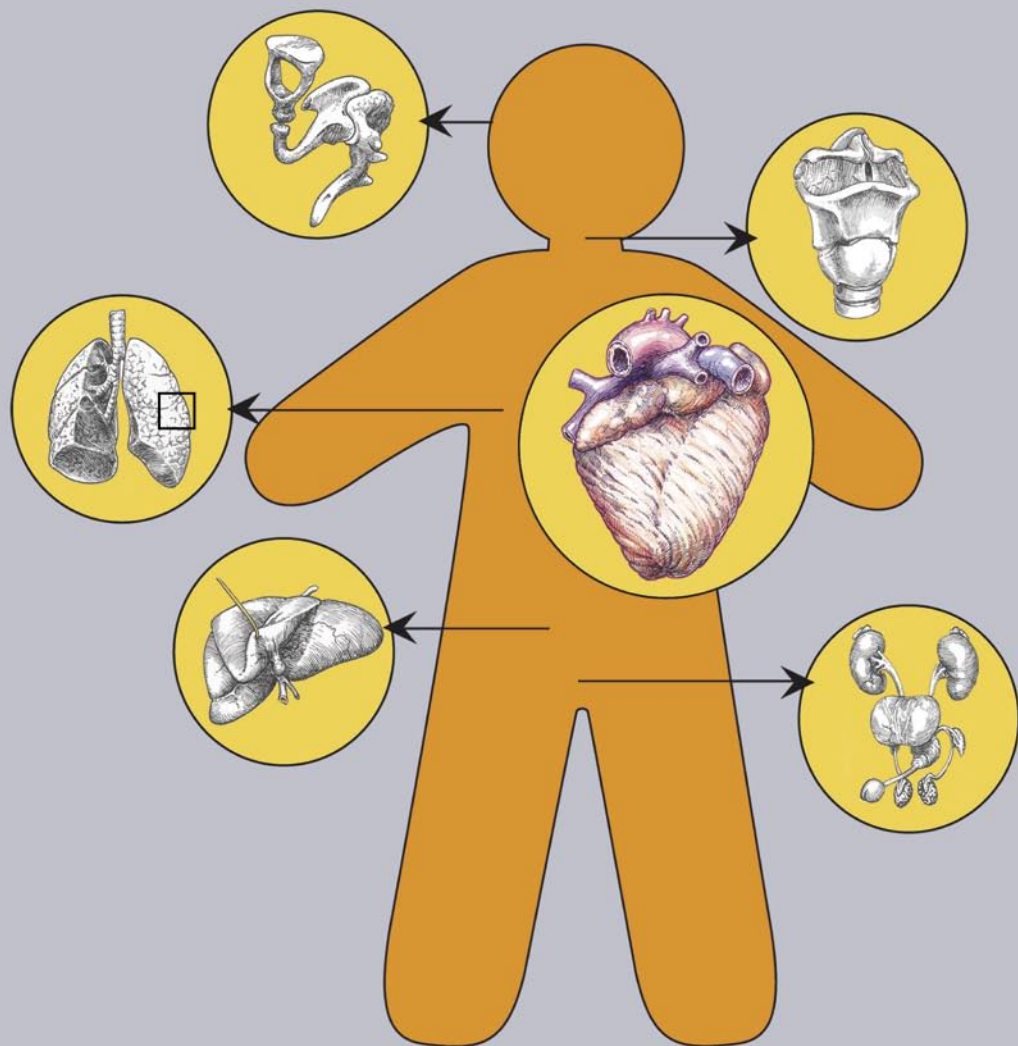


Dissecting larp

Collected papers for Knutepunkt 2005



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Dissecting larp

Collected papers for Knutepunkt – 2005,
the 9th annual Nordic Conference on larp

Edited by
Petter Bøckman & Ragnhild Hutchison

Knutepunkt
Oslo 2005

Contents

7 **Welcome**

Introduction



- 11 Knutepunkt and Nordic Live Role-playing:
A crash course
- Eirik Fatland

Application



- 23 Live Action Role Playing, Teaching through gaming
- Torstein Utne
- 31 Lived Scenarios, Combining Role-playing and Design
- Juha Mox Huuhtanen
- 43 School of Flour, Developing methodology through eight
experimental larps
- Mike Pohjola
- 71 Testing Larp Theories and Methods,
Results for Years Zero to One
- J. Tuomas Harviainen

On larpers and the larp scene



- 83 Danish larp in numbers
- Morten Gade
- 91 Larp organizing and gender in Norway
- Ragnhild Hutchison
- 105 Profiling the larper, What is actually at stake
- Thomas Duus Henriksen



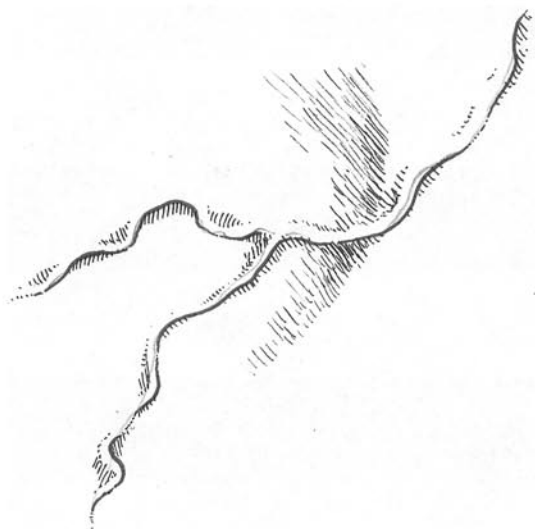
Doing larp

- 125 Nothing is True; Everything is Permissible,
Using Deception as a Productive Tool
- Markku Jenti
- 135 Corresponding Expectations,
Alternative Approaches to Enhanced Game Presence
- J. Tuomas Harviainen
- 147 Incentives as tools of larp dramaturgy
- Eirik Fatland
- 181 The Collective's little red book, A step-by-step guide to
arranging larps the collective way
- Martine Svanevik
- 189 Quantifying In-game economy,
A contribution to the analysis of the in-game economy of
larp events
- Mathias Lysholm Faaborg.
- 205 The Process Model of Role-playing
- Mathias Lysholm Faaborg



For the afterthought

- 239 Real Magic
- Elge Larsen





Welcome to “Dissecting larp”!

Larp needs understanding. Understanding requires knowledge. Finding knowledge involves digging into the murky material and getting your hands dirty. Finding understanding requires the will to dissect your own knowledge.

Nearly all writers on larp are avid larpers them selves. This makes the process of finding understanding a lot more difficult than most people outside the field would think. Larp can at its best be intensely emotional and inspirational, even a defining element of ones life. At its worst larp’s just boring. Getting to understand larp demands that the writer is willing to cast aside the fondness they feel for their subject, to evaluate the failures and boring bits. You cannot dissect without taking your subject apart.

This is the dissection, here are their findings.

This is the third collection of articles for Knutepunkt, the annual Scandinavian Congress on Larp. It is our hope that this book will establish a tradition of an annual book comprising articles on larp. The two former works, *As Larp Grows Up*, and *Beyond Role and Play* set the standard for us. Hopefully, we have not put them to shame.

Hereby, we pass the torch to the next editors.

Some notes on the review process:

This year, we have elected to experiment with the review process. With broadening and deepening of the field, it has become increasingly clear that reviewing all incoming articles has become too much for a small editorial staff. Thus, we decided to let qualified writers do the review for us.

We have named this process “peer review”, though it is not peer review by the strictest scientific standards. Firstly, there exists no set definition as to what makes one an expert on larp matters. Neither is there any larpers



holding a doctorate in larp. We have elected to let the writers themselves be each others peers, holding to what academic standard there is. Secondly, the reviewing itself has been fairly informal. The process has largely been an amicable process between writer and reviewer. Larp theory is after all a young discipline, and we have seen no need for imposing rigorous rules for the process.

Still, we are proud of what we have achieved. All articles in this volume have been subjected to scrutiny by someone writing in a related field. It is my view that the people involved in these articles best represent the reviewers available. With this edition, I hope to have paved the way for establishing a lasting review system and perhaps a permanent board of reviewers. And with a little luck, the doctorates will be coming.

Some words of thanks:

I would especially like to thank Ryan Rhode Hansen and Gunnar Fredrikson for volunteering to help out with the review process, and to Monika Hestad for doing lay-out.

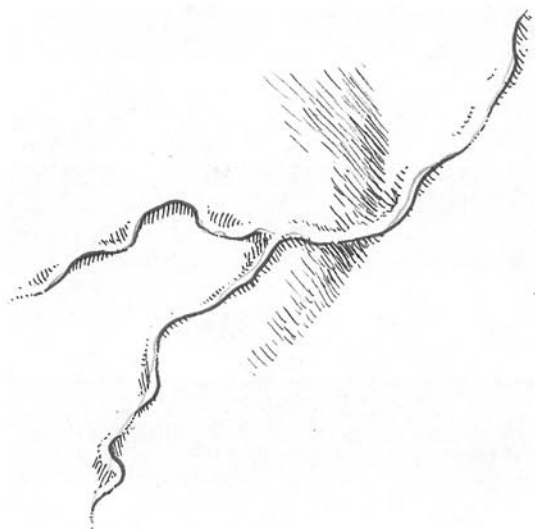
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Petter Bøckman and Ragnhild Hutchison
Editors

Introduction







Knutepunkt and Nordic Live Role-playing: A crash course

So, it's your first time to Knutepunkt. Or you've been here several times, but still have trouble figuring out those weird Finns, Danes, Norwegians or Swedes. This article is a quick introduction to the Knutepunkt event and the many traditions grouped together as "Nordic larp".

For the complete foreigner: Geography & Language

Scandinavia proper is the peninsula on which most of Norway and Sweden is situated. The "Scandinavian Countries" are Norway, Sweden and Denmark. The "Nordic Countries" are the Scandinavian countries, Finland, Iceland and the autonomous regions of Åland, Greenland and the Faroe Isles. These countries are closely connected through geography, culture, history and politics. Long before the EU, one could travel between the Nordic countries without a passport.

The "Nordic larp scene" (more on that later) includes Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark and increasingly some neighbouring LARP scenes - most notably in north-western Russia and Estonia. There are reportedly larpers on Iceland, but there has as yet been no contact between these and larpers in the other Nordic countries.

The Nordic countries have tiny populations – ranging from Sweden's 8 million citizens to Iceland's 300.000. However, while there are no hard statistics to prove this assertion, an exceptionally high percentage of the population seems to be involved in live role-playing. The popularity of larp has recently made it a feature of "common knowledge", so that a Swedish journalist may refer to something unrelated as "larp-like", Finnish TV produces a teen soap opera about fantasy larpers, and a Norwegian professor of theatre history routinely ends his course by mentioning larp as the "new theatre".

The languages of Norway, Denmark and Sweden are mutually intelligible – mere dialects of each other. Finnish is a Finno-Ugric language, entirely different from the Scandinavian languages but related to Hungarian,



Estonian and possibly to Turkish, Mongolian and Korean. In theory, all Finns learn Swedish at school – in practice few Finns, outside of the Swedish-speaking minority, are fluent in the language.

Because of the Finns, English is the common language of Knutepunkt conferences and the books published in connection to them. The non-Nordic reader should however keep in mind some differences between the Nordic and Anglo-American uses of English when talking about larp: For one, we treat “larp” as a word in it’s own right, not an acronym (L.A.R.P.). This is the way we treat the word in our native languages - “laiv” (no), “lajv” (se), “live” (dk) and “larp” (fi).

Both “Role-play” and “Role-playing game” translate to the same word in the Scandinavian languages : “rollespill”. “Spill” can mean both “play”, as in “skuespill” (lit. “spill for view” - acting, theatre) and “game” as in “brettspill” (lit. “board spill”, board game). Most Scandinavians therefore rarely talking about larps as “games” in English, as “spill” in our larps rarely is particularly gameish. Instead of “a game” you may hear “a larp”, “an event”, “a role-playing session” etc. The Finns do not seem to have the same discomfort, though whether this is for linguistic, theoretical or ideological reasons is a matter of debate.

Knutepunkt: the meeting-place of Nordic larpers.

The first Knutepunkt conference was held in Oslo, Norway, in 1997. It was, for it’s time, a fairly unusual event gathering larpers from all the Nordic countries to talk about larp rather than play it. Since then, Knutepunkt has been held annually, rotating between the Nordic countries, and each year being named in the language of the host country. So it is “Knutepunkt” in Norwegian, “Knutpunkt” in Swedish, “Knudepunkt” in Danish and “Solmukohta” in Finnish. The meaning is the same: literally, “the point of a knot”, a nodal point, a meeting place.

Knutepunkts are very diverse events, shifting between the atmosphere of an academic conference to the mood of a crazy surrealist larp. Networking, partying, lectures, discussions and entertainment have always been core components of Knutepunkt. In recent years, Knutepunkts have been accompanied by the publication of a book featuring theory and articles, the occasional small larp, and the “a week in..” prelude where foreign visitors are invited to come a week earlier to role-play, socialize and tourist their way around the host city and it’s nightlife.



There is no real “Knutepunkt” organisation, only tradition. When it’s time for a particular country to host a Knutepunkt, an organising committee pops up out of nowhere. Sometimes, two committees pop up simultaneously and they resolve between themselves how to do it. The “host organisation” of Knutepunkt varies from country to country and year to year. As does the size, ambition and themes of the conference. Extras, such as the book, the “week in..” programme, mini-larps, “Knutepunkt on-line”, are not essential ingredients of a Knutepunkt but good ideas that may or may not be maintained from year to year. This system is not perfect, as occasional heated discussions within and between organising committees have shown, but any alternative (say, creating a pan-Nordic Knutepunkt organisation) is bound to be even more controversial.

For Knutepunkt newcomers: Knutepunkt Traditions

- Opening and closing debates: an irregular tradition, dating back to the very first Knutepunkt, where all participants are expected to voice their opinion on a specific question – usually the theme of this years KP. An ice-breaker and a collaborative tool.
- Hot Discussion of the Year. Whether it is “art or entertainment”, “gender and live role-playing” or “to immerse or to act” - Knutepunkts usually offer a forum for the most-discussed topic of the year.
- Elge Larssons lecture: Elge Larsson, Swedish larps “elder statesman”, annually holds a very popular lecture involving a variety of ingredients from high-flying philosophy to teddybears.
- “Ricki Lake show”. Though officially discontinued, organiser Joc Koljonen keeps getting buggered to host the famous larp version of the American TV show. The “speculative larps” panel and the musical about larpers have been recent substitutes.
- Opening ceremony. This varies in style, and is generally held to reflect the mentality of the host country – from pompous ceremony with many drums and much symbolic tying of knots (Norway) over jolly welcomes and cheers to y’all! (Denmark) through lengthy Recitations of the Conference Rules & Regulations (Sweden) and short to-the-point-and-not-at-all-like-Sweden (Finland).
- Heavy Theory of the Year. Authors of the most difficult Knutebook articles usually hold lectures or seminars where their ideas can be discussed and are explained in plainer English.
- Workshops. Make a Bronze Age costume. Drama exercises. Larp and musicals. Workshops are practical get-togethers, with a higher degree of active participation than lectures.



- LARP presentations: Retrospective summaries of key larps held during the last year. A what-we-did-and-how-it-worked for organisers, and a nostalgic occasion for players.
- Shameless plugs: aggressive PR on the part of next years ambitious larp events. Organisers can be very creative in seducing potential players - promo parties, screenings of film trailers and hijacking other events are not unheard of.
- The LARP fashion show: Showcasing larp costumes on the catwalk, often with theatrical flair and without the depressed anorectic models who make mainstream fashion shows so dull.
- The Finnish bar: An infamous opportunity to consume all your tax-free vodka, in a motorist setting. Usually appears in countries with restrictive alcohol policies, situated right outside of the conference area and the power/responsibility of the organisers.
- The Banquette: Don a fine costume, enjoy fine wine and dining, get annoyed with the overwhelming amount of unsolicited not-allays-to-the-point speeches that no toastmaster has ever had the power to stop.
- The new issue of "Panclou". "Panclou", which irreverently mixes hard theory, debate and gossip, is the longest-running Nordic larp zine. Issues are usually published at Knutepunkt, and sold for a pittance to support the bar tab of the editors.
- The Norwegian Ritual. Commemorating the legendary "ritualgate scandal" of Knutepunkt-98, there is usually a ritual around midnight between Saturday and Sunday. What a "ritual" is and how it is carried out varies from year to year, but the aim is usually to provoke as many people as possible, sometimes by being provocatively unprovocative.
- The Helicopter Workshop. A male pride workshop. 'Nuff said.

The Nordic larp styles - similarities:

The idea of live role-playing reached the Nordic countries in the early 80s, but it was not until the early 90s that we could speak of a "tradition", "style" and "community" of larpers. While each country invented their larp style independently, they soon got in touch with each other and ideas, players and even larps crossed borders. After Knutepunkt appeared, Nordic integration got a lot tighter and it became possible to speak of a "Nordic scene".

It is perhaps because of the interconnectedness of these countries, or perhaps because of the cultural similarities, that larp in the Nordic countries



has developed a number of similar characteristics. These characteristics also make Nordic larp fairly different from Anglo-American or continental European larp.

Scenography: A lot of Nordic larps play a high emphasis on scenography, to the point where medieval villages are built for fantasy larps and professional theatre scenographers design the stage for arthaus larps. Sweden is the most scenery-obsessed country in this regard.

Costume: Costume design and sewing is, especially in Sweden and Norway, seen as an indispensable part of live role-playing. It is not unusual for players to work for months, even hand-sewing, on a proper costume for a mere four days of play. Once again, the Swedes are the leading extremists.

Minimal game mechanics: Nordic larps in general use none or very simple, unobtrusive, game mechanics. The honour system – whereby players trust each other to improvise appropriately rather than resort to rules – is the basis of most larps even though some use simple guidelines for things like combat and magic.

Little combat: Puzzle-solving, diplomatic intrigue, human events (a marriage, a funeral, village life) and atmosphere tend to take precedence over the fighting that seems to dominate larps in many other countries. “Boffer” weapons, made with latex, are often brought to larps but rarely used. The last-day battle or the nightly raids of enemies are used as adrenaline kicks in some, not all, larps.

Persistent role-playing: At almost all Nordic larps, players are expected to play their character without interruption from beginning to end. This means that even sleep is in-character. Real-life talk (“out-of-character” or “off-game”) is usually explicitly prohibited by organisers, a prohibition enforced by the general consensus of larpers.

Genre: Fantasy is the dominant genre of Nordic larps, as a majority of larps are held in a fantasy, often Tolkienesque, setting. There are, however, so many exceptions to this rule that these days you may easily encounter a Nordic larper who has never attended a fantasy larp. “Historical” larps are a good number two, some of these are very similar to fantasy except that “The Holy Roman Empire” replaces “the Kingdom of Arbogrod” while others are strict recreations of the look, feel, mentality and society of a chosen historical epoch.



There are two notable exceptions to these characteristics – one is larps based on the commercial system “Vampire : the Masquerade” from White Wolf Publishing, which tend to be similar to such larps everywhere though often played with home-made rules. The other is the growing movement of “Arthaus Larps” - more on that below.

Nordic larp styles - differences

Despite all these common characteristics, there are also some major differences between the ways larps are played and organised in the Nordic countries. Awareness of these differences will make it easier to understand the other Knutepunkt-participants.

A significant difference is in duration. A “normal” Norwegian or Swedish larp is between a weekend and a week long, anything shorter would be a “mini-larp” or a “short larp”. In Finland and Denmark, the “normal larp” lasts from four to twelve hours, and thereby can be played during a day. This difference in format has led the countries to develop different playing styles – the short format encourages intensity, speed, drama while the long format encourages brooding, daily life, resting in character, and developing complex stories over time. There are plenty of tales like those of the Danish larpers going to Norway and exhausting themselves before the Norwegians had even gotten into character, and likewise of Norwegian larpers going to Denmark, seeing the larp end just as they had finally built their camp. Another difference worthy of notice is that everything is bigger in Sweden. A “big” Swedish larp could hold 250-1000 players, a “big” Norwegian or Danish larp about 100-200, a “big” Finnish larp even fewer (Timo “Dragonbane” Multameki’s blockbuster larps being a notable exception).

The mixture of genres and age groups varies from country to country, as does the size of the live role-playing community. An extremely unscientific estimate puts the number of larpers in the Nordic countries as follows: Sweden, 10.000. Denmark: 5.000. Finland: 3000. Norway: 2000. Norway has the oldest average larpers, with few participants below the age of 20 (if we exclude the children of adult larpers), Denmark probably the youngest - with many in their early teens, thanks to a tradition of holding “Junior larps”. Gender and larp is always a hot issue at Knutepunkts, so it might help to know that Sweden and Norway has about 40% women, 60% men, Denmark significantly fewer women, and that male larpers recently became a threatened minority in Finnish larp. Gender amongst organisers and that



Norway has many more female organisers and leaders than the other countries, and that most larp theorists are guys.

Another difference is in the autonomy of larp scenes. In Finland, live role-playing and tabletop role-playing are for the most part viewed as two sides of the same coin, and most people participate in both. In Norway, larp is mostly viewed as an entirely separate activity which overlaps only somewhat with tabletop role-playing. Sweden and Denmark fall between these two poles, though are generally closer to the Norwegian position. This difference is visible in the bias of Knutepunkt organisers and writers. Thus, the Danish Knudebook - "As larp grows up" was explicitly about live role-playing while the Finnish one - "Beyond role and play" was about live and tabletop both, and the 2004 Solmukohta was a "conference on role-playing with an emphasis on larp" while the other countries have held larp-only conferences.

Nordic arthaus larps

A frequent topic of conversation at knutepunkts - arthaus larps are Nordic larps, and usually adhere to same basics as the mainstream (persistent role-playing, zero-rules etc). But in genre, role-playing approach and overall goal, Nordic arthaus larps differ from the "mainstream" on a number of points:

- Events often set in in non-genre milieus without anything supernatural or futuristic going on.
- The incorporation of moral and/or political themes into larps.
- A conscious blurring of the distinctions between larp, art and theatre.
- Increasing support from the institutions of established art forms, in the form of recognition, collaborative projects and the funding to match it.
- A strong focus on actually being the character (character immersion), at the expense of "just fun and games", physical comforts, and (possibly) sanity.
- Larp design principles increasingly grounded in theory and/or ideology.
- Experimentation being a must: an arthaus larp needs to be substantially different from previous larps to attract players.

The Nordic arthaus movement transcends national borders (it's far more common for an arthaus larp to have international participants) and has in the past been associated with the Knutepunkt conferences, though there is an effort to make Knutepunkt more open to "mainstream" (i.e. non-arthaus) larping. Still, quite a lot of the larps referred to in Knutepunkt books and discussions are such arthaus larps – and not necessarily representative



of the majority of Nordic larps nor something that most Nordic role-players concern themselves with. There is, however, no absolute separation between “arthaus” and “mainstream”. Most Nordic arthaus larpers also participate actively in the mainstream role-playing of their home countries.

The word “Nordic arthaus larp” is one I invented for this article. It is not in common use, but you may hear references to “artistic larps”, “progressive larps”, “experimental larps”, “indrama” and “weird larps” meaning basically the same. The experimental nature of most arthaus larps are the main reason they often get conflated with larp theory: experimental larps supply a lot of valuable data for theoretical comparison.

Organisation and culture

The organisation of larps and larpers are very different in the four countries, and the sub-culture of live role-players is equally diverse.

In Sweden, the national gaming organisation SVEROK, which channels government funds to various game-related activities, is a large and powerful factor in the community. Larp organisations abound, some strictly for the purpose of organising larp while others strictly for the purpose of organising players. Recurring player groups are a unique feature of Swedish Fantasy larp – organised groups of players who play a similar group of characters (orcs, elves, soliders etc.) at different larps. The magazine “Fëa” and a host of websites enables communication between Swedish larpers, although Swedens huge larp scene is notably more fragmented than those of the other countries. Swedish arthaus larp has recently been successful in co-operating with established art institutions, most notably Riksteatern, the national theatre.

Finland’s national organisation SuoLi deals with larp only and does not receive or distribute government grants. The magazine “Larppaaja”, the SuoLi mailing list, and the larp.fi website serve as a platform of communication, in addition to the annual gaming festival “RopeCon” which attracts a lot of larpers. Organisations do not play a significant role in Finnish larp, but loyalty to organiser troupes and campaign larps do. Finnish role-playing theory is notable for the fact that many of it’s authors are academics who actually work with related fields of research. The Hypermedia Lab at the University of Tampere and the academic conferences held in connection to RopeCon and Solmukohta have served to develop and promote Finnish role-playing theory.



Norway's larpers are kept informed and in touch with each other through the laiv.org website and web forum.

There is no umbrella organisation representing larpers, and significant opposition to the idea of forming one. In recent years – networks, organiser troupes and specialised sub-contractors (like “Gaffa Express” who deal with larp logistics) have replaced more traditional membership organisations. The Oslo organisation “Ravn” remains active and receives some cultural funding that is distributed to larp projects. The state lottery-funded “Frifond” has in recent years made it a priority to support larps financially.

Denmark has a central web portal, liveforum.dk, moulded on laiv.org and doubling as a web magazine. Recently the organisation LLR was founded to obtain and distribute government grants, and to publish the magazine “rollespilleren” (“the role-player”). Membership organisations are a key feature of Danish larp, organising players and serving as a host organisation of larps. A notable feature of Danish larp is a clear distinction between “adult” and “young” (or “junior”) larp cultures, caused by frequent events held for children and teenagers by adult organisers, who go elsewhere for their own player experiences. The rumours you’ve heard of enormous boffer sword battles in poor costume are about the young larp culture, not the adult one.

The notions of a larp “elite” and “elitists” got thrown around a lot at earlier Knutepunkts, but are troublesome as they mean different things in different countries. In Sweden “elitist” was a nasty accusation against some people who in the early 90s argued for higher quality of costumes and dramatics. Most of those accused angrily rejected the label and a few said “so what?”. In Finland, “elitist” was a nasty accusation to begin with, but some of those accused chose to co-opt the term and called themselves “elitists”. The term sometimes referred to an older generation who were active organising larps for a younger generation. In Denmark, some people began referring to themselves as “the elite” and argued for “elitism” as a positive thing. In Norway, the words have mostly been used when talking about the culture of foreign larpers. “You are an elitist” can be a compliment to some Danes, a statement of fact to some Finns, and an insult to most others. This is, after all, the egalitarian social democratic Nordic countries we’re talking about. “You are a member of the elite” is somewhat less loaded, but exactly what this elite is and who are members of it seems to vary from person to person and Knutepunkt to Knutepunkt.

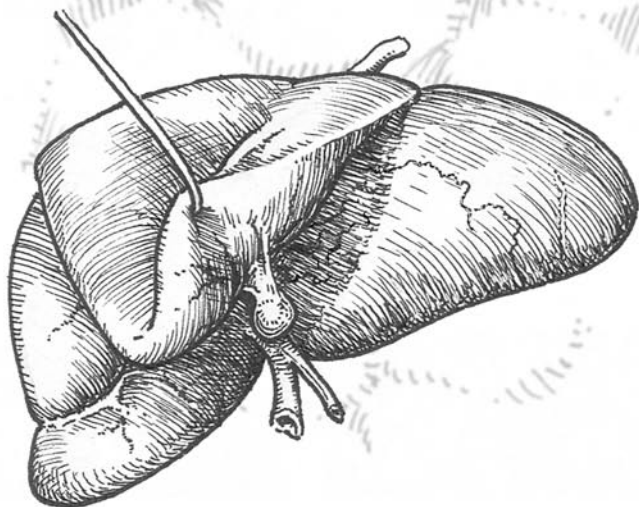


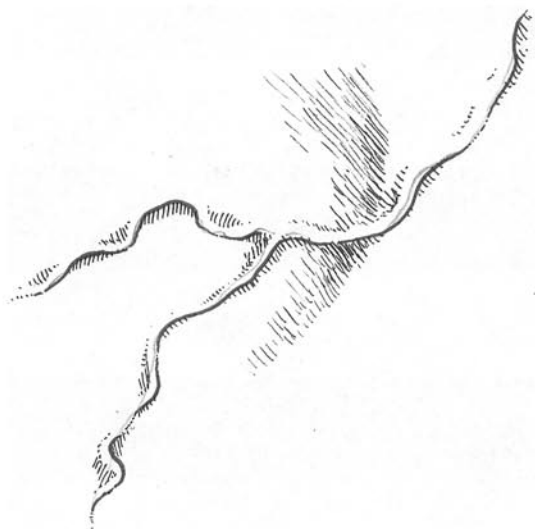
Knutepunkt and Nordic Live Roleplaying: A crash course —

Some other words to beware of: “Arrangers” means organisers, and is a mistranslation of Scandinavian “arrangør”. “Rules”, “Letters” and “Kompendium” are different names for the written texts of world description and pre-larp information sent to players before the larp. A Danish “scenario” can be a larp.

So, if you feel confused, you can seek comfort in the knowledge that you are not alone.

Application







Live Action Role Playing

- Teaching through gaming

Abstract: This essay is a digest of an article on larp and education submitted as a term paper in connection with gaming studies at Department of Information Science, University of Bergen, autumn 2001. It discusses the use of games for educational purposes. A specific type of game, Live Action Role Playing (larp), is discussed in light of educational purposes. The game concept will be presented in a case study. On the background of the game concept, a generic model for learning environments will be presented as well.

Key words: Larp, Interactive Learning Environment, History, Simulation, Education, Social systems, Actor, Rules, Resources, System Dynamics, Play, Hegelian dialectics,

About the author

Torstein Utne is a 27 year old from Bergen, Norway. He has been gaming for 5½ year and organised of 4 larps. His approach to making larps has always been to add a bit of humoristic incitements to the role. His latest involvement is a Woodhouse-larp. He has the rare fortune of having a degree in social information science, which has landed him a job at the University of Bergen. This is his first article for a Nodal Point collection of texts, originally written as a part of his master thesis. Torstein is a happy lad who prefers beer over wine.

1 Introduction

From a cultural and educational perspective, history shapes the way individuals look upon and interact with the society. In an educational situation, the classroom is made up from individuals, each with his or her own social history (Glassman, page 13) History shapes our society, and social history gives us shared historical artifacts. This gives us language, and also childhood symbols such as toys and games (Glassman, page 12) Vygotsky states that it is not the activity that gives meaning to historical artifacts, but historical artifacts that give meaning to the activity (Glassman, page 7). In



other words, it is the man-made artifacts that surround us which shape our understanding of activities conducted with these artifacts. Consider the topic history a tool for understanding the society, why the society is the way it is. Thus history as a tool shape our perception of our society

How does this relate to gaming and larp? Consider Dewey's theory of educational gaming (Cited in Makedon, page 49). Dewey included play in his curriculum, based on a belief that education should be based on the native needs and interests of the students. Dewey claims that play should be used as a means for the realization of educational goals.

Is it possible to design a game, which includes features for realization of these goals that is teaching history in a playful manner?

In this essay I will show how Live Action Role Playing can be perceived as a game. Furthermore, I will present a conceptual model of larp. I will show that larp can be used in teaching by setting the environment for the game in a certain epoch or place, and let the players re – live brief parts of history or social history. However, the discussion is only relevant to the Nordic larp style; other styles of larp are not subject of consideration.

2 Definitions

2.1 Frequently used words

- Actor – a participant in a game and a person who is given a specific role in a larp
- Environment - The setting for the larp and all reference material used to explain or support the players' cognitive thinking about the larp, such as historical info, role descriptions et cetera. Furthermore, it includes the surrounding landscape that the larp is set in, props and scenery, costumes and other things that gives the players a visual impression of the setting.
- Setting - The fictional time and place the larp is set in.

2.2 What kind of game is Live Action Role Playing?

In a game, you have actors who utilize rules in order to gain resources. Consider the figure beneath (From Klabbbers-a, page 23):

In a larp, you have the actors or players who utilize a given set of rules and conventions. Information is the main resource. With information the actors/ players can accomplish the given goals of their roles.

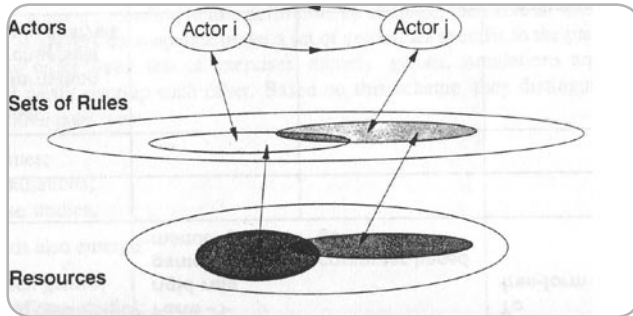


Figure 1

Caillos (cited in Klabbers-a, page 20) presents a classification of games based on two dimensions. Four different categories (Agon, Alea, Mimicry and Ilinx) of games are placed upon a scale (Paidā – Ludus) to measure the presence of rules and conventions. The category Agon is for athletic games such as wrestling, running and other sports. Alea is the category for games which is based on luck, charm, wits and chance, such as counting - out rhymes, roulette, and betting. Mimicry is concerned with theatre, roles, masks and disguise, while Ilinx is the category for dancing and ritualistic games. According to the classification, larp is a game with a strong element of Mimicry.

But how strong is the presence of rules and conventions in larp? It is possible to claim that larp is almost free of rules and conventions. After all, it focuses mainly on the actor's free improvisation. There are even fewer rules than in theatrical plays, where the actors' scripts can be perceived as rules. Is there still a presence of rules and conventions in this game? Or can larp be an event completely without a set of rules?

There is, but these are rules and conventions that consider the way the game is played, not rules and conventions that actually regard the gaming. These meta – rules regards matters such as the role – playing, not the game in which the role – playing is conducted. These can be social rules describing how players should behave during a larp session (e.g. – you do not play something else than your role, etc.), or contextual rules, concerning the boundaries for the game (e. g. – a player can not stop role – playing and still be a part of the game, since the game is a role – playing game). Furthermore, the players can create and apply new rules to their game environment during the game.



But these rules are not in any way formal rules even though they concern the context of the game. In other words, Larp is a game with a high presence of freedom and free improvisation, and with few formal rules. According to the second dimension of Caillos' classification, LARP has a strong element of *Paida*.

This classification of larp as a game should however in no regard be seen in context with the "Threefold Model" or the terms "Immersionism" and "Gamism". This classification can be regarded as one possible conceptualization of the phenomena larp in itself, not a conceptualization of the different styles within the larp scene.

3. The use of games for educational purposes

In this section I will discuss aspects of games that concerns educational matters, and look at games as a mediator for knowledge transformation

3.1 Why are games used for educational purposes?

Games can be viewed as models of social systems. (Klabbers-a, page 23) If we want to create models for training in various social systems, these models must in essence be games. Games better the understanding between content, process and context (Klabbers-a, page 21) Games are suitable for the transfer of concepts. The learner is the one who constructs knowledge from the information presented. Games can be helpful to construct this knowledge for the learner, to transfer the concepts in the human organization the game models.

3.2 Which games can be useful for educational purposes?

Basically, all games can be used for education. Children play games to develop skills. The need to play is in our biology. (Huizinga cited in Klabbers-a, page 16) Sport activities can be games (e. g. Soccer). Such physical activities help children (and adults) to develop better psychomotoric skills. Strategy games, such as Chess, better people's mental skills. To play a game can also teach children better social skills. As mentioned, games are models of social systems. At the same time, games are social systems as well. (Klabbers-a, page 23) There are literally thousands of games, and most of them can probably be used to teach children skills.

For educational purposes, there have been developed several games.



These games all strive to add the element of play in controlled learning setting, such as a classroom. The problems with such a kind of games are that the nature of the school system may force or compel a student to participate in a game. The playfulness of that game is then reduced (Makedon, page 52). Furthermore, educational games may become un-playful, because it has to be structured and ordered to reach certain pedagogical ends (Makedon, page 52). The nature of the school system and the classroom teaching situation hampers the use of games in education because the games played are not playful enough. Makedon states (Makedon, page 36) that games can be gamed un-playfully, but that this necessarily means that the participants have a dislike for the game. Spontaneous use of a game can never happen unless the game is playful (Makedon, page 35). If a game were not playful, the participants or actors would simply not begin to play the game.

Furthermore, Dewey (Cited in Makedon, page 50) states that free play or games that are very playfully can be problem – oriented, democratic, and intelligent. These elements are all viewed as desirable in Dewey's theory of education. In light of this, games that are used for educational purposes, especially in a school situation, must have a strong element of playfulness to it, in order to realize the educational goals for such an activity.

4 Educational aspects of LARP

Larp as a free-form game gives the students the opportunity to distance themselves from the rules, and produce new ones. Thus a dynamic organization emerges. This characterization is based on the notion that free-form games enable a self-organizing capacity. (Klabbers-b, page 19) This capacity gives the students a chance to explore the subject own their own premises.

Actors form their own cognitive maps of the history presented and the game. Each actor will perceive the events of the game differently, and individually. In the larp, there will be no teacher or mentor how will tell them what to do, how to do it, and how to perceive and think about the concepts presented in the larp. There will only be facilitators who can help and assist the players. This approach corresponds with Deweyan views, which holds that student's experiences should give momentum to new, secondary experiences. These experiences should follow the natural momentum. A prerequisite for this is that the teacher steps back and simply facilitate, rather than guide or mentor the children (Glassman, page 9)



5 How can LARP be modeled conceptually?

5.1 Game descriptions

According to Peirce, (Cited in Klabbers-d, page 13) games can be interpreted as semiotic systems. This is one approach to describe a game. Games can be described at several levels.

Klabbers, in his taxonomy on gaming (Klabbers-a, page 23) states that games can be viewed in terms of actors, rules and resources. At a second level, they can be described by their syntax, semantics and pragmatics. At a third level, games can be viewed on the basis of group dynamics and organizational dynamics. And, at a fourth level, games can be described as narrative. Each player's own experience is a story that together represents the story of the game session. These four levels all interconnect with each other's. (Klabbers-d, page 13). A larp could therefore be conceptualized as the sum of the players, the rules, the information and environment, the organization, the meta-rules, the information flow, and of course, the actors' personal experience. But this, however, is not a very useful definition and probably almost completely inapplicable for practical and academic purposes. We need to simplify this approach.

5.2 Perception as experience, experience as culture

Each participant in a larp perceives things differently and acts differently. They each construct different cognitive maps of the reality of the social system they exist within. These cognitive maps represent the way a participant in a social system perceives the surrounding environment. Our culture/experience decides the way we think and perceive our surroundings and what information these surroundings produce. Furthermore, the way we conceptualize and learn is decided by our biology, our culture, and our education. Experience in education is activity in which the link between action and consequence is interconnected with previous and future (related) activities (Dewey cited in Glassman, page 8) In other words, what and how we learn is connected and in a certain degree dependant on previous and expected experiences.

5.3 A model of a learning environment

It should therefore be possible to claim that these experiences function as rules that allow the actor to utilize the resource/information provided, in ways that construct meaning for that actor. Then the cognitive map of each

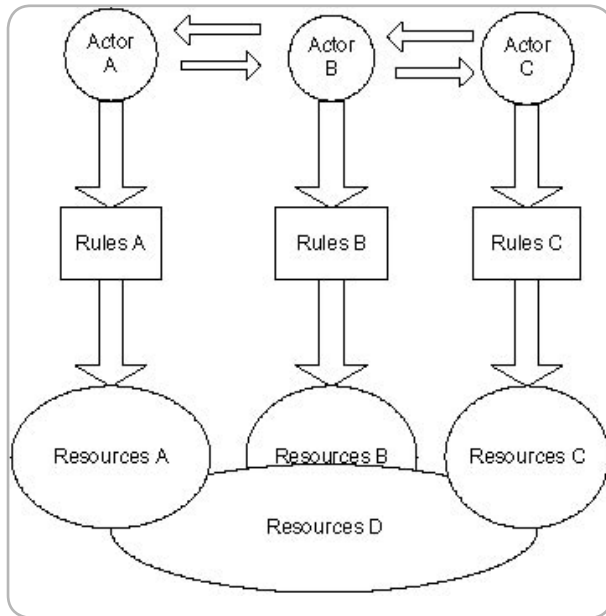


Figure 2

I have presented a model of the game, a model that in fact is a family of single models which each represents a single actor. The model can be regarded as a representation of the learning environment in such free – form games.

Games such as larp are useful for educational means, and could be used in education. It presents history in a different way than the ordinary class-room situation, and brings key elements of the history into play, though only on micro-level.

The learning environment free-form games such as larp represent, can be applied to a number of different learning situations. The model should be valid for wherever information is gained. People utilize information on the basis of their previous experiences. Each actor in a social system has personal resources that he or she utilize, along with the information presented by a teacher, on the Internet, television or wherever else information is distributed to people.



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Lived Scenarios

Combining Role-playing and Design

There are so many bright minds in the world. All the people of the everyday life. Yet, there are the very few, who design and create the world we live in. How to give stronger voice to the everyday people? How to provide scaffolds that enable people to participate in the making of today and tomorrow?

This article provides a short description of the role-playing -oriented Lived Scenarios¹ -project, conducted at the University of Art and Design Helsinki (UIAH), and related research. The project, conducted during Autumn 2004, was built around a course called "Introduction to Future Media Scenarios through Role-playing". The optional course was held in Helsinki Polytechnic, and was open to all of the students in the school. The aim of the Lived Scenarios -project was to develop concept design methodology within the course and to explore the forms and possibilities of using role-playing as a way to create video scenarios.

About the author

Juha "Mox" Huutuane is a 28 years old Master of Science from Helsinki University of Technology, Finland. He majored in user-centred design in 2003. While not an active hobbyist, Mox has played a few table-top role-plays and a larp in his past. Currently he works as a researcher of the ARKI research group in the Medialab at the University of Art and Design Helsinki.

The main sources of inspiration for the project were everyday creativity (Sanders 2003), co-design (Botero et al. 2003), immersive stories (Kim 2004), and using stories and acting to develop product ideas (Lehrdahl 2002). From these ingredients, the methods used in the Lived Scenarios -project have been evolved as a process that has continued during the whole project.

During the course process, six stories were written by students, who drew inspiration from a set of scenarios



describing possibilities of using media in the future. The stories were then evolved with improvisational acting by the participating three students. This eventually resulted into five video scenarios describing the personal views of the students on what the media practices should be in the future.

Role-playing

What kind of activities can be called role-playing? There have been efforts to define role-playing games (RPGs) for many years (e.g. Mason 2004, MacKay 2001, Fine 1983). For this particular book, writers were asked to distinguish e.g. between table-top role-playing and live action role-playing (Larp). However, as the applications of role-playing increase, these boundaries may become inappropriate. Particularly, trying to categorise the Lived Scenarios -project between theatrical acting, Commedia dell'Arte (Rudlin 1994, Tuomola 1999), improvisation (Routarinne 2004, Johnstone 1979) and role-playing feels quite fruitless. For clarity, however, this paper considers role-playing as an activity that engages the participants to act and reflect on predefined themes, from the first person point of view.

Participative acting has been used for a long time as a means to design change. Maybe Commedia dell'Arte already caused change during the Middle Ages. More intentionally, however, Augusto Boal (1995) introduced forum theatre – a participative theatre method focusing to solve societal problems. In Finland, it has been used, for example, by theatre groups to conduct interventions in elementary schools, on issues such as teasing and mobbing. Within the product development context, there is an ongoing exploration (Kolu et al. 2003) to use participative theatre in user-centred product concept design.²

In product development research, there has been many experimentations that involve story writing and acting. As already mentioned, Lehrdahl (2002) used fantasy writing and science fiction role-playing to brainstorm product ideas. He used a process of mental visualisation, group storywriting, and scenario play – prior to a brainstorming session for product ideas. In the EU-IST Maypole project (Mäkelä & Battarbee 1999, Maypole Project Team 1999), several simple mock-ups were given to children. Using the mock-ups as inspiration, the children played and showed by acting the ways they would like to communicate.

Mazé and Jacobs (2003), on the other hand, have been interested in games as a way to engage users' imagination for product development. The game with strongest relationship to role-playing was a superpower prototyping game, where various props were used as superpowers. Each team of



players used their powers in combination to solve problems in the treasure hunting they were asked to play in the city.

As a way to elicit user feedback on products that do not yet exist, Salvador and Sato (1999) developed focus group into a focus troupe. The method involves live actors that present scenarios of potential products to a focus group that then discusses the scenarios. Iacucci et al. (2000), on the other hand, have used both table-top role-playing and SPES, Situated and Participative Enactment of Scenarios, to emphasise the role of the participants in acting and generating ideas.

Design

How people might use things? How people see themselves as users? These are questions of concept design (Koskinen & Battarbee, 2003) that aims to search for ideas and concretise those ideas into concepts of products, services and systems³. According to Keinonen et al. (2003) concept design searches new, innovative solutions, concretises the alternatives and charts the future. They also emphasise that, unlike product design, concept design does not create concepts directly for the production or for the markets. Where concept design ends, product design begins; a few of the concepts are selected and then refined into solid products.

In concept design, it is typical to use scenarios (Keinonen, 2000) as a way to communicate and evaluate the concepts. A scenario is a story about the use of products. It describes the people, who use the product, the environment where the product is used, the ways to use the product, its functions and the benefits that the user gets from it. It is not mandatory to describe the specifics of physical devices and/or user interfaces in the scenarios; the product can be clearly shown, or instead, the focus can be in the context – letting the environment and action speak for itself. According to Ylirisku (2004), scenarios can explain the purpose of the product in a brief, concise and engaging way. They are good for communicating causal relationships, as they describe events happening over time. While probably the most straight-forward form for scenarios is an illustrated story, they have been also created for example as comics and animations.

Video scenarios have been used for quite some time to envision the future (Tognazzini, 1994). In fact, many scifi movies, such as the *Metropolis* – made in 1927 and *Minority Report* – made in 2002, could be thought as over-large video scenarios with wide focus. More participatory scenario making has been practiced by for example Ylirisku (2004), who used video scenarios in the development of a computer system for a bank.



The Project

The Lived Scenarios -research project draws in ideas from the fields of theatre to role-playing, and applies them into concept design. This has resulted into an idea generation method that emphasises participation through mental and physical personal experience. The following key characteristics that, when combined together, describe how the project contributes to role-playing and design.

Instead of creating product concepts, the project is involved in the co-design of everyday practices (Botero et al. 2003). It is part of an overall effort in our ARKI research group at UIAH to describe the desirable future of media and related tools. In order to define what is desirable, our research actively involves everyday people to discuss and brainstorm, what kind of future they would want to have for themselves.

The attitude of emphasising the “voice of the participant” is loosely related to the empowerment in the field of scandinavian participatory design. The field aims to enable, through participation, the workers’ influence in their working environment (Ehn & Kyng 1991). During the process in the Lived Scenarios -project, students were frequently reminded to create stories that were meaningful to them personally. The stories did not have to be focused on the students themselves, however. It was enough to think that the story could involve a person close to the student.

A prepared context facilitates the forming of a common language for the participants (Iacucci et al. 2000, Lehrdahl 2002) and inspires participants to open their minds to unexpected possibilities. This can be thought as a way of building scaffolds, as described by Sanders (2003). The Lived Scenarios -project used the prepared context, a set of 9 excerpts, as a starting point for the idea generation. The excerpts were brief stories based on the work in Mediaspace scenarios, a sibling research project in the ARKI research group. The two projects had natural synergy between them, as the aim of the Mediaspace scenarios -project is to explore and visualize the potentials of media practices in the future.

In the Lived Scenarios -project, the students’ stories were evolved into video scenarios through acting. During the first half of the process, the focus was on iteratively writing and discussing the stories. In the second half, the stories were acted out in several variations with almost fully improvised dialogue. The intention during the whole process was to describe and then rethink the desired media practices.



The Process and Larp

The process in the Lived Scenarios –project was not same as the process in a typical larp game would be. However, some elements of the process were more similar to larp than others, and are elaborated here further.

In the first phase of the process was started by introducing the prepared context to the students. This is similar to role-playing games (RPGs), in which the created world is described or explained to the players. The world introduces the environment and means of interaction to that environment (Fine, 1983), which makes it easier for players to have an engaging gaming experience. Unlike many RPGs (MacKay, 2001), the Lived Scenarios -project did not define detailed rules to structure the action within the game. This was because, in the project, the world was defined as being only three years into the future, i.e. 2007. To describe the relatively familiar world, it was deemed appropriate to use the small excerpts.

The first phase of process continued with students discussing their ideas that the prepared context had inspired. The ideas were then refined into stories and eventually narrowed down into a few, concise, written stories. Each story had two students as main story- and character writers. The aim was to keep the amount of characters small (2-4 per story). However, one scenario (the school assignment) had eight characters that were eventually acted out by three persons. Similarly to larps, dialogue was not written out for the characters. The characters, that is, the roles that participants play during the game are, of course, central also to the RPGs (MacKay, 2001). Depending on the larp, the characters can be written by the organisers of the larp (Enghoff, 2003), or by the players themselves. For an engaging game, it is important that the characters have written relationships between themselves.

In the second phase of the process, props were selected to identify the characters, similarly to many larps. The selected props included hats, coats and a fake beard. No attempt was made to make the props convincing or realistic. The aim was to help the interaction between the players, the rest was left to imagination. In larp, on the other hand, the quality of the props vary. Some games aim for high realism while others use very low-fidelity props.

Contrary to many larps, there was no game master in the Lived Scenarios -project. The only remotely similar role was that of the movie director, that is, the person who recorded with the digital video camera and gave directions for the acting students. This was the point of the strongest divergence to larp – the role-playing in the project was not continuous. Instead, the acting was



recorded in pieces, similarly to movie takes. While this often undesirable for a RPG, it suited the purposes of the project. The focus was in creating engaging, well-thought video scenarios. That necessiated many iterations and tries, instead of long uninterrupted plays.

The Video Scenarios

During the process, altogether five video scenarios were created, based on six finalised stories. One of the stories, "Digital Diary", was left out, because the students felt it was a little bit too close to the other stories and was the least interesting to act out.

The video scenarios were:

- Two friends, showing a possibility of listening again songs that had been played in the radio.
- Accident, exploring the possibilities of using pictures and video to communicate first-aid instructions to a passer-by at the accident site.
- School assignment, where media devices were used by school kids to record the visits to a lamb farmer, a textile designer and a clothes shop and then share the experiences with the class.
- Night of the arts, showing two art-liking city dwellers use close proximity digital contact cards as a way to advertise and share.
- Safari, where two grand-children used a "magic thing", to communicates with both the camera of the tour car at the safari and the television at grandma's home.

In addition to the five video scenarios, three smaller half minute long video clips were recorded. The aim was to explore and to reflect further in the prepared world that was now very easy for the students to relate to. The video clips consisted of quick improvisations, based on the characters of the school assignment scenario.

The three clips described:

- The possibilities to share music while speaking on the phone – one of the school girl characters.
- The use of laptop as a VCR – the teacher character
- The cooperation with several lamb farmers on wool orders – the lamb farmer character.



Discussion

The preliminary evaluation of the Lived scenarios -project, based on the feedback from the students and the fellow researchers, has identified some of the strengths and challenges in the used method. They are summarised in table 1, and compared to the findings of another project using video scenarios (Ylirisku, 2004). The project focused on a case for developing knowledge management systems for a bank.

In summary, the Lived scenarios -project was successful in using role-playing to create video scenarios. The resulting scenarios represented the opinions of the participating students on what the desired media practices of the future should be. The method used in the project is engaging to participate in. However, it requires many special skills, such as shooting, lighting, sound editing, directing and storytelling. Also, the participants may need to be facilitated in order for them to get familiar with acting.

What about future? Mason (2004) briefly mentions free-form as a style of larp that does away with many of the constraints that typical larps have.

	The Lived Scenarios -project	Ylirisku (2004)
Strengths	Concrete, engaging, physical and mental experience.	Acting and scriptwriting can be highly motivating for the participants. Participatory video scenarios were used to co-design with users in an efficient, effective and engaging way. (page 13)
	Shared language between participants, possibly easy to convey ideas to others as well.	The scenarios can communicate media practices to uninformed people without any additional explanation. (page 12) Well created video scenarios can convey a message in rich, specific and emotion-evoking way. (page 4)
	Taking the ideas to the level of action makes visible the details, thus enabling to solve, while acting, the potential problems that arise.	
	Once familiar with the method and the defined world, it is relatively easy and quick to act out and develop any ideas that arise.	



Challenges	Acting raises the demands to trust all participants and not to lose one's face	Creating video scenarios requires willingness from the participants to act, which in some cases will require facilitation and practicing. There must be a way to withdraw without losing face. (page 13)
	Acting by it self does not necessarily make the resulting scenarios easily understandable.	Making video scenarios needs skills similar to making movies: shooting, lighting, sound recording and directing. Those are required to make quality videos. Also, skills in storytelling are required to make the video scenario engaging and understandable. (page 4)
	Post-processing of the videos can be time-consuming, especially if original audio/ video quality and content do not fit the needs of the final video scenarios.	Participative scenarios can be made relatively quickly, however editing the final video scenarios can take a lot of time. (page 4)
	Getting used to improvisational acting can take some time to learn.	
	A relatively straight-forward and transparent process, from an idea to the scenario	
	The participants' "voice" is quite visible in the resulting scenario.	

Table 1: The comparison between two projects utising participatory video scenarios.

Could this new style of larp have something that would contribute to the concept design methodology?

Recently there have been also several major publications in user-centred design, such as the dissertation on interaction as performance (Jacucci, 2004), and the dissertation on co-experience (Battarbee, 2004). Exploring deeper into these views will give new insights into how role-playing and design can merge.



¹ The Lived Scenarios -project is funded by the Mediaspaces -project of Medialab, University of Art and Design Helsinki. <http://arki.uiah.fi/>

² An Academy of Finland -funded project: DRAMA - Scenario Methods for User Centered Product Concept Design. <http://www.hiit.fi/fuego/drama/>

³ In addition to products, also services and systems can be designed. These are not, however, explicitly mentioned from now on, to maintain brevity.

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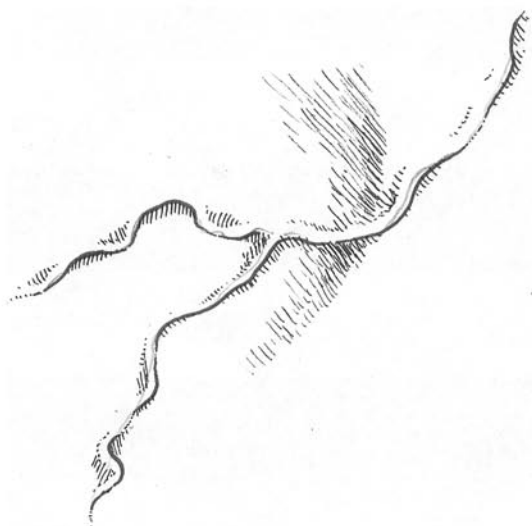
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School of Flour

Developing methodology through eight experimental larps

*"If we knew what it was we were doing,
it would not be called research."*

- Albert Einstein

1 Introduction

In this essay, I deal with the growth of the understanding of methodology in my work. I will introduce eight case examples of experimental larps I've created to portray the development of their methods from 1997 to 2004. I will explain the methodology of these larps and analyze its effects.

In the first part, I chronologically introduce eight larps I've run, and several larps I've participated, as well as other things that have affected my work. In the second part, I explain the methods categorically to show their evolution.

About the author

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2 Larps and inspirations

As with most larp writers of the mid-90s era, I started with fantasy larps. I was taught the rather formulaic style widely in use in Finland in the early 90s. Typical larps lasted six to eight hours, and all characters should have a minimum number of contacts and plots.

The larp experiments of that time were attempts at cyberpunk or horror, there being a strong belief that the form needed little developing. At the same time, there was a continuing discussion between the dominant dramatists and the simulationists. The dramatists underlined the importance of acting and plots, while the simulationists wanted a more realistic and less melodramatic view



of the larp world. Most of the simulationists had strong roots in the tabletop community.

Following the discussion and participating in it, I started agreeing with the simulationists. The immersionists later emerged from the ranks of the simulationists, and formed the loose coalition known as the Turku School.

After a few years of debates, most people agreed that character immersion was the goal in role-playing, even if the methods for achieving it were different. The dramatists believed it could be best achieved by lots of plots to react to in-character, while the simulationists believed it could only happen if the character lived in a believable society in a believable world. Both had good points, although back then I condemned the dramatist view.

2.1 .laitos (1997)

My boldest early experiment was the larp .laitos, set in a high school in a totalitarian future. The original concept was far from that.

.laitos originally set out to combine Happy Days style cheery rock'n'roll high school with cyberpunk's cool technical gadgets. I called the genre "cyberRock'n'Roll." As the concept developed, and the suitability of a school environment for a larp fully dawned on me, the game became the opposite of cyberRock'n'Roll, being more like schoolpunk, with no technical gadgets. The result was a bit like what a high school might've been in the world of George Orwell's 1984.

One advertisement e-mail described the larp:

"The society controls the people's contentment. The individuals unfit for society are removed in the name of the common good. The Masters rule the world. The Overseers make sure the Masters are obeyed. Anti-social behavior is destroyed wherever it is seen. Good children turn in their parents, the youth remove the unwanted material from among each other, the grown ups observe the others' obedience. In schools the submissive teachers give falsified information to indifferent students. .laitos is such a school."

People commended it as the first art larp for the larger public, and proof that art larps don't all have to be 20 person experiments. This one had roughly 70 players and the game was open for anyone to sign up. As the concept of the game changed radically during development, many people assumed



it would be a happy high school parody without the oppressing undertones. Even they quickly adopted the new genre.

2.2 Paljon melua tyhjästä (1998)

With the success of .laitos I wanted to do something that would be intentionally experimental from the start. When panclou printed Eirik Fatland's article on fateplay, I was sure such a dramatist brutality would never work, but wanted to try it out, anyway. Thus, in 1998 I ran *Paljon melua tyhjästä* (Much Ado About Nothing), an attempt at a fateplay based on the Shakespeare comedy. For reasons I'll explain later, this was my least successful experiment. So far.

As I now understand, the point of fateplay is to employ simple pre-determined plots in larps in order to bring about powerful scenes and emotions. *Paljon melua tyhjästä* took a part of the method, but none of the goal, making a minute-by-minute schedule for each character. This misunderstanding of the fateplay method proved a very interesting experiment. It created a terrible larp that was nevertheless a powerful learning experience. In retrospect, *Paljon melua tyhjästä* combined the worst parts of both theatre and larp.

2.3 International influence

During the next few years, I ran the *Myrskyn aika* fantasy campaign, and studied literature, media theories, and Aristotle. I also got my first influences from the international role-playing community. A bunch of friends dragged me to my first Knutepunkt in Denmark, I visited an American larp convention in New Jersey, and discussed theory and practice on international forums. Joc Koljonen's magazine *Panclou* provided an excellent medium for longer articles, and heavily stimulated the theory debate.

When Eirik Fatland and Lars Wingård wrote the *Dogme 99* manifesto, it was reported and translated in the Finnish forums. By the time the English translation of the *Dogme* was published, I could counter with the *Turku School's Vow of Chastity of the Player*. For *Solmukohta 2000*, I had finally written the *Manifesto of the Turku School*. The ensuing debate between Eirik Fatland, myself, and others brought about new ways to enhance the immersive experience.

Many people, myself included, demanded thematic content in larps. As I strongly believed a larp was experienced by the player only through the



character, the theme should also be evident in the character, preferably as an inner conflict. (Because a character's inner conflict would be with the player even when she was alone.) As the shared immersive experience of all the players forms the whole of the larp, so the shared themes would form the thematic whole. In other words, each characters' theme and inner conflict would have to reflect the larger themes and conflicts of the larp.

2.4 *Europa (2001)*

As a result of our debates, when Fatland started writing the Dogme larp *Europa* with the Weltschmerz group, he asked me to collaborate as the Finnish character designer. I agreed. The larp was unlike anything seen in Finland, a bit like *.laitos* made more topical and political and focused. Providing the players with five days in a refugee center as refugees of the Nordic wars was certainly the most political larp I had heard of by then.

One of *Europa's* few problems was the alternate reality setting. The idea of having Nordic people as refugees in Eastern Europe was good, but the world of the characters was left a bit sketchy at times. In a way, the setting was too much a narrativist outline instead of a simulationist world. I believe a more solid background would've grounded the larp more firmly in reality beyond the refugee center.

Europa was also the first time I had been to a larp that lasted for more than two days. Five-day larps are normal in Sweden and Norway, but in Finland they are practically unheard of. Thanks to *Europa*, I begun to understand immersion better, realizing that in a long larp, the player's mid-term memory consists only of the larp: even if the mind wanders, it automatically wanders only within the larp and the character.

2.5 *inside:outside (2001-2002)*

Europa was immediately followed by the second Norwegian *Knutepunkt*. During the conference I approached the post-*Europa*-high Fatland to suggest a larp project we would design together. He immediately agreed. Neither of us had a concrete concept at this point, but ideas soon begun to fly.

We wanted to make a larp like nothing that existed before, something like Kafka's *The Process*, or Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. *Prisoner's Dilemma*¹, and the slightly more elaborate *Wolf's Dilemma*², provided action to the setting, and the larp had form: a prison where a bunch of normal people are forced to face dilemmas. The early dilemmas would be like the



Wolf's Dilemma, then they'd move on to Prisoner's Dilemmas, and finally to the truly horrible ones. The worst ones were not non-zero-sum games anymore, they were purely moral dilemmas: Are you willing to choose one of your cellmates to die, as the price for your freedom?

To our knowledge, this was the first time a larp (or indrama³ as we called it) was created on such an international scale, with both writers being equally important and still living in different countries. The dialogue between Fatland and myself forced us to think outside of our separate boxes, each idea needing to be justified independently of tradition.

inside:outside was by far the most focused larp I had created by this point. The exchange of ideas between Fatland, myself, the other team members, and the players sparked some great insights into what larp can be. Only having one hour to prepare the players forced us to heavily condense previously existing techniques, and many of the methods developed for inside:outside are still used in our work.

2.6 Hamlet (2002)

The larp Hamlet by Martin Ericsson and Christopher Sandberg was a major revelation for me. The game contained numerous experiments, and all of them worked well to create a brilliant whole. I believe it is still the best larp I have attended.

The division into three thematically different acts, and the famous monologues were the biggest methodical lessons I learned from Hamlet.

2.7 Ei minulta mitään puutu (2002), I Shall Not Want (2003)

Ei minulta mitään puutu was a small larp I wrote for the Turku Book Fair. The game had about a dozen characters, and it only lasted two hours. As the production budget was minimal, I wanted to focus on the writing, and the themes of the game to make this the ultimate Turku School larp.

I gave myself a few guidelines: The theme of the game would be death. The theme would be reflected in each character's inner conflict. The style would be slightly gothic.⁴ The genre of the game would be emotional realism. There would be an emotional turning point for each character during the game. This proved a success.



The game was set at the Memorial Service of a recently deceased businessman. It was structured as a murder mystery, including a butler (that didn't do it), a bunch of suspects, the real murderer, and a detective disguised as a waiter. This was to be the background, but the important thing would not be what happens, but what the characters feel while it is happening.

I felt the game worked pretty well, and edited it into a six-player version that was published in English as I Shall Not Want in "The Book Of LARP". I ran this version in the Lucca convention in Italy in 2003.

2.8 Myrskyn aika: Unia hiekasta ja raudasta (2003)

Some of the methods learned in experimental larps were later put to use in the Myrskyn aika (The Age of Storm) campaign ran by myself and Jami Jokinen. The campaign is set in an "evil empire" where the games would follow the lives of a group of rebels fighting for what they saw as good.

The setting and concept of the Myrskyn aika campaign was later developed and expanded into the role-playing book Myrskyn aika (published by Johnny Kniga Publishing in 2003). To publicize the book, I decided to run an introductory Myrskyn aika larp in the Finnish Ropecon convention that had housed inside:outside in the previous year. Taika Helola helped me in design and production.

2.9 The end of the Age of Manifestoes

Several more revelations were due in 2003. The first one followed the Turku Manifesto being published in *As Larp Grows Up*. In the foreword I admitted that the Manifesto had for the most part outlived its usefulness, even though many of the ideas were still solid.

"The most interesting dramatist concepts have evolved just as much as those of the eläytyjists and simulationists. So much so that they're all transcending into something much bigger. What the next step is, it's hard to say yet. Perhaps we'll focus on making the role-playing media popular again, now that we can roughly agree on what that media is. And that it is a media. Or perhaps role-playing will continue evolving for a long time. Clouded is the future. Still, it seems clear the "Age of Manifestoes" (1999-2002) helped make it happen." (Pohjola, 2003c)

The two years that followed *As Larp Grows Up* certainly did see the



emergence of something new with Panoptincorp, Mellan Himmel och Hav, and several smaller experimental games. I also revised the Turkuist ideas in the article *Autonomous Identities: Immersion as a Tool for Exploring, Empowering and Emancipating Identities* (Pohjola, 2004a).

2.10 Panoptincorp (2003)

Panoptincorp produced by Irene Tanke had Eirik Fatland as their lead writer, and he again made me the character developer for the Finns. Panoptincorp is a good example of a larp that took many of the methods learned in small, experimental larps and made a really good game that had innovative content and a solid form for it. Perhaps the most influential concept for me, personally, was the effort Tanke's team had seen in creating a working micro society.

"The Panoptincorp unit was the life of the characters. They ate at the agency, they slept at the agency and they even shagged at the agency. During the days of the event the Panoptincorp agency was the one and only reality for both participants and their characters." (Widing, 2004)

The methods for this were adopted from real-world work spaces, and creative McJobs, like actual ad agencies. The result seemed more like a cult which indoctrinated the characters in the environment.

"The participants became deeply manipulated by the clever organisers as they gave away their language and thus their thoughts. After just a day many participants were thinking like binary machines: hot/not, lassex/nexsec, upcard/downcard, always judging co-workers as effective or worthless." (Widing, 2004)

Through these methods, Panoptincorp became the most integrated and holistic larp I know of.

2.10 Mellan Himmel och Hav (2003)

Ars Amandi's Mellan Himmel och Hav used many of the same techniques of society building, but had a more specific use for them. They used the techniques to transcend the division into sexual genders. This succeeded so well that the new words used in MHOH (such as new non-sexual pronouns) managed to not only create new ways of thinking (like in Panoptincorp), but to also show the problems within our current ones – such as dividing people



into genders based on their biological attributes.

“Most players said afterwards that the new social rules (like the deconstruction of gender: a man isn’t a man but a morning or evening person, and should behave like one) very quickly felt natural.”(Tidbeck, 2004)

2.11 File Not Found (2003)

Arte ry, a Turku-based organization of artists, was running an art festival called “Virasto” (“Bureau”). Photographer Juha Allan Ekholm wanted to explore his photography in relation to live role-playing, and we decided to co-operate on a bureau related larp. The game design Ekholm and I did together, with me writing and him later taking photos inspired by the larp.

There is a large bureau building in Turku which holds a number of different state institutions, including the County Land Survey Office, the County Arts Committee, the Province Environmental Center, and a dozen other offices. The building itself is seven stories high with a large basement complex. We were promised we could use this space as the location for our larp, titled “File Not Found.”

This should have been a more or less routine experiment. The larp’s experimental nature and ultimate downfall was due to the fact that it was to be played among real bureaucrats during office hours. A couple of bureaucrats (from floors 3 and 5) had agreed to serve as NPCs providing stimulus for the characters. Much of the actual physical content of the larp was to be characters filling forms and finding obscure clues on papers left around the building.

That was the theory. The practice was that the lobby clerk who was supposed to get the players started on their search for clues, had forgotten what to tell them. She was also getting frustrated by all the calls she got from the real-life bureaucrats that were bothered by the strange people. The janitor of the building (who had given his permission to use the building) was furious when the players entered the (unlocked) basement, and almost threw us out. As a result, the characters spent most of the time in the lobby mingling with each other. Rather ironically, this bureaucracy larp worked on paper, but couldn’t exist in the real world.

The attempt to change the bureau atmosphere had been successful, but the larp ended up lackluster. The attempt to play among real people while



interesting, didn't take off at all. The concept of finding different interpretations for a mundane environment worked well, though.

After the larp, Ekholm spent several days at the building taking photos inspired by the larp. The series "The Vanishing of Teodor Björklund (Roleplay Scenes)" premiered in the exhibition "That which is ordinary" at the Turku Arts Museum in the fall of 2004.

2.12 Luminescence (2004)

Writing articles for *Beyond Role and Play* had released a lot of artistic energy in myself and Juhana Pettersson. Pettersson contacted me a month before *Solmukohta 2004* with a very peculiar idea for a larp: a bunch of people in their underwear in a room full of flour. How could I resist?

We wanted the focus of the larp to be in the flour, the extraordinary sensory experience of being knee-deep in the stuff. But how to justify the flour? Would the characters be bakers or captives of an alien space ship? Or could the flour be something more insubstantial? Could the room represent the characters' childhood or their feelings of guilt?

What else could happen in the larp, except for the standing around in flour? I wanted to take inside:outside's abstract nature further, and Pettersson criticized the use of narrative elements in larps in his *Beyond Role and Play* article:

"Forget narratives, forget how the game might appear or sound later. The player experience is the only relevant thing. [...] Think what are the experiences you want the players to have, what are the perspectives you want them to take, and what are the characters you want them to employ, and proceed from there. Talking about role-playing in terms of stories is not just regressive and near-sighted – it's embarrassing." (Pettersson, 2004a)

One possibility would've been to have the characters be the players' own subconsciousnesses, but in the end this would've made the interaction very abstract. Designing *Luminescence* was a difficult balancing process between the surreal and the concrete.

In the end we wanted to have the people interacting within a realistic frame, but in a surrealistic environment. Apart from flour, the environment



was enhanced with a strong green light, and a soundscape consisting of absurdist monologues and various strange music. The characters were to be cancer patients in a group therapy session.

2.13 *Todellinen kaupunki (2004)*

The city of Kuopio in Eastern Finland holds an annual public art festival ANTI. Juha Allan Ekholm suggested we participate in the festival, and I agreed. The concept of the festival was to offer “a venue for new and unexpected ideas to be realised in a city environment by means of sound, light or environmental art, performance and live art.” Public art was described in the festival brochure by Professor Mary Jane Jacob:

“Public art (as distinguished from art in museums) is intrinsically tied to a place and all that it contains and implies, physically, culturally, personally... Public art participates in what art fundamentally does: to awaken our perceptions to the everyday. It can bring us to a new awareness, a sense of heightened, deepened, self-reflective awareness. And site-specific public art – located in the actual places and rhythms of everyday life – can be the most articulate mode of making.”(Jacob, 2004)

Todellinen kaupunki dealt with the theme of the city, and was played all around the city. Unlike in File Not Found, this time the mixture of mundane and larp reality worked well.

Several of the other artists of the festival were enthusiastic about Todellinen kaupunki, and some joined in with quickly written characters. The photography inspired by the larp project is still going on, and will probably become an exhibition of it's own together with the series taken in File Not Found.

3 Methods evolving

Throughout these larps and revelations, I've grown to adopt new methods, develop old ones, and experiment with many aspects of the medium. In this chapter, I try to outline six different methods that I have worked with in my larps, and that other people have influenced. These methods are abstract elements, rituals, character creation, dramaturgy, anagnorisis, and instructing physicality.



3.1 Abstract elements

One problem with simulationism is that it requires for every element in a larp to represent itself. This is, of course, impossible, and strangely lacking in the simulationist tabletop role-playing games. I have made some attempts at creating specific content that would be on the grey areas between diegetic and nondiegetic.

3.1.1 Background music

One inspiration from the fateplay method in *Paljon melua tyhjässä* was the use of nondiegetic music. A well considered soundtrack could have worked for the game, underlining the mood of individual scenes. The characters wouldn't hear it, but it would affect the players' feelings. As the game's schedule was known before the game, a soundtrack would've been relatively easy to make.

As it was, though, the game had three extremely cliché songs played for key scenes, such as the Star Wars theme song during a love scene. While the technique itself is good, this experiment turned me and many of the players off from nondiegetic music for years.

3.1.2 Nondiegetic costumes

Perhaps the only experiment in *Paljon melua tyhjässä* that wasn't a total disaster were the costumes. To create a more theatrical feel for the game (which was set in Renaissance Italy), the players were told to wear whatever clothes they would feel suitable for their characters, from any period. Just no Nike logos, or the like. This was moderately successful, although in future larps it resulted in more specific guidance (like colors and styles) for the player costumes.

3.1.3 Monologues

Hamlet's monologues were a strange mixture of diegetic and non-diegetic.

“At the agreed signal, a bell tolling, all action would stop and the players gather around the central circle. A text character player would get up and read the relevant soliloquy, or in some cases perform a short piece of dialog or even just weep, as Gertrude did over Ophelia's body at the end of the second act. [...] [E]very word spoken during the soliloquy breaks is every character's inner monologue, a reflection of the mental state of everyone at court. [...] We gathered around the circle and heard those words, Claudius cursing God



or Hamlet contemplating suicide, and we listened attentively and mirrored it in what was going on with our characters, and then the bell would toll again and return us to whatever we were doing just before.” (Koljonen, 2004)

The emotional impact of the monologues was immense. The idea that one could portray the character’s inner world in this manner had not occurred to me, but it was definitely something I would later want to use.

3.1.4 *The Rule of Normalization*

Luminescence had a really cool environment, and a solid basis for immersion and interaction. What was lacking was a unifying element. Why would the group therapy session take place in a room full of flour? Was it a normal room that the characters for some reason saw like this? Was it an experimental therapy technique? How could we explain it? And furthermore, how could we prevent the interaction falling to the level of talking about the flour?

Could the entire physical reality of the larp be labeled as nondiegetic? Then how could the characters mess around with the flour? In the end, we realized that although the location of the larp would have to be physically real, it would not have to represent the diegetic location. At this point in our discussions we made frequent references to the movie *Dogville* (Von Trier, 2003). In *Dogville* the world of the characters and the world shown to the audience are different. In *Luminescence*, we decided, the world of the characters and the world of the players would be similar, but unlike the players, the characters would find it completely normal. They might not have been to a flour therapy before, but they would not find anything strange about it. Thus they could play with the flour and react to the soundtrack, but they wouldn’t spend their time wondering why the room was so strange.

This method (that we came to call the Rule of Normalization) worked wonderfully, and would allow any number of abstract scenographies for larps. Typically the setting of a larp is supposed to represent the character’s physical reality, but here it could be in dialogue with it. We were very happy with this, and intend to use it for future projects, as well.

3.2 *Rituals*

In Finnish tradition, ritualistic elements have often been neglected in larps. What I know I have learned by accident or through my Scandinavian contacts.



3.2.1 School anthem

In the fiction of .laitos, each school day started with the singing of the school anthem, and a speech from the principal, a teacher or a state official. The school anthem was based on a melody of an old religious song often sung in Finnish schools in the last day of spring.

The image of seventy people all singing a highly submissive song in unison still lives strong in my mind. It was strongly ritualistic, and a great start for the game, since it created a feeling of unity between the characters. I wish there would've been a similar ritual at the start of every lesson.

3.2.2 Norwegian tradition

In 2002 I had two revelatory experiences. One was participating in a ritual workshop by Fatland and Erlend Eidsem Hansen in the Swedish Knutepunkt. This was the first time I had attended, and it felt like the school's anthem from .laitos, just longer and more powerful.

I realized the methods for immersing in a character and immersing in the magical reality of a ritual were very close to each other, and could probably work well together. This was well known at least to some Norwegians at the time.

3.2.3 The wake

In *Ei minulta mitään puutu*, I directly employed the singing method of .laitos. As the setting was a wake, I could easily include Christian funeral hymns, and even a prayer. This real-world religious ritual worked well with the gothic mood, and the theme of death.

3.3 Character creation

The dominant method for character creation at least since the early 90s Finland is pre-written character descriptions given to players by the larpwrights. The text is traditionally in second person prose: "*You were born thirty years ago to loving parents...*"

The descriptions typically included a biography, contacts, and motivations for actions in the game. Although I've often used this method, I also consider it very problematic. Apart from the tedious workload, one of the biggest problems for me personally, was being forced to see the lives of characters as narratives leading logically from one point to the next, and the underlying assumption that in this narrative should be hidden all the contacts and plots the character has.



3.3.1 Multiple characters

In order to give all the players enough to do in *Paljon melua tyhjistä*, some players were given several minor characters, such as Constable Dogberry and Balthasar the Bard. This is standard operating procedure for theatres, so I figured it would be worth a shot. However, at least in this case, it made any possibility of immersion impossible, turning the role-playing into mere bad acting.

3.3.2 Character creation as a dialogue

Sometimes characters are developed in a continuous dialogue with the players. This technique prospers in tabletop role-playing, but is a bit rarer in larps.

In Jami Jokinen's and Jori Virtanen's *Ground Zero* (1998) the writers would provide the player with an outline of a stereotypical 60's American character, and the players would fleshen it out in e-mail conversations with the writers and the other players. The writers promoted the dialogue, not the outline, as the main part of the character creation process. Similar techniques have been used elsewhere (including *Europa* and *Panopticon*), but this was my first contact with it.

3.3.3 Simple character concepts developed by the players

In *inside:outside* the characters were written as simple as possible. Each had very clear political or social opinions, and a personality that would in some way conflict with the opinions. There was the Middle-Class Christian, the Value Relativist Construction Worker, the Elitist Anarchist, the Utilitarian Doctor, and so on. Characters had no name, no gender, no nationality, or other such aspects when they were given to the players. Instead, the players were presented with a list of questions they would have to answer to make the characters more complete. This is one method I've used in almost all of my games since then:

1. *Where are you from? The country is the same as your own country. What city? What part of the city? What street?*
2. *What's your name?*
3. *How old are you? When were you born?*
4. *What did you do yesterday?*
5. *What were you supposed to do today?*
6. *What hobbies do you have?*
7. *How are you not the typical stereotype of anything?*



8. *What were your parents/siblings/children like? What were their names?*
9. *Is the character single? If not, what is/are the other person/people like? What are their name?*
10. *What's your best friend like?*
11. *What's your sexual orientation? Any quirks?*
12. *How do you deal with those that have differing views from your own?*
13. *Is there something in the character that doesn't perhaps quite fit the picture*

Each run of the indrama would start with Fatland's drama excercises, in which players would immerse in the history and personality of their characters, the questions being read aloud to them again. The players also visualized their characters waking up in the morning, feeling good, feeling bad, going through their typical day and giving the players a frame of reference for the character's basic emotios.

This was followed by the players being led one by one to the game location with their eyes closed. Then the lights would go out, and everyone would listen to Fatland's trance induction monologue which was a variation of the one he developed for Europa. He would count from ten to one, making the players focus on and adopt particular elements of the character. At the end of the monologue the players would have become their characters. (There was a similar count but backwards at the end of each run.)

Fatland would leave the room, the lights would go up, and the indrama would start. This process of gradually getting in the character enhances the immersive experience greatly.

3.3.4 Different styles of writing

Myrskyn aika: Unia hiekasta ja raudasta (The Age of Storm: Dreams of Sand and Iron) allowed me to try out different styles in character writing. For a long time already, I had seen the traditional prosaic style as a hindrance, but had not had a proper chance to experiment with it before this.

I came to like a list of relevant points as a character writing method. The writer has the freedom to just relay the facts, or focus on particular details, depending on what fits the game best. This was the method I have since used in all the larps where I have had pre-written characters.



3.3.5 Character creation as process

MHOH had a method for character developing that I had not witnessed previously. The characters and the details about the society were created democratically, in workshops between players and game masters.

“Much of the information about the planet and its history was created in the interaction between players and writers. The advantage was that everyone had a part in creating the world, which lead to some amazing solutions and stories about the colony and its inhabitants.”(Tidbeck, 2004)

While in Europa and PanoptiCorp and Ground Zero, the character creation happened in a dialogue, here it was more of a process. The focus is on the player creating the character themselves with the aid of the larpwrights, but not necessarily under their continued monitoring, as in a dialogue.

The creation didn't only focus on details of the characters' backgrounds, but also on specific emotional moments, like the marriage of one's children. Many theatre techniques were employed to create an effect similar to that of Hamlet's monologues: the focus was on the characters' emotional states. Developing characters through their emotions, not through their past deeds seemed like a logical result of emotional realism in games, and made MHOH a very emotion-laden game.

3.4 Dramaturgy

In earlier days, I spoke out against larp dramaturgies, since they seemed to me a dramatist method of creating narratives in larps. At the same time I realized a game without a good rhythm wouldn't succeed very well.

Now I've come to understand the importance of dramaturgy, not as telling stories, but in creating an environment where the events can work together with the themes, not just near them.

3.4.1 School hours

.laitos was dramatized to resemble an ordinary school day. Start at eight o'clock with a ceremony, then four 45-minute lessons, lunch break, four 45-minute lessons more. Between lessons were 15-minute breaks where all the students were forced outside. This strict schedule worked very well to promote a school atmosphere.



3.4.2 Fateplay catastrophe

The larp Paljon melua tyhjistä was divided into nineteen scenes, lasting from five to twenty-five minutes. The original play contains only eighteen scenes, but some events that were only mentioned in the play had to be dramatized for the larp. There were two nights and one dinner happening between the scenes. The totality of the game would be three hours and five minutes.

An example of Don Leonato's schedule:

15:00-15:15 In front of the house

You talk with your friends in front of the house.

Upon receiving a letter, you let everyone know what it says.

After Beatrice has abused Benedick's name for a while, you explain the situation to the envoy.

You happily welcome Don Pedro and your other friends.

You introduce Hero to Don Pedro.

After Benedick and Beatrice start arguing, you encourage everyone to go indoors.

Inside you trade news with Don Pedro.

You invite everyone to the dining room. You also invite Don Juan, since Don Pedro has forgiven him.

15:17-15:20 In a room

You enter the room narrowly missing Borachio.

You want to know if Antonio's son has taken care of the music for the masquerade.

You are amazed when Antonio tells you news about Hero, but want to consider them a dream until they come true. Still, your daughter must know immediately, so that she has time to come up with an answer.

You send Antonio to convey the news to Hero.

You both leave the room.

As one can guess after reading this one character's script for the first three scenes, there was little or no room for improvisation, interaction or character immersion. Most of the time the players could only concentrate on the careful following of their instructions. In ideal circumstances, the interesting scenes created would've sparked new situations and emotions, but here any possibility for that was eliminated by the incredibly strict guidelines.



3.4.3 Act structure

Hamlet was divided into three acts different in theme, character motivation and even mechanics. “The general ambience of each act had been prescribed – first act: party at the end of history, second act: intrigue, third act: despair” (Koljonen, 2004) The rules supported this thematic structure: “In the first act, you would hardly be affected [by violence]; in the second you could be seriously wounded but would die only if you chose to; in the third act any hint of violence would lead to an untimely and spectacular death.” (Koljonen, 2004)

Days or even weeks of game time could pass between the acts and it would not hamper the game at all:

“The game’s first act – Shakespeare’s third – ends with Hamlet being banished for England. It is unclear from the text how long he is gone, but here it was established that our four-hour break moved the plot about two weeks forward.” (Koljonen, 2004)

In a simulationist larp all this would have been unacceptable, since the characters would need to know what went on during those missed weeks: “Why didn’t my character take care of this and that during the time we skipped?” Yet, it worked. Because the important thing was not what happens, but what the characters feel while it is happening. Very revealing for me, and I’ve later come to call this genre emotional realism.

3.5 Anagnorisis

Having read Aristotle, I had started thinking on how to adopt his idea of anagnorisis, emotional turning point for larps. I deal with this issue in the article “Give me Jesus or give me Death!” in Panclou:

“Now, the easiest way of getting anagnorisis, the moment of recognition for all the characters, is to make it an anagnorisis of the world: Oh, this isn’t a normal world because there are vampires. If you know about it before the game, it’s not really an anagnorisis for the character, but still functions as such for the player: This world is different from my world. Even if all the characters don’t get the anagnorisis during the game, their players will in the debrief. Everybody recognizes something new about the game world. (This is the reason so few games are set in the real real world.) It’s a bit less easy to create an anagnorisis of the events. That might require



railroading, or writing an extensive plot-structure. Still, that's often done. A typical example of an event-based anagnorisis is revealing the murderer in the murder mystery. So that's what happened! It was Gnrl. Alert with the Mustard Enema on the Dining Table. The best and the most difficult to create is the anagnorisis of the character. For individual chars that's easy, but trying to produce it for all the characters is muy difficulto. And more importantly, the game often goes incredibly improbable when that is tried. And improbable, of course, is the same as not realistic." (Pohjola, 2003a)

I decided to test these ideas in practice.

3.5.1 A letter

I wanted each character in *Ei minulta mitään puutu* to have a dramatic arc, with an emotional turning point, anagnorisis: a moment of recognition and realization which would change the course of their motives and emotions. This is already very close to narrativist ideas on larp, except that the goal is to provide the experience for each character, not necessarily for the events of the larp itself.

The anagnorisis was mostly achieved through the reading of the deceased's letter, some of it also through interaction between the characters.

As the game structure still remained entirely improvisational, I had no way to guarantee there would be turning points for everybody, so the letter also worked as a turning point for the whole memorial service. If the events of the game would've resulted in the characters deciding not to read the letter, then most of the turning points would have vanished, and it would've probably made sense to have that element as a predetermined fate.

3.5.2 Inner conflicts

Although set in a murder mystery context, I wanted the actual content of *Ei minulta mitään puutu* to be how each character dealt with death, brought about by the death of a person they knew. Some were angry, others were saddened or afraid of their own mortality. One character had come to the service to pay last respects for his rival before going to kill himself.

The dramaturgy of the game was also focused on the same conflict. There were speeches to the dead, singing of hymns, prayer, and reading a letter



from the deceased. During the breaks tea and biscuits were served while the characters made smalltalk. These discussions also naturally turned towards death, as that was the foremost thing in each characters' mind, thanks to the inner conflicts.

I ran the translated version *I Shall Not Want* in an Italian convention for larpers who didn't believe in immersion at all. The inner conflicts proved a particularly strong element for them, allowing them to just play on their own characters' clashing emotions and feelings. Many of them came to thank me later explaining how you could role-play alone, and how they really had immersed in their characters.

3.5.3 Personal changes mirroring social changes

The idea of each character's theme mirroring the themes of the larp made many *Myrskyn aika* games much stronger. Occasional fateplay elements have allowed us to strengthen the emotional impact of some key turning points.

The idea of personal changes mirroring social changes was also the key in *Myrskyn aika*: *Unia hiekasta ja raudasta*. The major conflict in the world of *Myrskyn aika* stems from the coop by the evil emperor. Could we make this change of power somehow personal for each character?

We decided to use the magical elements that fantasy provided, and have the characters start a hundred years earlier, then magically lose a hundred years, and awaken in a world where they're outlawed. Each character would thus have something (family, power, money) that they would lose at the blink of an eye. How this would reflect on each of them would be the point of the game.

3.6 Instructing physicality

While immersion is mostly a spiritual task, the portrayal of the character has a strong physical element. The extrovert character portrayal, acting, has always been problematic in larps.

In theatres it is simple to give an actor instructions: the director can advice the actors during rehearsals. In larps it is very problematic, since often the player and larpwright don't even meet before the game. This is perhaps a reason why most players (at least in Finland) have a very specific style of physical playing, that stays the same from game to game. Some bother to



come up with mannerisms or the like, but the acting is rarely unified in any particular game.

Mellan Himmel och Hav is one of the few examples to the contrary. Players were instructed in moving and talking in a non-gender way. Yet, even here the players were not given advice on how stylized the acting of emotions, for example, should be.

3.6.1 Ars Amandi method

Mellan Himmel och Hav's perhaps most lasting legacy is the Ars Amandi method of simulating sex.

Typically sexual encounters are dealt with dry-humping or back massages, both very unsatisfying methods. The first has more to deal with players' wants than characters', and still leaves participants unfulfilled. Massages, on the other hand, offer none of the feelings of sex, just providing a way to communicate the existence of the sexual act for the other players.

With Ars Amandi's method, sex was simulated through fondling each other's hands and arms. The method allowed many different styles of sex, one could be shy or aggressive or tender or submissive or avoiding or casual, or whatever. What this was, was a demand for the players to physically act some key elements of the larp out in a specific way.

Similarly, the players were instructed to walk and stand in non-gender-specific ways. Standard theatre procedure that in larps has typically been left for the individual player. ⁵

4 Larp as kaleidoscope

All these different realizations and experiments have lead to the roots of a larger discovery. In a larp, as in any art work, the key themes should be visible everywhere. In each plot, in each character's inner conflict, in each name, in the physical acting, in the characters' pastimes, in every possible aspect of the larp. Everything should mirror everything else. In this way the themes will transcend into a whole bigger than its parts.

4.1 Bureaucracy as a theme

The artistic point of the Virasto festival in general and of the larp File Not Found in particular was to explore the different meanings of bureaus and



bureaucracy. In File Not Found, each character would be a bureaucrat of some kind (tax official, postal worker, synagogue secretary, customs worker, ministry clerk...) with a very particular view on bureaucracy (idealist, by-the-book, social democrat, ambitious...).

Thus, each character's personality and profession would mirror the main theme of the game. To make this more practical, they were also kept occupied by a peculiar bureau themed activity, such as crossword puzzles, chess, or knitting.

The reason for the characters to come to the office building would be to search for a missing bureaucrat called Teodor Björklund. Björklund's entire existence had been erased from all the files: no birth certificate, no graduation papers, no social security records, nothing.

The dramaturgy was supposed to be something like this: The characters enter the building each at their own pace. They go to the lobby clerk who gives them a form they have to fill with the instruction to take it to an NPC in the Social Affairs Department. She would then take the form for processing, and give the character a paper with an obscure clue. After processing the characters would return, be given a new form, and told to take it to another NPC in the Consumer and Competition Office. Again the processing would take place, after which the next form would be asked to be returned to the clerk at the lobby. (Most characters would probably not make it this far.) In the times spent waiting, the characters would follow the obscure clues to more obscure clues, such as parking halls or meeting rooms.

4.2 Physicality as a theme

The concept Juhana Pettersson and I presented the players of Luminescence with was "an abstract live-action role-playing game of physical experience." An indeed, we wanted to enhance the physical experience in any way possible. The theme of the larp would be physicality represented by death, and all the characters cancer patients. The situation in the game was group therapy for the terminally ill.

"One of our central concepts was to make the game experience a principally physical one. Instead of a social experience, this would be an experience of the body. We had some rules strengthening this idea, like the players were told to touch the person they were talking to, if possible. The game space was fitted so that the decor would create a strongly physical and unique experience." (Pettersson, 2004b)



The rule of the characters having to touch each other when talking to one another was strongly influenced by the Ars Amandi methods of physical acting instructions.

The soundscape was filled with strange music and surrealistic monologues. They were coded as affecting the characters' subconscious self only, not being something they could comment on during the game.

Half of the monologues were scripted by me with a few thematic directions given by Pettersson: death, sex, hope, peace, winter and snow for the first stage, and death, sex, despair, hysteria, frost and ice for the second stage. The other half of the monologues was improvised by Samantha Rajasingham. The monologues kept playing through most of the game, these from the second stage:

*“One, two, three, four, five, sex, semen, penis, penetration, death.
The vast emptiness of space is in my head. I must eat the penguin
dipped in metal and put your mother back in the refrigerator.
Have you ever fucked a penguin? They’re okay, but I don’t like the
color.
Once upon a time there was, but that was a long time ago.
Every time I’m raped, I keep thinking about igloos.
The mammoths are all extinct now, just like I once was. But then
again, what is life but a series of unconnected mammoths?”*

The written characters mostly contained a few personality traits, a description of their cancer, and a way the cancer had affected them. Again, the list of questions (now added with questions dealing with cancer and physicality) proved a useful tool for the players to develop their characters.

The environment worked even better than we thought it would:

“[The players] really went to town with the flour, having flourfights, burrowing into it, pouring it onto each other, stuffing it into their mouths and underwear. The players reported that the flour was very versatile as a medium for nonverbal communication and as a tool for all kinds of symbolism. The people stuffing it into their underpants had prostrate cancer. Perhaps the most poetic thing we heard was from a guy who had been lying down in the flour for a long time. When he got up, the shape of his body was still visible in the flour. He touched it and could feel the body heat dissipating the same time as his touch destroyed the fragile image itself.” (Pettersson, 2004b)



4.3 The city as a theme

Writing *Autonomous Identities* (Pohjola, 2004a) for *Beyond Role and Play*, I had read a bit about postmodern identity theory (Hall, 1996), which strengthened my belief that each person has multiple identities they can adopt at will. I touched this already in 2001 in a Panclou article:

“Sometimes, when you play a character long enough, explore the character’s feelings and attitudes and memories, that character becomes a “real” individual, a new role inside your head.” (Pohjola, 2001)

In *Autonomous Identities*, I took these ideas further, and proposed that perceived realities can be changed the same way characters can:

“As larps grow less abstract and more complex, they start to resemble not just fictitious realities, but also possible realities. They become Temporary Autonomous Zones in which the participants willingly live a different life” (Pohjola, 2004a)

This line of thinking lead to the question: Could each participant of a larp have a different concept of the reality the larp was set in? To explore this I took the concept of a city, and tried to explore the different meanings and realities that could be found in it. The larp *Todellinen kaupunki (Real City)* is described like this in the festival programme:

“People’s roles and identities can change. Real city springs from the idea that the mask covering the whole of reality may change shape. Role players move around in the game, seeking the true Kuopio from behind the masks of history, city planning and art festivals.” (Pohjola, 2004b)

Each character of *Todellinen kaupunki* would have a completely different way of seeing the city. One would only focus on the social reality, another would see everything in a historical perspective, a third one would see the city as an ugly growth on the face of our planet, and a fourth would be constantly afraid of terrorist attacks. Among the more fantastic realities was an immortal who had been unable to leave the city center for a century, and a character who had somehow started sharing the thoughts of the city itself.

One of the points of the larp was to change the reality of the city, change the way the city is perceived. For this purpose, many of the characters would not know each other beforehand, and would be forced to interact with normal, non-playing people, as well. The action of the game was to have each of



the characters trying to solve a mystery. The clues were given for the other characters, and pictured around the city. A plaque in front of a cathedral could be decoded to explain the birth of the European Union, the city map would reveal secret geometrical symbols that would point to a street address that would give the last digits of a significant phone number, and so on.

Thus, each character would be a comment on the city in some way, and each player and character would see a completely different city. The physical city was also made a character, or a co-interactor. Every action taken or idea thought of during the game would strengthen the themes.

5 Conclusions

It is my hope that the chronicling of these experiments, some successful, some less so, will be of some use to other larpwrights and role-play artists out there. And I challenge others to write about their own works in a similar manner, to inspire myself and others.

The medium of larp is an infant one, and there will be much more experiments coming before we begin to grasp everything it can be. Boldly, my friends, towards the unknown!

Notes

¹ In the Prisoner's Dilemma, popularized by the mathematician Albert W. Tucker, two criminal suspects are arrested by the police. The police have insufficient evidence for a conviction so they try to get the suspects to confess. The police offer them a deal that if they confess, then they will go free and their accomplice will be sentenced to twenty years in prison. If neither confesses, they will only be charged six months for a minor charge. However, if both confess, they will both get ten years.

The Prisoner's Dilemma is a classic example of a non-zero-sum game. As long as neither talks, it's a win-win situation. But as one suspect can't be sure of what the other suspect is doing, there's a chance the other one is confessing, in which case the other one would be better confessing, too.

² In Wolf's dilemma you are offered rewards instead of punishments, and the amount of participants is bigger, say, twenty people. If even one of them votes out of line, then nobody gets the big price, and only the ones that voted out of line get the small price. The rest get nothing.

³ Fatland and I didn't want to call inside:outside a larp or a role-playing game. I had had dozens of conversations where I'd say that what D&D players do is not role-playing, and they'd tell us we



don't have the right to take away their word. The larp community had attacked Fatland's work (like Europa) and told him it's bad for the hobby if he calls such works larps. So we decided to adopt a word first featured in the NeoKultur magazine (Anonymous, 2001), and call inside:outside an indrama.

In the manual for the first tour, inside:outside was described like this: "If you know something about devising theatre, psycho drama, roleplaying, performance or interactive story-telling, you might have a general idea of what inside:outside is about. But this is none of those and all of those. We call it indrama, for it's interactive, you're inside the performance, it is immersive,

Ludography

- Europa (Eirik Fatland, Irene Tanke, 2001)
- Ground Zero (Jami Jokinen, Jori Virtanen, 1998)
- Hamlet (Martin Ericsson, Christopher Sandberg, 2002)
- Mellan himmel och hav (Emma Weislander, Katarina Björk, 2003)
- The Myrskyn aika campaign (Mike Pohjola, Jami Jokinen, 1998-2001)
- Panopticon (Irene Tanke, 2003)
- .laitos (Mike Pohjola, 1997)
- Paljon melua tyhjästä (Mike Pohjola, 1998)
- inside:outside (Eirik Fatland, Mike Pohjola, 2001-2002)
- Ei minulta mitään puutu (Mike Pohjola, 2002)
- Myrskyn aika: Unia hiekasta ja raudasta (Mike Pohjola, Taika Helola, 2003)
- I Shall Not Want (Mike Pohjola, 2003)
- File Not Found (Mike Pohjola, Juha Allan Ekholm, 2003)
- Luminescence (Juhana Pettersson, Mike Pohjola, 2004)
- Todellinen kaupunki (Mike Pohjola, Juha Allan Ekholm, 2004)

Filmography

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Corresponding Expectations

Alternative Approaches to Enhanced Game Presence

A binding concept within recent larp design – seemingly regardless of design tradition –and the resulting research has been the ideal of set patterns in both diegetic behavior and extradiegetic goals. In order to discuss gaming experiences, those very experiences have been pigeonholed into tight, nearly immutable categories that are then used as a basis of both analysis and design. The purpose of this article is to break that mold.

Active divisions

In order to disarm the current preconceptions we must first analyze them. The most visibly dominant divisions are:

Immersion versus Simulation

What kind of a sense of 'self' do the participants of a game have during the course of the event? For most larp-related issues, this is the supposed "key distinction". It is treated as the most important criterion in deciding whether or not a piece of game design and/or participation is to be treated as high-

quality. It is also the underlying basis predicated which goals a particular larp manifesto is built upon, regardless of whether or not that manifesto sees immersion as something desirable. A very important part of this question's status is that it often is not even truly stated in such a manner.

Thus a more realistic definition would be to speak of preferred gaming experiences, but it nevertheless boils down to the point of actually dealing with immersion issues.

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Entertainment versus “Something of Value”

A resultant division, this one is created by participant expectations, including those of the games’ designers. That it indeed is a resultant division becomes only apparent if this is observed from the point of experience emphasis, as the separation of “art” and “entertainment” in gaming is far older than the immersion-simulation discussion. This is a heavily cultural issue, on both local and international levels.¹ When combined with the question of immersion, it forms the basic schools of thought in game design. This correspondence between goal-orientation and end result is a very vital thing to note. It is the most important factor determining whether or not a game can be considered successful. Usually this can be calculated by analyzing the correlation between the expectations of the designers and those of their players, but occasionally – especially in the case of art or media games – a correlation will not exist, or will work in reverse.

Scale and Quality

Another classic problem that, while seemingly not directly relevant to the issue at hand, must be addressed at this point. Unlike what many larp-participants think, it is this issue, not the gaming experience division, that is actually the cause of the aforementioned question of larp value. All local gaming cultures eventually form an image on the ideal relationship between experimentation/innovation and game scale, based on fiscal concerns.

These local assumptions and presumptions then influence the way game design is conducted.² Commitment to the game and its goals by its designers is appraised based on how well the game is perceived as matching the cultural template. Thus, when experimentation on elements like character immersion or mediated experiences is made, those paradigms distort the results.³

Mood versus Events, Plot versus Free Will

This is the pair of conflicts through which we may approach the solutions. Not because it is intrinsically of a higher value, or more important, but because it’s a division game participants actually observe and discuss. Whereas the “entertainment” dilemma was about external participant motivation, these two concern the game-internal expectations.⁴ Participation and commitment happens through matching of given narrative material with self-perceived requirements of the game. Since this is an individual process, the result often clashes with the vision of the game’s designers.



With these distinctions in mind, I suggest the following techniques. Some of them are relatively new, others are refinements of older methods. They are intended to be used together, not to maximize an impact, but because all four work to eliminate each other's negative sides.

Approach One: Being and Doing

According to my research, all role-players have an individual set of gaming preferences. All of them are aware of it to some extent, often to the point of it becoming a constrictive paradigm instead of a tool. I call this the Being/Doing scale. When gaming, a person has a pair of elements to which he or she devotes effort and energy. The first represents a desire to be a character, experience its life and surroundings, etc. The second represents narrative interests, on both a character-action and storytelling level. The rest is made up of disinterest and tangential elements such as enjoyment of extradiegetic social contact through gaming.

In this manner, a player could be quantifiable as 55% Being, 35% Doing.⁵ Naturally this is not an exact science, but can, with some practice, be used to enhance game casting. Even a rough description of desires in this manner from each player will substantially raise the possibility of getting to play a character one finds enjoyable and interesting.

The scale apparently corresponds but is not equal to the immersion issue. A player with a high level of Being is more likely to see herself as an immersionist, but without extensive psychological study the reality of such statements can not be ascertained. This scale also correlates with devotion to a game, but – unfortunately – not necessarily to skill or talent in playing. While most game participants have both Being and Doing factors in their relationship to gaming, it is also possible to have only one of them. In those cases, the Disinterest factor acts as a safety mechanism that protects the player, other participants and the gaming environment.⁶

A key element to note here is that neither aspect prevents acting in the manner normally attributed to the other category. Thus, it is quite possible to Being-do things in a game, as well as Doing-be in a diegetic environment.⁷ All experienced players subconsciously do this to some extent.⁸

With these factors in mind, a player's expectations of a good character and/or plot, and the narrative/anarrative desires of the game's designers can be matched. Neither the actions nor the influence of a character or plot



element will change, but the emotional enjoyment of all involved parties will be heightened as a result.

Please bear in mind that this does not mean that a player's BD-based requests should always be granted. Especially in long-term game campaigns it is quite possible for the game masters to mold a player's BD-ratio, as well as for a player to adapt his or her BD-expectations to optimize with the character's potential.

Approach Two: Manipulation of the Perikhoresis State

A role-playing character and its player's sense of self exist in a state where each is influenced by the other.⁹ The character derives new information from the player and is, when necessary, spontaneously expanded to new directions by him. At the same time, the player experiences new things with the character acting as both a mask enabling events not normally possible for the player and as a filter through which the player experiences only the parts of the game events which he deems necessary (or just interesting). In theology such a relationship of reciprocal penetration that leaves both parties intact is called "perikhoresis", a word that I've appropriated as suitable to describe the character-player interdependence and interaction.¹⁰

By manipulating one half of the perikhoresis relationship, it is possible to also influence the other.¹¹ For example, any discomfort experienced by a player usually transfers also to her character. Similarly a character experiencing a moment of physical intimacy will almost certainly produce reactions in its player. Thus, by using elements that actually force only the players to alter their state of being, a game's organizers can alter the mental and physical states of the characters, and through that create large-scale changes in the diegetic environment.¹²

The necessity of perikhoretic manipulation rises when games deal with sensitive subject matter. There are already a few recorded instances of it being absolutely necessary, such as the pre-game workshops on sexuality and body language done before the highly acclaimed *Mellan himmel och hav* in Sweden.¹³

A secondary version of this method has only recently been detected as being separate from the traditional rule of non-existence, which designates selected items that are present as non-diegetic (a door does not exist, the phone lines leading to the castle are not there, etc.). This technique, which



I refer to as “genre logic”, designates certain courses of action as unthinkable. While at the surface this may appear as just a thematic choice, it goes much further. In essence, by telling players that a genre logic rule is in effect their characters get re-edited so that they will now think and act according to the new rules and think of them as logical. This saves a lot of work with excuses, both for the game’s organizers – who no longer need a tree to block the only road away from the mansion - and the players – who no longer need to wonder why their character stays in a dangerous place.

Classical forms of this kind of manipulation are a murder mystery’s “you don’t want to leave”, a horror game’s “it will take a long time for small things to start looking suspicious” and a soap opera game’s “all character secrets must become public during the game’s course, but they must be told in an overtly dramatic, drawn-out manner.”¹⁴ As long as the game maintains its integrity as an extradiegetically enjoyable event, all internal manipulation is acceptable.¹⁵

Approach Three: Advance molding of expectations

This is actually a classic technique, but has only been appropriated to intentional use over the last couple of years. It is done by giving players a polished picture of the game beforehand, so that when the event itself actualizes, they have already been acclimatized to the necessary requirements. The methods used may vary, from a simple mention of theme and style in a game ad to a full series of preparatory workshops. Less obvious but often even more effective techniques are the use of thematic series in design and – quite simply – the reputation a game designer or design team has gained over the years.¹⁶

There are two notable sets of circumstances where advance molding is especially necessary. The first, more common one is an occasion where a game will include participants who are used to a completely different gaming paradigm. As stated above, this may result from having foreign players, but also where simply inexperienced participants used to just one style of playing exist. In those cases, invoking the theme and mood criteria, and explaining the basics of the paradigm the game was designed within, is often enough.

Explication of the game’s intended purpose may also prove helpful (“This game was created as just plain entertainment.”), but may occasionally prove counterproductive.¹⁷



A more rare, and much more difficult, instance is when a designer's, team's or series' reputation would work against the requirements of the game. Even most of these may be handled with the methods stated above, but occasionally a project will need more drastic preparation. When such a deadlock happens, it is best to analyze each needed piece on a case-by-case basis, and create an individual solution for it.¹⁸

Approach Four: Multi-Layering

The fourth method is more of a back-up plan, but may nevertheless prove useful. It is the idea that a game, regardless of genre, scale or style, should not happen on only one level. Basically this is similar to a movie being, for example, both an action film and a story of personal growth. But with the interaction and perikhoretic meta-levels available in role-playing games, the idea can be taken further. It is possible to build a net (or several nets) of correspondences between game elements that are not connected on the diegetic level.

As an example, imagine a low-fantasy game of court intrigue. On the basic level, it's simply part soap opera and part low-key action. Yet at the same time, on the first meta-level it has been designed as a political satire, and mirrors real-world events to a certain extent. If crafted well enough, only the participants interested in making such comparisons see the connection. Further on, a second meta-level consists of all characters being based on abstract metaphors, with their names reflecting this if examined properly. Again, this will only be obvious to those who enjoy such elements.

The creation of multiple layers not only enhances the experience for Doing-oriented players, it also creates a sense of meaning – and, of artistry – to a game, and helps it rise above the level of what are perceived as “common” works. Done well, it makes all parts of a game stronger, more intense. Westlund's Storyteller Manifesto includes a very good version of this for narration-heavy games.¹⁹ Note that, as Westlund's statement suggests, the layers need not be very far apart, nor do they have to be obscure. What is necessary is that a player desiring a bigger picture with thematic connections will be able to find one.

Conclusion

Creating a larp is relatively easy. Making them really good games with a meaning or goal is not. Game designers need to go further than before, in



both examining the external and internal participant motivation expectations of their players, and making sure the game's structure corresponds with those. In order for this to happen, the players must be ready to quantify their expectations to a certain extent, and communicate that information to the people creating games. Not only on the level of *"I'd like to play an evil person with lots of intrigue"* but also *"...because I like to have lots to do in games"* or *"...because trying to be such a person in this game might be interesting."* Immersion and simulation are to be seen as side effects of the Being/Doing ratio, not as goals, tools or enemies in themselves. Note that neither of these approaches, Being or Doing, is better than the other. The important thing is that the motivation is realized, and treated accordingly by correct character design and player placement.

Likewise all manipulation done in order to enhance the game's effectiveness for players of different kinds should be both utilized by the designers and appreciated by the players. Especially when games with a message are concerned. Winnicott states: *"There is a direct development from transitional phenomena to playing, and from playing to shared playing, and from this to cultural experiences."*²⁰ All attempts to keep that chain intact in games should be respected.

Notes

¹ This refers mainly to the generic American/Nordic division, but it bears noting that even within the "Nordic larp scene" generalization there are both gaming groups and prominent larp designers who do not consider this division relevant. Likewise, individuals interested in such issues naturally exist outside the Nordic area, but so often as a minority within their local gaming cultures that generalizations like these can be made.

² For example, Sweden has a long-standing tradition of government subsidizing, players used to higher game prices and larp organizations offering a financial security net. Thus the Swedish default paradigm is that of a game being acceptable as "high-quality" when it has been sufficiently large in scale and its extradiegetic game environment has been made as close as possible to what the diegetic game environment would look and feel like. Finnish game design, lacking those resources, has evolved into the opposite. The default paradigm there is that a "high-quality game" is conducted in small scale and with the idea that the game material should be so effective that as few extradiegetic elements as possible should be necessary. Large-scale games are seen as "pandering to the public". Bear in mind that this is the most clear-cut example. As a direct counterpoint, it must be noted that Norway, despite not having a subsidization system, has a paradigm very close to the Swedish one. And Denmark, despite having an almost as strong fiscal larp support system as that in Sweden, has a paradigm closer to the Finnish one. An alternative



explanation hypothesis to the reasons in paradigm difference has been suggested by Eirik Fatland, according to whom there is a definite correlation between the scale issue and local, historical tabletop role-play/larp connection. By this hypothesis, countries like Sweden and Norway, where larps evolved without any major tabletop role-playing connections, favor large-scale experimentation. And countries such as Denmark and Finland, with a strong connection between the two forms of role-play, favor smaller experimentation closer to the format of an “rpg session”.

³ An even more harmful effect is that they make the transferal of useful results from one gaming culture to another – even with distortion, let alone without it – a rare occurrence.

⁴ External participant motivation (EPM) is roughly describable through the question “why do I want to play”, whereas internal participant motivation (IPM) is describable with “how do I want to experience in the game”. Note that IPM includes both diegetic and extradiegetic expectations.

⁵ And would thus have a Disinterest ratio of 20%.

⁶ Theoretically, a player with a 100% Being ratio would enter a state of Diegetic Psychosis, in which he would consider every aspect of the game an actual, “real” fact. Likewise, a 100% Doing ratio would lead to Diegetic Dissociation, in which a player’s actions would be completely separate from the surrounding reality on both diegetic and extradiegetic levels. Such states have not been documented outside anti-role-playing propaganda.⁷ An idealized Bd state would be similar to a Zen exercise in which every aspect of an action is experienced as a continuation of one’s existence. A very accurate depiction of what a total Db state would be like can be found in J-K Huysmans’ novel *A Rebours* (1884).

⁸ An earlier version of this theory used German words (“Machen” and “Sein”) to illustrate the difference between the mental state and the resulting action, but the practice has been discarded due to it resulting in an easily misinterpreted abbreviation, the “BDSM ratio”.

⁹ This follows the normal construction pattern of the everyday self. “We must keep in mind that self construction is a complex process that responds to multiple ‘layers’ of interpretive constraint and narrative resources. While discursive pattern is always local, those contingencies that are bought to bear at any particular place and time coalesce from a vast array of possibilities, including those taken from broader cultural understandings such as might be drawn from race, gender, class, and myriad other configurations of meaning.” Holstein & Gubrium 2000, 167. Experiences of the constructed “social” self reflect back on the self-perceived “core self traits”.

¹⁰ I follow here the lettering of the original Greek word. The term originally represents the relationship of the human and divine parts in Christ.



¹¹ “In playing, the child manipulates external phenomena in the service of the dream and invests chosen external phenomena with dream meaning.” (Winnicott 1971/1980, 51). Exactly the same relationship exists within a larp participant’s mind, and therefore presents a way to designate the “dream” (diegetic) meaning of events and elements.

¹² For example, games such as *Luminescence* and *White Stains* used systems of communication based on required physical contact in order to provoke deeper, perikhoretic reactions to diegetic elements and thus reinforce the diegetic experience itself by providing player-level emotional feedback to it.

¹³ The game is also noteworthy for perikhoretic character theory, because unlike other noteworthy games about sexual roles in society, it had several male players publicly worry about having to play out elements of love that were normal behavior within the game’s four-gendered diegesis, but to them seemed extradiegetically homosexual. This is a clear example of an explicated, pre-empted perikhoretic reaction.

¹⁴ This method is most suitable for plot and story arc-oriented games, but may provide new innovative forms of game expression also to highly immersion-oriented games by introducing factors that can not be presented by staging alone.

¹⁵ “Playing is essentially satisfying. This is true even when it leads to a high degree of anxiety. There is a level of anxiety that is unbearable and destroys playing.” Winnicott 1971/1980, 52.

¹⁶ Thematic series are campaigns that are interconnected solely through themes and/or methods, not by reappearing characters or continuing storylines.

¹⁷ Usually by making the players very paranoid about the presumed “real intent” of the designers, even if that does not actually exist.

¹⁸ For example, the Finnish game *Mehiläiset Saapuvat* (“Honeybees Arrive”) was advertised as having a completely fictional author in order to prevent player preconceptions from intruding into its diegesis and to present new opportunities for narrative control.

¹⁹ “All intrigues, plots and fates must mirror the story or advance it. ... It should be possible to draw parallels between the character’s conflicts and the conflicts of the story.” Westlund 2004, 253.

²⁰ Winnicott 1971/1980, 51.



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Games

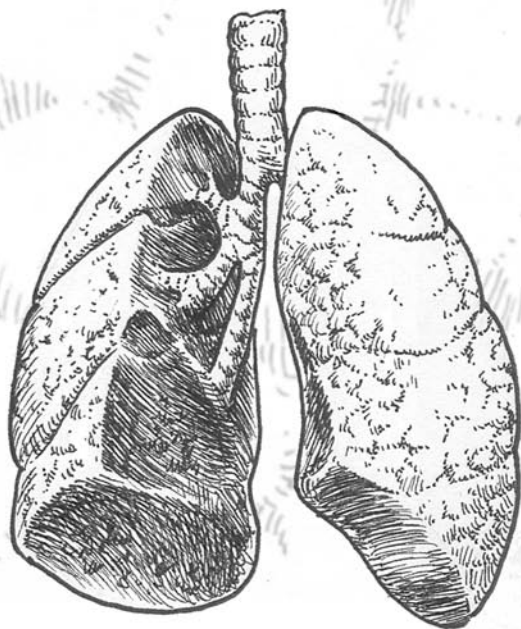
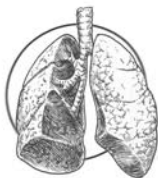
J. Tuomas Harviainen: *Valkoisia Tahroja / White Stains* (Finland, 2004)

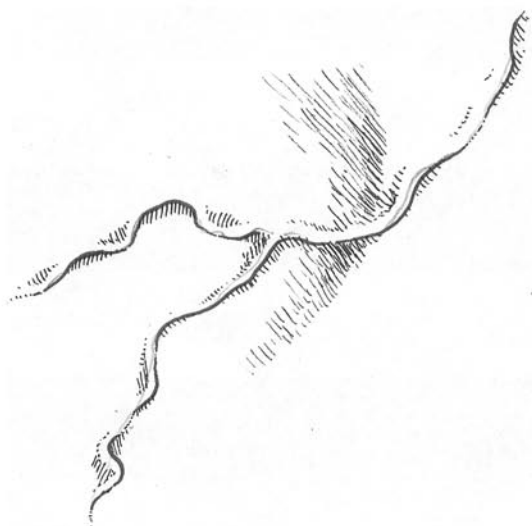
Juhana Pettersson & Mike Pohjola: *Luminescence* (Finland, 2004)

Julius Sepponen, J. Tuomas Harviainen & Jere Suvanto: *Mehiläiset Saapuvat* (Finland, 2004)

Emma Wieslander, Katarina Björk, et al.: *Mellan himmel och hav* (Sweden, 2003)

On larpers and
the larp scene







Danish larp by numbers

Abstract

This article gives an overview of the little empirical data about larp in Denmark 2004. There are two data sources: 1. a survey conducted with Danish children in the summer of 2004, and 2. the data from the calendar of the Danish larp portal, Liveforum. Finally, the article deals with the discrepancy between the two sources.

Over the last couple of years, there have been many attempts to guess the number of Danish larpers. In the last three or four years, I have heard numbers ranging from two to three thousand and up more than 50 thousand. It has been a frustration not to have a reliable figure, especially when contacting the "outside world", such as press and public institutions.

About the author

In 1997 a hooded teen with an axe came to Morten's front door. The teen asked Morten if he would like to go beat up kids in the forest. Morten came along and the rest is - as they say - history. Since then he has organized eight larps and larp conferences in varying sizes and genres. Also, he was a co-editor of the 2003 Knudepunkt book and is the editor of the major Danish larp portal, www.liveforum.dk. Morten is 24 years old, Master of Business Administration and Communications from University of Roskilde, Denmark and works as communications consultant

However, this summer the Danish Society for Nature Conservation (DSNC)¹ supplied us our very first reliable, quantitative data. It is a thorough analysis of how children between the ages of 10 and 14 use nature (Gallup, 2004a). The background for the survey was, that DSNC had little knowledge of children's relationship with nature. Hence, the survey asked questions such as "How often are you out in nature?" and "What did you use nature for, the last time you visited nature?" (Bandmann & Thaning, 2004).



One of the activities which were deemed relevant by DSNC was 'role-playing'. Thus, role-playing was a possible answer along such topics as horseback riding, bicycling, doing sports, building campfires and bathing. Although there is no definition of role-playing in the survey, the children are asked if they role-played 'in nature' for the last month, so in our terms, the children were asked if they larped. ²

Let us not hide it any longer: The results were thrilling. According to the survey, 8% of the children had participated in role-playing events in nature during the last month (Gallup, 2004b: 3). That means that 27.000 children aged 10-14 role-played (i.e. larped) in July 2004! ³ As the Danish National Larp Organisation (for short: LLR) stated in a press release, there are more Danish kids larping than playing e.g. basketball.

Also, the survey did not just provide us with a total number. We now also have indications about childrens attitude towards role-playing:

- 11% of the children state that larping is one of their five favourite nature activities (Gallup, 2004b: 4).
- The study also showed that Danish children think there should be allocated more room for larping in the Danish nature: 22% apparently think that we could use more room (Gallup, 2004b: 22) – even if most of them did not actually role-play themselves.

Furthermore, the survey tells us that 5% of the children larped the last time they were 'out in the nature' (Gallup, 2004b: 28).

So, where are all these kids?

One question remained to be answered though. Where do all these kids go to larpe?

The obvious source of information would be the Danish larp calendar at www.liveforum.dk. The calendar is close to complete and entails all major Danish larps on the regular larp scene ⁴. Here, I will go through the parts of the data which is reliable, also the parts which are not related to the numbers of players.

The database shows that in 2004 189 larp related events were held in Denmark. Approximately half of the larps are chapters in various campaigns and there also a few conferences in the calendar.



Liveforums current calendar system has existed since early 2001 and our data shows that the number of events is stable:

2002: 184 events

2003: 174 events

2004: 189 events

The LiveForum data also allows us to count together the number of players. Overall, the 189 larps in 2004 accounted for approximately 30.000 players. This can only tell us how many times Danes involved themselves in larp experiences, not how many larpers there are, as we have no data on the frequency, eg. how many times a year the average larper plays. Also, the data is based on the informations from the organisers of the larps.

What genres are these 189 larp events divided into? When an organiser registers in the database, he or she has free text to describe the genre of larp. In the following I have gone through the dataset and divided them into the following genres:

- Fantasy/medieval (including high fantasy, dark fantasy, war larps)
- Vampire
- Other larps (including submarines, alternate reality and much more)
- Conferences and other non-larp activity (including various assemblies and parties)

As figure 1 shows there is a very big majority of fantasy/medieval games in Denmark:

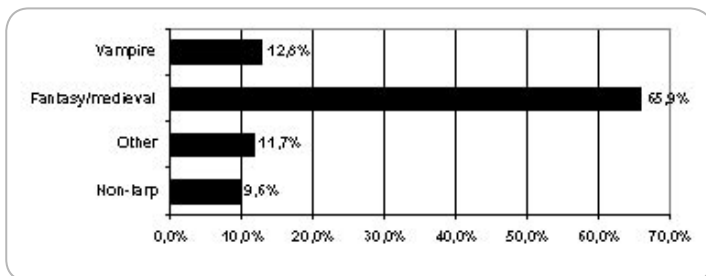


Figure 1: Larps in Denmark, genres 2004 (percent) (n: 189)



Two in three larp events in Denmark are fantasy or medieval. But is that also the case for the 30.000 players? To find out, I crosschecked the number of participants for the different larps with the above genres. The results can hardly come to any surprise:

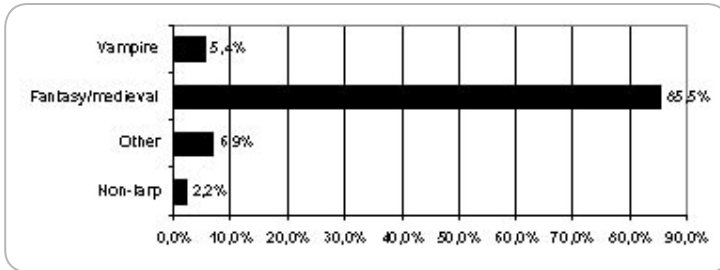


Figure 2: Players in Denmark, genres 2004 (percent) (n: 30.500)

The Danish larp scene is – as the above statistics clearly demonstrate – dominated by large fantasy and medieval games and campaigns, especially during the summertime. There are no signs of this changing, as the fantasy wave generated by popular movies such as Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter has created a huge demand for fantasy-inspired larp.

Finally, the database can give us reliable information on how much the participants pay to be involved in Danish larp. When studying these statistics, it is important to notice how a lot of campaigns in Denmark are low cost compared to stand-alone larps.⁵ Hence, 50 of the 189 larp events targeted Danish players in 2004 had a price tag below 20 DKK (approx. 3 euro), while only 8 were priced above 500 DKK (approx. 70 euros)

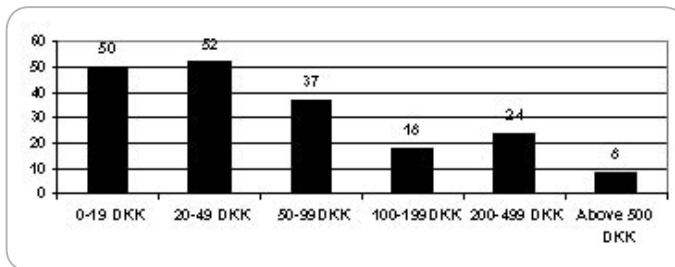


Figure 3: Prices for Danish larps 2004, absolute figures (n: 189)



What happened to the 27.000 kids in july?

The data above can of course be flawed as they are entirely based on the information given from the organisers themselves. The calendar is basically an advertising tool for the organisers, and this means that there may be some problems with the reliability of their information. Furthermore, there can be other reasons for the data to be flawed. Let us dig in deeper on one of the months, July. This was the month where the DSNC survey showed that 27.000 kids ages 10 to 14 larped. According to the calendar, 25 events took place in July 2004 (Liveforum 2004). However, three of the events are set in Norway and Sweden, one of the events was actually a party, one was a con and another one was cancelled. The remaining 19 larps could not possibly have 27.000 children participating, could they?

Even though Danish summer fantasy larps tend to be rather big, they do not have over 1.000 participants on an average basis. Rather, many children larp through institutions, schools and youth schools. The kind of larps played here are quite distinct from the larps usually played in Denmark and also, the organisers do not always have contact to the traditional larp scene of Denmark. For children in Denmark, larp has become a game or sport that can be compared to other activities, such as football or scouts. Of course this offers both challenges and possibilities.

It would be interesting to do extensive research on the two larp scenes, especially on qualitative differences between them. Also, it would be interesting to map out how the two scenes interact and what potential there is for stimulating this interaction and hence make better larps in institutions that can also be used for learning. For more on this, see *Rollespil for børn og voksne* which is written by larpers but targeted teachers and other educators (Andersen & Raasted, 2004).

How many of the kids did participate in larps organised by the traditional larp scene? My calculations based on the Liveforum data show that the 19 larps in july can account for somewhere between 3.000 and 6.000 participants. A lot of these participants are obviously not kids, but a lot older and some will probably participate in more than one larp in july. So in the age group of 10-14, the traditional larp scene can only account for a very little part of the larping actually done.



Conclusions: The public perception of larp

If we trust the data from the DSNC survey, there are at least five or six times as many children larping through schools and institutions as there are through the traditional larp scene. Among other things, that has great significance for the public perception of larp.

In Denmark, larp has become something you know what is. In a recent number of the fanzine *Rollespilleren*, the zine documented that larp has been used as an element in stand-up comedy, tv commercials and radio satire. People have a pretty good idea of what role-playing and larp is. In fact, it is actually the same thing in the public perception. Usually larp is coined as role-playing, whereas traditional tabletop role-playing has disappeared from the media (at least compared to the massive coverage of larp).

The only problem is, that their image of larp does not correspond with the way, we like to think of ourselves. In the media and other popular sources, larp is generally regarded as children's play – and larp is always based in fantasy- or medieval settings. I would argue that this is because the main frame of reference for the public consists of the larps conducted in the institutional larp scene, which are in general entertainment for kids.

Notes

¹ Danmarks Naturfredningsforening, www.dn.dk.

² In the Danish public, larp is generally termed role-playing, and traditional table-top role-playing is hardly ever mentioned.

³ The survey interviewed 1.026 children, a representative group. On the number "8%" there is an uncertainty of +/- 1.66% at a 95% significance level. Translated into common English, that is between 21.500 and 32.700 active players aged 10-14.

⁴ Many thanks to my fellow editor Rasmus Luckow-Nielsen for help with data acquisition. All of the data in the following is data from the Liveforum databases and is not accessible for the public. The data in the calendar is not necessarily correct nor accurate, hence it has been edited by the author of this article for flaws.

⁵ If there are different prices for members and non-members of a certain organisation, I have used the price for non-members.



Litterature

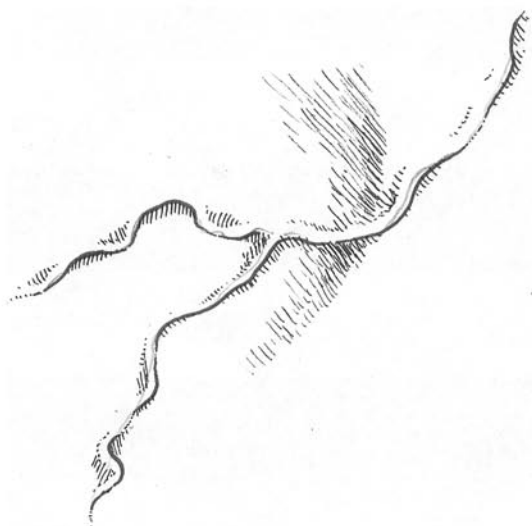
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Larp organizing and gender in Norway

Introduction

It is often assumed that the Norwegian larp community is fairly gender balanced and equality minded. This article aims to verify it. Based on information collected from the web site laiv.org and from former organizers, the article will discuss changes in gender amongst the organizers in the Norwegian larp scene from 1989 to 2004.

Larp organizers are the closest the Norwegian larp community comes to leaders. Studying changes in the gender distribution of organizers does not only tell a part of Norwegian larp history, but also indicates attitudes of and to gender equality and participation amongst young Norwegians.

Little work has been done on gender and leadership in non-governmental organizations (NGOs), neither in Europe nor in Norway (Council of Europe, 2002, p. 69). In Scandinavia and Norway larp, has rarely been the focus of academic study. Grasmø's book "Laiv" gives an in-depth description of Norwegian larp until 1998. However, the book is more of a description and explanation of what Larp is, than an analysis and much has changed since it was published (Grasmø, 1998).

About the author

Ragnhild Hutchison (28) has been active in the Oslo larp community since 1993. She has organized 5 larps, a majority of which have had a gender and/ or historical backdrop. She has a Master in history and is presently a research assistant at the Norwegian Institute of Local History. She is currently interested in the historical development of the Norwegian larp community.

In Finland Leppälähti has studied the Finnish larp community. Her results are published in e.g. "About the Community of Role-Players" in Knuteboka 04 (Leppälähti, 2004) . It had an anthropologists approach to the Finnish larp community, discussing it as a modern tribe. Leppälähti did not focus on gender, nor on

¹ I wish to thank Håvard Kongsrud for valuable help and support



the organizers. In Knuteboka 03 I discussed the changing role of the organizer. This article is, in many ways, an expansion of it (Hutchison, 2003). Gender and larp, and in relation to this organization, has been the topic of numerous debates at Knutepunkt, the annual Nordic larp conference. However, before discussing gender and organizers in the Norwegian larp community, it is necessary to give a short discussion of methodological problems which this study has met and an introduction to the Norwegian larp scene.

Methodology

Analyzing the data for this article has met with a number of challenges, the main one being inaccuracies concerning data, especially with the data concerning the number of larp organizers. This data has been collected from laiv.org's callendarium (laiv.org). In the callendarium all "held larps", "uncertain if held larps" and many of the "canceled larps" have been registered. It is not likely that many held larps are missing. The number of "uncertain" makes it difficult to determine the exact number of larps that have been held. Before 2001 this lattergroup is small, however after 200, they constitute an increasing number. The reason is that organizers have not updated the status. The registrations in the callendarium are not always accurate; sometimes an organizer has been left out, other times the wrong person has been registered and sometimes the larp has been registered with only the name of the group, not the names of the organizers. This has been corrected where possible, but it has been impossible to identify all.

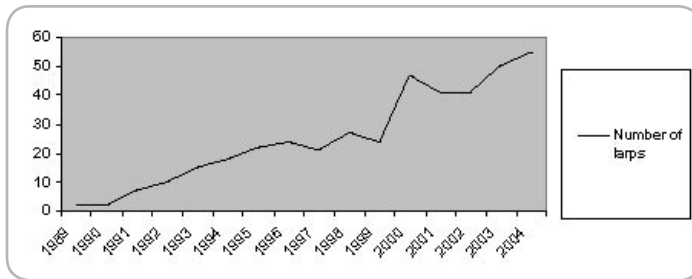
Inaccuracy has also been a problem when determining the number of larps which have been held. This has been done by counting "held" or "uncertain if held" larps in the laiv.org callendarium. This will have influenced the results by increasing the number of registered larps, but will still show the gender of those who at one time have been considered as organizers. The data on organizers has been supplemented by questioners to 60 former organizers. Their answers have helped to fill in information lacking from laiv.org, and also they also give an impression of how organizers experienced larp making.

By the help of former organizers it has been possible to collect data on gender and participation on altogether 83 larps 1989 - 2004. The collection is not complete, but should be sufficient to discuss common trends. The communities in Trondheim and Oslo will be used as case studies. The Trondheim community has supplied data on nearly all larps held in their area. It has also been possible to gather much data on larps in the Oslo area,



primarily from the earliest larps. The data for the Oslo community are fairly representative until about 1996/97. After this time, much data is missing. Another methodological problem is that the lists used to register the gender of the participants in both the Oslo and Trondheim communities date, in some cases, from some time before the larp, and have not been corrected for sudden changes of participants. The article has rarely used discussions on laiv.org or in other larp forums because claims made there have often been based on assumptions. Also, many of the participants in these discussions are amongst the older of the larpers, thus references to these discussions would favor their perception of the gender situation in larp. Despite the lapses and lack of information in the data it is still possible to give a fairly accurate picture of changes in the gender distribution of Norwegian organizers.

Short introduction to the Norwegian larp scene



Graph 1 The numeric development of Norwegian larps, 1989 - 2004

The first larps in Norway were held in 1989, one in Oslo and one in Trondheim. The two communities have evolved to be the largest, with Oslo in the lead. In the 15 years that have passed, larp communities have emerged in many places around Norway e.g. Vikersund, Ålesund, Stavanger, Holmestrand and Bergen. Many have disappeared after a while.

Parallel to the numerical growth, there has been decrease in the number of participants per larp. In 1991 Ravn's summer larp had 153 participants, in 1993 it had 104. In comparison, the Ravn larp "1202" in 2003 had 50 participants. Judging from the available data, it seems that the majority of larps since the late 1990's/ early 2000 has had between 30 and 60 participants.



The Norwegian larp community is loosely organized around the web page laiv.org. Parts of the Norwegian larp community is organized in groups, either with members consisting both of participants and organizers, such as Elysium in Bærum, or as groups of organizers such as Arcadia in Trondheim. Many larp organizers and participants are not in any group at all. The lack of any clear organizational structure is typical for many new youth activities (Engelstad and Ødegård, 2003). Attempts have been made to create an umbrella organization, however, this has not met with success. Until recently larp received little or no external funding, relying primarily on participation fees. This may be slowly changing. In 2004 applications from larps made up 32% of the total number of applications for the fund Frifond teater. (Rune Lundby, Norsk teateråd, telephone interview 7/1 2005).

Organizers and gender

A larp organizer in Norway participates in creating the creative background for the larp, the plots and in the writing of the roles. The latter is often the most important identification of an organizer. Some organizers also deal with the practical sides of making larps, such as logistics and sanitation. The organizers are the closest the Norwegian larp community comes to leaders. Until now "larp ... has no money to give, instead we pay in status and social standing in the community" (Hutchison, 2003). Organizers, being the ones who make it possible for others to attend larps receive much of such "pay". Below will follow a quantitative study and discussion of changes in the gender of norwegian larp organizers.

Organizers and gender; the numbers

In Table 1 the gender of the organizers is registered, not the individual. Thus, a female organizer who has made e.g. two larps in a year has been registered twice. This leads to over-registration, however it is still possible to identify trends and developments. Table 1 shows that there has been an increase of female organizers since the beginning in 1989. The growth has taken shape as a gradual increase until 94 /95, speeding up in 96 and 97, and a sudden spurt and top in 98 when girls constituted 40% of the organizers. The top was followed by six stable years where girls constituted approximately 30 – 35%. The high number of female organizers in 98 and 99 corresponds with numbers in table 2 showing that in these two years larps organized by groups with 50% or more female organizers constituted approximately 50% of the larps organized.



	Men	Women	Men %	Women %
1989	6	0	100	0
1990	7	1	88	12
1991	23	1	96	4
1992	28	3	90	10
1993	35	4	90	10
1994	41	6	87	13
1995	81	15	84	16
1996	81	11	84	16
1997	54	14	79	21
1998	46	31	60	40
1999	66	35	65	35
2000	95	50	66	34
2001	106	43	71	28
2002	86	37	70	30
2003	86	47	64	35
2004	115	49	70	30

Table 1: Male and female organizers from 1989 to 2004

Table 1 also shows that since 2000 the number of female organizers has stabilized at around 40 to 50 persons. Numerically this is more than a quadrupling of the number of female organizers since 1994, however, their proportion of the organizers has fallen. In 1998 31 girls organized larps, constituting 40% of the total number of organizers. In 2004 49 girls organized, however, they constituted only 30%. One explanation for this is that much of the increase in the number of larps since 2000 has occurred in new areas such as Stavanger, Tromsø; Vikersund, Kongsberg and Mandal. In many of these communities there were fewer girls in the organizing groups than in the Oslo and Trondheim communities.

Table 2 shows that the gender distribution in the organizing groups has become more even over time. The first all-female organized larps were registered in 1992. Unfortunately it has not been possible to discover more about them. The first well-known all-girls organized larp was "Jentelaiven/Bylaiven" in 1995 in Oslo. Since 2000 the number of all-girls organizing groups has stabilized at 4-5, while the number of groups with female majority, has varied more.

The first time a group had 50% or more women was in 1993. Table 2 also shows that the first time 50% or more of the organizing groups had female



	100% males	75% males	50% males	25% males	0% males	Sum of larps
1989	2					2
1990	1	1				2
1991	6	1				7
1992	6	2			2	10
1993	11	3	1			15
1994	13	5	0			18
1995	15	3	1	2	1	22
1996	16	6	0	2		24
1997	13	3	2	0	3	21
1998	6	9	2	3	7	27
1999	7	7	9	3	1	24
2000	16	7	6	7	9	47
2001	18	7	11	3	5	41
2002	17	6	9	4	5	41
2003	22	10	4	9	5	50
2004	26	12	7	6	4	55

Table 2: Distribution of gender and number of larps between 1989 and 2004

participants constituting more than 20% was in 1996. At that time there were 16 larps organized by boys only, 16 with more than 20% girls. Since most groups consist of 3-5 organizers, 20% would be one girl.

Judging from the data supplied by former organizers, it can be concluded that the overall majority of larps with more than 80 participants have been made by male dominated groups. Female dominated organizing groups have mostly made larps for 20 to 40 participants, i.e. within the norm of the recent years. However, data for many of the larger larps since 1998 is lacking. Some of these larps, such as “Wanted” and “Den enes død 1” were made by organizing groups with about half female organizers.

Trondheim and Oslo

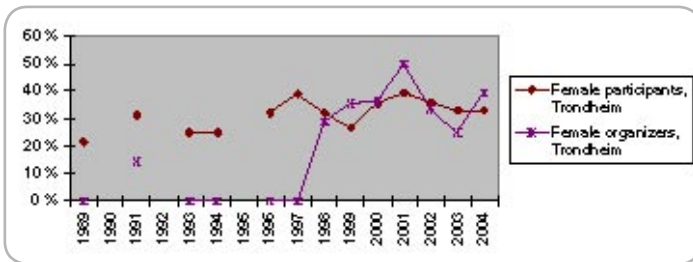
Case studies of the larp communities in Trondheim and Oslo can give more insight into the gender distribution of organizers. The data supplied for these communities is more detailed, making it possible to discover the representation of female organizers, compared both to male organizers and female participants.

Graph 2 is based on data supplied by former organizers and shows that the

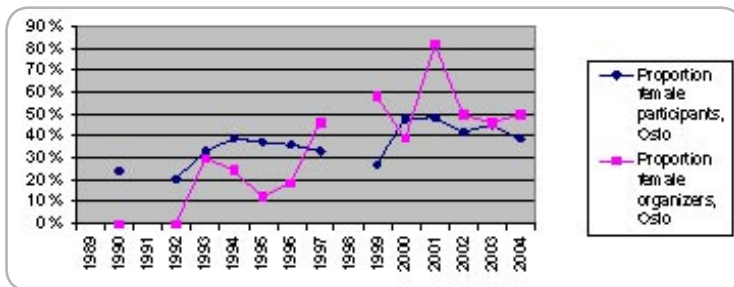


female participation in the Trondheim community has been between 20% and 40% since the start. Female participation seems to have stabilized at approximately 35% in the last 5 years. In comparison, there were none or few female organizers before 1998. In 1998 this changed radically; suddenly girls made up approximately 30% of the organizers, and then 50% in 2000. Since then the percentage of female organizers has stabilized at about 35%, approximately the same proportion which they constitute as participants

Graph 3 is based on data from the organizers. From 1996/97 it is less accurate than graph 2 because of incomplete data. Nevertheless, it can still indicate trends. One, is that female participants already from the early 1990s constituted approximately 20%-30%, slowly increasing to a bit more than 40% in more recent years. This coincides with observations in Trondheim. Another is that girls began organizing in the early 1990's, approximately 5-6 years before girls in Trondheim.



Graph 2: Proportion of female organizers compared with the proportion of female participants. Trondheim

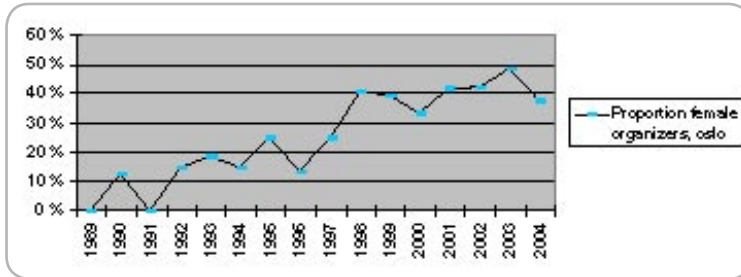


Graph 3: Proportion of female organizers compared with the proportion of female participants. Oslo



Larp organizing and gender in Norway

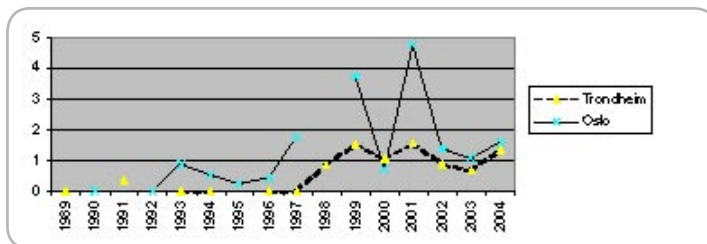
Graph 4 shows a more accurate development of female organizers in Oslo than graph 3 because it is based on the laiv.org calendarium. It shows the same increase of female organizers in the years 96/97/98 as in the Trondheim community. It also shows, as graph 3, that the girls in Oslo began organizing earlier than those in Trondheim. The proportion of female organizers seems to have stabilized at about 40% since 1998.



Graph 4: Proportion of female organizers in Oslo.

Graph 5 shows which gender is better represented as organizers, compared to their proportion as participants. When the number is larger than 1; female organizers are better represented than their male colleagues. If it is less than 1; female organizers are less represented than men. If it is 1; both genders constitute the same proportion as organizers as they do as participants.

Graph 5 sums up the quantitative development of female organizers in Trondheim and Oslo. It shows that in Trondheim, men dominated as organizers until 1997. However, after 1998, female organizers become better represented than male, compared to their proportion of the participants. This also happened in Oslo, but earlier than in Trondheim.



Graph 5: Proportion of male and female organizers, compared to their proportion as participants. Oslo and Trondheim



The organizers experiences

Numbers and graphs describe the situation and developments of women as organizers in the Norwegian larp community. However, to learn more about how organizers experienced being organizers, especially from a gender perspective, it has been necessary to use questionnaires. 27 female and 33 male former organizers were chosen randomly. Of these 16 men and 14 women replied, representing organizers from the whole 15 years of larps history in Norway, both those who have organized numerous larps, and those who have organized only one.

All the organizers, irrespective of gender, felt they had learned much from larp organizing. They focused primarily on having learned the importance of structure and organization of work, and on logistics surrounding the actual event. Many also mentioned that they had learned much about finances, communication and handling stressful situations.

The majority of both male and female had initiated at least one larp, either as part of a group, or on their own. Three of the girls said they had not taken initiatives, but instead been “headhunted”. Two girls had taken initiative to a larp because their larp organization “needed an activity”. Few of the organizers had met any reactions on their gender in relation to their role as organizers. Of the girls, four said they had only two elaborated. One said the reactions had only been positive, another told of a comment from a participant saying she “organized like a man”. One of the guys had received comments relating to him lacking practical abilities e.g. not being able to pitch a tent. The overall majority of the organizers had experienced support and backing of some sort from the community both during the making and while considering making a larp.

The answers also reflect differences in opinions regarding whether women and men organize differently. The split was irrespective of gender. Some of those who answered said they thought that women were better at writing roles, intrigues and plots, and that their larps focused more on social realism and history. Boys on the other hand, were perceived as making larps with more fighting. Others said that they thought there were different ways of organizing larp, but that gender was not a relevant explanation. Instead they focused on the individual differences of organizers and organizing groups. Many also pointed to age as an important explanation, e.g. that fantasy larps with fighting tends to be made by younger organizers, whilst murder mystery larp at hotels tend to be made by older organizers.



They were also asked if they felt they mastered being larp organizers. Seven out of the 16 men answered that they in some way felt insecure. Some said they felt they should be more structured in their work, others that they did not master the practical sides of larp making. Of the girls, only three said they did not master being larp organizers. These said they felt they did not have control of all the uncertainties involved in larp making.

Discussion

The results from both the quantitative and the qualitative part of the article indicate that the larp community is an equality-minded youth community where both men and women have equal access to the leadership positions as organizers. Nevertheless, it may be that the girls do not realize or perhaps admit that they have been treated unequally. This has been found to occur in a number of male dominated sectors. In order to fit in, girls do not want to draw attention to their gender, nor be perceived as complaining; thus they turn a blind eye to discrimination (Ørjasæter, 2004). A similar reaction amongst female organizers could be expected. The confidence with which the girls regard their own larp organizing skills may be understood as a wish to be perceived as equally qualified organizers. However, none of the results which have been discussed in this article support such a claim. Female participation was between 20% and 40% already from the start of the two largest larp communities. Further more, despite that the girls began organizing later than the guys, graph 5 shows that the proportion of female organizers often has been higher than their proportion of the participants.

The high participation of girls in leading positions makes the Norwegian larp community stand out compared to other cultural youth activities. According to the Council of Europe's publication "Going for gender balance", research has shown that women are often well represented in the grass root of an organization or community, but few in leadership roles (Council of Europe, 2002). This coincides with Anne Lorentsens finds in her study of the Norwegian rock music community, another cultural activity dominated by young people. Not only did she find few women in positions of leadership, she also found that female rock musicians were perceived as different, and sometimes not as good as their male counterparts. To be respected as musicians and achieve leadership positions, the girls took on roles as "one of the boys", in "her own category" or "rebellious" (Lorentzen, 2001). The quantitative data and the answers to the questioner referred to in this article do not reflect such a situation in the Norwegian larp community. The high number of female participants from the start, might well have made it



unnecessary for the girls to take on certain roles, as girls in rock music, in order to be accepted as organizers.

It is more fruitful to compare the participation of female organizers in the larp community with youth NGOs such as the environmental youth movement “Natur og Ungdom” or political youth organizations. Research done in connection to “Makt- og Demokratiutredningen” shows that that these communities and organizations also experienced a large growth of women in leadership positions in the late 1990’s (Engelstad and Ødegård, 2003). Unfortunately, there has been no research why this happened in these NGOs.

A possible explanation for why there was a sudden increase of female larp organizers in the mid/ late 1990’s is that there occurred a change of organizer generations. After 1996 there was an increasing number of new organizers, of both genders. Further more; few of those who had organized before 1996, many of whom had been important in establishing Norwegian larp, stopped making larps. This change of generations is also visible in graph 1 as a slump in the number of organized larps. The slump represents a year with few larps because the “old” organizers stopped and the new generation not yet taken over.

There were more girls in the new generation of larp organizers than previously. In Oslo the change began already in ca 1995/96 with larps such as “Jentelaiven/ Bylaiven” and “Bronselaliven”. The change came approximately three to four years later to Trondheim. In Trondheim, Soria Moria, the first larp organizing group is still active, thus the generation change took form as an increase of organizer groups. It seems that most of the new generation of larp organizers became larpers in the early/ mid 1990’s, but there is not sufficient data to determine this exactly. It has also not been possible to determine if there is a difference in how long girls and guys are participants before they organize a larp.

Looking at who has and is organizing larps, it is possible that a new generation change is presently taking place in the Norwegian larp community. Many of the organizers from the late 1990’s/ early 2000’s are fading out of the organizing scene and are replaced by new ones. This is further supported by the slump in the number of larps in 2001/02 and the following growth. This is similar to what happened in 1995/96.



It is difficult to say if there is a difference in larps made by male or female dominated organizing groups. It does not seem that the size of the larp is linked to gender of the organizers. Large larps have generally been made by male dominated groups, but the majority of these were held in the early 1990's, a time when there were few female organizers. The increase of female organizers has influenced the reduction of larp size, but it is not because girls make unusually small larps. Their larps are a part of an overall numerical increase.

Answers in the questionnaires indicate that there is a division in the community regarding the perception of differences between male and female organizers. Parts of the traditional gender stereotypes are still present, represented through the claims that girls focus more on relationships and feelings and boys more on fighting when they make larps. It has not been possible to determine if these assumptions are correct. That would demand creating a categorization of different forms of larp, a task to daunting for this article.

Related to the issue of stereotypes it is interesting to find that nearly half the male organizers felt that structure and practical tasks were skills which they did not completely master. Both these skills are traditionally part of the male stereotype of being handy and in control. The insecurity may be explained by the uncertainty which surrounds what is "male" and "male ideals" in modern society after the feminist revolution. Another possible explanation is age. Many of those who felt insecure were in their early twenties and had made fewer larps than the others. However, it should be said that also some of the organizers with numerous larps on their track record were humble. It may also be that the older male organizers answered with more humility because they feared they would be perceived or presented as too self confident in an article they knew would be written by a female larper and read by the community. The women's confidence may be motivated by the same; the need to show confidence and strength to defend their positions as organizers in an article that will be read in the community.

Conclusion

The Norwegian larp community is fairly gender balanced. For the past five to seven years, girls have made up approximately 30 to 40% of organizers. Since the start in 1989, girls have constituted between a third and half of the participants of Norwegian larps. This is the same number as the Norwegian government wants in board rooms. The girls began organizing later than the



guys, nevertheless, there is little to indicate that they have met significant barriers when taking on the leadership positions as larp organizers.

Based on the data available in this article it can thus be concluded that both men and women have fairly equal access to leadership roles in the Norwegian larp community, and that both genders have taken them. The highest number of female organizers occurred in the late 1990's, when girls constituted 40% of the organizers, and even 50% in one community. In general, it seems that the proportion of female organizers is approximately the same as the proportion they constitute as participants. The high female participation in leading positions from the late 1990's can be explained by a change of organizer generations. There was also a similar increase of girls in leadership positions in Norwegian youth NGOs. Unfortunately, there has not been done any studies of why this occurred.

It also seems that larp organizers are struggling with old and seeking new gender stereotypes. Female organizers are predominantly confident about their competencies as organizers; the male organizers show more uncertainty. The uncertainty is connected to ideals which traditionally have been linked to the male stereotype and changes that are occurring in it. This article leaves many questions unanswered; some are linked to the sudden growth of female organizers in the 1990's, others are linked to changes in masculine and feminine ideals. However, first and foremost the article shows the need for further study into youth activities such as larp. It is through such studies we can find indications of the values that may dominate our future.

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Profiling the larper - what is actually at stake”

Larping in Denmark is not meant to be fun, and never has been. Question is, if it will ever be. It is no fun to sit on a stone, offgame, having spent endless amounts of time on practicing a role, and money on the perfect costume, props, or whatever ones time and money has been spilled into, waiting for someone to come up, and with a mediocre talent of acting, pretending to play up.

Larping it self is not fun, but some people fancy winning, achieving status, creating scenes, or merely being part of something. Others fancy dressing up, or fancy weapons and armor, building props, rules, negotiating and manipulating, fighting, planning stories, organizing, or trying to be someone else.

About the author

Thomas Duus Henriksen is 29 years old, and lives in Copenhagen, Denmark. He is educated as business psychologist, specialised in the use of games for educational and developmental purposes. He has been larping since 1992, organising since 1996, and has used this experience to design learning games for the public educational system and for supplementary education. Before becoming a business psychologist, Thomas worked 4 years with mentally ill young people as an environmental therapist at a psychiatric department. He is currently employed with a private company where he designs learning games for various purposes.

My claim is, that larping itself is not funny, but rather is a category of activities, a means of giving the individual an opportunity for pursuing certain interests of personal value. This opportunity to pursue certain interests is what drives the player into larping, and eventually into becoming a part of the scene. In order to investigate this, it is necessary to take just a tiny step away from the all-engulfing larp experience. Taking one step back is what this article is all about, and it reflects the perspective, from which it is written.

Seeing the activity as deconstructed instead of “just a game”, played “..



because it is fun”, which are the most commonly given explanations for larping, gives us an opportunity to reach beyond the common answers to why people larp. If we manage to take the famous step back, it allows us to take a look at the needs fulfilled by larping, and thereby gives us a better chance of figuring out who the larper actually is. It also provides us with the opportunity to understand the struggle taking place between larpers trying to define the content of the activity.

Some might claim that I have been looking too deeply into “The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism” (Weber, 1930) before writing this article, and this might be true. But even though the article contains my developmental recommendations, it is mainly descriptive. Reading applied psychology is often a provocative experience, especially when the reader is reflected by the application, and the reader should therefore be aware of how his or her bias is applied to the article when reading it.

The main purpose of this article is to encourage larpers to reflect upon their own and other’s motivation for larping, and eventually on the developmental reflection created by the scene. Due to the fact that larping holds a limited, and not necessarily realized, learning potential, and that the Danish larp scene encourages childish behavior and compensatory activities, my recommendation is to get out, and have an additional taste of the world outside. My recommendation is based on the fact that larping is a developmental sleeping bag; cosy, but not much else in the long run. Seeing this, one must bear in mind that the common Danish larper often is a person, who has lacked social impact in his or her daily life, using larp as a compensatory, essayistic opportunity for experiencing a feeling of success.

This is interesting because the larpers holds certain qualities, which are sought after by our contemporary and future society, but are rarely realized, due to the common larper’s lacking ability to interface socially with and participate in his or her contemporaries. The easiest ways of achieving this, is by promoting the extrovert styles (such as the dramatist way), and for the larper to visit the real world once in a while.

And this is really interesting, not just to the psychologist, but to the bridge builders trying to unite the larpers as a whole, and for those trying to interface larping with the world outside. Whether the purpose, it is relevant knowing what resources, which flaws, and what kind of desire makes larpers larp.



Besides the descriptive perspective, it is relevant to notice that the picture of the Danish larp scene is drawn from directly above. It shows variety and content, but lacks a perspective; height. It says something about the different contents, but not about how heights to which the different areas are represented. I am not saying anything about larpers outside Denmark, nor am I trying to define an archetype for larpers, I am presenting a descriptive set of traits, helping us to understand who the larper is, and why he or she larps. It may be a useful tool for a lot of things – please be aware of how, and for what purpose you use it.

The already presented conclusion is achieved by comparing a lot of combined theory with a look at larping, the larper and the scene. By combining the academic theories concerning play and socialization, supplemented with the scene's own theories and values, a very interesting perspective is produced, giving us grounds for stating differently than the “because it is fun”-answer, that a larper most certainly would produce. To be precise, the above conclusions have been created by applying a playmatch-, an entry- and a developmental need analysis with the Three-fold model, all founded in a solid understanding of play, onto the larp phenomenon.

Starting somewhere

Play being the prime core

The core issue in larp is the play part. By playing an alternative reality based on a fictional re-centering of our immediate perception (Ryan, 1991). We pretend that what we perceive is something else, thereby creating an in-game experience of an object or phenomenon (Henriksen, 2002, 2004). When we play a role playing game, we apply a certain perspective, called diagesis (Hakkarainen & Stenroos, 2003) or frame onto our reality. This game perspective is usually given by the game master, and we play that we are a part of this diagesis by putting on a role.

The reason why we play can be deducted by looking at the games we play. It is striking that we always play situations from perspectives that we do not have access to. As adults have access to more situations than children, this difference causes the two groups to play in different ways, and in different quantum. This perspective is originally proposed by the Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1978), who claims, that we play in order to compensate for needs or desires that we are currently prevented from fulfilling in the real world. We therefore create a fantasy (which can be carried out as play), in which we fulfill the given need. If we lack the ability to achieving status in the real



world, we can compensate for the frustration this lack creates by playing that we achieve status. This can be done through role-play, and the pleasurable experience created by this compensation is often perceived as fun. Play is often viewed as an experimental approach to learning, but it is relevant to notice that learning might be a beneficial effect, but not the motivation for the participant

As we grow up, our needs and opportunities change, and with them the way we play. It is no longer relevant for a teenager to play that he or she is brewing coffee due to the opportunity at hand, whilst the opportunity is out of reach for the toddler. The way we play (or larp), is at reflection of the match between our desires or needs, compared to our given opportunities. This gives us an impression of both the needs at stake, and of the purpose of the given activity. Lets try and bear this in mind while taking a look at some well-known gaming styles.

Three approaches to larping

The Three-fold model was originally introduced to the larp scene as a Norwegian analysis of the entry players background. According to the theorist Petter Bøckman (2000), the first larpers came from the tabletop roleplay. These were coined gamists, and were driven by a desire to win, gain levels, and by a love for rules. Later on came the dramatists, who had a background from theatre. They were driven by a desire for drama, for creating scenes, and for the story it self. Last to arrive were the simulationists, who mainly consisted of reenactors who's desire was to recreate events and to explore and experience (mostly) historic circumstances. This model has later on been influenced by the Turku approach (Pohjola, 2000), and in the Three-way version (Bøckman, 2003), it describes the choice of gaming style after getting into larping. In the Three-way model, the simulationists have been replaced by immersionists, who seek to emerge into another consciousness (Pohjola, 2003). The Three-fold perspectives each give us a cue to understanding larp behavior, whereas the normative element of the immersionist perspective makes the image a bit blurry. This is due to the fact that the 3-fold refers to natural causes for the participant to start larping, in contrast to the immersionist perspective which is meant as a direction for the larper once started.

Gamists rules!

The gamist perspective is probably the most common in Denmark, mostly due to the large body of relatively young players. The gamist approach



is based upon rules, on optimizing, on winning. Rules are seen as the inventory of legitimate means during a larp, and cheating in larp is very common. Cheating is both seen as a means of achieving a feeling of omnipotency (Fine, 1983), and as a mean for unjustifying others actions in order to compensate for the feeling of defeat. Both gamist players and gamist organizers are ridiculed, mostly by the older members of the scene. The gamist perspective is often countered by a “No rules”-attitude, both depriving the gamist from his or her explicit rules, and on the same time allowing this (subclass) meta-gamist player to draw upon his or her social skills (/education) to gain the upper hand in the game.

- The gamist toolbox of resources consists mainly of a thorough understanding of the rules in play, combined with a sense of plotting, the ability to optimize, and the skill to manipulate others. The gamist player is often able to draw upon a wealth of introvert resources, which are often hidden from his or her surroundings. The participation is focused on optimizing ones own situation, status, control, power, wealth and so on, and not paying much attention to entertaining others or giving away opportunities for others to create events.
- Each of the gamist’s desires gives an impression of the needs at stake. It is striking that they all are centered among the issue of achieving power in the game, which points our attention to the everyday inadequacies for the gamist. The need for basing the interaction upon the strict obedience of rules (at least for the counterparts), points our attention towards a need for simplifying the otherwise complex social interaction. This need for participating in contexts of explicit ruling is very common among teenagers, so is the need for breaking the rules for ones own good.

Dead dramatist on demand.

The dramatist perspective is probably the least common in Denmark, mostly because it has been ridiculed during the last few years. The dramatist perspective is based upon creating scenes of drama, acting, taking responsibility for the storyline, and for involving other players in the game. An action becomes legitimate if it creates a scene, or if it creates something for other players to be a part of. For most dramatists, breaking the rules are often a means for creating something spectacular, which puts the dramatists under constant fire from especially the gamists.

- The dramatist toolbox consists mainly of an ability to create attention, to entertain, to create a show, to act, and to gather a crowd. The



dramatist actively uses the implicit rules of social interaction to achieve his or her ends. The dramatists participation is focused on pleasing a crowd, gaining prestige by becoming a center of events. Not much attention is paid to obeying rules, but rather to gather as much attention as possible.

- The dramatists tools clearly points to a need of social status, a need for positive attention, and a need for creating, and to be part of a community. This is often achieved without paying much attention to the need of others, eg. to the gamist's need for rules to lower the complexity of social interaction.
- The dramatist is a very extrovert way of larping. In contrast to the gamist and simulationist ways, which both heavily depend upon introvert values, the dramatist exchanges analytical depth with expression, precision with adequacy, and planning with a loud voice. The need for creating positive attention, social status is common among teenagers and up, whereas the lack of attention paid to the needs and values of others are mostly seen during the teenage years, as is the justification to breaking rules.

The simulationist - knowledge is power

The simulationist perspective is mostly seen in debates about the qualities of larp equipment. Like the gamist perspective, the simulationist perspective relies heavily on the obedience of rules, but not in order to win, rather in order to recreate certain circumstances, mostly historic events, but eventually also planned scenarios. Cheating (against game rules) is here seen as a mean to eliminate discrepancies between frame and how the simulationist thinks things should be. Cheating about the planned circumstances often results in a historic debate about the interpretation of facts, about the means to the common end.

- The tools of the simulationist are clearly precision, planning, coordination, acting skills and setting knowledge. The primary legitimating means for the simulationsist is knowledge (historic, mechanical, ect.) usable for recreating the specific setting, circumstances or chain of events, and status is gained through the precision of this knowledge.
- The simulationist displays a need for expressing knowledge and for being acknowledged for this knowledge. Another need seems to be security, due to the emphasis on predictability and planning. As with the gamist, the strict obedience of rules indicates some need for reducing the complexity of social interaction.



- The simulationist style relies on drawing upon introvert resources, especially those abilities concerned with precision and reproduction. The simulationist also manages to make use of an explicit set of rules in order to legitimate the expression and use of own knowledge.

The immediate immersionist

As mentioned above, the immersionist perspective was introduced with the Turku school, and seeks to promote players to change their way of larping. "Immersionist' is the style which values living the roles life, feeling what the role would feel. Immersionists insist on resolving in-game events based solely on game-world considerations." (Bøckman, 2003, p. 14). The immersionist approach to larping is commonly known in Denmark, and has been praised by some to be the only way of larping, while others have merely adapted the term as a fashionable description of their way of role playing. Both are frequent arguments for elitist positioning within the scene. Cheating is unheard of among immersionist, as the only way of cheating implies breaking character.

- The prime tool of the immersionist is clearly effort and the ability to stand ground. Rules and knowledge are only relevant if they are a part of the character, and in order to achieve this, the player must be able to create a full fictional recentering, in order to avoid interference from personal perspectives (see also Henriksen, 2004).
- The needs of the immersionist are harder to spot than the tendencies in the above approaches, although one need is clearly stated - the desire to be someone else. Additionally, due to the current approach in Denmark, the immersionists displays an effort to ridicule the, according to the immersionists, inferior styles, and to present themselves as visionaries. This unbound perspective seems to fulfil a need for artistic expression among the immersionist players, whereas the elitist positioning states a need for status.

Other sources of analytical inspiration

Entry level analysis

Having described the need fulfilment for the common larping styles accordingly, an interesting picture can be drawn by matching the conclusions with some of the commonly encountered problems for teenagers. According to McHanon, the play as a compensatory activity disappears when we reach the early teens, where after the compensatory activities transmute into more adult processes. In contrast, the larper seems to continue using



larp as a playful compensation, instead of, as his peers, distance himself to and reject the childish behavior, which threatens to pull him or her back to the previous stage of development, thereby effectively halting the development. It is my impression that the common larper has problems establishing the adult means of compensation, and therefore recycles the childish compensatory means by larping. It is also my impression that the larp activity (/scene) is being used as a simulated practice, a training field for developing social skills a.o.

It is interesting to look at the needs of the larper at the entry level (when he or she starts using larp) seen across different ages:

Late Childhood : 6-12 years (age of games)

Entry players usually takes up the gamist behavior, seeing larp similar to a boardgame, it all about winning. Such rule-based activities are most common for the given group. The usual point of perish for play is set to the thirteenth birthday, but in the real world, the point of perish is set to the beginning of puberty.

Early Teens : 13-15 (age of insecurity)

Players entering larp during early adult scene are likely to take up any of the three styles.

Gamist: These players have usually experienced problems coping with the social complexity of being a teenager. Not being quite ready, the game is being used as a demand free stasis, where the player can wait until he or she is ready for the real world. Fantasy and other black-white settings are preferred, as it creates a predictable and comprehensible frame for the participation. Satisfaction is achieved through winning and achieving power. This is the dominant larping style for this group.

Dramatist: These players seem to be actively developing an extrovert, social convention, but doing so under safe conditions.

Simulationist: Like the gamists, the simulationists are trying to achieve a sense of security through rules, but seek to achieve acknowledgment though knowledge and precision. This group does not seem widely represented.

Late Teens : 16-19 (age of expansion)

The picture here is the same as the previous group, but there seems to be



movement towards the extrovert dramatist behavior, as to the simulationist behaviour. The development of social skills has become more essential at this stage, and there seems to be a remarkable difference between the groups.

Young Adult : 20+

Only very few go into larping at this stage, and they seem equally divided. The motivating needs seem to fit the three styles accordingly.

The point of perish seems to exist among larpers too, but it is quite hard to investigate, as it usually results in the player leaving the scene. Some players stay in the scene without playing, usually because he or she has established a solid social network within the scene. These ex-players usually claims, that they do not find larping pleasant anymore, which indicates a mismatch between that persons compensatory needs and what larp has to offer.

Motivational analysis

Players have diverse motivations for their participation. One is the compensatory need fulfillment, another is the developmental use of the activity. Surprisingly enough, the use of larp as a self therapeutic mean is not an uncommon motivation in Denmark, and thereby creating three major motivational categories for larping; Entertainment, Developmental and Therapeutic (see figure 1).

<u>Entertainment</u>		<u>Developmental</u>		<u>Therapeutic</u>	
<u>Amusement</u>	<u>Play</u>	<u>Specific ability</u>	<u>Social skills</u>	<u>Compensation</u>	<u>Specific treatment</u>

Entertainment as motivation

This kind of motivation derives from the activity itself, from the mere feeling larping produces. It can be subdivided into Amusement and Play:

A1 : Amusement

Amusement is seen merely as a brief breakaway from unspecified factors in an everyday life.



A2 : Play

Play is seen as an essayistic attempt to compensate for frustration produced by perceived inadequacy (Vygotsky, 1978)

Development as motivation

Larp holds a great developmental potential for the participant, as gives access to a wide range of activities. Although the potential is present, one must be aware of a) that the potential is not necessarily realized, and b) of the limited level of skill/knowledge available (see Henriksen (2002,2004)).

B3 : Learning an ability

This kind of motivation derives from an specific interest in a larp related activity or craft. This could eg. learning how to build an armor, to fight, to act, to write an essay, to know something about the middle ages, to organize, or how to build a database. This implies both skill acquisition and training.

B4 : Social skill training

This motivation derives from the opportunity to develop social skills, and eventually establishing a social network. This could be the ability to give a speech, lead a group or a crowd, manipulate others, negotiate, sexual behavior, or simply how to talk to other people.

C : Therapy as motivation

This kind of motivation derives from an urge to feel better mentally. It is not to be confused with playing, although they are alike. Although childish, play is a natural defense mechanism, whereas motivation from this category is caused by pathological conditions.

C5 : Compensatory hiding

This motivation derives from the need for the mentally ill to establish normal usable peers, without sticking out too much. It also includes behavior categorized as excessive hiding from the normative demands of ones surroundings.

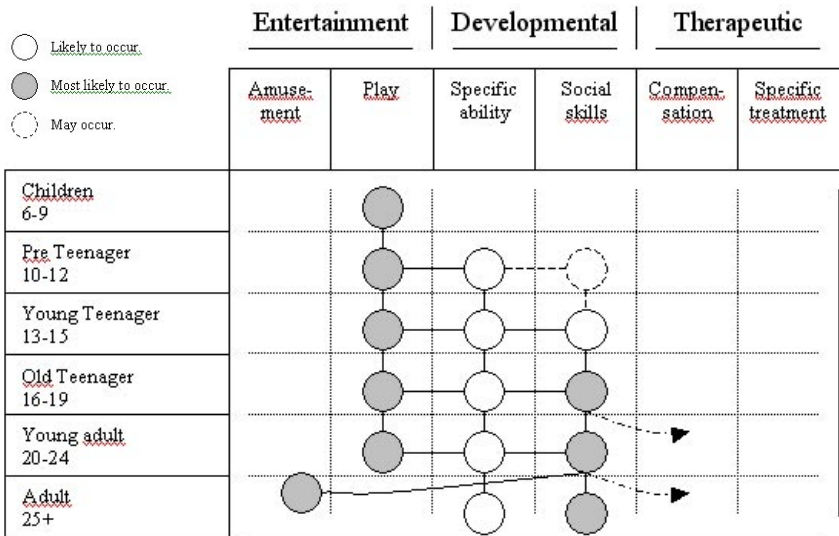
C6: Specific treatment

This motivation derives from the participants need to work with a specific topic within a mental illness, but to do so outside the health system. Psychologists or psychiatrists in Denmark do not normally recommend this approach.

The six categories each present a benefit for the participant. Although the effect in some cases is likely, it is not guaranteed. The categories can be



matched with the entry- level analysis, thereby giving an impression of both the entry level motivation, and of the long term trajectories of participation which a participant is likely to experience. The entry-level motivation is plotted into figure 1. The social learning potential is noticed by comparing the motivational trajectories for larp (figure 2) with the trajectories of classical dancing in figure 3. Notice that the therapeutic motivation (C) is not normally linked to age, but is due to factors outside the game.



The struggle for power

The intrigues and power mongering rarely ends with the play – the Danish scene is clearly marked by an ongoing struggle for the right to define right and wrong among larpers. This struggle seems to be a culmination of the diversification of needs attempted fulfilled through larp. Due to the fact that larping helps the participants to meeting certain needs, the larpers constantly struggle in order to make shure that larping meets their needs. Armor enthusiasts unite with simulationists against foam and latex armor, gamists claim the need for rules to keep the game balanced, and meta-gamists the need for rule abolishment in order to ensure their means for maintaining status by outer means.

The purpose of this struggle is rather simple. Similar to the process of individual socialization, the larpers merely attempt creating the opportunity to express the widest possible array of ones personal repertoire in a context



Profiling the larper - What is actually at stake _____

as wide as possible (see figure 5). According to the sociologist Mørch (1995), unsuccessful integration in a practice results in a participation, through which only a limited part of the participants qualities is brought into action, and that only in a limited part of the given practice.

The major threat to the individual larper would be a definition of larping, which does not meet that particular larper's individual needs. If, for instance foam or latex armor were accepted, the metal armor enthusiasts would loose foothold, and would undermine his or her benefit from larping. This brings about a discussion for the bridge builders on how to develop larp as a whole, which is not taken here, but implies thinking beyond ones own desires.

Looking at the larpers

Having used the theories for drawing a picture of the larper as playful but immature and childish, it is relevant to take a look at the larpers in practice. The question is whether these immature tendencies can be recognized among the larpers or if my theoretical application is unjust.

Armies of unskilled labor

A popular, but often in reality, blinding approach would be taking a look at the resources present among the larpers, and would thereby attempts to falsify the childish labeling. Such attempt would merely reveal, that most skills or abilities (category B), associated with larping, applied by larpers, are similar to unskilled labor. The exceptions to this are those participants, who are educated within relevant fields, and who apply thiese skill to the larping scene. This is especially seen within the field of communication, among simulationists, and among meta-gamists.

Leaving childhood

Two perspectives supporting the childish label come from looking at how larpers communicate, and on the reigning fundamental attitude expressed by larpers.

The way we talk

Danish larpers have a distinct way of talking, and are often recognized by the way they talk, and it is said among non-larpers that role players sort of 'taste' each word, and generally being very cautious on their pick of words. Others describe role players as well shaken bottles of champagne. If you ask them anything they like to talk about, the cork goes off, and out comes an



unstoppable cloud of bubbles rushing to surface.

Looking at the communicative transactions between larpers, it is notable how little part of the communication that is based on properly used, adult, neutrally loaded information. Seen from an transactional analysis (see Berne(1995)), most players strive to take the position of the knowing parent, telling a child what to do. Another popular position, which is also often seen at bulletin boards, are the roles of the two old grumpy men from The Muppet Show, both knowing better and spending their time devaluating others. The final set of distinct roles, seen from the transactional analysis, are the roles of the cute children fooling around, playing innocent or adorable, and speaking as such.

The transaction becomes somewhat different when the larper is communication with someone outside the scene. Attempts to take the role of the all-knowing parent are quickly abandoned, and usually replaced with the role of the child being told what to do with a parent. Several hypotheses can be raised relating to why this occurs. However it is most likely that the larpers usual communicative games are not accepted by the surroundings. At bit more banal explanation could be that the larper, eg. lacks relevant knowledge or communicative skills to participate as an equal partner, resulting in given set of roles.

And the way we walk

Danish larpers generally display a very distinct fundamental attitude, distinguishing them from their surroundings. The more distinct features or (or values) of this discourse can be seen as:

1. a general acceptance of the idea, that it is ok to be weird.
2. an idealization of the abnormal
3. a tense attitude towards normality (values of the non-larp society)
4. a claim for not requiring social acceptance.
5. a claim for being accepting of others.

These values are widely recognizable among the common larpers, and are interesting, as they reflect an acceptance of the problems, which larpers are likely to experience in every day life. The above values are likely accepted by persons looked upon as weird, failing to meet the social demands of their surroundings, and thereby developing a tense relation the these surroundings and to the values it represents. Many larpers bear clear marks from the bullying, which is a major problem within the Danish educational system, and is a likely cause, both for starting to larp, and for accepting such values.



Profiling the larper - What is actually at stake _____

Another common, observable syndrome among larpers is seen, when larp values, attitudes, languages, mental models and such, are allowed to flood the participants behavior. It is usually manifested as a cultural push, played against non-larpers, and includes for instance saying "Greetings" instead of good morning in school, wearing a robe on everyday occasions, or by reframing situations into a role-playing discourse. The reactions created among non-larpers by this flooding are usually used by the larper to manifest a certain feeling of personal identity and cultural belongingness. Further readings on such social phenomenon can be found with Fine (1983)

Cast of characters

Lets make a turn away from the masses of common larpers, and brief look at the more interesting characters in play. Looking at the larp scene, two classes of characters puzzles me: What makes the exceptional players (not just ingame, but as a part of the scene), and why on earth are there so many mentally ill hanging around among larpers?

The exceptional characters

One type of players has managed to grow as individuals, and thereby have managed to stand out as exceptional within the scene. This is often done by having and putting certain characteristics into the game, and by evolving those skills. Whereas some manage to grasp the present, although limited, learning potential of larping, and manages to stand out by having learned how to eg. organize or similar activities, this is rarely a successful approach. A more commonly effective approach, is achieved through bringing in knowledge acquired through formal education.

The latter approach is often used by the meta-gamists, striving for the opportunity to bring in their personal repertoire, thereby giving them the competitive edge in-game. Although the skills of some education is more relevant and applicable than other, the successful application allows the player to leap beyond the performance of his or her co-players, often creating a mixed reaction of envy and recognition. Another, and just as relevant result of meta-gamism, is the feeling of personal success created, as it fuels the struggle to define the legitimate content of larping.

Not matter the strategy, those standing out as exceptional characters are often those who have managed to run a successful campaign, not necessarily as in being an organiser of a role play, but rather through sheer use of personal marketing.



The special characters

As mentioned (way) above, one motivation among larpers is the therapeutic purpose (category C motivation), and that the amount of mentally ill in the larp scene is mild to moderately overrepresented. One classic, but wrong interpretation of this has long been, that participation in role play activities produces incidences. It might be true, that persons, who are socially or genetically predisposed for developing a mental illness, can be provoked to incident by larping, but it is not likely to occur without the predisposition. Two likely explanations for the overrepresentation would be that

1. the scene is not centrally regulated, and that there are no explicit means for excluding a person. The scene is therefore deprived of the opportunity for regulating the right of entry to the scene.
2. the scene and activity bears characteristics, a.i. the claim for being acceptant to others, making the scene cozy for the mentally ill.

There seems to be a general acceptance towards the presence of the mentally ill. Also, there seems to be an certain openness concerning the specific attitudes, and on some occasions, a tendency to flash ones own weaknesses as a mean of gaining some accept. Being weird is seen as ok, and a bit mad likewise. Whether this attitude comes from larping, or if is a contribution from the mentally ill is not known. This tendency to attract mentally ill does not seem unique to the Danish larp scene. Rather, it seems to be a general phenomenon, as an example from the US shows:

“While such games do not cause someone to become violent, and the majority of participants in the Live Action Role Playing groups (LARP) are just in it for fun and creative outlets,LARPs can attract mentally unstable people, who find encouragement for their delusions within them.” (Ramsland)

Just as the larpers, the mentally ill present are not one coherent group, although three major groups can be identified, each bringing their contribution to the scene; the schizophrenic (F2), the affectively (F3) and those suffering from personality disorder (F6) (WHO-ICD-10). Due to professional secrecy, I cannot provide the reader with examples throughout the following part, as it would risk compromising the identity of several of my former patients.

The schizophrenic (F2)

For the schizophrenic, larping holds an opportunity for using the schizophrenic behavior in a normal manner during role play. As the role play basically is all



about redefining the perception of an object into something distinct from that particular object (Henriksen, 2004), the schizophrenic is often able to blend in with the crowd. The schizophrenic rarely make much out of them self in the scene, as they mostly manage to blend in among the often bizarre actions, sayings and attitudes of other role players. Although mostly labeled as odd, it is worth noticing that the schizophrenic often manages to contribute creatively, both to the specific game, and to larping all together.

The affective disordered (F3)

Like the schizophrenic, the affectively disordered rarely make much out of them selves. The most common affective disorder among larpers is various degrees of depression, which usually forces the player to leave the scene during the peaks of the depression, for then to reappear some time after. Although rare among larpers, the mania-depressive participants manage to annoy their surroundings during the manic phase, making their disappearance seem as a relief when the depression strikes. The affectively disordered usually sticks to themselves, and do not seem to have a notable impact on the scene.

The personality disordered (F6)

Most noticeable are the borderline girls (F6), who weaves their web of intrigues both in-game and off-game. Some seem to be in treatment, whereas others have left treatment, or have managed to stay below radar in order to avoid diagnostication.

The borderline girls usually uses the larp scene to hold court, creating a preserve, and keeping up an ever changing social acquaintances, based on intrigue, and are usually attracted to those larps, which gives them exactly this opportunity¹.

Although raising the stakes during intrigue play, the borderline girls' most distinct contribution is the personal failure they bring about whoever is lurked into getting personally engaged with them.

Almost unnoticed, but only really threatening group of mentally ill, are the handful of psychopaths, who are on the loose in the Danish larp scene. It is not my impression that a single one of them has been receiving treatment for the disorder, making the problem unaddressed in every single way.

As the psychopaths find it amusing bringing people down, the larp scene is a playground, as well as a training field for perfecting manipulative behavior. Apart from the personal failure they like to apply to others, the contributions of

¹ Eventhough borderline girls are attracted to intrigue larps, it would be wrong to assume that any girl playing intrigue larps as in this category.



the psychopaths to the scene have a.i. been a legitimization of manipulative behavior, as well as an excessive tendency to project and blame others, which both seems widely adopted. As with the borderline girls, they seek to establish and maintain a group of fans or tools, used for promoting their intriguing ideas.

There is an unattended discussion on how to cope with the presence of these special characters. However, as the main purpose of this article is to describe the variety among the larpers, I will leave the issue of the special characters here.

Summing up

All in all, profiling the larper seems as hard to do, as to define the activity of larping. There are just too many interests to adjust to. The sketched picture of the larper as a playful, but also a very childish individual is probably not very welcome among larpers, as well as having their leisure (if it can be called so), reduced to a process of the satisfaction of needs.

My developmental recommendation – to get out – or at least to develop an extrovert gaming style, is due to the fact that most larpers lack the means for developing a widely founded participation in his or her surroundings. The development of a relevant array of extrovert abilities might help the larper bringing his or her resources into play other than larping, eventually reducing the need for compensatory activities by effectively bridging the larpers knowledge to his or her surroundings. It is about time that the debate on what resources are present among the larpers is supplemented with a perspective on what the individual larper actually needs.

To the bridge builder trying to create some kind of unity I have tried to bring the diversity, as well as the reason for this diversity, to attention in order to enable the bridge builder to create unity through inclusion instead of internal distinction. This certainly implies looking beyond ones own needs and desires which I hope this article has been helpful for. The only question remaining is whether larpers, as a whole or as individuals, are ready to take a look into the cards dealt, and thereby confronting the issues at hand. Or, if the game is to be played continuously with the cards closed.

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Profiling the larper - What is actually at stake _____

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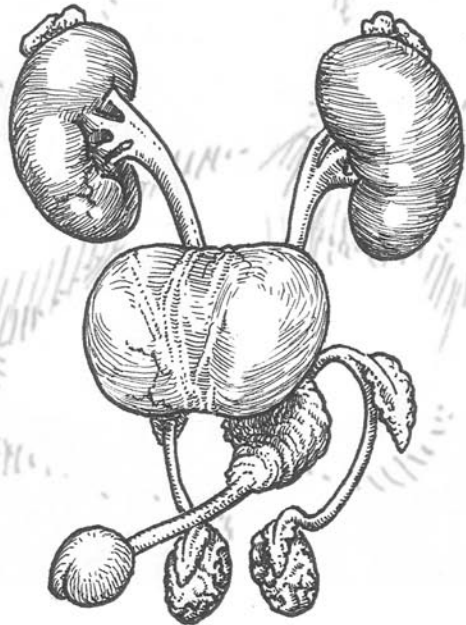
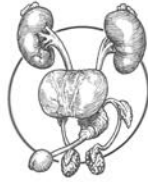
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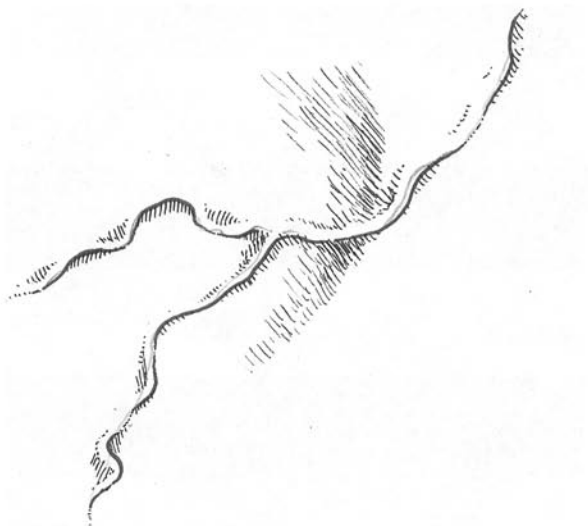
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Doing larp







Nothing is True; Everything is Permissible

Using Deception as a Productive Tool

As creators of role-playing stories, we are all accustomed to stretching the truth. In tabletop, we do it all the time: describing new characters and plots in false light, all in the name of a good story. Yet, when it comes to larp, we are often much more reluctant to use treachery to get what we want.

This article will introduce a combination of old and new larp preparation methods, collectively called “deceptive design”, that have been collected into a single body of work for the purpose of explaining how to use lies and illusions to make better games. What the text does not do, however, is exist within any single field of thought as to the purpose of larps, or the purpose of creating larps, although it does contain a few notes about reasons people should not have for creating larp material. The ideas within are meant to be an option for enhancing all kinds of larps.

About the author

Markku Jenti does not exist. He is a pseudonym created by a group of Finnish larp writers to assist in distancing games from the reputations of their creators, and in developing new methods of narrative control. The mask stays the same, but the people behind it change. Markku loves seeing his influence expand. tenjiaram@hotmail.com

Every Thing Possible to be Believ'd is an Image of Truth

Despite my grandiose title, two perimeters should always restrict the use of deception as a design tool. First of all, due to liability issues it should not be used at all in games that have underage participants. Complaints from people you have tricked are fine, complaints from third parties who feel their children have been cheated are not. Secondly, the designer must always avoid taking

advantage of his status in any way: Cheating players for monetary gains or romantic/sexual potential is not acceptable behavior.¹ It is the intent here that counts: Erotic narrative fine. So is getting paid for one's work and the money invested into the project. Only when the purpose is to take advantage of the situation, the thin ice cracks.



Other than that, anything goes. If dishonesty will make a game better for the players, go ahead and lie. Until the project is over, everything you will have stated as a truth will be seen as one. Almost always everything you've even just implied might be true will be treated the same way. The only real measure is taken when the game ends. If you succeeded, no one will complain about you making the game more effective. If you fail, they may still see the amount of effort you put in the project, and appreciate that. Or they may be disappointed – but, since the game failed, they would have probably been anyway. So go ahead and try if deception is a method that suits you.

Die Elektrischen Vorspiele

Well-prepped players are an incredible resource. They are far more flexible than any gymnast you may dream of bedding. Tell them that a game will follow a certain pattern and style, and they will make that happen. Not exactly, but closely enough, and will feel that they did it of their own free will. During the initial advertisement/recruitment stage, state clearly enough what the theme(s), style(s) and genre(s) of the project are. While you're actually describing just what the game will be about, and how you intend to present it, your future players will read a further semiotic meaning into that advertisement. They will see it as a description of what kind of a game you want them to make it. Say "soap opera", and they will create one. Say "full-contact prison camp game about emotions", and that will happen. Just make sure you do say it out loud. Otherwise the players will create a genre out of their own expectations, and you will have no control over your project.

At this stage it's also important to let loose all the important falsehoods you want to be told about the game. For example, if you're actually making a horror game, feel free to advertise it using a descriptive genre that is close enough for your purposes but not the actual genre, so that you can create a sense of shock. Call it a "week-end long game about the sense of social isolation" or some such. Note that if you use a bad combination of false and true genres and/or playing styles, you'll ruin the whole project.² The same thing will happen if you lie too much about the scale of certain game elements, and by doing so end up changing the genre by default. This is a very delicate thing, and is closely tied to genre conventions. A deceptive change from detective mystery to horror will probably work, but one from low to high fantasy (or vice versa) probably won't. And any slip-ups that make a supposedly introspective or social interaction oriented game into a hack'n'slash will almost certainly make players hate you – and you will most certainly deserve that hatred.



The next logical step is a good pre-game hype. Make promises about your upcoming game's high quality, the effort put into its creation, and so on. Draw from what you believe will be its strengths – since before the game you're actually just speaking about your preparations. You do not have a finished product you can truly, honestly talk about before the game is over. Selective omissions will prove very useful here, as you move from one potential target audience to another. Leave out anything a group might see as a problem, but remember to tell it elsewhere. In this way, all elements will be introduced into the common pool of (staged, possibly even forged) knowledge in the most positive light. Players who like a certain idea or a certain co-designer others might be wary of will always prove more persuasive than a lone game writer.³ Let them do your work for you, and remember that the means will eventually be justified.

If at all possible, try to get your game a transcendent status within your gaming community. Should you succeed, the game will be treated as "legendary" if it's even a marginal success.⁴ Good tools in this are talking about the number of people involved in the game, mentioning names of well-known, well-liked organizers, and the size of the game budget.⁵ One of the best status-gaining techniques is to refer to your works as "experimental", but this carries a serious risk of alienating players interested only in what they see as more traditional gaming. (Again, by using selective descriptions, you can turn this too to your advantage.) Finally, if your game is a part of a longer thematic flow of games – campaign, themed series, etc. – prepare the descriptions so that people will see your previous works in the best possible light and style for the current project's success. The reason you are doing this is to make the players feel special. That mood will translate into a heightened game experience – as well as gather you a useful reputation for other upcoming projects.

At the writing stage, first make an almost complete version of the diegetic environment – "that which is real within the context of the game", in this case the general story structure and the intended perception of the actual gaming space of the larp – the game is going to happen in. Then create characters according to their purposes within the story, but leave them otherwise skeletal. Either let the players select characters from a list, send you a list of preferences, or send them brief outlines of suggested concepts yourself. The purpose is to let them believe they have a say in the make-up of the people they're going to be playing, while you're actually typecasting them to the roles they'll themselves get the most out of at the same time they're



supporting the joint game experience. Most players will be very happy if they get to dictate the motives of their characters. Let them help you – they're only providing you with material that you'd otherwise have to invent yourself. Simply make sure the resulting actions stay the same, and your story plan will not only survive, it will become stronger. If every player feels that he or she is a star, you're certainly on the right track.

Access to electronic media will help you here. Using web pages that differ from one another is a relatively easy trick that will help you distribute slightly different information without appearing to do so. So are fake "group" emails, whether from different sources, or by giving an illusion that everything is sent as Bcc to "keep player anonymity" while everyone is actually receiving a separate email briefing. Electronic communication also helps to preserve your anonymity, should that be needed.⁶

Thinking Like a Vampire

With the game about to begin, put in the second gear. As you observe the forming group dynamics at the game site, take special note of any elements that might – not just those that will, might is enough – cause deviance from your vision. Typical examples of such items are misunderstood points of character connections and questions about plot paths you do not want the game to proceed to, such as leaving the area. Most of these can be easily spotted from the pre-game small talk between the players, and the things they ask you about. Then, during the opening speech and possible character/group briefings, address each and every one of those points. If needed, make up excuses and new rules as you go along. Players will always adapt if you give them a reason – any reason – to do so. The reason has to be relatively plausible, but need not be one that could survive any closer examination.⁷ All excuses, as stated before, can be dismantled as "necessary trickery" at the end of the game.

One of the best gamemaster guides ever written, the Mastering chapter of the game book *The World of Necroscope*, has a short section about playing incomprehensible evil creatures. The text states: "Never draw a conclusion for the players, but feed them the information to draw their own conclusion, and make sure that the conclusion they draw is wrong." (Bolme, 1995) In larps, this applies to both almost all narrative-related questions in the pre-game briefing and absolutely everything the players ask about the subject during the game. The latter has an additional benefit: by letting the players come to false conclusions you desire, you lessen the feel that you're railroading



them. Self-made choices always seem more palatable to larp participants than external, extra-diegetic measures such as gamemaster directions do. The basic rule here is that a player enjoys a character wanting to become the king out of its own decision the most, is quite happy to make such a decision based on pre-written material, but will be much less likely to enjoy it if the choice is either written as an absolute plan into the character or is stated by a gamemaster during the game. Certain forms of Fateplay are an exception to this, but only because they work on a structure agreed upon by all players in advance.

A further refinement of this technique also exists. More properly, it is a combination of using traditional, scripted non-player characters in a larp and the “draw your own wrong conclusions” method explained above. This technique, called “intradiegetic scripting”, places hidden gamemasters within a game, with full rights to edit any situation and leak any information needed to keep the game on track.⁸ They are listed among players and pretend to be players, so that their actions do not appear to come from “outside”. In this way, everything they do will have a diegetic explanation.

Using intradiegetic scripting works at first as a surprise trick. At the next stage, it will create a small sense of paranoia in every game, but test runs seem to predict that it will eventually lead to a state of improved general acceptance of all narrative control. By blurring the lines, it helps remove resistance to extradiegetic control.

And finally, read the mood of your players at the end of the game. Explain all inconsistencies away as needed. Improvise if you must, but it’s usually much safer to simply say that it was all done in order to enhance their game. If the game proved to be disappointment, apologize.⁹ Honestly, if you can – this is not a time for deception.

Grandfather arrives at Kåge valley

Done the wrong way, such systematic manipulation of players – friends – will net you nothing but contempt. Take thus extra care when you are using these tricks. At any given new locale, the first “deceptive design”-based game should be an intentionally created showcase piece. That way all the effort will be seen as a value in itself, and the trickery will be perceived as just a part of that well-made preparation.

Humor may prove a useful extra tool. If you can make the tricks you use



clever and entertaining as well as effective, your players will love you more. After giving yourself through deception a lot more leeway in design than is normal, feel free to utilize it. A few good jokes done in the game's general style, especially at the invitation stage, can work wonders. And if you're clever enough, those too can be recycled to further the deception. For example, creating characters that players associate with real people will enable you to slip in them some extra material the players will not expect.¹⁰

Do That, And No Other Shall Say Nay

Excluding the mandatory limitations outlined in the beginning, there is only one more rule to hold on to. It is that you always ask yourself whether or not the game you are making would benefit from your using deceptive design methods. No simple method for doing such an analysis exists, so you may well have to rely on both your instincts and the view of the game's concept you have. There is absolutely no point in tricking players just for your personal amusement, or even for the sake of a few extra laughs during the debriefing.

If it looks like the game might become stronger with some deceptive methods, take a bold step forward and use them. It's only cheating if you do it for selfish reasons. As a game designer you have an obligation to do the best games you can. So do not deny yourself the use of this very effective tool.

Deceptive Design in a Nutshell

- All deception must always be used for the sole purpose of enhancing the game experience. To use it for anything else is cheating.
- Larps are heavily influenced by the expectations of their participants. By altering those expectations one alters the game. The easiest way is through selective deception. It is often, but not always, also the most effective way to create the desired alterations.
- All pre-game hype, if analyzed properly, is actually a lie. The question is thus not whether one lies to the participants, but in what way and how much.
- The presumed "status" of a larp has a life of its own, initially modified by factors such as scale and designer reputation. That status can be prepared to a certain extent at the early stages, but becomes more difficult to adjust over time. A game with a positive status before it actually happens is more likely to be enjoyed by its players.



- When used for the purpose of creating a better game, all forms and methods of deception are permissible.
- The most effective deceptions are both plausible and entertaining. That way the participants will enjoy them even if the effects are not exactly those that were expected.
- All deceptions should be credibly explained away at the end of the game, but not before that. Explanations may be edited to correspond with the end results of the larp, if that will make the project seem more holistic or refined in nature.
- Apology is always proper policy, even when the game was a success. The fact that the players (and occasionally other unwitting participants, such as outsiders propagating the deception) have been lied to, must be addressed, and given the correct context.
- As a rule of thumb, comparing this situation to lying to a friend when organizing his upcoming surprise party will provide good ideas about the limits of acceptable deception. (With experience it's of course possible to harmlessly proceed far beyond those.)

Notes

¹ Writing a plot that may enable your friend to possibly get laid is respectable. Writing that same plotline with that particular intent purely in mind is not. A gamemaster should avoid creating such plotlines for his own character completely, in order to stay truly objective.

² Especially never, ever tell your players a game is a Soap Opera if it is not. That particular genre has its own momentum, which will sweep away the plausibility of all other themes you might want to introduce. And never call a hack'n'slash something else, or something else a hack'n'slash. Organizing an orgy under the pretense of making a larp is also considered bad form, but it's been nevertheless known to occasionally happen.

³ Should a negative view of such an element become dominant within the pool of knowledge, be ready to discard that trait without hesitation, even when it means firing a friend from the project. Then blatantly lie about the reason why.

⁴ The Swedes are extremely skilled in this. Study and then adapt their techniques – it's always best to learn directly from the masters.

⁵ Be careful in all of these. Make sure people see the part they like most in games as the most emphasized one. Also make *extremely* sure that they understand half of the budget isn't going to be spent on things like engine rooms only one player is going to see during a 300 participant game - unless you're a self-centered idiot who doesn't care, that is.



⁶ The Finnish game “Mehiläiset Saapuvat” was credited to a fictional game designer (“Markku Jenti”, to be exact), and the aforementioned means were used to obscure the fact that he did not exist, as well as that the actual designers were familiar with their players. This enabled the writers to seemingly accidentally place certain people to certain roles without appearing to do any typecasting.

⁷ Yet again, an excuse needs only to stay together until the game’s end. Usually all that is necessary is that it lasts long enough for the diegetic frame of the game to catch the player’s full attention.

⁸ In narrativist or plot-based game, they pace the game so that all conclusions are reached at suitable times. In immersion-oriented games they help preserve immersive states intact by introducing and removing phenomena and stimuli as needed.

The main plotlines in larps commonly proceed by “intradiegetic flux” (character choices forming a chaotic network), “extradiegetic scripting” (gamemaster-directed narrative) or “peridiegetic scripting” (gamemaster-directed narrative implemented through pre-scripted characters without a free will). Intradiegetic scripting is a synthesis of the latter two, disguised as intradiegetic flux. Note that other forms of plot procession also exist, but they are either variations of these or harmful forms of player-based intrusion (such as “extradiegetic flux”, which would be a state were the desires of players – not characters or a gamemaster – would dictate the plot).

⁹ Shifting blame is not a good idea. The only exception is that if someone is actually guilty of the failure, feel free to try pointing him out. You may garner some enemies, but the larp community will benefit as a whole from such social Darwinism. And it’s not like you weren’t already disliked – remember that this happens at the point where it is evident your larp wasted other people’s time and money.

¹⁰ Mehiläiset Saapuvat contained three characters named and described after known Nordic larp figures, one of whom (the murder victim, “Martin Ericsson”) was mentioned by name in the original game advertisements in order to draw in the attention of experienced players who might otherwise have not been interested in a larp with a typical-seeming theme written by strangers.



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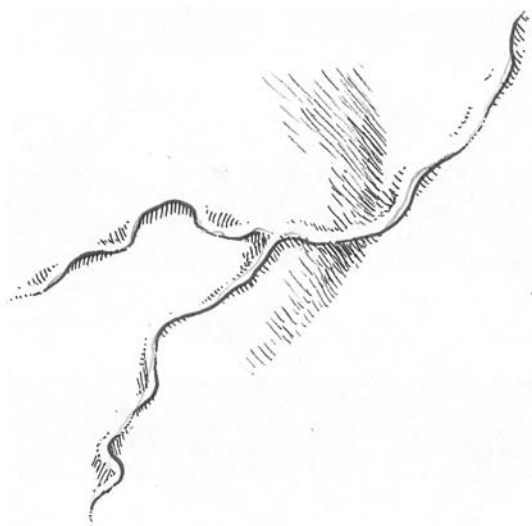
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Games

Mehiläiset Saapuvat (2004) by J. Tuomas Harviainen, Julius Sepponen and Jere Suvanto.
Originally credited to Julius Sepponen and Markku Jenti. Finland.





Testing Larp Theories and Methods

Results for Years Zero to One

This article reports the results and observed difficulties of my experiments in testing larp theories and methods that have been presented over the last few years. An emphasis is placed on studying the classics of the field, but the research has not been limited to them.

Origins of the Test Run Initiative

This project – which I hope will soon spread – began as a reaction to my own text in *Beyond Role and Play*. (Harviainen, 2004) I realized that I had no right to demand results from other larp scholars if I was not myself willing to do testing on the material I criticized. The test runs described below were all conducted by my initiative, some of them in games I produced myself, others in joint works. The tests yielding the findings are briefly described along with the results. There are two reasons for this abbreviated approach: The primary one is that full exposition of any one of these experiments would be an article in itself, and should in the interests of objectivity be written by someone other than myself. The secondary purpose is to show how small-scale some of the experiments can be, and that they do not necessarily have to be essential parts of a game in order to be still integral to the whole, and useful for the information they provide.

About the author

J. Tuomas Harviainen is a 32-year old Finnish librarian-in-chief, with a background in theology and text analysis. He sees role-playing primarily - but not solely - as a new form of media, and is active in seeking new tools and methods to enhance the gaming experience. Harviainen is also running a long-term project that tests the supposed findings presented in role-playing studies and manifestoes.
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Reliability of the Results

From a scientific point of view, all my findings should be considered contaminated data. My own game writing has had a clear impact on the reception of all these studied applications of the theories and methods examined. I am thus not



truly objective in analyzing them. The way my experiments show a strong influence by local gaming paradigms also hints towards the results not being automatically adaptable to other game paradigms.¹

The most obvious problem, however, rises from the fact that compared to other forms of art/media, larps have a unique, fragile structure that makes it practically impossible to use some normal scientific methods in studying them. As an example, comparing two different ways – manifestoes – to make a larp out of a single concept is not truly possible. The first run will always contaminate the second, if the participants are the same. If they are not, it can easily be argued that the difference in players resulted in any observed changes. My research suggests that the problem could be alleviated within a long-term project with full-time playtesters – by removing the "special" status larps have due to their limited availability – but that is not at the moment feasible to organize.

It also bears noting that it has not been possible to conduct these test runs in clinical conditions that would have been completely isolated from outside influence.

The contamination does not, however, render the findings irrelevant. Instead, it directs the studies to more immediate points of research, in forms that can – and should – be re-tested in close enough forms within different larp paradigms until a satisfactory amount of data has been collected to support more advanced experiments. In the mean time, the findings themselves can be seen as having significant ground-level value, as they indicate quite clear tendencies on whether or not certain forms of larp and certain theories and/or methods show a desirable synergetic effect, producing new beneficial results gained from using those things together – benefits that would not otherwise have been possible.

Code of Conduct

I have therefore set out to study elements of larp theory and methodology from a practical point of view. The idea is that every test run is conducted according to the following principles:

1. Whenever a core idea for a larp is invented, a suitable-looking theory, manifesto or (set of) method(s) is chosen. Due to the project being at this point a personal, non-funded operation, the choice is made primarily by personal preference supported by previous design experience and, if



possible, earlier findings of this research project. The game will then be designed in the writer's own style, using the chosen element(s), with the intent of making the game as good as possible. It is permissible to choose which parts of the subject matter are to be tested, but after the element(s) have been selected, they must be treated without prejudice for the duration of the experiment.

2. When the creative process is finished, an appraisal is made on the element(s) used. The primary question is always "did using this new element make creating the game easier or harder, or did it produce a result that was new in such a way that creating it should be considered worthwhile?" (Ease of creation in this case means whether or not a similar result could have been gained with less effort through other means. The purpose is simply to find functional tools and not to comment on any preference in correlation between product quality and "artistic suffering".) If the answer is "yes", the process moves to the playing stage. If not, the negative results are noted, and the product discarded. Either way, notes are made on all parts of the element(s) that contributed to the result or were counter to it, as well as any points of potential interest such as the kinds of obstacles the circumvention of which might prove to be good challenges in themselves. This way also the interests of those desiring the aforementioned artistic suffering are taken into account.

3. After the game has been played, as much feedback as possible – both immediate and long-term – is gathered and recorded. Then a process similar to the previous one is gone through, with emphasis on the question whether or not the element(s) used made the game more effective or enjoyable. The primary method here is the use of qualitative interview techniques during the post-game debriefing. In small-scale games, of which type most experimental larp are, qualitative data both better represents the individual experiences of the participants and, given the size of the test groups, presents a more accurate picture of experiential dispersion among the group than a quantitative analysis would. Should it be possible, I naturally recommend collecting and recording both kinds of data. Key elements in this form of debriefing are that all game participants should be interviewed, by directing the flow of discussion as needed, and that even when using conversation-based interview techniques the sense of dialogical intersubjectivity (objectivity through interactive validation of interpretation) is preserved. Similarly, key questions to ask should concern the sense of general enjoyment, observed results of the tested elements and emotional



states during and after the game, as well as the reasons for all those. Due to the material dealing mostly with personal experiences and perceptions, better results are gained by using the questioning techniques of therapeutic psychology or pastoral counseling than with the interview techniques used in social sciences. This, of course, again favors a qualitative approach to data.

The purpose of this experimentation structure is two-fold: On one hand, the idea is to simply gather good tools for further games, by examining what does or does not work in the given context. On the other hand, all results are gathered in such a manner that should the study of larps at some point become a legitimate science with the funding necessary to conducting valid studies, these preliminary findings can – despite their contamination and limited scale – be used as signposts that will mark up subjects most deserving of such testing.

The plan has from the beginning been to make complete games by using larp manifestoes, and to test methodological elements in conjunction with them when possible. Making a complete game to test just one method is not economically feasible in Finland. The player base willing to participate in experimentation is too small, and outside funding is not available.

During the last one and a half years, the following results have been gained:

Turku School Immersion

The first of the manifesto test-runs was based on the Turku school. (Pohjola, 2000) The game was "Valkoisia Tahroja / White Stains", a dream-state concept larp with character material drawn from the poetry of Aleister Crowley. (Crowley, 1898) Observations and player feedback strongly pointed towards a Turkuan approach being both valid and productive within an artistic-immersive game frame. Using Turku-school design methods made creating the game easier. All negative comments were also related to the Turku parameters, with a clearly detectable correlation between a lack of interest in immersion and the sense of momentary boredom. This relationship was explicitly stated by the participants themselves during the debriefing interview, to the accuracy of "I was bored because character immersion was not enough to keep up my interest for the game's duration"², and should thus be considered a very accurate result as far as their personal sense of mental state is concerned. It covers their own limitations and expectations, such as



”optimal form of character” only to some extent, and thus should be considered only indicative of possible problems that may occur with the Turku parameters, not as proof of flaws.

Westlundian Narrativism

The second manifesto targeted was Aksel Westlund’s Storyteller Manifesto. (Westlund, 2004) The murder mystery game ”Mehiläiset Saapuvat” was entirely created using the design principles Westlund lists.³ However, previous experience and research – in the form of discussions about the value differences of roles and characters, and quantitative analysis of questions such as ”would you like to participate in a game where major character choices would be pre-scripted – has shown that the dominant Finnish larp paradigm has a high level of resistance towards any sense of a lack of free will, and thus the actual production of the game was made using Deceptive Design instead of Westlund’s ”Pledge of Allegiance”.⁴ To have done otherwise would have meant a serious risk of either lack of participants, hostile treatment of the game material by the players, or both, none of which would have been conducive to the experiment.

Clear findings through both the design process and post-game analysis made it very obvious that using the Storyteller’s Manifesto’s design principles enables the creation of far stronger plots and narration than a normal free innovation probably would. I highly recommend using that segment of the manifesto – with adaptations for mechanics, if necessary – when designing such games. Especially useful were Westlund’s suggestions about mirroring plots and ascertaining that material meant by the game’s designers to become public during the game really does that.

It Might Be Possible That You Could Perhaps Be Able to Do That

There is a third larger test-run was actually conducted in 2003, before the project ”officially” began. It was a game called ”Valon Yö”, but has been more often referred to as ”Waiting for Lucifer”. The story was about a group of occultists spending 24 hours in a country house waiting for a summoning spell to take effect. Being a low-key immersion game without any larger diegetic narration, it was a suitable place to try out the KMSKM method, a system where a character’s skills and limitations are equal to those of its player.⁵

As a method experiment, the game produced a definite result. KMSKM



proved far too limited in form to fully cover interaction whenever characters went into specifics. As a post-game resolution, many players stated a feeling that the method would only function in games designed with the sole purpose of supporting the method, not the other way around.⁶ Examples of such games would be realistic low-key larps about social interaction, in general anything rooted to non-violent realism by advance restrictions of all kinds of behavior and activity that can not be covered by the KMSKM method. In a broader sense, it always requires having a game design system created or converted to support the method, with the method's use being one of the starting points of the game-creative process.

Hands-on Methodology

Probably the most important piece of game methodology invented during the last few years has been the *Ars Amandi* method.⁷ Both of my manifesto-testing games used derivative versions of it, and *Mehiläiset Saapuvat* also the original technique.⁸ Every test run I have conducted with it points to the *Ars Amandi* method being an invaluable contribution to larp tools, both by removing unnecessary game tension and allowing the creation of more intense emotional and erotic content – necessary tension – without risking player safety or reputation. The use of other altered diegetic meanings in touching – designated changes in the significance and meaning of certain forms of touching, the replacement of forms of verbal communication with forms of touching, or vice versa – is also worth investigating further.

Smaller Tests and Projections

I have been using for several years the basic design methods Christian Badse lists in "The Development of Ideas". (Badse, 2003) While they are not especially new or radical, nor specifically larp-related in any way, it bears noting that the techniques he recommends are indeed worth utilization.

In contrast, despite several serious attempts I have been utterly unable to reconcile Martin Enghoff's character design guidelines with my game creation style. (Enghoff, 2003) This does not mean that they are not fundamentally useful, but it does however point towards definite incompatibility with some forms of larp design, something that Enghoff himself also notes in the beginning of his text. While essentially suitable for most typical large-scale games, his rules are too rigid and too prejudiced (by value of certain forms of information, as well as optimum styles and segment sizes) to be of direct use in anything outside the style of games for which it was developed.



Both runs of "Valkoisia Tahroja" had a pre-planned soundtrack of music that was heard by the characters within the diegesis, but they were unable to affect the music or even comment on it. The sound design was directly based on Henrik Summanen's principles, and according to post-game feedback – gathered, again, through direct interview questions – succeeded very well in influencing altered mood states.⁹

Future Projects

I have intentionally been avoiding a test of Dogma 99 manifesto and the character-role-player theories of Morten Gade. (Faitland & Wingård, 1999; Gade, 2003) The former is antithetic to everything I have so far recorded as producing more effective and innovative games.¹⁰ It, like Westlund's Pledge of Allegiance, also requires a heavy reduction in diegetic options of the characters, and is thus extremely hard to experiment with in Finland. Gade's theory includes a template of the character-player relationship that is completely incompatible with my own views and design style. Gade uses a divisive model, strongly separating player, role and character, whereas I hold tight to a view about information and experiences flowing between player and character in such a manner that neither is purely within or outside the diegesis. (Harviainen, 2005) In the interest of the project, however, both of the aforementioned "problem" texts will be used in test run projects during this year.

As a side product, player feedback about the aforementioned games, in both debriefing and elsewhere – intentional interviews included – has brought up two questions worth further examination.¹¹ The first one is that player descriptions of the diegetic reality of games is seemingly identical to Winnicott's description of the space where child's play happens.¹² Likewise, comments on behavioral and motivational changes in long-term game diegesis presence suggest that studying whether a correlation between what Martin Ericsson describes as the liminal states in gaming and real-world liminal phenomena exists.¹³ Both questions need to be answered – at least to some extent – before any truly scientific research into not only the experience of larp participation, but also larp theories' and manifests' effects, can be analyzed.

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A final "thank you" will be extended to all those who dare pick up the banner and join us in actually testing larp theories and methods instead of just speculating. More than one testing team is needed to get results that are even close to being acceptable as "reliable".

Notes

¹ This of course does not automatically make them invalid in the given context. It only means that they should not be treated as universally reliable until cross-paradigm testing has been made.

² Crowley, 1898. A second run of the same game was later made, but it included an added character-change experiment and thus did not qualify as fully Turkuuan.

³ The game deviated slightly by permitting a few minimal specific safety rules concerning sex and violence, but not so much as to affect the reliability of the test.

⁴ For Deceptive Design, see Jenti 2005. Extrapolations on the pre-game analysis of questions related to Westlund's Pledge requirements form a hypothesis that it might be fully functional within larp paradigms that consider fate elements and visibly pre-scripted plots valid parts of larping, and not a completely different (if related) form of play like people do within the Finnish paradigm. All pre-game analysis showed that to have produced the game using all of Westlund's requirements would have resulted in a definite lack of interest in participation, to the point where the experiment would likely not have been at all possible to perform. Note that this situation is an exception to the norm of being open to experimentation. The main causes are a tradition of different value given to roles (theatrical, with pre-scripted major actions) and characters (semi- to complete freedom of action), and the way any game with a rigid, inflexible plot is seen as a boring waste of time and money. The latter reason was mentioned in precisely this form (with some additional expletives that I have removed) by several interview subjects as an answer to why they'd not like to participate in games requiring the kind of lack of diegetic free will that Westlund's Pledge requires.

⁵ Lippert 2003. The abbreviation means "If you can, you can", denoting a simple, direct equality of player and character abilities, as well as a strict adherence to realism. Note that despite there being magic in the diegesis of the test larp, the possibility to create magical effects during the game did not exist.



⁶ The experiment was exceptional in that almost none of the players had any larp experience, and thus should by pre-evaluation have been more likely to accept the method than systems-oriented gamers. Nevertheless the negative reaction was very strong and directly led to the creation of the FreeComm method, a combination of KMSKM and keywords allowing the use of extradiegetic commands. The idea in it is that most actions are covered by the "if you can, your character can" principle, but when that is not sufficient the players are allowed the use of certain code words within in-game speech. Those words mean the statements convey extradiegetic information which the listeners must react to accordingly. As the "systems information" is swiftly conveyed in conversation and handled through play-acting immediately afterwards, but is at the same time clearly at once different from all diegetic speech, the general illusion of continuity and realism is preserved.

⁶ Described fully in Wieslander 2004.

⁷ Valkoisia Tahroja had a system where skin contact with symbolic forms of touching was required for interpersonal communication. Mehiläiset Saapuvat, set within an orgy, permitted a free choice of sexual simulation for the players, but all nevertheless chose a version of the Ars Amandi method where they added some noise and rhythmic movement. The game also had additional rules within the method to cover masturbation.

⁸ Summanen 2004, 225-226. By using a sequence of rhythmic, dreamy melodies and annoying noise, neither of which could be avoided nor commented on, the effects of the player/character vs. music relationship were carried over to the emotions of the characters. Most prominent of these was the way in which frustration caused to some players by the noise resulted in an increase of coping with it through character aggression. This was both observable during the game and reported in the interviews.

⁹ The original outline of the Deceptive Design technique was largely created by reversing the rules of Dogma 99 and then combining them with past uses of planning-stage deception methods.

¹⁰ A more complete description of this theory, called „perikhoretic character relationship“, is included in my article „Corresponding Expectations“, also presented in this book.

¹¹ The interviews were conducted within free discourse, but followed scientific criteria for valid interviewing practice. The only reason I do not consider the found details truly reliable is the limited number of test subjects that was available.

¹² Summarized as „This area of playing is not inner psychic reality. It is outside the individual, but it is not the external world.“ Winnicott 1971/1980, 51.



¹³ Ericsson 2004. For a thorough ethnographic look at a modern-day, European liminal phenomenon see Young, 2000.

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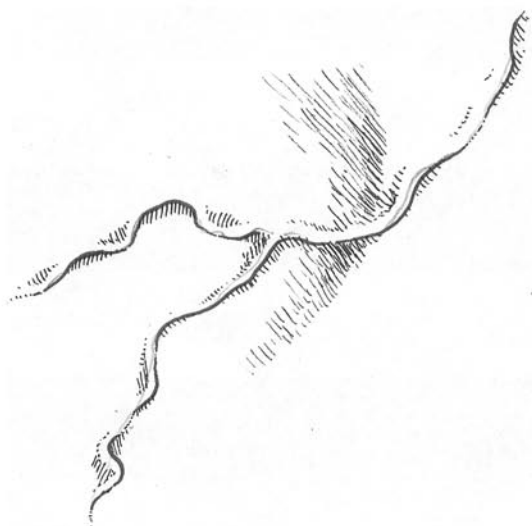
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Incentives as tools of larp dramaturgy

Abstract

This article concerns itself with dramaturgy, the authoring and structuring of live role-playing works. It provides an overview and analysis of “incentives”, methods employed by larpwrights to encourage specific player interactions during the larp – conflict, puzzles, fates, etc. and how they can be structured into connected “webs”.

Introduction

Dramaturgy is in the strange situation of being the aspect of larp theory that is the most popular (“how do I write larps?”) , but also the least covered. This article is an attempt to remedy some of that imbalance by presenting an overview and analysis of What We Already Know. As such, it may serve as a “crash course” for the beginning larpwright, giving her an introduction to some of the methods available.

Though not, it should be noted, much advice for how to use them properly. I should also hope there is something in here for theorists and even the most experienced of larpwrights, since the methods common in one tradition of live role-playing may be entirely unknown to another and vice-versa.

These methods are for the most part time-honored and tested, used by larpwrights on all five continents for several years. Still, they have rarely been described in much detail. A

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number of “how-to” articles and columns in larp-related magazines offer the best documentation available, but unfortunately these are often brief, written in a local larp jargon, and take much for granted on the part of the readers familiarity with the tradition wherein the author is writing. This very local style makes international discussion of dramaturgy rather difficult. My goal in this article is to describe, analyze and organize these dramaturgical methods into a coherent system that enables further discussion.

I have relied on several sources in writing this article – personal larp experience, discussions in person or on the Internet, previous articles on websites and in fanzines - most of which are not easy to reference. Erlend Eidsem’s classical article “Plotteori”, published in *Guru* in 1994, was the starting point of the discussions that have led to this article, but since then precious little has been put into writing. The first section of this article provides an overview of larp dramaturgy and its problems, explaining dramaturgy through concepts from recent Nordic larp theory. The second, and largest, section deals with one group of dramaturgical methods: incentives.

Notes on live role-playing dramaturgy

A larpwright friend of mine described her recurring nightmare before a major larp: “the players are all there, all enthusiastic, having made wonderful costumes and prepared for months. But they have no idea how to interact, they try gesturing and smiling and connecting to each other but cannot find any words to speak, any meaningful opening to a conversation. They don’t blame us, but it is our fault, they don’t have characters, they don’t have plots, they can’t interact”.

This dream illustrates a dogma of Nordic live role-playing: it is the larpwright’s responsibility to give the players “something to do” during the larp, and without the larpwright’s input a larp risks becoming unplayable, overly predictable and/or dull. We can imagine a larp where the larpwright has not done this task: the characters are interesting, but have no established relations between each other, no reason to stay put at the given place, and no reasons to contact each other. The larp begins with all the players in the same room, but players immediately confront the question: “Why do I stay here, with these strangers? Doesn’t my character have anywhere else she wants or needs to be?” If characters leave, the larp disintegrates, and if they stay, the interaction feels forced, artificial, unnatural. No-one has, to the best of my knowledge, authored such a larp.¹



At the bare minimum, live role-playing scripts establish relationships and an initial situation that brings characters together. So a purpose of the larpwright is to provide characters with reasons to interact, and reasons to continue interacting. Once the larpwright fulfills this purpose, the larpwright will do so in accordance with her own creative vision. Simply providing excuses to interact are usually not enough, the reasons to interact will form a whole, a creative work, a foundation not just for improvisation but also for artistic meaning.

I use the term “dramaturgy”², defined as “the inner and outer structure of a larp as it is authored by a larpwright”³, to describe this aspect of larp authoring. Dramaturgy has several aspects:

- Establishing an Initial situation, the starting point of the larp and what came before it, bringing or binding characters together – such as a society, a past common history, a set of social rituals. (more on this in Wingård 2001, Fatland 2005, Hansen 2003)
- Establishing Relationships between characters – by organizing them into families, factions, friends, hierarchies, networks, by defining relationships between individual characters and by suggesting how characters are to relate to other characters they meet. (see Gade 2003, Gräslund 2001)
- Real-time directing the progress of role-playing, for example by using “contact points” and “control knobs”, adopting ad-hoc characters, staging theatrical segments, and controlling the flow of information. (see Freitag, 2002, Young 2004)

And finally, the focus of this article:

- Providing Incentives that encourage players to follow specific paths in their improvisation, to play specific scenes, to confront specific questions, etc.

A “textbase” is the larp equivalent of a theatrical “script”: the sum of all information provided to players before the larp, including character descriptions, group descriptions, world descriptions, etc. (Fatland, 2000) Even verbal briefings and drama exercises form part of the “textbase”. With the exception of real-time directing, the dramaturgical tools mentioned above are normally authored in the textbase.



The Fog of Larp

Unlike texts in linear media (the theater, the novel, the film) a larp is typically unpredictable. Some larps are planned “open-ended” or “player-driven”, purposefully unpredictable, others risk seeing the carefully crafted plans of the larpwright failing utterly when played. Bøckman’s maxim states that

“is impossible to control the direction of a game as long as the plot-structure is hidden from the players, and that an action appearing the only logical step to an organizer don’t necessarily do so for the players. (...) For any given problem, there are an infinite number of solutions, and as an organizer, you may take for granted that the players will think of those you did not.”

(Bøckman, 2003) .

I call the unpredictability implied by this maxim for “the fog of larp”, and the fact of it’s existence can be attested to by any number of larpwrights and players.

Markus Montola’s application of a chaotic behavior metaphor to larp (see Montola, 2004) sheds further light on the fog-of-larp. Chaotic systems are not random, i.e. not “pure chaos”, but become unpredictable due to their qualities of non-linearity, recursivity and dynamism. Montola makes the convincing case that role-playing can be described as a chaotic system, and recommends that larpwrights view their activity not as authoring scripts but as establishing attractors. An attractor is “a dynamic pattern of behavior the chaotic system tries to follow”. We can think of attractors as paths or roads leading through the fog of larp, which players may try to follow but from which they may also deviate or be forced to deviate. Montola’s example is that of the race-car which attempts to stay on the racing track until it strays too far off-course and picks a new track leading into the forest. A web of incentives involving the election of the next Pope may be the focus – the attractor being followed - for the Cardinal characters of a larp, until suddenly the Visigoth characters decide to attack Rome and the cardinals jump onto the attractor called “defend the Vatican”.⁴

Integrative techniques make attractors stronger, bringing the larp closer to order and hence predictability, while dissipative techniques nudge the larp towards chaos and unpredictability. Integrative and dissipative techniques can be used by larpwrights and players both. For the larpwright to issue



clear instructions as to the purpose of the role-playing (“Elect a new pope!”) is an integrative technique, for the player to ignore them (“fellow cardinals, enough in-fighting – let’s get drunk instead!”) is a dissipative one. The fog of larp gets thinner when integrative techniques are used, thicker with dissipative ones.

The chaos model is a useful tool for analysing larp dramaturgy, not just on a theoretical level but also in the practice of authoring larp. It forces us to think about which parts of the larp we can predict and which we can’t, and on how the dramaturgy will actually affect the larp - as opposed to how good it looks on paper. Comparing the concept of “attractor” to the concept of a “plot” or “incentive web” helps us to see the difference between the structures visible to the larpwright and the structures that are followed by players.

While Bøckman, Montola and other authors (including Hansen, 2003 and Henriksen 2004) argue that live role-playing is for the most part unpredictable, I do not believe this to be absolutely and universally the case. Bøckman’s maxim applies only to larps where the “plot-structure is hidden from the players” which is not usually the case with Dogma larps, fate-plays or suggestion-plays. Implicit in the chaos model is that if attractors are made strong enough, the larp becomes predictable. Montola also mentions “over-integrative” techniques, such as fate-play, which remove some of the characteristics of chaotic systems from a larp, leading to the question of whether they are role-playing at all.⁵ Whether that is a good or a bad thing and whether the boundaries can be pushed to include them remains to be discussed.

Predictions, Intentional Possibilities and Fabula

Apart from the use of strongly integrative techniques, a second factor is the ability of experienced larpwrights to predict player behaviour at otherwise chaotic larps. It is easy to offer anecdotal evidence for this statement, hard to offer empirical evidence. But consider, in general, all the predictions made that do not go wrong: if a murder occurs and a detective character is present, that character can be relied on to investigate the murder.

At the beginning of a larp, anything may seem possible - the characters may elevate themselves to godhood, or commit mass suicide, or sit meditating for the entire duration of the larp. Some things are however more likely to occur than others since the players improvise according to their characters, based on their understanding of the world in which these characters exist,



and according to the rules and conventions of the larp. A normal family at a social realist larp are pretty unlikely to elevate themselves to godhood, a group of businessmen are probably not about to sit meditating for hours during an important trade meeting.

Specific predictions, such as “Mr. Moo will go to the toilet at 14:00” usually fail, but general predictions, such as “Mr. Moo will visit the toilet at some point during the larp, and will see the painting on the wall of the toilet” are usually accurate. Making precise predictions about the development of the larp is probably a matter of experience in larps and in understanding which developments are safe to predict and which are not. An experienced larpwright may easily foresee that allowing 40% of the players to play Visigoths hungry for plunder is bound to interfere with the activities of the 60% who play cardinals meeting in the Vatican.

Different players will usually interpret and play the same character in entirely different ways, but the character’s social role tends to stay the same with different players – the character of a judge can be relied on to give judgment, but may do so in many different ways. For the larpwright it is a fairly safe prediction that the combination of discovered crimes and the characters of a judge, a prosecutor and a defense lawyer will lead to a trial, but a shaky prediction how the trial will conclude. The experienced larpwright will avoid predicting the outcome of the trial, and in stead focus on the possibilities it opens – by planning an in-game prison, and by contemplating how an “innocent” verdict will affect the larp.

In other words, a central part of the larpwright’s craft is predicting the outcome of the larpwright’s decisions. This leads to “intentional possibilities”, possibilities and probabilities planned by the larpwright in order to establish specific attractors and events during the larp. Since they are planned and intended, these intentional possibilities exist prior to the larp being played. Unforeseen events may be improvised by the players, some intentional possibilities may be realized, others not. The intentional possibilities may include choices to be made by characters, conflicts with no clear outcomes, puzzles that may or may not be solved, courses of action that may seem obvious to the larpwright but not to the player. It is the summary of larpwright-held intentional possibilities I call “the fabula”.

The term “fabula” helps clarify what exactly it is that larpwrights do. They certainly do not author the thoughts or actions of characters, the way a



movie director or writer would – while the larp is played, the characters are the domain of the player. What larprawrights author is not the actual larp, but the fabula. The dramatics of the larp situation are partly the result of players' improvisations and interactions with this fabula.

The term “fabula” is derived from theater theory, where it describes the underlying story of a play - the actual acting is called the “suzjett”. It is a concept pair similar to that of “story” and “discourse” in narratology. “Fabula” changes meaning when applied to larp because, as discussed in the next section, a larp cannot be said to have a single “underlying story”.⁶

The lack of an objective perspective

A larp cannot be observed, it can only be played. Passive observation is non-participation, and non-participation is not role-playing. Anyone who merely watches a larp, will see amateur ham actors engaged (for most of the time) in boring, humdrum activities. In an age saturated with media, where films with production values above the GNP of an average third-world country are instantly available in your living room, it is obvious that people do not larp to watch amateur actors perform humdrum activities. The experience of live role-playing lays only in the act of participation.

Analysing a larp as the summary of events externally observable thus makes little sense. A larp is experienced from the perspective of the single player, not even of “the players” (plural) but of a mass of single players, each with a set of unique experiences derived from the same larp. Markus Montola argues, and I agree, that even the “diegesis” - the world which is true to the characters of a larp – does not exist in an objective sense but that each player interprets the events of the larp as a subjective diegesis. (Montola, 2003) Subjective diegeses differ from each other, but players strive to maintain the illusion that their characters are interacting in the same world. I use the term “pre-diegesis” for that single consistent diegesis that larprawrights author before a larp begins (typically evident in the textbase), and the term diegetic situation for the diegetic truths that players believe their role-playing signifies to each other during the role-playing of a larp. In the larp situation (the real world “visible interaction or non-interaction of players”, Jonsson, 2001), one player touches another with a grey rubber stick, while in the diegetic situation one character kills another with a sword. Being entirely the subject of individual interpretation, the diegetic situation is a convenient illusion, not an “objective” truth.



What all of this means is that the theories of narratology, of dramatology, of cinema studies are hard to apply to the study of the dramaturgy of live role-playing. Even basic terminology, like “story” and “discourse” change meaning when the “story” could not exist before the discourse, and the discourse is only observable to those who take part in it, while they take part in it.

“Story” remains a problematic term in discussions of live role-playing theory. There are both fierce critics (see Pohjola, 2000 and Pettersson, 2004) and fierce proponents (See Westlund, 2004 and Rognli, 2004) of the idea that larps can and should “tell stories”. Part of this disagreement stems from what, for the proponents and opponents, a “story” is and how, exactly, they can be told through live role-playing.

I use the word here in the meaning of “a chain of events where the whole chain in sequence yields a greater meaning than it’s individual components”. Murder, discovery and punishment yield a greater meaning if all three occur, and occur in that sequence. Under this definition, stories can be “told” through larps by larpwrights authoring the events and their sequence using incentives such as fates, suggestions or simple linear puzzle webs. They can be “told” through larps by players desiring to follow a path of improvisation that is story-like. They are always told after the larp, as the narrative created by the player to interpret the role-playing (Stenros & Hakkarainen, 2003, mention the “narrative of self” in relation to role-playing roles). This is a broader definition of “story” than the one used by Edwards, 2003, and role-playing stories in my sense does not by definition imply narrativism or even dramatism.

Since talking about a played larp as an objective set of events makes little sense, it is equally nonsensical to talk of “the story of a larp”, singular. What we have is a number of players, who improvise according to their understanding of the textbase, who interact with each other and the diegesis following attractors – some established by the fabula, others improvised on the spot – and who ultimately interpret and narrate what happened as a story of what their character saw, felt and did. It is against this background that we need to see the use of incentives and other dramaturgical tools in larp – not as tools turning the role-playing into a grand story, but as tools providing reasons and methods to interact, an interaction which may or may not form stories.



Types of Incentives

Now, the beef.

An incentive is any method used by the larpwright before the larp has begun, in order to encourage specific events to occur during the larp. We can identify a number of different types of incentives: Writing two groups of characters that are at war with each other is an incentive (conflict), encouraging battles between these during the larp. Writing a time-table of daily tasks during the larp is an incentive (scheduling), encouraging these tasks to occur and to occur with a specific rhythm. Burying the five fragments of the One True Ring needed to save the world at different locations is an incentive (puzzle), encouraging a complicated treasure hunt under threat of oblivion. Ordering a character to fall in love with the woman who calls him “little man”, is another incentive (fate), initiating a story over which the character has no control. Incentives are usually combined into inter-dependent structures, what I call incentive “webs”, but previously called “plots”, “plot-lines”, “story-lines”, “fate-webs”, “intrigues” etc. depending on jargon and context. Combining incentives into webs is sometimes done by design, but may also be a necessity as far from all incentives are self-contained.

One of the most easily misunderstandable words in discussions of larp is the term “plot”. “Plot” means different things in different larp jargons, and something else entirely in common English and in narratology.⁷ Whether “incentive” means the same as “plot” depends on which definition of “plot” you are talking about.

In terms of the threefold models (Kim, 1998 and Edwards, 2001), all incentives are neutral. They can be used to facilitate any creative agenda, although some incentives are biased in that they more easily facilitate a specific agenda. Fates were invented to facilitate dramatism, (Fatland, 1998), while puzzles and conflict may nudge players towards gamism. But one can easily imagine a game-oriented larp where fates are used to initiate challenge, or a simulation-oriented larp where competition in solving the existing puzzles is important only to the characters, not the players.

Conflict

Nearly all larp dramaturgies establish some form of conflict between characters in order to encourage specific attractors in the diegetic situation. One of the simplest larp dramaturgies available is to divide the characters into two mutually hostile factions, and let the larp be about them fighting it



out: Orcs hate humans, and humans hate orcs. Or Iran hates America and America hates Iran, and the larp is set in the UN security council.

An axiom of theater theory is that every play has one or more conflicts at its core, which is resolved during the progress of the play; an axiom unchallenged even in the face of “absurd theater” where a conflict is found between the actors and the audience. In this fairly abstract sense, we can identify conflicts on many different levels of a larp, but when talking of the use of conflicts as an incentive, I will use the word to refer to any obvious conflict of interest or intent placed in the textbase by the larpwright.

While live role-playing traditionally, especially in the Anglo-American world, has focused on violent conflict, occasionally to the point where “LARP” has become a martial art in fantasy costume, a conflict incentive is more often resolved in non-violent ways, adding to the depth and complexity of the larp. Diplomatic conflicts may be resolved through negotiations, both in public and in the back room, unless “extending policy by other means” becomes necessary. Internal conflicts, inside a group such as a family or a political faction, can be resolved through emotional appeals, ideological discussion, and arbitration. Characters can be written with inner conflicts in mind, tearing the character between different courses of actions – enhancing the character interpretation, and perhaps involving other characters in what was initially a personal dilemma.

Likewise, conflicts need not be large battles between hostile factions – they can also be applied on a small scale. A violent conflict may be a war of civilizations, or a wife beating her husband. A diplomatic conflict may be about succession to the throne, or about what to eat for dinner. An inner conflict may be about murdering the heir to the throne or accepting defeat, about whether to speak out ones love for a particular person, or whether to wear the brown or the red coat. Conflicts may invoke huge, complex questions of morality, philosophy and human nature or be fairly straight-forward.

While some form of conflict incentive seems almost indispensable to larp dramaturgy, American author Ursula LeGuin has a different take on the issue:

“Modernist manuals of writing often conflate story with conflict. This reductionism reflects a culture that inflates aggression and competition while cultivating



ignorance of other behavioral options. No narrative of any complexity can be built on or reduced to a single element. Conflict is one kind of behavior. There are others, equally important in any human life, such as relating, finding, losing, bearing, discovering, parting, changing.” (LeGuin, 1998)

In my experience, which can be corroborated by taking a glance at web fora where players describe and discuss the larps they have been playing<8>, non-competitive behavior often forms key elements of players experience: the death and mourning of an old friend, the birth of a child, the sharing of stories, falling in love, the sight of forest spirits dancing in the morning mist.

I can think of no examples of larps that have been authored and played entirely in this way, though “Mellan Himmel och Hav” (Wieslander et al, 2003) allegedly came close, but it is not hard to imagine a larp where characters are involved not in conflict but in relating, finding, losing, bearing, discovering, parting, changing.

A common dramaturgical tool is for larpwrights to instruct players on the relationships between their characters, both according to affiliation (membership in groups, families etc.) and to emotional bonds or antipathies – the sum of these forming the “relationship map”. (Freitag, 2002). On the surface, this method could be seen as supporting a “LeGuinian” dramaturgy. However, relationships, when used to encourage events, often imply conflict. A relationship of mutual love is not always an incentive, it may encourage some role-playing between the two lovers but no specific courses of action. Love becomes an incentive when the parents of the young lovers refuse to acknowledge their relationship, and we once again speak of conflict.

Establishing conflict

Since incentives by definition are established in the textbase, it follows that conflicts are created by authoring the larp’s characters, published materials, and other information given to the players before the larp begins. Aside from the obvious “You don’t like Jim”, the textbase can be manipulated in many different ways to encourage conflict. A common and clear-cut method, objectives, give players clear goals in their character descriptions, as in: “your over-riding goal is to kill the king” or “your goal is to gain the acceptance of Maria’s parents to marry her”.



A danger of objectives is that they usually are fairly integrative, leaving the players in an either/or situation when the attractor established by the objective fails to seem plausible, achievable or desirable. If the king turns out to be a good and capable ruler, the player may question why her character would wish to kill him, what the purpose of the objective was and whether regicide will contribute to her desired larp experience. Motivations, on the other hand, give players more depth and more alternatives than objectives, as they state the reasons a character might have to achieve any specific objective, for example “you are deeply unhappy with having others in control of your destiny. If you could somehow take the place of your despotic older brother, the King, you believe that happiness would be within reach.”

One of the more subtle methods of authoring conflict is the creation of natural conflict by introducing two entities (characters or groups of characters) who are bound to come at odds with each other even though there is no explicit statement that they shall. The natural conflict may simply be an issue of setting up mutually exclusive objectives, such as with a larp where the pioneers who are out to settle new land meet the American Indians who already live there. Or it may be constructed by supplying factions with different world-views and ideologies, as with a larp featuring missionaries from two different imaginary religions: one seeking salvation in the afterlife and rejecting all worldly concerns, and the other teaching that the afterlife is of no concern and the gods are here to help us while we live.

In larps where characters are written as narratives of their past life (back story), conflicts may be initiated by authoring events in that story which are left unresolved at the beginning of the larp, as in the following cliché: “The Abasians murdered your entire village and you fled, but you remember the face of their leader, you know he will be at the market, and you’re hungry for revenge.” Alternately, conflicts may be established in the back stories of groups (“Your pal Frodo has this magic ring, but there are some nasty folks who want to take it”) or the entire larp; “Three thousand years ago, Sauron was defeated, but unfortunately his defeat was not final and these days he is again gathering vile creatures to his fortress”.

By using other incentives, a conflict may be concealed in the textbase only to appear during actual play. Triggered conflicts do not provide initial reason for the hostility, but enter play when a trigger occurs. Triggering can for example be done through a fate - “on the second day, you shall declare war against the Abasians” - or a puzzle: “if Bob manages to combine the clues leading



to his fathers Last Will, it will be clear that his fathers murderer was in fact his loving mother”.

inner, internal and external conflicts

Conflicts need not be between different characters or factions, but may as well be inside these or against foes that are not present in the larp situation. The inner conflict, a common device of storytelling, is one where a character faces a choice but does not know how to resolve this choice. Asking advice, thinking it through and rethinking it as events unfold will be a way to resolve the question.

Inner conflicts may be fairly straightforward, pitting two options against each other, as with “Your parents want you to marry Peter, a decent chap, but you love Andrew. You can’t make up your mind on whether to follow your parents or your heart.” Or they may also involve larger questions of morality and ethics : “You believe in doing what is necessary and good. But on the other hand, you hope most problems can be solved with diplomacy and understood over time. You don’t want to be a hero, but face a moral obligation to act as one.”

Internal conflicts can be seen as inner conflicts on a group level, where various factions of a group will disagree, and there will be no obvious way to resolve that disagreement. A larp where the characters are divided into conflicting factions can become even more complex when members of these factions disagree on how to confront the other factions. For example: “The Knights have begun persecuting the witches, but the witches’ council is divided. Of nine members, four say we should flee, four say we should abandon our pacifism and fight and one says we should do neither but stand our ground and be martyred.”

Conflicts may also be set against a foe that is not present at the larp – as in a larp set amongst European diplomats discussing how to confront the American drive towards war in Iraq. Even though the foe is not present, the pressure of preparing for confrontation may lead to role-playing as if it was.

“Lids” - prolonging conflict

The usefulness of conflicts as incentives is tied to how much actual role-playing they generate. A conflict involving two dueling cowboys is not particularly interesting if they kill each other off at the beginning of the



larp. Especially if a narrativist creative agenda is pursued, where it may be desirable to gradually build tension and provide an illusion of a “story arc”, conflicts work the best if they can be made to last for a while. Similarly, diplomatic conflicts usually require a reason to remain diplomatic and for the tension of unresolved differences to be preserved.

“Lids” are methods used to prevent premature resolutions of conflicts, or to prevent unsatisfactory resolutions. A number of different methods may be used to put lids on conflict, including:

- Ruling out some possible resolutions: if a member of Council kills another member, the murderer will be executed by the magistrates guard.
- Direct instructions: “In no circumstance will any of the characters consider going for a peaceful solution”
- Scheduling: The negotiations are set to last for four days. On the last day, not before, will be discussed the one topic the factions cannot possibly agree upon.
- Setting a deadline: The wedding will be held on Saturday, the decision must be reached by then and can be changed at any time before the wedding.
- Limiting the area: As magic is forbidden, and the Magistrates spies are everywhere, the ritual to silence the magistrate can only be held somewhere it is neither seen, nor heard and therefore can’t be interrupted.

Several of these examples rely on the use of other incentives to construct the lid, forming webs of incentives. More on those later.

Triggers

Conflicts are often fairly simple incentives to deal with – they establish an interesting situation, usually with the onset of the larp, and occasionally put a lid on it to keep it interesting. Players are left with a large degree of freedom to follow and switch between the attractors established by conflicts – the fog of larp is thick, but unproblematic. The fabula becomes more complex if the larpwright intends to reveal new attractors at later points of the larp, as is the case with most of the incentives discussed below.

When dealing with predictions and developments over time, the question of causality becomes an important one: which effects will be caused by the events established in the fabula? How can it be ensured that a certain



event will produce the desired effect? One way to control causality is by using triggers, “if-then” situations embedded in the fabula: if a certain thing happens, then another thing will also happen. The concept of “triggers” may seem both a bit abstract and painfully obvious, but since they are integral to several other incentives (puzzles, fates and suggestions especially) , they are worth a closer scrutiny.

Triggers can be discerned and established in many different ways. One is by direct instruction: If Event X occurs, then character Y must do Z. (“If your wife divorces you, you will kidnap the children.”) Another is by planning outside intervention in the event of a condition being fulfilled: If character X achieves objective Y, then the organisers will stage event Z. (If Arthur pulls the sword out of the stone, Merlin will appear to proclaim him King). Triggers may be features of the underlying logic of a fabula : if the King dies, the struggle of succession will naturally begin, and so we may view the event of the King’s death as a trigger for the struggle of succession.

All triggers can be broken down into conditions, effectors and connectors. The event that sets the trigger in motion is the “condition”, the outcome is called an “effector” and the way the trigger activates the effector is called a “connector”.⁹

To illustrate, we’ll break down the previous example:

Condition: Character X achieves objective Y

Connector: The larpwright reacts

Effector: Event Z occurs

Condition: Arthur pulls the sword out of the stone.

Connector: An organiser observes the sword-pulling feat and orders Merlin to enter the game.

Effector: Merlin proclaims Arthur to be king.

Studying triggers in terms of their conditions, connectors and effectors are a useful way to “debug” an incentive web. Triggers can be analysed by looking at how likely their conditions are to be reached, which demands



the connectors put on organisers, the likelihood of a connector actually producing the desired effector, and how an effector will further influence the larp.

Connectors can be “direct”, i.e. they require no outside intervention to work, or “invoking”, calling the attention to an outside influence (typically an organiser) to cause the effector.

A direct connector: “If Agrod has the three keys, he may enter the treasure chamber” - Three keys are needed to open the door to the treasure chamber. The chamber has actual locks, and the keys actually fit in these.

An invoking connector: “If the five elfstones are gathered at the holy place, the Green God will appear”. The organisers need to know this is being done, and send in the green god NPC.

Especially connectors can be the troublesome links in an incentive web. In the case of direct connectors, the larpwright will need to examine whether they actually will causally produce the desired effector or not. In the case of invoking connectors, it is necessary to examine which organizational burdens they imply: having lots of invoking connectors at a larger larp is usually an excellent way to produce overworked organizers and a dysfunctional dramaturgy.

Dramatic, temporal and spatial triggers

Triggers may be broadly divided into categories according to the nature of their condition; “dramatic triggers”, “temporal triggers” and “spatial triggers”. These terms were originally invented as part of the terminology of fate-play (Wingård, 1998), but are easily applicable to other incentives as well.

“Dramatic triggers” have conditions that are events played out. Dramatic triggers are by far the most common form of triggers.

Examples: If the pope dies, the cardinals must convene to elect a new pope.

If the five elf-stones are gathered on the sacred hill, the Dark One will be defeated.



Temporal triggers have a specific time as their condition.

At 11 PM John will turn into a werewolf. At 6 AM he will resume his human form.

On the morning of the third day, the Shiites will rebel against the Sunnis.

Spatial triggers have some event occurring at a specific location as their condition.

If someone enters the graveyard, the ghosts will appear.

If someone enters the underworld, they cannot return to the world of the living.

These different types of triggers affect role-playing in different ways. Temporal triggers may act integrative, perhaps even over-integrative, by establishing new situations no matter which situation preceded it. Spatial triggers may add an element of discovery to the larp experience. Dramatic triggers can be used to establish story, by ensuring that events occur in the desired sequence.

Puzzles

When the conditions of triggers become sufficiently complex, they represent a distinct source of challenge to the players/characters, and it makes sense to talk of them as “puzzles”, a separate type of incentive. In addition to having complex conditions, puzzles differ from fates and suggestions in that puzzles require investigative effort on the part of the characters to solve, and in that they may be left unsolved.

Examples: If all the clues surrounding the death of Sir Edward are put together, it will be apparent that the Butler was the murderer.

If the three fragments of the Necronomicon are assembled, the spell for dispelling Cthulhu may be read.

Larp puzzles are similar to the puzzles of adventure computer games: they both require investigative effort, problem-solving, and the gathering of objects (items or clues) for resolution. Where this similarity comes from is a



bit of a chicken and egg problem: both larps and adventure games trace their genealogy back to “Dungeons & Dragons” and it is hard to say whether D&D first inspired computer adventures or computer adventures was a significant source of influence on the evolution of D&D. Both may be true.

We can discern at least two major types of puzzles used in larp - those that concern items, and those that concern information. The classic murder mystery is an information puzzle, the Lord of the Rings has an item puzzle at its core.

Item puzzles require a certain combination of physical objects for it's conditions to be fulfilled, for example the One Ring, Mount Doom and the person Gollum in order to destroy Sauron or the three keys in order to open the safe of Madame deRiche. Solving item puzzles (called “Widget Hunts” in the U.S., see Young, 2004) is thus mostly about gathering stuff and taking it to places.

Information puzzles require the understanding of a certain combination of facts in order to gain an over-riding insight. For example, if the detective finds out that the butler was underpaid by Madame deRiche, that he was the sole heir in her secret testament, that he did not have an alibi and that he spent his childhood as a throat-slitting hit-man in the slums of Calcutta it will be pretty obvious that the Butler was the Murderer.

Puzzles can be analysed and constructed in terms of the triggers they're composed of. For example, the “Lord of the Rings” puzzle contains a spatial trigger (mount doom), a temporal trigger (during the final battle, when Sauron is occupied elsewhere) and a dramatic trigger (Gollum grabbing the ring and falling off the cliff).

Instructions

Conflicts, triggered events and puzzles all give larpwrights some measure of control over the larp. They are also prone to the abilities and free will of the players, making their outcome rather difficult to predict. If there is a conflict – who will win it? If there is a puzzle, will it be solved, and will the players even care? Instructions are a group of incentives (meta-instructions, fates and suggestions) that give larpwrights a greater deal of control over the larp, especially it's chronology. This group can be sub-divided according to how voluntary or interpretable the instructions are – with fates at the absolute end of the scale, suggestions at the voluntary end, and a fuzzy are in between.



Meta-instructions are a form of instruction that borders on what can be considered an “incentive”, since the place responsibilities for the overall larp that go beyond what a normal player has. Unlike fates and suggestions, meta-instructions clearly have a non-diegetic purpose.

Example: The player of Judge Whitey is instructed not to allow the case of Josef K to be brought before the court until the second day of the larp. There is no diegetic reason for this delay, and the player will be forced to invent in-game excuses, but the larpwright has deemed that bringing the case up earlier will take focus away from the larp’s opening scene.

Just as with puzzles, instructions rely on triggers to gain their effect. The difference is that instructions - in theory - should not pose any challenge for their conditions to be reached. While a puzzle might require forcing the truth out of the butler for the detective to solve the murder, an instruction could tell the butler to confess his sins.

Instructions are often associated with dramatist play. A dramatist player may be happy to carry out parts of the story, even or especially if it comes as an order, while a simulationist player may see the instruction as a violation of her character interpretation and a player pursuing a gamist creative agenda may see it as a hindrance to achieving the objective.

There are exceptions. For example, an instruction may create part of the challenge to achieve the objective, satisfying gamist priorities. Instructions may also be used to force natural events that do not occur naturally in the unnatural circumstances of a larp. For example, the King’s player may be instructed that the King will die of a stroke on the larp’s second day, triggering the contest for succession.

Fates

Fates are absolute instructions given as part of the character text. They are, by definition, unavoidable although human error or the fog of larp might make it impossible to carry them out. (see Fatland & Wingård, 1998)

Fates differ from meta-instructions in two important aspects. First of all, they may allow for surprise - the exact design of the fabula will only be revealed when the fate is acted out, it need not be discernible from the written instruction. Secondly, fates may be dealt with as diegetic truths - as the threads woven by the Moirai or Nornir, as the will of God or as the



unavoidable determinism of nature.

Example: Orfeus' fate is to marry his true love Eurydice, to travel to Hades on the second day of the larp and beg for the return of someone who died recently, and to look back right before leaving Hades. Eurydice's fate is to die on the marriage night. Hades' fate is to let Orfeus have Eurydice only on the condition that he leave the land of the dead and not look back until he is outside.

A "fate" was originally the list of instructions given to the player. The term has drifted so that a "fate" today refers to a single instruction. See Fatland, 2000 and Wingård, 1998 for more on fate-play.

Suggestions

The Oslo-based troupe Amaranth pioneered with "Dance Macabre" (Solberg and Bardal, 2000) their own version of instructions, under the name of "hendelsesforløp" (roughly: "sequence of events"), an incentive which I here will refer to as "suggestions".

Suggestions are a less rigid version of the fateplay technique. A fate is something you (the player) have to do, or something you (the character) inevitably will end up doing no matter how much you resist. Suggestions are often written like fates, and may be combined by triggers into webs, but encourages a player to follow a specific suggestion only if it suits the player at the given time. A larp using suggestions may deviate quite a lot from the fabula, while the suggestions serve as an inspiration to players and as a "safety net" for players to follow if the larp situation does not develop interesting dramatics by itself.

Suggestions are usually more dissipative than fates, they allow the larp's development to be recursive, and as such encourage a more chaotic larp with a greater freedom for players to improvise and choose attractors. On the other hand, suggestions can be harder for players to handle since it is not always known how central a suggestion is to the fabula, and whether other players are expecting you to carry out the suggestion since it forms as a dramatic trigger for their own suggestions.

Fate-Suggestion combinations

While fates often mix badly with puzzles and conflicts, they mix quite easily with suggestions. In a fate-suggestion combination, the most important



events of a story may be secured by fates whereas lesser stories and non-critical details may be written as instructions.

William Anderson is a wealthy businessman, married to the neurotic Barbara, and father to Carl, an unruly anarchist of 19. It is fated that William will expel his son from the family towards the end of the larp. Before this, it is suggested that Carl smokes pot in his father's presence, that William tries to pressure Carl to attend business school, that Barbara reveals her plans for divorce to Carl – telling him about the many sins of William. The father-son conflict is the central theme of the story, and the breach is inevitable. The apple has simply fallen too far from the trunk. Suggestions provide several possible extra reasons for the breach, but these are not necessary and the players may choose other quarrels to build for the break. Suggestions also may bring the mother into the conflict, add a divorce to the story, and explore an unusual mother-son alliance.

In a story with a “Romeo and Juliet” theme; the Mavrocordato and the Sokollu families are fierce competitors for the attention, positions and gifts of the Ottoman Sultan. One family being Greek and orthodox, the other being originally Serb now Muslim, they have no love for each other. A Mavrocordato son is fated to fall in love with a Sokollu daughter at the beginning of the larp. Their parents are fated to despise any affair between the children, and certainly marriage. The rest of the story is described in suggestions, no matter if and how the children declare their love – the central theme remains intact.

Tasks and Scheduling

Tasks and scheduling are two kinds of incentives, reminiscent of instructions, but that double as being purely diegetic information. A task is the job of a character or group, as defined from the onset of the larp: “The bakers produce bread”, “The watchmen defend the village”, “The Circassian army is under orders to pacify the village and root out resistance fighters hiding in it”. The concept of a task may overlap with objectives (see “conflict”, above).

Schedules set up daily rhythms and/or schedules for specific events during the larp. Two examples of schedules:

Farmers always get up at sunrise, and go to bed at sunset. After awakening, a family breakfast is enjoyed. The elderly, the young



and women with child-raising responsibilities stay at the farm and care for the children, while other healthy adults go out to work the rice fields. When the sun is at its highest point, the farmers return and a communal lunch is enjoyed. The afternoon may be used for work, or for trade and visiting neighbours. Dinner, eaten when sunset approaches, is communal and often enjoyed with visitors from a neighbouring farm.

The Synode will begin with a meeting between clergy on the night of the first day. Drink is enjoyed, and theological points not discussed, but it is expected that factions begin organizing themselves during the night. The first debate is held on day 2, on the topic of whether Christ was of a human or a divine nature, and shall last 4 hours, chaired by the Patriarch of Constantinople. The second debate is held on day 3, chaired by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, on the topic of how many angels may fit on the head of a pin. This, too, shall last four hours. The third day is reserved for meditation, and at the fourth day the grand assembly, chaired by the Patriarch of Rome, shall reach consensus on the theological questions. Meals (at sunrise and sundown) are communal, involve much drinking of wine and no discussing of theology. The rest of the time, reserved for “meditation” will probably be used to socialize and attempt to convert fellow priests and bishops to ones own.

Incentive webs

As may be discerned from the examples earlier in this article, incentives are rarely used alone. They may often require other incentives to yield meaning, and one incentive may trigger another. The term “incentive web” is borrowed from “fate-web” in the terminology of fate-play (see Wingård, 1998), and denotes any such inter-connected group of incentives.

If all incentives are connected, then the larp has a single incentive web, but it is more common for larps to have several unrelated webs – say a web of internal issues for each group, a “master web” involving all factions, minor webs involving characters from different groups etc. The bigger and more all-encompassing a web gets, the harder it is to predict and huge, inter-connected webs are notoriously difficult to manage – two good reasons why larpwrights often divide a larp into smaller, self-contained webs. On the other hand, separate webs that develop independently may establish attractors that conflict with each other and the overall dramaturgy of the larp.



If a master web establishes a situation of warfare during the larp, the minor webs dealing with the grudges of family members may lose a lot of meaning.

Open, Closed and Wild incentives

Central to how incentive webs function is the degree of openness in their component incentives. Any incentive can be designed as an “open”, “closed” or “wild” incentive, depending on how much it allows for players’ interpretation and how many options it provides for different outcomes.

Closed incentives allow only for a single, or a finite set, of improvisation options. A fate is typically a closed incentive, but so is a puzzle which allows for only one outcome when being solved (the finite options are “solve it” or “not solve it”) and an objective (“you are consumed by a raging, all-pervading passion to murder John F. Kennedy”) that can only be achieved or not, never re-interpreted.

Open incentives, on the other hand, allow for a high degree of interpretation and variety in their accomplishment or non-accomplishment. A task such as “pacify the village” may be solved in multiple ways and lead to many different outcomes for all parties. A task such as “kill the villagers” allows only one solution and two possibilities : victory and defeat. It can be turned into a web of open incentives by including traitors in the village, and moral doubts as inner and internal conflicts amongst the soldiers.

A third class, wild incentives, allow for an even greater degree of freedom than open incentives. Wild incentives encourage players to re-interpret and re-define the frame of meaning wherein the incentive is used. That includes making alterations to the interpretation of normally “rock solid” premises of improvisation such as past diegetic events, the nature of a character, and the interaction code. A fate that when played unexpectedly turns a tragedy into a comedy (“an hour after your death, you shall arise from the dead and declare ‘it was only a flesh wound!’”) is an example of a “wild” incentive.

The incentive web of the bohemians at Norwegian larp “Baghdad Express” forms a good illustration of wild incentives: a close friend of the bohemians had died, and each single bohemian was convinced that he or she was in fact the murderer. There was no “true explanation” available in the larp. As the incentive entered play, this left characters free to decide whether they were deluded and the first one to confess was the actual murderer, whether

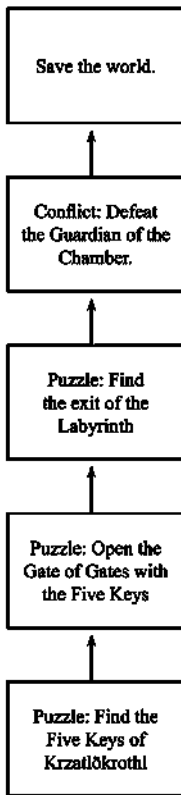


Fig. 1 : Linear Incentive Web

there had been an outside conspiracy to make them each feel guilt, or whether there had actually been a murder at all etc. While most incentives gravitate towards one degree of openness, there are exceptions to nearly every rule. A suggestion that “on day two, you shall propose a toast to the health of your father” is closed. A Suggestion that “on day two, you shall propose a toast” is more open. A suggestion that “on day two, you shall fall in love with one whom you hate” borders on wild.

In terms of the chaos model, closed incentives generally act integrative while open and wild incentives generally are different degrees of dissipative. I write “generally”, because there are exceptions when you look at how incentives behave in context. For example Susanne Gräslund notes how fates may, from the players point of view, act dissipative:

“Many players tend to get stuck in a certain kind of character and in a common pattern of action. Fateplay is a way for the organiser to direct the players and thus both break their habits and make the game more unpredictable.

A cautious player can get a little bit braver and an often too dominant player could be made to act more low-key. “
(Gräslund, 2001)

Web Structures

In his classic essay “plotteori” (Eidsem, 1994), Erlend Eidsem proposes a view of three kinds of incentive webs (“plot structures”) - linear, branching and non-linear. This distinction remains useful, as it shows how incentive webs may (and often are) organized. It also helps us analyze an incentive web in terms of the chaos model.

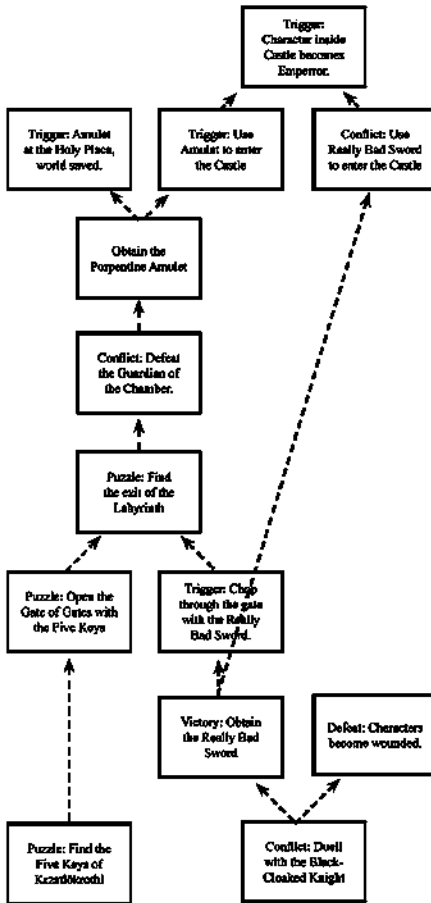


Fig. 2 : Branching Incentive Web

Linear web structures (see fig. 1) require conditions to be reached in sequence, only when one condition is fulfilled may the next one be attempted. Thus, the players may only explore this track of the fabula to the extent that the required incentives are carried out. This is the typical structure of typical fate-webs, but also describes one kind of puzzle-based web.

Example: To get the Porpentine Amulet that will save the world, our heroes must first obtain the Five Keys of Krzatlökrothl, then use these to open the Gate of Gates, then find the path through the Labyrinth, and finally defeat the Guardian of the Chamber of the Porpentine.

Branching web structures (see fig.2) are similar to linear web structures, except that they allow for different lines to branch out depending on whether a condition was reached or not, or on whether a specific choice was made.

Branching structures may also mean that there are several paths leading to a single goal.



Examples: The players may obtain the Porpentine Amulet. If they do so, they may go to the Holy Place to save the world, or they may go to the Castle to become emperors. If they choose instead to obtain the Really Bad Sword, they may conquer the Castle or go to Mount Destiny and lob the sword in, thereby destroying the world. Or, if they don't have the Five Keys, but they have the Really Bad Sword, they use the Sword to cut open the Gate of Gates and grab the Porpentine Amulet.

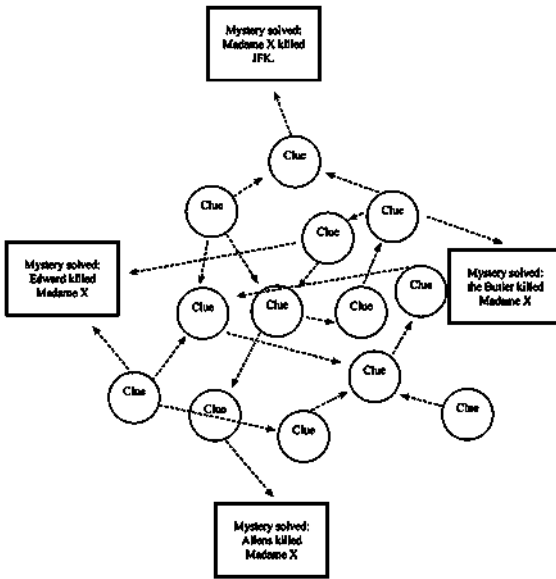


Fig. 3 : Non-Linear Incentive Web

“Non-linear” see fig.3 is a catch-all phrase for puzzle structures that are, well, non-linear - where one may jump from incentive to incentive in no particular order. A web of purely open or wild incentives would often be a non-linear web. Another example is the “marble structure” (proposed by Eidsem, 1992) that requires a certain amount of items or clues to be collected to trigger an event, but not necessarily in any specific order and not necessarily all available clues.

Thus, if 4 out of the 10 clues left in the larp regarding the murder of Lady Posbridge are collected, the murder will be solved, but which four and in what order they are collected is irrelevant. Wild incentives could be added to a non-linear web – for example by setting



it up so that who is revealed as the murderer will depend on which 4 out of the ten clues that are collected. Different combinations of clues will yield different murderers. If incentives are not connected to each other thematically or by using triggers, we may speak of a “non-connected” web (actually, not a web at all). Establishing some conflicts, and only conflicts, would be an example of a non-connected web, as would a web where the solving of puzzles do not lead to any other puzzles.

Using incentive webs

Incentive webs are easiest to organise, in theory, when they use closed incentives only. But in actual play, closed webs can be the most problematic structure, where the non-achievement of a single incentive may halt the progress of the drama or put players in a conflict between following the logic of the fabula or the logic of their character and the diegetic situation. Closed incentive webs, when they fail, can greatly thicken the fog of unpredictability,

not always in a positive way. That is not to say that closed incentive webs are by definition dysfunctional or “bad”, only that they require a great deal of care to function.

Pure fate-plays commonly use closed incentives in linear webs. Of the many larps using this structure that have been attempted, only some (“Moirais Vev”, “Knappnålshuvudet”) have been successful. Others (“Much Ado About Nothing” and “Afasia Barn”, to mention a couple) have failed according to their larprawrights and players both. (see Pohjola, 2005 and Wingård, 1998) The successful examples, on the other hand, have become larp legends.

Larps using open incentives, especially if they are structured as branching or non-linear webs, are far easier to deal with. If the larprawright has failed in predicting a specific development or the failure of players to solve a puzzle, player improvisation will easily enter to fill the gaps. The non-connected web is perhaps the easiest structure to deal with, but also the one that provides the fewest opportunities for larprawright influence on the larp situation. With a non-connected web, chronology becomes impossible, and establishing story-like attractors using incentives equally impossible.

The use of wild incentives, on the other hand, may thicken the fog of larp so much that the role-playing loses all coherence. Players will have all the freedom in the world to fill in the gaps in the fabula, but when doing so they



risk making even bigger holes in the consistency of the diegesis – the gulf between their subjective diegeses becomes so wide that the illusion of a single diegesis is lost.

Not many larps have used wild incentives, however, and some experimentation may well end up proving the previous paragraph wrong.

In closing

External influences

A number of factors which are not, technically, incentives have a strong impact on how incentives are played out. The limited scope of this article does not allow the discussion these deserve, but it should be clear that incentives are not autonomous structures, and that how they affect actual play depends greatly on the following external factors:

- The character spread. Which characters are present, and which players play them. There is a large difference between the larp with 100 starving, angry, peasants and 5 oppressive nobles and the one with 40 starving, angry peasants, 5 nobles, and their 30-strong oppressive guards. Or maybe not, if the guards of the latter larp are played by 12 year old kids and the peasants are adults in their thirties and forties.
- Relationship maps – what are the initial relationships between characters? A number of larps rely on relationship maps and only relationship maps in building their dramaturgy.
- The nature and values of characters. Different people handle the same situations differently.
- The players (obviously). Different people interpret the same characters differently.
- Interaction Codes – genre conventions, cultural conventions and thematic implications. Which course of action seems the most appropriate according to the interaction code?
- Space. A player will walk five minutes, but not five hours, to follow a promising lead. Which conversations are overheard? Which opportunities do the scenography offer for interaction?
- Ability. Which character has the greater chance of exerting her will in a given situation? Who will win a fight, be able to command the loyalty of others, win a debate? This is a question determined by players, their characters, their interpretation of characters and/or game mechanics – depending on the larp and the style of live role-playing.



- Creative agenda (GDS or GNS). Which non-character criteria are players pursuing during play? (see Edwards, 2001)
- A butterfly flapping its wings in Inner Mongolia.

Alternatives to the incentive-based fabula

Not all larps use incentives to construct the fabula. There are at least two notable alternatives to the use of incentives – one is to simply avoid incentives, relying on fundamentals like the society and relationships between the characters to provide a fabula. Pre-diegesis, characters and relationships remain the most powerful tools of larpwriting, adding incentives to the mix may bring in more complexity but also (which too often is the case) destroy the excellent possibilities that players improvise themselves.

The other alternative is what O.P. Giæver (Giæver, 2003) calls “Event-machines” (“handlingsmakin”), a structure embedded in the larp or larp society that generates possibilities of interaction without tying them to characters or groups. An example of an event machine is the dramaturgy of PanoptiCorp (Tanke et al, 2003): the constant appearance of customers (short time characters), or messages (by mail) from customers, kept the employees of the corrupt ad agency PanoptiCorp busy working. Added to the structure of the company, which determined leadership and distributed jobs and money through formal popularity contests, the characters were kept quite busy interacting, working and partying.

An event machine usually forms a very strong attractor, or a number of very strong attractors, without removing the chaotic nature of a larp. Players are in theory free to pick a different attractor, but the event machine tends to call attention back towards itself and may contain corrective measures for characters that stray off the path, as a PanoptiCorp character who didn't bother to attend business meetings would quickly discover.

Acknowledgements

This text has evolved over a period of five years, from an initial draft for a “larp organizing how-to” into a 100-page book covering every aspect of larp and dramaturgy, which was then cut up and pasted back into smaller articles, of which this article is one.

Larp dramaturgy is not an easy thing to capture in an article, as every part is connected to every other part of the larp medium and a full understanding of



larp dramaturgy would require us to have a full understanding of every possible aspect and variety of live role-playing. It was this realization that prompted the original article to grow into a book, and it was the realization that one man cannot cover all aspects of larp alone – proven by the 2003 and 2004 Knutepunkt anthologies – that reduced it back into article format.

- Fate-play is not, as I claimed in 1997, a radically new approach to larping but a tweak, a minor innovation that is reliant on the same structures as traditional larp dramaturgy: triggers and webs.
- “Plot” in most Nordic jargons is the same as what I call “puzzle”. They are structurally so similar to their brethren in computer games, that

During this process of expanding and contracting, writing and re-writing, some things became painfully obvious:

- They provide easy proof for the “Larps are games!” camp, with whom I otherwise strongly disagree.
- Some of the most interesting larp experiments these days do not use any of the incentives mentioned.

There is still a lot left unwritten. The list of incentives presented here is by no means exhaustive, a couple of the methods mentioned have been invented within the past five years. This article answers a lot of “whats” but few “hows” and almost no “whys”. With a growing arsenal of tools available, why should larpwrights use a particular tool, and how is it used most effectively? And perhaps more importantly, how can we understand and encourage larp experiences in terms of drama, narrative and meaning? Some of these questions are in essence questions not of craft but of art, inspiration, expression.

I would like to express my gratitude to Lars Wingård, Mike Pohjola, J. Tuomas Harviainen and especially Markus Montola – who read through and commented on this work at different stages of it’s (de-)composition. Without their constructive criticism and encouragement, this work would have spent the rest of it’s life with spam e-mails and old to-do lists, gathering digital dust on an obscure hard disk sector.



Notes

¹ It would have great value as an experiment if someone actually did organize such larps to test this hypothesis.

² My use of “dramaturgy” in English is a translation of the Norwegian term “dramaturgi”. According to Gronemeyer, 1996 - “dramaturgi” is the “inner and outer structure of a play”. See Hetland, 1997 for an example of “dramaturgi” in relation to larp. The English term “dramaturgy” may be used in this sense, and may have a meaning as wide as the “art of authoring theatrical drama” but more often refers specifically to the process of adapting a text for the stage.

³ By “the larpwright” in this text I mean “the institution which holds defining power over the pre-diegesis and the fabula of a larp.” It is not necessarily a single person. In fact, it is more often a team of people. The institution can even be a method whereby players democratically agree on these things. But for simplicity’s sake, we’ll pretend it’s a single person, and in situations where I refer to actual people, such as in “experienced larpwrights”: I mean a person performing the duties of the larpwright institution.

⁴ I am aware of the fact that the Visigoths pre-date the cardinal system by a few centuries. The fictive larpwrights of this imaginary larp, however, are not.

⁵ On the scale from dissipative to integrative, taboo breaking techniques (overruling player actions, fate-play, rewriting diegetic history) can be considered over-integrative. They integrate the game, but as they remove interaction, dynamism or recursivity, they also change the core of role-playing essentially.” (Montola, 2004) My emphasis.

⁶ Coincidentally, “the Fabula” is also the name of a book that creates the world out of itself in Tomas Mørkrids role-playing game of the same name (Mørkrid, 1999), an excellent metaphor for the nature of a larp’s fabula.

⁷ See the definitions in the “dictionary of larp terminology” at laiv.org, <http://forum.laiv.org/showthread.php?t=265>, for examples of conflicting definitions of plot.

⁸ For example “Terningkast” at “forum.laiv.org”.

⁹ I originally stumbled upon the concept of trigger/connector/effector when reading an American “how-to” for new larpwrights on the web. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find that article again, and so cannot provide a reference for this Very Useful Concept.



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The Collective's little red book

A step-by-step guide to arranging larps the collective way

Abstract

The collective's little red book is a summary of our groups experiences with collective larp organising. Collective organising does not mean a "free for all" writing of roles and plots, but is an extreme outsourcing of creative efforts to the players, within a set diegetic frame. This relieves the creative efforts of the strain of practical and economical responsibility. As long as the frame is intact, the problems of collective organising are mainly of practical and social nature, most of which can be dealt with by simple means.

Introduction:

While the idea of organizing live-action role-playings (larps) with a flat power structure has been conceived and in some cases explored by others (Widding & Hansen, 2002), and while larps have been made without a clearly defined organizer, this text is, as far as I know, the first attempt to formulate a cohesive method for creating larps with a flat power structure, where the tradition role of organizer is non-existent. The aim of the method is to reap

all the benefits of a flat structure in larp-organizing. This paper is based on experiences with this method of arranging larps. It will give you an idea of what the collective way is and a guide to one of the several ways of organizing a collective larp. This method will hopefully let you sidestep a few possible mistakes. However, if you have other ideas of how to organize a collective larp, there is no reason why you should stick to this guide. In fact, I would very much like to hear about your experiences if you choose to handle problems differently than I have sketched out.

About the author

Martine Svanevik is a 20-years old bachelorstudent of History at Oslo University, Norway. She has been role-playing since 1998 and has been a dedicated larper since 1999. In addition to her affection for larping, she has a keen interest in larp theory. Previously she has been co-author of one publication in Imagonem. This paper for the Knutepunktbook 2005 is her first solo publication on larp theory.



In this paper I will first give the vision of collective larping, followed by a short list of the benefits of the collective way. Then I will give a how-to guide to arranging the collective way. This guide can give an insight in how to achieve the best results of collective organizing. Finally, I will list a few of the problems of the collective way and try to give solutions to these problems where possible.

Vision: The meagre beginning of this method was a small statement of objectives, included in the making of the first collective larp: "The collective –take the power back", organized in Oslo in the fall of 2004. The experiences of this larp has helped form the opinions of how to organize larps with this kind of flat power structures, as will be shown later in the paper. Although the original principles were somewhat altered after their first encounter with reality, I believe that it's paramount to understanding the method that the original principles are stated in full, to illustrate the ideals in their original form.

Collective larps

Collective larps are basically about cooperation. It is not part of the traditional way of organizing, where the organizers create a larp for the players to participate in as seen in most larps (Hakkarainen & Stenroos, 2003) It's about one participant taking the initiative to make a larp, and all the participants creating the larp together. All the participants get together to create the best possible larp, and everyone contributes with their specialties. Collective larps demand a close cooperation between the participants, and thus small larps are the ones most easily made in cooperation. There is no theoretical limit to how large a larp can become however, or how many small larps that can interact in the same fictional reality.

The three commandments of organizing the collective way:

1. Everyone is responsible for the larp

In a collective larp, all the participants are organizers, and thus all shall help create the larp and benefit from the results. Therefore one demand is that every participant puts as much time and effort into the larp as the next. It is everybodys responsibility to make the larp work, and everybodys benefit if it does.



2. *There is no organizer*

The initiators job is to set the scene, time and place for the larp, not to organize it. There should however be an administrator of the arrangement whose job is to make sure that all the agreed arrangements take place and that all that needs to be done, actually gets done. This could be the initiator, but it needn't be. When the larp takes place, the administrator is a participant like all the others.

3. *There are no limits*

Collective larps place the responsibility of organizing the larp on all the participants, and 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.

Why organize the collective way:

- 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. Thus not only will the participants feel inclined to spend more time researching their own character and the setting, they will be a part of creating that setting and they will have the responsibility to make the larp function.
- The flat structure of collective larp-arrangements makes everyone equal in the creative process, a noble goal in itself. In addition to this, the flat structure enables the initiator to initiate ideas that could not be realized with a small number of organizers, or without wide cooperation between all participants (Huctchison, 2003). This could be a project that requires a large amount of work from each participant, for instance the building of a village, or that each participant should create her own religion, something one cannot always expect from players.
- The collective way relieves the initiator from the responsibilities of the traditional organizer, and thus equally distributes the workload among all participants.
- This method is an opportunity to use all the participants' abilities in creating a larp, instead of concentrating all the work on a few shoulders. It is an accepted fact that everyone cannot be as adequate in all part of the process of creating a larp, and by making all participants



responsible for the creative process, one can take advantage of the abilities of all, and thus reap the best results possible. Everyone is not a born accountant, or an author.

- In addition, whilst this is not something unique to collective larps, having each participant develop her character with almost total freedom, can (and have) yield characters of amazing depth and realism. The fact that no-one sees “the full picture” allows the “plot structure” and social dynamics of the larp to be just as free flowing, illogical and vibrant as it is in real life.

How to organize the collective way:

The initiator sets the time and place for the larp. She also has the responsibility of formulating a diegetic framework for the participants to work within. She can also set the price for the game. These are small matters that are of interest to the participant, but are difficult or unnecessary to decide collectively. When participants decide whether or not they can attend the larp, the date of the larp, as well as the core concept, is paramount. The freedom of the collective organising is thus freedom within limits. These limits must be set in stone before any other work begins.

A small number of participants are not necessary to make the larp collectively, but it will make the organizing easier. If you choose a larger number of participants, a possible solution to the organization problem is to split the larp into smaller units, families, clans, workplaces and so forth. Thus the smaller groups can work collectively within the units and meet the others at a few meetings before the larp. There is no reason why individual participants shouldn't collaborate outside of these units, but the units themselves should be responsible for the larger part of the preparations.

During the preparations, everyone has the right to introduce new elements into the game without informing the other participants. Thus the element of surprise in the game needn't be lost to anyone. The safety rules of the larp must, however, always be agreed to before the rest of the preparations commence. Likewise, all participants must know the framework they are working within. This framework should specify themes agreed to be unsuitable for the larp, for instance rape, as well as which element of the fiction are not to be touched. A good rule of thumb is to disallow anything that would seriously disrupt or alter the original intent of the game, as well as anything that could cause the larp to end prematurely. For instance, if the larp's theme is the social dynamics of a workplace, it would be an ill advised



decision for one participant to close down the office and fire the rest of the participants. This means in practice that all participants of the game must simultaneously be daring enough to seize the opportunity to shape the larp, and sensible enough to know when not to.

During the first meeting it is a good idea to choose one person responsible for the economic aspects of the larp. Although the creative process of the larp is collective, that is not to say all aspects of the larp have to be. My experience is that one person, not the collective group, handles the economic aspect of a larp best. The practical responsibility should also either be outsourced or given to one participant. While outsourcing might seem to go against the ideals of the collective way, it is rather self-evident that the main benefits of making larps the collective way are to be found in the creative field. Even though it is nice to do everything together, it is rather counterproductive to make each participant buy her own potato.

Beware that some of the element of surprise will be lost on the person handling economy and the one (or those) handling practical responsibilities will lose in the larp, since they will have to be informed of the elements of the larp that either requires money or practical considerations. For instance, if a participant decides to introduce a new character who is set to arrive on day two of the game, that person's food and lodging needs to be taken care of. Also if someone decides to set off fireworks, it is a good idea to have more than one person knowing exactly when and where the fireworks will go off, and where the fire extinguisher is located. This is why outsourcing these tasks could be a good idea. In addition to these two, one person should be assigned the job of administrator, making sure that all the common assignments get done.

On the first meeting, the participants should set the theme and date for the following meetings. There is no reason why individual players should not have meetings in between these common meeting, however the common meetings should be set so that the creative work is structured and the participants will know when and where they will make the larp. Another important subject to address during the first meeting is how eventual surplus money should be distributed and how additional funds, if necessary, are to be raised.

It is important to remember to utilize each participant's area of expertise, and not to have all participants working on the same project all the time. For



instance, if one is to write the background material, having one or two participants, rather than the entire group, do the actual writing is the most effective use of everyone's time. All material produced for the game is of course dependent on the approval of the other participants. On the other hand, if it is a small larp, there is nothing to say that one needs to have written material at all. One solution is to, instead of having a written setting, have a creative night where the entire group meets up and decides together how the setting is supposed to function.

The start and finish of the larp should be agreed to before the larp begins. Having the larp rudely cut off before time because one participant feels that the larp should finish could be quite frustrating. The ending point of the larp should be very clearly defined, such as an alarm clock or a given time, and should not be subject to change.

Last but not least, it is obvious that a person should not to be counted among the participants before she has paid the fee set by the initiator. It is a sad fact of human psychology that we are more likely to follow through with projects we have actually paid for.

Problems with the collective way:

There are, not surprisingly, several problems associated with this method of organizing larps. It is, however, important to remember that the collective method is not necessarily the best method for all larp or larp organisers, though it might be ideal for some. In addition to the practical and economic problems facing all larps (which have been discussed) there are a number of other problems peculiar to collective organising.

The most obvious problem is the one cooperation. Personal friction making two or more of the participants unable to work together is most effectively dealt with by the administrator. She could either decide to separate the two participants into different groups, and not force them to collaborate unless it is absolutely necessary. Another solution is to address the problem collectively and try to find a solution.

Another problem is freeloaders. Again one solution is for the administrator to address them and make sure that they do their assignments. If this doesn't work, one could address it with the entire larp and decide whether or not the person can be a part of the collective larp. Collective larp-making is not a method that has room for freeloaders.



If a problem arises during the larp, it can be difficult to know whom to talk to, since there is no organizer. If the problem is of a practical nature, my suggested solution would be to either talk to the administrator, the economically responsible or the practically responsible depending on the situation. If it is of a personal nature, I would suggest talking to someone you know and trust. Stopping the larp should not be an option unless it is necessary for the entire larp to be aware of the problem, and even then, one should consider whether or not this information could be conveyed without stopping the larp. Having for instance a noticeboard in an off-game area could be a solution. If the subject matter of the larp is of a serious psychological nature, an idea is to appoint one participant as confidant, giving the players someone to turn to. This of course requires that one of the participants is willing to take that responsibility (see Duus Henriksen, this volume).

In my opinion the collective method is more suitable for larps dealing with a heavy emphasis on character and character relations rather than stagings, epic storylines or gamism (see Bøckman, 2003). I am not saying that it cannot be done, only that collective organising is not ideally suited for it. There is however a solution to the problem of plots in collective larps. Since it is every participant's right to introduce new elements into the larp, there is nothing to stop them from introducing new plotlines, as long as it does not harm the agreed upon theme of the larp. Personal plots can be written into the characters either by the participant herself or in collaboration with other participants.

Perhaps the most important problem that can arise when one is to organize a collective larp is the problem of the non-diegetic power structures. It is easily to associate the initiator with the classic organizer since it is the initiators task to formulate the diegetic framework, and often has strong views on how the larp should be organized and what themes should be most prominent. One solution is to make sure that the initiator is not also the administrator, responsible for the economy or the practical situation on the larp. Make sure that each participant is only responsible for one area, and that the initiator is not responsible for any of those areas. Thus the power structure will be evenly shared between some of the participants, and the initiator will not have any more responsibility than any other participant.

Conclusion

While the elements of collective organising are not new, the collective way as a coherent method is a new way of looking at larp creation. It is not



supposed to be a meat-and-potatoes method for making all sorts of larps, however it does have its benefits. It is a great way of making characterdriven larps, it's a good way of creating realistic and surprising stories and by using this method one can become more aware of how power structures actually work in larp organizing. And, last but not least, one of the main benefits, one could even say goals, of the collective way is to shake at the foundations of the power structures of larp. By "taking the power back" and distributing it evenly among all participants, one demystifies the role of the organizer, clearly demonstrating that a great larp can be the product of great participants rather than great organizers.

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Quantifying In-game economy

A contribution to the analysis of the in-game economy of larp events

Summary

The in-game economy on large larps in Denmark has seen very little attention from the organisers, despite being of great importance to the players and representing large expenses on the organiser's budget. This article attempts an analysis of in-game economy, using common economical models, and suggests methods for dealing with some of the malady. My findings is that careful taxation, food-vendors paying in-game money for raw materials and regulate the flow of money by introducing guilds best counter the rabid inflation seen on larps. Fixed prices may be counter-productive. However, the real problem lies in the fact that few organisers ever treat economy as more than a scenographic element.

About the author

Mathias Lysholm Faaborg is a 20 year old student of social sciences at Aarhus University. He has been a larper with the Danish group Enherjene for the last 6 years, and have organised their annual summer larp for the last two of them. He is currently involved in making the larp "Renkespil og Trolدتøj" for this summer. The analysis of in-game economy is his first article on larp, born out of the experiences with organising large larps for hungry Danes for the last two years.

Contents

The problems of economy

Introduction

Material and definitions

Inflation and money stock problems

Basic economic in-game structure

Psychology of players and its influence on in-game economy

Savings, or the lack thereof

Game over

Inflation and saving

Tools for countering the problems

The problem

Countering increase of V

Countering increase of M

Tying game economy to real life



economy

Fixed prices

Increasing amount of merchandise

Conclusion

The problems of economy

Introduction

This analysis is based on experiences from the Danish larp-scene. This scene predominately produces fairly large fantasy or quasi historical medieval larps lasting several days, usually over a week end. Commonly, the game areas are enhanced for gaming purpose with various props, auditory equipment, pyrotechnical effects and external resources, either actual or symbolical. Peculiar to Danish larp, the participation fee normally cover all sustenance needed, to be bought with in-game money by the players. This food often constitutes the largest singular expense on the organiser's budget.

The analysis is based on experiences from several years of larp group Einherjene, Denmark, though the principles should be applicable to other groups and games. This article is primarily based on the authors own experience with Danish larps (Nemefrego 6 2001; Dalens Døtre, 2002; Anno Domini 2003; Heltedåd og Brudedefærd 2004; Einherjerne) as well as valuable input from other sources (Sandberg, pers kom og Bøckman pers kom.)

Material and definitions

This analysis is limited to dealing with larger larp-games. A large game is defined by three criteria:

- The first criterion is that the game in question is large enough that a certain amount of scenery becomes feasible. Such scenery also commonly contains some symbolical value markers in the form of in-game money. The analysis is of course irrelevant in moneyless games, though some of the principles still may apply.
- Secondly, the game needs to be of a certain length. Though the exact time might be debatable, I suggest the game must last for more than 24 hours.
- Thirdly, there needs to be enough participants so that no role knows every other role's motives, actions and needs.

Only if all three criteria are fulfilled, the game is defines as a "large game" for



the purpose of this article. For a large game to have an actual economical system, the game needs to have a monetary feedback system, that is, that is there is some sort of built in diegetic mechanism returning money to the primary spenders. For smaller games, the rules may still apply, but these being more transparent; the analysis will become self evident or irrelevant.

Primarily due to the Danish way of organising larps, where the participation fee covers all sustenance needed, we will assume that during the course of the game, the focus will be on basic needs. The needs of the players can be seen as a Maslowian Pyramid of Needs, where the subject will seek to fulfil the need for food and shelter first, then the social and identity needs and lastly self realisation (Alderfer, 1972). If the players have been hungry, thirsty or have slept in a wet sleeping bag - rampant critique will soon surface. The failure to fulfil the basic needs properly is what most often leads to critique of the organisers in Danish larps.

An analysis of the in-game economy of large larps is interesting because this will help the organisers alleviate any problems that may arise due to failure in supply of sustenance. A well working in-game economy is here defined as one that will lead to minimal inflation, thus giving players an even access to food and drink as long as the game lasts (barring day-night fluctuation in availability).

Inflation and money stock problems

The common problem in achieving this is that most participants receive a fixed amount of money at game start. This distribution, being essential to the working of the economy, is peculiar to the Danish scene. This money is amply enough to sustain him the first day. However, as inflation goes rampant, daily income (either from a paid in-game job, or owning a store or boutique) will effectively diminish. Though real hunger and thirst is relatively rare (most people can function perfectly on very little food for a few days), the loss of economic power, or the absence of increased wealth with increased income will lead to dissatisfaction. This too will lead to criticism.

In most large fantasy games, there is no possibility for trading with external economies, exchange money, investments or do anything else with one's wealth other than consume. Therefore, large larp economies may be seen as a closed economy with an exceedingly small public sector (the local ruler) and similarly small financial sector (the nobility or rich merchants). This is usually an unconscious choice made by the organisers.



$V * M$	=	$P * Y$
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Table 1: Theory of Quantity,

The analysis of large game economy is based on the Theory of Quantity (Dornbush, Fischer & Startz 2004)

The Theory of Quantity quantifies the relationship between the stock of money (M), the velocity money (V), the price level (P) and the »output« and the available amount of merchandise (Y):

- V is the rate at which money is recycled in the economy. By convention this factor is denoted V for velocity. The velocity of money is a measure of how many times the stock of money (M) is used for purchase by the consumer within time, t.
- M is the games stock of money, the total amount of money (coins, notes or other monetary unit) available in the economy.
- P is the level of prices of the general merchandise, that is, the mean price for all in-game merchandise, services, etc. available to the players on the market (i.e. the larp). The mean price times the amount of merchandise equals to total amount of money spent during time, t, which would be the length of a given larp
- Y is in this model the amount of merchandise (food, services) available to the general public. This can be seen as the larps Gross Domestic Product.

In this analysis, we consider the stock of money constant. For all practical purpose, the players can't fabricate new coins, and there are no-one outside the game that can feed more coins into the system. The organisers will usually control the influx of sustenance or merchandise constant, and keep it fairly constant. The players cannot during time t, sow, grow and harvest crops, nor can they commence slaughtering of animals. For the sake of simplicity assume that the amount of merchandise is constant throughout the game, though Y will in reality decrease as the players eat and drink during the game.

The basis of the analysis is a variable velocity of money, and a fluctuating price level, combined with a constant money stock and merchandise. The results for the economy for a large game are evident.



Basic economic in-game structure

The amount of money is unequally distributed among the various groups of players. The poorer roles, the »riff-raff« have the least money, while the »middle class« (tradesmen, innkeepers, soldiers etc) will have considerably more. At game start, the upper class (the nobility) will usually have extraordinary reserves of money.

Those with an interest in economy may argue that the treasuries of the noble class is separate from the market, and that upper class consumption may be seen as an increase of M, rather than V. This argument does not change the fundamental analysis or the results, though it may have a bearing on the results of the suggested tools.

During the first hours or day of play, a transfer of money from the upper to the middle class takes place. The middle class again transfer parts of this money down to the lower class. At the same time, there is a corresponding transfer of goods and services from the two lower classes to the upper.

The economical problems occur when nobility's monetary reserves, previously confined to the treasury chest, are put into circulation. When this money enters the economical system, the paid workers can suddenly spend their income and their monetary reserves. Thus, the velocity of money increases, as the baker can spend the money earned on bread, on beer right away. Even though the stock of money is constant, the velocity of money speeds up as soon as the upper classes start spending their money.

It might be argued that the spending of treasuries constitutes an increase in the stock of money, thus tipping the balance towards inflation as the amount of goods and services remain constant.

$V * kM$	=	$P * kY$
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Table 2: Basis for the analysis

However, the nature of large games makes this effect worse. In a real life situation, sudden extra income would at least partly be taken out of circulation to form monetary reserves (investments, savings etc.) by the lower classes, i.e. effectively making it a transfer of monetary reserves from the higher to the lower classes. While we might expect this money to return



to circulation in the long run, (dissaving, return on investments, etc.) such hoarding of money would at least even out the velocity of money, reducing inflation. However, in a larp, when this money enters the economical system, the paid workers can (and will, since saving and investments is not attractive, and not even possible), suddenly spend their income, and, not expecting to experience any dire needs in the foreseeable future, their potential savings. We will return to the psychology of spending later.

Increased velocity of money is influenced by another peculiarity of larp: The small area. Particularly in a densely populated country like Denmark, game areas are by necessity small. This reduces the physical distance any coin need to travel in order to be spent. It is fully possible for a coin to be payment for food, payment for beer, taxation and be redistributed as soldier's wages all within a 200 meter diameter from the original transaction. With such small distances, the time needed for such transactions can be breathtakingly small. The above mentioned chain of transactions could well take place within a quarter of an hour. Thus there is neither in-game nor off-game natural obstruction for an increase in the velocity of money (or increase in money stock).

The quantitative theory tells us what's bound to happen when V (or, as can be argued, M) increases.

$V' * kM$	=	$P' * kY$
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Table 43: Increased turnover rate in the analysis

Note: The V' denotes the change in V, not V itself. Likewise, P' denotes the change in P.

An increase in V and a constant amount of money will by necessity lead to rising prices when the amount of merchandise is constant. As an example, we may consider luxury goods. The middle classes are initially given 15 coins, placing steak and wine (priced to 30 coins) out of their economic reach. However, as the middle classes are paid in coins by the nobility, the segment of players able to buy steak and wine increases. The amount of available goods being constant, the increase in buyers will push the prices of luxury goods upwards. This is a demand-driven inflation.

So far, the model has assumed that the amount of money (M) is constant, but this is not always so. A factor contributing to the inflation of larps is the sudden injection of previously hidden money, typically in the form of



recovered treasure. In principle, an increase in the stock of money could be accommodated by a drop in the velocity of money, so that V falls accordingly to the increase in M , thus retaining $P&Y$ at a constant level. But, as discussed earlier, this will not happen, as the newly discovered treasury is not saved or invested, but spent right away. This happens so quickly, that V does not have time to drop.

In summary, we have seen that both an increase in the stock of money (through uncovering of hidden treasures) and an increase in the velocity of money (through upper class consumption), leads to a rise in prices and thereby to inflation.

Psychology of players and its influence on in-game economy

Savings, or the lack thereof

Factors outside of the diegetic frame of the game will influence the players' actions in the mini-economy of large games. A real life economical actor will have some sort of real or expected monetary reserve, whereof one part will be saved or invested, and another part will be spent. However, the players know that once the game is over, they will again have access to normal market resources (including food and drink). Laying down monetary reserves or investing money into projects that may later yield profit, will therefore not be a factor that promotes the players into saving money.

Game over

Another factor is the "game over"-factor common among large game participants. The influence of the game over mentality on game-play and plot structures is beyond the scope of this article, but some factors need to be considered. As the players are all aware that the game ends at a certain time, actions become bolder, as the risk of spending a large part of the game as riff-raff (or even dead) diminishes as game-end approaches. Effectively, the role with all its ambitions and fears ends as the game ends. Another result of this is big battles that commonly rounds off large fantasy larps, as the role has nothing to lose by being killed.

From an economical point of view, the game over mentality means that the quota the player saves will diminish with time. As the larp is over, in-game money will under most circumstances lose all value anyway, thus spending is actively promoted!



Inflation and saving

The inflation in itself will also act as a detriment to saving. If we assume an inflation of 20% per day, the quota of money saved will lose a fifth of its value overnight. The money spent, on the other hand, can not lose value. The same factor governs real-life macro economy. If interests were not a factor, saving money would only be a rational choice if there was deflation, while during inflation, taking up a loan would be the only sensible choice. With the runaway inflation commonly seen in large games, the only reason to save money would be to enjoy the look of numerous in-game coins.

In the previous section we saw that inflation is either due to an increase in the velocity of money (V) or an increase in the money stock (M).

If even a small part of the middle classes' income from the upper class or recovered treasures was spent on investment and savings, the inflation would drop drastically. A 20% marginal propensity to save would translate into around 20% lowering of the velocity of money – thus lowering the increase in prices. An increase in the stock of money could lead to an increase in savings and halting the velocity of money (V), balancing the rates of V and M . Unfortunately we have already concluded that the marginal propensity to save equals almost zero, initially being dependant of style of play and experience in larps, moving towards zero as the game progresses.

In summary, we have seen that an increase in the velocity of money could result in a fall of the stock of money (for instance via saving), but this is countered by players' action in the in-game economy. The result is that V and M does not balance each other, and we get a runaway effect on P .

Tools for countering the problems

The problem

It should by now be evident that a large part of the problems around participants' access to food, drink and luxury goods is caused by a lack of balance in the economical system. As there is neither a central bank, nor interest rates to regulate the stock of money or further incitements to monetary investments, we are cut off from conventional economic tools of bonds and interest rates. A central bank as an incitement will only work in the long run, and the "game over"-mentality of players makes them spend all their money towards the game end. Thus, an investment in anything but in-game goods (bread, beer etc.) will never be an attractive alternative.



Throughout the years various organisers of large games have tried different approaches to solve the problems of in-game economy. Here, some of these approaches are analysed using the Theory of Quantity.

The basic problem is an increase in V or M . We will now look at some attempts to counter this:

Countering increase of V

As the consumption by the upper classes increase, more money enters the economical system, resulting in an increase in V . This money is almost exclusively used for buying goods from the in-game vendors. We may assume these vendors to have a marginal propensity to save of 5%. The velocity of money of the sum of money paid is increased with 95%. This money will again be used for the restocking of the store and the vendors' personal expenses and consumption. If we introduced a tax system so well balanced that it could take out of the store exactly the amount of money remaining after restocking and expenses, the velocity would remain at a constant. This, on the other hand, demands that taxes must be regulated and collected after each transaction, thus keeping the vendor from spending the extra money on consumption.

The problem with this approach is evident. The tax collector has little chance of keeping track of how much each vendor will need after taxation to replenish stocks, or the nominal value of the savings. Also, the number of customers may vary, thus hard taxation risks bankrupting the vendors responsible for food distribution! A balanced taxation will require having the tax-collector always present at each vendor. Also, the tax-collector will have no way of knowing how much a not stationary vendor, like a shoemaker serving multiple customers have earned, or the whereabouts of the shoemaker for that matter!

One way to keep some control of the money is to establishing other in-game monetary relations and dependencies (properties, trade rights etc.). These

$V * M$	=	$P * Y$
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Table 4: The Theory of Quantity



are really just other means of organising a tax system however, all with their merits and drawbacks. In-game guilds may fix prices, kP , in a way that does not feel unnatural to the players. At the same time, players may have as part of their personal plot to put aside money for their guild. This will increase savings, reducing the stock of money, without removing them from the game all together, thus reduce the velocity of money. Even the use of all these tools will probably not be able to make up for the effect of V and M on P and Y . A fixed P will sooner or later lead to a rising demand for Y .

However, the increase in V can be dampened by the vendors must pay for the raw material. This will draw money out of the game (M will diminish). The aim is making the decrease in the amount of money in circulation balance prices so that they remain constant. For this, the prices of the raw material need to balance the increase in money circulation speed (V), taking away the vendors ability to make a profit. However, an action like this requires a decrease in M , exactly equal to an increase in V – and there is no way any organiser could perform this calculation, since we can not foretell the different players' urge to save.

A tax collector, and payment for raw material may effectively counter the variations in V and thereby P . However, payment for raw materials means less income, and thus less tax for the upper class. In the long run, this may lead to a collapse in the economy. With diminishing stock of money in-game, the balance of the equation may shift with deflation as a result.

Countering increase of M

An increase in the stock of money in a large game economy typically happens as organisers refund economically important roles that have run out of money, or by the finding of treasure. Whether the increase in M is due to lucky players or nobility in an economic pinch, an increase in M will mean an increase in consumption. As mentioned earlier a marginal propensity to save will take the edge off the problem, but as we have seen, this is not realistically achievable in most larps.

Once again we see that vendors having to pay for raw materials may counter the effect of an increase in V relative to P . Again, this will lower available amount of money (M), and lower the income of the upper class. Some of the money should therefore be returned to the upper class as “land income” (historically, the main basis for the nobility's income in the feudal system).



Thus, the organisers may regulate M to counter an increased V , but only within the bonds of the nobility's need for income. In short, paying for raw materials may become a very finely tuned, consumption based taxation.

It should be noted that payment for raw material is a double edged sword. Combined with a zealous tax collector, the result of payment for raw material could mean the bankruptcy of the vendor. On the other hand, an inept tax-collector will result in a very wealthy merchant with a large income and equally large consumption – thus the goal of reducing V is not achieved since the vendors consumption will increase equal to the turnover in his store minus the payment of raw materials.

If there were no tax-collectors, all the money would eventually end up with the vendors (or leak out of the system as payment for raw material). This would quickly dethrone the nobility, making the vendors the new effective diegetic rulers. Making vendors pay for raw materials, is a way of bleeding the system of money, and lowering the vendors profit. A theoretical solution would be for the organisers on a non-diegetic role to ensure that vendors don't end up with more profit than their starting capital. This approach would ensure a fairly stable velocity of money, and allow the three classes to continue their initial consumption. However, mixing in non-diegetic economical means is not desirable in the traditional large game setting in Denmark, and it would take away the vendor players' incitement for doing trade. We might also expect a certain form of "cheating", as the vendors too get the money to buy sustenance from their business. A mix of diegetic and non-diegetic dealings with the tax-collector may potentially get very ugly.

Tying game economy to real life economy

A way to address the problem of inflation is to tie the in-game monetary system to the real life economic system, and set an exchange rate for the in-game money tied to your country's currency. This is the same strategy used by small countries to combat extreme inflation, who usually tie their currencies to US Dollar. While this solves the problem of inflation immediately, it does make some large aspects very problematic. In-game theft will become real life theft; extremely rich roles will have to spend extraordinary amounts of real money; etc. A mixed tied and untied economy may be a somewhat less troublesome solution. In this system, one essentially has a double currency system, where one unit of money is real, the other not. One may for instance let low value "brass coins" be Danish 10 krone coins, while the high value silver coins (that features in all major transactions) are game money. This



system has been used in a few games like the Norwegian Cowboy larp *Wanted* with success (Bøckman, pers kom.), though it too limits the in-game economical possibilities in the game.

Let us leave the velocity and the stock of money, and instead have a look at the possibility to influence the other half of the equation, the level of prices and the amount of merchandise.

Fixed prices

The organisers may fix prices as part of the rule system, just as they may fix combat stats or rules for magic. This non-diegetic setting of prices may ruin the vendor-players' game. However, there are diegetic means of assuring the same effect, through guilds and guild-fixed prices in a fantasy or medieval larp.

The central point of non-diegetically fixed prices is that the organisers attempt to fix a constant P . This will immediately solve the problems with V & M 's effect P . However, this solution will open another can of worms. If V & M can not be balanced by a variation in P , it will make up for it by altering the amount of merchandise, Y . If the middle class increases their available capital (which we have seen will happen quite quickly) and the prices remain constant, they will demand an amount of goods that simply is not there. Remembering the example of steak and wine – the middle class will begin to demand the quite exquisite goods, intended to be available only to the nobility, and thus only bought in small stock by the organisers.

Fixed prices will diminish the vendors' gains, giving them less impetus to make and distribute goods. This may at its worst end up with empty shelves and long queues, similar to conditions in countries with defunct, central planned economy. The fixed price system was attempted on *Trenne Byar*, with the predictable result that food distribution became ineffective, and the players went hungry despite raw food material being available (Sandberg, pers kom).

Increasing amount of merchandise

One solution close at hand is to increase the amount of available goods. On day one, Y equals n units of merchandise. The number Y will rise until the last day, so that n equals Y multiplied with the effect of V & M . However, calculating V and M is impossible, so balancing inflation of prices with Y is



at best guesswork. Pumping a surplus of food and drink into the economy may will in most cases lead to the players eating more or even vast stores of spoiled food not eaten by the players at the end of the game.

While this may solve the in-game problems effectively, the solution is not desirable from an organising point of view. Food is usually the largest expense on the organiser’s budget in Danish larps, and this strategy will make it even larger. Also, the experience of Trenne Byar, where the organisers had calculated a surplus of vegetables of about 100 kg, shows that a surplus of merchandise will not automatically solve the problem.

Conclusion

It should be obvious to the reader that the economy of large games is almost as complex as real life economy. It is this that makes the in-game economical system so interesting. To fully solve the problems of in-game economy will require total control over all actors in the system or unlimited information of all transactions in the game, any attempt at putting forward a “perfect solution” will be futile. Instead, this analysis will give advice on how to best meet the challenges posed by the Theory of Quantity.

$P*Y$	=	$V*M$
V increases		Taxation and payment for raw material.
M increases		Marginal savings organised through guilds
P fixed		Through in-game guilds or tying to real-life economy
Y increase with time		By increasing food delivery.

The starting point is the double problem of an increase of both V and M during a large game. To counter the effects on P and Y, I suggest taxation and payment for raw materials. The later will work for pulling money out of the game, lowering M. Taxation will limit the useable income, thus lowering consumption and V.

Lack of merchandise is here considered less damaging to the game than inflation. While short supply won’t stop specific group from getting food (except perhaps those who lack the patience to stand in a queue), inflation



will only allow the upper classes access to goods and groceries. As the aim of this study is to counter malcontent in the players of large games, inflation is the main enemy, as it leads to actual discomfort and envy.

It has come to my attention that some organisers in Denmark as well as in Scandinavia have considered to organise very large projects – such as the pan-Nordic “Dragonbane”. On a more local scale, some Danish larp societies have mentioned the possibility of having different cities with different currencies. Apart from the real problem of running a stable economy including food for around 1000 players, the problem of exchange rates must be considered. Between various currencies, real exchange rates may deviate enormously from the expected or ‘natural’ exchange rate, creating substantial problems in supply and demand for groceries. One worst case scenario would be one currency being able to purchase almost all the goods in the game, while others would be unable to trade with a profit.

The main problem of economy is that it is treated as a scenographic element, not as an important, working part of the game. A lot of the in-game economical problems could be solved if the economy is given the same attention as plots. Seeing how important economy is, the lack of attention to it is surprising. With the experience from medium sized games, I would recommend someone with a degree in economics parting company with the organisers of such a large larp. If not, we might risk turning a 1000 persons’ game into a 1000 persons’ experiment in catastrophic economic management.

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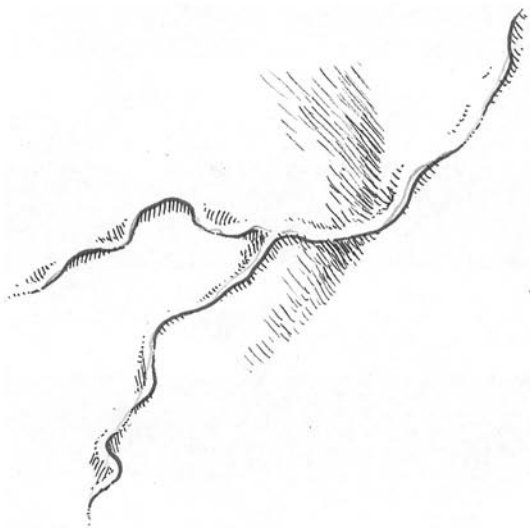
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The Process Model of Role-Playing

Abstract

This paper presents the Process Model of Role-Playing. The model provides concepts to describe and analyze role-playing sessions, to describe role-playing preferences, as well as to plan and convey visions of future role-playing sessions and campaigns. The core idea of the model is to look at role-playing as a set of processes, distinct aspects of the act of role-playing that go on over a period of time. On top of this, a model is built that identifies the various processes, as well as the end results of role-playing, the individual methods used, and the interactions of all these components. Index terms: roleplaying, roleplaying styles, models of roleplaying, roleplaying analysis

About the author

Eetu Mäkelä is a 26-year old student of Computer Sciences at the University of Helsinki with a side interest in Sociology. He is currently employed as a project leader in the Semantic Computing Research Group at the Helsinki Institute for Information Technology. Eetu has been roleplaying since the 80's and larping since 1996. He has organized about 40 small scale larps and gamemastered numerous tabletop campaigns. Recently, he has been leading a group in exploring innovative tabletop gaming systems and methods to better understand and push the limits of what roleplaying can be.

1 Introduction

The Process Model of role-playing is a set of concepts and tools to describe, analyze and discuss the act of role-playing. The specific design goals of the model were as follows:

1. to identify distinct elements and components inside the act of role-playing and create a vocabulary of such concepts, and
2. to describe how these components interact to make or break a game.

The model can be used for the following:

1. to describe and analyze singular or typical gaming sessions from the viewpoint of an individual or the whole group,



2. to plan and communicate visions of future sessions and campaigns, and
3. to describe play preferences of an individual or the whole group. This article is divided into two parts, plus appendices. The first part gives a full understanding of the base model, introducing the main descriptive framework of the model. It contains the core of the article, and it is intended that after reading it, one can apply the model in all its uses.

The second part of the article advances on the first, introducing normative restrictions to the model in the interest of rigidness and the creation of a common vocabulary. This is attempted by categorizing the instances of the various model component types as exhaustively as possible. With the vocabulary at hand, further analysis of the interactions of the various components is undertaken. The second part closes with a discussion of weaknesses and ambiguities in the model and other areas of future work.

Appendix A gathers the terms used in the model in a glossary. In appendix B, the model is put to the test of describing different gaming cultures around the world. Finally, in appendix C, the model is compared to other models of role-playing, primarily focusing on how the concepts of the model relate to the concepts of the other models compared.

The terms used for the concepts of the model have been selected to be as fitting as possible. Some of the terms selected are however already being used with varying meanings in the general role-playing community. The reader is advised to see the definitions given here as normative with regards to the model, and read no more into the terms in relation to the model than is given in the term descriptions.

Part 1: The Descriptive Framework of the Process Model and Applications

In this part, first a general outline of how role-playing is perceived through the model is given. A general description of the descriptive framework of the model follows, after which the individual components of the model are explained. In chapter 3, the model is put to use, first in analyzing and planning sessions, then in describing preferences and plans.

2 The Descriptive Framework of the Process Model

2.1 The Definition of Role-Playing as Seen From the Viewpoint of the Process Model

To understand the basis of the Process Model, it is useful to offer a description of how the act of role-playing looks from the viewpoint of the



model. To accomplish this, the act of role-playing must first be defined, along with a few formalizations. For the purpose of the model, role-playing is defined as any act in which an imaginary reality is concurrently created, added to and observed, in such a manner that the two acts feed each other. This definition of role-playing is left intentionally as open as possible, including for example improvisational theater, children's play, collaborative storytelling and imagining alone. It is not all-inclusive, however. The requirement that the creation and observation feed into each other rules out for example computer role-playing games (when they are not used as an aide in imagining) and listening to or reading a story (though not improvising one).

The facts, expectations and hopes about the imagined reality being explored, as experienced by an individual, define a conceptual space referred to as the Imagined Space. When role-playing in a group, the Imagined Spaces of the individual participants overlap to create a Shared Imagined Space (SIS) with regards to which the majority of interaction pertaining to the game is enacted.

The environment in which this interaction is enacted is the Shared Space of Imagining (SSoI), a concept that includes the Shared Imagined Space, but also all the other facts, expectations and intentions concerning the act of role-playing, like unspoken or spoken social contracts pertaining to how the game is played.

The term Shared Imagined Space originates from discussions at the Forge¹

In some texts, particularly in the Nordic tradition of role-playing theory, the term Diegesis is used, but there is debate on if it should be defined the same as Imagined Space (Montola, 2003) or the same as Shared Imagined Space (Hakkarainen & Stenros, 2003). The term definitions given here are an attempt to better distinguish the concepts from each other.

A description of how the model sees the actual act of role-playing can now be given. The Process Model of Role-Playing sees role-playing first and foremost as a process, something that happens and goes on in a time-frame. Inside this process, multiple concurrent but distinct subprocesses can

¹ The concept of an individual's own Imagined Space is not used there however, and neither is the concept of a Shared Space of Imagining, though a highly similar term in Forge-speak is the Social Contract. For the current definitions of these terms, see the Forge Provisional Glossary (Edwards, 2004).



be seen. Each of these subprocesses revolves around a certain element, creating and consuming it, be it player competition or the exploration of a theme. The qualities manifested in a role-playing session by these various processes are hopefully enjoyable, benefiting the participants in some way. If they do not, they can be considered losses.

The needs of the various processes in terms of techniques and decision-making considerations vary, sometimes coinciding, sometimes being at odds with each other. Processes benefit from methods and other processes that support them, leading to a more optimal gain of benefit, while conflicting processes and methods lead to the poor running of the affected processes, diminishing the benefits gained thereof. The driving idea behind the research presented here is that by understanding and intelligently selecting the processes and methods used, and controlling the circumstances that affect them, wanted benefits can be maximized and unwanted losses minimized.

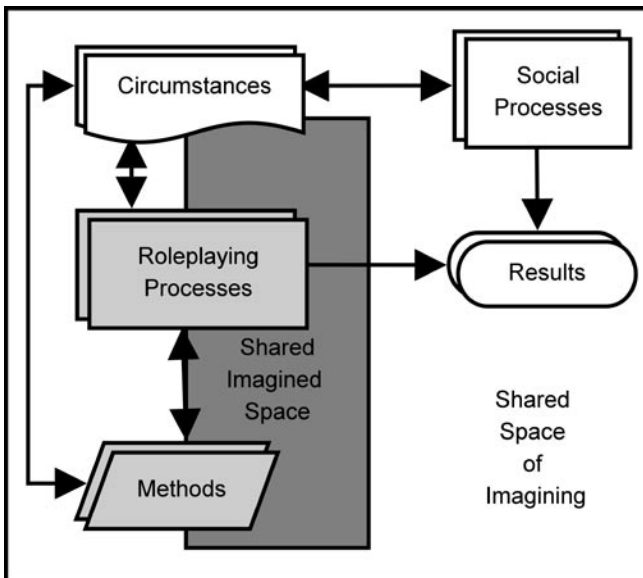


Figure 1: A flowchart showing the relationships of the components of the model

2.2 Overview of the component types recognized in the Process Model of Role-Playing

The Process Model of role-playing forms around four main types of components and their interactions. The main component types are



Circumstances, Methods, Processes and Results. The relationships of these component types are visualized in figure 1. A Result is what comes out of the role-playing session, what the people engaging in role-playing get out of it. Wanted Results are called Benefits, while unwanted Results are termed Losses.

Feeding to the Results are a number of Processes, both Social and Role-Playing. Processes describe what actually happens inside a role-playing session. The Role-Playing Processes describe what qualities are being created or explored in the role-playing session and how, while the Social Processes are general forms of social contact that happen to coincide with role-playing, but are not actually tied to it. Both types of Processes describe what the means that lead to the different Results are.

While the Processes are the means to the Results, they are in turn constrained and guided by Circumstances and Methods. Circumstances are any states of affairs that affect how the role-playing group enacts the various processes. Methods on the other hand are the agreed-upon means and rules by which the actions pertaining to the role-playing session are undertaken. The influence is not one-way however. The Processes can affect the Circumstances, while the Methods actually used are usually chosen from an available set depending on the needs of the Processes. Finally, an intentional alteration of Circumstances is a Method, while the choice of Methods can be limited by the prevalent Circumstances.

In the following, the four component types are discussed in more detail, in turn describing the Results, Processes, Circumstances and Methods.

2.3 Results

The term Result in the Process Model describes the final wanted or unwanted outcomes of the interaction of the various Role-Playing Processes. They are further subdivided into Benefits and Losses.

Benefits describe the reasons we role-play, what we gain from participating in the role-playing process. Sample Benefits are for example positive emotional experiences arising from the game, gaining new knowledge from the material explored in the game or getting to know your co-players better through playing with them.

Losses, on the other hand, are harmful Results, created when a role-



playing session goes awry. They can be for example boredom arising from an unsuccessful session, the worsening of social relations or unpleasant emotions arising from role-playing.

A suggested normative categorization and further examples of Results are given in chapter 4.1.

2.4 Processes

The Processes are the core of the model. They describe what actually happens in a role-playing session by identifying various distinct aspects of the role-playing process that are responsible for producing the results of play.

The characteristics of Processes are as follows

- A Process produces some measurable quality in a role-playing session
- The amount such a quality is present or is realized depends on how play is conducted, ie. is affected by how decisions are made by the players or by how the players choose to experience the Shared Imagined Space. In most cases, it is affected by both.
- The qualities produced can be mapped to the various Results.
- The Processes are distinct entities in and of themselves. If a role-playing session is permeated by a single Process, it can even be said that realizing that process be the primary process, role-playing merely being the means.

The Processes are further subdivided into Role-Playing Processes and Social Processes. The Social Processes are the general social interactions that could as easily coexist with other activities, and are therefore not given much thought here. Sample role-playing processes are for example exploring the personality of a character, competing among the players using the experience system and number of monsters killed as a measure of competence or exploring a moral dilemma by playing the various sides of it. A suggested normative categorization and further examples of Processes are given in chapter 4.2.

2.5 Methods

While Processes tell us what happens in a role-playing session, Methods tell us how it happens. They are any singular techniques, rules or contracts that are used or referred to in connection with the game. The relationship



between Methods and Processes is twofold. Firstly, Methods are chosen from those available in accordance with the needs of the various Processes. Secondly and conversely, the Methods used guide and constrain the game so as to promote and enable certain Processes. The amount of methods is nearly infinite and so no definite listing is possible. Only the most important method choice in role-playing is discussed below, but some others are given as examples in chapter 5.

2.5.1 Authority over the Shared Imaginary Space

The single most important choices shaping a role-playing session are the Methods used to distribute authority over the Shared Imagined Space. Usually this authority is subdivided into authority over the inner world of player characters and their actions, authority over the actions of the world and finally authority over resolution of events.

In traditional tabletop role-playing games, usually the players have absolute control over their characters inner world and their choices of actions, while the gamemaster has similar control over all other aspects of the imaginary reality. Authority over the effects and resolution of stated actions seems often overtly to reside in the rules system, likened to the laws of physics of the imaginary world, but usually actually resides with the gamemaster with his godlike ability to ignore or bend the rules when he wants.

In games of co-operative storytelling without a gamemaster, the final authority over all matters usually rests within the game system, tasked with resolving any conflicts that arise between the storytellers. Usually the drive for social consensus is given a chance before resorting to the system, or is actually facilitated by the system.

In live-action role-playing, particularly of the Nordic tradition, authority is mostly trusted to the likening of the actual laws of nature to the laws of nature of the Shared Imagined Space and the strong drive for silent social consensus, with authority resting on specific rules for discrepancies like injury, death and technology.

2.6 Circumstances

Circumstances are any parameters that affect the game. They differ from Methods in that Methods are chosen and agreed-upon means of interacting with the SIS, while Circumstances exists in and of themselves. The number of Circumstances affecting every event is nearly infinite, and thus as in the



The Process Model of Role-Playing

case of Methods, no definitive list can be given. Example Circumstances are for example the mood of the players, the amount of outside disturbance in the place where the game is played and the social relationships between the players. An important Circumstance that exists in almost all games is the gaming history, particularly the facts already established pertaining to the SIS.

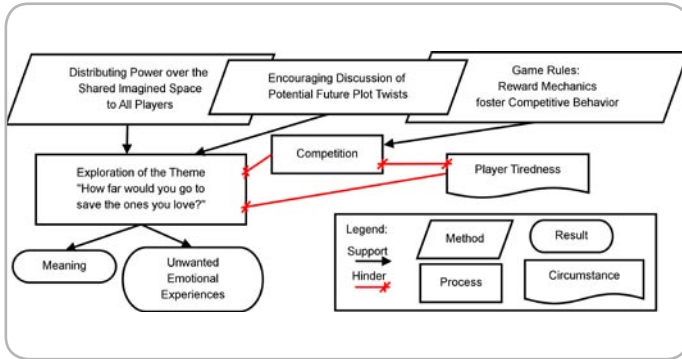


Figure 2: A flowchart showing the support/hinder relationships of the components of the model

Circumstances can share some space with Methods however, where a Method is used to change a Circumstance. So, while the number of players should most often be considered a Circumstance, changing the number

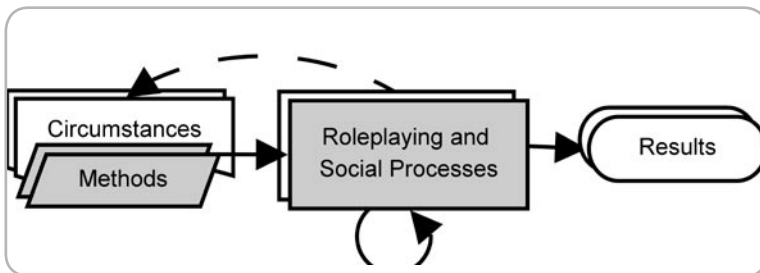


Figure 3: A flowchart showing the support/hinder relations of components of a sample session

of players dynamically in response to some in-game situation could be considered a Method.



3 Using the Process Model

3.1 Using the Process Model for Analyzing and Planning Sessions

The main use of the process model is in analyzing how the different components support or hinder each other. For this purpose, because the components of the model are distinct and complete entities in themselves, the interactions between them can be modeled as a simple support/hinder dichotomy.

Also, in this context, the choosing of Methods according to Process requirements as well as the restrictions Circumstances place on the available Methods lose significance. The resulting simplified flow is visualized in figure 2. Methods and Circumstances support or hinder Processes, while Processes affect each other and the realization of Results. Of the two remaining feedback loops, the one directly between two Processes is the more important, and thankfully usually both easy to recognize and analyze. The more complex interaction, in which a Process affects another indirectly through affecting Circumstances has fortunately proved to be infrequent and/or inconsequential, and can thus often be ignored.

A flowchart depicting the support/hinder relations of components of two sample sessions can be seen in figure 3.

In the example, Meaning, a positive emotional connect, has been generated through the Exploration of a Theme. There was also some Competition among the players, but no-one actually enjoyed that enough to gain any benefit from it. In contrast, the existence of Competition was seen to pollute the Exploration of Theme with incompatible priorities.

In the example, the Method of Distributing Power over the Shared Imaginary Space to All Players and the Method of Encouraging Discussion of Potential Future Plot Twists was seen to help in Exploration of the Theme, while certain aspects of the rules were seen to be the forces fostering the air of Competition among the players. The Circumstance of Player Tiredness was seen to hinder all the Processes - but conversely, by keeping the players on their toes and thus reducing Player Tiredness, the Process of Competition actually ended up also indirectly benefiting the Exploration of Theme.

This same simple formalization of interactions can also be used to plan future sessions, trying to predict what the interactions of the various components will be and selecting a blend that supports the most important components



best. Perfect support between the Processes is extremely hard to obtain and perhaps not even advantageous — humans are extremely good at adapting, and cross-Process interference can be easily forgiven if the Processes still provide a good enough yield of Benefits.

3.2 Using the Process Model for Stating Preferences and Describing future Sessions or Campaigns

When using the concepts of the Process Model for stating play preferences or describing visions of future sessions or campaigns, one should always start with the Benefits desired. After that, if necessary, other layers of components can be added on, if desired.

The simplest form of stating a preference or vision is only stating the Benefits a person is interested in. For example: "I'm interested in gaining Meaning and Entertainment from role-playing", or "I'm thinking my next campaign will be pure Meaning".

To this, Process restrictions can be added: "I'm interested in gaining Meaning and Entertainment from role-playing, and want to do it by Immersion and/or Exploring the Social Surroundings of My Character" or "I'm thinking my next campaign will be pure Meaning, through the Exploration of Moral Social Dilemmas".

Finally, if necessary, Method restrictions can be added: "I'm interested in gaining Meaning and Entertainment from role-playing, and want to do it by Immersion and/or Exploring the Social Surroundings of My Character by Pure in-SIS Causality Simulation" or "I'm thinking my next campaign will be pure Meaning, through the Exploration of Moral Social Dilemmas, with Much Scene Framing Power Given to the Players".

In this way, the preferences stated never lose sight of what actually is important. all role-playing that is enjoyable must lead to a Benefit, and that Benefit must come through a Process. A plain statement like "I want to play a game with Pure in-SIS Causality Simulation" guarantees an enjoyable game only in the rare circumstance that actually all Processes and Benefits are equally palatable to the one giving the statement.

Part 2: Normative Categorizations of the Components and Analysis

In this second part, the two component types of Results and Processes are given suggested normative categorizations. The reason for creating



such categorizations is simple: with a common vocabulary exhaustively partitioning the concept space, speech between different users of the model is made much easier. This also gives us clear-cut targets for interaction analysis between the components. This fact is taken advantage of in chapter 5.

4 Normative Categorizations of the Components

4.1 Results

The categorization of Results in the normative version of the Process Model is based on identifying general types of enjoyment and discomfort. The Benefits currently recognized in it are as follows:

Entertainment Enjoyment of fun, being together and passing the time.
Learning Gaining new knowledge or understanding, affirming or questioning old knowledge, spiritual growth and reflection.

Social Benefits Positive changes in the social sphere arising from role-playing, for example the strengthening of social bonds, or getting to know the other players better.

Meaning Enjoyment of an emotional experience, resonance with established thought constructs

Aesthetic Appreciation Artistic appreciation, enjoyment of beauty and form.

The Losses mirror the Benefits, being:

Boredom Frustration caused by lack of enjoyment. Usually caused by a failure to gain any Benefits.

False Knowledge Misinformation, incorrect or misleading understanding.

Social Dysfunction Negative effects on the social sphere, the worsening of relations.

Unwanted Emotional Experiences Unwanted negative emotions, overly intensive experiences.

Aesthetic Failure Failure of form, frustration caused by unengaging aesthetic aspirations.

In the following, the various Benefits and Losses are explained further:

4.1.1 Entertainment

The most common Benefit gained from role-playing is Entertainment. Being



together with friends, having a good time, twisting the game into something funny. These all belong under the heading of Entertainment. Entertainment is the lighter side of role-playing, the passing the time aspect of it.

4.1.2 Learning

The Benefit of Learning applies equally well to the study of ancient Greece through a role-playing game as it does to learning how to deal with emotional situations through the game, encompassing equally the acquisition of factual knowledge as well as experience, self-knowledge and understanding. Sometimes the understanding gained through gaming can be faulty however, leading to the Loss of False Knowledge.

4.1.3 Social Benefits

The Results of play are Social Benefits when the play experience changes something in the social space of the participants for the better. This can be for example by transference of inter-character social cohesion to the actual participants, or when playing the game tells the participants more about each other. Social Dysfunction appears when the Role-Playing Processes produce negative social results like distrust or hatred.

4.1.4 Meaning

Meaning is defined as an emotional connect with the game content, be it fear, suspense or a remembrance of past love, as long as it is wanted. The flip-side of Meaning are Unpleasant, Unwanted Emotional Experiences. Meaning is usually approached via empathy or sympathy for, or immersion with the characters, but can also be obtained through any other means, for example when suspense is being created by competition.

4.1.5 Aesthetic Appreciation

Aesthetic Appreciation is the enjoyment of form and beauty in itself, the satisfaction one gets from a perfectly composited scene in the game or from the simple joy of applying a well-designed rule system. Aesthetic Failure is the result when these aspirations fail, when a rule mechanic leads to frustration or when the person framing the scene just fails miserably in conveying anything to the other participants.

4.2 Processes

The major normative Role-Playing Processes discerned are first listed here, then explained below:



Competition The pursuit of victory

Tension Maintenance and enjoyment of tension

Challenge The besting of challenge and overcoming adversity

Exploration of an Entity of the Shared Imagined Space Exploring the many-fold interactions a single entity has with others.

Exploration of a Concept through the Shared Imagined Space Exploring a concept through its expressions in the Shared Imagined Space, and bringing forth such expressions to be explored.

Immersion Equating the self with an entity of the Shared Imagined Space, feeling and acting as that entity.

4.2.1 Competition

Competition is the name given for the pursuit of victory in some form, in the classical sports race sense of the word, where there can be only one who is fastest. It is the aspiration to be the first, the best, the highest in whatever actual measure used. The existence of this measure is key.

Thus, also in the context of a role-playing game, this Process requires some form of measuring competence, be it experience points, character levels or simply giving implicit social appreciation to whoever solves a puzzle first. An important element in Competition is Tactics. Tactics is the subprocess of both optimizing resources for maximum potential and also the actual act of pondering situational choices in relation to their expected benefits. A pure implementation of a game supporting Competition, also from the gamemasters point of view can be found in Rune (Laws, 2001), by Robin D. Laws.

4.2.2 Tension

While it may look like most traditional tabletop games and role-playing games with a strong element of such in them revolve around Competition, in truth most games are designed and most people seem to play in a way which keeps Tension as high as possible. This is the style of play where, in order to keep the winner uncertain for as long as possible, people give slack to those who have fallen behind and use other means to keep the playing field relatively equal.

The enjoyment gained from Tension actually comes from two sources. In addition to the actual enjoyment of the sensation of tension, Tension can also be seen as a chained series of miniature Competitions. As such, enjoyment



is also gained from the small moments when one notices that one is ahead and gives slack, thereby acknowledging a small victory for himself. Like Competition, Tension requires at least some form of measuring competence, and also employs a great deal of Tactics. Good examples of games designed to support this style of play are D&D and its ilk.

4.2.3 Challenge

Challenge, the overcoming of adversity and the besting of challenges, is a Process closely associated with Tension. In contrast to Tension, however, the enjoyment gained from Challenge does not come from besting other players. It is enough to simply overcome the challenges put before you. This is evident for example in many forms of live-action role-playing, where the pursuit of character goals is seen as important, even though there is usually very little comparison going on between players.

The challenges put before players in the Process of Challenge need to be fair, ie. not so easy as to not really be challenging at all and not so hard as to halt progress.

In role-playing games, this balancing or "fair challenge" inherent in all of Competition, Tension and Challenge is most often seen as the responsibility of the gamemaster, who in traditional role-playing games is given way too much power to actually Compete with the players. Thus, mostly, the gaming systems suitable for Challenge are the same as for Tension.

4.2.4 Exploration of an Entity of the Shared Imagined Space

Exploration of an Entity of the Shared Imagined Space is a process of observation. It means taking an entity, and exploring the interactions of that entity with its surroundings. The entity need not be a character, it can be a medieval village or the love of two individuals. What is important is that it is a distinct, whole entity and that its interaction with other elements is the focus of the exploration. Usually this means that that entity is also discussed as an indivisible whole, so that for example when studying how a medieval village deals with the outside influences of church and state, or the rise of internal tensions, the individual villagers comprising the village are in at best a secondary role, the village being thought of as an active entity itself.

4.2.5 Exploration of a Concept through the Shared Imagined Space

The flip-side of the Exploration of an Entity is the Exploration of a Concept through the Shared Imagined Space. The two form differ in focus. In the Exploration of a Concept, the focus is on a concept, which is then explored



possibly through numerous expressions in the Shared Imagined Space. Again, the subject of the exploration can vary wildly, from exploring the sides of a moral dilemma through investigating the concept of psionic abilities to the study of social dynamics of clan life. These two last explorative processes are interesting also in that in them, the two sides of interacting with the Shared Imagined Space are more clearly separate. After the subject matter is injected into the Shared Imagined Space, it must somehow be experienced. Most often this takes the form of Empathy, an emotional connection with an element of the SIS. This experiencing the SIS is actually the part of exploration that brings on the Results - but it cannot stand on its own as a process, as it always needs that some subject matter be brought in to the SIS to observe. Only in this combination is it whole.

4.2.6 Immersion

Immersion is the process of becoming another entity, thinking, feeling and acting as that entity. It is a process going beyond mere Empathy, the general method of relating to and experiencing the Shared Imagined Space. To Immerse is to be, to feel inside. It has few counterparts in other medias, method acting perhaps coming close, while for example feeling with the characters in a book or a film is sympathy, feeling from the outside. While Immersion is generally possible with only one target, empathy can be felt for other players characters as well as for other entities in the SIS.

A fitting description and discussion of Immersion was given recently by Mike Pohjola, who defined it is as:

Immersion is the player assuming the identity of the character by pretending to believe her identity only consists of the diegetic [Imagined Space] roles (Pohjola, 2004)

The article by Pohjola also contains a chapter on Inter-Immersion, describing what would in terms of the Process Model be multiple Processes of Immersion supporting each other, with some references also to supporting Methods.

5 Analysis of Typical Component Interactions in the Model

While it is useful to remember that none of the support/hinder relationships between the components of the model discussed in chapter 3.1 are absolute, there are many common patterns that usually hold. This section tries to analyze some of them, starting with the Processes of the normative version of the model and then moving on to some common and sample Methods.



5.0.1 Process: Competition

Usually, Competition co-exists poorly with the other Processes. The grounds for decision-making required in Competition are very rarely in sync with the decision-making grounds of other Processes. With Tension, Competition can coexist for as long as other factors like the game rules can keep Tension alive. For as long as that is the case, the decision-making priorities between the two are the same. It is only when balance is broken that problems arise, but then they may be as severe as with all the other Processes. With respect to Challenge, the situation is much the same.

5.0.2 Process: Tension

Tension shares much of the same interactions as Competition. It can rarely truly coexist with most of the other Processes. But because the imperative to do well is not as strong as in Competition, it may be easier to blend with the others. For example, in a murder mystery game, Tension (and even Competition) could exist alongside the Exploration of detective work or even Immersion, with the various characters racing to find the murderer first. Tension and Challenge are mutually compatible.

5.0.3 Process: Challenge

Challenge, existing primarily on an individual level, rarely affects the running of other processes. Tension and Competition are especially congruent. Immersion however, can be adversely affected, if challenge is actively sought from the one Immersing. To an extent, the same goes for the Exploration of an Entity and the Exploration of a Concept, if the target of Exploration is something that does not pose a challenge.

5.0.4 Process: Immersion

Immersion is a companion of the Exploration of an Entity. The two can share the exact space for a long time, so that the other players get Exploration and the one Immersing into the entity gets Immersion.

Those Competing will not be bothered by Immersionists much — except if they perceive a total lack of challenge, but anyone valuing Tension present may be spoiled by having to keep dragging the Immersionists along to keep Tension going. Challenge is also usually unaffected, as long as the one Immersing does not inadvertently ruin the challenge.

5.0.5 Process: Exploration of an Entity of the SIS

As previously stated, Exploration of an Entity goes well with Immersion, if



the entity being explored is the same that the immersionists are trying to immerse into. But if true Immersion is attained, at least for that player, it completely replaces the Exploration. As for the other processes, they are not very much constrained by the Exploration of an Entity, unless they touch on that Entity directly and profusely.

5.0.6 Process: Exploration of a Concept through the SIS

Exploration of a Concept doesn't often do really well with the Exploration of an Entity. They approach exploration from too different vantage points, with the Explorers of a Concept wanting to inject that concept into all interactions, while the Explorers of an Entity would just like to see that entity interact with a multitude of different elements. With the other Processes, the situation is similar.

5.0.7 Method: Consequence Rules

Consequence Rules are a rule Method that describes the consequences of a characters actions in relation to a meter. Examples of such mechanics are the humanity mechanic in Sorcerer(Edwards, 2001b) and all the attributes of characters in My Life With Master(Czege, 2003).

These methods are directly built for a subclass of the Exploration of a Concept, the exploration of the consequences of ones actions.

In relation to the other processes, these rules are usually reasonably isolated. However, Immersion can suffer from any forced behavior resulting from the Consequence Rules.

5.0.8 Methods: Use of Only In-Character Knowledge, In-SIS Causality and Realism

Use of Only IC Knowledge, In-SIS Causality and Realism are all Methods drawing a border between the Shared Imagined Space and the Shared Space of Imagining. They all deal with insulating the SIS from outside influences to various degrees and in various ways.

The Method of using only In-Character Knowledge versus also including Out-of-Character Knowledge does this by limiting the bases of decisions. This Method certainly supports the Process of Immersion.

The requirement for In-SIS Causality on the other hand forces adherence to an In-SIS simulation of event causes and effects. This supports those Processes that benefit from an ability to conclusively and believably rationalize events from a purely in-SIS perspective. Immersion again certainly qualifies,



but also some forms of Exploration of an Entity would probably benefit.

Finally, Realism, or perhaps better termed believability with respect to genre conventions, is a looser restriction, only requiring that any change to the SIS can be rationalized as believable after the fact. Usually, this is sufficient for maintaining Empathy in Exploration, but the mere act of applying outside rationale to decisions can be enough to break Immersion.

The Processes of Competition and Tension both suffer from all these Methods.

6 Discussion and Future Work

The concept of a Process, while intuitively very simple, is actually quite complex, with many adjoining concepts. Thus, while the authors of this paper are certain that the central concept of a Process is a worthy one, there may be other tied concepts, sub-concepts and concept relations still hidden beneath the conglomerate Process. The major normative Processes are also perhaps not as intuitive as possible. They seem to partition the types of extant role-playing processes quite well, however. Still, the descriptive part of the model works just as well with more free-form components.

If one goes far enough, many of the normative Processes can be seen as the Exploration of a Concept through the SIS, for example Immersion being the Exploration of Immersion through role-playing, and so on. Further though is needed to clear the matter.

A big field for future work will be to further analyze the common interactions between the various Methods, Processes and Results — and in breaking those defaults by applying new, innovative methods.

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Jonathan Walton's post on the Forge that later grew into an article on rpg.net (Walton, 2004) about values in role-playing prompted us to re-evaluate and rephrase some of our normative Result categorizations.



Thanks must also go to all those whose discussions about role-playing theory we have listened to, both at the Nordic conventions and at the Forge, and all the role-playing theories that have come before. Special thanks to the people of the IRC channel #ropeteoria, with whom many an enlightening conversation has been had.

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Appendices

A Glossary of Terms used in the Process Model

A.1 Descriptive Framework

Imagined Space A conceptual space defined by the facts, expectations and hopes about the imagined reality explored, as perceived by an individual.

Shared Imagined Space The intersection of the Imagined Spaces of the participants of role-playing.

Shared Space of Imagining All the facts, contracts, expectations and intentions concerning the act of role-playing. Includes the SIS.

Result A final wanted or unwanted outcome of role-playing.

Benefit A wanted outcome of role-playing. A distinct form of enjoyment.

Loss An unwanted outcome of role-playing. A distinct form of discomfort.

Process A distinct operational part of play, that can be associated with a distinct, measurable quality.

Social Process A process operating in the sphere of general social interactions

Role-Playing Process A process particular to the act of role-playing, especially operating through the Shared Imagined Space.

Method A singular technique, rule or contract that is used or referred to in connection with the game. A constraint on or guide to how the game is played.

Circumstance A parameter that affects the functioning of the various Processes.

A.2 Normative Vocabulary

A.2.1 Benefits

Entertainment Enjoyment of fun, being together and passing the time.



Learning Gaining new knowledge or understanding, affirming or questioning old knowledge, spiritual growth and reflection.

Social Benefits Positive changes in the social sphere arising from role-playing, the strengthening of social bonds, getting to know the other players better.

Meaning Enjoyment of an emotional experience, resonance with established thought constructs

Aesthetic Appreciation Artistic appreciation, enjoyment of beauty and form.

A.2.2 Losses

Boredom Frustration caused by lack of enjoyment. Usually caused by a failure to gain any Benefits.

False Knowledge Misinformation, incorrect or misleading understanding.

Social Dysfunction Negative effects on the social sphere, the worsening of relations.

Unwanted Emotional Experiences Unwanted negative emotions, overly intensive experiences.

Aesthetic Failure Failure of form, frustration caused by unengaging aesthetic aspirations.

A.2.3 Processes

Competition The pursuit of victory

Tension Maintenance and enjoyment of tension

Challenge The besting of challenge and overcoming adversity

Exploration of an Entity of the Shared Imagined Space Exploring the many-fold interactions a single entity has with others.

Exploration of a Concept through the Shared Imagined Space Exploring a concept through its expressions in the Shared Imagined Space, and bringing forth such expressions to be explored.

Immersion Equating the self with an entity of the Shared Imagined Space, feeling and acting as that entity

A.2.4 Other

Empathy a form of experiencing the Shared Imagined Space. An emotional response to or resonance with something in the SIS.



B Descriptions of Various Role-Playing Subcultures Using the Process Model

In this chapter, an attempt is made at describing various schools of role-playing around the world using Process Model terminology. This is done primarily in an effort to demonstrate the expressiveness of the model, and its usefulness in formulating styles clearly and firmly. We recognize that such characterizations of gaming cultures both intimately familiar and distant is very likely to cause severe arguments about the rightness of the characterizations. Thus, we posit these descriptions as propositions to be developed, and for some leeway in the interest of proving the actual points.

B.1 The Nordic Live Role-Playing Community

Centered around yearly international conferences, the Nordic live role-playing community is also an active producer of theories concerning role-playing. While live action role-playing forms in the various countries do differ quite much, through such conference publications as *As Larp Grows Up* (Gade et al., 2003) and *Beyond Role and Play* (Montola & Stenros, 2004) and such larps as *Mellan Himmel och Hav* (Gerge, 2004, Wieslander, 2004), a very clear message is seen. Larp and role-playing are seen as a media like any other, and at its best, a media for art and/or questioning.

This, translated to the Process Model, means that the Nordic larp community puts a clear focus on Meaning as the sought-after Benefit of role-playing. The publications also speak of a willingness to try and experiment with a wide variety of methods and play styles in the pursuit of this goal, though there is a general wariness of introducing many actual resolution rule mechanics. This wariness in turn can be traced to a strong desire for maintaining believability, in the Process Model and probably also in the Nordic community seen itself as a Method for maintaining Immersion, a Process often seen as very desirable. In addition to the de facto base Process of Immersion, most highly acclaimed larps such as the already mentioned *Mellan Himmel och Hav* have also introduced the element of Exploring a Concept through the SIS into larping.

B.2 The Turku School of Larping

The Turku School of Larping (Pohjola, 2003b, Pohjola, 2003a) is a Finnish manifesto, nowadays mostly historic but still describing a distinct style of live action play. It also beautifully distills one facet of the more general Nordic larping mode. Art, ie. Meaning is up front stated to be the highest goal



sought after in role-playing. It is posited that the potential for this Meaning has been carefully crafted into the starting setting of a game by its writer, and the players task is to bring this Meaning to the fore and experience it as deeply as possible. It is then strongly and directly posited that the Process of Immersion be the single best means of experiencing Meaning, due to the strong and direct nature of the experiences gained in that state. Methods like Use of Only In-Character Knowledge and Strict Adherence to In-SIS Causality and Considerations are proscribed in turn as the means to support Immersion.

B.3 The Old School of Tabletop Role-Playing

The traditional Finnish way of playing tabletop role-playing games is based on the Benefit of Entertainment, with a sideline of Meaning. Actual play in turn usually consists of multiple simultaneously running processes, with individual players taking interest and operating according to only one of them. Some Methods are very entrenched. Use of Only In-Character Knowledge, In-SIS Causality and Realism are all standard, with final authority over the SIS resting firmly in the hands of the gamemaster. While these Methods are primarily Immersion and Entity Exploration supportive, one should not assume these Processes to dominate. While they may be more prevalent, the whole range of Processes is encountered, with for example Competition and Tension being supported by the prevalent Method of Character Balance.

B.4 The Vampire Live Action Gaming Community

The Vampire live action gaming community has never had the aversion for rules its Nordic counterpart triumphs in. The Method of Using Resolution Rules in these games, added to the socially adversarial nature of the setting, often leads to strong Processes of Competition, the means of choice for Entertainment. On the other hand, the basic premise of humanity inherent in the setting is clearly a Concept to be Explored, usually resulting in Meaning. The two Processes usually both exist in a given game, but the players who engage in each try to remain separate from each other as much as possible.

B.5 The Forge Narrativist Tabletop Community

The Forge's narrativist community is self-providing in the sense that they play many games designed for themselves, by themselves. Examples of such are Sorcerer(Edwards, 2001b), My Life with Master(Czege, 2003),



Dust Devils(Snyder, 2002) and Dogs in the Vineyard(Baker, 2004). In the Forge lingo, narrativism is defined as putting the characters in situations of choice whose consequences are meaningful to the player. This alludes to a strong desire for the Benefit of Meaning, but in actuality it seems that easy going Entertainment is at least as important.

Immersion is not usually a popular Process among the narrativists, and neither are Competition, Challenge or Tension. What is left are the Exploration of a Concept and the Exploration of an Entity. These are both utilized, but the choices always appear in the context of some Concept relevant and interesting to the players.

Methods used in the narrativist games are often wildly avant-garde, with a clear de-emphasis on In-SIS Causality and Use of Only In-Character Knowledge. In contrast, a Method known as Observing a Director Stance towards the SIS is often employed, and Authority over the SIS is often Distributed. While these Method choices are common, the Methods truly best supporting narrativism seem to be Consequence Rules, found in almost all the successful narrativist games

C Comparison of the Process Model with Other Models of Role-Playing

In this chapter, an attempt is made to compare the Process Model with the various other models of role-playing created before. The chapter is mostly intended for people familiar with the respective models, not as a full review of those models, so previous knowledge of the other models discussed is assumed. The focus of the comparison is on relating the models to each other by analyzing design purposes and use expectancies, and by mapping concepts between the models. Additionally, some thoughts are given on what the Process Model might have to give the other models. The models discussed here are the Threefold Model(Kim, 2003), the Three-Way Model(Bockman, 2003), GNS(Edwards, 2001a), the GENder Model(Jester, 2001), Glen Blacow's and Robin Laws' player type classification(Laws, 2002), The Big Model(Edwards, 2003), and Channel Theory(Hols, 2003a).

C.1 The Threefold Model and the Three-Way Model

The Threefold Model tries to describe gaming styles through goals. These are not the same as the sought after Results of the Process Model however, but correspond more with the Processes, the actual form of enjoyment gained from pursuing these goals not being given much thought. The Threefold Model describes three styles of play, Dramatism, Gamism and



Simulationism. The short definitions of these, taken from (Kim, 2003) are as follows:

dramatist is the style which values how well the in-game action creates a satisfying storyline. Different kinds of stories may be viewed as satisfying, depending on individual tastes, varying from fanciful pulp action to believable character drama. It is the end result of the story which is important.

With this definition, the Threefold is quite vague on what actually causes enjoyment for Dramatists, it only proscribes that that something be found in the Story. The mapping of Dramatism in the Threefold thus depends on what actually makes the story satisfying. Most likely it will be Exploration of a Concept or Exploration of an Entity.

gamist is the style which values setting up a fair challenge for the players (as opposed to the PCs). The challenges may be tactical combat, intellectual mysteries, politics, or anything else. The players will try to solve the problems they are presented with, and in turn the GM will make these challenges solvable if they act intelligently within the contract.

This definition of threefold Gamist can be seen to map to either or both of Tension and Challenge in the Process Model.

simulationist is the style which values resolving in-game events based solely on game-world considerations, without allowing any meta-game concerns to affect the decision. Thus, a fully simulationist GM will not fudge results to save PCs or to save her plot, or even change facts unknown to the players. Such a GM may use meta-game considerations to decide meta-game issues like who is playing which character, whether to play out a conversation word for word, and so forth, but she will resolve actual in-game events based on what would "really" happen.

Simulation, in the scope of the Process Model, is not really a Process, but a Method. The Process most likely involved in Threefold Simulationist play will be Exploration of an Entity of the SIS, but with the added methodological constraint of strict in-game cause-and-effect.



In the Three-Way Model(Bockman, 2003), Simulationism is replaced with Immersionism, defined as follows:

Immersionist is the style which values living the roles life, feeling what the role would feel. Immersionists insist on resolving in-game events based solely on game-world considerations. Thus, a fully immersionist player will not fudge rules to save its role's neck or the plot, or even change details of background story irrelevant in the setting to suite the play. An immersionist organizer will try to make the plots and setting such that they are believable to the players.

While this definition skirts the process of Immersion, it mixes it with other elements. The notions of realism and in-game causality are again Methods in the Process Model. The definition also does not make a clear difference between outside Empathy and Immersion.

As the Threefold model strives to describe common major styles of play, it could be beneficial to it to study the various playing styles that can be formalized using the Process Model (see chapter 3.2), and see if any of the possible combinations of Benefits, Processes and Methods should rank a classification of their own. Careful thought should at least be given to the inclusion of Immersion in the basic model, as well as to the omission of Competition in its entirety.

C.2 GNS

The GNS model is an evolution from the Threefold, and a precursor to the Big Model, developed by Ron Edwards at The Forge. It strove to find important goals and decision-making considerations in role-playing that were distinct from and incompatible with each other. The model posited that coherent, successful play could exist only when just one of these goals was being realized.

GNS defines the elements of Gamism, Narrativism and Simulationism as follows in (Edwards, 2001a):

Gamism is expressed by competition among participants (the real people); it includes victory and loss conditions for characters, both short-term and long-term, that reflect on the people's actual play strategies. The listed elements provide an arena for the competition.



The GNS definition of Gamism maps neatly and completely to the Process of Competition.

Simulationism is expressed by enhancing one or more of the listed elements in Set 1 (Character, System, Setting, Situation, Color) above; in other words, Simulationism heightens and focuses Exploration as the priority of play. The players may be greatly concerned with the internal logic and experiential consistency of that Exploration. The Simulationism of the GNS model maps directly to the Exploration of an Entity of the Shared Imagined Space.

Narrativism is expressed by the creation, via role-playing, of a story with a recognizable theme. The characters are formal protagonists in the classic Lit 101 sense, and the players are often considered co-authors. The listed elements provide the material for narrative conflict (again, in the specialized sense of literary analysis).

While this definition of Narrativism is still a bit vague, later definitions have equalized it with Exploring a Premise, which in the Process Model is a form of Exploring a Concept through the SIS.

Thus, the definitions of the GNS seem to map quite neatly to the Processes of the Process Model. As the GNS model has evolved into the Big Model, what the Process Model could have to give it is discussed there.

C.3 GENDER

The GENDER model (Jester, 2001) was created to counter some of the ideas expressed in the GNS model, positing that a single game can support multiple playing styles simultaneously. The Process Model recognizes this claim as valid, though not incompatible with the claim of the GNS model that coherent play requires that only one creative agenda be adhered to. In terms of the Process Model, it can be seen that multiple co-existing Processes often interfere with each other due to differing support methods and decision-making considerations, but as the Processes also independently generate Benefits, they can continue to co-exist without breaking the game as long as the interference is not severe enough — especially since human beings are so able at adapting to non-optimal situations.

As for the playing styles of the GENDER model, no definitive definitions of them exist. From the discussions and related definitions the following may however be gleaned: Gamist in GENDER seems to mean the overcoming of



obstacles, whatever they may be. This definition puts it into close contact with at least Challenge, Competition and Tension, mostly hovering between them. Explorative play on the other hand points directly at Exploration of Entities of the SIS. Finally, Narrative seems to share the definition of Threefold Dramatism.

C.4 Glen Blacow's and Robin Laws' player type classification

In his book of game mastering advice (Laws, 2002), Robin Laws describes a player type classification that is a modified version of an original (Blacow, 1980) by Glen Blacow. In it, the following seven types of players are recognized:

The Power Gamer seeks to make his character ever better. This equates with the subprocess of Optimization, a part of either Competition or Tension, but as it is described in the text without bounds, it equates more with Competition.

The Butt-Kicker simply wants combat. In terms of the Process Model, this can be simply described as Exploration of the Concept of Violence.

The Tactician wants to overcome adversity and tactical challenges. This behavior can be part of the Processes of Competition, Tension and Challenge, but in its purest form is an instance of the last.

The Specialist, always playing and exploring a certain distinct type of character, could at first glance seem to be Exploring an Entity, but what is happening is probably actually better described as Exploration of whatever Concept the character type represents.

The Method Actor, who strongly identifies with his or her character, can, in terms of the Process Model, either be engaged in Immersion or the Exploration of the Entity he or she is playing.

The Storyteller, on the other hand, is harder to describe in terms of the Process Model. Being equal to the dramatist of the threefold model, it too lacks a clear cause for the enjoyment, only the medium through which it is gained is mentioned. Thus, the same considerations apply.

The Casual Gamer, finally, is described as a person who is playing without



special interests, mostly joining in to enjoy the social aspects of the game. In terms of the Process Model, he may enjoy any of the Role-Playing Processes to an extent (though probably none of them very much), but is probably gaining something significant from at least one of the Social Processes co-occurring with gaming.

C.5 The Big Model

As stated above, The Big Model(Edwards, 2003) is the current form of the model of role-playing developed at The Forge. It has its roots in GNS, but those aspects are only a small part of the current model.

On the top tier of The Big Model stands the Social Contract, defined as follows in the Glossary of The Forge(Edwards, 2004):

Social Contract All interactions and relationships among the role-playing group, including emotional connections, logistic arrangements, and expectations. All role-playing is a subset of the Social Contract.

While the wording and intent in the Process Model is quite different, the concept of Shared Space of Imagining defined here certainly does have lots of points of contact with the Social Contract of the Big Model, both concepts being the containers of everything else.

The Big Model then defines a layer containing three Creative Agendas, Step On Up, The Right to Dream and Story Now, defined as follows:

Step On Up Social assessment of personal strategy and guts among the participants in the face of risk. One of the three currently-recognized Creative Agendas. As a top priority of role-playing, the defining feature of Gamist play.

Step On Up is a driving force behind Competition and Tension. In the Process Model, it is best equated with seeking the specific Social Benefit of an acknowledgment of guts and accomplishment.

Right to Dream, the Commitment to the imagined events of play, specifically their in-game causes and pre-established thematic processes. One of the three currently-recognized Creative Agendas. As a top priority for role-playing, the defining feature of Simulationist play.

The Right to Dream maps directly to the Method of in-game causality, and is in close proximity with other Methods, like the use of out-of-character



knowledge. It also has a close relationship with the Process of Exploring an Entity of the Shared Imagined Space.

Story Now Commitment to Addressing (producing, heightening, and resolving) Premise through play itself. The epiphenomenal outcome for the Transcript from such play is almost always a story. One of the three currently-recognized Creative Agendas. As a top priority of role-playing, the defining feature of Narrativist play.

In terms of the Process Model, this Creative Agenda can simply be likened to the Process of Exploring a Premise, a form of Exploring a Concept Through the Shared Imagined Space.

At the bottom tier of the model are Techniques and Ephemera, described as follows:

Techniques Specific procedures of play which, when employed together, are sufficient to introduce fictional characters, places, or events into the Shared Imagined Space. Many different Techniques may be used, in different games, to establish the same sorts of events. A given Technique is composed of a group of Ephemera which are employed together. Taken in their entirety for a given instance of role-playing, Techniques comprise System. Ephemera Moment-to-moment or sentence-to-sentence actions and statements during play. Combinations of Ephemera often construct Techniques. Changes in Stance represent one example of an Ephemeral aspect of play.

In the Process Model, these are both compacted into the definition of Methods, which then occupies the exact same space as in The Big Model in relation to the SIS.

The Big Model and the Process Model are complementary models that can be used to look at instances of role-playing from two quite different viewpoints, thus possibly fostering a greater understanding together than could be gained from the viewpoint of only one model. As for the part of The Big Model that continues to study coherent and incoherent playing goals and decision-making considerations, it could perhaps use the Process Model as a tool in further analyzing and formulating the various coherent and incompatible styles, as well as to probe for possible new additions.



C.6 Channel Theory

Channel Theory(Hols, 2003a), built upon the foundations of a solid critique(Hols, 2003b) of the Threefold and GNS, shares much with the Process Model, but also differs from it fundamentally.

Both models leave behind the single planar partitioning of a space that the older models exhibit. Both try to isolate distinct concepts from the whole of role-playing that could be measured independently. The basis of classifying these axes are completely different however. Channel Theory tries to create a thorough description of a gaming style, through partitioning the axes, or Channels into priority groups. Unfortunately, the model stops at this, without describing any relations or interactions between the various channels. Due this, the applicability of the Channel Theory model is extremely limited. It can only be used to describe, not analyze. The model would do well to analyze the different interactions between its component axes.

In general most of the top Element Channels of the Channel Theory model correspond with either Social or Role-Playing Processes in the Process Model.

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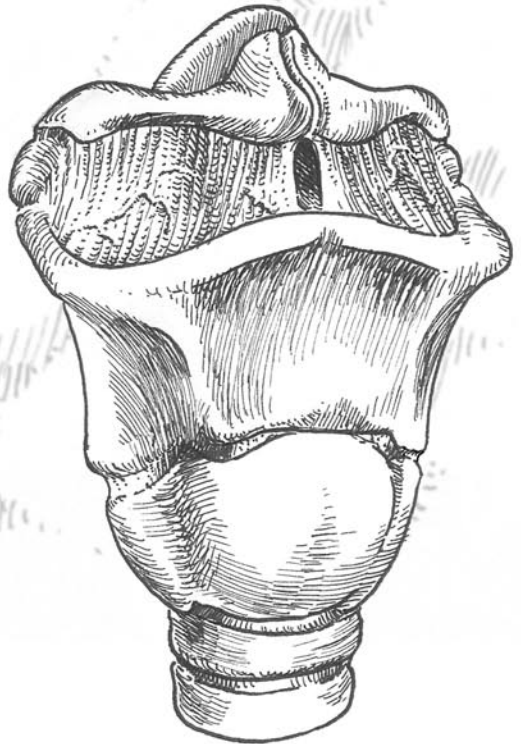
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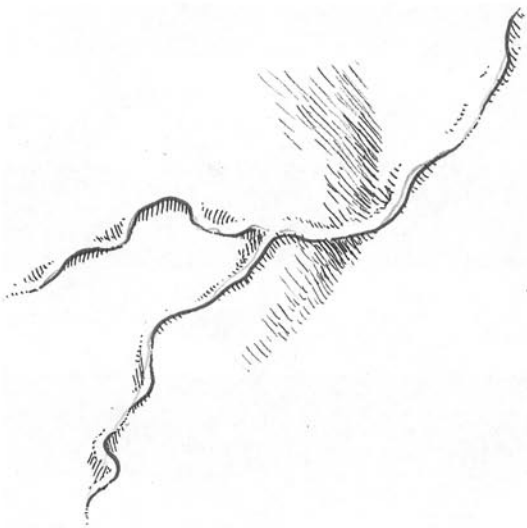
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For the afterthought







Larping as real magic

The theme I am exploring is: what is the psychological need for believing that our fantasies are real? In practice there is no difference between “reality” and what I believe is reality. Das Ding an sich is forever elusive – we will never get to it. What we’ve got is sensory impressions coming from nobody knows what and if we believe them, they are “reality”. For all we know they might as well be hallucinations.

Evidently we have learned to differentiate between “reality” and “fantasy”, at least to the point where we can lead reasonably ordinary lives. And yet we do our very best to create situations where we annihilate the borders between the real world and the world of our dreams. Why is that?

Since we all are larpers, I suppose you suffer from the same yearning as I do: I want there to be magic. There was a time when I stopped reading

fantasy literature, it was too painful to return to a world without magic. Now, I want to say that I do not, repeat not, believe in magic or any other religion, but I miss it bitterly. No, not religion, but magic.

About the author

Elge Larsson is 60 years young and lives in Stockholm, Sweden. He is a kind of academic scholar with wide interests in most form of humanistic studies. A translator by profession and larper by interest, he divides his life between books and larping, which he has been doing since 1994. He’s pet projects is convincing everybody larping is the noblest of arts. Being very serious-minded, he writes verbose articles and give deep lectures where he proposes radical ways of looking at larp. He thinks reality sucks, and that it could be made better conscious larpers dedicated to improve the world.

But perhaps you also have, like me, wondered about this desperate longing, this urge to believe in magic. From whence does it come? I do not think it is just because we were raised on the Brothers Grimm heritage, Tolkien, Narnia, Belgarion and all this sword and sourcery stuff. Not to forget Moomin, Tove Jansson is actually a better author than Tolkien.



No, I believe there is a much deeper reason to believe in magic. It's because we once lived in a world where magic existed, and we were gods in that world, and our will was done, on earth as if in heaven.

Probably many of you still have one or more of your childhood's teddy bears, dolls, or other kinds of furry friends around in your home. Perhaps you even still talk to them once in a while. Considering that this friend of yours may know your darkest secrets, would you be prepared to swap it with somebody else, or just give it away to some other person? If not, why is that? Do you have a feeling, or perhaps just an inkling of a feeling, that your secrets may be revealed? If so, you still have a little of the magical touch, and your experience of the world change a little according to your will.

What I wanted to show with this example is that our magic creativity is not lost, it just has to adapt a little to "reality" (whatever that is). But I still haven't said anything about how this kind of magic is constituted. Is it really real, or is it just a way of seeing things? (Preview: It's just a way of seeing things.)

Where it started

Once upon a time we lived in darkness, but we had neither words nor concepts to understand it as darkness, probably we had not even awareness or consciousness or what you want to call it. We were not born yet. Then we were born, and perhaps it was not an altogether bad experience. There we are, newly born, and I leave it to your imagination to define what the world looks like when you have never seen it before, never felt it, heard it (oh yes, you heard it in your mothers tummy), never smelled it. How do you make sense of something you have never experienced before when you have no frames of reference? Remember that "making sense" means "putting in frames of reference". Is it even remotely possible for us to understand what newborn babies experience?

The person I have been inspired by today is the English child psychiatrist D.W. Winnicott. He has developed a theory of what happens when you are newborn and try to understand the world you have fallen into, Narnia-like, you might say.

The child has needs and the needs make themselves felt in the body, probably as some kind of tension, since the child starts to scream if the needs are not met. Screaming or not, the needs are met, somebody takes



care of the child who then can return to sleep. Now I want you to understand that the child – as the psychologists think – has no sense of inside or outside, no sense of this is Me and that is Not Me. For the newborn child there are only sensory impressions, nothing else. Hunger is a sensory impression, food is a sensory impression, lying in bed is a sensory impression, being in the caretaker's arms is a sensory impression, but they do not come (as for us) from an outside world to an inside ego, to a consciousness. They do not even come, they are indistinguishable from the child, they are the child. That's it, the child is just impressions, there is no one to feel them, there are just feelings that get themselves felt. (Oh, the inadequacy of language!)

This is, parenthetically, a very Buddhist thought: the thinker consists of the thinking. Let me make an analogue: In this world we have this phenomenon of being furry, hunting small rodents, lying lazily in the sun, purring while caressed and so on. We call this bundle of activities "a cat", but the cat is nothing more than this "catting". End of parenthesis.

After a while patterns start to emerge in the child. Impression: hunger, bodily tension, perhaps screaming, and then impression: food, a nice warm bottle or mother's heavenly breast. What happens here, says Winnicott, is that the child *creates the impression* of mother's breast or the bottle. (Winnicott 1974.) Of course, to the objective eye that is not what happens, but there is no objective eye in the child. The child only has wants and gets satisfaction, and evidently – for the child – it is the want that creates the satisfaction. Now I ask you: is that magic or is it not? I want and because I want I get satisfaction. That's magic to me.

So, we lived in a world where magic was real, and then one day nobody came when we were hungry or wet. But if the time before had been good enough, we had a memory of our happiness, of our satisfaction, and for a while we could live in this happy memory even though nobody came to care for us. And then it happened again! The world, the caretaker, materialized! Now this magic is even greater, because we had been "thinking of" or "remembering" something and then it was created. Wow! Am I God or what?

At the same time this is the beginning of the expulsion from paradise. Sooner or later the time between need and satisfaction will be too great and our happy memories cannot save us anymore. We have to realize that the world will not come to us, no matter how strong our needs are, no matter how strong our wants are. But we can still create the memory, we can still give



ourself the feeling of satisfaction, and we can invest this feeling in a toy, a blanket, a teddy bear or anything else.

What is happening here is that we project our feelings of happiness into the object, and when we contact the object we get those feelings “back”. In reality we are creating conditionings so that the object elicits our memories of happiness – I am my own Pavlovian dog. It goes like this: I am happy, I cuddle my teddy bear, the teddy bear gets connected in my mind with happiness. Now I can do it the other way around: I cuddle my teddy bear, which in my mind is connected to happiness, and then I get happy.

This is done in a place that is neither reality in the “objective” sense – out there – nor is it psychic, “inner” reality. It is called the transition area or intermediate zone by Winnicott. This is the place where playing starts.

This is the place I wanted you to remember and revisit by thinking of your furry friends at home.

Playing as the basis of everything

Now I want to cite Winnicott:

“Into this play area the child gathers objects ... from external reality and uses these in the service of some sample derived from personal or inner reality. Without hallucinating the child puts out a sample of dream material and lives with this sample in a chosen setting of fragments from external reality”. Do you see the parallels to larping?

“In playing the child manipulates external phenomena in the service of the dream and invests chosen external phenomena with dream meaning and feeling.”

“There is a direct development from transitional phenomena to playing, and from playing to shared playing, and from this to cultural experiences”. That is, playing (e.g. larping) is the base upon which culture is built.

“This intermediate area of experience ... constitutes the greater part of the infants experience, and throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts, and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work”. Here we may ask ourselves: if art, science and the like just are more evolved forms of playing, are we retarded who do not leave the playing ground, or are we holding on to the source in order to be forever young and creative?



Then Winnicott says something I first found rather curious: “...*the task of reality-acceptance is never completed, ...no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, ...relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience which is not challenged (arts, religion, etc.). This intermediate area is in direct continuity with the play area of the small child who is 'lost' in play.*”

To me this means that we never will be completely happy in the world, because the world is never up to our dreams, but that we can find some kind of happiness in art, religion, or science, or any other cultural phenomena since they are the continuation of our happy playing in childhood.

What is larping then?

Now let's talk about us. We are evidently still playing, we even make big conferences around our playing, write books about it, plan to conquer the world with it. What's going on here?

I can think of some hypotheses, you may invent more of them.

- We are so discontented with reality that we want to play all the time.
- We realize that the world will not live up to our expectations – ok, so we create our own world according to our criteria for happiness.
- If we expand the intermediate zone to incorporate the whole world, then everybody can live in happiness all the time.
- We don't want to grow up.
- We want to grow up – without losing our creativity.
- We want to be playing, making art, religion and science at the same time.

Winnicott has also been thinking of what happens when we have to adapt to an external reality that is not optimal. He says that then we have to create a False Self which is the one person we have been allowed to be. The False Self is that personality your upbringing, education, and other peoples' expectations wanted/forced you to be.

Then he says: “*Only the True Self can be creative and only the True Self can feel real. Whereas the True Self feels real, the existence of a False Self results in a feeling unreal or a sense of futility.*” (Winnicott 1965.)

I'm not completely convinced; I'm fairly neurotic and I regard myself as pretty creative, but perhaps it is just the true part of me that is creative, not the false part of me – I really have difficulties telling them apart.

Anyhow, if Winnicott is right, then we can put forward some more hypotheses:



Larping as real magic

- We are larping because we want to feel real.
- We are larping because we want to leave the False Self and get to the True Self.

Larping as therapy, that is. Is that really bad?

But you can also say larping as revolution. In my opinion we live in a predefined world, a world where rules, expectations, and behaviors are more or less constructed for us, but not by us. When we create our transition areas, our intermediate zones where we define the rules of reality, we are actually saying NO to the powers that be.

I want to end this paper with all these hypothesizes, and I want to ask you again: What is it that we actually are doing while we are larping?

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Dissecting larp

- Collected papers for Knutepunkt 2005

Dissecting larp is a collection of articles on larp, written for the Knutepunkt 2005, with contributions from Eirik Fatland, Torstein Utne, Juha Mox HUUhtanen, Mike Pohjola, J. Tuomas Harviainen, Morten Gade, Ragnhild Hutchison, Thomas Duus Henriksen, Martine Svanevik, Mathias Lysholm Faaborg, Elge Larsen and the fictional Markku Jenti.

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