

EDITED BY ELGE LARSSON



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PLAYING REALITY

PLAYING REALITY

ARTICLES ON LIVE ACTION ROLE-PLAYING

EDITED by ELGE LARSSON

Collected for KNUTPUNKT 2010 –
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Live Action Role-Playing

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Playing Reality
Articles on Live Action Role-Playing

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Larp – acronym for *Live Action Role-Playing*, a form of artistic expression where the participants share a common fictive setting, enacting fictive personas. There are many variations, where neither settings nor personas are that fictive, but the main characteristic of larp is anyhow a collective creation of experience by and for the participants themselves, not for spectators. Thus the gap between artist and audience is abolished; here there are just fellow co-creators.

Knutpunkt in Sweden, *Knudepunkt* in Denmark, *Knutepunkt* in Norway and *Solmukohta* in Finland – meaning *nodal point* – is a larp conference circulating between the Nordic countries since 1997.

PREFACE: THE HOUSE THAT LARP BUILT

Viewing the world of larp as one big house, you are invited to visit some of the rooms that are to be found there. As the house is continually expanding in all directions, it is not possible to even include a map of it. Instead we will make short stops at a few of the rooms, after which you may feel free to build new rooms, wings, extensions, outhouses, lean-tos, attics or cellars (and dungeons of course), galleries, great halls or small and obscure closets for yourself and your friends (or enemies).

THE ROOMS

THE WORKSHOP—Here of course you find reminders on how things can be done or have been done. *Alexey Semenov* recounts the development of Russian larps, where they have interesting models that are quite stimulating. *Nathan Hook* gives us a worthwhile blueprint for designing deeply engaging larps, and *Florian Berger* actualizes the ever-important discussion of how narratives may function in larps. Then *Nathan Hook* returns with a short list of things every organizer should think of, while *Gabriel Widing* points out some common mistakes we all have done or will do – let’s hope they will be less common in the future.

We often think that larps can be places where we can be released from our everyday personas, but as *John H. Kim* claims, such changes need structural changes in our larp designs. If you

are going to do a larp campaign, *Katri Lassila* gives you a lot of practical advice. In order to put things in immediate motion *Pekko Koskinen* invites you to make the reading of this book (or any other) into a game.

Then we come to THE ASSEMBLY HALL where political uses of larp is presented in three project descriptions. That ARGs (alternate reality games) can be fruitfully used to convey information and critical thinking is the message *Dirk Springenberg* and *Daniel Steinbach* gives us. That this really is necessary in a time when the lessons from World War II seems to fade is shown by *Alexander Karalevich* and *Dirk Springenberg*.

If you happen to live in a state where just one official history is promoted (don't we all?), you may need to do what *Pavel Gotthard* and *Jiri Zlatohlávek* tells us about: recreating the real history.

From THE TOWER you can catch disturbing looks into possible futures or pasts of larping. *Karin Tidbeck's* spine-chilling tale raises the intriguing question: where do our stories come from – and where do they go? *Ebba Petrén* gives us a bold review from a larp in 2057, almost 50 years from now, which may present some hope for the times to come. *Sandra Snan's* dramatic excerpts from eventual uses of larp in an asylum – somewhere, sometime – provides a dark counterpoint (remember, the Cassandra of old was the truth-telling but never-believed prophetess).

In THE STUDY some deep thinkers have gathered for philosophical and/or academical musings on larp. *Daniel Jungblut* sets the tone when he asks if larp should not be seen as an heir to the idealist tradition. In telling about her personal paradigm

shift *Johanna MacDonald* shows us that things we took for granted, such as the relation between player and role, can be seen in a new light. *Ari-Pekka Lappi* brings some always welcome Nietzschean ideas on larp and morality into the discussion, while *Stefan Jordan* raises questions about the relation of fantasy to reality. For his part *Tobias Harding* wonders if larping might be anti-modern rather than post-modern.

Angelina Ilieva demonstrates convincingly that much larping is done with words, and shows how our speech in larp necessarily must work on several levels simultaneously. J. Tuomas Harviainen rounds it up with telling us what good manifestos are for, at the same time kicking some ass that needs to be kicked.

The reports from THE OFFICE tells about things to remember when dealing with business or societal interests. The experiences of *Olle Bjerksås*, *Molly Ränge* and *Max Valentin* have a lot to say on how to handle collaboration between larpers and worldly powers. *Mathias Gullbrandson* paints a wonderful picture of how larpers can use their skills for making a better world. That is also what *Bo Nurmi* strives for, as he gives a passionate speech on participatory education as a remedy for the shortcomings of traditional schools.

So be welcome to The House that Larp Built!

*I do hope that you will find rooms that interest you
– and if by chance you don't, start building your own!*

— ELGE LARSSON, EDITOR
INTERACTING ARTS



THE WORKSHOP
TRICKS OF THE TRADE

ALEXEY SEMENOV

Russian Larp History

THE VIEW FROM SAINT PETERSBURG

THE BEGINNINGS—Live role-playing games started in Russia in 1990 when the first *Hobbit Game*, i.e. a game based on the Tolkien epos was held near Krasnoyarsk. This does not mean that before that there were not any role playing games at all. They actually occurred from time to time, though the gamers did not see themselves as “role-players”, members of a community, the role-play movement. However that self-identification happened in summer of 1990, so the first *Hobbit Games* are now considered to be the initial point of the role-play movement in Russia (USSR then).

Who were the players in the first games and what was the origin of this movement? The cohort of the first members (between 1990–1993, though in different cities these boundaries differ) mostly came from the Science Fiction Fans Club, hippie movement and teachers who stuck to the non-formal approach in their studies with teenagers. This non-formal approach was known under the title of Communar movement. What was it in practice? Communar movement which germinated in 1960 was based on some clear principles, such as developing the personality in a romantic way, following the principles of humanity, building up close relationships between the people who share and defend the same noble values.

This approach for the upbringing of the youth, and, most of all, the actual methods of it, contrasted dramatically from the ones approved by the state structures, but due to bureaucratic rigidity on one hand and the absence of a clear concept on the other, this new approach failed to win its proper place in the state's educational structures. Communars considered a role-play to be the ideal space for application of their ideas, the space which is informal and friendly while being independent from the state's influence. Also some of the kids already brought up in this tradition entered this movement as well. All the three parts intersect with each other.

The specific features of the set mentioned here are important because division into periods in Russian role-play movement and all the significant changes in it originate from changes in the initial set of the participants. We have to outline the fact, that this movement in our country acquired the unique social status unlike ordinary pastimes such as tourism, paintball, stamps collection, being a fan of some music style or a football team. This was the status of the specific community of people praising, openly or implicitly, some of the social values, which differed from the characteristics of the so-called square members of society. After some time, the said attitude to the status of the movement and especially to the image of it as the bearer of these principles, have changed, even within the movement itself.

The first games were mostly based on fantasy novels. Speaking about the style and methods of those, we confess that the enthusiasm of the first path-breakers prevailed. Participants of role-play games were few, practically all of them knew each other, so each project was unique and collectively created, without extra theoretical generalization or deriving basic

principles. This was the initial spontaneous stage of developing and experience building. One of the most important factors was the fact that a certain specific system of basic values had formed itself among the cohort of first role-players. This was caused by the content of the participants.

It is very important to underline, that a certain specific system of the basic values formed itself among the cohort of first players, and this fact was caused by the specific features, characterizing the first participants. This system of values, these morals were determined by romanticism, humanity, informality, understanding that every personality is unique, the spirit of friendship, even brotherhood, altruism as a basis.

Role-plays in Russia, due to the open-minded and active way of players' life, spread fast. Already in 1991 the first Games in Saint Petersburg, Moscow and Kazan were held, 1992 brought in Saratov (Volga region), Kharkov (the Ukraine), Novosibirsk (Siberia), Yekaterinburg (the Ural) and then other cities. But the first mentioned became the centers of game development, that is, cradles of new ideas and methods, and some of them still are. The quantity of players in first games was rather low – from 50 to 200 people.

First games, like most of them now, were held outdoors, when it was warm outside, in the woods. According to Russian legislation on land usage most of the forests territories belong to the state, while not being wild-life reservations. That is why pastimes in the woods are free for everybody and does not require special permission. So the woods have become the most convenient place for performing such informal mass meetings as the role-plays are.

THE SECOND STAGE

The beginning of the second stage of role playing dated back to 1992–1995. The external cause for it was mass publication of works by Tolkien in Russia, and, later, other famous fantasy writers. This gave the readers a strong desire to express their feelings and impressions of the books in communication and even in real acts. But the internal cause was the overwhelming crisis of Russian society, disintegrating of moral values in the youth strata of society, then the turn to the principles of bare pragmatics which replaced the moral code created by soviet propaganda. This internal cause was also the search for the unique ecological niche for those who were not contented with existing informal youth movements.

This inflow of participants became more intense: some of the games mounted up to 500–600 people, although in general did not exceed 200. The number of games increased rapidly, the area of them spread fast (games then were held all over the country: from Kaliningrad and Byelorussia to the Far East). However, the second stage could not be characterized by some certain content of its participants. The only characteristic feature we can point out was the fact, that most of the players were high schools and university students. On one hand, as a result of this inflow, the contemporary system of values for role-players community began to lose its integrity. One of the reasons was the fact that the representatives of the first wave did not build up the tradition of introducing those values to the new-comers, and, which is worse, did not manage to present the system of those clearly and explicitly. On the other hand this stage shows us the fast increase in number of players, integrating of the mutual experience, and the appearance of

specific, sometimes even clearly presented schools and methods of role playing.

The range of themes became wider. Together with the games based on fantasy new games emerged. They were inspired by the historical or epic events, mostly medieval, such as the War of Roses, Viking raids, Irish heroic epos, the Hundred Years War, Albigensis Wars, Crusades etc. This resulted in increasing requirements for the participants' equipment, game constructions (fortresses, most of all), establishing of the tradition to write the set of game rules for each game separately, especially the rules concerning the martial play together with armory and costume modelling, economy simulation, magic simulation, demographic principles and medicine. The social structure and ethical system used to be stipulated by some general text, sometimes even belle-lettre style ones, without clear inner structure.

This stage was marked by the considerable number of historical reconstruction amateurs, who joined the role play movement. Some of them lost their interest for role-playing rather quickly, disappointed by its approach to history. According to them this approach lacked veracity and therefore was not worth paying respect and attention, also the play participants were much more poorly equipped. Although some of them still combine their passion for historic reconstruction and role-playing.

The technogenic games deserve separate reference. They turned up after the second wave in role-play movement. The peculiarity of this approach was, from the very beginning, its close attention to the technical side of the game at the expense of the plot-making aspect and the almost total absence of an idea message. Though, we should point out that recently they have changed towards the more interesting plot-making.

Simultaneously, while the management side of the games was being developed, certain clear principles of the attitude to the playing process and working over the play image were formed.

NEW SCHOOLS

In 1992–1997 three different schools of role playing were born. They declare different approaches to the creating of games and gamers' behavior, although they do not grossly contradict each other.

The so-called Model School (or Stimulus School) was the first to be noticed. Its main principle was modelling the reality (historical or fantasy) which presented some interesting goals (political, economic, plot lining) before a player and some tactical tasks which required tricky solutions. The machine of the game, described in the rules, should provide the player with the tools to achieve those goals. Thus the contest principle of the game prevailed, as the main purpose of the player was getting to some determined targets. According to this approach a specific form of pre-game master player workout was created. This included creating some pre-game personal history, making ties with the other players ("quenta") and setting out the game targets, the main and optional ("quest").

We should acknowledge the well-developed game-rules and game tools as the strong feature of this Model approach, but should also mention the lack of attention to the psychological and social laws of the presented epoch or the fantasy world as the weak side of it. The disappointment in this model was caused by the failure to plunge oneself in the other, non-real world; prevailing of the combat and political sides of a game over all the other aspects; team-play (coming to the game in

close-tied teams) where teams gained their goals sometimes just by bare force of armor. The wide spreading of team-play diminished the personal value of each player for the game and, for most of the players, narrowed the scale of the acting to scarcely worked-through episodic parts.

Another approach identified itself as a Theatrical School. Its main principle was the research in the psychology of every character in the play, reconstructing of the social and behavioral patterns, cultural and habitat realities of the depicted world (the background). Accordingly, there came interest for the role of "an ordinary man", the working-through of the historical and literature context improved radically, the role of acting skills, costume, scenery became more important and better realized. The detailed description of the game-world became the important part of the game-rules. Then came the small-scale pre-play games, held indoors, in the cold season, at first as a part of pre-play preparation and then, as an independent genre. They were mostly games held at private apartments, where all the combat play was impossible.

The strong side of the Theatrical School is the feeling of the reality of the other worlds, the so-called "plunge-in". The weak side is the absence of motivation to be active and insufficient plot lining.

At last came the Symbol School, revolutionary new against the previous two, though it inherited the best from both. Its novelty lied in the so-called "metaphysical aspect" which emerged in the play. This aspect could be found in the games before, but mostly incidentally. The Symbol School made it the essential and recognizable stem of the game, which was to be determined by pre-game description and rules. The main idea was the following: some "hooks" should be placed in the game structure, in

the plots and models. These “hooks” were meant to enable the player, through the personality of his character, to discover some idea or philosophical principle, for example “God is Love”, or intercultural communication, or categorical imperative.

According to their content, the metaphysical games can be divided into three types: games where religious or philosophical idea is interspersed into the content, games based on the purity of style of a genre (a detective story, a Victorian novel, a romanticism novel, a modern novel) and, the third, games based on the traditional cultures and their ethical systems (pagan Scandinavia, medieval Japan or China).

The strong side of the Symbol School is its raising of the role-playing to the level of interactive art, the depth of the depicted world, mighty emotional impact on the players through their characters and the follow-up interpretation of the emotional effect in the cultural context.

It is rather significant that the Symbol School has introduced the term “catharsis” in the role-play thesaurus. This term is treated in the same way as by Aristotle, that is “the deepest emotional trial with realization of it”. The weak side of the Symbol School lies in the difficulty of game formalization, high requirements for the players’ competence, the over-sophisticated process of explaining the masters’ ideas to the players within the format of game rules. Also there is the danger of inadequate performing of the initial ideas in game plots modelling, general underestimation of this approach by the most players and even game masters, the necessity of individual work with every player, erratic terms, and, rather often, inability of masters to set up clearly the game idea concept.

On the second stage of the role-play movement the value of such specific gatherings as convents increased. They actually

started at the first stage, the Zilantkon (Kazan) which grew from the science-fiction fan club was the first to be held. Convents became one of the most important means of communication for the role-players during the autumn-spring period when games are rarely held. Convents served as a medium where role-players communicated out of play context, the terms were mutually worked out, the discussions of the game methods took place. This is the main function of the convents nowadays too.

The number of them has increased, as well as the number of their participants. (The main Russian convent Zilantkon nowadays gathers up to 3000 people). The covered geographic area is wide, and the thematic content has widened as well, and it includes nowadays not only discussion of role-play questions, but also presenting of role-play subculture art works.

THE THIRD WAVE

The third wave of the role-play movement brought in people whose childhood was in the nineties, and therefore, they carried lots of mass media culture stereotypes. Many of them, who came into role playing at the end of 1990s viewed the games as another kind of entertainment business, part of show-business and took a game for an entertainment project. As a result of it, a new widening in the range of themes happened: there appeared movie-based games, especially western-based ones, anime-serials and computer games, “gothic” games with vampires and vampire-hunters, Harry Potter games and cyber-punk games. The requirements for the technical support, comfort, game gear (armor, costumes, stage set, scenery) increased. Often this desire to meet these requirements first and the consumtionist approach to the games led to the

considerable loss of meaningful content. The games started to become a rather dull pastime, limited to demonstration of posh fancy costumes.

Many of the representatives of the second wave and some of the people from the first wave did not accept this transformation of role-playing, standing for the priority of the unique system of basic values, which was born in the role-play society, as well as the priority of the meaningful content, idea and plot richness of the games. As a result of the intercommunicating of those three schools, which, in fact ceased to be clear-cut schools about the year 2000, some completely new formulations were spotted. These projects were based on application of the methods used in movie-making, drama, and theories of aesthetics. Series of bright games based on classic conceptual works of literature and filmmaking showed up. As for the theoretical research we can mention several master-groups, each of them having its own style and concept of the game-making. All those groups communicate closely.

Nowadays the role-play movement in Russia is coming to a new level, because role-play games cross the bounds of the role-play community. Last year in Moscow a new project using role-play games in the interdisciplinary projects in higher-education schools was launched. The experiment proved to be successful and now this project is expanding. At the same time, the discussion about the question if the role-play games is a specific kind of interactive art, or if their role is limited to being one of the mass entertainment brands is far from its conclusion. The followers of both opinions are quite numerous.

The range of the approaches and themes in the Russian role-play games is fairly wide and rich, and therefore it is quite difficult to give a complete view of them in a few words, and

say which kinds of games and which styles of game-making prevail or play the main role.

Sticking to the western terms, we can claim that in Russia role-playing is the fruit of successful crossing between “role game” and “role-play”. And the simplest way of explaining our situation was this excursus into their history.

TRANSLATION: OLGA CHESTNOKOVA

ALEXEY SEMENOV (*a.k.a. MacDuff*) is a person we know nothing about. This text has arrived to the book by strange by-ways and crooked paths. But it really doesn't matter who wrote it – it is well worth reading.

NATHAN HOOK

Larp of a Thousand Faces

APPLYING MYTHIC STRUCTURE TO LARP

COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGIST Joseph Campbell developed the concept of the Monomyth (a word coined by James Joyce) – an underlying archetypal pattern of the Hero’s Journey. For Campbell hero stories conveyed universal truths of self-discovery. Different religions are seen as cultural “masks” of a deeper truth – an outward knowable face that communicates an abstract concept. This article is about practical applications, not Campbell’s spirituality.

George Lucas discovered Campbell after writing the first draft of *Star Wars* and saw the Monomyth in his own work (Larsen and Larsen 2004); the two later became very close. Hollywood scriptwriter Chris Vogler distilled Campbell’s work down to a seven page memo which was the basis for Disney’s first original story film *The Lion King* (1994), and his book *The Writer’s Journey* (1998) on how film script writers can use the Monomyth.

White Wolf summarized the Monomyth using Vogler’s terminology in the RPG *Changeling: The Dreaming* and used Jungian archetypes in character creation. Less well known is *Aria: Canticle of the Monomyth*, by Last Unicorn Games.

WHAT IS THE MONOMYTH?

The Hero's journey is summarized in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*:

The mythological hero, setting forth from his common day hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark (brother-battle, dragon-battle; offering, charm), or be slain by the opponent and descent in death (dismemberment, crucifixion). Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be represented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world (sacred marriage), his recognition by the father-creator (father atonement), his own divinization (apotheosis), or again – if the powers have remained unfriendly to him – his theft of the boon he came to gain (bride-theft, fire-theft); intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being (illumination, transfiguration, freedom). The final work is that of the return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection (emissary); if not, he flees and is pursued (transformation flight, obstacle flight). At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero

*re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection).
The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir).*

— CAMPBELL 1949

In *The Writer's Journey* Vogler applies this model to dramatic writing in a modern format. Capitalisation is as he gives it, with my examples.

- I. Heroes are introduced in the ORDINARY WORLD. Characters are initially shown at home, in order to contrast with the places they go later. *E.g. Luke Skywalker on his farm, Dorothy in Kansas, Frodo at Bag End.*
- II. They receive the CALL TO ADVENTURE. Something goes wrong with the natural order of the world. In detective stories, the rules of society have been broken. In myth the land or balance of nature may have been upset. This defines the question the story will answer. *E.g. Request for rescue by Leia, the challenge to seek the Grail is issued, Buddha becomes bored of royal life.*
- III. They are RELUCTANT at first or REFUSE THE CALL. A moment of fear which emphasizes the magnitude of the challenge is quite common. Often an initial push is needed to make the hero set out. *E.g. Luke refuses to leave his home until his parents are killed, Jonah refuses to follow God's order and flees, Neo refuses to climb off the ledge and surrenders to the Agents.*

- IV. They are encouraged by a MENTOR. A mentor figure appears to push the heroes to overcome the refusal or to arm them for the road. Often someone who has already completed their own hero's journey. *E.g. Obi-Wan arms Luke with his father's sword, the good witch gives Dorothy the ruby slippers, Ariadne gives Theseus a ball of string.*
- V. They CROSS THE FIRST THRESHOLD and enter the Special World. The heroes leaves their home and enters a wider world, often having to defeat a threshold guardian. *E.g. Luke enters the space port filled with aliens, Jesus receives baptism, Buddha escapes the palace.*
- VI. They encounter TESTS, ALLIES, AND ENEMIES. The heroes faces various trials which allow them to learn more about the wider world and to grow in themselves. *E.g. Luke fights blindfolded, Neo meets the crew, Frodo meets Faramir.*
- VII. They APPROACH THE INMOST CAVE, crossing a second threshold. The heroes arrives at the most dangerous spot, making preparations to face the challenge ahead and overcoming guardians to get there. *E.g. Luke is sucked into the Death Star, Orpheus descends into the underworld, Theseus enters the labyrinth.*
- VIII. There they endure THE ORDEAL. The heroes faces the greatest ordeal, where everything hangs in the balance. Often this includes seeming dead for a moment. This element is very common in rites

- of initiation. *E.g. Luke is pulled underwater and appears dead, E.T dies on the operating table then recovers, Ishtar is killed and hung upon a hook.*
- IX. They take possession of their REWARD. The heroes now claims the reward. Sometimes this is a physical item or romance interest, sometimes this is a new understanding. *E.g. Luke rescues Leia, Prometheus steals the secret of fire, Perseus rescues Andromeda.*
- X. They are pursued on THE ROAD BACK to the Ordinary World. The heroes recognizes that they must leave the special world and return to the ordinary one. Often this involves a chase sequence. *E.g. Luke flees the Death Star, Perseus flees the other two gorgons, Taliesin flees Ceridwen in a shapeshifting contest.*
- XI. They cross the third threshold, experience a RESURRECTION, and are transformed by the experience. The final test; the hero is reborn into the ordinary world as a better person. *E.g. Luke is now confident enough to fly against the Death Star, Neo is reborn as the One, Jesus rises on the third day.*
- XII. They RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR, a boon or treasure to benefit the Ordinary World. The heroes returns to the Ordinary World, bringing back something which transforms not just themselves but the wider world. If this is failed the whole quest must later be repeated. *E.g. Luke destroys the Death Star,*

the Grail restores the land, the gift of fire is given by Prometheus to mankind.

APPLICATIONS

The structure has been accused of being too loosely defined. Everyday events such as going to a shop and returning home appear to fit it. Indeed this is why the structure resonates with life experience. The flaw in this is if we look deeper, we can identify why a “shopping trip” is not interesting – lack of mentor, no significant (as opposed to trivial) thresholds to cross, or ordeal, and no change to the wider world.

It's possible to see the Monomyth in the tarot deck major arcana or in rites of passage. It's also seen echoed in life events, e.g. entering the special world of a hospital, entering the innermost cave of an operating theatre and facing an ordeal to be reborn as a healthy person.

Larp itself can be considered a Monomyth. Larpers start off in the ordinary world, hear the call of the adventure when finding out about the larp, meet a mentor when they discuss their attendance with the organiser, and cross the first threshold into the special world when the larp begins. At the end they return back to the ordinary world, perhaps transformed by their experiences.

In a fantasy adventure format (e.g. *Treasure Trap*, Hook 2008) it's easy to see how the Monomyth literally applies. E.g. the adventurers are hired by an older figure to kill a necromancer. They haggle over pay then accept the call. They enter the woods, fight bandits, orcs and undead, then enter the inner lair and slay him. They make a swift return as the larp ends.

Myths and films regularly have characters who do not experience the whole Hero's journey, but it is quite possible

for several characters to undergo it, perhaps with some parts as backstory. In larp a first-hand Hero's journey may be ideal, since first-hand experience is a defining feature of role-play.

Consider whether the larp is trying to narrate the story of one character/“party” or tell a story for every character. The latter is more challenging to write.

Jung (who corresponded regularly with Campbell) developed the concept of archetypes, asserting they are embedded in human collective unconscious. Essentially, a cultural/genre appropriate “mask” is used to represent each archetype. In Jungian terms this can be compared to the “Persona” – the face a person shows to the world over their inner self. E.g. Obi-wan wears the Mentor archetype mask when he first appears in Star Wars, while Leia's message wears the Call to Adventure mask.

The Monomyth can be a framework for greater emotive power by suggesting turns at dramatically appropriate moments. To demarcate each phase a character or object in the story adopts the mask to represent the appropriate archetype for that phase. E.g. as the characters reach the special world, they need to cross a threshold to strengthen dramatic tension. One player's character changes his mind and tries to bar them passage, becoming a threshold guardian. He opposes them but is defeated or talked round so the guardian can be overcome.

Also the situation could be designed so that events charged with mythic potency are likely to emerge – the events happen through a process of enfoldment. One way to achieve this is to carefully plan characters – their resources, goals, and motives – to lead to this. E.g. it may be consistent with a character's behavior to seek advice from an elderly relative, who ends up playing the role of mentor.

Another approach is to encode mythic structure into the

customs and beliefs of the society used in the setting. E.g. in a vampire larp a new character presents themselves to the Prince when they arrive – the first threshold guardian. They then mingle in vampire society and encounter allies and enemies there.

Even the “ten o’ clock monster” turning up to attack the players can be seen in this light. This might be an unconscious attempt to fit the model by bringing in an innermost cave at a dramatically appropriate moment.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

One key aspect of the Heros’ Journey is crossing the three thresholds. Making it clear when a threshold is crossed is therefore an important element. This might be a physical threshold or a change of circumstance. In *Dragonbane* (2006), the innermost cave came to the players when the dragon finally arrived (and then died, leading to a rebirth of society). If the threshold is not included clearly it may go unnoticed, losing emotive power.

The Hero’s Journey can refer to external changes in the situation or internal changes in the character. Ideally both should run in parallel. E.g. the grail seekers grow by their journey, seeking it until they are ready to achieve it.

The same character can wear different masks at different points; a mask can be taken off, passed on or replaced. Different characters can wear different masks at different points – facing a former mentor may become the great ordeal. E.g. Obi-wan assumes the mask of the hero in facing his former pupil in his own ordeal, dies for the reward of Luke escaping, and is reborn.

Characters are needed at different stages in their own

Hero’s Journey, particularly characters inexperienced of the special world. In horror settings (e.g. *Call of Cthulhu*, Chaosium 1980) the normal characters start off unknowing what they will face. All are new heroes setting out on the journey. In a more heroic setting with player-created characters there is the risk of writing all “seasoned” characters. A character is needed to play the mentor, and a character is needed for them to be the mentor to.

Characters that don’t experience a journey may be too static and shallow. This can be used in fantasy writing – making immortal characters (e.g. faeries) unchanging can be a good way to reinforce their separation from mortals. In Tolkien’s Middle-Earth humans have the “gift of death” and the “creative fire” to change the world which the immortal elves lack. Frodo and Aragon grow and face up to their responsibilities from their journey but Gandalf only changes by literal death and rebirth and Legolas is unchanged.

When designing a character it can be useful to consider such questions as:

- » What threshold would this character need to cross to leave the everyday world?
- » What other character might play the mentor role to them?
- » If this character was in the innermost cave who would their enemy be?
- » If they could gain a divine reward what would it be? Would they win it or steal it?
- » What transformation might plausibly happen for them?

The character in play might not turn out as expected, but making sure there are some possible answers to such questions will make playing the character a richer experience.

Some RPGs have tried to incorporate the Monomyth explicitly by including a literal mystical quest – in *Vampire: The Masquerade*, the quest for Golconda. This is using high fantasy elements to crudely include the Hero's Journey rather than “masks” to represent each archetype. This is particularly flawed if the players (and in modern settings, the characters) are consciously aware of the Monomyth.

Should the players rather than their characters experience the internal changes and emotive power of the journey? I'm confident Campbell would say they should, that larp can be living myth with the same potential for personal transformation as mystery plays or religious rites. Campbell claimed the cinema had replaced temple mystery plays; shamans replaced not by socially ordained priests but by artists who seek personal insight. Greg Stafford (co-founder of Chaosium, author of the *Pendragon* tabletop RPG) took this further and claimed that role-playing offers a way for modern people to reconnect with myth in an active way in contrast to the passive nature of films.

Here are two examples of how I used the monomyth to design mini-larps.

NOT TO YIELD

I wrote *Not to Yield* (2007) using the *Magica* tabletop RPG setting, aiming to present a more emotional-orientated play style by the metaphor of characters stumbling into a faerie realm. The characters consisted of two separate magi and companions, and a faerie. The tensions come as they seek to find a way to leave.

The character briefs included descriptions of how the characters began their lives in the everyday world, heard the call and crossed the threshold into the special world of Faerie. As the game starts they meet the lady of the realm who initially takes the mask of a mentor figure, instructing them in the ways of this place. They also encounter each other as allies or enemies. As they explore the nature of the realm, they gradually put together different pieces of information they share and come to understand that their “host” is misleading them to keep them here. As the dramatic arc moves, they come to understand they are trapped in the innermost cave and what they face is their greatest ordeal. The means of success relies on the characters' understanding their “heart's desire” (their main intangible goal, e.g. glory, knowledge, faith), either finding it or renouncing their quest for it. The means of escape is to experience personal growth and change one's goal. When a character leaves they simply disappear – others believe them dead, echoing the “death-and-resurrection” element in the monomyth.

Past runs: ArsCon 2007 (UK) twice and Stabcon 2008 (UK), Fastaval 2009 twice (Denmark), Solmukohta 2008 (Finland), the US in 2009.

PASSIONFRUIT

I wrote a jeepform game *Passionfruit* for presentation at Fastaval 2010. This three player game consists of a series of scenes exploring cheating in a relationship. Due to the jeepform style it was possible directly use the Monomyth when writing each scene – an early draft mapped each of Vogler's phases, which was later condensed. Each scene consists of an interaction between the “protagonist” and another character playing an archetype. Meeting the “other man/woman” for the

first time is the call to adventure which is initially refused, but eventually he/she becomes the threshold guardian. The tests occur as the partner gets suspicious. The innermost cave scene used Freudian symbolism, followed by the greatest ordeal of confronting the partner. While changing in themselves, the characters' set of relationships are reborn in a new form.

CONCLUSION

For Campbell's followers the Monomyth is a guide to life, a modern religion that recognizes cultural masks and peeks behind them at underlying truth. For storytellers, scriptwriters and role-players the Monomyth is a guide to telling dramatically powerful stories and access the mythic roots of the human psyche.

This brings us back again to the criticism that the structure can be applied to anything. In my opinion it is more useful as an editing tool to revise a larp in the planning stages rather than as a basis for writing. While it's easy to see the Monomyth if you look for it, that does not undermine that some stories are strong manifestations of it. For those familiar with the theory it is sometimes difficult to not see it.

Larps are ritual spaces, defined with a magical circle of space and time within which we are enabled to undergo powerful experiences removed from the everyday world. We create new myths for the modern age, and don masks old and new to play out once more the eternal dance of the archetypes.

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FLORIAN BERGER

Stories in Larp Revisited

AUTHORING, MANAGEMENT
AND EXPERIENCES

THE LAST YEARS' PUBLISHED OPINIONS of story in larp vary from fierce rejection to sophisticated integration. An emerging agreement has been the notion of story as the player's interpretation of game events. Contemporary larpwrights still value stories in their games, in part preparing complete story arcs. Distributing narrative functions to players in the process helps to incorporate them in meaningful action. An understanding of story events helps identifying and controlling the story at run-time, though a story experience is still individual and thus hard to enforce or manage.

INTRODUCTION

Writing a text about narrative aspects of larp feels to some extent like summoning demons of the past. The great battles of the role-playing “-isms” in larp have been fought, the defenders of digital ludology have made a point in their field of study, and we all have arrived at a much more fine-grained analysis.

Reviewing texts and interviewing authors on stories and games it becomes evident that each one has a personal – and, most of the time, implicit – definition of what a “story” actually is. However it is beyond this article to make up for this inconsistency. “Story” and “narrative” are the key words we use as a

handrail, and we will trustfully assume that the statements and theories we will examine talk about the same subject, elusive as it may be. Taking a step back, this text attempts to allow for a glimpse of a bigger picture.

STORY AND LARP

Saying the great battles have ceased does not mean that narrative aspects of larp are undisputed. The general idea of stories in larp has been rejected and labeled “embarrassing” by Petterson in 2004. “The medium doesn’t even superficially support the concept”, he writes, and “Role-playing games tend to produce stupid stories”. (Petterson 2004)

Heliö took a more moderate position, pointing out that traditionally “narration always requires a narrator and someone for whom the story is narrated” (Heliö 2004). The sole fact that the players themselves may form some sort of audience “does not [...] turn the game into a story, much less a narrative”. He concludes:

Still, we must note that there is no actual story in the game of the role-playing game, though there are events, characters and structures of narrativity giving the players the basis for interpreting it as a narrative. This makes us realise how important it is for us to interpret sequences of events as stories, and tell in them about things we consider important.

— HELIÖ 2004

That player-centric concept has proved to be rather popular: Harding also has stated that “larp is interpreted as a narrative” (Harding 2007), similar to Kim who identified a “perceived story” that is constructed by the player by “interpretation of the actions of other players” (Kim 2004).

The very subjective player viewpoint makes Rognli reject the traditional story concept when it comes to larp:

... telling linear stories with a main character and a supporting cast (as most films and books do) is fundamentally wrong. In the craft of the larpwright, it is important to be aware of the nature of mainstream storytelling, and its incompatibility with our medium.

— ROGNLI 2004

Fatland has explored the issue further and highlighted the ephemeral nature of larp, from which he concludes:

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.

— FATLAND 2005

He nevertheless states that larp can tell stories given the broader notion of *a meaningful sequence of events* – that the game masters can more or less control.

The 2004 paper *Narrative, Game Play and Alternative Time Structures for Virtual Environments* by Lindley offers yet another view on games and narrative. According to Lindley, narrative is one possible “system determining the temporal structure of the play experience” (Lindley 2004). From that perspective a sense of narrative is inherent to *any* complex ludic system, a fact that may have contributed much to the story vs. simulation vs. immersion confusion of past days.

STORY PREPARATION AND AUTHORING

All the analyses presented above would at best be of pure academic interest if larpwrights and organizers did not think about story experiences while designing and conducting their larps. Like other studies of arts and culture, larp analysis must reflect actual practice after all. To meet this requirement an interview of five contemporary larp authors from Norway, Sweden, Finland and Germany has been done for this article.

When asked whether larp – in their respective understanding – could provide a narrative experience, all of them basically agreed. One restricted this to a subset of his games; another said he provided a mere potential for a story experience in his. One statement attributed story experiences to the larger (fantasy) larps, while mini- and chamber larps in her mind aimed at something different than a narrative.

Another author pointed out that some games he wrote were by design not about a narrative but about exploring identity or establishing a certain atmosphere. While these games had more intellectual and aesthetic appeal to him, he concluded that the narrative ones were more like “traditional fun”.

The second question was whether they designed their own larps to provide a story experience, and whether they used narrative devices like pro- and antagonists, conflicts or a story arch. There once again was a strong agreement. One explicit reason given was the desire that players should be able to tell their heroic deeds to each other within a story frame *after* the game.

In terms of a pre-conceived story arc there were mixed opinions. Two authors clearly stated that they worked this way, with one of them dividing the game into acts to control

the pace. In contrast, two rejected the concept and were content with setting up situations, conflicts and other “story seeds”.

Other common narrative devices used in the preparation were given characters with background, relations to other characters and preset goals, in one case even a clear distinction between “good guys” and “bad guys”. One author described special character instructions to enforce a story arc later.

Answering the questions one larpwright found that she actually had no idea of “narrative constructs” but rather followed a gut feeling. While this is of course a perfectly valid approach, it may provide additional insight to see what narratologists say about authoring interactive experiences with story potential. One renowned scholar of narrative theory and electronic textuality is Marie-Laure Ryan. In her paper *Interactive Narrative, Plot Types and Interpersonal Relations* (Ryan 2008) she discusses the applicability of several plot types for player interaction. She points out how Aristotle’s *dramatic plot* – where human relations evolve by characters changing what they feel and think – can make a game experience meaningful and dramatic to the players. However it still leaves one problem unresolved: the tension between *authorial control*, i.e. the desire to craft a complete and meaningful story on part of the larpwrights, and *player agency*, i.e. the player demand to have his actions impact the story he is experiencing.

A possible solution called “narrative functions” has been suggested by Rognli. He states that an author can start out with a preconceived narrative but then has to go on and transform

[...] *the required elements into clearly defined tasks for players to handle. Each player is given a clear and specific*

obligation to the whole of the larp, making clear what his essential contribution to the story is supposed to be.

— ROGNLI 2004

Rognli divides the range of narrative functions into *structure-building*, *conflict-driving* and *mood-setting*, acknowledging a “considerable overlap between the groups” (Rognli 2004).

Rognli’s proposal introduces a meta-layer for the players since besides the inner thoughts and goals of the character there now is an outer obligation to be observed. This may not be to everyone’s taste but it does have two advantages: making the players aware of their responsibility for a good experience and satisfying a player demand for agency. In addition it provides a valuable tool for larpwrights in the authoring process.

Any reflection about larp authoring and story considerations would be incomplete if it omitted Fatland’s “Incentives as tools of larp dramaturgy” (Fatland 2005). Compared to narrative functions incentives are a more subtle tool to be used in the preparation of the course of the larp. According to Fatland:

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.

— FATLAND 2005

The types of incentives presented in the paper are *conflict*, *scheduling*, *puzzles* and *fates*. In the authoring process incentives are usually arranged in a dependency graph (called “incentive web” by Fatland). A thorough explanation is to be found in the original paper. Using this tool it is especially apparent

that planning a sequence or path of events is only half the job – managing the story aspect at run-time is equally important.

STORY AT RUN-TIME

To get a complete picture the five larpwrights has also been asked whether and how they attempted to control dramatic experiences or complete stories once the game runs.

The predominant method reported was bringing people into the game that shaped the events as desired by the authors. There were “partially directed characters”, “secretly directed characters”, “helping players” (i.e. ordinary but instructed players), “non-player characters”, “hidden game masters” and “directors” who played no character at all and were thus invisible to the characters.

Only one author mentioned explicit game master instructions on how to play but restricted that to new or shy players.

Another method was controlling the end of the game. One larpwright explained that he took care to provide dramatic endings, possible with epilogues for the characters, while another emphasized a “massive” ending with pyrotechnics.

Only one of the five authors stated that he practically renounced run-time game mastering even in story-oriented games, calling this a “paper-plane approach”.

From a theoretical point of view the basis for run-time game mastering must be a concept of which events actually constitute story progress. Digital game researcher David Thue has presented a set of questions to identify *story decisions* that produce a driving story event (Thue 2008). According to him, a story decision has the following attributes:

» IDEA What should happen?

- » ACTORS Who should be involved?
- » TIME When should it happen?
- » PLACE Where should it happen?
- » ACTIONS How should it happen?
- » REASONS Why should the actors act?

— THUE 2008

This is of course a very general scheme and can be applied for narrative analysis of almost any medium. It is equally valid for pre-designed story arcs and run-time decisions. For example, an author may come up with the story decision:

A. will assault his long-time opponent B. (IDEA and ACTORS) on the morning of the second day (TIME) in the backyard (PLACE), beating him up with bare hands (ACTION), because he will finally be fed up with his libel (REASON).

In contrast, a run-time story decision might be:

I finally surrendered to the police (IDEA and ACTORS) two hours after the incident (TIME). I showed up at the police station, talking whispering and slowly (ACTION). My character felt guilty and just couldn't stand the pressure (REASON).

To distinguish between pre-conceived and run-time story decisions, Thue asks five questions about *design decisions*:

- » RESULT What was decided?
- » CHOOSER Who made the decision?
- » TIME When was the decision made?
- » METHOD How was the decision made?

- » JUSTIFICATION Why was the decision made in that way?

— THUE 2008

These questions were used for analysis of digital narrative systems but they work well for larp analysis. In the first example the design decisions may be described by the author like this:

As the author I (CHOOSER) decided that A. will finally no longer hide his aggression and commit a crime (RESULT). The decision was made before actual playing at the time of writing (TIME). I trusted my skills as an author and thought it would lead to interesting developments on that day (METHOD). I think authors should precisely design key events beforehand (JUSTIFICATION).

The design decisions behind the second example, as seen by an observer, may turn out like this:

C., who played a friend of the victim (CHOOSER), decided that his character would surrender to the police, thereby revealing details of the incident (RESULT). There was no game master involved, it was a spontaneous decision right in the game (TIME). We were told that we were free to follow our character's mindset and feelings, so I guess it's just what he felt in the moment. (METHOD) I think the game masters were not after a 'story' at all, it was more about exploring the feeling of guilt, so there was nothing we could do 'wrong' (JUSTIFICATION).

The questions compiled by Thue are a useful tool to reveal the structure of story and design decisions in a larp. Controlling a story at run-time means controlling story events by making story

decisions. If an author finds that he is making most of the story decisions *beforehand* with the sole justification that *he thinks it would make a good story*, then there will be very little room for impact of run-time player actions. To allow for flexibility or even interaction, story decisions should be moved to actual playing and possibly be placed in the players' hands. As shown above, Rognlis "narrative functions" are one possible tool for this.

A simpler but more abstract approach to run-time story management has been taken by Mateas in his dissertation *Interactive Drama, Art and Artificial Intelligence* (Mateas 2002). He adopted the work of McKee (1997) to digital storytelling, creating *Façade*, the most frequently cited digital interactive drama to date (<http://www.interactivestory.net/>). Originating from screenwriting, the basic idea does also apply to stories in larp. Mateas puts it like this:

In this theory of dramatic writing, stories are thought of as consisting of events that turn (change) values [MCKEE 1997]. A value is a property of an individual or relationship, such as trust, love, hope (or hopelessness), etc. In fact, a story event is precisely any activity that turns a value. If there is activity – characters running around, lots of witty dialog, buildings and bridges exploding, and so on – but this activity is not turning a value, then there is no story event, no dramatic action.

— MATEAS 2002

Following that theory, a story event is characterised by the single feature of *turning a value*. According to the definition, the above example of the assault is a story event because it will turn B.'s relation to A. from *predominance* to *fear*, turn A.'s

powerlessness to *self-confidence*, his peers' *disrespect* into *appreciation*, and maybe the law enforcement's *neutrality* to *suspicion*. These are four value changes in consequence of the physical event "assault", rendering it meaningful in a story context.

The second example of the suspect surrendering to the police is a story event because it turns the character's *mental pressure* into *relief*, *doubt* into *certainty* for the part of the police and possibly *friendship* into *hate* for a friend of both the victim and the suspect.

The concept is useful for story management at run-time because it brings the *dynamics* of the characters' *thoughts and feelings* into focus. That puts it in line with the aforementioned interactive *dramatic plot* (see STORY PREPARATION AND AUTHORING above) because story events are in essential about the evolving relationships that constitute a *drama*. Concerning the desire for agency and Thue's notion of design decisions, the question is now: who is controlling or producing the value changes in a running larp?

If the game masters want to enforce a certain course of the game, they have to make sure that they – and *not* the players – are in charge of turning values. As shown above, this is mostly done using controlled characters. On the contrary, should a larpwright strive for player agency and an interactive plot she has to make sure that players have the *right* and the *possibility* to turn values. From a story perspective this is a lot harder to achieve since it means letting go of the conventional "authoring" mindset.

To introduce the concepts the above explanations acted on the assumption of a single story line. As explained in the section STORY AND LARP this is a simplified perspective since in larp there are actually as many stories as there are players.

The final section of this article will cover these subjective story experiences.

STORY EXPERIENCE

Albeit the interviews were a very small and by no means representative sample of larp design practice, they showed that the idea of “narrative” and “storytelling” is still present in contemporary larp. However the unisonous notion of “story” as an individual interpretation of perceived events in larp theory makes it challenging to apply the theories of story events and their management to actual games.

The difficulty is that larp is a multi-player – and thus a multi-protagonist – activity with weak or missing *synchronisation* (as opposed to tabletop role-playing games with a fixed player location, a turn-based time structure and the all-dominant role of the game master). While Thue’s and Mateas’ concepts hold true also for individual story experiences, there may be no such thing as a “common story event” in larp. Instead, what constitutes a story event in the player’s interpretation may widely differ from player to player.

That does not render any notion of story in larp useless. The consequences are simply that larpwrights either have to put effort into *synchronising story events* to forcefully place them in the individual experiences – or take the “paper plane approach” mentioned above, resorting to a sort of “Zen of larp authoring” by letting go of control.

It may have been a kindred insight that made Trier-Knudsen conclude “trying to tell stories through larp is possibly both naive and slightly dated” (Trier-Knudsen 2008) after running a larp based on narrative considerations. But not all is lost when it comes to story and larp. Narrative interpretations are the

prerequisite that enables players to verbalise their experience after the game. This is a fact that even hard-core immersionists do not dispute. As Heliö (2004) put it:

This makes us realise how important it is for us to interpret sequences of events as stories, and tell in them about things we consider important. The narrative desire becomes evident at these moments. It doesn't make the games themselves stories, nor does it make the events in them stories. It is our interpretations and experiences that can be strongly narrative seeking, and this becomes even more evident in the way we put the experiences into words after having played. [...] By verbalising their actions in the game, the players make a story out of the game.

CONCLUSIONS

Stories are a feature of larp – whether by an author’s intention, a player’s interpretation during the game or as means of recapitulation afterwards. Contemporary larpwrights may choose to fulfill, deliberately disappoint or plainly ignore narrative expectations, but they have to deal with them in one way or another.

The approaches and analyses presented in this article circle around the presence and shape of stories in larp. They avoid the more profound questions about *why* these pre-designed or emergent narrative elements are present, what *functions* they possess and how narrative experiences in larp are *related* to those made in other activities. These remain to be explored, and they might provide further insights into the operations of the human mind – and into why the beings equipped with it indulge in such a strange exercise as larp.

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8 Things I'd Like to Know

WHEN DECIDING TO GO TO YOUR LARP

SO, YOU ARE PREPARING your exciting new larp and advertising to recruit players. Going to your larp takes effort (in terms of time and money) so I'd like to know more about it to make an informed choice about whether it provides what I'm looking for.

Here is the information I look for when making that decision. Providing nicely flowing flavour text or video is all well and good, but I also appreciate a nice clear concise statement of it as well.

- I. LOGISTICS – How many players are expected, how long is the event, what is provided and what a player needs to bring. How much does it cost, and is food included? Where it is (and transport advice) also helps. If I can't get there, I'm not going to.
- II. SETTING & GENRE – At what point in history or fiction are you setting the larp in? If it's an original fictional setting, what known setting might it be similar to? You might be running a Cthulhu larp, but that doesn't tell me whether it's pulp action heroics against the mythos, classic cosmic horror or film noir horror. Even if it's not based on a

particular existing fiction, comparing it to an existing one or three is a straightforward way of doing this.

- III. THEME – What thematic elements is the larp seeking to explore? This is even more important if I'm going to write my own character, so I can make it reflect the theme(s) in some way.
- IV. CHARACTERS – Who is writing them? If the players do it, what sorts of concepts are (in)appropriate, and what sort of background to go with it? Related to this, is the game a one off or part of an ongoing series with continuing characters?
- V. GNS POSITION – Yes, it's primitive, but so are Newton's laws of motion and we find those useful. Is your larp aiming to cater/encourage/support competitive *gamists*, arty *narrativists* or cause-and-effect *simulationsists*? While we are at it, is immersion is significant goal or not? If so, what kind of immersion? If you don't like GNS, you can still explain what sorts of play style it supports.
- VI. GOAL (DESTINATION) OR EMOTION (JOURNEY) ORIENTATED – Is the larp about characters struggling to reach a goal state, or is it more about accepting the situation as it is and experiencing it? For example if you are running a feudal setting larp, are the players expected to challenge the social order, or experience living in it?

- VII. CONFLICT – What forms of conflict is the larp aiming for? Will problems be solved by use of latex swords, resolving moral dilemmas, social intrigue or internalised personal conflict? What systems/rules are you using to resolve these conflicts?
- VIII. HARDCORE – Is the larp planning to push people outside their comfort zone, and if so in what way; physically, emotionally or otherwise? Is there a significant chance of players having a traumatic experience? Related to this, is it intended to include challenging content?

There we go, simple and straightforward. All you need to do is put that on the website for your larp.

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6 Common Mistakes

IN LIVE ROLE-PLAYING DESIGN

DESIGNING LARPS IS A COMPLEX PROCESS and one must have courage to take on the responsibility of doing it. The players are demanding and bring creative power as well as infinite demands. I have assembled a few common mistakes that are made in larp design. If you avoid them you we'll be pretty much on track. They are of course a generalization and there are probably exceptional situations where all of these design choices can be motivated. So rather than banning them from larp design I wish that you, as an organizer, think twice before using them. The mistakes all have a common feature: they disable role-playing. So the work-arounds would generally be focused on how to enable participant interaction by the means of their characters.

MISTAKE ONE: THE ACTION IS ELSEWHERE

There is a revolution going on – but you are not there. Placing the characters outside the actual drama is quite strange, but still common. It is as if the organizers wish to save the players-characters from drama. But drama is not dangerous, its the nerve of role-playing. This doesn't mean that only big actions are important, the small ones can be great experiences too. Forgiving, approaching, confessing, trusting can all make nice scenes, but

we must also dare to let our characters suffer and hate, murder and make love. This means placing the characters center-stage. If you write a story that is impossible to enact within the confinements of the physical space of live role-playing you should reconsider the means for telling the story. Maybe a freeform role-playing session would suit it better. Larp is not neutral – so we must find stories that surf on the waves of collaborative improvised character interaction rather than writing up epic or cinematic narratives that in the end is forced off stage. The problems with cinematic aesthetics in larp was noted ten years ago in the *Dogme '99* (Fatland and Wingård 1999), but it's still a holy grail for all too many organizers.

MISTAKE TWO: THE WORLD IS BIG
– BUT THE STAGE IS SMALL

Many organizers has an urge to "create a world". Nothing wrong about that, but its very common that the world is described by 50+ pages, followed by one page about the actual setting of the scenario. This way the backdrop of the story becomes very heavy and the players are afraid to improvise in a way that conflicts with the pre-written world. Neither are they helped in relating to each other. If the larp is set in a small village in the forest, you are not very supported by knowing how big army or deep religious beliefs or flourishing trade the people of the neighbouring country has. What you actually need is to be informed of the context of the actual stage: the village. Who lives there? How are they related? What are they doing on a Friday night? What are their dreams about? And for the purpose of creating drama: What are their holy cows? Who is in debt to whom?

MISTAKE THREE: THE SURPRISE!
– DECONTEXTUALIZING THE PLAYERS

Organizers trying to save their players from boredom through an unexpected rupture in the dramaturgy of the scenario is quite common. When organizers doesn't believe in the basic strengths of their scenario they are tempted to save the players from boredom by twisting the whole scenario. This works perfect in most media, like literature and film: think *True-man show*, *The Matrix*, *Fight Club* etc. But in the context of live role-playing it generally fails to serve its purpose. Why? Because putting the character in front of a *completely* unexpected situation – *Your world is not what it seems to be!* – also decontextualizes the player. The message being: Whatever you have prepared yourself for doesn't make sense anymore. This makes the player insecure and alienates her from the character, erase the genre frames etc. The player must thus rethink her character. What would my character do in this super-strange situation? How would she feel? This generally disable the interaction between the characters for quite some time.

A deceptive design has sometimes been promoted, for example by the finnish pseudonym Markku Jenti in *Nothing is True; Everything is permissible – Using Deception as a Productive Tool*, but the article fails to communicate when it's a good idea to deceive the players in that way. Most of the text is actually about when it's problematic designwise or morally dubious to do it.

There is nothing wrong about strange turns within a larp story – but neither is it a problem to communicate those twists on beforehand.

MISTAKE FOUR: NEGOTIATIONS OF NONSENSE

Negotiations within the fiction is not a bad thing per se. But its all too common that the negotiations is about something that doesn't exist on the actual setting, something off-stage. "I have an army of 500 men, only two days travel from here" (the larp ending in one day). "But I have an army of 800 men, haha!" This kind of non-sensible negotiations will never support good drama. How about the beggar saying: "I'm prepared to work in your shop, just for free food and lodging." The trick would be to put the things at hand into play. What matters to the characters at this point in their life?

Political negotiations does require more abstract conceptualisation and it's potentially interesting to play. But if you don't think it through carefully it is likely that the players will reenact present day ideological dogmas. We have seen many times how pseudo-medieval feudal villages has turned to present-day democracies. This is of course a sound impulse on behalf of the players, but sometimes a little bit too predictable and dull. Another problem in the same direction is how a conflict between upper and lower classes in a larp story turns into an argument between social liberal and social democratic ideologies, echoing the last debate between parliamentary left and right. Sometimes the political negotiations even resemble the yearly member meetings where we choose a new board for the club. Is that where we want to go within our fantasy worlds too? Another board meeting, chewing through trivialities.

I would suggest political scenarios on another level – stories about affinity, forming groups and collectives, breaking them apart, regrouping, being in conflict, making peace, going to war. After all larp is not about D.I.Y. but D.I.T., do-it-together.

MISTAKE FIVE: WRITING FOR AN ELITE

It's rather easy to write a political scenario where 15 important people meet up to negotiate and have a nice time. It's a lot harder to make all their servants, associates and subordinates to feel and become center stage. Extras are sweet in movies, but dull in larps. This does not mean that everyone on larps should play high status people, but rather that equal focus should be turned to all players involved, also in terms of theme. If the game has a political theme, then everyone should be involved in the political process one way or another. If the game has a social theme then social relationships should be the base for character interaction. All too often the theme of the game doesn't involve more than a bunch of the characters. So please relieve us from "important" meetings in which only a few are invited to play. The dynamics between open and closed rooms can be useful, but should be used with care.

MISTAKE SIX: DIFFERENT STYLES OF ROLE-PLAYING

During the years of manifestos (1999–2003) the theorists of the Nordic larp scene set out to find "the possibilities inherent in larp, [...] unique laws; the essence of larp" (Fatland and Wingård 1999). It was like a reenactment of the early 20th century modernist rapture in art. The problem was that we came back with a dozen of "essences". Is it the story, the character immersion, winning the game, meeting people or making art that is the "essence" of larp? I would say that the general conclusion that came out of years of heated and friendly debates was that any of these directions can be made into the essence of larp. But, there is a but, if you combine two or more of those player motivations you can get into trouble. Thus communicating the style of

play on beforehand is a win-win situation for everyone involved. If you are into intrigues and gaming you will find it pretty dull to interact with an esoteric immersionist. If you just want to hang out and have a nice time with your friends within a fictional framework, then you don't want some maniac swinging rubber in close proximity etc. So organizing as if there was an essence in your way of doing larp is recommendable. The interaction will run smother and everyone will be content in the end.

FINAL REMARKS

So, why are these mistakes done over and over again? I mean this text is definitely not a critique of a certain group of organizers or genre or style.

My hunch is that we are a little bit scared by the potentials of the larp. Many organizers intentionally or unconsciously wish to «save» their participants from the larp. This happens in many ways and the consequences are most of the time disturbing or even ruining the player experience. My point here is that there is nothing fundamentally new about the design issues that I've tried to pinpoint.

The underlying problem seems to be that we *know* that it's bad but *still* we do it, over and over again. Thus the philosophical/psychological twist to these hands-on design tips is to question whether we actually *want* involving, mindtwisting and breathtaking events, or if we are content with the stumbling scenarios that we keep on repeating? It is as if we unconsciously wish to fail to realize our fantasies, but with the right proximity. Neither too good nor too crappy. Might be that we do not *really* want our fantasies to come true, because that would probably have far-reaching consequences for our daily life. Our praxis is directed to *almost* getting there.

Are we too coward to use our full set of methods and learn from previous mistakes? Are we afraid of what can happen if we design at full throttle? I dare all the organisers out there to be even more daring in your proposals.

Let's see how good we *really* are.

Thanks to A-K Linder for input.

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JOHN H. KIM

Culture and Social Status in Larping

SOCIAL STATUS can mean many different things depending on the social situation and the interpretation of the viewer, but we have some common understanding. Higher status people may be richer, more cultured, more famous, or more respected. On a scale of an entire country, business leaders and politicians have enormous economic and political power, much greater than the average citizen. Related dynamics define status within a smaller group, where there are leaders within a clique as well as lower-status members on the fringe. Most of us have no issue with the existence of a status hierarchy, yet have great concern that the hierarchy be fair and/or just.

There are many diverging views on what is fair and just in social dynamics, but some key issues are mobility of your status, the effect of status differences, and what qualities status is derived from. Many larpers feel that worrying over status differences seems petty, and would prefer to think that their larps are above issues of status. However, even while we pursue other creative goals, we still form status hierarchies within our groups that strongly influence us.

STATUS PROBLEMS IN LARPS

Most larp players have experienced larps that they perceived

to be unfair based on their status. Typically, the organizers write a scenario including some plotlines, and some key figures for those plotlines. They then include all the extra characters around those figures. The organizers then assign players to roles, and they pick players who they know well as talented for the key roles. Other players are lower status – such as newcomers and younger players – and are assigned less vital roles. They then play out the larp watching important events happen, but with little awareness of what is going on, and even less ability to influence the events. The players often see this as the organizers giving the most fun and/or powerful parts to their friends, even if the organizers genuinely intended only to give parts to the people they felt would play them best.

Thus, a larp often reinforces the prior social status structure. Those who are in power stay in power, and those on the fringe stay on the fringe. Most see this as unethical. Players usually accept differences in social status, but feel that that they should have equal or nearly equal opportunities within play.

In addition, the key characters in the plot tend to be those of noble birth or otherwise high status within the setting. This is especially true of fantasy settings, but often true of other settings as well. Fantasy is full of stories such as a child who achieves greatness only to find that he is secretly of noble birth. In this case, the larp not only reinforces the pecking order of the immediate social circle, but also projects a class-prejudiced view of larger society.

STATUS IN ROLE-PLAYING GROUPS

Like any social group, role-playing circles have a status hierarchy, where certain member have higher status than others.

The more senior members tend to have higher status, as do the more generally privileged (upper-class, majority culture and ethnicity, male etc.). In larp circles, a special high status is reserved for those who write larp scenarios, especially ones of perceived quality. High status is also accorded those who play their roles especially well.

We tend to see some parts of social status as reasonable. If someone is a skillful larpwright and/or larp player, then it is only fair that they should be respected in the larp community. In a similar way, we tend to think it is fair if someone who is skillful and hard-working makes a lot of money. However, other assignment of status can be seen as unjust.

Sociologist Gary Alan Fine analyzed social status in early role-playing culture in his book, *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds*. Writing in 1983, he found that role-playing games mirrored the social hierarchy of the group. Higher status players would referee games or take key roles as party leader or most powerful character. As he puts it,

While there is an informal perception that it is legitimate to kill gorgons, harpies, chimeras, and manticores, it is considered improper for a fourteen-year-old to lead a party of adventurers in which there are twenty-year-olds.

In the same way, larps tend to have in-game hierarchies that match that of the group in general. People may or may not think this is right, depending on their views. Within larps, many would feel it was wrong if someone was accorded high status for having a very influential and well-written character in a larp, when they did not do anything to earn that. In other matters, different people will have different perceptions of what is right, and the details are too complex to delve into. Instead, I will

suggest some possibilities, and readers can judge for themselves what they feel is appropriate.

Going further, Chris Lehrich, in his essay *Ritual Discourse in Role-Playing Games*, suggests that status differences can be reinforced within role-playing games. He writes,

That is, it could be argued that the shared space of ritual, although it permits and even demands reflection upon social inequalities, ultimately acts not only to affirm these inequalities as natural and given, but also deludes those in inferior positions into thinking that they achieve a measure of equality that is in fact nonexistent.

— LEHRICH 2003

For example, a hypothetical larp author might write historical larps where he details women's roles, but they are low status in keeping with his view of society. As such, women players have a harder time standing out in play. After each game is over, everyone remarks how they perceived the in-game society as sexist, as the larp story called attention to the inequities of the in-game society. Nevertheless, certain players afterwards are raised in status for their portrayal of pivotal figures in the game, and those figures are not women. Cut out from these parts, the women players tend to stay on the fringes of the social circle outside of the game. This would be the larp reinforcing social inequities.

Larps often draw from historical fiction or fantasy genres, which often include many social inequities. For example, fantasy stories are full of characters who win acclaim only to find that they are really of noble birth, explaining their rise to greatness. In a fantasy larp, a set of hypothetical larp organizers might have parts for the king and ministers. For the play to do

well, they want to cast a player as king who can convincingly portray an upper-class leader. They choose, then, a player who fits the part well – he looks convincingly, is well-educated, and speaks with confidence. By doing so, though, they have reinforced social inequities.

STATUS STRATEGIES

In the following sections, I suggest some strategies for handling status when designing a larp. Each strategy has a tag line that suggests the strategy, though the tag is evocative rather than being a strict definition. Also, regardless of the names, the strategies are not entirely exclusive, so that some could be used in various combinations.

The point of outlining these strategies is not as a search for one that is best, but rather to point out the different ways that one can look at the social ethics. There is no single right way to construct a fair and just social structure. Further, what is appropriate within the span of a temporary game may not be the same as what is appropriate for a permanent social structure. By parallel, at a birthday party, one person is considered special, but that is not seen as unjust because it is a temporary state that everyone gets an equal opportunity for.

"The Ladder"

In many long-term larps, new players come in at the lowest status, and then are given opportunities to rise in status. Over many sessions, some players leave and some players join. By analogy, they are climbing a social ladder, with steps up and down depending on their actions within the game. For example, larps set in White Wolf's *World of Darkness* tend to have status based on game-mechanical advancement as well as the

social process of making allies and defeating enemies. Even in non-mechanical theater-style larps, though, some groups have an informal sense that there are experienced “star” players and that newcomers must work their way up through the ranks in order to be trusted with a place in central plotlines.

This intentional mobility of status further complicates ethical issues, because not only should opportunities be fairly distributed at the start, but also the advancement should be equitable. Even if the structure is equitable, though, many dislike the idea of deliberately having to work one’s way up through the ranks. Some feel that social circles are hierarchical enough by normal social interaction, in that those who have been there longer know more and have developed skills that fit the group’s values. From this view, formal structures should work to lessen the feeling of working up through the ranks rather than enhancing them. Further, some feel that working up from deliberately low status encourages regular or loyal larpers rather than creative or helpful larpers. If someone new comes in with great ideas and is willing to help, should they be deliberately ranked lower than someone who has only been showing up for years?

Of course, there is no single correct answer for how to structure status within larps. However, a ladder structure tends to be more off-putting to newcomers.

“The Commune”

This is the strategy of trying to make all roles roughly equal in power and opportunity for action. In effect, you are trying to create the effect of a flat social structure, at least for the purposes of the scenario. This can be very difficult, and it is an issue that many larp authors struggle with. The tag line of

“commune” implies both the aim and the difficulty of creating a flat status structure, even though the games may have little resemblance to real-world communes.

One approach is to have artificial circumstances that negate the usual status hierarchy – i.e. a group of people all find themselves in a mysterious room together. Another approach is to have a social hierarchy, but to give compensating circumstantial benefits to lower-class characters. That is, there are upper class characters and lower class, but the lower class characters have secrets and plots of their own to compensate for their status.

For example, I played in a fantasy larp entitled *The End of Lloegy*, organized by Ryan Hart, set in a fantasy world inspired by Old English myth. I was cast as a commoner who was a bodyguard for a local king. Secretly, though, I knew that I was one of seven chosen representatives of old gods. While the nobles dealt with important politics, I was working with others – usually commoners – on a religious quest to find the other six. In principle, my involvement and importance within the religious quest balanced my lower status within the main political battle. However, in practice, the outcome of the religious quest had little influence on the cataclysmic events of the finale. Balancing the importance of plotlines and of characters within plotlines can be very difficult.

While this strategy may eliminate the advantages of a deliberately structured hierarchy like “The Ladder,” some players will have advantages outside of their character. For example, experienced players could have out-of-character knowledge of the organizers, players, or background. Being familiar with the people involved may let a player use his character to overshadow others. Depending on the circumstances, these advantages may range from minor to overwhelming. Most would

tend to say that the status of the players is more dominant than the status of the characters.

“The Upheaval”

Another strategy is to set a game within a social upheaval, which could be very local (like a family break-up) to very broad (like a national revolution or coup). Rather than status being fixed within a game, some characters who are powerful and important early in the game may become overshadowed by those who were formerly unimportant. This mobility of status can make it even more difficult for the parts to be strictly equitable, but that may not be relevant. This strategy values giving many people turns at higher status, rather than everyone having the same moderate status.

The mechanism can be handled differently. Two experimental larps handled this by a meta-game mechanism. *Tango for Two* was a larp organized by Tor Kjetil Edland and Even Tømte for Solmukohta 2008. Half the players were conscious characters, while another half were their subconscious impulses. When the lights were dimmed, players were instructed that the subconscious would be dominant. *Irgendwie Kunst*, organized by Karsten Dombrowski and Martina Ryssel for Knutepunkt 2009, had a similar mechanic. Each of five players was told a particular color, and when that color was showing in the lights of the room, they were instructed to be dominant.

These were explicit, meta-game instructions on dominance. However, a similar effect can happen in-game if the in-game events encourage dominance by formerly lower-status characters. For example, a foundling child may be discovered to be the heir to the kingdom, or orders from distant authority may fire a CEO and install his assistant in his place.

To be reliable, the high status should not depend on action from the player of the role. Certain high-status roles call for assertiveness and/or aggression on the part of the player. For example, a role may be an official leader who gives order to others, or the role may have a game mechanic that the player must actively use. Low-status players are less likely to give orders or use assertive mechanics, and further if they do so, they risk alienating other players. It is more reliable if the status is created by instructions given to other roles. For example, rather than instructing the revolutionary leader to assert herself, the organizer can create other characters with motivations to support the leader after the revolution.

“The Celebration”

Another strategy is to make a special role or roles that are higher-status throughout a given game, but to distribute these in an explicit and equitable fashion. Rather than trying to make all of the characters equal (as in “The Commune”), participants would recognize that certain roles are special and encourage and celebrate those roles.

For example, a sharp contrast to “The Ladder” strategy would be to give high-status roles to newcomers that recognize and celebrate their joining the group. This could be seen as a parallel to a debutante ball or other initiation ceremony. This is equitable since everyone in the group should get such an initiation at some point.

For example, I organized a fantasy larp, *Long Live the Queen*, that was run specifically for the 13th birthday of one of the players. I made the birthday girl’s character special in that she was an oracle who knew all the secrets of the background, and she would decide in the end who was the true heir to the

throne. Since the event was announced as a birthday party, the other participants were not discouraged or displeased that the role was special.

Alternately, organizers could have certain special roles or conditions assigned by a random or semi-random draw. Assigning roles randomly makes it difficult to get appropriate characters to players. However, there could be in-game conditions or events that affect status randomly. For example, a hypothetical larp could have a set of related characters that are assigned according to choice or organizer casting, but then at the start of the larp, a randomly chosen character wins an enormous sum of money from a lottery. Fantasy or speculative elements could similarly be randomly assigned.

It is critical to avoid false expectations in this approach, however. Casting low-status players in high-status roles can potentially result in only frustration. For example, if you cast a low-status player as the king, the result may be a king that none of the other characters listen to or obey. There are two keys to avoiding this. The first is creating high-status roles that depend less on action from the player of the role, as in the case of “The Upheaval.” The second is getting buy-in from others players. The other players must recognize and support these roles as special and legitimately assigned.

CONCLUSION

While we may not like to admit it, status differences and hierarchies are present and affect all of our activities. Like other social activities, larps are filled with issues of equity. Do our larps promote the sort of social dynamics that we would want them to? There is no single right answer to this. Not only do our values differ, but we have different interpretations of the

values of any given structure. Still, these issues are worth thinking about in the next larp you play in or organize.

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KATRI LASSILA

Larp Campaign Director's A–Z

A ATTITUDE—You are the director, and the players feel your energy and direct it to their game. If you're not the most enthusiastic of all, something is wrong. Positive attitude keeps you, your campaign and the players up and running. Don't bother to tell the players if you're having a bad day, they've got enough bad days of their own and still they're willing to put their time and effort in your campaign. You don't wanna or you don't need to hear about your 30 players' bad days either. Admire your players' playing and devotion and become their fan.

B BUDGET—How much does your campaign cost? How do you pay the expenses? Is the fee of the game payable all at once or do players pay something for every game? How do you make sure that they pay in time? Are you getting money from anywhere else than players? Calculate the budget of your campaign well in advance and stay with it. Calculate the costs for locations, food, insurances, photographers, entertainment, transport, scenography etc. Have a reserve for surprise bills. If somebody breaks a lamp in an old mansion, it's you who'll end up paying it otherwise. You're going to have enough things to consider without needing to worry if you've got to sell your car

to be able to pay the bills of your games. If issues relating to money seem difficult, find a reliable person or an accountant to make it for you.

C CHARACTERS—The campaign characters get to evolve in a long term timeline way better than in one-shot games. That makes them special and often magnificent to play. Campaign characters tend to become very dear to their players. Create the character together with its player. Dig out your player's preferences and dreams and help them come true in the character. Give them several contacts and plots to start with. Let player have an effect on character's history and future. Respect the player's opinions during the campaign, he/she's the one knowing the living character, not you anymore. Trust the player to play the character the best possible way. Help him/her to enjoy and use all your talent to make the character the best he/she's ever played. Use helping characters to make the campaign better and more variable.

D DIRECTOR'S CUT—Realize that a larp differs greatly from a movie, not only by having all the characters in the leading roles but in many other ways also. Scenes or plots which work well in movies (lone nights in the city, standing in the rain, walking five kilometres feet wet in the snow crying) don't always work in larp. The most important and luxurious trait in larp is the interaction between characters. Use it!

E ENDING—Your campaign has it's age. Design it in advance. Make decisions of how many games you'll play, for how long time and how the story runs through them. Change in the run if needed. Decide one or more endings to

your campaign, let them live according to the development of your campaign. Be open to new endings if the original ones seem outdated.

F FEEDBACK—Give five times more positive than negative feedback to your players and your fellow directors. Direct the positive feedback to all and also personally to players. The negative feedback if needed, only personally. Make sure that your feedback is understood correctly. Take well feedback given to you. Don't get angry or sad. Learn of the critic if it's constructive, forget the unconstructive and move on, thank for the good feedback.

G GROUP—Creating a campaign with a group of people means that you're creating it not only with the fellow directors but also together with your players. In a different way from one shot-games, players get to affect to the world the characters are living in on a long term basis. Make sure that they feel that the characters' actions have an effect to the world they're living in. Use that for the good of the campaign, don't restrict players' ideas because you're jealous of your original ones. Change them to better ones if needed. Trust your players and their effort for the campaign. You're still the one holding the strings and knowing the secrets.

H HAVING FUN—The main and most important idea of larping is having fun. If you have to calculate pluses and minuses, something is wrong. Remember your childhood plays and savour their feeling. Don't stress too much. Decide why you're making a campaign: for the fun of it, for the enjoyment, for wonderful experiences, or for boosting your own ego

or gathering fame. If the reason of creating a campaign relates to your low self esteem which needs boosting, reconsider. If you're not having fun, soon nobody else isn't having either.

I NTERNET—Use internet to spread information. Be sure to make yourself well understood, communicating without voice tones or gestures isn't always easy. Some people are more familiar with internet than others. Make sure that it doesn't affect their communication with you. Take personal contact in a cafe if needed or use your phone bravely.

J OB MANAGEMENT—Ask somebody else to take care of game fees, locations and meals. Creating the world and keeping it running takes enough of your time, you don't have to worry about dull practical things on top of that.

K EY PERSONS—Put together a good team. Trust your team and respect its input in your campaign. If there are players interested to work as helping directors, take them along in the designing process. You are the biggest key, but for opening all the great doors of your campaign you'll need smaller keys too.

L EADERSHIP—Directing a campaign requires leadership. You're the one making the decisions, you're the one taking the responsibility of the bad and the good ones. As the film director bears the consequences of his/her team's bad decisions, you're the one doing that in your campaign. In a crisis situation your job is to be the one acting as a reasonable human being. If the others break, you'll be still all cool and in your senses. Make sure that everybody know the purpose,

the vision, the style or the idea of the campaign. Most part of the problems comes from misunderstandings. Communicate well what you want your players to do, what's your vision. The players contribute gladly and play on your side if it's clear what you want. Use a lot of examples, make yourself an example. Be strong enough to be an inspiring leader and be recognized for it.

M EETINGS—Meet your players and fellow directors personally and take active contact to them not only by email, but also before or after the games or in special player-director-meetings.

N ORMAL LIFE—Your campaign may be for you the most time consuming project you're doing at the moment but that's not the case with the players. Everybody's got their own lives to live so don't demand too much. If they enjoy the campaign, they'll put as much effort in it as they can. Remember your own real life and live it. If you find your only joy from your campaign, something is wrong. Make your real life so fun and exciting that you don't need to hide in your game from it.

O THER PROJECTS—Be realistic with your projects. Don't try to direct a larp campaign if you're at the same time planning your own wedding, having a baby, renovating a big house or divorcing your spouse. If you will be doing some of these anyway, plan your time well and stick with the plans. You can maybe share time between your projects in other ways than before.

PLOTS—Salute those given by players with joy, never turn them down. Tune them to fit in your plans, you'll find the way. Never answer "you find nothing". Use bluff, wrong paths, and lots of imagination. Always give some prize in the end. Don't let the plots become too fragmented. If a player knows too tiny bit of a plot, he/she may not even recognize it to be one. Glue your campaign together by making sure that you remember all the plots, even the tiny ones. Write down them as soon as they appear and continue them freely. Draw timelines and plotlines. Be sure to use them and let players use them during your campaign. You don't need to know of all the plots where they're heading to. The solutions players invent are often better ones than those you would have come up with.

QUESTIONS—Answer them politely and clearly, even the stupid ones. Trust yourself. You're doing great job. Be humble and ready to learn more but proud of yourself. Ask advice, ask questions. You know experienced people, ask their opinions. Don't panic. Everything always ends up well eventually.

RELATIONSHIPS—Make the campaign as enjoyable for the players as possible. Know your players and their preferences. Let the players play with the people they play well together with. Never underestimate the effect of chemistry in game. It's not your job to educate players in relationships or try to make them like each other if they don't. Use their relationship traits for the benefit of your game.

STORY—Create a storyline and the big story behind the scenes. If you've created the world, that's good, but not

enough. Create the arch of drama which evolves from the beginning through the middle point to its end. Small stories are also important. All the characters must have them as well. Let them see whole stories sometimes, otherwise they don't realize there are any.

TIME—Know how much time you've got to spend directing a campaign. Make an estimate of the time you think the campaign will consume and multiply it by two. That will be closer to the truth. Consider if you still want to do it. If so, don't hesitate to throw yourself in to it.

ULTIMATE STARDOM—All the players of the campaign (if not helping characters or similar) have the same right to feel themselves as the star of the campaign. All the characters have to be equal so that the story could be told in a way that every one of them is in the leading role. As in a TV-series episodes concentrating sometimes on certain groups or characters, you can pick different characters and design games so that all in turn can be in the center of the whole game also.

VIEWPOINT—Remember, that the audience or reader of your larp is not you but the players. Every aspect of the game must feel aesthetically satisfying directly to its participants and them only. There is no use to design plots, scenes or other dramatic elements which only an outside spectator would grasp.

WORLD—Create your world so that there are no walls your players can run into. Make your campaign mellow enough that you never have to tell the players that

what they do or how they they play is wrong (if they're playing by the rules and respecting your world). Communicate well your ideas and the playing style, but don't whine about details. Be open to new ideas and greet them with joy. Creating a solar system full of different planets and races living on them is easy, more difficult is to create something believable and interesting for them to actually do. As interaction and action are the strong points of a larp campaign, be sure that the players don't have to just be in your world but they can do things and live in it.

X X-FACTOR—The great unknown can work for you or against you. If there are no unexpected surprises in the campaign, you're making a theater piece, not larp. Embrace the unknown and be creative enough to find the best solutions when something unexpected happens. The surprises keep you interested as well. Direct the campaign but railroad wisely. Create actions to lead the campaign to the direction you want to go, use helping characters and manipulate players. They shouldn't notice that there are ready paths they follow.

Y YOU—You are the most important part of the campaign. You have to take care of yourself, nobody else will. Don't be a martyr, recognize your strengths and weaknesses. If you get too tired, take a break. Communicate the reason to the players honestly but without putting guilt to their shoulders. Be sure at all times that you're getting from your campaign the thing you're searching for.

Z ZOO—A larp campaign is a zoo, full of different species (the players). As not the same methods work for everyone, get to know your players and find the right methods

for each one of them. A good animal handler gets along with all the species and doesn't try to make alligators eat salad or wombats feast with zebra meat. All the species don't necessarily fit in your zoo. If that's the case, free them decisively but keep positive relations to them.

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PEKKO KOSKINEN

This Book, Replayed

AN EXPLORATION INTO
INSTRUMENTS OF PLAY

OVERTURE: TEXTUAL PLAY—Apparently you’re “reading” this book – you could as well be playing it. How? The possibilities are innumerable. Here’s one take on the topic. The following system plays upon text, in a rather literal fashion. The book directly attached to this system serves as the “source setting” for your play, presenting the material that fuels its operations. In addition, you can integrate this system to any other body of text, engaging the play upon it.

As an underhanded move, this text also suggests a somewhat unconventional style of role-playing, built out of Instruments of play. (With the word role-playing, this text refers to larps, tabletops and any other forms that employ a similar system of roles.)

PRELUDE: INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF BEHAVIOR—Herewith you’ll find a blueprint for an Instrument – an Instrument that plays upon yourself. You could liken it to a musical instrument, the difference being that it uses your behavior, rather than sound, as its medium. This comparison serves as an apt introduction to the design principles of the Instruments of play. The correspondence between musical and behavioral instruments can be condensed into three themes:

- I. PLAYFULNESS IN OPERATION: All musical instruments are suggestions of a playful relation to sound – think of the change of behavior when someone creates a drum out of their pots and pans, for example. Likewise, these Instruments of play serve as similar suggestions towards your behavior and the environment that surrounds it.
- II. DESIGNED CHARACTERISTICS OF PLAY: Musical instruments offer both a unique tone, and a particular, intentionally designed style of play. In other words, they harbor a personality that expresses itself as sound. These Instruments make you a similar offer: they color your behavior in a style that is likewise characteristic to their nature.
- III. CREATIVITY CENTERED ON THE PLAYER: While the violin restricts the actions of a violinist, the nexus of creation is still considered to be on the player's side, not in the instrument itself. Thus, Instrument's restrictions set up a novel field of expression and experience, which the player then takes over.

Likewise, in the practice of behavioral play, the Instruments transform into roles: as the player takes over, the Instrument “dissolves” into the player's personal process. This feature arguably brings the play into the regime of role-playing, although in a rather unconventional manner.

After these preparatory remarks, we'll move onto the Instrument itself.

READING, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES —AN INSTRUMENT OF PLAY

This section outlines an Instrument, the operation of which forms a particular practice of play. Survey its different areas first in a general manner, developing a sense of the whole, then experiment with the different practices within.

Structure

- I. CORE forms an engine that generates material for play.
- II. EXTENSIONS turn that material to different practices of play.
- III. KEYS offer variations to the Core, expanding the possibilities of its application.

The first instance of play initiates from the Core. Subsequently, you are free to shift your focus from an area to another.

Operation

The use of this Instrument is initiated in a ritualistic fashion: its descriptions outline practices, which should initially be followed. After the initial steps, the method within the ritual is left to you, as a seed, intending to take root in your soil. Whatever grows therefrom, whatever you nurture into being, is left to your jurisdiction.

Play

The play tends to be richer the more you merge it with your everyday life. The less distance it has from the conventions

around you, the more material the play has from which to feed upon. Also, play in an opportunistic manner: don't set aside a particular time for playing, but play when a possibility arises.

THE CORE: FRAMED READING

Select a text for reading. When reading, focus on finding a passage that draws your attention, rousing stray thoughts, and breaking the routine advancement of reading. At such moment, halt your reading, and seek to isolate the passage of text that caused this effect. Decide from where it initiates and where it ends – this might well be mid-sentence. After you have the passage thusly limited, read it repeatedly to build a robust mental image of the words themselves, and the thoughts it engenders for you.

This Core combines with interchangeable extensions. To complete the Instrument, select one of them, and attach it to the core.

Extension 1: Textual Permutation

Move your eyes away from the passage itself, shifting the focus from the words to the thoughts engendered by their reading. Experiment with these thoughts for a while, trying out variations and combinations. After this period of experimentation, move your focus back to language – not on the original words, but with consideration of how to express the thoughts you currently harbour.

Once you've formed an expression of these thoughts, write it down, replacing the original passage with your text: bracket the original, make a note beside it, and write your replacement in an opportune place (which could be an additional paper between the pages). Decide whether you want the

replacement text to weave into the main text, without introducing a breach of its flow, or whether it intentionally cuts up its flow, and make modifications accordingly.

You can incorporate the changed text into the reading phase of your play, thus forming a cycle of permutation. This cycle could form a path of development both for the text, and the play it induces, thus moving ever farther from the original material.

Consider the possibilities of this approach as a genre of writing: Every instance of writing results in a finished text, yet no text is ever finished. None of the texts is written by you, yet all of them are yours. You might imagine yourself as such writer by vocation, perhaps including fictional elements to yourself.

Extension 2: Scattered Fragments

This Extension can be used in combination with the first one.

Consider the passages as a collection of fragments, and use them in combination to imagine larger bodies of meaning. While gathering the collection, you might filter it through a particular theme to generate cohesion among the collection.

Consider the methods for using your collection:

- I. Gather your collection on a table, and survey them together. Think of possible ways to organize them, and move the fragments accordingly: form groups, move them closer and farther from each other depending on the emerging associations. At times, cease the movement to survey the layout as a whole.
- II. Select a limited space over which you have some authority – your home would be an archetypal

example. Distribute the fragments into the space, merging their meanings with the space itself. In your home, for example, you might consider the fragments against the nature of its different locations.

Consider the possibilities of this approach as a novel form of mapping: a manner of charting imaginary spaces, associations, lands, conjuring their ideas into being. With the second method, you might develop a technique of creating allegorical spaces – intersections between text and physical spaces.

Extension 3: Conversation Pieces

After creating a passage through Framed Reading, seek a conversational situation, and introduce the passage into the dialogue at an opportune moment. Consider your style of introduction:

- I. You might introduce the passage through a playful premise: drawing scenarios, placing suppositions against everyday life: “What if there was a God of Play with a dogma like this ... ?” This approach offers a path for your conversant to enter into the weave of fiction, which could also grow into a more full-fledged play.
- II. You could limit the introduction of play to yourself, assuming a personal role. For example, create a role based on the passage, using conversation as a development platform.
- III. You might also introduce the passage in a candid fashion: “I’ve find this quote interesting – what do

you think of it?” Whether such situation is play is left up to you. Play is ultimately a question of attitude, rooted in the player, not the context. When we talk about “playing with your food” for example, we do not refer to an inherent quality of the subjected material, but rather an approach taken by the person that causes the play.

Approach this style of play as a conversational tool. For example, you might reserve a notebook for writing down source passages. You might also experiment with a micro-level role-playing, where sessions last only for a few exchanges of dialogue.

MODIFYING MECHANICS: KEYS OF VARIATION

So far we’ve been detailing the practical mechanics of reading. Let us now turn our attention to the interpretation of the text: how to playfully alter the meaning you gather from it.

These modifications are called Keys: a musical term that defines a system of notes based on a key note, giving the music its characteristic tone. The Keys of this Instrument function quite similarly: by changing the underlying meaning of the source text, they come to color all operations with the Instrument.

The Key of Self

This Key orients the play upon yourself. It directs the passages more directly towards yourself, setting reflections between yourself and others, or between different versions of yourself (past and present self, for example).

Read the passage as if it was written by you:

- I. ...when you were younger, presenting a viewpoint you used to hold, but have since grown out of.

- II. ...during some period that you've totally forgotten – you've no recollection of it.
- III. ...as a raw copy which you're now editing, correcting the lapses of thought, clumsy expressions etc.

The Key of Cultural Distance

This Key plays with the idea of culture, the traditions and conventions implied with it. By alienating yourself from a familiar culture, you create a space of new interpretations.

The passage is a fragment:

- I. ...from a lost genre of play. This curious genre, perhaps the whole culture of play, is unknown to you – all you have of it are the fragments you're interpreting.
- II. ...from documentation resulting from a role-playing game in a seminar format. Documents were written in character, and contain traces of the format of the original game. You're trying to figure out its design...

The Key of Dogma

This Key plays with the idea of a sacred text. Most sacred texts are made of common words and phrases: their sacredness stems more from the context of interpretation, rather than the fabric of words. Because of this, any text can be considered sacred by applying a simple change of perspective. In addition, the source of sacredness is also an area for potential variation.

The passage you're reading:

- I. ...is from a holy book, describing the dogmas, doctrines and origin stories of a certain playful god. Some potential areas of research upon this god: A. the daily practice of its devotees B. The form and function of its place of worship.
- II. ...compels you: somehow you have to honor its intent, reflecting it in your coming actions. Use the passage to figure out the activities you should undertake.
- III. ...contains traces from a sacred text. Unfortunately, the original text has been damaged – only fragments remain.

POSTLUDE: DESIGNING TOOLS, NOT WORKS—As an afterthought – a thought to leave you with as you move past this text – we should tackle a couple of essential questions, so far unaddressed. That is: Why Instruments? Why design Instruments for play, instead of games?

To tackle these questions, let's work through a second reason why these designs are called Instruments. This is the tool-like nature the concept of instrument implies.

What is a tool? Tool is a piece of design that requires the operation of an active user to realize its intent. This aspect is mirrored in the relationship between games and their play. Yet, tools employ approach in a much more radical fashion than games.

To observe the difference between tools and games, think of a pen that you might carry in your pocket, always at hand, taking it out when an opportune moment arises. Once introduced, the pen brings its palette of actions into everyday life in a seamless fashion. In other words, the pen upholds a designed

range of operations, yet is completely submerged in everyday life, without limit.

This approach is shared by musical instruments: think of a flutist, walking down a street, taking up a flute at opportune moments to “comment” on everyday activity. While unconventional, there’s nothing to prevent this possible behavior.

There’s another aspect of tools and instruments which becomes apparent in situations of multiple users: Think of a band of musicians. Each member has an instrument... which have not originally been designed to work together, but as independent units. Yet, the idea of a band relies upon the collaboration of these units: the musical instruments have a combinatory nature, even though they are designed independently.

Both of these aspects are common among everyday tools, and form the basis of their versatility – versatility that is arguably missing from our conventional forms of play. If we were to translate these aspects into requirements for play, they could be expressed in the following manner:

- I. The design should center on the player, rather than on the game “around” the player. The play is upheld by a single person, against the background of the everyday environment.
- II. Several players can potentially combine their play, creating situations that resemble traditional game structures. However, the players do not have to employ the same design: as they can interact with the everyday world, they can likewise interact with any form of play.

The Instrumental structure for designing play was conceived to tackle both of these requirements. Unlike most role-playing

games, or even pervasive games, the setting and the backstory are not positioned as anchors of play. Rather, its anchor is the *practice* of play itself: a defined method which develops through player’s actions. This gives the player support, which is vital in the case of solo play, where you cannot rely upon others to support the fiction.

The instrument of playful reading presented here, as modest as it is, tackles the possibility of representing such designs, of finding a form in which to express them. Perhaps it is just a stab in the dark... but this darkness, lack of illumination in a direction that *should* exist, is precisely the reason for its existence.

CODA: SKETCHING THE HORIZON—Think back to the case of the pen. Think of how that modest tool, created by us, has come to change us – change our actions and identities. In time immemorial, we learned to build concrete tools to change our relationship with the world. By the passing centuries, these tools became extensions of ourselves: weapons engendered soldiers, pianos pianists, computers programmers. Persons, their very understanding of life, were built around the presence of such tools.

Reflecting role-playing through the idea of tools, one can conceive a possibility to repeat this cycle – but this time in a more expressive manner. Just like the weapons and pens have created ways of perceiving the world, playful tools could generate possibilities of self-modification: methods to take control of who we are, and who we want to be. A possibility of a selection of tools that we carry with us, as an extension of our personality.

This horizon is implied in role-playing – and before this horizon, I (yes, me, personally) would like leave you, as a final scene, to ride off to.

By its very existence, role-playing has always stated: An expression can become a way of being, encompassing all that being entails. To me, this is our task, even duty... and personally, I cannot think of a larger duty along the path we have ventured.

PEKKO KOSKINEN is a game designer who also plays among more traditional forms of art. He's a member of the theater group Reality Research Center, and collaborates with YKON, an advocacy group for utopian thought. He also designs games in Playsign, and is currently developing a playful learning environment for the city of Oulu. If you happen to meet him, ask him about meta-religious structures – he certainly likes to talk about those.



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Projekt Prometheus

ALTERNATE REALITY GAMES
IN CIVIC EDUCATION

BERLIN IN JUNE 2008. *On the Festival für junge Politik a group of youths and young adults from different regions of Germany decipher a mysterious e-mail message which had been sent to an education center, the Bildungsstätte Alte Schule Anspach. The message reveals that on the very same day a terrorist attack will take place in Berlin that needs to be prevented at all costs. The group becomes more and more involved with the events and uncovers a conspiracy that aims to override the basic democratic order of the Federal Republic of Germany.*

Information is hidden in deposit boxes at train stations, in hotel rooms, libraries, museums, but also in exotic places in Berlin, such as old underground bunkers or the futuristic hacker club c-base, which has been designed to mimic a space station. Other clues can be found in the newspapers, on web pages or in chat rooms. The participants meet actors and eventually do not know whom to trust anymore. Others watch the game from the festival grounds and try to help the groups in the city to solve the puzzles.

This is the start of *Projekt Prometheus*, an Alternate Reality Game (ARG) event series, an idea which came up in the area

of civic education. *Projekt Prometheus* is a unique combination of elements from experiential education and political education. Through the events, youths and young adults are able to experience political education on a practical basis, and discover it to be an interesting topic. Therefore, the games are designed to especially appeal to youths and young adults. The exciting plot ensures a high level of motivation among the participants and allows for a controversial depiction of complex interrelations in society. Participants learn to analyze political situations as well as their own position in a playful way.

The use of new and traditional media is strongly incorporated into the game. A number of web pages, press advertisements and fake newspaper reports that the organizers specifically created are used in the game, and are to be identified by the participants as means to manipulate them. Thus, they acquire a critical media literacy that excels the mere use of the media by far and can be regarded as a general skill to process information. The game design is oriented on the living environment of young people, that is strongly influenced by the media, and offers an exciting and interactive alternative to the passive use of media.

There are situations in the game where participants meet actors who ask them to make a decision that has influence on the further course of the game. Here, participants are able to experiment with unconventional decisions. The consequences of these decisions hold a high potential for learning. In the background, organizers watch the game and take care of its secure and smooth progression. At the end of each game, all participants discuss the experiences made during the game.

The previous events under the name of *Projekt Prometheus*, incorporating games, political education and media literacy

skills, have been designed and carried out by *Bildungsstätte Alte Schule Anspach* and *basa e.V.* in close cooperation with the *Forest Knights (Waldritter e.V.)*. Furthermore, the event series has been funded by the Federal Agency of Civic Education in Germany.*

STORY

The *Bildungsstätte Alte Schule Anspach* is tracking a high level conspiracy. A group of radical conspirators, high rank politicians, members of the military and intelligence services, is about to override democracy. To accomplish this aim, conspirators make use of so-called *false flag operations*; operations for which Islamic terror cells are then wrongly accused. This is supposed to frighten people and enable the sneaking abolishment of the German democratic order to install a totalitarian surveillance and police state.

The security firm *Hendriks & Trauth* (H&T) has developed a concept for a terrorist attack that will ensure extensive media coverage – an attack on the FEZ building (Center for leisure and education) at the youth event *Berlin 08*. An Arabic student – won over under the pretense of him working on an anti-terrorist intelligence task – is to be employed as the main perpetrator and head of a fictitious Islamic terror cell. In secret meetings videos are made and pictures are taken.

A programmer with low security clearance at H&T, unaware of the criminal activities of his employer, accidentally discovers secret documents when he is doing server maintenance work. Amongst these he finds a file called *Prometheus* which includes

* Information about funding programs of the Federal Agency of Civic Education in Germany can be found at <http://www.bpb.de/>

all the information about the planning of the terrorist attack. Appalled by his discovery he copies the data to a USB stick and covers his tracks on the server. While he is also worried about his own safety, his concern is to warn the Arabic student and to prevent the terrorist attack from happening. In order to prevent the attack he lays a puzzle trail in the city and on the web.

In this fictitious background story an alternate reality is described. Different historic cases, such as the failure of the Weimar Republic or recent developments leading to the limitation of civil and human rights, have been analyzed to strengthen the deemed authenticity of the plot.

The story critically assumes that a war against terror is in fact a war against the freedom of citizens in western democracies. This polarizing perspective is created to raise the participants' awareness for actual current affairs. Participants become aware of weak points in our democratic society that can be misused by antidemocratic forces for their own objectives. In this case a slightly exaggerated and bleak scenario is designed. It reveals the manipulative potential of new media to the participants.

PREPARATION

The organizing team consists of one full-time employee of the educational institution, freelancers and a large number of volunteers. The preparations, especially concerning the design of the background story, are very extensive but also very informative for the people involved. Current political affairs, trends and moods are researched and analyzed, and it is tested whether they are suitable for the game. In the process, the organizing team looked closely into the subjects of terror, war, civil rights, intelligence services, influence of the

media, conspiracy theories and current political developments, for example the *Freedom of Information Act* and the *Patriot Act*, both enacted by the USA. The game design is based on actual sources and material. At times, this lead to curious results, as for example the realization that it is more difficult to build a mock bomb with a time detonator that sounds a horn instead of exploding, than building an actual bomb that would actually explode. This is, of course, a thought-provoking fact...

This is Not a Game – that is the philosophy of the Alternate Reality Game (ARG). In order to create a setting that is as close to reality as possible, the game has to do without anything that might reveal its staged nature to the participants. An actor – similar to a non-player character (NPC) in larps – employed by the organizing team to personify more than one character would directly appear to be unrealistic. Another problem are actors who participants already know from a different setting. There are even more aspects commonly accepted in a larp that cannot be applied in Alternate Reality Games. The enactment of physical combat for example is likely to trivialize the event and would too obviously disclose the fictitious characteristics of the game.

The basic concept of Alternate Reality Games is to obscure the borders between fiction and reality. Therefore, the background organization has to stay hidden during the whole game, and ideally the starting point of the game should not easily be recognized. For the organization team, which has to supervise a fixed group of participants, collect a fee for participation and set a fixed date for the game, this is a dilemma: How can an event be advertized that claims that there is no event?

We have not found the best compromise for our event series yet, but are still in an experimental stage. The organizers

of the Swedish ARG *Sanningen om Marika*^{*}, that was conducted in 2007 in cooperation with the Swedish TV station *Sveriges Television* (SVT), found a compromise. They changed the mission statement *This is Not a Game* into the rule *Pretend that it is real*. Thus, they assumed that participants knew that it was a game but acted as if the fictitious story was real.

It does not suffice to just spread so-called *rabbit holes* on the web – hidden introductions to the game with cryptic hints – in order to reach and obtain enough participants to fill an event. This approach is only feasible when long-term and mostly web-based events are concerned.

Mysterious messages, which are supposed to subtly invite random people to join the game, very often lead to confusion and sometimes even rejection of the game. When finding the origin of the message becomes the participant's main concern, the game masters (or *puppet masters* in ARG terminology) run the risk of being uncovered, and with them the meta-level of organization and eventually the fictitious background of the whole story is revealed. Some addressees feel hassled or teased. This happened to the organizers of a commercial marketing-ARG, advertising the Enigma music album in 2006, when they send a feigned obituary to several blog hosts trying to involve them into the game. Within a couple of days the marketing agency was exposed as sender and the game to be advertising for a product. Many of the receivers felt manipulated and consequently rejected the game (Dietrich 2007).

* More information about *Sanningen om Marika* (The Truth About Marika) can be found on the web page of the producers (<http://www.thecompany.com>). For idea and realization *Sanningen om Marika* was awarded the International Interactive Emmy Award in the category of interactive TV service.

Customary registration of the participants takes away a lot of the game's suspense and mystery. For upcoming events we will establish a long-term opportunity to register in advance, so that all participants are free on the appointed date. We will contact the different groups beforehand in different ways to introduce them to the game. However, all players will be aware of participating in a game at all times.

As the creation of videos, photographs and web pages is greatly facilitated nowadays by digital technologies, there is a large number of options to supply participants with seemingly real information.

In *Projekt Prometheus* we employed the following media: mobile phones, sms, self-made newspaper articles, small advertisements in daily papers, Internet Relay Chat (IRC), Instant Messenger (ICQ), GPS-coordinates, QR Codes, CDs/DVDs, SD cards, voice recorders, videos, photoshopped pictures, and self-made documents and files.

Furthermore, a large number of specific web pages and e-mail accounts for fictitious organizations, companies and persons has been set up during the preparations, which is an important element of the puzzle and is, in addition to the different locations in the city, the second mainstay of the game. Social communities like StudiVZ and SchülerVZ (social internet communities like Facebook) were also incorporated into the game.

During the game the players have access to a computer room to be able to do the necessary research. On these computers the remote control software TightVNC is installed, thus enabling organizers to transmit mysterious messages to the computers and track the players' investigations.

PROCEDURE

In an Alternate Reality Game the participants do not personify a character – as it is the case in live action role-playing games – but themselves. They follow a puzzle trail that leads them to different locations in the city and to various web pages. In doing so, they acquire a large amount of information. The participants' task is, similar to the *mailbox task* in an assessment center*, to gather information and sort it according to relevancy. The information is designed as to not obviously appear to be true or false. Bit by bit, the single pieces of the puzzle start to make sense, but have to be rechecked and adapted as soon as new information comes up. Thereby, participants practice their skills to handle and process different kinds of information and data. Background knowledge about social topics, our political system and its processes of decision making are subtly embedded into the information.

The high level of interactivity in the game also requires the skill to improvise during its execution. The degree of difficulty of the tasks and puzzles has to be adjusted during the game so that participants do not get bored. It is also necessary to react immediately to unexpected actions on the part of the participants.

It is essential for organizers to promptly receive information concerning the current status of the game. Organizers are therefore in close contact with the actors at the locations

* In this task, which is quite popular in assessment centers, the participants receive a large amount of e-mail that they have to sort out. There is not enough time to put all letters and e-mails into order. Participants are to show that they are capable of working in a structured manner, to not get stressed out and not make any mistakes.

on-site. Additionally, the participants are equipped with mobile phones so that organizers or actors are able to contact them.

Designers of an ARG have an increased duty of care, on the one hand towards participants and actors, on the other hand towards people not involved in the game, which should not be imposed on them. Scenes that would attract a lot of attention should take place in an enclosed area as to avoid the irritation of random audiences. Furthermore, danger to participants and actors needs to be averted.

EDUCATIONAL DEMANDS

Aims of the project are the strengthening of critical skills as well as the mediation of knowledge about the democratic political system. It should also facilitate participants' development of their own conception of the world. Topics that are controversially discussed in public are also treated controversially in the game. The imaginary political situation and the participant's own attitude towards it are to be analyzed to draw a conclusion.

Project Prometheus facilitates practically experiencing political education and makes use of activity-oriented methods that possess features of activity, immediacy, suspense, emotionality, variation and a high level of authenticity. Although experiences cannot be purposefully caused, the realistic design of the setting makes certain subjective experiences very likely. Participants are confronted with physical, psychological and social challenges during the game. Through the design of the detailed political background they educate their power of judgment and their ability to act, hereby strengthening their personality development. Cooperation between the participants is vital to solve the plot or single parts of it. This promotes social skills and the ability to cooperate.

In order to make the event into an experience with lasting effect, extraordinary situations are designed that allow for limit experiences. A transfer of these exemplary learning processes to participants' living environments and everyday situations takes place when processing the experiences made. On this process organizers have little or no influence. Still, the learning process is facilitated by an elaborate reflection at the end of the event, where participants can talk about their intensive experiences and where organizers reveal the meta-level of the game.

In October 2008 *Projekt Prometheus* was awarded the third prize Continuing Education Innovation 2008 by Weiterbildung Hessen e.V. in cooperation with Hessen Agentur GmbH under the patronage of Dr. Alois Rhiel for its "outstanding, future-oriented and innovative educational offer".* The German live role-play association has assigned *Projekt Prometheus* with the F.R.E.D., the prize for progressive role-play progression in Germany.**

TRANSLATION: ALINA STÖTEKNUEL

FIRST PUBLISHED AS "*Projekt Prometheus. Alternate Reality Games in der politischen Bildung*" In: Dombrowski, Karsten (ed.): LARP: Hinter den Kulissen. Aufsatzsammlung zum Mittelpunkt 2009. Braunschweig: Zauberfeder, 2009.

* More information concerning the award and more winners can be found on the web page Weiterbildung Hessen e.V. on: <http://www.weiterbildunghessen.de/>

** The other applications and placings can be found on: <http://www.larp-mittelpunkt.de/cms/MP09FRED/>

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ALEXANDER KARALEVICH
& DIRK SPRINGENBERG

1943

AN EDUCATIONAL LARP MODEL?

WHEN IN PARTICULAR YOUNG PEOPLE in Belarus hear about events on the World War II topic, they generally wave it aside immediately. They assume that this is again part of the populist and patriotic propaganda, with the aim to present Belarus as a nation that has emerged after the World War II and the 'heroic victory' in this war has always been considered to be a watershed in the history of the country. The Belarusian government took over the Soviet attitude to deal with their history and inherited the Soviet culture of remembrance, which excludes coming to terms with the past systematically – until today.

FINDING ANOTHER HISTORY

These outdated mechanisms for dealing with the Belarusian history, led the Public Union Education Center "POST" in Minsk to the larp *1943* which was carried out as part of a comprehensive education program. The aim of this program was to attract young people to experience the events of history that were mostly contradictory, so they could examine their own attitudes on the subject. It was an attempt to rediscover their history as an argument against governmental propaganda. The objective of this larp was not to show what the participants were aware as "black" is "white" or vice versa. Instead, what

they should be acquainted with was that during the difficult and tragic times of World War II the values of humanity and qualities of courage and empathy play more important roles than the ideologies. Especially this is the case if we do not take a look just on the soldiers, but mainly on the civilians living on double-occupied territory. During the day they had to hide from the German soldiers and at night from the partisans.

Educators of the NGO education center “POST” got the idea for the game during a visit of the Rafto Human Rights House in Bergen, Norway. There, the organizers of the Norwegian role-playing game *1942* exposed their experiences and soon the idea to organize such a game in a Belarusian context was born. It took one year from the initial concept to the actual implementation. The approach was demanding – so far there hadn’t been a larp in Belarus with the theme World War II, in which the emphasis is not on military battles, but on the personal experience of complex events. In this game, participants were placed in specific conflict situations in which they were forced to make quick decisions. Often it was a matter of choosing between individual and community needs, or a command and their own opinion. In hindsight the decisions were not easily judged “right” or “wrong”.

THE GAME

As a venue a little vacant village in the middle of a forest was chosen. At the beginning of the game the village was inhabited by the players of the villagers. Among them were also some policemen. The following day the players of the German soldiers arrived to the village and seized one of the houses. The inhabitants of this house were evicted and had to find a different shelter. Two partisan groups lived in the woods – one

Polish and the other Soviet – and they came constantly to the village to fill up their water and food supplies. Sometimes they got into conflicts with each other or in skirmishes with the German soldiers.

One of the approaches of this project was the greatest possible realism of the game, which was very demanding for the participants. For example the Polish partisan groups had to talk to each other only in Polish, and if possible also to pray in Polish. The villagers were also divided into two groups: the Catholics, which should have a Polish accent in their language, and the Orthodox, who spoke different dialects of the Belarus. However for the “German soldiers” it was fairly difficult to talk to each other only in German. A few weeks before the game the group had rehearsed a lot of commands and phrases so they occurred, at least to the villagers, rather authentic. The communication was facilitated by a custom-designed dictionary, which was provided prior to the plays. The character roles were written by the organizers in advance based on a thorough research in primary and secondary historical sources and the inclusion of eyewitnesses. Video interviews with eyewitnesses were a key part of the overall project.

The next challenge for the participants was the surroundings and the weather. The game was initially scheduled for late August, but was later postponed to the end of October 2008. All groups were exposed to extreme conditions during the game, which they partially overcame with the help of the organizers. The villagers searched the woods for mushrooms and cooked their meals on an old wood stove. Even the house itself had to be heated and there were geese to take care of. For the partisan groups the lack of heat and scarce water were the most critical challenges. According to their own statement the

German soldiers were afraid to leave the house in the night even for going to the toilet. Such real adversity, which the people were exposed to, could put the game elements in the background because the participants do not suffer just as a character, but also as real people. In any case, for most young people it had been a valuable experience – especially for those who had no rural background.

SOME RESULTS

In this type of games, containing an educational approach, the learning effects usually appear in the analysis of the game and in a long and continuous reflection. Immediately after the end of the 1943 project an evaluation round was organized for all participants when there had been enough time to look back at what happened and clarify possible misunderstandings. After the game, some participants were interviewed intensively in order to evaluate the educational effect. A statement made by many participants, was the stereotypical notions that are still present in the Belarusian culture, which are difficult to store. The Soviet “red partisans” for example were first perceived by the villagers as friends, even though the villagers was deprived because of them. As a result of the project, new facets of history have been identified: For example many participants did not know before about the Polish partisans in these times in Belarus with their own interests and policy preferences.

A year later, also in October, a second game was organized for more than 40 participants. The game has formed a community of interested people who is very motivated to organize more games of this style.

Cooperation with the *Forest Knights (Waldritter e.V.)* and the education center *basa e.V.* in Germany has been considered,

since they have gathered good experience in the field of Alternate Reality Games and their implementation in civic education.

The issue of World War II, especially in Germany, however, requires a responsible approach with great sensitivity. As noted in Belarus a thorough preparation, follow up and historical research is required.

Of course the particularities of German law has to be respected. The use of certain symbols, uniforms and gestures are not allowed. But also from an ethical point of view the representation of SS characters or other elements that transport the Nazi ideology should be dispensed. Otherwise, there is great danger of trivializing or even glorifying, since a nearly authentic representation in the context of a larp is hardly possible. These ideological orientations are not necessarily required for the implementation of the scenario. After all, this type of game is less concerned with historical authenticity, but to offer personal experiences for a better understanding of the motivations the persons had in former times. The enthusiasm for military technology and the glorified hero worship are not served in these games. Playing military conflicts and combat simulations are largely avoided.

It is absolutely necessary to distinguish oneself clearly from the sympathizers of the inhuman Nazi terror regime. In some cases, the “New Right” uses similar projects as a platform to spread their ideologies. For example under the harmless club title *European Association for Living History Presentation (EDLG)* the members spread their Nazi ideas.

A WAY FORWARD

Especially in Germany, the implementation of the World War II theme in an educational project that uses larp as a method,

could initiate the confrontation with the own family biography and the role of the soldiers in the Third Reich. The very emotional debate about the exhibition *Crimes of the Wehrmacht. Dimensions of the war of extermination, 1941–1944*, which was accompanied by continuous demonstrations until their last day of opening on 27TH March 2004, still shows the need for coming to terms with the past. Lack of interest in history and little knowledge or even false information are an ideal breeding ground for right-wing, anti-democratic ideas. Larp, however, can at best be a part of a larger educational context. It is always important to have in mind that it is almost impossible to describe the horrors of war in a realistic way and the implementation in a game context has strict limits. But the immersion into the characters can provide a “sensible” reality, which would be lost by mere facts and numbers. New ideas and a more differentiated view of the past are possible. Such a step can be achieved to recognize that war in the past and even in the present with all its implications is awful and worth to be condemned.

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PAVEL GOTTHARD &
JIRI ZLATOHLÁVEK

Children of a Freedom Clock

THE BEST WAY TO IMAGINE THE HISTORY of Czechia is to imagine two clocks. One of them runs when the country is free and democratic. The other one runs when we are part of some totalitarian system. Czechoslovakia was formed after declaring independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918 – 92 years ago. Let's take a look on the score we have reached so far. The hands of the totalitarian clock stopped on the number 47. The hands of the freedom clock keep moving, but are only at the sign of 45 years. We haven't even reached the half yet.

Both totalitarian rules – fascist and communist – that Czechia has gone through, left inerasable traces in literature, films, school curriculum and broadcasting schemes of statutory television, that keeps playing documents about totalitarianism each and every year. The life in submission is one of the strongest Czech national themes. In spite of this whole national culture heritage, the youth born into the free Czechia seem not to be touched by it. For them, totalitarianism has become a dull school theme similar to Punic wars and all the national experience was depreciated into a statement: “One could not travel and artists were locked up in prison.”

Don't be mistaken, it's not bitterness speaking when we say that the children of the freedom clock do not know anything

about what our fathers – their grandfathers – went through. It's something more significant. It's the fact that the fear of a return to totalitarianism has disappeared from these children. Critical thinking and healthy suspiciousness to the laws restricting civil liberties, media connections and populist practices of some politicians and parties have disappeared as well.

As the appearance of those laws, connections and populist parties increased, we have started to worry that the critical voice might be missing one day. Because without the voice that keeps asking: "Won't this somehow threaten my freedom?" we are on the best way to increase the score of 47 even more. Some countries just do not deserve freedom.

That's why we have, driven by a feeling that something must be done, decided to organize a larp to remind people what a totalitarian regime was all about.

CONCEPTION

Before the creation of the larp, we had set three basic things we wanted to keep at all cost.

- I. The larp must restore critical views of totalitarianism in its players. If they miss the totalitarian theme, we fail.
- II. The larp must be open even to players not from the larp community and without any larp experience. If we address the same people every time, we fail.
- III. The larp must be very well made in every aspect. If the players are not astonished, we fail.

The specific aspects and the shape of the game, described later,

have emerged from this basic codex. On this project's realization we have applied for several grants from various foundations active in Czechia. The total amount of granted funds in the end exceeded 8 500 euros. Almost the entire funding was used on realization of the game. Financing six months of preparations and consecutive postproduction took only a fraction of the total sum. The player's participation fee was from 30 to 60 euros (students and those paying in time paid lower fee). About 1 200 voluntary work hours of the nine-member team were thrown into the game as well.

To allow comparison: in Czechia a usual game entry fee is between 15 and 20 euros and the budget of a game does not usually exceed 2 000 euros.

FORMAT

The larp *Project System* itself was intended for 40 players and 15 non-player characters (NPCs). It was played three times during three weekends. The games lasted about 30 hours from Friday evening to Saturday evening. On Friday, the game was preceded by informational talks and drama workshops and during Sunday after-game workshops and game-reflection sessions took place.

The larp was played in interiors and exteriors of a close-set summer resort built in the times of deep totalitarian regime. Thanks to the architectonic style and structuring, this area closely resembled a village, which was used to a great degree.

The plot of the game was set in a small village in a fictional regime called The System. The story of the game was set around a wave of investigations and repressions that happened because of some local school's students' prank.

GAME DESIGN

In order to adhere to the three basic points of conception set before the making of the game, some specific requirements on the game arose.

The first point of the conception preached the renewal of the critic thinking towards totalitarianism. Thus we weren't supposed only to show totalitarianism to players because it's only half of the task. Along the way, we had to make them start thinking about it or perhaps visit a library or research some online data and come with an opinion of their own after the game was over.

We believed that to start this process the best tool would be a strong experience. If the players experience something so intensive that this experience will linger with them after they return from the game, there's a chance they would start to think actively about it.

Because we were determined – according to the second point – to work with people without any previous larp experience, we had to deliver the intensive larp experience in the rawest form. We could not permit any stylization, non-diegetic elements or complicated game mechanics. More experienced larp players can filter those elements and see the essence of the game, but for common people these elements are alienating and could cloud the essence. Furthermore, we couldn't rely on the creativity of non-larpers and their investments into the game beyond the frame of playing their role.

Together with the third point – necessity to astonish – we gathered an image of what the *Project System* should look like.

The larp had to try to achieve maximal lifelikeness while using minimal amount of meta-game techniques. For the players, everything should be prepared in advance – roles, costumes,

even the story they will go through. If we wanted to achieve something, *Project System* had to be as intensive as a movie, or more. From these premises, the final form of the game emerged.

GAME LOCATIONS

In the area of the socialistic summer resort, we had several brick houses (for common families), longish dormitories (for students and workers) and two other structured buildings to our disposal. This segmentation allowed us to simulate the village rather closely and work with the division of players into smaller groups.

Villagers had breakfast together, spent a while in their family and then parted for their own work – the students to school, workers to clean the village and public officials to meetings.

Consequently, the whole village met again at the next collective activity. This way the players were made to fluently switch between various social circles and integrate themselves into new groups of people.

PROPS AND COSTUMES

Separate player groups (parents, students and subsidiary work forces) were differentiated by costumes, which were lent to them prior to the game. A certain degree of uniformity proved to be much more useful than we anticipated. Soon the players of subsidiary work forces in uniform overalls became neglected by other players/characters as something less significant. This behavior of the rest of the village offered them great freedom of movement and action, which we intended to provide them.

The props and costumes players had available were as realistic as the area itself. Some of the doors were locked with real keys, there were CDs with illegal music circulating among

the students, a real local broadcast announcer was functioning in the area and players/characters could tune in small radio receivers to catch an illegal radio broadcast with the broadcast itself being transmitted from an FM broadcaster.

The extensive text materials served as props as well. Leaving aside the character descriptions, there were around 150 pages of various documents, lists, notices and archived correspondence. These texts were not just fillers; each of the documents had some relation to the story of the game and personal plots of some characters.

CHARACTERS

The original concept was based on the idea that the players will receive only briefly sketched character opinions and will create the complete character during the workshops before the game. But the extent of the game and cohesion of the various plotlines turned out to be so complex, that after the sketch of the basic elements necessary for the story, each character description counted no less than thousand words, which is the extent to define the character quite closely. So we finished the characters by ourselves.

Even though we basically treated the player as a consumer and not as a co-creator, this does not mean that the game was a pre-arranged railroad larp. The structure of a player's story was indeed built from several fixed scenes, but the progress between those scenes that in the end became a personal story, was free. Simply put, we knew the character of one student would experience a family argument, would be beaten by his father and would get close to a dangerous prank of his fellow students that would later bring this character to a police interrogation, where he will face an option to turn in both his father

and his fellow students. These three things were the main way-points of the character's plot and were bound to happen, but the results of these events and the elicited consequences were entirely up to the player.

The role of the NPCs was very important for tracking the plot routes. If we were to offer the players a strong experience, we couldn't allow all events to be dependent on chance and the acting skills of the participants. Moreover, we were working with a large number of people without any previous larp experience. The NPCs were set to watch the going of the scenes and make sure each player had enough dramatic scenes to play.

DRAMATURGY

The story arc was framed by two rituals, a funeral of a citizen from the village at the beginning and a ceremonial appointment of new citizens and public officials at the end.

After the first three hours (in 1/10 of the game) the first real game conflict arose and engulfed the whole village, creating space for development of the main dramatic line.

The system of mutual conflicts worked in a simple, yet operational scheme. Each character longed for something: to get to university, to acquire better standing in the society, to find a better job, to secure their family etc. During the game, the characters tried to reach their goal, but the game presented obstacles. Every partial success was compensated by some mischief happening to people close to the character. Simple example: A father-dissident lives in the village. He wants to rebel against the regime. However, the louder he rebels, the more his children are persecuted at school. On one side, a father's friend, being dissident himself, is tied to this basic conflict, because his goal is to support the father's effort against the regime. On

the other side, the characters of the children step in, because they want to go to university and are aware of the fact that as long as their father keeps his stand, they won't have a chance. A social press was constructed this way and it kept pressing the father-dissident until he made a decision either to betray his own children or his ideals (represented by his friend).

The first half of the game where the characters were defining their moral borders was played in similar moods.

In the very moment when a balance of some kind came to existence, a twist took place. Investigators were called into the village from the capital city to bring light upon the incident that happened in the local school (and in which many players were actively taking part).

The following investigation resets the balance of powers. The characters that were unsuccessful in their pursuits (in our example the children whose father didn't give up his dissidence) get a new chance to turn in their opponents and free the way to their desired goal (being able to go to university). This decision is then given back into the game by the investigators (they imply to the father-dissident his children turned him in) so the dramatic conflicts in the last part of the game escalate dramatically.

The larp in its very essence basically seeks an answer to the question "How far are we willing to go?"

OUTPUTS

We have found an interesting paradox during a reverse analysis. We had been presenting the game as a possibility to "experience a life in the totalitarian regime". Thus we had offered people an immersive-simulative game, where they would be able to find the barriers of the totalitarian society. However,

the web of conflicts and social knots would function better, if the game was played in a dramatic manner, if the players brought out their conflicts into the light, openly argued and pulled other people into their problems.

But a player playing with dramatic distance will never experience such strong emotions as another player who will let his role become him. So in the ideal case, we were looking for players who are able to dramatically analyze the situation and then immersively live through it, which is quite a schizophrenic task. By coincidence, we were able to experience this state during the first run of the *Project System*.

This run was composed roughly half on half of very experienced larpers (of rather dramatic type) on one side and of absolute beginners without any larp experience on the other side. So it happened that the two factors mentioned above mixed. This was an essence to a spell beyond imagination.

Larpers played their roles dramatically, extroversively. They skillfully brought all the conflicts the game offered them to the boil. They shouted at their fellow players, begged them, blackmailed them, betrayed them and apologized exactly in the way the game was set to function. The inexperienced beginners were struck by this expressive force and deeply immersed into their roles, dropping their fears of acting and started acting naturally. The border between player and character went thin and it wasn't possible to tell, if tears and shouts come from the player or the character. The authenticity of the ensued situation then hit back on the drama players and moved them in the very same way their dramatic acting moved the beginners in the first place. The whole game then turned into an emotional spiral, where deeper and deeper emotions excited even more intensive emotions. Near the game's final scene, half of the 40

players were in tears and several of the organizers with them.

From the point of psychic hygiene, this conception is on the very edge. However, because the game was overseen by a psychologist, who was at players' disposal after the game ended, we believe that we didn't do any psychic harm. The fact is, we stood surprised by the potential power of these two player approaches combined.

As for now, we're not sure if we want to knowingly create this emotional spiral again. However, as a sign of how great potential a larp can possess, this experience is invaluable.

ENDING

Project System was a groundbreaking experience for us, with its extent, organization difficulty and with the impact it left on its players. However, we see the biggest break in the fact that *Project System* was a first Czech larp made to be a manifestation of an opinion, a medium that tried to communicate with its players and deliver a specific message.

As organizers, we didn't have a clue how it would be accepted. We literally wandered into the unknown. And the result? It didn't cause any general social storm – it wasn't even supposed to – but it caused several tiny individual storms inside the heads of its players.

It's not an all-saving step to protect our country from the totalitarian clock starting to tick again, but it is something. We're not the only ones in Czechia to react on those matters. So, hopefully, one day the children of the freedom clock will not face a grim future.

Definitely it is – and we didn't think in such way at the start of the project – a first step to show us, what a powerful tool to communicate with people larp can be.

PAVEL GOTTHARD is a Bachelor of Arts from Janacek Academy of Music and Performing Arts of Czech Republic. He's recently studying a master study in radio and television screenwriting and dramaturgy. Pavel is a member of civil association Court of Moravia in which he participated on creating six chamber larps and a large scale larp Project System (2009). He's set to organize larps for the public and tries to promote this phenomenon. He's one of the founders of Czech larp conference Odráz.

JIRI ZLATOHLÁVEK, being a very playful person, is a member of Czech civil association Court of Moravia which is set to bring larp to the public. He participated on creating several chamber larps and four large scale games including Project System (2009). He's one of the founders of Czech larp conference Odráz.



THE TOWER
VISIONS AND NIGHTMARES

PREAMBLE

I got this text recently and thought it might be interesting to the larp crowd. It was mailed to me by a friend who claims to have found it in a collection of books donated to the library where she works. It's hard to tell when it was originally written. I can only guess that it's dated sometime after 1970 but probably before word processors became commonplace (the latest date mentioned is 1970, and the original is written on a typewriter). Other than that, I have no idea. Maybe you do.

— KARIN TIDBECK
MALMÖ, JANUARY 2010

An Essay on Rapture

I USED TO WORK IN A LIBRARY in one of the larger towns. I was hired to organize the letters and diaries section, which is fairly large for a library this size – I suppose because it is a college town and popular with intellectuals in general. The library had donations coming in almost weekly; great big boxes filled with letters, diaries and notes. By the time I was hired they had been severely understaffed for a long time and the backlog was enormous. It was while sorting, reading and cataloguing this huge mass of material that I stumbled upon my discovery.

The majority of the correspondence we had came from artists: writers, painters, musicians and so on. Many of them were obsessed with the creative process. Some of them wrote some odd things on the subject. There was, I discovered, a common theme. I had even experienced it myself. Once you see it, it is obvious.

THE CREATIVE PROCESS

It is necessary that I first explain my view on the creative process and the different modes of consciousness associated with it. Let me first say that this is mainly based on my personal experience as an artist. Have I experienced the phenomenon I'm talking about? Yes, but I consider my own experience less

important than some of the other accounts I have come across.

THE FOUR LEVELS

The creative state is not one but several different states. I have divided them into four levels. There are of course other schools of thought that propose different structures, but for now, let us use this one.

At the lowest level, the artist is completely intent on her activity, be it writing, painting, playing music, *et cetera*. Irrelevant thoughts are pushed to the back of her mind. This state would be described by most people as being “concentrated”. The artist is aware of her surroundings and shifts focus without effort, if perhaps reluctantly.

At the next stage there is the experience of being “there” and “not there” at the same time. You are aware of what is happening, you are aware of the act of creation, but your super-ego is now sitting in the back seat without having much say in the matter. This is where the act of creation starts to become similar to meditation, or trance. If left undisturbed, the artist can spend a very long time in this state. It is common to exit this state feeling very energized or exhausted.

The third stage is where the physical medium becomes transparent. The writer sees not words on a page, but scenes and dialogues; the painter sees not mere paint on a canvas, but is working inside a landscape. The hands continue their work – writing, or drawing, whatever it may be, but it is no longer a conscious act.

RAPTURE

Sometimes the artist crosses into the fourth stage. It is impossible to talk about the fourth stage without speaking in terms of either physics, myth, or magic. If you happen to belong to

a different persuasion than myself, please bear with me – the distinction between those realms is sometimes only a question of semantics.

Discussing the fourth stage necessitates a few notes on the nature of time and the human psyche. You may be familiar with Albert Einstein’s theories on time. In his later years, Einstein concluded that time – the past, present and future – exists simultaneously.

C G Jung spoke of a collective unconscious: a set of archetypes common to all humans. These archetypes comprise the foundation that we build our personalities on.

I propose that our collective unconscious is not inherited, like Jung claimed, but experiences bleeding over into ourselves from other points in time. We cannot perceive it, our conscious minds stranded on an island in the ocean of time. But we “remember” experiences and images from our own past and future life subconsciously, and in our waking state attribute them to either imagination, half-remembered facts or madness depending on our psychological makeup. Most of us never go further than standing on the shore of our little island, our only taste of the ocean the waves lapping at our feet.

Some people venture out into that ocean, encountering both themselves and others.

This is what happens at the fourth level of creative trance. I call it rapture, for lack of a better word. The majority slip into this stage unintentionally, emerging with tales of a chaotic and emotional experience. Depending on the experiencer’s cultural background they take the shape of religious visions, abduction by aliens, psychotic episodes, *et cetera*.

A small number will tell stories of a very different character: hyper-realistic, detailed scenarios completely devoid of the

chaotic feel of the first type of rapture stories. It is as if they have found other islands and waded ashore. Take this journal entry by painter Maurie Duvall:

It was like a waking dream. I was kneeling on the ground, my hands clasped in my lap. I was dressed in what for all the world looked like medieval clothing: a dingy woolen surcoat over a coarse linen shift, belted at the waist. My hair was long and filthy, and I could smell my own unwashed body. It seemed that I was kneeling before a tribunal: a row of high-backed chairs stood on the grass, men and women sitting in them. They looked sprung out of Arthurian legend, or a Technicolor version of it: the colours were bright and garish, their jewels and finery looked cheap and artificial. They were speaking a language I hadn't heard before, yet I had no trouble understanding it. I was being tried for some sort of witchcraft: hiding a cursed fetish in the camp of a group of virtuous knights. I was weeping, grovelling on the ground, and I couldn't control myself. I was a passenger inside this person, who must have been the village idiot.

"You may speak in your defense", said the fat woman in the middle chair.

Speak in my defense? How could this poor moron speak her defense? And she didn't. She sniffled and wailed. I could feel her desperation crashing like waves against my own mind. Let me in, I thought. And she did. I took over. I spoke in her defense, using what limited speech she had. I made the fat woman weep.

Then I was back at the desk again. I called Alice and told her everything. She was quiet for a long time. Then she said, "I remember that. Years ago. I've been there. I sat in the left-most chair." She came over to me with a small notebook. It was a diary from when she was nineteen. It was an account of the same scene I had just experienced, except it was told from the perspective of one of the tribunal members. She had even memorized parts of the village idiot's speech. The words were mine.

Years apart, these two people found the same island in time's ocean. One wonders how many others have done the same. There are a number of different scenarios, hundreds. But they have some things in common, and many of the scenarios crop up again and again. There is an overall feel of being engaged in a play or ritual. The scenarios may be historical, contemporary or fantastic, but the people taking part look 20TH century regardless of garb. Clues abound in the different accounts: a knight smiling and revealing a set of braces; a peasant girl hiking her skirt up and showing off shaved legs; a submarine deckhand with a conspicuous red mohawk.

ADAM BRACE

Working in the library, I have found accounts of this kind dating back to the 19TH century.

Diaries and letters are increasingly difficult to find the further back you go, mainly because they were seldom reproduced and the originals have degraded by now. And in less accepting ages, accounts of strange visions devoid of God or angels would hardly be publishing material; they would be signs of madness at best, heresy at worst. They would be hidden away from the world.

The earliest text I have found is one such hidden item. Three diaries were found inside the hollow headboard of Victorian poet Adam Brace's bed in 1978, when his descendants dismantled it for transfer to the Museum of Literature. They kindly donated the books to our library. It was while leafing through the oldest journal, dating between 1844 and 1846, that I stumbled upon my first discovery. Brace notes that during a writing session on April 6, 1845, he had a "vision both peculiar and chilling":

It was a hallucination like nothing else I have had before, notable because of its dreary nature. I was standing in front of a row of panels. My hands were mechanically turning wheels and pushing buttons. I was chilled to the bone. My hands were shaking from the cold. Suddenly someone tapped my shoulder. It was a woman. She said, "Boris. Shift change." And then I woke up.

JACK ADAMS

Sometimes these visions have caused the experiencer to go through drastic changes. Author Jack Adams made his debut in 1968 with the wildly successful "postmodern pornography" *Ocean Creatures*, the first of a planned trilogy. Shortly after the 1970 publication of part 2, *The Abyssal Plain*, he announced that no more books were forthcoming. Adams had decided to abandon his craft. Two years later, he committed suicide. I found a letter in his collection here at the library that reveals an encounter with rapture.

Emma,

Apologies for the sentimental crap you're about to read. I just had to tell someone. Read it, burn it, and pretend it never happened.

I was working on the new project and really getting into it. The third part, you know? I mean, really getting into it. Going into the automatic writing stage. Being both here and somewhere else, as you like to say. Only suddenly I was only somewhere else completely. "Here" was gone.

I was in a room filled with people. They were dressed like bedouins or something, but most of them looked European, and there was something about the colours – about half of them were in reds and yellows, the other half in shades of blue. I had a man's body. I looked down at myself: I was one of the people dressed in blue. There was music in the background, a voice droning over the sound of sitars. I was facing a young man, shamefully young, perhaps nineteen or twenty; he had that kind of rosy glow and porcelain-like features. His eyes were a liquid brown. He was swathed in vibrant red. His lips were rouged. Note this: we were fully clothed. We were touching. Hands. That was all. We were touching hands. There was a swell of sensual joy that made my eyes sting. I woke up crying.

I tossed the script. It feels cheap and pathetic. I don't know what to do. I honestly don't know. I just want to go back to that room.

— J

MY OWN STORY

I will finish off with my own experience, and you will see why I first took notice of Adam Brace's diary.

I was a teenager. I had just discovered writing; I was in that beginner's phase of learning the craft where you copy your favourite authors. I was trying to write like J R R Tolkien, of course, except it was a "transported into another world"-drama, with a thinly disguised me as the heroine. I had developed a secret alphabet for this purpose. I didn't want to risk anyone else finding it and laughing at me. Thus protected, I had a feeling of almost erotic exhilaration: I had the keys to a secret kingdom.

It wasn't a gradual transition. One second I was writing, completely immersed in my own landscape. The next I was cold, horribly cold. There was a stench of oil and mould and the loud noise of engines. I was lying on a cot, dressed in coarse woollen pants and a heavy woollen sweater. The room was cylindrical, cots bolted to the walls. A scrawny young woman sat in the bunk across from mine, idly lifting a dumbbell up and down. She looked at me and grinned. "About time", she said. "It's your shift."

I had the feeling I was merely a passenger, peeking out from someone else's eyes. I couldn't control my actions, in any case. I got up from the bunk and went through a small circular hatch in the wall. The next room was about the same size as the previous one, but lined with machines. There was an overwhelming noise of engines working. A couple of deckhands were standing along the wall, facing a panel with switches and wheels. The panel was dark – no lamps were lit, and there was no light coming off the displays. Despite the din of engines,

there was no vibration, no heat, no motion. It was like an enormous theatre stage. I walked up to one of the deckhands, tapped him on the shoulder and said:

"Boris. Shift change."

CONCLUSION

This is only meant to be an introduction into the nature of rapture, and therefore only skims the surface of the subject. I intend to follow shortly with a cross-referenced list of experiencers, scenarios and the years in which they were reported.

As to what this phenomenon is, I have two guesses. The first is that these are actual events somewhere in time, so emotionally charged that they act as magnets for drifting minds. Are they placing themselves in a state that invites the swimmers in time?

The second is that these are not actual events, but some kind of cosmic stage where archetypal tales are played out. The artists are invited to take part in the act.

It could be both, either, or none of them. Perhaps, in time, I will find out.

(FROM DAGENS NYHETER 12/11 2057)

Action Translated to Music

Shivering seconds left to chance in the new event by larp company Hexagon, NOW IS THE NEW FOREVER at the 10TH anniversary of Culture House's larping scene. DN's larp reviewer participates in a larp where each participant's actions becomes fuel to the fire: an inferno.

THE LAST YEARS we have had the possibility to participate in two larps that really made it into the contemporary debate in Scandinavia. I'm thinking of Paul Rauan's *Glacier* with which he wanted to explore the moods from the environmental summit meetings in the 2010s, and also of *Leal Wolk*, the very acclaimed costume larp by the siblings Nilsson this spring. The latter was situated in a Chinese factory and was the background for the debate started by *Leal Wolk*-participators in Aftonbladet (20/4)

During both of those larps the apocalyps became a reality where the participators' actions got charged with anxiety in a world that just retreated further the more they tried to grasp it. The idea of a world that is glassy, anonymized and forgetful, where nobody knows anything about anything (least of all themselves), an idea that's been popular this year, resulted from the agreement of forced lying in both of these larps.

The monologues that Anna Rostanpoor mixed together in *Glacier* struck almost every player. In *Leal Wolk* the astonishingly well working surprise turnaround where either half of the participators must be sacrificed, resulted in a collective despair which the players continued to play out, although the space of action had been brutally reduced. Without the emotionally charged starting scenario that surprise would have been a worse flop than the one in *Do you know me 2*.

FOUR HOURS OF UPLIFTING ACTION

The premiere this Saturday by last year's famed debutants, the Hexagon commune's larp *Now is the new forever*, continued where *Glacier* and *Leal Wolk* ended. The forced lying technique is abandoned for what seems to be an attempt to return to the ritual, uplifting motives, but without falling back on old-time ensemble play. This will surely put its mark on much that is done in future larping.

The larp is organized for 25 players and seven shadows, with a runtime of four hours. Once again we are playing short scenes from life in the Hagemo family, and the style is imbued with honesty and lightness. It's a classical family drama where you can expect to play out realistic relations, strategies and negotiations. The roles was assigned upon arrival, and I was playing the newly fallen-in-love but still lonely widow Karolina.

Hexagon's work is not as obviously connected to contemporary topics as the two aforementioned larps; it's just under the surface. This is also the strength of the larp – the mercilessness in that everything we do are our personal choices, and that no one can escape that. A couple of linguistic agreements of how to start and end a conversation and how to always stand up for choices once made, together with the final scene's open

intention– which I will not disclose here – creates spectacular opportunities of play.

PLAYING WITH SPACE

The larp is hold together by this hour-long final scene where the rooftop of Culture House opens towards Sergel's Torg. After the claustrophobic elevator ride from the cellar up into the air the light from the city was overwhelming. Wow!

The cellar was completely unrecognizable in Karl Magnussons provoking and brilliant set-up. Magnusson had built six small rooms from concrete blocks, each with two simple chairs and sophisticated sound systems. The rooms were linked to a big hall with church-like acoustics and lighting. It was impossible to speak discreetly since the smallest sounds got amplified and turned into echoes. The openings to the bigger hall was constructed in such a way that you could not see who was there or who was about to enter. This created unexpected and sometimes unwanted encounters since it was impossible to flee. I couldn't plan my way through the game but had to endure the crossings, trying to steer them ad-hoc in the directions I wanted.

These ideas have been part of everything Hexagon has made since they started – chance rules. But during the premiere they didn't seem to be aware of what was going on in all rooms since participators' initiatives was all too often (for being Hexagon) disrupted by game-mastering. Somewhat more work on preparations would have been good.

POLITICS IN FORM AND CONTENT

The first part is a stroll-around centered on the sound system. There are opportunities for guided monologues and

negotiations in the small rooms. I found it stressful to cover it all and used the possibility for play-gaps in one of the boxes while other participants seemed to move about without problems.

The subtle analogy to the oppositional party's City Commissioner outburst last week about the "utopian fascism in the cultural field" got underlined with black irony in this part of the larp. It was this analogy and not my longing for negotiations that kicked me back into the walkaround again after my play-gap. I was not pushed to play by the larp itself, but by an intellectual analysis of mine – the larping transformed my thinking more than it transformed the rhythm of my action. In the moment I felt false or like an outsider because of this, but looking back, it was a great experience.

The choice of political background music for the big group scene created the unbelievably beautiful finale, where the complete family picture was gathered. I'm getting close to the other players by the catastrophic loneliness of my character, before the music breaks in over us and makes the picture fuzzy. As the title says there is nothing that will keep forever in this larp. Nothing stays forever in this world.

NEW STARS AND OLD

To make a larp of this kind workable you need participants that are interested in the same kind of experience. During the press conference Hexagon said they were worried about mixing their vision (where agreements change according to location) with the adventuristic and aristotelic games that the Culture House's visitors are used to. But not to worry: the ambition of the Culture House (and manager Petra Torsson), letting non-established organizers use the Larp Scene (now on

its 10th year) in the parts that earlier was used by avant-garde theatre Unga Klara is still the most innovative thing Culture House Larp has done. Not least because it draws a totally different audience to the Culture House.

As for the game, it was embellished by veterans like Nils Berglund and Margareta Klein, but there were also the usual subscribers eagerly waiting along the walls. The only info we had got beforehand was on practical matters. Although the simple format should have distributed the weight of stimuli evenly and in spite of clear meta-distribution, Hexagon never really let go. It started already when Janna Tyrén, Roger Lehtimäki and Alexandra Dahlbäck, Viktor Rowles and the new organizer Kit Näsström entered the room. They were welcomed by a big applause from noobies as well as veterans. Sure, they deserve great credit, but when the Hexagon group went on initiating almost all game-play during the first hour, I got fed up. Is this a lack of trust in participants? Or just first night nerves?

I think we can handle more fragmented events like *Now is the new forever*. I hope that the organizers are not trying to push us back to the time before the paradigm shift, so stop worrying and take responsibility for creating such a brilliant spaciousness!

PROPHECIES

This is the first time Swedish players get to experience this – for an institution – so pathbreaking scenario, which was first set up 2056 at Rewind in Oslo. It was interesting to note that every set at Rewind ended in fragmentation. Probably that was the organisers' intention, since the final scene was omitted there.

Today, when coming-together is so *à la mode*, Hexagon is

doing the right thing when they let the final scene to be played out by the participants, although that kind of dramaturgy may seem to be tired. It is not.

Hexagon is still leaders in the larp development and I'm looking forward to more collaboration with Karl Magnusson. He has just finished his last year at the larp program in Stockholm School of Dramatic Arts. After a couple of clumsy years that program is getting to be the obvious choice for the growing crowd of organizers with ambitions to be professionals.

Setting up *Now is the new forever* is kind of a prophecy about the inner conflicts created by the dishonesty of our society. Just like *Glacier*, but even closer to the point where we, as species, is right this moment.

I'm leaving the larp and getting out onto the checked square with the distinct impression of having been seen. We can all share in the catastrophe, I think, as long as we can play the roles in a way that makes them understandable for others.

NOW IS THE NEW FOREVER *will be running at
Culture House to middle of December 2017.*

EBBA PETRÉN

EBBA PETRÉN is a 22 year old writer, director and producer of theatre and performance art. Special interest in utopian issues and dance. Member of Stockholm-based theatre group UngaTur.

SANDRA SNAN

Self-fulfillment

Dr. Enstrom, excerpt from notes 10/07/2010

Patient Cassandra H. reported latest dream. Incomprehensible. Discussed CH's dreaming with Monica at break; who became visibly upset. "That... that can't be true!" M. claimed earlier that CH had "predicted" Diego's death. "Sure, she had some details right about that back-room staircase being slippery, but she passed that thing every day. Of course she'd dream about it—and she didn't give Diego's name, did she?" I said. She was still spooked, so I told her about the latest dream and finally convinced her of how far-fetched it sounded. I had too much coffee.

Dr. Enstrom, excerpt from notes 12/07/2010

Discussion with Dr. West who wants to move CH to another facility and increase medication. Reflected on her most recent dream. It amused Dr. West to hear what he interpreted as "her take on the grander narrative of our quarterly hospital larps". Did she really say "post-immersionist"?

*Dr. Enstrom, excerpt from conversation with
patient Cassandra H. 13/07/2010*

DR. ENSTROM

What would it take to convince you that
these dreams are only that: dreams?

CH

Are they? That doesn't matter.

DR. ENSTROM

Like your latest.

CH

Same dream tonight again.

DR. ENSTROM

Recurring dreams aren't unusual.

CH

Same dream tonight again.

DR. ENSTROM [INTERRUPTING GESTURE]

Why do you say that they're prophetic dreams?

CH

I want you to know what is going to happen.

DR. ENSTROM

I'm listening. Tell me.

CH [TURNING EYES UPWARDS AND INWARDS]

*You've been in your role, you've been in it deep
your thoughts in your fingers and toes—
you saw what your role saw, heard the same sounds*

*Sometimes you'll break it and wake up from sleep,
make up a story that nobody knows,
glimpses of shredding your character's bounds.*

DR. ENSTROM

Do you mean that we need to see to the needs and well-being of the actor, not just the needs of the role? Sure, of course, but participants intentionally breaking diegesis? What would be the use of that?

Dr. Enstrom, excerpt from notes 14/07/2010

I'm excited about the next quarterly larp, regardless of Cassandra's warnings of "post-immersionism", and regardless of my own misgivings about the unsuitable furniture in the community room. Need to send a memo to Dr. Hansen regarding a better space for these excercises, a safer environment. Nevertheless, I hope the patients and staff will have more confidence in their role-reversal. Our earlier larps, in various fantasy settings, served well as a relaxation technique, to bring safe adventure to our patients, but these later role-reversal larps have the potential to show them just how much we care for them.

*Dr. Enstrom, excerpt from conversation
with patient Lars S, 20/07/2010*

DR. ENSTROM

Lars, you were given the honor of playing
Dr. Abrahamsson, our head of clinic.

LS

That's correct, I was.

DR. ENSTROM

What were your thoughts before the larp?

LS

I had my usual fear that it might be boring.

DR. ENSTROM

So what happened?

LS

After wearing the shoes of my role for about four hours, I let go of all thoughts of judging, of determining

whether or not I was bored. I started thinking “How would my role react to noone talking to me”, instead of thinking “I, Lars, currently experience boredom.”

DR. ENSTROM

That’s a great step!

LS

Soon, I took a further step. I wasn’t thinking at all. I just was Dr. Abrahamsson. Pure being—a scent of satori in our own community room.

DR. ENSTROM [HIDING A YAWN]

That sounds kind of boring in itself, though. Wouldn’t the real Dr. Abrahamsson interact more with the others, or pursue investigations of various kinds?

LS

Er... Are we talking about the same Dr. Abrahamsson?

DR. ENSTROM

Point taken. [Note: With all due respect, Dr. A. I was trying to avoid triggering a new psychotic episode in the patient.]

Dr. Enstrom, excerpt from memo to staff, 21/07/2010

It’s with great pleasure I’m able to report success for the immersion project. The plan went beyond my initial hope—emphasize empathy in the patient by having them temporarily re-live our roles as doctors—to pure being. Even the most violent patients are calmly sitting, and simply perceiving. I think we have truly stumbled upon a tremendous pacifying force—immersion.

*Dr. Enstrom, excerpt from conversation
with patient Lars S, UNDATED*

DR. ENSTROM [CLEARLY UPSET]

Lars. Dammit, Lars! I’m really curious to hear your side of the story! The last community room larp, three months ago, was so pleasant. Now we’re standing in plaster dust, I’m covered in soot, you’ve got a doctor’s formal tie wrapped around your forehead and we’re surrounded by bodies, unconscious or dead. How do you explain what happened?

LS

Do you know this patient, a woman in white?

DR. ENSTROM

All patients wear white here. Hospital clothes.

LS

This woman had a lot of freckles.

DR. ENSTROM

Cassandra.

LS

That’s right.

DR. ENSTROM

Oh, do go on!

LS

I was in sitting in the faux Shaker highback, looking calmly at you and the other “patients”, just like Dr. West would do.

DR. ENSTROM

That's right, the role you were assigned for this larp.
West always was a furniture snob. Did that help you?

LS

I used it, but I didn't rely on it. Props are fun but it's about perceiving and being.
Sometimes getting up for a cup of coffee.

DR. ENSTROM

Dr. West does like it black.

LS

I know. Well, I know now. I usually take two sugars but as
Dr. West, the mere thought of that was sickeningly sweet.

DR. ENSTROM

But the axe?

LS

About month ago I was talking to Cassandra and
she inspired me to move the story forward.

DR. ENSTROM

Dr. West would never use an axe. Only
poison, and only pure cyanide at that.

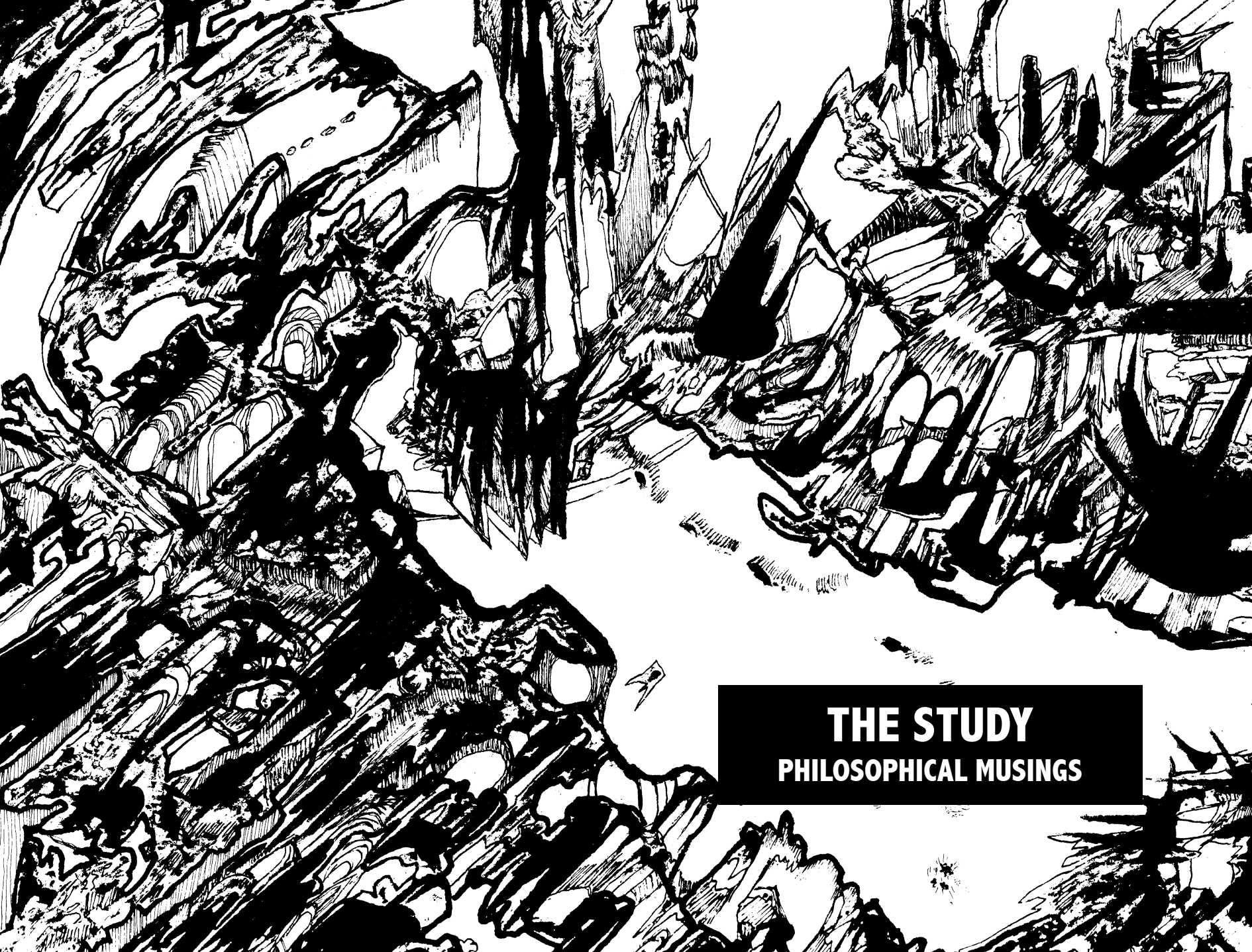
LS

I am well aware, but I was curious to see how I as
Dr. West, and the other "doctor's", would react to
someone hastily getting up and brutally cutting a
hole in the main gasline. Cassandra said "Who, but
we bit players, are responsible for the story and the
grander narrative?" God is gone, Dr. Enstrom.

DR. ENSTROM

We remain.

SANDRA SNAN, often working as Idiomdrottning (<http://idiomdrottning.org>), is a poet and composer. She is obsessed with predicate grammar and de Stijl. She knows nothing about Greek mythology, institutional care nor larps.



THE STUDY
PHILOSOPHICAL MUSINGS

DANIEL JUNGBLUT

Larp-Idealism

OR: HOW SCHILLER INVENTED LARP

AS A TEENAGER I read in a book by Friedrich Schiller, *Votivtafel*, a saying that I found utterly ridiculous: *Strive always for the Whole, and if you cannot be the Whole yourself, then join the Whole as a serving member.*

For a sixteen year old kid who counted Punk music, liquor and dyed hair as his hobbies, this was just rubbish. And as only dead fish float with the stream, an old classic with dumb hairdo and strange syntax could really not connect with the rebellian youth. Then what about the Whole, which man should join as a serving member? That sounded like chains, like establishment.

Today, after more than ten years of role-playing, I can understand the meaning of these words – but if that’s because of the role-playing or the ageing is hard to say. In the subtitle to this text I have anyhow dared to claim that this poet invented role-playing. With those lines? Most likely not. Yet by this quote we arrive precisely at the idea behind Schillers works: *Seid umschlungen, Millionen!* (Be embraced, millions!) as it says in another text. (Ode to Joy, mostly known from Beethovens 9TH symphony.) But what has this to do with larping? I really have to do some further explaining to make it believable.

AS IF-REALITY

When you ask for the basic thought behind live action role-playing, when you ask what larp actually does, you often meet some embarrassment. If you go on asking, you'll most often get something vague: *Doing as if*. Formulated somewhat more strictly this phrase means nothing less than creating new reality. If you ponder upon that and start thinking about it, it will bring more questions: How is this new reality functioning? Is there a leading principle? Is there any sense in it? In real life such questions are the centre of any philosophy; they make us think about the base of our reality.

But what has that to with role-playing? There are actually obvious parallels between the real and the played world: The character is the living being on the fictional earth, and the role-play is the life it leads. If we start asking metaphysical questions of the larping, then we likewise concern ourselves with the basic reality, but this time a reality which we have created ourselves. What's the meaning of such a reality? What's the meaning of our fictional role-playing lives?

Personally, what's exciting for me about larp is the stories. Both as history, but even more the stories as told, that is drama, epos and theater. In my opinion that's precisely what larp is about: to tell an interactive story. Still this doesn't necessarily mean a classical plot, it can just as well be the setting for a feast, which in a novel would have passed by with the words ... *and they rejoiced until early in the morning*. But to tell a story also means to create a context where all participants are parts of a greater whole. Such a holistic view of larping is anyhow not an attempt to evoke a mutual, overarching scene, rather it means to bring the participants together under one unified ideal. But

in order to find an ideal for our mutual play, we have to know how the game reality functions. What then is the basic functional principle for larps?

LARP AS ABSTRACTION

What's common for almost all playing styles in this hobby, is the use of symbols, e.g. symbolic actions. Since we are playing in a fictitious reality, that's also necessary: a symbol works for us as an abstract place-holder which we perceive as reality. With the help of our rational mind we transform that place-holder into a concrete meaning inside our game-world. This means that a latex sword is a symbol for a deadly blade, and me myself in the world's best finery is even only a symbol for a fictitious character; I'm still a human of today, disguised to enact something else. Thus larp functions only through abstraction. Without abstraction the latex sword is just something made of foam, the armour is not a shield against killing hits, but a designer product from the store. In short: without abstraction there is no *in-game*.

Thus it's possible to say that the defining functional principle of larp is *abstraction*. As common ideal we must then find a unified principle of abstraction, upon which all participants can base their playing. Unified means here that every player make the aforementioned abstractions by the same principle, that is the same ideal. Since abstraction only works by aesthetics (perception, that is), this unified ideal have to be an aesthetic ideal, a perceptual ideal.

And here comes Friedrich Schiller into play. The idea that humans should be unified under an aesthetic ideal happens to come from him. *Aesthetic Idealism* is in this sense the password. Basic to this attitude is the assumption that the human mind cannot perceive but poor reflections of transcendental *Urbilder*,

prototypical ideas. This means that beyond what we perceive with our senses, there are so-called ideas that we can experience only by the combination of rationality and input from the senses. The easiest way to explain this is by way of Plato's famous "cave analogy". We assume that we as humans are placed in a cavern, with the back towards the entrance. Outside, under the free sky, it's daylight – but in the cave sunshine enters only through an opening. As things pass by this opening their profiles are cast as shadows on the wall of the cave. The humans in the cave sees the shadows, can describe them, give them names, can even with some effort differentiate between them – but they are just shadows. Not until they turn around and find the way out of the cave may they see the true nature of things, experience them in all their dimensions. The things that passed by the opening of the cave are the aforementioned *transcendental ideas*, that we through our senses only perceive piecemeal, but never in their totality – since the mind is oriented towards the wall of the cave, while the rationality is looking outside.

If we apply this analogy to larp, then all real off-game things is but mental constructions, that is, the objects with which we actually can play are such shadows on the wall. It's only when we, by thinking, transpose us into the game-world, when we focus our rational minds upon what we assume to be the true essence of these objects, it's only then they become reality in our game-world. Only thus can we experience the transcendental idea of a mace in a latex truncheon, or the transcendental concept of an elf in glued-on plastic ears.

INTO THE GAME WORLD

Based on this model about idea, perception and abstraction we then have to find a common ideal that lets all the participants

become part of a greater whole, part of a single story. Thus we must find common ground in unified ideas and thereby a unified game-world. This is where the game masters enters the scene: that's to say that if the game-world is our reality and the role-play our life, then can the Godhead principle as a creative, almighty principle only be the game masters. They create the frame, they initiate this creation, and to continue the biblical bend: their Genesis bears the title *Larp Invitation*. Beside the actual preconditions – that is, the organizing of the event – the game masters also have to create the fictious frame. They have to decide on the game-world and put all gameplay factors under one hat. Only thus will it be guaranteed that every player sees the planned Demon Prince in a certain NPC (Non-Playing Character), and not some disguised cultist, an actor in costume or the bassplayer from Kiss.

The game masters are then not only conductors, but also composers. They compose ideas. They create the conditions, the mood, the ambience, the style, the story of the larp – precisely what usually and also in this case is called *Poetics*. They are responsible for everything that this event contains; they are responsible for how the event is *experienced* by the players. Only when the player is ready to join it – when she follows the abstractions of the game masters – then can she be part of this world, and only then is the larp even more than the sum of its parts.

... *join the Whole as a serving member*. Because now we can truly understand what Schiller had in mind. In actual practice, this view means that the game masters have to plan their world very carefully. Each player has to be absolutely sure about her milieu and place. Each player has to identify with the game masters' role-playing intentions, and all game masters have to work together with the players on the common world: the

former on the background, the latter on the front, the character. That doesn't mean that all players have to know all the secrets of the game-world – they just have to recognize that world's *laws of nature* and *basic fundamentals*. The players have to level their characters with the background created by the game masters, and game masters must be consistent in their choice of characters. Note, in the choice of characters, not in the choice of players. And lastly, the boundary around the larp must be realized in order to make the participants literally into just that: part-takers.

The most consistent version of this idealistic approach is surely an event where the characters are pre-given. They are well anchored in a fixed game-world with more or less tangible goals which the players will reach by what means the characters have. This playing principle is e.g. implemented by some genre-larps. A more flexible version is found at events that offer a conceptually unified background world, where the choice of character is as free as possible – as long as the hardware is recognized, one can without much ado install any fitting software. Events aiming for this homogeneity (*Turniertage* – or *Dragonbane* – are some good examples) have this in common that their atmosphere is described as very dense. You really have the feeling of being *in the thick of it*.

But at most events it's often otherwise. Many times different views on playing overlap and lead not seldom to conflict. It may be about simple rule interpretations, but also about non-compatible differences at the character level: for many people a half-dragon is a enrichening concept, for others simply a big misery. This kind of problem can not be solved at the playing level; such gulfs in playing ideal leads to off-game rumble and disturbs eventually the harmonic game-play.

But that's precisely what it's all about: harmony. Surely not in the form of conflict-free flower-larps with cotton candy and happy ends, but rather as the poetic harmony of a communally experienced story. Even tragedies are harmonic – Schiller has shown us that: Don Carlos, crown prince and idealistic champion for freedom, succumbs in the end to the grim *realpolitik* of his father. But on the inside both he and the story are complete.

... AND HEGEL INVENTED THE NPC

I would also give a short word to another idealist. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel has once described something that in a certain sense can be applied to live action role-playing. In the preface to his famous *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*), he writes: *Das Wahre ist das Ganze* (The true is the whole). That sounds first as mushy banality; but you have to understand it in the light of the Hegelian philosophy of history. The whole, that is the world as such, comes into existence through the historical process where – as he so beautifully says – *the rational mind comes to itself*. To Hegel history is made up of dialectic processes, of small conflicts, which by connecting arrive to something higher, and so come yet closer to completion. The old principle of thesis + anti-thesis = synthesis. This dialectical principle he then applied to world history: both as lots of small sub-processes but also as a general program. If we are to believe Hegel there is a *Weltgeist*, a world spirit, that controls the unfolding events since it knows how to steer history in corresponding lines by different tricks.

It would not be totally wrong to picture the game masters as such a world spirit. By hook or crook the game masters succeed to tell a story through their event. We may well name this story the *plot*, although not in the sense of the classical

lego-artefact-, ritual-, endslaughter-scenarios, but *plot* as a Game Master-desired, general unfolding of the event – e.g. a judging court or a decisive fight on the battlefield. Though in the planning phase the larp is not yet a game-play. It's not until the end of the event that you can talk about a real experience, about an existing larp. Where *plot* is the concept, it is possible to paraphrase Hegel: the plot is the process whereby the larp comes to itself. Through small dialectical finessing the world spirit (the Game Master that is) succeeds to bring in the player as part of a process: Thesis: *I seek the Artefact*. Anti-thesis: *The Artefact is in a labyrinth*. Synthesis: *Adventure!* Even simple role-playing in itself works dialectically: by role-playing two different positions unites through interactive communication into a synthesis.

To those who now thinks this is just academic Hegelianism, I would say that there is something important for which we have to thank the old state-philosopher: namely that Hegel invented the NPC. Of course he doesn't use that word, he talks about the *world-historical individual*. That's what he calls those persons who in their lifetime transform the historical will into praxis: Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon – they are the NPC:s of the divine creation. In a rather spiteful way Karl Marx called them *the world spirit on foot*. Likewise, in our idealistic game-model we also have factors that transform our plot into praxis. It may be the Quest-NPC with the exclamation mark (e.g. as used in the computer game *World of Warcraft*) or the evildoer, but also the count that invites you to a feast. They are all the plot on foot, that is realization-helpers for the game masters. Such a *plot-satisfying individual* is a role which the game masters put into play and who fulfill certain functions in unfolding the game in the desired direction. It's through these

realization-helpers that the game masters can communicate their story.

This idealistic conception of games doesn't mean that a larp will get a fly-paper-attraction just by having NPC:s that marches Napoleon-wise through the storyline and only give the players a minimum of possibilities. How and if the game masters deem it useful to steer the events or present scenic developments, is in the end a matter of taste and don't influence the model as here described.

PLAYING FOR YOU, FOR ME, FOR US

So here's the claim: Every event needs premises to follow. Those premises must be accepted by all participants, without coercion; since that is precisely the æsthetic ideal we were talking about in the first place. This ideal must be defined and known by all before the event and every player must partake of this objective truth. In the real world it is impossible to know objective or absolute truth. Not so in the game-world. That world is created by *us*, and thus we may well know the absolute truth in it – since we actually are the ones that have defined it. To be sure, the roles that we embody are tied to the constraints, laws and borders of the game-world – we, the players, are not. Still we have to be of one mind. We have to enter into a common world, the truth and reality of which we recognize. We must put our egos in the service of the commonality, as we are playing for the others. We must put logic in the service of the game-world and abstain from destructive consequences by our actions. When everyone is playing for the others, then there is play for everyone, then there is play *with* everyone.

Only in this way is a homogeneous world possible. Just as

a human being is a *zoon politikon*, that is a social being, so is role-playing possible only by interactivity. A person who in her best finery gives the perfect embodiment and ambience – that person can only role-play for real when she has someone to role-play with. An egocentric approach, where everyone creates the game-world in her own fashion, will eventually lead to total autarky, that is total isolation of the individual, where no role-play is possible. It wouldn't be fun, that's the long and the short of it.

Well, have Friedrich Schiller then invented role-playing? Maybe that claim is a little too strong; but I hope to have shown that with his world view, which he certainly did not find by himself but still has strongly influenced, we all could get more fun out of larping.

Lastly I would give the word once more to Schiller; already in 1784 he wrote something that we even today might empathize with when we travel homewards after a good event:

THE STAGE AS A MORAL INSTITUTION

[...] *Much human woe is placed before us in the play. Artfully it pulls us into unfamiliar troubles but rewards us for the momentary pain with sublime tears and grand growth of courage and experience.*

[...] *In this manmade world we dream away the real one, we are once more given back to ourselves, our feelings reawaken, healing passions rouse our slumbering nature and speeds the blood in brisk waves. Those who are unhappy weep away their own sorrows along with others' troubles – the content ones are sobered and the selfsure*

provident. The emotional weakling becomes strengthened into manhood, the brute begins for the first time to feel. Then, at last [...] will people from all circles and places and positions, emancipated from the chains of pretense and fashion, liberated from destiny's constraints, becoming brothers in one all-encompassing sympathy, in one species redeemed, forget themselves and the world and approach their heavenly origin. Each and everyone will then enjoy the ecstasy of all, as it returns reinforced and beautified by hundreds of eyes, and in their hearts there will be room for but one emotion – this: to be human.

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JOHANNA MACDONALD

There You Are, There You Ain't

ON GOING TO PIECES WITHOUT
FALLING APART

IN 2008 I WAS AT A performance studies conference in Copenhagen, or more accurately sitting by myself in a tent in the rain surrounded by faded postcards from Romania and itinerant furniture and soon-to-be-discovered-as leaky caravans and wondering what the heck I was doing in this incomprehensible performance installation, when I had one of those paradigm-relocating moments. Not that I really understood it at the time, but ever since then I've been unable to work on any art or theatre project without Signa's *The 11th Knife* asserting its influence. Not, also, that I really think the artists anticipated the effect their game would have on me; I was the right person in the right place at the right time. Lucky me.

The 11th Knife was billed as a performance installation. It took up a small field, bounded by makeshift walls and laundry lines, and included three caravans replete with hideous interiors, two old dead cars, tables, a makeshift litter for The Goddess (a small contraption with a bed on wheels, on which she spent nearly all of the entire five days), *et cetera*. The installation ran non-stop for five days. Inside the installation, people dressed in formal servant's wear informed us it was a game. Applying Huizinga's magic circle, the piece was strictly delineated spatially and temporally (one field, five days). However, its

influence seeped out of that circle (as with all my favourite games and experiences). But more on that later.

What was odd, probably especially for larpers and performers who rather love to jump in and take part when given even half an invitation, was the way our participation was controlled. The game, it turned out, mostly involved two Players and a Playerette out of the cast, plus one character called The Rabbit, and did not involve any audience members. When they said it was a game, they meant for them, not us. We were free to participate but couldn't touch anything without permission. We could bet on who would win each round (which rounds were adjudicated in the most absurd ways; it took me days just to make sense of it), and we could help the Players, but we were not allowed to become one. (People asked. Many people.) We could not go and try on costumes. We could not assume a new name. We could not pretend to be other than what we were, something that's easily enforced when everyone's wearing conference name tags. The whole night after I first spent time in the game, I wondered (loudly and to anyone who would listen) why they made our participation so irritating. Why do they get all the fun when we have to just watch? Why have they limited us so much—don't they understand how to make this work? Why have they teased us with interactivity only to relegate it and strongarm us into our 'audience' box? And what we were watching was, dramaturgically, the abused stepchild of improv theatre: rounds, wherein each Player and Playerette was given an archetype to play (Sailor, Nurse, Child), a boon or a disadvantage (loss of sight, use of a servant), and followed themes (lust, joy, sorrow) went on for as long as the Masters wanted, so Players never knew if they had 3 minutes or 30 hours to play out the round. The result was ugly as sin.

THE CHARACTER IS NOT NECESSARY

So it was on the second day of me being frustrated and confiding to the Goddess that I didn't know what this piece wanted of me and I desperately wanted to play but didn't know how, and of The Rabbit giving me a postcard out of her personal stock so I could write to my mother and the conversation falling off and a few minutes of silence followed by an hour or so of being by myself and just quiet, it was in the middle of that that I realized I was suddenly in. I didn't have to do anything. I had allowed myself to become bored, and I stopped making demands of the game. A confused, cold person sitting on a shabby divan scribbling a postcard of nonsense *was part* of the installation. I had adapted to a new environment. And once I instinctively grasped that, I knew what I wanted and more or less how to get it. I knew who I wanted to be and I did everything I could to become just that. There was plotting, storytelling, scenes, moments of intense action and moments (hours) of nothing. I learned how cigarettes become currency. I'd leave at 4:AM and bike back to the hostel and get up at 7:30 to be back there around eight. I wasn't playing any character, and at the same time I was different, of course—shockingly different from how I behave in a more conventional environment—but the thing that really twisted my moral compass was how, in just a few days, how quickly the game revealed just what kind of person I can be in a certain environment of play/cruelty, and my complete lack of bones about doing all kinds of things—nice and naughty—in the name of fun.

And but so the thing I'm trying to get at here is that a really fantastic round of live action role-playing does not require character. It does not even require action at all. What are we left with? Live play? Leaving action and role aside, perhaps

what could be more important are the environment and the time scale. I would never have understood *The 11th Knife* in an evening. I had to spend about 15 hours in the environment before I came close to being relaxed enough to see it. And I also suspect that the fact that dropping in to the piece happened when I was alone (and thus basically creating the installation myself) is significant.

While it appears that larp, particularly of the Nordic genus, has long been flirting in the zone between role and player (Jeepform's rather Brechtian approach allows mid-scene role-switching, replays, fast-forwards, and a number of other tactics that tend to remind the player of the fact that he is playing), another trajectory can be traced back through contemporary theatre and *esitystaide* (a Finnish word that usually describes a contemporary theatre that mixes shamelessly with performance art, installation, and site-specific art) back to performance theory. Here, more or less, is the arc of the bullet (although it is certainly a grape-shot and thus cross-pollinated with all kinds of other aesthetics, philosophies, and art practices): Linguist J.L. Austin in 1962 writes *How to do things with words*, in which he introduces the act of creating reality through saying something, or more succinctly, the performative utterance, the most accessible example of which is the utterance by which the priest not only proclaims that a couple are now married, but literally performs that act through the speech of it. There really aren't that many examples of performative utterances, but what's interesting is that something that is made up of abstract signifiers (language, syntax, vocabulary) creates something that is real. Let there be light, as it were.

HOW TO DO YOURSELF

Following the idea that humans are performative beings, all kinds of questions start to pop up about who we really are, and how 'who I am' *happens*. In the Cartesian universe, who you are basically amounts to a noun, a thing, and what you do is an expression of what you are, literally the sending-out-into-the-universe actions which correlate to and represent something that is essential, whether that's your personality or soul or whatever you like. We still use this kind of parlance when talking about ourselves, or when we talk about a dancer's power of self-expression. There was such a thing as a self, and we each possessed one. We used to be somebody. But postmodernism marks the grand shift of what makes us us from noun to verb—what's called the performative turn. Derrida debunks the idea of essentialism, replacing it with *differance*. Nutshell: take a thing. An apple. It's not the thing itself that we know; but rather we know it by its position or qualities in relation to other things (its *appleness* also depends on there being oranges). The idea of a fixed, uncontingent self (a noun) gives way to a world in which we are verbs: processes, repetitions, dialogues, never independent from the environments (social, ecological and mental) in which we act.

Sociologist Erving Goffmann and, later, anthropologist Victor Turner, are among those who started to write about social behaviour as inherently theatrical, dramatic, or performed. Turner collaborated closely with theatre director and performance studies pioneer Richard Schechner, who introduced action as restored behaviour. What this means is that everything you do is a repetition of an act that preceded it, by you or by another person. You can speak because you learned the words from others. You brush your teeth pretty much the

same way all your life. You know how to mosh, wear a scarf, hide your emotions, do your hair, or browse at the bookstore in such a way that other people will know what you are doing. And every time you repeat something, you're adding another instance of it on to the great detritus pile of human social behaviour. And so culture happens. Schechner also coined the term *twice-restored behaviour*, which brings us back to *difference*: it's the idea that even though all behaviour can be seen as repetition, there is no original behaviour that is repeated. No original act is actually being "restored"; it's rather that the restoration brings to mind and solidifies or destabilizes the imaginary origin.

All of this is, of course, hideously oversimplified, but we're coming to the juicy bits. So far this might sound all terribly textbookish and theoretical and not really having anything to do with anything important (let alone larp), but the difference between "you as a being who is" and "you as a being who does" has enormously interesting implications. Let's take gender, for example. As conventional wisdom goes, girls are into pink and boys are into trucks, and they're simply 'made that way'. There are arguments for the tendency to display what are considered masculine or feminine behaviours as being based on genetic programming, and while I get that there is some decent science behind those observations, the logic is worth unpacking. The idea of *expressing an existing quality* (masculine or feminine) is very different from the idea of *repeating* (and thus co-creating, reinforcing, or modifying, oh hell let's say *playing with*) that quality.

Judith Butler, gender theorist par excellence, is the one who first took gender for a performative turn. She writes, "the distinction between expression and performativeness is quite

crucial, for if gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no pre-existing identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction." Butler's saying that if gender is not something we are but something we do, it means we're all making it up as we go along, and there isn't any "true" X or Y, and if we tell somebody they're not doing it right, then we're doing that for some sociopolitical reason: punishment, ostracising the different, enforcing the concepts of whoever happens to have authority. Which, if you have anything about you that rails against the status quo, is important knowledge. It means there's nothing bloody well about you that's good or bad, but others make it so.

SWIM OR DROWN

Expressivity offers a prescriptive model: this is the ideal actor, this is the ideal human being, the ideal man, the ideal hero, the ideal vampire. It effectively closes off participation to anyone who does not fit the prescriptive model, while a performative, playful idea of identity allows all permutations and possibilities. In theatre, as everywhere else, the prescriptive model is both deeply entrenched (the number of people who would tell a man of short stature and dark complexion that he would be completely wrong as Hamlet) and under investigation (or attack) by those who are interested in the marginal, the different, the unrepresented. We can't simply throw our stereotypes out with the bathwater this instant and expect to be able to understand our world, but I'd venture that the key is to be on the lookout all the time—notice what you're not supposed

to notice. And this is where larp stands to be a champion—in its ability to help you notice your surrounding structures and systems, and choose how you want to deal with them.

This is not to say that that's a done deal, especially if you're the sort of person who likes to make a distinction between a character and a player; a temporary role and the normal self you come back to after a game. A character is not an essence. It is not a self, and neither are you. You exhibit strong tendencies towards consistency because that is how you make sense of things in a performative world, and also it's how people expect you to behave, and how would you be able to cajole and influence and manipulate and help and show love for others if you weren't able to be meaningfully predictable? Hamlet, however, does not exist. He's just not there. Steven Wangh says that when an actor says "my character would never do that," she's saying "I don't want to do that." They're blueprints, ideas, psychological choreography. Characters are not people. A character is not an escape from you, nor are you a return from your character. To me, the idea that one escapes into a character is the opposite of enlightenment. It is dressing up your fear. Good acting, as is so frequently written in the great biographies, costs something. Immersion is not a holiday. Let yourself be really, suffocatingly, tachycardiacally, deliciously uncomfortable, and then adapt or drown.

YES, IT CAN BE DONE

In a very gentle sense, Aarni Korpela and I worked with this when we did the 18-hour performance game *Walkabout* in Helsinki in 2009, and it turned out to be, for me, the single most valuable aspect of the piece. Participants (or players, or audience, depending on the time of day and I just have to use

all of these words for them) didn't start out with very much info at all. They first encountered us as actors, people who were putting on this performance, and who had no role at all, but instead had the task of introducing the world to our audience. Players then spent some time on their own walking to the next encounter, and this performer would be slightly more 'in' to the game world: he or she was both their real-world self and a fictional concept. It was hours before they met anyone who claimed to be someone completely fictional. Over the course of many hours, participants were given their own fictions, and were allowed to develop them but were not allowed to disengage their real names and lives. It allowed people to flutter back and forth between fiction and non-, depending on what suited the moment. I encountered people who used their fictional role as a tool to talk about and think about very personal things that were going on in their lives, and people who augmented their real-life identities in a playful way through the lens of a fiction. And if those two things aren't the most rewarding things in art and larp (aside from the pleasure and enjoyment of it all), then I don't know what is.

It was somewhere in the fifth day of *The 11th Knife* that my friends came by the installation. I had at that point spent about 45 waking hours in, around, and of the game, and was happily ensconced within its magic circle, sitting rather literally in its court, playing a sort of jester to the two Masters. Everyone knew who I was. I was steering plots with less and less subtlety. I felt like I knew everything that was going on. I hadn't, however, noticed that my vocal patterns had gone all weird, and that I had been speaking with formal airs. I hadn't been aware of the fact that I was being obsequious towards the Masters, and haughty towards other guests (who, after all, didn't have

anything near the status that I did at that point). I was blind to the fact that I had status at all, much less that I cared so much about it. And but so then what happened was my friends came by, and I noticed what I wasn't supposed to notice. I realised I couldn't speak in front of my friends without seeming condescending or mentally incompetent or both. I couldn't speak in front of the Masters without throwing away all the in-game formality, suspension of disbelief, and status that I'd been building for five days. My lungs started to fill with water. I bit my nails and tried to communicate in monosyllables, but I don't think I fooled anybody. The worlds came crashing into each other and I stood to lose face in both. I also had the very uncomfortable realisation that my motivations, likes, dislikes, and personality were all completely dependent on context—even the one I usually consider to be my “normal” personality was a glaring construct, carefully (albeit unconsciously) made in order to fit in with certain people in certain places.

AN END IS NOT A CONCLUSION

And now I'm basically stranded on this iceberg, without getting into half of what was worth getting into. But anyway though, the things I wonder are like this: how can role-playing (or art) be made to be productively uncomfortable and also enjoyable and attractive? Can I really change my “self” through larp, and is that desirable? Is there any need whatsoever for preparation before a game? Wouldn't it be better to just throw yourself into an intense game environment for a few days until you really start to adapt? To what extent is a game that is “performed” by some and “participated in” by others, a game? What if you find out that you're far more sadistic than you thought you were? Was that my outside voice? And can larp be art if it does not

address the fluidity of identity and the authority of self—if it doesn't make you notice what you're not supposed to notice? Who are you to make experiences for people in which they can be violently ripped out of their own comfort zone? Does it count if they know beforehand that it's going to be uncomfortable? 'Cause otherwise it's about as easy to do as it is to catch yourself off-guard, which: can you do that, too?

JOHANNA MACDONALD grew up in Ontario, played a lot of sports and musical instruments, studied English and Drama and Biology, and then moved to Finland in 2002. Since then she's been a writer, actor, performance artist, gotten well into an M.A. in Performance Art and Theory, and discovered larp. Her art pieces take many different forms, but they tend to feature long duration, repetition, physical sensations, deprivation or rigour, and Finnish text. Her next work, Tower Room, is a game-performance in Helsinki in June. She plays the durational role happeningfish at Twitter and Blogspot and various other outlets.

Contra-moral of Play

FROM ETHICS OF GAME TOWARD
ETHICS OF PLAYING

MANY GAMES ARE NOT ONLY APT to repel ethical considerations as such but also to replace ethical norms by their own rules. Take boxing as an example: boxers must accept brute violence as the only allowed way to play the game and thus, temporarily suspend from thinking that hitting others is wrong (cf. Montola, Stenros and Waern 2009).

Within a game those things that are normally immoral or bad may suddenly become not only acceptable but also expected behavior. A boxer, for instance, would do *wrong*, if he refused to hit the other during a match. I call this “contra-moral of boxing”.

Contra-moral negates or inverts some of everyday moral norms or values. It is not freedom from moral but an alternative moral per se. The negation or inversion does *not* imply a contradiction with everyday moral. For instance, betraying allies in *Diplomacy* doesn't quite contradict the everyday moral norm “not to betray allies”. Betraying in *Diplomacy* has its own special meaning that is not fully commensurable with betraying in the ‘real’ world, i.e. outside the context of the play. Yet, betraying allies in *Diplomacy* is *betraying*.

The contra-moral implies *only* an unsolvable tension between it and the everyday moral. Actually, the older meaning of “contra”, “in comparison with” describes a bit better what

is meant by it in the concept of “contra-moral” than the more modern meaning “opposite” or “against”: a moral that is in comparison with the everyday moral.

PLAY AND MORAL

*“Play and moral are two completely different things!
You should not mix them.”*

Ignoring what is normally seen as valuable and good is a moral statement. Negating a norm or value is even a stronger moral statement. If I argued that “punching another is ok” in (almost) any other context than a playful one, I would be seen as immoral. When I negate a moral norm within the context of a known game (e.g. boxing), I seldom face such opposition.

Play isn’t the only phenomenon that may negate moral norms and values. There are many others. For instance, war negates the norm “don’t kill people” and the result is two norms “do not kill your own except if they are traitors” and “kill enemies of the country”. Of course, not everyone accept that negation. Likewise, not everyone accept the way boxing negates the norm “don’t hit another person”.

Arguing that war has nothing to do with ethics is rather a political statement than an ethical one. The same applies in games. Arguing that betraying allies in *Diplomacy* is not at all an ethical choice is self-deception – nonetheless quite healthy self-deception.

When everyday moral is negated or inverted, the result – contra-moral – is often *alienated* from the original, opposing ethical context. Thus killing in war, hitting another during boxing match or betraying an ally in *Diplomacy* isn’t always recognized as ethical issues.

ONLY A CONTRACT?

“Anyway, the norm that ‘one should not hit another person’ still applies generally. Boxers have just a contract or mutual agreement that they may hit each other, therefore it is acceptable non-moral activity.”

Even if there was a contract between the boxers, it wouldn’t be any answer to the question on contra-moral. At least I don’t usually accept contracts that contradict my moral. If someone suddenly suggests “is it ok to you, that I try to hit you and you try to hit me with these softened gloves”, I probably would not accept that contract. In case I choose to commit to it, it is really hard to see the contract as anything else than play. Thus, a contract doesn’t make me accept any immoral aspects in a play but the other way around: play make me accept contracts which I would not accept otherwise.

It is amazingly easy to accept silly and even harmful contracts when playing. If the extraordinary ethics of play is based on a contract, why can only play have such liberating, willingly accepted contracts while other areas of life seemingly cannot? For instance the contra-moral of war is largely based on coercion and is different in that sense.

ONLY FICTION?

“Play is fiction – or non-real unlike moral. Fictive things can be taken more lightly.”

Again, I would not accept a *fictive* norm “you may attempt to hit me and I may attempt to hit you” if I didn’t interpret it as

playful. Fictive things in play can be taken more lightly than the “real” one exactly because there is a playful contra-moral in fiction. The playfulness within it *alienates* us from the burden of overly serious everyday moral. On the other hand:

Why might not the world WHICH CONCERNS US—be a fiction? And to any one who suggested: “But to a fiction belongs an originator?”—might it not be bluntly replied: WHY? May not this “belong” also belong to the fiction? Is it not at length permitted to be a little ironical towards the subject, just as towards the predicate and object? Might not the philosopher elevate himself above faith in grammar? All respect to governesses, but is it not time that philosophy should renounce governess-faith?

—NIETZSCHE, JENSEITS VON GUT UND BÖSE, §34

The world which concerns the boxer during the match is the world of boxing; the moral rules that apply then are those of boxing, not those of the everyday world. What the worth of the moral rules of boxing is compared to those of everyday life is another question.

It is notable that people quite commonly commit to play by rules that

- I. contradict their everyday moral principles,
- II. may cause physical, emotional, economical or social harm and
- III. often have only fictive or “non-real” benefices to achieve.

Good sportsmanship and commitment to play’s moral codex seem to concern us as much as or even more than many moral norms and values of everyday life.

FETTERS OF PLAY

“Maybe play then liberates us from ethics?”

It depends on how you understand “freedom”. If freedom to you means “lack of limitations” or “opportunity to do anything you want to” or something like that, then play won’t make us freer. Quite the contrary, playing enchains us. At best, play changes the way we are constrained and bound by arbitrary rules – including written rules as well as unwritten ones (cf. Sniderman 1999). In most cases, there are a lot more limitations in play than outside it.

When I don’t play chess I can browse the Internet, read a book, move restlessly, drum the floor with my feet, show my middle finger, talk business, and so on. During a chess game doing any of those things would be an insult toward the co-player. Virtually chess has nothing to do with moral, but in fact it has such a strict etiquette that players cannot do much more than think and every other minute move a play token.

And then again, isn’t it strange that it is so easy and even pleasing to accept an overly limiting, arbitrary etiquette within the context of a play? There are, of course, many other areas of life in which an actor is constrained by arbitrary rules and norms, for instance work. Nevertheless, the way work constrains our living usually won’t make us feel free. The way play constrains our living – in form of rules, fictive setting and play society – usually will make us feel free. That’s a crucial difference.

FREEDOM IN PLAY

"Then why are games and playing associated with freedom, even if they in fact narrow the possible choices we can make without breaking the rules and ethos we are committed to in play? Why would we want to be enchained?"

My theory is that play makes me feel free because:

- I. I can choose which rules and what society limits my behavior. Playing makes me less free but I have virtually full control of the constraints. Freedom without constraints that make it meaningful is an empty concept.
- II. The rules and other participants of the play underline the meaning of my choices. Often, I cannot recall when and why I actually decided to make a sandwich, I just did it. On other hand, I'm very conscious of the moment of and reasons why I chose to move a horse from one of 64 squares of chessboard to another – like it really had a special significance in my life.

The contra-moral is a part of the meaningfulness of play. And meaningful goals and insights are pretty much what we want from play (see Costikyan 2002). Boxing, for instance, makes hitting another an obligation and exactly that obligation makes boxing exciting and interesting, not the lack of the maxim forbidding hitting another. In most cases, the ethics of the play is rather just the etiquette of the play – nothing more. There is not much ethical deepness in playing Carcassonne and only a bit more in hide-and-seek. In some cases, nonetheless, the

contra-moral of play is a key element of fun and excitement.

Montola, Stenros and Waern (2009) notes also that "[t]he restrictions set down by the game are needed for the game to be free and liberating." My argument is very similar to theirs on this. However, the crucial difference is that I will take neither magic circle nor any other property of play/game as a key element of the moral theory of play; instead I use the concept of playfulness. Magic circle is a property of play/game whereas playfulness is a feature of participants – including audience as well as the players, and both those who are aware of a game and those who aren't.

The concept of magic circle may help to understand why a person hadn't the playful attitude he were expected to have, or why he chose playful approach in a situation he should have taken seriously. However, the participants' state of mind is the core in the ethics of playing, not the means (i.e. the games) that have made some change in the participants' attitudes and point of views.

WHEN EXCITEMENT BECOMES OFFENSIVENESS

We don't need not to presuppose an objective spatial, temporal or social borderline between play and non-play. In ethical discourse, presupposing them is even a bit problematic.

Imagine of group of little boys that spontaneously start to wrestle in the snow. They all know that it isn't serious but play. Playful wrestling of little boys remains play as long as they all are committed to the implicit, de facto rules of play; that is, as long as all are *aware of the playfulness* of the situation.

Then something changes. To one boy the situation becomes suddenly uneasy. The aggressive contra-moral of play is suddenly offensive to him. Just a moment ago he enjoyed the

exciting contra-moral allowing him to push other boy's face into the snow.

The contra-moral that has become offensive is ethically problematic, not the situation where a boy pushes the face of another boy into the snow and the other revenges by throwing snow into the coat's collar. It is not possible to say objectively when this happens. There won't be any objective – let alone observable – spatial, temporal or social change in the play situation and its preconditions before the play has already turned into unethical fighting from the perspective of the boy.

We should rather ground the moral theory of play on the subjective, fuzzy awareness of playfulness the participants of a play situation happen to have or not to have. That awareness needs not to be based on any spatial, temporal or social constraints – nonetheless, it may. In the ethical considerations we must pay careful attention to causal relations. The aforementioned virtual constraints are usually dependent on a playful attitude, not the other way around.

AWARENESS OF PLAY

VERSUS

AWARENESS OF PLAYFULNESS

Usually, we don't see contra-moral as an offence or otherwise ethically problematic. For most of the time, we even expect others to be at least in a bit playful mood and, thus, to not take things too seriously. Nonetheless, contra-moral may become *fully* acceptable only if the all participants of play can and will participate into the play situation.

By “participate in a play situation” I mean that participant de facto differentiate between *playful* and *serious*. I don't

postulate here a necessity for difference between play and non-play but only between playful and serious. This is a weaker condition than the normally made one (e.g. by Huizinga 1936).

“To be a part of a game”, i.e. “to be a participant” don't require that one play in it. A person can be *unaware* of a game, and thus unable to play in it, but still participating in the play situation. That is, an *unaware* participant can be in a playful mood within the play situation and interpret everything in the game correctly as “not-so-serious”.

Every participant should be aware of playfulness in the play situation. Otherwise they are insulted – no matter if they realized the insult or not. This is the minimum condition for ethical play. It is that also in cases where a (possibly unaware) participant doesn't want to play or doesn't know how to play but rather observes game as a performance or similar kind of art.

OBLIGATION TO INFLUENCE

It is not necessary to understand that the source of the playfulness is a game. To laugh at a joke you need not to classify if it was irony, sarcasm or something else. Similarly, to recognize something as playful and exciting you don't need to know if the source of those feelings was game, happening or just performance. In short, you need to understand neither the structure of fun to have fun nor the structure behind playfulness to be playful. I take two examples:

1. *Vem Gråter?* (Who's crying?) was a reality game arranged in Sweden 2005. I was meant to be a cross-media poltergeist mystery, but it was generally seen as vandalism. The ethical problems rooted from the fact that most people just didn't get the ludic

nature of the game's elements (Montola, Stenros and Waern 2009).

- II. In *Prosopopeia Bardo 2: Momentum* (played in Stockholm in the fall of 2006) there was a scene where game organizers had given a painting to an art gallery and told the owner to give it to a person who really wanted it. The game organizers didn't reveal that the painting and those who really wanted it were a part of a play. Even if the gallery workers were not told explicitly that they were in the middle of a game, they took a playful attitude toward weird occurrences and enjoyed that day (Montola, Stenros and Waern, 2009; Stenros, Montola, and Waern 2007).

Game designers need to make the playfulness of their creation clear enough to the target audience, no matter if the audience will be aware of the actual game as a play-event or not. They definitely don't have to underline the structure and nature of the play situation!

Playfulness is *being*, not *seeing*. I don't see a game as playful, the game makes me playful. I'm the origin, subject and object of playfulness. The game is just a catalyst of it. This implies that game designers not only need to communicate their ideas to participants but also – and more importantly – to influence a state of being of the target audience. Actually, the first obligation to communicate is rather a common consequence of the later obligation to influence than an ethical necessity in itself.

Playful behavior can be interpreted properly only from a playful point of view, thus all participants must be prepared to a playful state of being. This is easier than it sounds.

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STEFAN JORDAN

Reality is an Interpretation of Fantasy

REALITY IS MERELY AN ILLUSION, ALBEIT A
VERY PERSISTENT ONE — ALBERT EINSTEIN

“Dreams are my Reality” —Richard Sanderson

Does reality exist? If it does, is it what we perceive, imagine and react upon? Is what we remember the truth?

It is not possible to deny the feasibility of the Matrix model purely on an epistemological base. For the purpose of this discussion, let us assume consensus reality on a physical level: there is a planet called Earth in an expanding universe, about 6.5 billion humans currently live on this planet, there is fast food and cancer, quarks and MP3 players.

Still, there is a huge difference between reality in a physical sense and its imaginary counterpart in our minds. In this article, I try to show why what we perceive and remember is only remotely related to consensus reality, why larp can be considered a conscious splitting of personality and how we can deal with dangers resulting from these observations.

“The Man-Machine” —Kraftwerk

Many people imagine their sensory organs as some kind of technology: human eyes as cameras, ears as microphones, the skin as some kind of huge touch sensor and their brain as some kind of biological computer with the most sophisticated CPU

in the world. These are nice models, but just like there are no electrons spinning around the atomic nucleus like planets around the sun, they are not real. They are fairy tales for adults, but still fairy tales.

“One Vision” —Queen

There is a blind spot in each of our eyes, where the optical nerves are attached to the retina. It is easy to understand that if you have two healthy eyes the pictures from both eyes are merged into one in the brain and since the blind spots do not cover the same area of the picture, a complete picture is the result. But what happens when you close one eye? You still cannot see the blind spot, so maybe it is just too small to be consciously detected. If you look at the full moon, you can get a good idea of how big this blind spot is: it is considerably larger than the surface area of the moon.*

“Listen to your Heart” —Roxette

In a normal day-to-day situation, there are more signals sent from the brain to the ears than vice versa**. There are certain sounds some human ears cannot discern, because they are programmed to ignore the difference. This is a process quite obvious in languages: the average adult Japanese cannot tell the difference between the English “R” and “L” sound. They usually are able to pronounce both, but they do not hear them as two different sounds.

* http://www.tedmontgomery.com/the_eye/optcnrve.html

** http://www.aitnstitute.org/ait_and_brain.htm; see also *A User's Guide to the Brain, Perception, Attention & the Four Theatres of the Brain* by John J. Ratey, MD.

“I have the touch” —Peter Gabriel

The sense of touch is even more complicated. Any dysfunction aside, we do have a pretty good idea of our body's proportions and a feeling of integration. But there are phantom limbs and dissociation – people still “feeling” missing limbs and not feeling still existing ones.

You cannot tickle yourself, since the sensitivity of your skin is extremely reduced when you try to – even when using tools to do so.* Something similar is true for pain: it seems a lot less painful if you e.g. remove a splinter from your skin yourself than if somebody else does.

So, even if we imagine and experience our senses as being accurate, they are by design not. And even if they were, there remains the question of how information is processed and stored. Actually, it is hard to tell if our brains are like biological computers or not, but evidence suggests they are not.**

“Brain Damage” —Pink Floyd

Usually our memory works just fine, but if something does not work as designed, your whole world works differently than the majority's. Reality takes on a different shape. One interesting example is demonstrated in the movie *Memento*. The main character's long term memory does not work correctly anymore since he had an accident.*** This completely changes

* God knows why this works different for genitalia, but thanks anyway.

** <http://users.ecs.soton.ac.uk/harnad/Papers/Py104/searle.comp.html>

*** Apparently this happens if both your Hippocampi are dysfunctional or removed. He remembers everything before that accident perfectly well, but since then nothing, which happened longer than 5–10 minutes ago, is stored. The filmmakers use a very simple trick to make us experience something similar: all scenes were cut in a reversed order.

his world-view and you can get an idea of this by watching the movie.

“You can't go home again” —DJ Shadow

Another failure of memory processing is something most of us have experienced. It is usually called déjà-vu. According to one theory, this is what happens: a course of events is erroneously moved to long-term memory before it is committed to short-term. When the information is stored in short-term memory, the brain recognizes that the same memory does already exist in long-term memory (the “past”), therefore you experience that you already “knew that”.

“Both sides of the story” —Phil Collins

The brain stores memories by telling us stories*. It can store simple bits of information, but it is exponentially easier if the information is in some context – apparently that is why mnemonic rhymes work so well. The problem is that when the information is stored, the brain cannot discern between “made up” or constructed** and experienced (lacking a better word) “real” information. This is something one can experience with particularly realistic dream sequences, where it is sometimes hard to tell if it really happened or not.

Another example is the other way around: it happens when you memorize a certain story or even idea, but you cannot remember exactly where it came from. It is called *source amnesia* (Wang and Aamodt 2008). Sometimes people

* <http://www.news.utoronto.ca/campus-news/dont-i-know-you-u-of-t-research-sheds-light-on-how-cues-and-context-kicksta-1.html>

** Also called pseudomnesia.

actually do not remember being told things at all and mistake them for their own ideas. Welcome to the wonderful world of plagiarism.

This method of storing information can also be used to our advantage. In trauma therapy, e.g., there is a method where you try to find a compelling story about how the trauma originated. Some therapists argue that it is more important that the story is conclusive than whether it is true to the actual events or even if it is responsible for the trauma at all (Reddemann 2003).

“Another Version of the Truth” —Nine Inch Nails

Just as serious, but a lot more common is what is called the *witness problem*. Part of this phenomenon has to do with how information is perceived by our sensual organs and then stored by the brain. Missing parts of the picture are quite literally filled in (c.f. blind spot discussion above), but also to make “the story work”, not necessarily consciously, but sometimes also to make sense of what we remember. In stressful situations this might only be bits and pieces of the actual events. When thinking about the course of events that we experienced, what we remember to have perceived needs to fit into place, but the whole “story” will be remembered and later on we do not have any means of telling which parts of it were actually perceived, filled in by the brain while perceiving it or filled in to make sense out of a number of disjunctive facts.

“Games People Play” —The Alan Parsons Project

When playing role-playing games (especially larps) you take on a role, which is in some way or another different from your day-to-day personality. Thus you change the way you perceive the world, sometimes in very delicate, sometimes more

blatant ways. In multiple meanings of the word, you try out new realities: quite often in a literal meaning by entering a fantasy, scifi, horror etc. world, but also in the meaning that your own image of reality is changed by your perception. You see situations from a different angle than your own, thus you put your normal view of reality in perspective. Thus, larp can be used to question or even challenge your reality. This presents a huge opportunity to try out different “what ifs”.

“Mad World” —Tears for Fears

As we could see, our perceptions are not 100% reliable and our memories even less. Although we like to believe otherwise, our image (or imagination!) of reality is not set in stone. A myriad of permanent and temporary dysfunctions can shake our grip on reality, which is pretty loose to begin with.

Live role-playing is playing with reality – we superimpose a game world on consensus reality, which we like to imagine as the “real world”. To be able to play and immerse into character, we need to set aside the real world or even forget about it. The better we are at this, the more entertaining and intriguing the experience.

In some way, assuming roles in a larp is quite similar to the definition of dissociative identity disorder (DID):

- I. The individual has at least two distinct identities or personality states. Each of these has its own, relatively lasting pattern of sensing, thinking about and relating to self and environment.
- II. At least two of these personalities repeatedly assume control of the individual’s behaviour.

- III. This behaviour is not directly caused by substance use; symptoms cannot be the temporary effects of drug use or a general medical condition.
- IV. Common forgetfulness cannot explain the patient’s extensive inability to remember important personal information. (DSM IV)

The first characteristic could be interpreted as a definition of role-playing. The second characteristic reminds of recurring characters in role-playing and campaign-style larp games. The third one is obviously correct.

The fourth point looks questionable, but it is not as clear-cut as it seems. First of all, for the sake of the role played, the “player memory” does not exist. It is non-diegetic and thus referring to it or using it is viewed as switching “out of character” (and thus of personality). Second, the same paragraph in the German Wikipedia translates to:

“Actions of the respective “other” person are not – or only dimly – remembered or *he experiences it as the actions of a different person.*”

This is even closer to what we usually describe as “in” and “out” of character perspectives.

“I want to break free” —Queen

Do not get me wrong, this is in no way arguing that live role-playing is the same as having a DID. There are similarities, though. Getting into character is at least comparable to a conscious and willing act of “splitting personality”. It is a controlled act, but what happens “in character” can sometimes overwhelm and ask too much of you or other participants. Hence it is argued that phases of immersion can be viewed as DID episodes.

Being aware of this fact can help dealing with the resulting emotions and experiences.

One obvious difference between the two is that we voluntarily and consciously play a role as opposed to involuntarily and maybe even subconsciously switch into a different personality. Resulting from this is also a difference in the evaluation of the experience. “Immersion” usually has a positive connotation as opposed to the “medical condition” DID.

One might question how much choice a person with DID has or had in creating her personas, but then again: if you immerse into a larp character, even more so into a gamemaster-provided one, how much choice do you have how the character acts? The first step, registering for the larp, is voluntarily. Everything which happens thereafter, has at least peer group pressure associated. Developing the role and how it acts often is a very deliberate and conscious process, the actual reactions of the character in the game often are not.

“Vicious Games” —Yello

In game situations, the choice is even more limited: either you have to act in character or break the immersion and game reality – at least for yourself and maybe also for other participants. It can be an embarrassing experience to break the immersion. It is also opposed to the general idea of role-playing, and some people might even consider it as impolite. Thus it is only an option in the most extreme of situations.

When you are not acting, but actually *immersing* into a character, breaking the immersion can only happen in your mind. This can be a very trying process since what you experienced while in character is part of your personal experience – including all emotions. Emotions cannot simply be ignored; in the

long term one has to deal with them in some way or another. So even when a participant decides to “jump over his own shadow” and break the immersion, she still has to deal with the emotions that led to the decision.

“Where do we go from here?” — Buffy

Considering all this, live role-playing as a trial field for personal borderline experiences is walking a thin line in the best of circumstances. Even rather light-hearted games can become taxing and challenging. Without attention to these dangers, players are left to themselves to deal with emotional problems resulting from situations considered utterly harmless by their fellow participants and game organizers.

So what is needed to prepare game organizers to handle such issues? Depending on the gaming culture, formal or at least ritualized feedback and reflection mechanisms should be offered for all games, even those considered as “psychologically light-weight”.

“Can't Stop” —Red Hot Chili Peppers

From a game organizer’s perspective, there are tools to reduce the number of situations when breaking immersion is needed. This can be done e.g. with an established method of meta-playing: *trigger words*. The most commonly used form of triggers is “stop words”. These are supposed to give participants and organizers a safety net. On the one hand, a player acting out a character should be safe to assume that other participants will stop the action by using the trigger word if certain lines are crossed. On the other hand, somebody using the stop word to stop a certain course of events can assume that it is accepted and thus can enter into borderline experiences without complete loss of control.

A stop word (or, for that matter, any trigger word) consists of at least two aspects:

- » The word itself
- » What are the consequences (for all parties involved)

If the word itself is too complicated, it might not come to mind when a stressful situation occurs that would require its use. It cannot be a word which could be used accidentally in the game, but if it is too “far” off-game it will destroy the immersion for everybody nearby – even for participants not involved in the situation.*

If the rules define that the word will stop the whole game dead in its tracks, participants might be very hesitant to use it at all, since it takes a lot of courage to stop the game for everybody around – the consequences might be considered too harsh. A better rule might have a softer consequence (e.g. use of the word requires clarification of the situation between involved players).

“The Godfather” —Fantômas

From experience, triggers which are in genre, but still clearly off-game work best. A good example for this comes from a 1930s Godfather-style game. In this scenario a trigger word was used, but not as much as a stop word.

The situation was that four organizers and game masters were present, but were doing servant duty, cooking, mixing drinks and similar. Whenever a player (character) needed to be told that a specific task was too much to ask of the organizer,

* In one 1920s scenario I was participating, the word “laser printer” was used as a stop word. Not a very good choice in regards to this requirement.

he would tell him “Mario” would take care of it. The off-game message was clear and in-game the servant didn’t need to find a way to tell the Godfather that he wouldn’t polish his shoes before breakfast. And the Godfather’s player who didn’t want to shine the shoes himself could still complain in game that Mario didn’t do a good job about it. This worked so well that players even used it proactively (“Could you ask *Mario* to clean this glass for me?”). The players loved it and didn’t feel at all like meta-playing.

“6/8 War” —Leftfield

It has also been suggested using keywords not only to deescalate, but also to escalate game situations.

An example where escalation/de-escalation trigger words could be used is a classic fantasy tavern scene. The adventurous rogue orders a jug of beer and gives the wench a slap on the butt when she turns around to fetch the order. She could now stop him from any more sexual harassment in the workplace by telling him “If you like that backside, you should see my cousin *Maria!*” or tell him that it’s no problem and he may continue with his rude flirtation routine by winking at him and saying “don’t let my brother *Mario* see this”.

As shown in this example, using trigger words for both escalation and de-escalation enables players to communicate different meanings in- and off-game: though the wench player might not have a problem with a slap on the behind, her character might see things differently. The advantage of this method can be that all players involved in a situation exactly know what the other players are comfortable with. The increase in “meta-play” could be considered a disadvantage by some, though.

“Is there anybody out there?” —Pink Floyd

Offering overburdened players ways to recover from the situation is always a good thing. This can be done with an “off-game room” which is near the gaming area, but not part of it. There should be a discreet way to contact the game organizers and some room to relax. Sodas, coffee and sweets or fruit can be added at leisure. If you fear that players will abuse this, think about it: would you? Probably only when the game is either really too much or just plainly boring. Feel free to draw your own conclusions.

“The End” —The Doors

It does not hurt anybody to consider options for players to deal with emotionally overstraining situations. Not offering any solution can – and does – hurt. De-roling, reflection and feedback methods exist and have been used in some gaming cultures for years. Even if they are new to a specific larp scene, they are standard tools of facilitators, social workers and therapists worldwide; they only need to be adapted and applied to the local live action role-playing context. Use them, they’re free!

“Reality is an interpretation of Fantasy”, after Touch Yello, a virtual concert by the Swiss music duo Yello (2009).

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TOBIAS HARDING

Playing Against the Modern World?

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES IN LATE MODERNITY

*Is there a longing among young people for the civilization of the disassembled welfare state to crumble entirely? Is there a yearning for archaic rites and authenticity? And are these exploited for a decided purpose by certain business interests?**

— BARN & UNGDOM #5 1995

THE QUOTE is from an interview with Didi Örnstedt and Björn Sjöstedt in 1995, when they were leading what could be described as a crusade against role-playing games. This was about the same time as I started playing role-playing games. In retrospect, the most interesting part of the interview may be their obvious inability to understand why young people in the highly organized society that they considered Sweden to be, would choose to go out in the woods to play medieval or post-apocalyptic role-playing games, rather than take part in the various activities that well-meaning adults provided for them at great cost. Örnstedt and Sjöstedt reacted in fear at this tendency, which they described as a “right wing anarchist

* Swedish quotes have been translated by the author of this essay.

ideology” (ibid.), they are however not the only ones who have found it difficult to understand.

CHANGING VALUES AND WORLD-VIEWS

Many role-playing games seem to include a rejection of some of the values that we have come to identify with modernity, such as belief in progress, rationalism, efficiency and rational social hierarchies. Role-players are not alone in this questioning. On the contrary, we are often considered to live in late-, or even post-modern times. Role-playing games, and indeed role-players as a community, may instead be interesting examples of a number of larger social trends.

Örnstedt and Sjöstedt feared the deconstruction of individual identity and the individual’s connection to what they considered the real world. Nine years after the article quoted above Martin Ericsson wrote in the Solmukohta 2004 book:

[...] making the players shed their former selves along with their entire socio-moral luggage before entering the game should be the primary goal. Currently there seems to be a lot of hesitation among players and organisers about going into games naked and head over heels, yet the game will touch deeper if one gives oneself up to it completely and enters the liminoid space as a humble initiate rather than a headstrong actor.

— ERICSSON 2004

He is not alone in this view. Like Örnstedt and Sjöstedt, he sees potential in role-playing as a ritual vehicle to transcend our everyday selves. Unlike them he is aware of the extraordinary effort it takes to accomplish this. He also implies that this is

an effort that many role-players do not make. This puts him at a long distance from Örnstedt’s and Sjöstedt’s worries about children mistakenly slipping away from their everyday selves when playing dangerous games outside the reach of “loving and supporting grown-ups” (Barn & Ungdom #5 1995).

Role-playing can be seen as a way to change the way we look at the world by trying to see a different world (the game world) through the eyes of a different person (the character). It also creates a space that reinforces this alternative frame of reference (Harding 2007). There is an escapist side to role-playing games. At their most basic level they are about leaving ones ordinary troubles for a while. To some it is a conscious effort to live a large part of life outside the strictures otherwise placed on them. This ritualized escape have been considered to question what we have come to see as the modern world-view in at least two ways: it helps players view things from a perspective different from the one dominant in our society (i.e. a modernist perspective), and it questions the modernist idea of the individual as a constant rational unity. As all strong experiences these games are likely to change the way that we view the world and ourselves.

A ROMANTIC HERITAGE

What we do see at most live action role-playing games is, at least in Sweden, young people creating games in the forests inspired by romanticized versions of the Middle Ages. This is easy to see as escaping the strictures of modern society into a simpler or more authentic life. The works of J.R.R. Tolkien, which has inspired much of the fantasy genre in both literature and role-playing games can, for example, be read as rejecting both industrialism and the more collectivistic and relativistic

sides of modernity. Compare for example the preindustrial idylls of his Lothlorien or the Shire with his descriptions of the darkly mechanical Isengard or Mordor (Harding 2010).

While not all fantasy displays these traits as clearly as Tolkien's work (or at all), other genres common in role-playing games display similar characteristics. The Gothic genre has a lot in common with the Romantic movement that so inspired Tolkien. Mattias Fyhr defines Gothic as a genre that "depicts one or more subjective worlds which lack a moral order, are characterized by an atmosphere of decay, doom and unsolvability, and contains devices that lend the text labyrinthine qualities" (Fyhr 2003).

A strong inspiration to role-playing games with these characteristics is H.P. Lovecraft, to whom progress was literally a road to disaster (Fyhr 2006). This sounds much like the opposite of both modernity and the romantic anti-modern ideals depicted by Tolkien. Yet, in many role-playing games, these devices are used to describe the modern world, or at least something close enough to it to be considered a caricature of it. Look for example at this quote from the role-playing game *Vampire the Masquerade* from White Wolf Game Studio, describing a game world that is much like the real world:

The World of Darkness has a Statue of Liberty, an Eiffel Tower and rock clubs like CBGB. More present than in our world, though, is the undercurrent of horror – our world's ills are all the more pronounced in the World of Darkness. Our fears are more real. Our governments are more degenerate. Our ecosystems die a little bit more each night. And vampires exist. [...] Buttressed buildings loom overhead,

bedecked with classical columns and gargoyles. Residents are dwarfed by the sheer scale of architecture.

There is little hint of nostalgia in this description, aside from the gothic imagery. It is, however, setting the stage for a bleak world without much room for the individual. There is a lot of room for the morbidity that so horrified Örnstedt and Sjöstedt. Role-playing games have often also turned to the apocalyptic (as the White Wolf games often do) and to the post-apocalyptic. "Dark games for dark times" as the Sverok chairman and future IT mogul Jonas Birgersson is quoted saying in Barn & Ungdom (#5 1995). Role-playing games of this kind can often be read as a satire of our own society, thus creating a critical distance at the same time as providing escape. Both as critique and escape they can, however, be a way to handle anxiety in what is often characterized as a risk society (Giddens 1991), not necessarily in the sense that we face more or greater risks than for example medieval peasants did, but that we are constantly faced with the medialized images of disaster, and thus constantly reminded of the risks we face, or imagine.

MARKET AND ART

So far I have not been in complete disagreement with Örnstedt and Sjöstedt. The last sentence of the quote is where they descend into virtual paranoia: "And are these exploited for a decided ["bestämt"] purpose by certain business interests?" Role-playing games in Sweden have developed into a highly decentralized voluntary non-profit movement. Especially live action role-playing games can only be organized thanks to enormous amounts of voluntary work. Gabriel Widing (2008) describes this in terms of a gift economy, in the anthropological sense. Status in the gift economy is created by the destruction

of resources. This description is almost diametrically opposed to the logics of the market economy. This attitude is, however, is not unique to role-playing games. Instead it is quite similar to the logics and motivations of much other voluntary work (cf. von Essen 2008 or Harding 2009). It is typical of modern society that a voluntary sector has grown up in opposition, or complementary, to the commercial and public sectors. It is in this third sector that people may seek escape from the concerns of for example working life and school.

Some features of how live action role-playing games are organized are, however, different from the established ways of organizing cultural activities. According to the writers of the book *Deltagarkultur* ("Participatory Arts", Haggren, Larsson, Nordwall and Widing 2008), live action role-playing is by definition a collective creation. As every participant is also a part of the art work, that art work only exist through their work. When participation ends, the art work remains only as memory (cf. Harding 2007). In this sense we have to do with a whole new kind of art that is produced by and for the participants, and unable to exist without their active participation. In a sense this fulfills the old dictum of art for art's sake.

Deltagarkultur, however, focus more on the cultural impact than on the purely artistic ones. Participatory arts is contrasted to spectator arts, a concept that encompasses almost all established forms of art and entertainment, i.e. art and entertainment that do not involve the audience/participants in the creative work. Parallels can be drawn between this view of art and Horkheimer's and Adorno's (1996) views of mass culture as a commercial force making people passive. The major difference would be that while they defended high culture and criticized popular culture, the writers of *Deltagarkultur* turn their

argument against high culture, although certainly including most of popular culture as well. Rasmus Fleischer has argued that one need not go so far as the writers of *Deltagarkultur* and "assume an absolute distinction between active participation and a passive viewing [... which] leads to a nihilistic ideal. Participation becomes an even gray porridge, in the long run a duty". The alternative is to see that "[t]he relation between artist and audience is an incidental agreement that may very well be reversed the next day" (Fleischer 2009).

The main concern of Örnstedt's and Sjöstedt's may, however, have been their view of the players of role-playing games as unsupervised children. Viewing young people as children appears in fact to be an underlying assumption in their whole discourse. This is the same point that to many role-players marks their scene as egalitarian: that this is an activity that participants organize together and for each other, rather than an event that is organized by outsiders in favor of participants. The national organization Sverok have stood for a similar line of argument; that they are an organization in which young people organize activities together. Örnstedt and Sjöstedt, on the other hand, assumed a need for supervision and education, preferably by trained professionals acting within the framework of a welfare state (cf. Örnstedt and Sjöstedt 1997).

NETWORKING INTO THE FUTURE

Gabriel Widing argues that the production of live action role-playing can be described as a network structure: a loose structure connecting various groups of organizers and participants. The same individual may at one time be a participant and the next time an organizer or a writer. As role-players grow up, the network structure appears to grow into a quite different alternative:

people of all ages participating on equal basis in the same events. This may sound utopian, and to some extent it is: a network is not necessarily an equal structure, it has nodes, and some of these have more connections than others. Yet, the relationship between nodes in a network is a complex one and depends on context and situation (Castells 1996), and is quite different from a structure in which adults under the guidance of professional pedagogues – such as Örnstedt and Sjöstedt – provide activities of their choosing to young people who are treated as children.

One cannot help to notice the sharp contrast that an organizational chart of Sverok presents when compared to the network structure presented by Widing and others. Both views may, however, be true as most role-playing events are organized at the level of member associations in Sverok, rather than by its national or regional bodies. These member associations display a wide variation and are in many cases quite short-lived. It is for example not uncommon for a group organizing a game to simply set up an association that may or may not cease to exist when the game is finished. Many associations are thus ad hoc organizations and the field of organizers and participants may thus be better described in terms of a network than by an organizational chart that superficially resembles that of most national youth organizations in a Sweden that has essentially been a neo-corporative state (Harding 2009).

CONCLUSION

If the descriptions presented in this essay are correct, it is no surprise that role-playing games seemed both alien and dangerous to Örnstedt and Sjöstedt, who both appear to have identified strongly with their roles in the professional hierarchies of what they describe as the “civilization of the disassembled

welfare state”, legitimized by their status as educated adults and, to some extent, as guardians of a rationalistic modernity. That modernity is giving way to post- or late-modernity. Trends that once were alien, are now major characteristics of a *Zeitgeist* in a society where the deconstruction of identity is part of governmental rhetoric and vampires and disasters are the theme of any number of blockbuster movies.

This makes role-playing games interesting in their rejection of rationalistic modernity, organizationally, as well as in terms of genre and narrative. This is, however, not to say that they herald any end of civilization, or even of modernity. Romanticism and the Gothic have been present in reactions against an overly rationalistic modernity for as long as it has existed. Network structures may be how almost everything is connecting today. The inclusion of Sverok among the established youth organizations of Sweden may be a sign of the counter-culture’s ongoing integration into society, as may the recruitment of role-playing organizers to do participatory appendices to popular TV-shows. This may not be a revolution, but it remains a way of handling anxiety in a changing society by providing escape, as well as critical distance, possibly in a way that is constructively creative to society as well as to the individual. Much as the old Romantic movement, it is a sign, and a symptom, of that rationalism alone does not give meaning to human life.

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ANGELINA ILIEVA

How We Do Larps with Words

CHARACTERISTICS OF LARP DISCOURSE

JAAKKO STENROS DEFINES THE END RESULT of the role-playing process as role-playing text (Stenros 2004). The definition refers to the role-playing text, yet it contains the idea of the text as a process of creation. Here, an attempt will be made to more clearly distinguish the process from its result and the intended exchange of sign information among the communicators from the sign complex or semiotic structure in which it exists at a particular moment of time. That is, an attempt will be made for larp to be viewed not only as linguistic structure, “mais comme l’activité de sujets inscrits dans des contextes donnés” (but as activity of subjects, part of certain contexts) (Maingueneau 1996), but as discourse.

FIGURE 1: THANK THE CAPTAIN!

A person addresses another person: “Milady, your Captain is exhausted and cannot comply with his obligations any more. Will you grant him your permission to retire for a little while, to have a meal and rest?” (*Clan Larp Festival* 2009).

There are two participants in the speech act – a male and a female, where the male is the addresser of the utterance, and the female is the addressee. The man is young, wearing a leather tunic, with leather shield in his hand, and a red band

is tied across his chest. The female is of middle age, wearing a dress, made of red velvet and gold brocade. The two are standing in the remains of a medieval temple. The ornate dress, the shield and the red band are extralinguistic features of contextualization – they render the social positions: the male is a soldier, the band being a sign for his rank; the female is a noble lady. The function of the addresser is that of a suitor. We might guess, that the addresser is actually “her Captain”, begging for the sake of himself, and the use of the third person as category is a marker for “high style”, e.g. high level of formality in communication.

If we consider the communicational act from the participants’ point of view, its meaning becomes far more complicated because of the further addition of (macro-) contexts in the production and interpretation of the message and the respective subjective positions (roles), which the communicants take in them. The first context is the fictional world to which the texts (or messages) arising during the role-playing are related. In relation to the fictional world of the game the participants in the communication are the Mistress and the Captain of the Royal Guard. The social frame is the one of feudal relationships, i.e. the social status of the dame is the highest one possible, and the communicational act is not simply formal, it is also institutional, as long as she is the bearer of the absolute power of the Empress. The ruins around are remains of the ancient city of the First Emperor, where the Mistress organizes a feast and a tournament in memory of ancient mythical events. The young man is the Captain of her Guard, asking for retire to rest.

Out of the context of the fictional world – or with placing the communicational act in *the real context of “here and now”* the subjective positions (roles) of the communicants are

different, hence, the meaning changes. As real (social) beings, they preserve their common social features, perceived as sex, age, social status, which could (or not) impose certain behavioural etiquette. That etiquette, however, as a social standard, would be quite different from the medieval one. In this context, the addressee does not have the authority over the utterance author, to permit or forbid whatever it might be; what is more, the etiquette requires otherwise: one should not refuse a polite request. In fact, the addresser does not have a reason to beg, he is just making an announcement: I am exhausted, and I am going to have a rest and eat. In this context, the illocutionary act (in John L. Austin’s terminology: illocutionary act – or illocutionary force – is an act performed in saying something) in the second sentence is different – it is not a request addressed, an intention is announced.

A third, additional meaning appears in the utterance when it is placed in *the context of game mechanics*. Playing the role of the Captain of the royal guard, the player is also charged with the task to be the main referee in the tournament being carried out and his temporary withdrawal will strongly influence the game mechanics. Considered in this context, the utterance acquires the meaning of a warning, addressed to one of the members of the organizer’s crew, playing the role of the Mistress; in other words, the speech act is perceived by the addressee as charged with additional perlocutionary force (in John L. Austin’s terminology: perlocutionary act – or perlocutionary effect – is an act performed by saying something). In this particular case, the addressee interprets the received message exactly as organizer, in the light of her own observation and opinions as to the general course of the game and the obvious fatigue of most of the players. The result of the communicational act is an hour

recess in the larp session. So, in the global context of the whole larp event, this communicational act comes to be of particular perlocutionary effect: suspension of a game with more than a hundred players.

Looking on the face of it, two things make impression:

1. the multitude of meanings of the speech act according to the contexts, where the participants lay and interpret it; and
2. their impossibility to be cut into segments, i.e. their non-discretion. The request, addressed in the fictional world, results in purely mechanical cessation in the larp session; granting the request in the context of the real social environment does not duplicate the same act in the fictional – in fact, the Captain’s request remains unsatisfied, since the Mistress does not grant him leave; the request, uttered (locally) by a player has been interpreted and satisfied (globally) by the game masters – all the participants in the game are given the needed rest. The impossibility for segmentation is a result of simultaneity of the multitude of subjective positions (roles), which the communication participants take with the establishment of the meaning of the speech act. Simultaneity means a constant choice of alternatives during the interaction, i.e. it presupposes play. The play with subjective positions (roles) and the play with interpretative contexts are the two sides of the joined *play of production of meaning*.

FIGURE 2: WHO ATE THE DRAGON EGGS?

Rumour has it: The Financial Minister has been noticed eating a red dragon egg (*Election in Ser Taj* 2009). In the game’s fictional world, in the high mountains of Cante province, some Dragons have awoken. In the mechanical structure of the game, the game masters set up quest objects – dragon eggs, which are

to be found and gathered by the players against a promised reward. In the reality of the larp event, the “dragon eggs” are represented by boiled eggs, painted in different colours, that is, Easter eggs (the game takes place immediately after Easter). In this case, the specific “cacophony of signs” is present, typical for the larp games, and described by Loponen and Montola (2004). If we are to follow their line of reasoning, the real issue here is not “Who ate those eggs?”, but “What has been eaten?”, i.e. interpretation of the iconic signs as indexical – Easter eggs are festive food, meant to be eaten.

Player X has been noticed eating a red coloured egg. This is the information, the message about an event carried out, which is to be the propositional contents of the utterance. In this case, it is not an interpretation issue to be faced, nor a misunderstanding of the situation; on the contrary, the message is simple and transparent to everybody and it is: (at least) one of the quest objects has been destroyed, the quest has failed. In this particular case, it is about a message being re-encoded into a specific role-play language before it has been produced.

The discrepancy between meaning and contents of the message, the gap between the considered thing and the uttered one, which like every other space has form, following Gerard Genette was called “figure”. The pragmatic implicit content of the utterance is related to the context of the game mechanics: the quest has failed. In its production, the message is being re-encoded into the role-play language and is being transferred in relation to the fictional world context. In reception the message is to be decoded and its real pragmatic meaning to be construed. The function of the figure in a larp message comes down to its being a sign in itself, *proclaiming the role-play essence of the discourse, containing it*.

FIGURE 3: THE GALL HAS JUST
VENTED THROUGH THE DOOR

- [1] X (*pointing a finger*) *A cloak, keeps from the cold...*
 [2] Y *Leather protectors...*
 [3] X *Belts... Sacred stones in particular...*
 [4] Z *How sacred are they?*
 [5] X *Among the most sacred!*
 [6] Z *Among the most sacred? Where are they dug out?
In the backyard?*
 [7] X *Oh, no! No...*
 [8] Z *Oh, no?!*
 [9] X (*in a singsong*) *From the highest mountain in our
kingdom!*
 [10] Z *The hill over there?*
 [11] Y (*pointing*) *Magic potato we offer...*
 [12] Z *Magic potato, no... No need of dying yet, thanks.*
 [13] Y (*pointing*) *The apple of life?*
 [14] Z (*Bending down and lifting a coloured card off the
ground.*) *Look! Isn't that interesting?*
 [15] X (*laughing*) *Yes!*
 [16] Z *What is it?*
 [17] X *Well, it brings luck... a lot. Never mind its label
"100% of trash".*
 [18] Y *Only if you burn it!*
 [19] X *Yes, if you burn it, it brings two more to the luck.
And it costs...*

- [20] Z *It's obviously priceless. (Leaves the card on the
table.)*
 [21] X (*laughing*) *Well, how much is it? One gold.*
 [22] Z *One gall?*
 [23] X *One gol'.*
 [24] Z *The gall, I think, has just vented through the door.*

— THE GOLDEN ARROW 2008

We will consider a communicational interaction which is longer – a conversation among three subjects: players X and Y perform the roles of merchants, trying to draw player Z's attention to their trade. We can break up the conversation into three: In part I (cues 1–13), the active party are X and Y, they are in charge of the thematic development of the conversation, and Z brings their statements to question about truth or appropriateness, using mainly irony as instrument. We see a *communicational interaction of agonal type*: “a piece of sword-play”. In part II (cues 14–21), the topic changes and the conversation is organized around an object, directly involved in the real context, which has drawn Z's attention. The three partners participate in the progressive display of the textual meaning, they are *in a process of interactive cooperation* with a common target of their wit whose referent is out of the text. Part III and the cues in it (22–24) have been defined as separate, because they are an example of quasi-communication. The cues exchanged represent a pure pun, not being bound by direct communicational goals and uttered only for personal entertainment. The meaning of the conversation in this part is exhausted in the process itself of production and perception of the utterances, that is, its production has a *ludic function*.

After this short description of the conversation let us look for the contextualization features which mark it as belonging to the larp discourse. We can define “sacred stones”, “the highest mountain in our kingdom” and “magic” as belonging to the genre clichés of fantasy literature and hence, as related to the fictional world of the game. “Sacred stones”, however, relates in meaning to “How sacred? – Among the most sacred”, “magic” is an attribute to “potato”, and cue 9 is uttered in a singsong, with a slight drawl, as if imitating the ritual utterance. The meaning of these phrases is overturned into parody. “If you do something you receive +2 to the luck” can be related to the mechanics of the computer games, but we cannot relate cue 19 to the mechanic structure of this larp. The text “brings two more to the luck” is part of an isotopic chain, built about a particular object, turned into an occasion for and target of the common manifestation of wit. This object is part of the real (social) environment, but it becomes subject of conversation without evoking direct off-game comments. The target of communication among the partners is not concentrated on building or backing up of their fictional characters, neither on setting up and coordination of game rules, nor on discussion and evaluation of the real socio-cultural environment. The conversation is a kind of *communicational interaction with emphasized emotive function*. In simple words, those three are joking all the time.

Does that mean that the players “get out of role”? Throughout the whole episode, the two merchants are demonstrating efforts to sell some of their goods to a fastidious and sceptical customer. Player X is trying to convince player Z that the sacred stones offered are of the highest quality; player Y is ready right away to respond to the customer’s demand, recommending something magical from the backyard; they both join efforts

to advertise the accidentally found object and are ready to sell it for a single gold coin, despite the shared opinion that it is priceless. Players X and Y are indisputably skilled traders. But their effort can by no means be taken seriously, because they themselves destroy it by tools of irony and parody. The twofold aspect of their actions is tangible, and yet a clear borderline cannot be cut. The language of role-playing is not an external thing to be laid upon the essence of the role-playing – every role-play interaction in its communication form is language interaction. *Role-play is in fact language-play*.

CONCLUSIONS

The verbal side of the role-playing text exists only as a dialogue. The meaning of every message in larp is produced by the communication participants in acting together, in a particular situation, in the particular communicational context and this draws larp communication closer to the everyday speech. Role-playing speech is at the same time conventional (sign) speech – speech represents speech – and this draws larp closer to theatre, where the actor’s cue is a sign for the character’s speech. The pragmatic meaning in everyday interaction is established among the interlocutors. The artistic sense of theatrical communication is the dialogue between the actor’s performance and the reaction of the audience. The specifics of the role-play interaction lie in the fact that it is an *artistic interaction between interlocutors*, in other words, the art of role-playing game is the art to artistically produce and interpret messages. The great issue of what exactly is “artistic” will be left to the theory of art; here it will only be presumed that the artistic communication is specific and/or different from the everyday one.

Dialogic speech requires two mutually related conditions:

code share and memory share. With the specifics of the artistic communication, we can presume that it is not only about communication code (and communication memory), but also about cultural code (and cultural memory). Here, mythology, history, folklore, literature, documentary and media texts “liquefy” in the process of communication and come rearranged in new dynamic constructions, according to the participants’ shared notions of the game world. In this sense, we can consider larp as setting for *artistic re-interpretation of cultural texts*. On the other hand, it is specific to the natural dialogical speech to be able to create its own, unique codes of interpretation in the process of communicational interaction. An example of functioning of such (secondary) code has been considered in Figure 2. Last, but not least, the dialogical speech presupposes intersubjectivity. The discourse structures of the role-play language in use can be a key to understanding not only of the Self as social and cultural identity, but of every possible aspect in relation to the Other, too, and to the otherness in general.

Following the advice of the classical rhetoric, we have considered three communicational events, trying to choose from homogeneous in “genre” larp games (medieval-fantasy style, carried out in the open, more than a hundred participants from different larp clubs). It is not a surprise, that we have found an amount of various play forms: play with production of meaning; play with message encoding and decoding; verbal play and pun. It is a temptation these forms of play to be announced as form of art, which is simply to be perfected, but giving final answers will put the end to questions. What exactly we do with words in larp and how we do it, are issues with regards to which the linguistics has a lot to say.

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- Election in Ser Taj* (2009): Ilina Konakchieva et al. The 2ND and 3RD of May, Sofia, Bulgaria.
- The Golden Arrow* (2008): Alexander Krasnaliev et al. The 2ND and 3RD of August, Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

The Manifesto Manifesto

A DECADE AGO, we started writing the larp manifestos. We were young, eager and arrogant as hell. First there was *Turku* (Pohjola 1999), then the *Dogma* (Fatland et al 1999), then a bunch of others. Some of these produced great games, other were blissfully left into oblivion. I do, however, argue that despite hostile reactions by larpers both domestic and far away, these statements of intent were necessary. Yes, necessary. And not just that, they were a benefit to the hobby in general.

Why is this so? For one, a view outspoken is a view that provokes reactions. Disagreement with prevailing thought-patterns is a classic catalyst for new art. Also, some of the manifestoes, especially *The Storyteller's* (Westlund 2004) actually provided new – or clarified – tools for others. And, furthermore, a lot of the manifestos inspired their authors with that same clarity, leading to designs that are now considered the apexes of Nordic larp design.

HITS & MISSESS

Looking back, it is obvious that the writers of the strangest, most stringent of the manifestoes were also very active larpwrights. *Turku* spawned a lot of works. *Dogma* gave us works like *Europa* (Weltschmertz 2001). My own Post-Bjorneborgan

manifesto was realized in the *PehmoYdin* series of adult-themed larps, culminating in an acclaimed Marquis de Sade adaptation, *The Sin-Filled Nights of Bratislava* (2001). Local-habit manifestoes did alike, it seems, but never published their successes to the rest of the world. We do not know whether the less than totally serious *Roihuvuori School* (Loponen 2002) ever did increase the number of push-up bras in larps, but I dare say its spirit does live on in the *Adventurous Romanticism* (Lassila 2009), which also very strongly showcase the points emphasized by the manifesto *Brosme 9.9 kg* (Moe 2001). Recent years have also seen an increase in the direction of participant responsibility demanded by *Irislahti* (Heino et al. 2001). For more thorough examples of larps created with a manifesto basis, see the book *Nordic Larp* (Montola and Stenos, eds., forthcoming 2010.)

Of particular interest (in addition to the saturation of immersion-talk after *Turku*, particularly in Finland) is *The Manifest Sunday* (Boss et al 2001). It emphasized very clearly that the story is the key point of a larp, to which all else is ancillary. Nearly a decade later, we still see the authors working towards that end in several projects. They have, however, individually taken different routes, ranging from the mutability of Jeep-form and refined art-games like *A Nice Evening With the Family* (Westerling et al. 2001) to pervasive art plays (see Widing 2006 for a good example) and specialized character design. Their example shows another facet of the larp manifesto, that of an open ideal reachable by many roads.

Other manifestos may not have had that much general significance after their initial publishing. Some have, however, endured as guidelines for personal, or local, larp traditions. The rather minimalist, very strict *Key Manifesto* (Mørkrid 2001)

exemplifies this: it is still – at least locally – a work of relevance many years later, even after other larprawrights have transcended its suggestions and limitations. A good larp manifesto is a milestone which endures, some are just on the side of more popular roads than others. Especially if it is in direct conflict with the goals of other manifestoes. Most are.

A LEGACY THAT LIVES ON

The times still see a new larp manifesto now and then, and they continue the better parts of the original trend. While we have forgotten several earlier manifestoes, as they provided neither sufficient inspiration nor larps of high international acclaim, some have survived due to one thing: They provided larps. And damn good ones at that. The trend has shifted after the initial boom, though. The new manifestoes are written only after not just initial, but continual success. They stand apart, again, as clarified statements of intent, not rule systems which demand obedience from others. *Bristol* (Hook 2007) emphasizes control limits and powerful simulation, and the author's works (e.g. *Against the Night* and *Passion Fruit*) reflect this very clearly. Likewise, the *Karstic Style Vademecum* (Castellani 2009) is a codification of a style that already existed, the famous Italian melting pot of the best parts of larping anywhere. They both carry on the manifesto tradition first seen in *Brosme* – the formulation of local play habits into a system which outsiders can see, understand, and hopefully even appreciate.

This is what we need: Statements of habit and intent. Many modern magical systems start their rituals with such procedures, and we larprawrights can – and should – do likewise. That way we convey our vision to practical use – to game participants, to later analysts, and – first and foremost – to ourselves.

To state design goals out loud is to either follow them or be forced to reflect upon them, whether intentionally or not. We need this. I for one am tired of larps where the point of it all has not been stated clearly. I want games which explicate what their playing styles and goals are, by either reference or explication. *A Nice Evening with the Family* excelled in this – it drew strength from limiting the participation styles of its players. I cannot but applaud that choice.

AND THE NON-LOYAL OPPOSITION

There is also one more manifesto which keeps on thriving. It is definitely worth mentioning here. It has never been collected properly into a document – although the *Angelltroa Manifesto* (Austlid 2001) did get close to that goal – but exists as a loose group of arguments meaning basically the same thing. I have taken the liberty of codifying it:

The Prejudice Manifesto

- § 1 *Every game concept which does not appeal to me is by default badly designed. "My viewpoint on larp is the only significant one."*
- § 2 *Do not dare to try broaden my vision. "Being the sole significant viewpoint, my idea cannot be wrong, and thus needs no expansion."*
- § 3 *My reading of your intent is always correct. "Do not bother with your explanations or disclaimers, I know all you really want is to change the way I play."*
- § 4 *Multiplicity is Weakness. "There should not be differing kinds of games, nor discussions on such, as they confuse me. And even a grudging acceptance of others,*

or being the supposedly loyal opposition, is capitulation, and will ruin my fun."

- § 5 *I am great, you suck. "You do not deserve an explanation."*

—ON BEHALF OF SUPERIOR LARPER EVERYWHERE,
THE MADMAN, THE SNOB & THE MORON

This is whom we fight. A responsible larpwright's response to these comments should be "And this is what I will produce – if you don't find it interesting, do us all a favor and stay out of my game." Clarity of vision, clarity of art, clarity of player selection. No game caters to everyone, no matter how hard we try. Jove knows I have tried.

And this is why we need the manifestoes: They are signals of design patterns, signs of what we see as important. Or what we once upon a time found important. They tell all that to both us and our potential players. They tell us of discussions and arguments past – and they tell us very clearly of the currents which run below the peaceful co-operative surface of our loose community. They show a facet of the hobby/art/lifestyle which no other part of it – not even our larps themselves – can never truly show.

Praise the manifesto! The tool of honest larp design! The tool of years gone past – and years to come!

Codify. Design. Succeed or fail. Examine. Transcend.

Then repeat.

J. TUOMAS HARVIAINEN *is a Finnish larpwright and larp analyst who normally writes heavily academic papers about the study of larps, and designs quite mean-spirited games for*

small groups of people. He thinks that larp is a wonderful medium, the potential of which has so far been sadly neglected by many.

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THE OFFICE
BUSINESS AS NOT USUAL

OLLE BJERKÅS, MOLLY RÄNGE
& MAX VALENTIN

Playfulness vs. Structure

LEARNING FROM THE MUNICIPAL CHALLENGE

HOW DO WE as producers of co-creative contexts work to create sustainable and meaningful relations with the municipality, with whom we need to cooperate in order to succeed in our more widely aimed larp productions? This text is about what the structured municipality can learn from playfulness, but also what producers of playful productions should bear in mind to be able to make their fun a part of a greater continuous process.

This article will raise and discuss problems related to the field based on personal experiences of past partnerships with municipalities in Sweden.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM? - INTRODUCTION

Hey look at us! Now holler if we aren't a great bunch of dedicated producers, taking oh, so valuable initiatives for developing play, games and co-creative arenas out of stories that has to be told. Out of questions that have to be brought up in broad daylight and opened for discussion. And out of problems that has to be solved.

We are also a bunch of people who eventually, and let's say more and more often, want to break out of a world of gamers. In order to meet and involve a larger audience and thereby

actually be able to make a change in someone's mindset who are not already one of our think-a-likes, it would be very valuable to set up our projects in co-operation with a municipality. Why this? Well, in short, the relation to the municipality can help both our individual production journey as well as the end result in many ways.

Now this article aims to decode some of the success factors in creating this kind of giving and sustainable relations to your municipality representatives. In order to do so, we will begin with the stories of two projects we made come true in collaboration with different townships in Sweden and share our happy discoveries as well as great mistakes. After a summarizing discussion we end this fine piece with some, hopefully useful, *Dos & Don'ts*.

WORKING THE CHALLENGE – CASE DESCRIPTIONS

We see the major challenge originating from the municipality's vertical influence processes and from the need of producers of participatory contexts to have a more horizontally designed advocacy model. The collision occurs when the producers fast-moving organisations, under the roof of the establishing cooperation, becomes dependent of decisions made by official hands.

But to just say "they move to slow" might be to put it too simple. Instead the experience can be understood as the need of finding initial agreements that help the different organisations models. These are based on clear measurable goals that both parties can agree on and preferably also based in common models that generates comparability. Upon these circumstances we believe they can work together in the best possible way. And if nodding to that, we find ourselves with the challenge of

finding the key factors in being able to set up such agreements and models.

In the end we are actually talking about being able to establish a shared understanding for such basic questions as "What is it that we are going to do?", "Why and How shall it be realized?" and "What will and must the project mean for all involved parts?" It's about defining responsibilities and even more about what value the invested resources will give back to both producers, the city and the participants. The shareholders in such an anchoring are not only those directly involved in the realization and the strategic decisions.

What we actually are saying is this: one major lack in the work with creating a shared platform for project management is a standardized way to explain and evaluate our productions in ways that helps us to describe and prove how our methods actually work and makes a difference in relation to society as a whole. People in the gaming industry might already be called true believers, but the language in which to speak to the civic society, as well as to the academy and business life, is a language under construction.

That might seem simple for some, but in Sweden, the ambition to measure and evaluate our productions, is not just a rather new thing (especially in the cultural field), but also surrounded with a whole lot of scepticism. Frequently we end up asking ourselves questions like:

When evaluating a larp production, what parameters are actually relevant to measure in order to prove an event's long term value in a way that makes sense to both the municipality, the participants and the producers? A way of describing the ambition and goals that not only makes sense,

but which also can be accepted and referred to as valuable when it is time for a similar project to be developed.

When working within the context of a municipality, we have experienced a couple of concrete challenges that in some sense grows from this broader discussion of evaluation. So why not get our hands dirty in some real life experiences?

CASE I – THE JOURNEY

The Journey (Resan) is a larp and a simulation of how it could be to come as a refugee to another country. One of the purposes of the project is to create a common experience for the participants. The idea is that a shared framework will work as reference for discussing and thus disclosing antagonisms regarding migration.

The project is a development of a theatrical/pedagogical concept that has toured many European cities during the 90's.

Choice of Strategy

From an organizational point of view the concept can be packaged in two ways; as a stand-alone project inviting students and professionals from the field of migration to participate in, or conceived as a part of a strategic process within the municipality. The first approach is fairly simple, you need to raise funding and make some noise in media. Those two things are fairly easy when working with a visual concept and a strong idea framed by an urgent context. The second approach is however a much tougher challenge for the coordinators. The criteria from the first strategy still have to be fulfilled, but in a different order (media can not come too early, since that would undermine the partnership). In addition we also need to consider the organizational administration more carefully and the term “anchoring”

comes in handy. Anchoring imply that all involved partners find a consensus regarding the execution of the work, something that will be impossible. In real terms anchoring means introduction of antagonism. The antagonism involves the concepts of speed, money and commitment and has to be taken in to consideration. We will now try to apply the terms to the implementation of *The Journey* in Malmö 2006.

Partnership

Among the actors involved in the drama is the city of Malmö that owns many of those resources that are key to success, the museum (space), schools (users) and administrative functions. Other partners are the NGO Sverok, Sweden's largest youth organization supporting leisure activities as games and larps, also Fabel Kommunikation, a privately owned company. The different actors all act upon different logics because of their purpose in society, the people involved and who they serve.

Post-narrative

The initiative came from an employee in the city of Malmö, a person with little power of decision-making, but with a big passion for the content. At an early stage the distance to the decision makers was far, that means a long time for anchoring before any user will be involved in action. The speed of anchoring does not matter to Sverok since spreading of qualitative gaming is the objective, not getting paid, but there is a real consequence, namely low commitment. From the Fabel point of view the distance is a bigger challenge since there is no money in anchoring, and that is the need for speed. In business words the sales processes is seen as an investment. The dialogue of anchoring continued for one and a half year slowly

moving up in the organization. The hope at this point was to try the second strategy mentioned above, the concept as part of a bigger process.

At this stage we managed to get the first contract that is needed, “the letter of intent”. That contract means nothing but is a good symbolic action to commitment. What we have learnt is that theoretically it is good to link this “letter of intent” to a plan of execution. But to translate theoretical learning to the specific situation is hard especially when many actors with different agendas are involved. We encourage you to think like the president Eisenhower: “Plans are nothing; planning is everything”. However during this time in the project a national agency made a decision to fund the concept. The funding was great enough to execute the concept as a stand-alone project in full scale. The funder had a different relationship to speed than the municipality and wanted result within a given time frame not linked to the semesters of the schools.

Due to this investment the antagonism of speed got more evident and it also changed the balance of power – in one way it could be seen as being more equal. All together this made the project take the decision of execution with or without proper anchoring. Evidently this made the project into more of a stand-alone construction rather than integrated in the bigger context. Instead of getting pupils from the schools sent to *The Journey* as part of the social science subject of school, teachers were invited to participate with their classes. On the other hand the municipality of Malmö is big and other parts of the organization had strong commitment. A contract of collaboration was signed with the museum that gave the project space to zero cost.

Thanks to a strong penetration of local media the project reached out well and almost 2000 students came to participate.

But since the project lacked the formal position within the field of education the space for reflective dialogue and continuous work became random.

Our conclusion is that the project never could bridge the different tempos of private and public logic. Furthermore it could not generate the commitment needed for a full integration of schools thus failing on the long-term potentiality of change. However there are many positive results by the project as well. One of the more exciting ones is a before and after attitude measurement carried out in the targeted group that shows an significant positive change about this topic.

CASE II – THE TALE OF THE SEVENTH DRAGON

Ina Lindén, the principal of the cultural school in the southern archipelago in Gothenburg, and Henrik Wallgren, multi-artist best known as the Art Director of the major Post-Apocalyptic larp *Futuredrome* back in 2002, came up with the idea to produce a larp for the students in primary school. The application they sent to the Cultural Board was granted and in 2007.

The Project

The project description from Ina and Henrik contained a plan, budget, goals, vision, purpose and all you can wish from a two-pages project description. In short, the project was to produce a week-end larp for 30 participants from three different schools. The participants (age 13–16) were to make all the preparations in the schools premises after school hours. The preparations was to be led by experienced larpers. The initiative aimed to:

Develop self-esteem and creative desire among children/young people.

To form self-sustaining networks around co-creation culture and borrow pedagogical tools from the computing and role-playing world.

To create a platform for meetings between children/young people with different backgrounds, and reduce the fear of the unknown by giving all participants an opportunity to leave their everyday role and in a new guise solve problems together.

To offer creative culture to the rapidly growing group of children/young people who are interested in role-playing via computer.

The Process

The first step was to meet the principal. We got along very well and after engaging in brainstorming and refinement of our ideas we came up with a proposal on how we would proceed to handle the various parts of the project. After a successful meeting with Ina and Sven Apelmo, who coordinates the organization between the cultural schools in the different parts of Gothenburg, we got names and contact information to a number of key players in the city. The next step was to get them involved. That was easily done by a phone-call and a short meeting.

Together with the school principals we agreed upon how to use the school premises, and organized information seminars for the students in each of the schools. We got the right keys, met the teachers responsible for the workshops and agreed upon dos and don'ts when using the facilities, booked the dates for the seminars, met the students, held the workshops, went

to the larp and back again. During the project we informed the principals about small changes in the plans, at one time we needed to do an extra workshop and we also invited students from one school to come to another, none that were any problem.

During the project we also involved 100 experienced larpers to take part in the larp. The idea was to make them role models for the new generation, a strategy that worked well.

The Larp

The 30 inexperienced larpers' main plot was to unite different and conflicting groups of people and beings in a country far away. The underlying message of the larp was: We are all different but that doesn't mean we sometimes can't unite in time, place and peace. So go ahead and do that now.

The Result

The principal was in the end very satisfied with the project. This is some of her official statements:

All objectives was very much achieved.

The participating students were incredibly enthusiastic, several described the larp as one of the biggest events in life.

By the evaluation we understand that it has been invaluable for the students who participated.

The project was given extra attention in the City of Gothenburg's annual report 2008. Almost one half page in a 85 page report. So a good argument for publicly financed larps is that it looks really good in the annual report!

The “Dragonkids” as they call themselves have continued their larping career and has now received a grant for 7 000 euros from the EU to produce the sequel by themselves. They are also successfully applying for the same amount from other sources of funding.

PLAYFULNESS VS. STRUCTURE – DISCUSSION

Both projects proved excellent in producing great experiences for the ones involved as well as great pictures and documented stories for the municipality to show in annual reports etc. So far so good, but what we commonly miss is the anchoring in a larger developing process within the framework of the municipality. In other word, none of the projects had the capacity to be handed over and integrated in daily practice. One reason for this could be lack of meta-goals. By some this phenomenon is called “the project disease”, meaning that the greater challenge for today’s project managers isn’t to “make it happen”, but to make it happen again and again, actually developing their project concept into a part of a greater continuous process. In a way this can be seen as a lack of a wider understanding for the municipality needs, not on explicit project level, but on a more widely defined process level.

We can of course develop a larp to engage students in issues concerning hot political issues, but in order to make our work a part of a pedagogical and methodical revolution we need to ask, not only ourselves, but our partners: What methods are we developing here? What do you need to learn in our common process to be able to work like this again and again?

One important viewpoint comes from Gustaf Josefsson, CEO of *The Entrepreneurial Chase*, (Entreprenörsjakten) which can be described as a downtown scavenger hunt created to

put focus on young entrepreneurship. By bringing together his experience in business, his education in psychological testing processes, and his passion for gaming, Gustaf has managed to not only involve hundreds of young entrepreneurs in his projects, but also created a profitable company around it. Gustaf has a great experience in what he calls the entrepreneur’s most important skill, listening:

Designers tend to think of their product as a game, a larp, an experience. But, when you’re selling, you have to be able to look at it with your customers’ eyes. You need to understand that in their eyes, you are nothing more than the solution of a problem. It is so easy to just let go and start spitting out all the amazing innards of your fantastic idea that you love so much and want to tell the world about – but that isn’t always the right thing to do. It might get the client all fired up, but the fire will soon burn out and when it comes down to getting the dotted line signed the only thing that will matter for the one holding the pen is: What’s in it for him – what user problem are you solving?

We see a need for a more structured work that sets up measurable goals from models that are commonly agreed upon. This would make initiatives comparable and developable, which in turn generates space for self-criticism. We also think that this is linked to a evaluation process that does not aim for self-confirmation but for learning.

In this way we think that our playful production can be re-realized within your structure not once but twenty times, not by me but by any other believer. We have to design our creative processes in a way that is not only fun and challenging

for the participants, but eventually educates our partners on how to pick the magic wand up again – not only hours, but days and months after we moved on to set some other place on fire. This is what playfulness can learn from the structured approach and the two cases above are but two of many examples of what the structures can learn from play.

DOS & DON'TS – CONCLUSIONS

We will end with throwing you some Dos and Don'ts in the development of sustainable relationship with your municipality. Some of which we followed and some we wish we had.

Dos

- » Play the highest level first! That first teacher who loved your idea might not be the one making decisions. Find out who's got the power, make that phone call and get a meeting right away! To work like there is no tomorrow and always aiming for play on highest possible level is crucial to get a broader understanding for the clients along with term needs.
- » Trust your radical ideas! You are the professional here. Don't be scared to make changes in the project in order to do things smarter, better, cooler or whatever. But always be sure to confirm with your client if there are changes that contradicts the original plan.
- » Listen first! Ask not only yourself but your client what problem you are to solve, you might be the larp/production professional, but they are professionals of the context in which you are setting things up.

- » Write a "letter of intent". The letter of intent is a loose contract that shows the intentions of the parties involved in the process. If it is practically possible, make a appendix with "go" and "no go" linked to those funding sources you approach. If it is a bigger type of project that has a high impact on your private economy it can be wise to add some scenarios of what happens if you get a no. Maybe the municipality can pay you for a month or two if the applications fail?
- » Develop an understanding for the value of the concept you developed on a meta- or structural level. Aiming to make our way of working to become "the new school", we have to develop tools that can be used by others.

Don'ts

- » Don't aim for self-realization. It might be a positive consequence of your great project, but when initiating a co-operation with the municipality you need to be prepared to put your ego on second row.
- » Don't challenge the partnership. From the moment the dotted line is signed you sort of own a organization together and you should be careful about letting all your friends into the project without discussing it with the client first.
- » Don't do your own media drive. Always make sure that the client is the one who takes the lead of the communication with media. If not, you are risking to inform the public on topics that wasn't attended to

leak out just yet, and thereby heavily affect internal political processes in a negative way.

Best wishes for your publicly funded larp endeavour!

OLLE BJERKÅS, *project leader, game designer and owner of Whatever Incorporated. Olle participated in his first larp at the age of 14 in 1997.*

MOLLY RÄNGE, *story loving project manager at Fabel, currently into testing out new methods for getting education and fun to marry.*

MAX VALENTIN *works at Fabel and find it interesting to work in the borderland between business practice, the cultural field and public governance.*

MATHIAS GULLBRANDSON

Time to Emigrate

A ROAD TO HAPPINESS?

FOR A DECADE, The Story Lab have worked as consultants in order to strengthen corporate cultures and communities for global cooperations, public organisations and UN. We have based our business method on larp, cause we think larp as a point of view and design method is appropriate to design, enhance and strengthen cultures and communities. Our belief and the purpose of our service is to deepen co-creation in all kinds of organisations and societies. A deeper level of co-creation can unleash a larger potential on both a individual and collective level, and is a key factor for human development, to reach meaning, authentic happiness and fulfil needs and dreams.

THIS IS HOW THE LAB STARTED

The Story Lab was founded 2001. One of the crucial meetings took place in Gothenburg, where I met Linus Malmberg, a management consultant at Ernst & Young. I had just talked about how to re-write Shakespeare's *Hamlet* into a larp for The National Touring Theatre (Riksteatern) in Sweden and he asked me how to design a larp like *Hamlet*. Well, I said, first you need to set the framework for what is common to all participants in a role-playing game. Second, you need a good set of roles that the

participants would love to improvise around. We had therefore written 80 new roles to Shakespeare's original script. And when the audience (participants) bought tickets to the show they also received the role they would play. When they came to the theater room, they got the costume, a short directed instruction and could say hello to those they would play with.

Then you need a meeting place, a game environment where participants meet, which can be either physical or digital. In this case, we had created the Castle of Elsinore as a plastic dome of 800 cubic meters, which we inflated with a large fan inside the theater room. The audience had to go into the castle through an airlock. Once inside there were up 12 rooms furnished with antique furniture and very pink plush.

Finally, we also have an interactive drama, a strategy for how to add narrative material so the overall story will develop in an exciting way. We had also created a sound and light environment in order to strengthen events outside Elsinore Castle. With video and photo projections we created "windows" on the plastic walls. For example, when the Norwegian army was passing by, you could hear gunpowder explosions and gaze out the window and see the soldiers.

Then exclaimed Linus "Really?!" He raised his glass to me and continued: "This is exactly how we think when we create the conditions for successful and profitable organizations. *Framework story* is similar to a company's *business concept, vision and values*. *Set-up of roles* is similar to *job- and role-descriptions*. *Game environment* is similar to the company's *offices and other structures* for co-creation. The *interactive dramaturgy* is similar to the company's *strategy*."

And this night ended up with The Story Lab as a associate company to Linus management consulting business.

EXPERIENCE MATTERS

When we evaluate these 10 years of success and struggling within more than 80 companies and organisations in Scandinavia, Japan and some project on a global basis, our conclusion is that we have reached a certain level of co-creation within our commissions and projects, we have delivered a lot of value – our customers doing better than before.

So how come that larpers, storytellers, service- and game designers beat management consultants when it comes to engage people in doing things that matter? Our short answer is "The Experience matters when it comes to engage people", and larp-, ARG- (Alternate Reality Game) and service designers are trained and skilled in designing immersive experiences within reality as medium. Jonathan Haidt, professor at the University of Virginia, give a slightly longer academic answer:

People perceive a sense of meaning and enlightenment when their lives cohere across the physical, psychological and sociocultural levels of their existence. Religions are good examples of this. The Hindu idea of purity and pollution (psychological level) makes the Hindus to bath (physical level) before offering to God. A ritual you have heard stories about (sociocultural level) since you were child, with plots that involve purity and pollution. Even the social structure through the caste system (sociocultural level) is based on the idea of purity and pollution. When the coherence get interrupted by internal or external contradictions, people seek enlightenment to restore meaning and purpose of life.

Haidt continues with the idea that religions may be constructed to offer people a coherence across the three levels of

their existence. Which reminds me of a Martin Ericsson (Swedish larp designer) quote: "Religions are just larps that have been running too long". If I use Haidt's words I would conclude our success within the corporate world with "As a larp- and servicedesigner I am good at designing a culture (game) with coherence across the physical, psychological and sociocultural levels of our existence. It does not matter if the product is a larp, a company or religion". And the worlds most successful corporate cultures are similar to religions, for example IKEA and Ritz Carlton.

But we are also frustrated – knowing that these are just very small steps compared to what is possible if we use collaborative technology and leadership in order "to engage people in doing things that matter". The reason is that many worklife cultures are influenced by risk minimizing. But that is contraproductive if you want to enlarge the space of action, which is essential when solving the worlds most critical problems (Burns 1978). Many issues, such as successful leadership, sustainable growth, global poverty (Burns 1978; Bass and Riggio 2006) and environmental issues, is solved in research labs and written about in reports but not implemented in reality. Thus we must ask ourselves – what is fact and what is fiction here? I believe this thin line between virtual reality and physical reality, between fiction, fact and what really matters, is one reason why storytellers, service- and gamedesigners beat management consultants when it comes to engaging people, since they have been living and working on that thin line for a long time.

THE NEXT LEVEL

What else can we do, what is the next level? If we can use the larp design model when designing both arts and entertainment

and corporate cultures, can we use this method when fulfilling our dreams and wishes in order to get a happy and meaningful life? Is it even possible to create a collaborative game (structure for strategic interaction*) distributing this model to everybody – creating conditions where our dreams are fulfilled? Can we create a collaborative game with inspiration from on-line role-playing games and Wikipedia**, which are collaborative structures for millions and even billions of people? Is it possible to establish a new nation, country, with a national culture and codes of conduct that are created in order to help the citizens to fulfill their dreams?

THE ULTIMATE EXCUSE TO EMIGRATE

These questions are the reason why we will realize a vision that was born the last night at *Futuredrome*, which was a mega mash up of a larp, music festival and an art happening situated in a quarry where we had build a *Mad Max* city of 200 tons of iron scrap and plastics.

Accidentally *Futuredrome* ended one night earlier than planned, though just half of the participants stopped larping while the other half continued without noticing anything. The framework story of *Futuredrome* was about an endless party, and this last night with thousands of people not knowing and not caring who they were was transformed into something magic. This magic is one reason of why we will focus once again on larps and Alternate Reality Games. What we will do

* In this case I use the term game as it is used within the field of Game Theory.

** Wikipedia have just 35 employees that serve hundreds of thousands of people who create value (presenting information) for 1 billion users. A incredible efficiency when it comes to organizing people.

can be seen as the opposite of risk minimizing, we want to put our-selves into the identities and worlds of our highest wishes. We want to explore the realisation of our individual and collective dreams.

This larp story will start when we establish a new country, *The Borderland*, with a national culture built upon positive emotion, party, play, mass euphoria, giant sandboxes, new social structures, a co-creative summerfestival, enactment of fantasies, dreams and fears, puzzles, cooperations, work in process, culture and trust, the aim is to fulfill all citizens dreams – the ultimate excuse to emigrate.

THE BORDERLAND

The Borderland is a larp that will take place in both specified and public spaces, thus it also can be seen as a ARG. This will be enhanced by a on-line community and a location-based application. The first large festival, the zone that will last for a longer time to celebrate. *The Borderland* will take place in the very south of Sweden, at the beaches of Österlen, in August 2011.

The setting

The Borderland is an Emigrant Story. Just as people went from Europe to America 150 years ago to seek a new life in the new continent, more and more people decides now to migrate to *The Borderland*, situated between here-and-now and your dream world. The reasons for emigration is the hope that the new country can let your dreams come true. Initially there is no other limits than those created by our thoughts and the web. Our game environments and venues will first be digital, and later realized in everyday spaces and refugee camps in the form of a festival. The digital platform will start as a mash-up

of social tools. The ambition is to go a step further and create playing mechanics that let us build *The Borderland* together.

Role Set

The roles in *The Borderland* is based on essentially two questions and rules. The questions are: *Who are you at The Borderland? What are you doing?* Using this information, our role writers link characters and construct meetings between the characters. The guideline is: We build each other and each other's dreams. The consequence of this rule is that instead of focusing on who I am, I focus on addressing what my opponent wants to be. Example: Donald wants to be Rambo and Karin wants to be Mary Stuart. Instead of Donald focusing on being Rambo, he concentrates on that he just met Mary, and Karin also focuses on that she has just met Rambo.

The interactive dramaturgy begins simply with commitment to these two questions. We have begun to gather people for a simpler game nights where we just drink and chats and answer these questions. Then the participants write down their dream characters and submit them to our scriptwriters. Step two is to start preparing for their journey into *The Borderland*, a step that can go on for a long time. Step three is the first trip to the festival in Österlen.

UNDERPINNING OF A DREAM NATION AND CULTURE

People evolve by genes and culture and both positive and negative emotions are important to human evolution (Fredrickson 2001, Haidt 2006). Positive feelings about a person or an object get us to approach it, and negative feelings make us withdraw.

Postive emotions such as joy, love, interest, gets people, cultures and communities to flourish. Positive emotions get people

to broaden their perspective, becoming creative and innovative which can lead to inventing new technology and knowledge. Positive emotions also get people to build relationships and trust, which makes people share knowledge, traditions and resources (Fredrickson 2001, Haidt 2006). Negative emotions such as anger, fear and disgust, narrows a persons momentary thought-action repertoire by alerting them to defend themselves or their belongings, by escape or attack. (Fredrickson 2001, Haidt 2006).

While the evolution of genes is a slow process of having children, culture evolves rapidly with a group's change of behaviours and beliefs. (Haidt 2006).

Even though this positive thing can be seen as just something fuzzy and fluffy, in fact there is joy, love and admiration beyond consumption needs to be explored. Happiness and meaning does not come from success or wealth. The fabulously rich (Forbes 100 with over 7 billion USD) are only slightly happier than the rest of us (Seligman et al 1995). Overall purchasing power and happiness do go hand in hand until the GNP per capita reaches 8 000 USD dollars, after that there is no correlation (Sweden has a GNP per capita of 42 000 USD). A study of 40 nations happiness and purchasing power combined shows this (Seligman and Csikzentmihali 2000).

Well, does fulfilment of dreams lead to happiness and meaning? Yes it does, says researchers* within the field of happiness, meaning and positive psychology, if:

- » Using my own signature strengths and virtues, spontaneously.

* For example Martin Seligman, Michal Csikzentmihali, Jonathan Haidt, Carol Dweck. Victor Frankl.

- » To get authentic happiness to last longer, your strengths and virtues must be anchored in something larger, a meaning and purpose.
- » Happiness and success must ensue as a unintended sideeffect of one's dedication to a greater cause than one-self, or to a person other than oneself.
- » Seeing the bigger picture of the contribution of your work enhances job satisfaction and happiness.
- » Vital engagement is charactized by flow lasting for longer times with a deepened sense of meaning. Vital engagement does not appear inside a person or in a environment, it does appear in between persons. Vital engagement is about an ever-deepening relationship, an ever-thickening web connecting a person's inner drive to activities, a tradition (story and rituals) and a community (other people with similar inner drive, interest or tradtion).
- » A supporting condition to achieve vital engagement is resources and sponsors. It is important that the engagement is aligned with the value it produces for others. If there is a unalignment, it is time to renew the conditions.
- » If their lives within *The Borderland* cohere across the levels (physical, psychological and sociocultural) of their existence.

If you believe that you can develop yourself (having a growth mindset) you are open to accurate information in order to learn and develop your abilities. On the other hand, those with a fixed mindset (not believing you can develop your abilities that much) look for information that only confirm their self-image

of being a winner or loser. They feel a need to prove their abilities while other is focused on developing their abilities.

Along this explorative journey maybe we will find meaning and authentic happiness, and be deeply engaged in doing things that matter, though *The Borderland* story start off as a play and fictive story told within reality as medium.

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BO NURMI

Participatory education

FROM CONDITIONED RESPONSE AND
RESISTANCE TO ACTIVE LEARNING

UNDERSTANDING EDUCATION is not the simplest of tasks. Any attempt to define education at a macro level will exclude aspects at the micro level, and any definitions derived from an individual level will at some point lack the ability to be generalized over different settings. *Culture*, or more precisely *school culture*, is one way of categorizing education, and depending on the definition of school culture (most commonly a matter of academic perspective) it captures different aspects.

This article will begin with the exploration of culture as being either a *spectator* culture (with or without the possibility for *interaction*), and *participation* culture. They should not be viewed as exclusive categories, but rather a tension field in which different social actors, organizations and institutions can lean more to one or the other side. From this definition of culture follows an explanation of how education can be explained as primarily a spectator culture, and examples derived from educational research are presented. Then, resistance to formal education and its limits is used as an example of the results of the dominating school-cultural paradigm. In the end of the article an example of how *live action role-playing* has potential not only as a pedagogical method, but as a liberating one enabling a change of culture; from conditioned response to active learning.

CULTURE

Spectator arts (Haggren *et al.* 2008) works on the basis of one way stimuli (phenomena that is picked up by our senses) which can create a number of cognitive, physiological and behavioral responses amongst its recipients. The stimulus is autonomous in its relation to the response. This means that responses have no direct impact on the stimuli. In principle the stimulus, regardless of the on-looker's response, will remain the same. This can be exemplified with the relation between a television show and its audience. Whereas the audience can decide not to watch the show, and thus canceling it, there is generally no way to direct influence the show itself while it (the stimulus) is broadcasted.

There is, however, television shows that enable *interaction*. When there is interaction there is a possibility for the audience response to interact with the stimuli, generally in quite limited ways and not with the source of the stimuli itself (the producers) but with its manifestation (the television show). When the popular TV-show *Idol* presents the audience with the possibility to choose which of the contestants they want to stay, the viewer is partly interacting with the stimuli. However, the choice is limited to the given contestants, or to not choose at all. The choices are made up beforehand at the source of the stimuli. So there cannot be said, from a psychological standpoint, to exist any real freedom of choice, since an alternate action is impossible. It can be exemplified as a number of stimuli affecting the recipient, resulting in a number of pre-controlled possible responses. The question that needs to be addressed is: Can there be said to be freedom if one can only move along a given path, without the possibility to take a detour?

In contrast, *participatory arts* can be explained as a process where the stimulus is a result of the participation itself. A product of active choice rather than a conditioned response, not limited to the options made up beforehand. Participation is not only the choice of which road to take, it's the act of deciding the goal. (For a more detailed explanation of the relation between on-looking, interaction and participation see Haggren *et al.* 2008).

EDUCATIONAL CULTURE

Education can be considered a spectator culture, as it depends largely on the one way stimulus-response pattern, with a varied degree of interaction. While new methods are introduced now and then little can be said to have changed over time. Teachers still teach (stimulus) and pupils still learn (response). The cultures of schools remain somewhat the same. Persson *et al.* (2007) describes three primary types of school cultures which can be described as *prisons*, *open markets* or *knowledge centers*. Where the first is more of an accommodation where the pupils are constrained, and the second is governed by open market principles, with grades as one currency, the later is characterized by an interest in learning for learning's own sake. What stands out is that regardless of school culture, education in general is based upon the principle of spectator culture, as outlined above.

Noted by renowned educational researchers Black and Wiliam (Black and Wiliam, 2001; Black *et al.* 2004) teachers often ask questions but require the answer within a very limited timeframe, and only ask questions that give room for short answers. Beside that this does not leave any room for answers that hold anything but short facts; it's a good example of how

the stimulus-response pattern is predominating in classroom activity.

Dyste (1995) describes a somewhat similar feature of education as being “one voiced”, where only once voice is heard – the teacher’s. Her answer as to what needs to change is to create classroom environments where the activities are arranged in such a way as to make the voice of pupils not only heard, but encouraged. This she refers to as a dialogistic classroom, which can be explained as a cultural shift where pupils are no longer the audience of the teacher, but participants of the show.

Another example is that pupils are given assignments which generally have little to do with creating something new, but rather to reproduce preexisting, predefined categories or is limited by the options presented by the teacher (Saar 2005). This can be explained as interaction between the pupil and the limited number of possible choices, and outcomes, presented by the teacher.

RESISTANCE TO EDUCATION

Pupils only have a finite number of choices and, more importantly, any attempt to take action and create new choice may be met with hostility as it challenges the teacher’s control over the classroom – a control that is not only the product of the teacher but can be contributed to the overarching educational system (Persson 2007). Hostility is of course not the only teacher-response, but it serves as an example.

Hostility is a normal psychological response to the stress triggered by the threat the challenging pupil poses. Note however that it’s only *triggered* by the pupil. There is not a direct causal relation between the pupil’s resistance and the teacher’s response because the pupil’s defiance is in fact a response

to the limits. Thus you could argue that the teacher’s stress response is triggered by the pupil (an intervening variable, using statistical language), but the causal relation is between the psychosocial environment (and its adjacent factors, like culture, demands etc) and the teacher and pupil respectively. This results in a relation between the pupil and teacher where the pupil feels controlled which results in defiance, and the teacher stressed, which leads to hostility (Nurmi 2010).

If one relates the stress as the *effect* of their relation (the *cause*) without seeing how their relation can be explained by other psychosocial factors, a third variable problem, one will look for solutions within the given relation. Instead of looking at the cultural factors, for example the predominant spectator-cultural principle, that govern their relationship the focus shifts to control which only worsen what was initially seen as the problem.

FROM RESPONSE TO ACTION

Recent educational researchers has written on how an alternative pedagogical rationale could be constructed* but little attention has been given to how teachers are to adapt to a new way of understanding education. One important aspect is to understand the difference between spectation (*pupils as the audience*), interaction (*pupils with limited choice*) and participation (*pupils owning the means of production*).

School culture can be described in a number of ways, and one way is to understand traditional education as dominated by spectator-cultural principles. This dominating view of the

* Alerby and Elidóttir, 2006; Aulin-Gråhamn, Persson, and Thavenius, 2004; Marnar and Örtégren, 2003; Lindstrand and Selander 2009

relation between teacher and pupil can be seen in the direct observations of classroom activities, and indirectly through the resistance that is formed in the pupil-teacher relation – a response to the controlling environment of schools, where little real choice is presented. A shift in culture does not, however, come about easily.

ASPECTS OF ROLE-PLAYING

It can be argued that role-playing in educational settings has traditionally been used as a methodological tool (as a *means* to teach, where what is learned is the end) where little focus is placed on the liberating potential (Långström and Viklund 2006). Because live action role-playing is not a response to stimuli created by an autonomous product it is not limited, and in the following I will outline a theoretical frame to exemplify some of its liberating potential. This is by no means a full explanation of role-playing in itself or as an educational method, and should be read with that in mind.

AN AUTONOMY SUPPORTIVE METHOD

At the center of participation are *choice* and the possibility for *action* which can be said to be a matter of the degree of autonomy. True choice (as opposed to being forced) is dependent on autonomous action, the possibility to act on one's own accord. Autonomy should not be mistaken for freedom in the traditional sense of being independent. Being independent refers to being without the need of others, and the mutual need of others are at the very core of participation. Or as written by Haggren *et al.* (2008): "A Self that does not reach a You is but a embryo of a subject, a unfulfilled potential" [my translation].

The concept of autonomy, here derived from self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 2002), refers to being the source of one's own actions rather than responding to an external stimulus. Live action role-playing, as the name says, is a matter of taking action. The participant has the possibility of choice and the right to act upon any given situation. When a participant chooses an action for his or her character, it is not chosen because it is the correct response judged on an external scale, but because it is right for the character and thus the participant. Another way of putting it is that action chosen for the character is motivated intrinsically rather than extrinsically.

The scenario itself, the "scene" on which the role-playing takes place, can be limited, but limits exist for the fictional characters and not for the participant. Consequently the participant is free in an autonomous sense to choose whatever action is possible for his or her character, as any limits are imposed on the character, but not the participant. Even though the framework can be said to be predefined, action in itself is not predefined, neither is the standard by which it can be judged to be right or wrong.

ESTRANGEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE

Where education generally revolves around a movement from the unknown (the *question*) to the known (the *answer*) live action role-playing as a method advocates a more inductive approach. The framework, the *scenario*, sets the stage but answers only *where* and *when*. It leaves the questions *who*, *why*, and *how* unanswered for the pupil to explore. *Who am I? Why am I here, and how did I get here?* These are not questions that need to be answered, rather dimensions to explore. A dynamic meeting in which what is given is explored and thus challenged,

leading not to a finite understanding of a phenomenon but rather an glimpse of how much there is that is not understood. And perhaps never can be.

This approach to education can be explained as being a process of estrangement of knowledge (Marner and Örtengren 2003). Instead of presenting a number of questions which are to be answered (which generally assumes there is a right answer) the movement is not towards certainty, the answer, but towards uncertainty and new questions. Live action role-playing in educational settings is generally centered around (but not limited to) a given scenario or framework. Because there is no given answer but an open end, the scenario can be explored in an unlimited number of ways. In this fashion education becomes inductive, rather than deductive, and takes the form of an exploration of an unknown landscape rather than testing the accuracy of a map.

A DIALOGISTIC METHOD

The dialogistic perspective is a critique of societies' (in this example, schools) view of language as being a one way communication of unambiguous knowledge. Or put in other terms: A critique of the inflexible use of language as prompting stimuli on another person, without room to challenge them. In the "one-voiced" classroom the teacher holds the right to interpretation (ask questions), and the pupil can only choose between acknowledging the teachers intention (answer the question) or choose not to (defiance). This can be compared with interaction and the possibility to choose (acknowledge) or not to choose, but with no room for alternate action.

Live action role-playing is by principle dialogistic. There is never any need for consensus or passive reception; rather it's

the dynamics between participants that forms the basis of the role-playing. The communication is characterized by two-way interpretation, continuously creating new meaning.

There is rarely any need of setting external limits, since the potency of the method lies within the dynamics derived from communication and dialogue. While this can, at a glance, be viewed as unsettling due to the lack of control this notion can be explained by a general bias. Control (through power) is generally viewed as the process by which one gets what one wants, in schools characterized by teachers setting the limits and standards. But as it is argued in this article (see also Nurmi, 2010, Persson 2003) control is the very source of the disciplinary problems it tries to correct. It can be argued that a movement in education from the known to the unknown, from monologue to dialogue is unsettling simply because it is rarely tried without the safety net that constitutes formal control.

CONCLUSION

Why should one employ live action role-playing in an educational setting? Is it because it is a "pleasurable way to learn" or because it challenges the dominant spectator culture and hopefully facilitates a change to participation? I would argue that both answers are correct and together forms a justification for live action role-playing as both a "pleasurable" method to facilitate learning and as governing principle. Traditionally the first answer has been predominant, while the exploration of the later is still in its early stages in Sweden. Creating a change in schools from pupils as passive respondents to active participants has good support from the current legislation, research and is from a democratic viewpoint essential. As outlined in this article the principle of participation through live action

role-playing is one way of moving closer to that goal, but also decrease the resistance to education, seen as the response to formal control. Live action role-playing should not be viewed as a way of activating children, for this refers to them as being inactive rather than controlled, but rather giving room for their own aspirations, creativity and motivation.

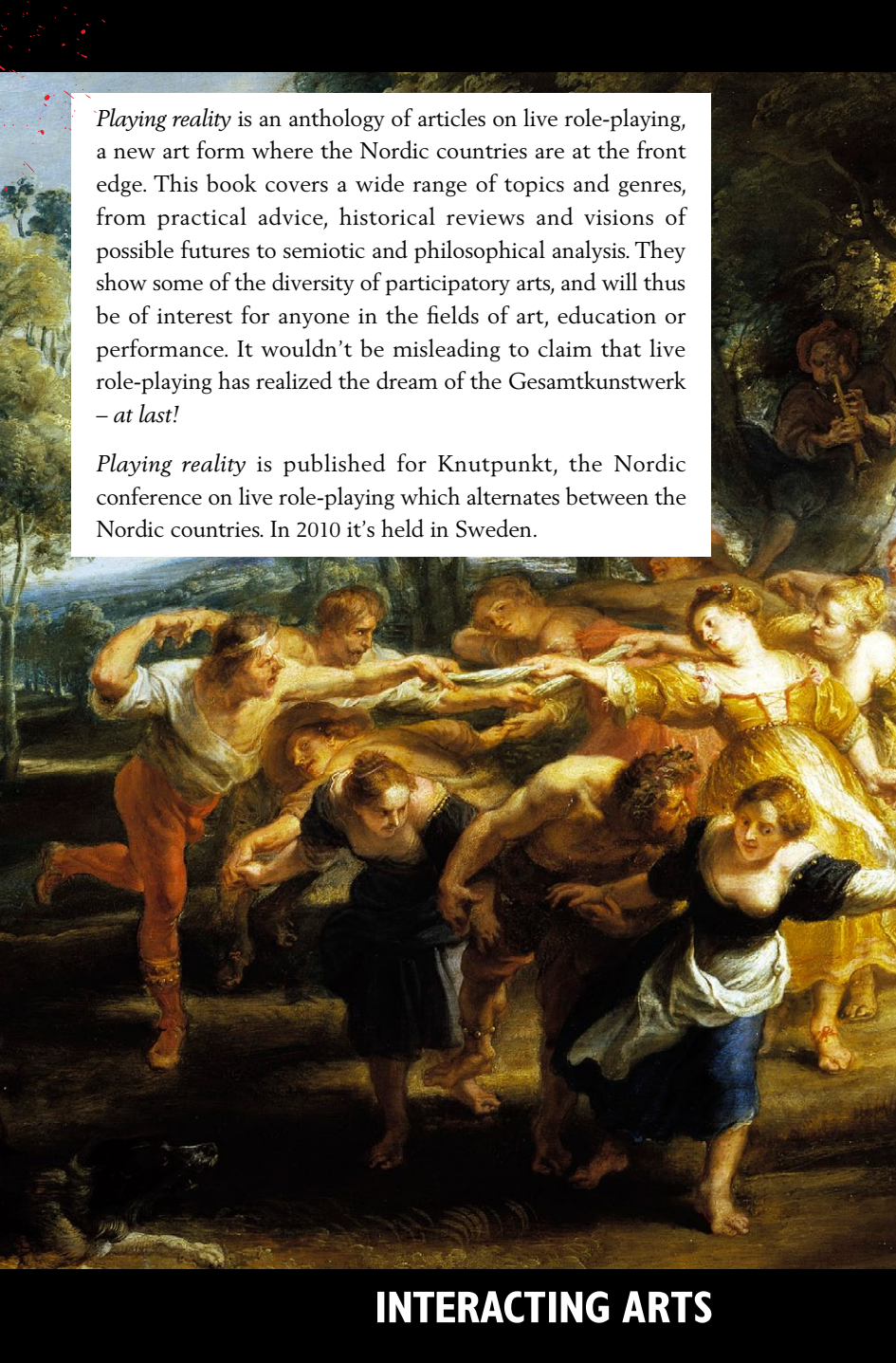
The potential in live action role-playing is not only as a method but as a principle for school activity in general, and this lends it a given place in education. It does not only show us different ways to different goals – it guides us in the process of creating new ones.

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Playing reality is an anthology of articles on live role-playing, a new art form where the Nordic countries are at the front edge. This book covers a wide range of topics and genres, from practical advice, historical reviews and visions of possible futures to semiotic and philosophical analysis. They show some of the diversity of participatory arts, and will thus be of interest for anyone in the fields of art, education or performance. It wouldn't be misleading to claim that live role-playing has realized the dream of the Gesamtkunstwerk – *at last!*

Playing reality is published for Knutpunkt, the Nordic conference on live role-playing which alternates between the Nordic countries. In 2010 it's held in Sweden.