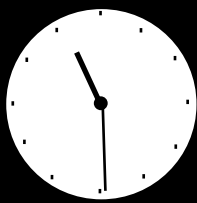
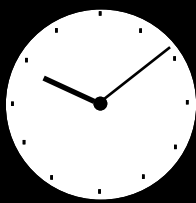
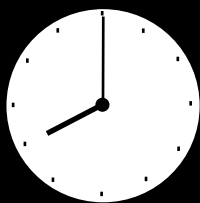
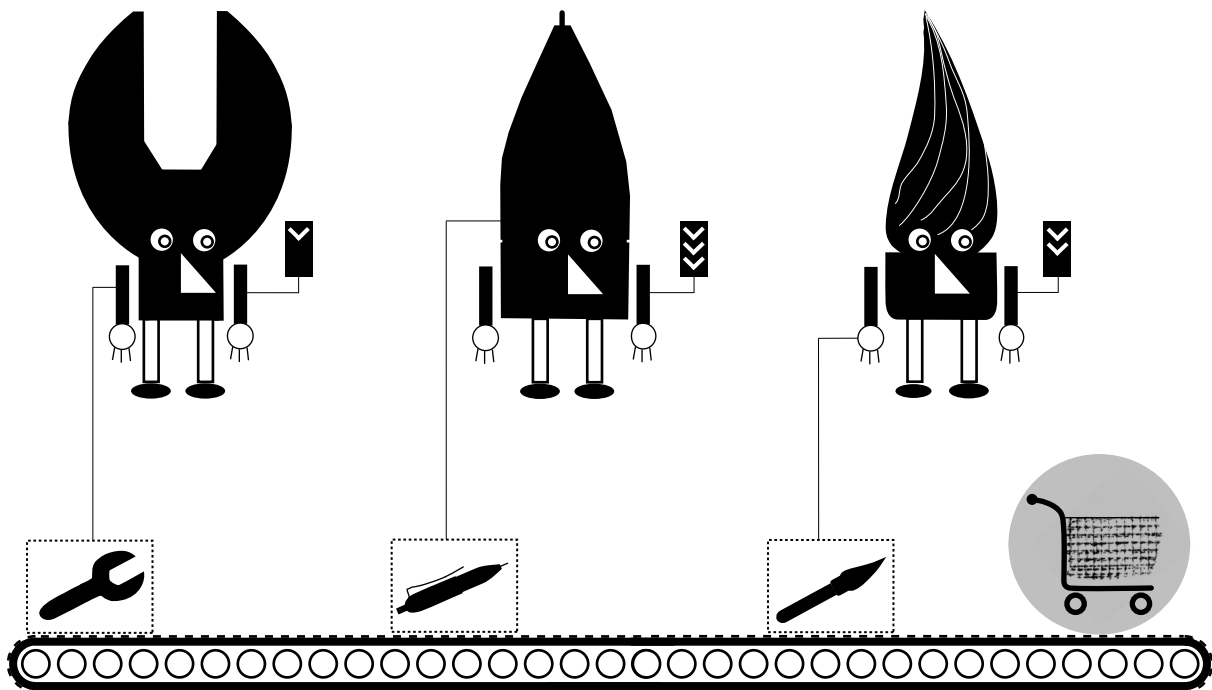


Ravers arrange outdoor parties where everybody take part in making the event and no-one charges for entrance.

People bored of the plasticity of life under capitalism self-organises their creativity. They invent new forms of culture based on gift relations instead of market exchange.

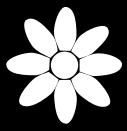


work

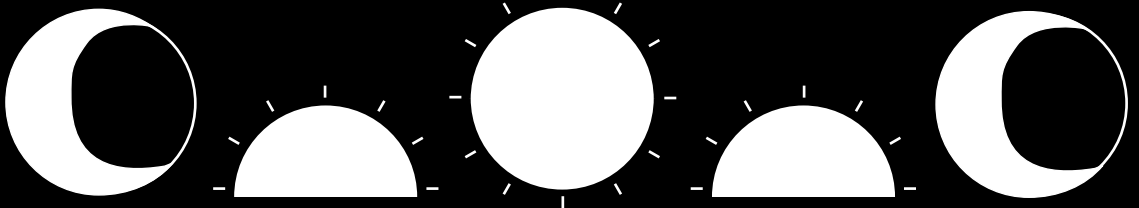
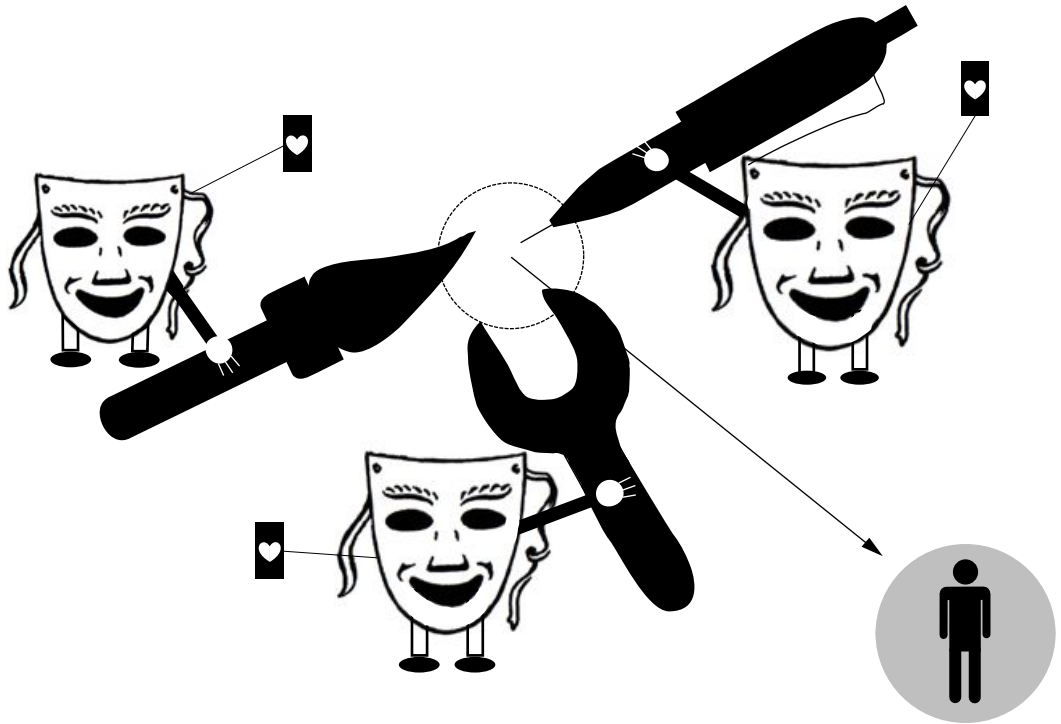


The power of professions to measure what shall be good, right, and done warps the desire, willingness, and ability of the 'common' man to live within his measure.

- Ivan Illich, *The Right to Useful Unemployment and its Professional Enemies*

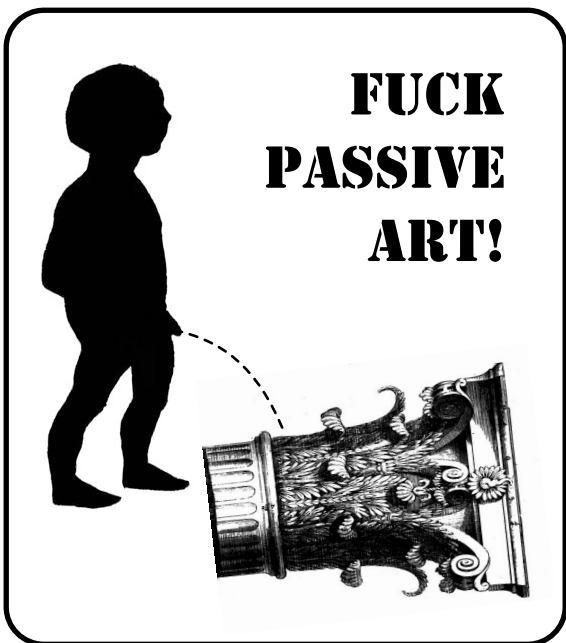
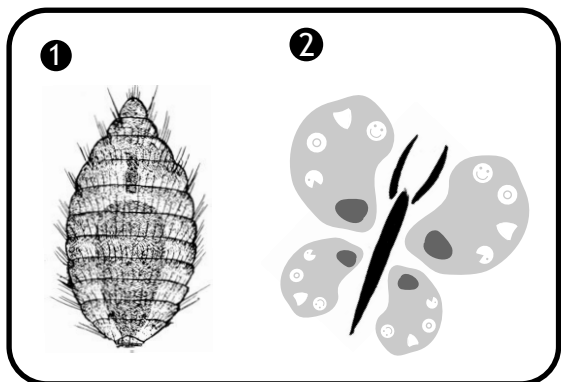
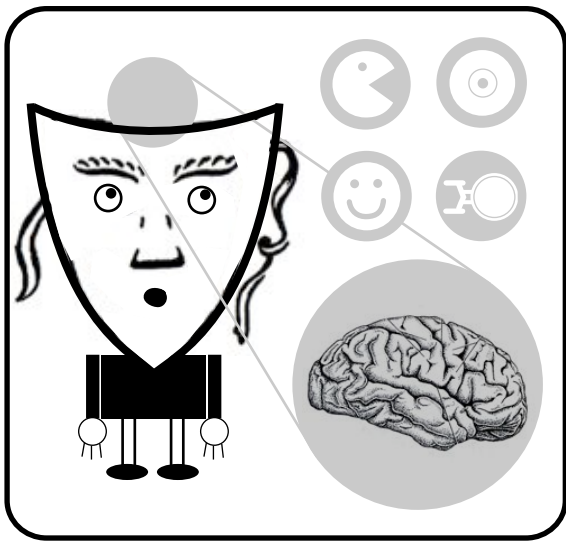
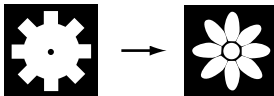


play



Play is unproductive and useless precisely because it cancels the repressive and exploitative traits of labour and leisure.

-Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization



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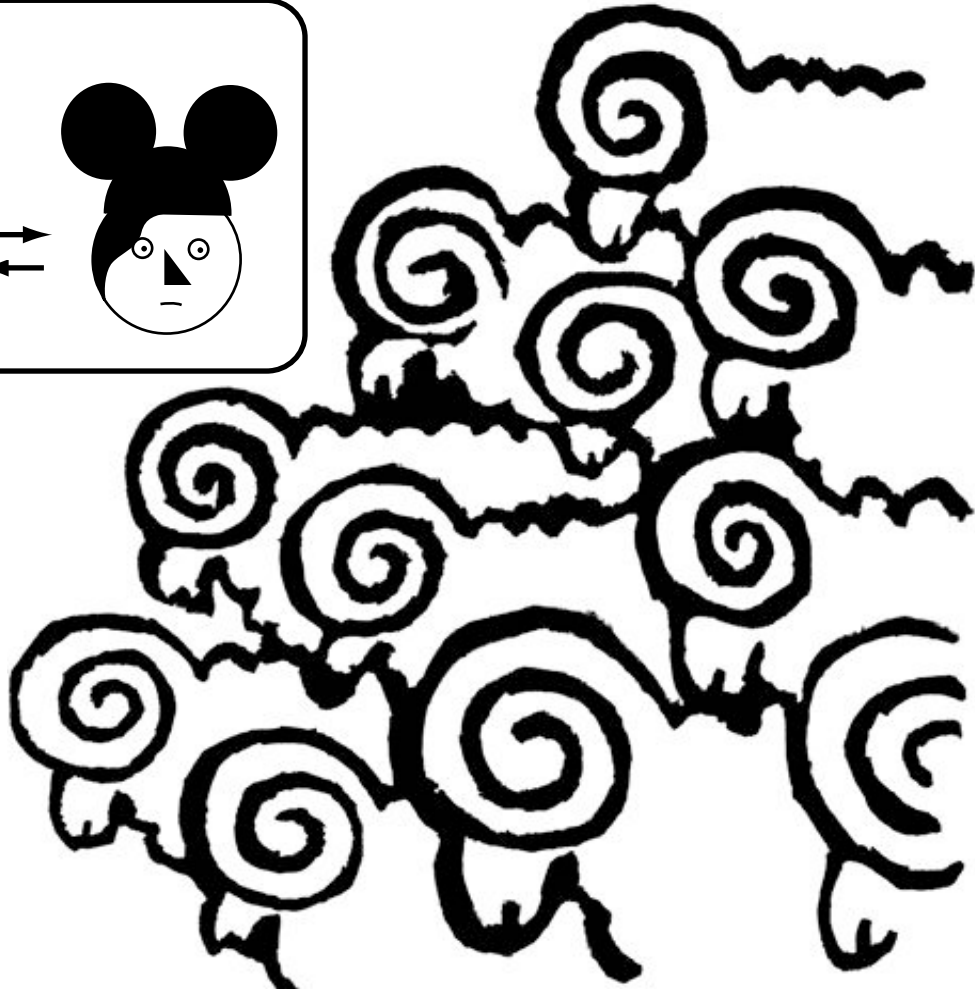
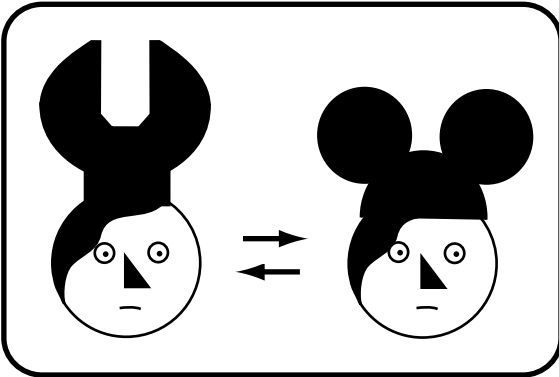
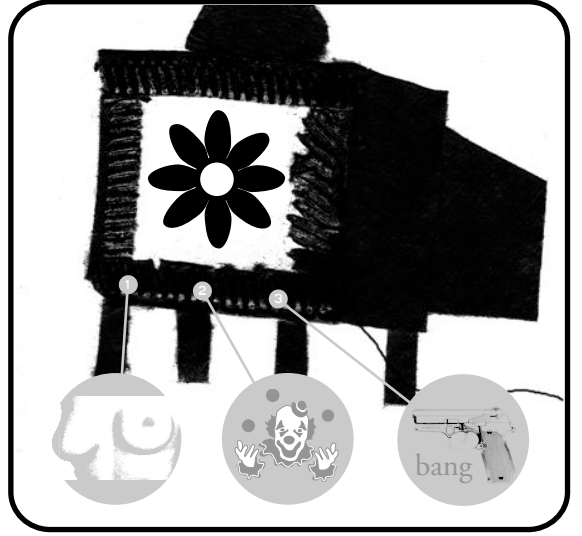
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and fuck work too





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ISBN 91-631-8853-8

ISBN 978-91-631-8853-4

Published with support from *Stiftelsen framtidens kultur*

Cover by *Martin Brodén*

