



C R O S S I N G
HABITUAL
B O R D E R S

C R O S S I N G
H A B I T U A L
B O R D E R S

EDITED BY
KARETE JACOBSEN MELAND & KATRINE ØVERLIE SVELA
THE OFFICIAL BOOK OF KNUTEPUNKT 2013



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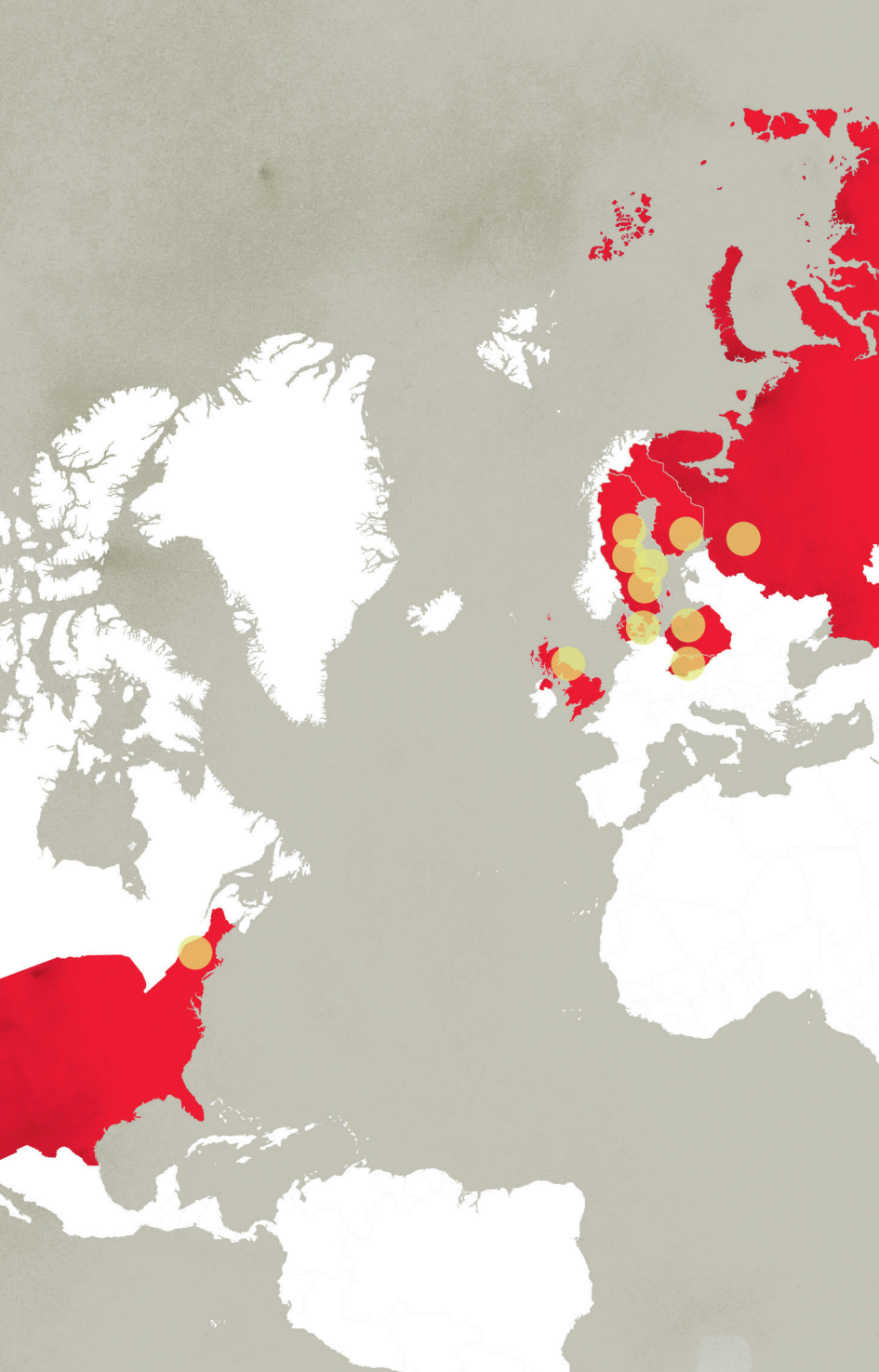
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This is the part of the book where we try to explore the different ways larping is encouraging us to examine and challenge our own, personal and automatic preconceptions and habits. We do not exist in a vacuum, and neither do our larps. How do we perceive the world? How do we perceive ourselves? What might our larps tell about us, and what kinds of repercussions can they have?

In addition to the articles, we wanted the book to reflect other methods of expressing the diverse ways larping might affect us. Therefore, we have included poems submitted by you – both for inspiration and reflection – and we hope that you will enjoy these beautiful contributions as much as we do.

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THE POSTMODERN DEADLOCK	SERGEY KOLESNIKOV 9
FITTING INTO THE FRAME	CARL HEATH 18
BUSINESS LARP	JANA POUCHLÁ 27
AN UNCHARTED LARP ARENA	EMMA STRÖM 34
BOOZE BEATS SAFETY	KIM TOMAS KLEVINGEN 45
PSYCHOTHERAPEUTICAL ROLE-PLAYING	LAURI LUKKA 56
TRAMPLED BY THE HERD	LIZZIE STARK 67
2027 - A LARP THAT TRIED	ANNIKA WAERN & PETTER MUNTHE-KAAS 80
BEING AN ANARCHIST FOR 15 YEARS	MORGAN JARL 90
LESS LARP IN EDU-LARP DESIGN	MICHAŁ MOCHOCKI 101

THE POSTMODERN DEADLOCK

SERGEY KOLESNIKOV | These days, our small community of larpers is full of talk and discussions on various prospects of larps; their development and even on their possible contribution to helping the World become a better place. A popular point of view is that we should first develop larps both extensively – by building active and positive communication with society, and intensively – by improving quality and enriching the content of what we are doing. Then, as larps can be considered Temporary Autonomous Zones where the rules of capitalism are denied (Pohjola, 2004), we will be able to help trigger the process of self-organization in the whole society and, therefore, in the long view, change and improve society from within.

However, it is obvious that society will hardly welcome us with open arms. Generally speaking, a regular person will not care about all our efforts. Why is it so?

Many years ago, our larping was a way to escape from the foul External World. Such escapism was laughed at by a disapproving society. But this very escapism helped us keep the values which had long become archaic in the External World, and to slowly turn larping into a great tool of self-organization and self-education for the players' personalities.

In the meantime, when the Information Tyranny began ruling the world, overwhelming it with mass media and internet, the notorious External World sank into the very escapism it was mocking us for.

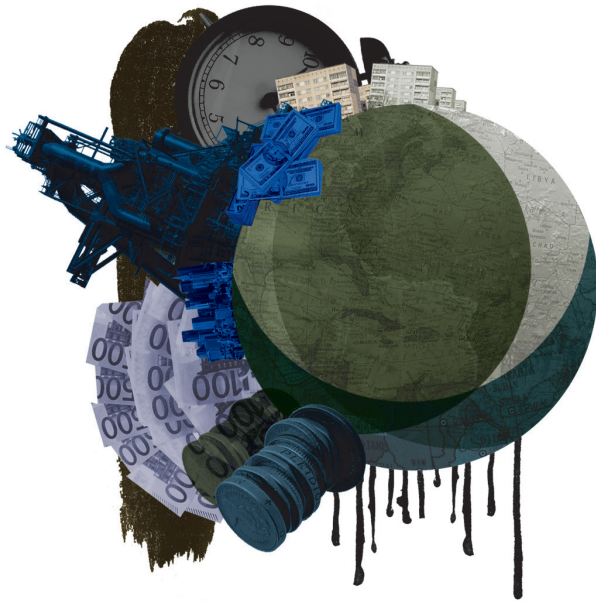
People work in order to earn money, money they in turn spend to relieve themselves from the stress caused by their jobs, which they occupy themselves with to earn money. Hundreds of millions of people are chasing their tails locked in this fruitless cycle. Meanwhile, we are continuously being soothed and reassured: "Oh, you feel ashamed you do nothing when children are starving in Africa? Well, send a two-dollar SMS to support them, and sleep peacefully!" So nobody is interested in the real world and real problems. It's much more fascinating to watch TV, surf social networks, goggle at celebrities, live virtual lives in computer games, focus our attention on mere trifles or simply engage ourselves in alcohol, drugs and extremes of sex. Humanity has stopped, it moves no further, repeating the same idle cycle. We're all in this together. We're in the Postmodern Deadlock.

**HUMANITY HAS
STOPPED, IT MOVES
NO FURTHER**

The first to rebel was Art. In the past, it has often managed to suggest to humanity, facing a challenge, some essentially new or unexpected view of the situation, or even propose a solution to it. But contemporary mass media effectively taught us that in the world of postmodernity every art trend could be stripped of its meaning and commercialized. Even art-inspired non-conformist subcultures with alternative values, from punk to cyberpunk, could become fashion. To escape this dreaded fate, artists started competing in creating the most shocking, cruel and perverted work of modern art, as though intended to awaken people from their endless slumber through shock. Alas, to no avail.

**A GLOBAL CATASTRO-
PHE, THE END OF THE
WORLD AS WE KNOW IT**

Then the real Protesters came. At first it seemed that protesting, denying, even committing a crime against the system could help. But how can one overcome a political system which states that "all points of view have the right to exist" – including the one contesting this system? In the end, the face of Che Guevara, this symbolic figure of the anti-globalization movement, was printed on millions of T-shirts. The most abominable form of protest, terrorism, became a media phenomenon causing lesser and lesser reaction to its crimes, no matter how revolting they are. And so, the Apathy of Masses (Noys, 2007) came. It seems now that only the Absolute Crime will overcome it; a global catastrophe, the end of the world as we know it. Neither ideology nor any kind of religion may save us from it in the globalized world. There seems to be no exit from the Postmodern Deadlock.



What can our small larps do about this big problem? One tempting idea could be to organize a hypothetical larp on today's world problems, suitable for politicians, social activists and other people in charge. Maybe they could invent some kind of Exit from the Postmodern Deadlock through larp's social modeling capabilities, and then apply it to the real world?

Unfortunately, our current larps do not suit this purpose for the most part. They are grounded in postmodernism; they are based on already existing plots and ideas mostly coming from the worlds of history and fantasy. This served as the foundation for escapism at the beginning of the larp phenomenon, and it is also the



reason why we cannot derive new meanings and solutions from tired situations, plots and clichés practiced in our current larps. There is a danger that if we start to churn out various community-oriented or commercial larp products in their present form to the general public, they can only hit it big with simple escapist and consumers desiring new sensations – turning larp into merely a form of social entertainment. Larps alone will certainly not overwhelm the Apathy of Masses.

But there is one thing of which I am absolutely certain: larp is a form of Art. It might be modern, synthetic, and non-classical, but still Art. So, if we want to improve our larps and get help to do so from outside our community,

then I think we primarily need to promote larping to people of art, culture, philosophy and humanities, and not necessarily to politicians or other people in charge. But, again, why should they care?

A possible answer lies in the fact that contemporary art theory does not separate *reality* from *diegesis* the way it used to before. A spectator/reader is always to some extent a co-creator of the diegesis, comprehending a piece of art through the lens of one's experience. I consider this even more applicable in larping, where the positions of the author and spectator are completely merged within a participant; co-creating every moment of the individual diegesis in collaboration with other interacting participants and game masters, while at the same time immediately living through it and making it part of one's own experience.

LARPS COULD PROVIDE
AN EXCELLENT FIELD
FOR EXPERIMENTING

Thus, larps could provide an excellent field for experimenting, practicing, studying, and playing, for the contemporary art and humanities community. In the process we could also learn from them, using their achievements to improve the language and techniques of our larps. Also, let's not forget about the content. Remember that exactly those people – among them Deleuze, Baudrillard and their countless followers and critics – described and studied the current state of post-modernity in their books and essays. They understood the very essence of it but unfortunately, their means of challenging the world and moving it forward have been

found to be inadequate. On the other hand, we have our larps, which are nostalgic and postmodern in their present form – but seem like a perfect tool to find the Solution.

We are destined to move forward together. Instead of being nostalgic, larps should become futuristic. Not in the sense of the same old stories decorated with tired sci-fi entourage, but in the sense of modeling and building our future. To do this, we should concentrate our larps on the modern world and its problems, and to do this right, we should inject them with concepts, ideas and tools from those who deeply comprehend and express the problems of modern civilization – the forefront of the art and humanities community. We should, collaboratively, fight the Apathy and Nostalgia inside and outside of us; we should constantly look for improvements and alternatives to modern ways; ultimately, we should seek the Exit from the dreaded Postmodern Deadlock. And if we succeed in finding one in larping – then we should spread it to the World.

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This paper is actually a compilation of two articles first published in Russian in 2007 that started tremendous discussions about larps and their possible role in our culture. They have been translated into English for the first time and extensively edited especially for this publication. The author would like to express his deep gratitude to Alexey Fedoseev and Elena Khalistova: without their invaluable help in translating and editing, this publication would simply not have happened.

FITTING INTO THE FRAME

CARL HEATH | "How hard can it be?", I asked myself. I had just been approached by the team leading the work on school development in the municipality, wondering if it was possible to create a larp to tackle some burning issues in the local community. In the past year, there had been a drastic shift in the attitude towards immigrants and foreigners amongst many of the pupils. The team wanted help to create a learning experience: memorable, concrete, immersive and keyed toward the issues at hand. And so, I set out to create this larp. This was the fall of 2001, and a few months later I ran it in a classroom for the first time. I was excited! I had integrated many interesting larp design techniques in the game, the story was closely related to the real and ongoing story of the pupils in the municipality, and at

the core of the game was the discussion of human rights. It felt so good. After an hour and a half, it became blatantly clear to me, and the players, that it was an epic failure. What went wrong? The short answer is: just about everything.

This first encounter with educational gaming and larps in formal educational systems was my introduction to a field where I have continued to work until now. For more than a decade, I have had the pleasure and opportunity to design and deploy educational games of all sorts and sizes, including larps, ARGs, boardgames, card games, role-playing games, simulations and ice breakers in Sweden and abroad. I have stopped counting but estimate that over the years, I have produced over a hundred different games or game-related concepts for schools, municipalities, governments, the EU, corporations and others.

AFTER 1 ½ HOURS
IT BECAME
BLATANTLY CLEAR

In all the design processes I have been involved in, there are a set of questions and dos and don'ts that reappear again and again. These are tools that provide me with a scaffold in the design, which in turn prevents me from producing as many epic failures as I did in the beginning. I will not delve deep into every technique or perspective – that would be a book in itself. However, I want to present an outline, a rough sketch, of topics which should be given extra consideration when designing larps (and similar experiences) with an educational aim in a school setting.

1. AIM

The aim of most larps is somehow to enrich oneself with an immersive experience. Often, but not always, the aim of the larp is to have fun. But when designing for a formal educational environment, the primary

IT ALSO BECOMES
IMPORTANT TO
ADJUST THE
CHARACTER DESIGN

aim isn't that of *fun* anymore.. The fun and the immersive experience is simply a means to an extrinsic goal, namely that of learning. This is a game changer, literally, as the aim is what connects the various parts of

the game design and narrative structure to the players and their characters. The aim is also one of the more important motivating factors for players. With the aim shifting from immersive experience to learning, one needs to relate the new extrinsic goal to the other parts of the game. This has broad implications on both game and narrative design, as these parts have to be in tune with each other to be effective. When the aim of the larp becomes learning, it also becomes important to adjust the character design so that all characters participate in the game in such a way that their experience will correlate with the aim. This aspect of the character creation process becomes important to ensure that all participating players have equal or similar means of learning.

2. ENGAGEMENT

In larps, it is a given that all larpers engaged in the experience want to engage in it. That isn't the case in a formal educational environment. At worst, you are present because you have to be, not because you want to.

The prior experience with role-play will also vary a lot. Some will have no experience at all, or very little, whilst others might be more experienced with the concept of role-taking and immersing oneself in an ongoing story. Because of this, it becomes important to design characters and proposed actions in such a way as to invite role-play, while not shutting the door for pupils who'd rather not immerse, but instead take on a more passive or observational approach.

3. ENVIRONMENT

Another issue at hand is the formal educational environment, which at best has drama facilities within the walls of the school. If the ambition is for the larp to be run on several occasions and in different school environments, one has to design with the notion that schools usually have a hard time using other facilities than classrooms, unless one is outdoors. Depending on factors such as the size of the school and the age of the pupils, it can be more or less complicated to run games in environments shared with other students.

NOTHING IS AS
IMPORTANT AS TIME,
AND TIMING

4. TIMING

In the formal educational environment, nothing is as important as time, and timing. Depending on age group and environment, the normal length of a lesson will vary. Usually, it takes longer than a normal lesson to carry out an educational larp. Some games have been designed to manage within the frame of a lesson, but many don't fit that frame. This is an important factor

$$1) SS_{tot} = \sum X_{tot}^2 - \frac{(\sum X_{tot})^2}{N}$$

$$= 110.247669 - \frac{(35905)^2}{284}$$

$$= 1.297488699 = 1.29744$$

Фиг. 2.7

$$2) SS_{bet} = \sum \left(\frac{\sum X_{i \cdot} \cdot \sum X_{\cdot j}}{n_{i \cdot} \cdot n_{\cdot j}} \right) - \frac{(\sum X_{tot})^2}{N}$$

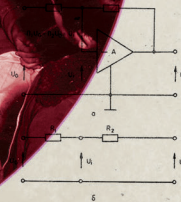
$$= \left(\frac{(4200)^2}{31} + \frac{(11483)^2}{31} + \frac{(10503)^2}{31} + \frac{(11091)^2}{31} \right) - \frac{(35905)^2}{284}$$

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*It is a very important thing to be
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important thing to be able to do
things that are not in the ordinary
way of thinking of things.*



При $U_6 > 0$

when it comes to playability, as all issues having to do with creating special situations and going outside the normal, structured, environment can become a reason not to carry out the game for the teacher. On the other hand, limiting oneself to designing games for the time frame of a lesson might be an even more problematic situation. No matter which path one takes, it's an important perspective to be conscious of.

5. TECHNOLOGY

If one is to design a technology enhanced educational larp, it is of key importance to carefully study how and to what degree it is possible for the educational environment one has as a target to actually use the technology. The availability and competence levels vary a lot between schools, making this a possible hurdle for the use of a game.

6. TESTING (AND TESTING AGAIN)

As in all design processes, one tends to test concepts too late in the design cycle. When testing larps, there are several levels of testing that can be done independently – specific game mechanics, characters or processes – without having to play-test the entire game. Parts of a design can often be tested through free-form role-play with a smaller group. Does the group understand the concepts? Characters? Plots? Does the aim of the game follow through? Does the game follow other design constraints, such as how long the game takes to play? Usually larps in educational context are written for sin-

THE AVAILABILITY AND COMPETENCE LEVELS VARY A LOT

gle school classes, but with rerunability as an ambition. In such a case, it's usually possible to test the complete game on the actual target group, through engaging a school in the design process. Testing, and failing repeatedly before implementing, is one of the most important (and toughest) parts of a design process, as it often means killing darlings.

7. FACILITATION

Another issue is concerning who's going to facilitate the game, or, if you will, be the game master. Should it, with some instruction, be able to be carried out by a teacher? Do I have to carry it out myself? When de-

signing for a broad audience, it is a given that many have to be able to manage the set up and deployment of the game. With this comes issues such as designing the proper instructional material, describing how

the game is supposed to be set up, what the aim is, to what educational purpose the game is designed, and so on. It cannot be emphasized enough how important it is to provide the teacher with good instructional material. Without it, the game won't be played – it's as simple as that.

8. ADAPTIVENESS

How will the design of the larp be able to cope with adaptation and redesign by the teacher? It isn't unusual that a teacher would want to use a game, but not exactly in the suggested manner. If the teacher doesn't have prior larp experience, it will be next to impossible

for him or her to actually adapt the game and be sure of the outcome of the adaptation. Helping out by instructing and suggesting various possible adaptations can be a way to handle this.

9. ITERATING THE END

Most larps designed for education will need both pre-planning and discussions with players after the game in order to be meaningful in a learning perspective. One needs to have time for the post-game discussions within the allotted time frame, whilst at the same time providing an ending to the game that correlates with the desired outcome. This doesn't differ drastically from normal larps and endings, but it becomes even more important to reflect, iterate and test the ending so that it becomes a proper bridge into the post-larp discussion of the learning experience. Another way of designing endings is by a triggered end design, where the game ends as soon as some given situation occurs.

As initially stated, the above drafted nine points are but an introduction to a tool box for designing educational larps. Having said this, it is my strong belief that games produced with the knowledge of these primary concepts, have a higher chance of success – both when it comes to the deployment of the game, and with the actual learning outcome of the game.

IT WILL BE NEXT
TO IMPOSSIBLE FOR
HIM OR HER TO
ACTUALLY ADAPT

Roses are red
Violets are blue
How hard can following a simple set
of propping instructions
be for you?

PETRI LEINONEN

MANAGEMENT SKILLS TRAINED BY A GAME

BUSINESS LARP

JANA POUCHLÁ | *Deep in the Arctic Ocean, the alarm sounds in a submarine. Twelve members of the crew suddenly realise that they only have enough oxygen to barely get to the surface. What will they do? Should they descend deeper to their colleagues trapped several meters further down, or should they save their own lives? Calling off the operation might end up costing them billions of dollars!*

This is the beginning of two days filled with some unusual training for a group of managers. They are about to embark on an adventure focusing on managing styles, negotiation, argumentation, decision-making, communication under pressure, achieving goals and time management.

YES, WE CALL IT LARP

Descent was originally written as a larp for the larp community. With age comes the need to pay bills, and in

2011 we in the Czech organizer team Court of Morovia made a radical step from focusing on larp for the general public, to introducing it to the business market. We began cooperating with professional trainers and coaches,

and modified our games for the business clientele. Then, we changed into suits and met with human resources managers and company directors. Although we altered both our target audience and clothing, we did not change our goal: To create larps with good game-design and strong ideas.

LARPING WAS AN
ENTIRELY NEW WORD
FOR THE HR MANAGERS

“We are in a hurry! If you can’t agree on your leadership amongst yourselves, we will designate it for you,” declares a voice from the speakers. The discussion starts immediately: Should the soldier lead? Or the technician who knows the submarine best? Or perhaps the one whom least people will mind? Sooner than the crew has settled upon a leader, the speakers are heard again: “We are in a hurry! Decide!”

Larping was an entirely new word for the HR managers. It proved a good idea to call our version of training *larp*, as this makes us new and interesting. At the same time, we do not hide that larp is also a game, and it should be noted that we do sometimes experience difficulties with making our business partners take us seriously. But a number of psychologists and anthropologists could confirm the importance and irreplaceability of games in human lives. And, as the formal educational environment is saturated with serious and frontal trainings, mostly boring and impractical, we propose that larping can prove to be a long-awaited alternative.

What makes larping so different from simulation gaming or experience pedagogies? Primarily, the game mechanisms are not set in a way that enables the participants to win collectively. The goals of the various characters are conflicting and it is impossible for all the characters to achieve success. Put in simpler terms: When someone wins, somebody else loses.

“The sealed case with mineral samples is in the airlock” says the console. The geologist grabs the case and before anybody can stop him – opens it. “What have you done?” the officers scream, “this is pure sabotage of the scientific mission. Now our samples are worthless!” . “Leave him alone. I paid him to do that.” A gentleman who has kept himself in the background the whole time suddenly appears. “So, young man, I’d really like to know: Who is the legal owner of all that oil?”

The different motivations of the characters manifest soon after the beginning of the descent. This causes a collision onboard that endangers not only the success of the mission, but also the lives of all the people present. It is not the collective feeling of satisfaction from a job well done, but rather an intense, often negative experience, that is the starting point of discussion, analysis and looking for solutions in parallel situations in the business world. It is our goal that the discussions will enable the employees to see the perspectives of their colleagues, reflect around these and hopefully understand them better. This fosters an open mind, respect for the work of others, and improves mutual communication.

LARPING CAN PROVE
TO BE A LONG-
AWAITED ALTERNATIVE

THE MOOD TO PLAY

This kind of training is not for everybody. The unknown situation of a simulated crisis puts the team members into different roles than the ones they normally take in their company. An employee may play the boss and vice-versa. The success of a game as a development activity depends on the right targeting. We recommend the use of larping to dynamic and communicative teams that want to evolve and improve. When approaching the larp, it is important to be in a mood to play, experiment, and constantly be ready to try out new solutions – otherwise it cannot fulfil its purpose. However, we do not leave this responsibility to the clients, as it is the role of the trainer to contact the group prior to the training and motivate them to participate. One should also prepare them for the game in an active and motivating way when at the training event. The trainer has to be a skilled pedagogue, and know how to deal with initial concerns and mistrust between the participants due to the new situation.

“The solution to this situation is obvious,” the agent says, pulling out a gun. He sees no point in a heroic death, his goal is clear – to survive at all cost. Will he pull the trigger?

LARP IS NOT ENOUGH

When the game ends, it is analysed by professional trainers that have experience in both larps and group coaching. This way, the larp becomes a base for further training, which will be focused on some specific educational topic. We set the aim according to the agreement with the company and the requirements of the group.



As participants can hide behind their roles, larps can uncover more than plain assessments or pure simulation. Importantly, it is not the action of the employee during the larp that is considered, but rather the employee's reflections around the role. The employee is never criticised or given negative feedback. The situations from the larp are used as examples for finding solutions with distance and detachment.

Bleep, beep. The alarm sounds again. "You've reached the point of critical pressure on the outer hull. If you keep descending, you may risk deformation of the submarine". "We have to keep descending. We are so close!" shouts the officer. "No way, do you want to kill us all?" The technician refuses to operate the console. "Do it, I'm the officer. This is a command." The crew starts to rebel. Red lights are blinking at the control desk.

Initially, we had decided to run this as a one-day long training program. However, it turned out that the reflection needs much more space, and we now recommend a two-day variant. The preparation for the larp, the larp itself and the first phase of the reflection (which focuses on the individual processing of the emotions and experiences) take place during the first day. The second day

is dedicated to the analysis of the different game situations, where the team looks for parallels with the working reality of the participants, finds new solutions, and sets new personal goals regarding their educational topic. This second day is lead by our coach in cooperation with

FOCUS ON THE INDIVIDUAL PROCESSING OF THE EMOTIONS

the manager of the team in order to achieve applicability in the particular working environment. Evaluation with the leadership takes place after the training, and in these meetings we provide recommendations for further work with the group, or give material to the internal company coaches.

DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME

We do not want to discourage anybody. But it is necessary to stress that, although the Descent has been redesigned twice since its creation, it took us a year to improve the characters and their aims, and to ensure their applicability to the goals of the projects. And most of all, a large part of the training is up to a professional coach that we cooperate with. Without him, we would never be able to manage an analysis of the game suitable for the top management of a corporation, considering that they come from a very different target group than what we have met earlier.

Still, over the course of the last two years, we have come closer to fulfilling a great dream of ours: To build a company on something we love to do – larping – and this brings us joy every day.

AN UNCHARTED LARP ARENA

EMMA STRÖM | Milsim is short for Military Simulation and started out as a subgenre within the airsoft hobby. It can best be described as a crossover between larp and airsoft activities. The core piece within the milsim genre is that the military experience has to feel realistic. This often induces a shift in focus from the action-packed airsoft scenarios played without larp elements, to more realistic, less action-triggered tasks. Several milsim games have even been played without an opponent, where the effort has been aimed at portraying the full experience of military assignments rather than simply the battle. Milsims also host a number of non-fighting characters, varying from a few to many depending on the game. This could include the local population, refugees, UN-personnel

and so on, giving yet another dimension to the game and bringing forth nuances that a strictly military affair would not be able to show.

Today, it seems as if players from the larp community are quite hesitant towards the milsim genre, and organizers of such games find it incredibly difficult to motivate larpers to try it out. The last milsim I attended had sixty larpers booked to attend as non-fighting characters the week prior to the event, but during the course of those seven days all but me and two or three others dropped out. So, during the milsim we were three non-fighting characters and 120 fighting ones. Quite a disappointment for the organizers, as well as for those who had plots and plans with the non-fighting larpers. In order to battle such destructive tendencies, I want to bring to light to, and challenge, some of the common (false) assumptions regarding milsim that seem to be circulating among larpers.

PLAYERS FROM THE LARP
COMMUNITY ARE QUITE
HESITANT TOWARDS
THE MILSIM GENRE

“BUT I DON’T WANT TO BE A BACKDROP!”

Many a larper repeat over and over again that they “don’t want to be a backdrop for the airsoft players”, while some airsofters claim that they “don’t want to be subjected to odd roleplayers acting strange”. This is extremely sad, and has its roots – I think – in complete lack of insight into what the other hobby encompasses as well as how a milsim game actually works. The participants who are present during the milsim are very considerate both of each other and of the game itself,

as well as continuously inviting interaction with all co-players, no matter their background.

The part about being a backdrop frustrates me most. During a classic larp, all participants are in some way or another a backdrop to each other, and the game becomes what oneself makes of it. A milsim game is no different; on the contrary it is common that the characters played by larpers get extra space and plots just because of the low participation so far from this group.

The border guards are a problem too, but for them she holds both drugs and some useful rumors to provide in exchange for free passage, should Bogdan's name not prove enough. The road block is worse; all the way there she ponders and discards a number of options. Everything comes down to who is on duty there, of course; if it is Fenrir, she would probably have to club him in the head and run through the woods instead just to get past. If it is Yellow Hammer, she might be able to make him understand, and the same goes for Xerxes. If the interpreter is John, however, and he has realized that she has given him away... Or if Johnny is there with his pitying eyes and mild voice, keeping her captive for some higher purpose he thinks he sees... She has information they might be interested in too, of course, or maybe she can succeed in tricking them into sending only one soldier with her as escort to her camp, where she can knock him out without anyone noticing.

(from Crusaders in Disneyland II, a game focusing on the border conflict involving the breakaway nation Transnistria, a strip of land between Moldavia and Ukraine, including NATO forces as well as Moldavian troops.)

One comment after Crusaders in Disneyland II was that the presence of civilian characters, who didn't *respawn* (regain life) but actually died if they were hit, gave the game a depth that surprised in its intensity. The realization of battle outcome having an impact also on those unable to defend themselves was striking. During the milsim Fun to be Had, players felt that just "getting to watch" while larger scenes were acted out between other characters was enough to make them curious and daring enough to try and interact more on their own. Such inspiration is truly catching and getting new larpers into the hobby is of course quite enjoyable.

AIRSOFT IS A
GADGET HOBBY,
EVEN IN THE WOODS

"BUT I DON'T KNOW HOW IT WORKS!"

There are many similarities between airsoft games and larps, and of course cultural differences that have grown to norms over the years. In my experience, any larper is well set-up to participate in a milsim, and might actually find the game tinged by the thrill of curiousness that comes with exploring uncharted grounds.

Airsoft games, as well as larps, are most often outdoor events that demand some form of understanding of how to adjust to the environment. It seems that players from the airsoft hobby have higher demands on the organizers when it comes to accommodation, transportation and game content, than what larpers usually have. Airsoft is a gadget hobby and there is no end to the comforts available, even in the woods, as long as you just get enough cool stuff. At the same time, players



with an airsoft background expect the game to be ready to use upon arrival, which occurs as close to game start as possible. That there are toilets on site is not certain, however, and apparently not a requirement either. Neither is it uncommon to be asked to bring all your water supplies on your own. This is highly different from the larp hobby, which is much more flexible regarding accommodations, the players' own contribution to putting up buildings or camp sites and input for game plots. On the other hand, larpers would expect the organizers to provide toilets and water.

Keeping offgame content out of sight is something everyone agrees on, but there is an enormous tolerance from the airsofters in regards to this that impresses me. At a larp, the off-game area is often outside the in-game

border, sometimes requiring quite a walk to get there. At one Swedish milsim location, the off-game area was a house in the middle of the ingame area. As this surprised me as a larper, those who encountered roleplaying for the first time were equally impressed by the ability to keep things in-game. To cook dinner from scratch (rather than pouring boiling water into a bag of powder) or to remain in-character although you're alone were things mentioned as especially interesting.

The respawn-element in the airsoft part of milsim is another factor to be ignored ingame. When a player is shot, this is marked by holding up a brightly coloured piece of cloth. The player must then get to the respawn area in order to join the game again after a given amount of time. To pass through a battlefield where the majority of

the soldiers rest in the ditches with their orange cloths on their heads requires a very good ingame filter. This is an aspect I think there are better solutions for, where experiences from the larp hobby can be used.

Furthermore, I believe that the milsim genre would grow a lot from bringing in more practical elements from the larp hobby as far as pre-game work is concerned (for example workshops, character connections or joint efforts to build and solve practicalities on site). That gives weight to the partaking rather than the using.

His expression when he sees me is so full of sadness and despair that I must wonder how much of the terror I bear visible on my face. Before we're allowed to say anything to each other, to confirm our respective well-beings, Daud and another intercede him and ask about the US troops' reaction and answer. Jack's words hit me like a sledgehammer inside my skull, vibrating with sounds of death that echo through my body.

"They are not coming. They said that they couldn't compromise the mission for one person".

(from Fun to be Had, a milsim about the conflict between American and Taliban forces in Afghanistan.)

"BUT THE STORY IS WRITTEN FOR AIRSOFTERS!"

The setting, main story and intrigue lines are produced using the larp tradition, meaning there is a set framework and a goal for the event that all characters can relate to, as well as leeway for personal threads and goals. There is often a range of missions running parallel to the

main story to be performed by each main group during the game, somewhat akin to a computer game. As in any war-focused larp there are a number of battles and skirmishes, along with numerous non-fighting scenes in between.

Since the players on a milsim come from different backgrounds and with different experiences, the need for direction is varied. The above-mentioned missions are perfect for those who have not tried larping before, in that they provide something to relate to and act upon. However, some experienced larpers could be happy enough with a story-bound framework and improvise their own missions ingame instead. Overall, this solution forms a flow of direction that I like, and keeps the game running no matter where you come from.

OVERALL, THIS SOLUTION FORMS A FLOW OF DIRECTION

In the larp hobby there is always talk of acknowledging ingame ideas and players. During milsims, this becomes incredibly clear and important seeing as how there are so many participants who've not encountered larping before. This also makes you reconsider your own expectations (wrought from years and years of larping within the same spheres) of interactive responses. In some situations, frustration overwhelmed me as my thrown nets and hooks didn't get picked up by others, or that no one seemed to realize that I held more information than what I first showed. Now, I believe this to be an "early disease" of the milsim genre; when more games have been held with more participants from the larp hobby,

those with a background in the airsoft hobby will learn to discern what possible game openings are wrapped in an offered interaction from another player.

Something I wish that milsims adopted from the larp hobby are intergroup-connections and character connections, aspects that today are brought into the game mainly by individual players' initiatives. This is important in order to better include anyone who would like to participate as well as to create more contact surfaces for players.

“Poor Jack must be exhausted from fear and literally carrying my weight all this time, but he stays strong and urges me onward. As I stagger onto solid, flat ground again, everything around me seems to diminish and a wave of dizziness washes over me as I’m at last allowed to stop. Jack is torn from my side despite my desperation and I’m left swaying alone, so alone. I try to gather my wits and look around, to at least see where they are taking him, and the image that leaps at me is enough to make panic rise in a terrible, unstoppable surge.

**JACK IS TORN
FROM MY SIDE DESPITE
MY DESPERATION**

Jack is on his knees with his face to me, hands behind his head with elbows pointing to each side. Behind him stands a taliban with his gun pressed to the back of Jack’s head, awaitening orders. The picture is so clear, so classic, and I have seen it a thousand times in the news clips. But it cannot be happening here, not to my cameraman!”

(From Fun to Be Had.)

SO, WHAT IS MILSIM AGAIN?

Milsim is not a dangerous, boring or larp ignorant genre. Milsim is a new, exciting arena filled with amazing, prospective larpers, game techniques and frameworks, as well as incredible gear! The milsim genre also provides an opportunity to explore conflicts that we normally only get to experience through the news, and which we more often than not distance ourselves from. It is an opportunity to step inside a safe version of such a conflict and gain an understanding of it in a close-to firsthand experience.

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Crusaders in Disneyland II, 2012.
Viktor Malmberg et al.; Rödjenäs,
Sweden.

Fun to be Had, 2009. Föreningen
Milsim; Stråssa, Sweden.

SIGNORA'S LAST

Brave enough to grab the knife
Scared enough to cry
Strong enough to take my life
Weak enough to die

LINN WILHELMSSON

BOOZE BEATS SAFETY

KIM TOMAS KLEVINGEN | Being dressed in uniform and being a part of a coherent group changes us as human beings. It alters not only the characters we are playing but also the player behind said character. The following is based on my experiences from playing a guard, stationed at *Statens interneringsleir for kvinner, Hovedøya* (The State's Detention Camp for Women), during the Norwegian larp *De fortapte pikers øy* (The Island of the Lost Girls). It was in many ways a mind-blowing experience, and in retrospect rather difficult to deal with.

It did not take long before several of the guards quickly experienced the importance of conforming to the group. The way they acted, walked, and spoke was subject to intra-group sanctions. The respect for the uniform and even the way they pointed out a direction served as an

important way of differentiating between the girls and the guards. To quote one of the female workers in the camp: “It is obvious to me that if I point like you [the guards] do, the girls will actually do what I ask of them”. Furthermore, typical army pranks were often observed,

and even among the privates a hierarchy was quickly established. When on guard duty, swift justice for not appearing on time was observed.

Covering for your allies and reporting

your enemies turned out to be a common aspect of the game, and definitely to the extent that one would go to great lengths to procure evidence that could be used as blackmail against the other party. It could well be argued that it was the player behind the character and not necessarily the character itself that arrived late. Thus, a player, or her character, might have become annoyed by another player, or his character, being late. This duality raises questions like “how to be fair to the other players while still playing the guard that is always late”.

As is often the case in Nordic larps a subtle fight between opposing views began. As the game progressed, one could say that this became the main intra-group theme. Inter-group relationships, with guards falling in love, friendships, or indeed hate and fury toward the girls, thus had a large impact on intragroup relations. It is on this note I wish to begin discussing the effect of group-legitimated action. Because as a guard everything you do can be covered behind this idea of the group. When I disciplined one of the girls it was not necessarily the wishes of my character, but merely a

function performed by a guard. This led several, if not all players, to perform actions that they as individuals arguably never would have deemed right in any moral way. This in itself might be merely skilled role-playing and approved by all involved parties. However the issue arises when players enacting dominant characters realize that the boundaries between play and reality blurs up; when a character’s fury or discomfort suddenly becomes the player’s.

This brings us to a difference that is obvious yet hidden in most safety talks. The difference between the use of safe-words and their immediate effect, which have been debated back and forth, and the minor events that by themselves does not require the use of a safe-word per se, but nonetheless remain issues that build up over time during the game, eventually cumulating into something quite disgusting in the long-term perspective. The special thing about larping is that even though the setting, characters and situations are fictitious the actions, feelings and players are very much real. In other words, even though the emotions might belong to the character, the player embodies them. Love, hate, fear, sorrow, loyalty, camaraderie, and power are examples of such feelings, the last one being especially visible during this larp. The need for these elements to achieve the 360° immersion needed for such games, while still guarding against the possibly devastating effects of that same immersion, becomes a big challenge. What kind of tools do we use to tackle these effects? Even if it is plausible that some

FURTHERMORE, TYPICAL
ARMY PRANKS WERE
OFTEN OBSERVED

A DIFFERENCE THAT IS
OBVIOUS YET HIDDEN
IN MOST SAFETY TALKS



players will be able to deal with these effects because they are good at analyzing their own feelings, empathic players might still experience strong reactions, forced to light by their own conscience, though based on in-game events. An effective way to combat some of these issues would be to define pairs of players who establish a kind of comradeship before, throughout, and even continuing into the debrief session and after the game.

The interplay between the girls and the guards was the main aspect of this game. Simple measures like requiring the girls to curtsy when passing a guard, to make them sit with their face towards the wall in the dining hall, with everyone else behind them, effortlessly made the distinct separation possible and real. Whilst not discussing the psychological effects among the female

players, the effect on the guards was notably quite large. They would push the limits for what they would do (within the framework of the game) further and further as the game went on, to create an atmosphere of constant pressure surrounding the girls. It has been pointed out by several of the guards, and also observed by myself and other players, that the border between character and player became hard to locate. This in itself is not a real surprise, since common sense suggests some people are fonder of exerting control and authority than others. The problem emerges first when the player in retrospect realizes that some of his actions were not brought on by the character but by the player himself. When the lines become blurred without the player's awareness, there is a risk to the players in the regard of something I will coin as *post-larp stress*.

FOUND PLEASURE
PERFORMING AC-
TIONS THAT ARE
MORALLY WRONG

Understanding that you have in fact found pleasure performing actions that are morally wrong could result in several kinds of trauma. For instance, realising that a trait is undesired by the morals of a society could arguably be life-changing. In particular, the impact on an

individual's self-confidence might result in negative thoughts and feelings about oneself. Players might suffer for weeks and even months and years if these fundamental problems are not tackled in a sound man-

ner. It could be argued that it is just a game, but in the Nordic larp-tradition, operating with 360° immersion and even turning bleeding into some form of art, the risk of later stress reactions clearly outlines the need for a proper debrief session. In fact I would argue that the debrief is more important than anything else.

Many people develop in-game relations that continue to be present after the game is ended. This is not abnormal by any psychological standard, nor is it something to be afraid of. One of the ways humans develop close relations to other people is indeed by spending time with them. There is no secret that intense and challenging situations, such as larps, traumatic episodes et cetera, works rather like superglue. The problem arises when we neglect to realize the unconscious feelings that might have arisen because of in-game conflict. These conflicts could be based on actions performed not only by a player's character, but also the player herself. What do we do as players when we realize we have performed actions that we didn't think we were capable of? How

do we tackle the hatred against a fellow player that is no longer just hatred between characters? How do we deal with in-game actions that have changed our real life views of other players?

In a game where extreme themes are put up front every player is challenged physically, but even more importantly every player is challenged psychologically. As organizers we would never put the players' safety at risk. Why then do we all too often minimise the role of the debrief? A tool, which by itself might turn out to be the decisive factor determining a player's psychological well-being? The debrief could, and I would argue that it must, be a tool for reconciliation. All too often the organizers of games I have been to have had their focus on anything but the debrief. Their attitudes have often been to pack up and get out as soon as possible, leaving debriefing to individuals at the after-party. The players are not free of guilt either. Often they care more about how fast they can get the liquor out of their bags or how fast they can get to the after-party.

IN-GAME ACTIONS
THAT HAVE CHANGED
OUR REAL LIFE VIEWS

The ultimate debrief would obviously bring every player through their experiences, talking about their reactions. How do we cope with the player's realisation discussed above?

It could actually be argued that the conversational topics at the after-party often serves more like a debrief than the actual debrief itself. I am not convinced this

is the right way to go. Will every player actually have the possibility to discuss what he or she needs to go on with his or her life? How do we cope with players that are on the introvert side? The debrief from The Island of the Lost Girls was arranged as a circle where every player could say a few things each concerning important events for their character. Where was the widely used group discussions, or the set time for individuals to

WE HAVE NOT
STOPPED HUGGING
FELLOW PLAYERS
AFTER A GAME

actually solve problems they might have? In the end, only a very few psychological experiences was put forward, and though recent research claims that talking too much about a recent traumatic event might in fact produce post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), there has been no argument made that supports not talking about the reactions to said event. Luckily for us, we have not stopped hugging fellow players right after the end of a game (!).

It is no secret that this larp's attempt of a debrief was lacking at best. It is neither a secret that several of the players reacted to this fact, nor is it a secret that most of the players had a great game experience overall. I do not want to diminish the game; I loved it from the start until the (for my character) bittersweet end. Still, it raised important questions and created situations that just might have spurred on the debate concerning the role of rough psychological play, the debrief and the aftermath of tough games. Hopefully, I can count on the more experienced players out there to take this debate to the next level (Kapo/1942?) and that organizers

might see the debrief as a just an integral part of player safety as making sure that no player takes a long walk on a short pier.

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De Fortapte Pikers Øy, 2012. Melina Edvardsen & Therese Hovland Langemyr; Norway.

PSYCHO- THERAPEUTICAL ROLE-PLAYING

LAURI LUKKA | Knutepunkt articles have rather comprehensively explored and described role-playing as a societal phenomenon, leisure activity and a tool in education. However, there are only a few mentions about role-playing used in psychotherapeutic settings to remediate mental disorders, and those anecdotes are vague and brief (see for example Stenros & Hakkarainen, 2003; Larson, 2003; Waade & Sandvik, 2007) – even if mental disorders are commonly used as game themes (see for instance Korhonen & Virtaperko, 2012). My aim here is to explore how the concept of mentalization can be used to describe some of the psychological processes role-playing improves and how role-playing can be used as a psychotherapeutic technique.

Mentalization refers to our ability to both unconsciously and consciously reflect on our own and other's

thoughts (cognitions) and feelings (affects) (Choi-Kain & Gunderson, 2008). Asen and Fonagy (2011) define it as a skill for seeing "ourselves from the outside and seeing others from the inside". Mentalization is sometimes referred to as a theory of mind or metacognitive skills. Its other conceptual cousins are emotional intelligence, insight, mindfulness, affect consciousness (Mohaupt, Holgersen, Binder & Nielsen, 2006), empathy and psychological mindedness; but also concepts such as introspection (latin for *looking inside*) and self-reflection. All of these concepts include some dimensions of mentalization, while excluding others.

FACILITATE SOCIAL
INTERACTION AND
COMMUNICATION

The function of mentalization is to facilitate social interaction and communication. Without these mental skills our interaction would be full of misconceptions and conflicts. Mentalization skills develop throughout childhood and adolescence, and there is evidence that we mentalize as early as 18 months old (Frith & Frith, 2003). While mentalization is believed to have neural basis in our prefrontal cortex, it cannot fully develop without a safe and consistent attachment relationship between the child and her caretaker (Fonagy & Bateman, 2007; Larmo, 2010). There is a correlation between the lack of mentalization skills and some psychological disorders, which has led to the development of psychotherapeutic methods specifically for these skills (Larmo, 2010).

I propose that mentalization is a prerequisite for role-playing a character. Without understanding one's own



and others' mental states it is impossible to affect and alter how one perceives, interprets and reacts to one's surroundings. During a role-playing game, one constantly exercises and pursues immersion in a fictional character and in the diegesis, the game reality. This immersion may first require conscious (explicit) attention, but during the game it can become more automatic and unconscious (implicit), leading to deeper immersion. While immersed in the character and the game reality, the player mentalizes on multiple levels through the eyes of both the participant and the character.

**THE PLAYER
MENTALIZES ON
MULTIPLE LEVELS**

A PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC TECHNIQUE

Some psychotherapies already use role-playing as a technique. For instance, it can be used in individual cognitive psychotherapy for children to develop divergent problem solving and emotion naming skills (Fredriksson, 2011). It has also been used in family therapeutic settings (Asen & Fonagy, 2011). Role-playing has originated from theatre and psychodrama (Flood, 2006). The latter may still be the most prominent group therapeutic application for role-playing, even if it is argued that psychodrama may not be suited for treating all psychiatric diagnoses (Aitolehti & Silvola, 2012).

Modern psychotherapy schools each have their own repertoire of techniques reflecting the underlying theories and principles that ultimately aim to increase the patient's well-being. Recently, it has been proposed that the common factor between all effective psychothera-

pies is that they all lead to the development of mentalization skills (Larmo, 2010). Role-playing could be used as a complementary technique fitting into many schools such as cognitive, behaviorally oriented or solution based therapy. Role-playing and immersion could be used to, for instance: 1) increase patients' understanding of the reasons behind their behavior by helping them to see themselves "from the outside"; 2) give patients tools and training to be able to name their inner states, both thoughts and emotions; 3) teach patients ways to distance themselves from acute stress; 4) which, in turn, can help them control their emotions and impulses; 5) correct patients' distorted interpretations about themselves, others and the world; 6) develop patients' social cognition, that is to promote understanding of other people's feelings and thoughts, by perspective taking; 7) help patients find more effective reactions in challenging situations by mental and actual training, and 8) aid patients overcome their social inhibitions by training social skills. Rather than developing all aspects of mentalization, it is important to clearly define which dimensions are in focus, as the concept of mentalization is both broad and multifaceted (Choi-Kain & Gunderson, 2008).

Role-playing techniques can be used in both individual and group therapies to increase the patient's understanding of social situations and the capability to function in them; as role-playing is, at its core, social (Gade, 2003). Both individual and group therapies have their own ad-

**ROLE-PLAYING
COULD BE USED AS
A COMPLEMENTARY
TECHNIQUE**

vantages and limitations, and the best results may be achieved by combining both methods. For instance, in individual therapies role-playing can be used to deeply explore past or anticipated events in scenarios or to train social skills in a safe environment. Role-playing could very well complement family therapeutical methods by facilitating and repairing the communication in and between the generations through perspective taking.

Because role-playing in itself can only train implicit aspects of mentalization, the key in therapy is to bring these processes to consciousness. Clear instructions of what behavioral or mental skills are trained and focused on, and appropriate debriefing afterwards, facilitates and supports the learning of new skills. When using role-playing as a therapeutical technique, role-play theoretical concepts – such as diegesis, immersion and character – can be used to clarify the process and the methods employed, as long as the patient understands them.

However, it is unclear to what degree role-playing and immersion actually improve mentalization – or if they merely put to use the skills we have acquired in our childhood and adolescence. This is especially important when using role-playing techniques to treat people with moderate or severe mental disorders who may be much more likely to have problems in mentalization and in overlapping fields such as empathy, affect consciousness and mindfulness, which all make immersion harder to achieve. Due to the deficiencies in some or all dimen-

**DEBRIEFING AFTER-
WARDS FACILITATES
AND SUPPORTS**

sions of mentalization they have been unable to develop these skills in spontaneous social interaction. This brings up the question: are people with weaknesses in mentalization skills unable to benefit from role-playing exercises or should we attempt to make the steps to lower the threshold for them to participate?

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Having weak mentalization skills is one factor predisposing to and complicating the rehabilitation from psychological problems. Role-playing that includes immersion in a character and interaction within the diegetic frame requires the player to engage in many forms of mentalization, which in turn may develop those skills if they are later reflected on and brought into consciousness. Perhaps this is an (un)conscious motivator for aspiring role-players to take up the hobby in the first place? Additionally, one explanation why some people find role-playing more natural than others may be the differences in our mentalization skills.

To this day, role-playing games and exercises have been used quite marginally in psychotherapeutic settings, but they could be incorporated to complement many

**ROLE-PLAYING HAVE
BEEN USED QUITE
MARGINALLY**

individual psychotherapies and especially group psychotherapies. Their primary objective could be the training of mentalization and other related skills such as empathy, perspective taking and mindfulness. Role-playing techniques may also make therapy more engaging, ecologically valid and active. Importantly, using such



techniques effectively in treatment requires appropriate training in both fields and the methods should be clearly incorporated into the therapy given.

Müller (2011) describes how larping has developed from a marginal subculture into the mainstream consciousness in Denmark. Games have been ever more popular in the 21st century and prejudices against them diminish by each generation. Role-playing has already made some establishments in education and it is possible that it makes new openings in the field of mental health as well. Before that, more research in the field is necessary for mapping who most likely benefit from role-playing techniques and for confirming what specific skills they develop and which psychotherapeutic schools could benefit from such new techniques.

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AMBITION

Chasing achievements.
A patience knowing no bounds.
Restart from checkpoint.

CARL FREDRIK HELLWIG

SOME THOUGHTS ON LARP SAFETY

TRAMPLED BY THE HERD

LIZZIE STARK | Larp designers could learn a lot from the former mayor of Bogota, Antanas Mockus. He's a larper's politician. He famously dressed in spandex and appeared publicly as Supercitizen, and he reduced traffic fatalities by employing mimes.

Yes, you read that right. Mockus hired 420 mimes to direct traffic in the chaotic city capital. They followed and physically mocked citizens who jaywalked and handed out thumbs-up and thumbs-down cards to drivers. Their presence, together with stars emblazoned on the pavement where pedestrians had been killed, dropped the city's traffic fatalities by more than half, according to a piece in *The Telegraph* (May 2010). The mimes effectively took the common practice of driving and walking irresponsibly and de-normalized it using shame.

But rules and shame don't always work so clearly or so one-sidedly. Stephen Dubner, one of the authors of *Freakonomics* and host of its eponymous podcast, outlined the experiments of psychologist Robert Cialdini in a radio spot called "Riding the Herd Mentality," which also profiled SuperMayor! Mockus. Cialdini explained two of his studies. The first looked at how to

**BUT AGAIN, SHAME
IS A POWER-
FUL MOTIVATOR**

increase energy conservation in San Diego. His team handed out four different flyers on energy conservation to a neighborhood, and then went back later to read their meters

and tabulate the results. Three of the flyers gave homeowners direct reasons to conserve energy – to save our resources, to save the world's resources for our children, or to save money on bills. The fourth flyer told homeowners that most of their neighbors were already reducing energy consumption. As Cialdini told Dubner, the latter "was the only message that significantly reduced energy consumption in the home." Yet homeowners rated that message least likely to reduce energy consumption. Sometimes, we're not the best judges of what will influence us, but again, shame is a powerful motivator.

The technique can cut the other way, though. Cialdini also told Dubner about a study he did in Arizona, at Petrified Forest National Park. The park has a problem with visitors stealing petrified wood from the forest floor. So Cialdini's team salted some paths with petrified wood and marked them with the standard sign, which said that so many people were stealing wood that it was compromising the integrity of the forest.

They found that posting a sign almost tripled the rate of theft, because it unintentionally reinforced the idea that everyone was stealing wood. And if everyone is already breaking the rules, why can't I? The sign's message became a self-fulfilling prophecy by normalizing bad behavior.

The upshot is that group behavior influences us, whether or not we think it does, so it's wise for larp designers to think about what sort of group behavior they are promoting, intentionally and unintentionally. In a larp, an imperfect group dynamic has consequences, for example discouraging people from using cut words in practice, even while extolling them as a safety measure. Whether game play normalizes torture for the characters isn't as important as the type of behavior it fosters in players, because of course, we often aren't worried for the safety of our characters – dying can be fun and rewarding! – but stuff that happens to you as a player happens for keeps. The problem is that the distinction between character and player isn't clear-cut, so the issue becomes finding a way to socially support individual players who might need a way out.

**STUFF THAT
HAPPENS TO YOU AS
A PLAYER
HAPPENS FOR KEEPS**

You can think of larp safety on two levels – the individual level and the group level, with designers wielding two sets of tools – in-game tools (system and setting) and off-game tools (social tone, workshops, community). It seems to me that Nordic larp focuses on off-game tools and group safety, while US roleplaying focuses on in-game tools and



individual safety – perhaps there is a causal connection between the two, or perhaps it’s mere coincidence.

Rules can be a very good thing. Much US larp relies on rules and regulations, and there often isn’t much structured community-building out of game. (Note: the US is a huge country with lots of disparate larp and roleplaying scenes, so your mileage may vary.) Rules can create sneaky social work-arounds. For example, many American larps are very concerned about off-game drama erupting between players. Rather than addressing relations between players themselves, boffer larps sometimes bypass the issue by prohibiting player-versus-player combat, since character fights often lead to real life fights.

Of course, some bleed – mixing of player and character emotions – is inevitable whether the rules prohibit in-game conflict or not. Rules-heavy games may also seek to protect each individual’s personal boundaries through making rules equally applicable to everyone. (Someone got naked and ran-through camp? Let’s make a rule that costuming must be “decent”. Some people aren’t comfortable with touching? No touching.) Ultimately, though, if community spirit doesn’t back up the rules, the rulebooks get longer and more baroque, but leave victims of bleed (why’d your ex-boyfriend’s NPC perma-kill me?) without the tools needed to work out their differences.

In contrast, Nordic larp excels on the group level and with off-game tools. It relies on implicit communal

bonds already in place, a set of assumptions that includes playing to lose, playing for others, hardcore individual responsibility, emotional openness, and sensitivity of and tolerance for the difficult experiences of others. It's difficult to import Nordic larp to other areas of the world, I think, because this assumed understanding, this assumed community doesn't yet exist in other places. As I learned from running the Norwegian larp *Mad About the Boy* in Connecticut this year, to run a Nordic larp somewhere else, first one must foster community, and that's a tall order.

Running a Nordic larp elsewhere is a little like vaccinating a community – once you get enough people on board, the group develops herd immunity and can carry a few people who haven't been inculcated into group culture. Danish larp organizer Claus Raasted agrees with me. As he put it, “It's a matter of having a ‘core

of the herd’ that's strong or weak. Written rules work well when the core is weak. Unwritten work best when it's strong.” Of course, the dark side of having a core play cul-

ture is that it can bully people when things go wrong. At Solmukohta in 2012, a big topic of discussion was the social pressure not to use safewords or other safety measures, to be “hard core” to not ruin immersion for the rest of the players.

Another problem with unwritten rules, the seedy effect of all this negotiated consent, often hashed out in the moment, is that there's no final barrier to the extent

of roleplay, no hard rule pulling people back from the abyss. That is both exciting and dangerous. And depending on where you are in the world, if players miscalculate what they can handle, you can damage them and they can sue you. When we talk about larp safety, perhaps we are talking about helping people accurately calculate what they can handle and giving them the tools to enforce that boundary.

So, how does Nordic larp help individuals figure out what they can handle and assert their own boundaries in the wake of herd mentality? Through transparency, cut words, and the off-game room. Transparency is the practice of allowing players to read all game materials or otherwise understand every aspect of the game's plot before the game, which helps potential players decide whether to participate. Organizers equip players with cut and brake words for use during the game, and there's an off-game room players can enter whenever they need a break.

But those safety measures are not enough, according to clinical neuropsychologist Dr. Maria Schultheis, because “the reality is that we know from a psychological perspective that you have no way of predicting how you're going to respond when faced with a stimulus that triggers something in you.” I spoke with Dr. Schultheis, a professor at Drexel University, about safety measures in Nordic larp because her research deals with Virtual Reality and using it to help improve the lives of people with disabilities. I explained to her that some of the games deal with heavy topics such as abuse in prisons,

THE SOCIAL
PRESSURE NOT TO
USE SAFEWORDS

homelessness, AIDS, gender identity, oppression, war, and even rape. As she put it, “If you combine a very immersive environment with somebody who might already be emotionally primed for the experience, something like rape, or death of an older person or murder or watching that, I think it’s very hard to predict what kind of response you’re going to have.” In other words, organizers ought to take into account the individual emotional makeup of players.

The missing component in Nordic larp safety, Dr. Schultheis suggested, is pre-screening for vulnerability in the pre-game questionnaire and in person. She noted that in hard-hitting larps, “You run the risk of doing more damage to somebody who may have something in their past that you don’t know about and they’re not revealing.” Transparency, of course, can help individuals decide whether taking the risk is right for them. If I am broken up over the death of my grandfather, I might choose not to play a game that has the death of elderly people as a theme. But transparency is not enough; psychologically, some people are more vulnerable than others, Dr. Schultheis said. If a game includes rape scenes, a person who has been raped is going to have a “different vulnerability” to those scenes, she said. And sometimes, people think they’re going to be OK and then they aren’t.

To help mediate the risk, she suggested an optional addition to the workshop. “They have a debriefing session, so it’s almost like you’d set up something analogous on the front end, so you offer that opportunity for some-



body with a rape history to have the option of going in there and talking with somebody about what they might experience. It's fine if you do this game, but it might bring up memories and emotional reactions – to have somebody to talk to about thinking through, 'if I put myself through this, I might be experiencing harm.'" She suggested it might even help certain people be better prepared to use the cut words, "as opposed to going in there feeling put off by their emotional reaction."

She likened playing Nordic larp to going on a roller coaster. Before you get on, she said, there's a whole long list of warnings about pregnant people, people with cardiac disease, and so on. The warning doesn't tell you not to ride, she said, "but it tells you that you could experience it differently than someone who isn't. These games, because they can be emotionally intensive and they can be so realistic, they might need a warning label. [...] These things are not benign. And I think that's the biggest misperception. These are pretty intense games." Perhaps a movie-style rating or warning label might help players choose whether or not they want to opt in to a particular game.

In some ways, Dr. Schultheis' advice sounds familiar – these games are intense, they should be done thoughtfully and sanely, and they're not for everyone – but too often, I think that last admonition goes unenforced. Nordic larp does a great job of facilitating community expectations, but sometimes it can leave individual concerns by the wayside, particularly for people who are not

steeped in the culture around these games. Wrapped up in this idea is how to facilitate an environment that will be psychologically safe for everyone. If there's an off-game room in a larp and nobody uses it, does it really count as a safety measure?

When we talked about why people don't use cut words, Dr. Schultheis had some practical advice. She said that organizers need to really train their players to use the words. "If you have good training," she said, "the evidence is that they're more likely to use it. Likelihood to use it is more likely linked to knowledge and acceptance of the cut word." This gets back to the herd mentality – the more the use of cut words are normalized through practice and usage, the more individual players will feel empowered to back out of intense scenes in the face of social pressure. And perhaps the more prepared players are to know what sorts of scenes might require them personally to say cut, the more likely they will be to recognize a scene gone wrong and utter the words.

Asking a whole battalion of psychologists, in addition to Dr. Schultheis, would probably be a good way to craft more successful safety practices. Maybe an explicit rule or two, correctly phrased, could help. Maybe pre-game therapy would help. Or maybe, like the city of Bogota, Nordic larp just needs a few good mimes.

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THESE GAMES
MIGHT NEED A
WARNING LABEL

2027 - A LARP THAT TRIED

ANNIKA WAERN & PETER MUNTHE-KAAS | *2027: Livet efter kapitalismen* was designed as a utopian larp. Its society was formed from several modern political ideas: the Parecon economic system as an alternative to capitalism, farming according to permaculture principles, and the idea of collective learning centres replacing classical schools. *2027* was a larp that set out to change the world. So, what happened? Did *2027* create any kind of change, and if so, what did that change look like? We participated in the larp ourselves and interviewed some of the players to find out.

THE DESIGN

The larp was designed as a transition into utopia: although the trajectory was pre-set, it would be the players who would construct their utopian society throughout the larp. The hub of the larp was a collective learning

centre, which would be formed through workshoping during the first day of the larp, and to which new groups with very different backgrounds would arrive during the second half of the larp. The idea was to create constant tension and need for change.

The setup was a combination of a sequence of pre-planned events (such as going to work on the farm Änggärdet, and fugitives arriving at the learning centre) and off-game workshops. Before the larp, players were free to form their own characters and core groups, based on a rough description of six different cultures (representing similar but different visions for the future). After the first day or two of workshoping (depending on which group you were playing in), the larp played out in a quite realistic 360° illusion (Koljonen, 2007) setting, that was broken off twice for additional workshops. The second occasion was used to fast-forward time, so that the larp ended about five years after the time when we first went in-game.

THE LARP DID NOT PLAY OUT AS INTENDED

WHAT HAPPENED?

The larp did not play out as intended. One particular element the designers intended to use in the larp, the Parecon system (an economic system using participatory decision making to guide production and distribution of goods) became a backdrop rather than something that was actually tried out in practice.

From the designers' perspective it is of course always disappointing to see a larp play out in a way you did not

intend. But our wish is not to focus on why this happened but on what happened instead, and on how that affected the players.

THE INDIVIDUAL STORY

For every player we interviewed after the larp, the main experience was that of a journey of individual development. There was no consensus of main highlights or turning points of the larp – everyone had their own and they were closely connected to their individual storylines. Many of the participants most likely shared the goals expressed by D, an experienced roleplayer:

“I don’t just want to travel to a transition conference and sit and discuss permaculture, I want to experience an adventure. And when I say ‘adventure’ I primarily think about an inner journey, that’s what I am looking for in a larp.”

The story arc that D developed is a good example of a successful larp story. His character started as a rich and selfish man. At the beginning of the larp, he lost everything including his self-esteem in the economic crash. Arriving at the learning centre as a refugee, he was adopted into the “family of friends” collective, and eventually married into the family in a beautiful ceremony created in-game by the group. D talks about his experience as “larp magic at its best”.

Given that larp as a medium puts focus on the individual experience, the major changes that players recount are at the personal level. The report from I is characteristic:



“This larp has resulted in more knowledge about my personality and what choices I have to make the next time, maybe (...) I learned a lot”.

THE VETERANS

One storyline that emerged during the larp was the story of the veterans. It originated in the pre-designed storyline, with the two groups of players that arrived to the learning centre as refugees from Finland (which had become a tribal anarchy) and south Sweden (which had turned to fascism). Both groups played on war traumas, and despite the well-meaning efforts to welcome and integrate the newcomers, the newcomers and original centre members did not manage to merge, neither culturally nor socially. The newcomers created a social circle of their own which was named the veterans. The main activities of the group were to provide aid to the resistance movement in the south, and provide support for each other in dealing with war trauma. Socially the group kept to themselves, alienated from the sense of security and peace that the learning centre offered which they perceived as false. During the last act, they participated in a centre celebration event with a demonstration. The experience of feeling excluded, by the set structures of a completely well-meaning society, was a major takeaway for some of the players and one they wanted to play on.

SOCIALLY THE GROUP KEPT TO THEMSELVES

The demonstration during the final celebration was particularly interesting from this perspective. As players, we danced together with both veterans and the dance

group, and when the dance ended one of the larp organisers (in character) thanked the performers – omitting to thank the veterans. Whether it was an oversight or a sign of her ignoring a case of larp hacking we don't know – but we suspect it contributed to the sense of being made invisible that Oliver Nøglebæk (2012) recounts when writing about his experience in a blog post:

“I can imagine how this mirrors why ghettos form. Where the anger at society starts. How much easier it is to fight and break things. How painful it is to be unable to explain yourself. How there's no room for your way of life, even in the most accepting of societies. How much work it takes to bridge the cultural gaps and understand each other. How little things can trigger negative emotions.

I've come to the realization that why these insights are so strong, is that they were unintended. There was no special focus on it, on the contrary we were told to make our stories utopian. There was no active attempts to make us feel unwelcome, we did not set out to disrupt the utopian. But we still ended up feeling very much us-and-them. And they probably feel that we were an unwanted interruption, ungrateful and abrasive. All things I see every day in the immigration/integration debate”.

THE NORM DISCUSSION

If the storyline of the Veterans was an unintentional case of larp-hacking, the norm discussion was a more intentional diversion from the original larp design. The norm discussion was initiated by a group of politically active players with no previous larp experience and who



also were active members of Magasinet, the communal house that was used as a learning centre. In-game, they recruited a group of players that would study the norms enacted within the larp, and later organized a norm discussion where their observations were listed and discussed.

One of the reasons why the norm debate was enacted seems to have been a case of bleed between the off-game organization of the larp, and the perceived in-game power structures of the larp. In all preparations preceding the larp, one of the organizers took a strong leading role, both concerning the artistic vision for the larp and the practical arrangements. This form of organization stood in stark contrast with how the in-game community was supposed to function, and something that some participants reacted against. The power structure

persisted in-game, as the central storyline of the larp was pre-scripted. The organisers ran an in-game group called *the infopoint*. This group was responsible for spreading information around the learning centre, and in practice, it timed the storyline events. In-game, a rumour spread that the info-point was not only gathering and spreading information, but also taking decisions on its own. This rumour could potentially have been a good dramatic tool, as the control over information is a means of power and could well become problematic in an anarchist society. But due to the bleed between the in-game and off-game roles of the organizers it became very hard to keep it in-game.

Another origin of the norm discussion was that even in-game, the larp was enacting gender and race norms from our society today, rather than those that would

be likely to exist in a post-capitalist syndicalist society. The only general meeting that actually was played out in-game went badly for this precise reason. Hence, the norm discussion resulted in a list of observations that more reflected the power structures of the larp organisation as a whole and norms of our society today, than the power structures and norms enacted in-larp.

GOING FURTHER – LASTING CHANGES

Although many of the participants in 2027 are themselves active in various political movements, the larp itself was not a political movement. It did not leave any lasting changes (apart from the fact that Änggärdet got their potatoes harvested and Magasinet got running water in their kitchen), and neither did we as players learn much about how to change the world. The emergence of the norm debate also shows that we enacted an anarchistic community rather poorly. The meetings that were acted out in-game were unorganized and unconstructive in

THE LARP PROVIDED AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIMENT

a way that gave some of us with an activist background uncomfortable flashbacks. The learning that people recounted in our interviews were personal, related to their individual storylines, and most had little to do with the utopian theme of the larp.

Still, the larp maintained an explorative and escapist rhetoric (Montola & Stenros, 2010) and this is reflected in our interviews. As most larps do in some way or the other, the larp provided an opportunity to experiment with the personal experience of living in a physical and

social setting that is not accessible in ordinary life. And this seems to be enough: many participants still left 2027 with a sense that it is possible to change the world.

Despite all the changes that the larp went through, we shared one core experience. For two or three days, we lived in a sharing society, taking equal parts in physical and intellectual work, helping each other when needed, and aiming for a culture where every voice could be heard. Even if each player explored an aspect of this that was most important for that particular player, the collective experience was that it is possible. We let D have the final words:

”We are all traumatised, in some sense of the word, by the capitalist time we live in today. And even if we at an intellectual level want to put ourselves above it, it is a large and tough thing to do in practice. You have to see it and work on it together and individually, so that you develop as humans. Then, you can also develop as a group. I had ideas about this before the larp, but here I got to experience it emotionally”.

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2027: *Livet efter kapitalismen*, 2012. Morgan Jarl, Annika Lykta, Gabriel Widing, Anders Nilsson and Julia Fries; Sweden.

BEING AN ANARCHIST FOR 15 YEARS

MORGAN JARL | *2027: Livet efter kapitalismen* (2027: Life after capitalism) was organized as an attempt to examine an alternate post-capitalist society. We wanted to explore this using positive power drama (Wieslander, 2004) and constructive solutions to conflicts as the general goal. We also had a pedagogic goal; and contrary to what many thought, it was not to say that “this is a solution, this is THE WAY”. Rather, it served to show that there are alternatives to today’s hegemony, and that we can have a different future with a different economic system. We wanted to inspire hope and change, action and empowerment.

The main setting of 2027 was a learning community, called Magasinet (The Warehouse). We played a 15 years span from today until the year 2027. Several major

events occurred in the world during the story arc of the larp. Oil became much more expensive, and international trade slowed tremendously. Economies became more localized, and the Swedish government fell apart, which led to Sweden being split up into four different regions. The learning community of The Warehouse was in a region called Fria Mälardalen, an area surrounding Stockholm. It was a libertarian socialist society; a participatory economy with ecologically regenerative permacultural means of production. Another in-game place was the farm Änggärdet, also located in Fria Mälardalen. Additionally, the characters had to deal with a Fascist occupied Scania (Skåne) and Denmark in the south, and a Finland thrown into the chaos of tribal anarchy in the west.

UNFORTUNATELY,
THE TWO DID NOT
MERGE WELL

Personally, as one of the designers, I also had an artistic goal, inspired by the epic theatre of Bertold Brecht. I saw a clear parallel to the utopian goal of our project and the epic model of telling stories, and I wanted to explore this connection, while at the same time doing some artistic experiments with how to design stories in larp.

Unfortunately the two did not merge well, mainly due to practical design flaws rather than an intrinsic animosity between the concepts.

DRAMATIC, EPIC, POETIC

To understand what I mean with epic dramaturgy and epic larping, it is necessary to discuss the difference be-



tween the epic, the dramatic and the poetic in classical literature theory. Except for the fact that they are performed differently; poetry was sung, drama was acted and epics were narrated; they also differ in how they deal with time, what kind of stories they tell, and how they are told. It can easily be summarized like this: Dramatic literature is unified and immersive, epic literature is spread out and narrative and poetic literature is thematic, emotional and abstract. Due to the scope of this article, the focus will be on dramatic and epic dramaturgy.

The action of a dramatic play should be taking place within a 24-hour period, in the same place and with few or no subplots, focusing on a main story, usually with few characters. During the action of the drama we get

to see the fall of the hero: As the hero sees his flaw and redeems himself, the audience experiences catharsis, a sort of emotional or spiritual cleansing.

An epic, on the other hand, is not confined to this unity of time and space. The classic epics were long stories stretching several years, with a manifold of plots and subplots, enacted in vastly different locations. The stories are narrated, with a clear narrator voice, compared to the dramatic literature which usually tell stories or events that are important for the identity of a nation or a people with a main hero as the focus point. According to Bertold Brecht, the cathartic effect in dramatic plays only serves to remove its audience from their sense of what is wrong, and to rob them of their will to revolt against this. Many of his techniques, developed to

make the audience actively reflect on what they see, are being used in modern day jeepform and meta-larping.

DRAMATIC AND EPIC LARPS

The dramaturgy for a larp is obviously not the same as for literature or film and theatre, where there is only one story and a few characters. A larp is a multi-story event, where each story is told from the perspective of each character, each having their own dramaturgy. These stories are usually more in the control of the players, while the general direction of the whole game is the organizers' domain. Therefore, we have to think separately of the dramatic versus the epic from a player's point of view and an organizer's point of view.

THESE STORIES
ARE USUALLY IN
THE CONTROL OF
THE PLAYERS

Most larps are set in a single location, within a unified space of time, and dealing primarily with a story with few or no subplots connected to a few characters. On top of that, most people play for some level of immersion into the story and for bleed, which I would argue is a form of catharsis. From an organizer's perspective the stories are multifaceted of course, but the design also supports dramatic playing; 360° illusion, 1:1 scale in time and space, set in one place to create immersion in the illusion over a continuous time, and with a dramatic highpoint at the end of the game.

Thus, an epic larp design should be using more of the following tactics: Several locations, time jumps, and a technique for players to get an overview of the develop-

ment of several stories and plotlines. Perhaps also encourage a playing style where the story is in focus, enabling you to narrate parts of the story, particularly the time jumps, for instance by telling the stories of a future group of people, a nation or an international movement. This way, each player would still be the main character of their storyline, like in all larps, but with a sense of the bigger story.

COMBINING EPIC DRAMA WITH UTOPIAN VISION

We wanted to make sure people got the experience of a vision for the future, rather than trying to see whether it worked or not. To do this, we felt that an understanding of how we got to the utopia was important, to make the here and now playable and engaging for the players. We wanted to let people feel that they had helped build the utopia.

Hence, we designed an epic structure that spanned 15 years of transition, where the characters to different degrees got to experience the transition from our society to that of 2027. At the same time, we wanted to make sure that the players spent enough time in the utopia, in order to truly experience it. Thus, the first one or two days were spent in a blackbox, either workshoping or playing scenes, and the last two to three days were comprised of longer 360° acts and long-term blackboxing.

LET PEOPLE FEEL THAT
THEY HAD HELPED
BUILD THE UTOPIA

What we unfortunately failed to take into account, is the extent to which the *fog of larp* affects the player



(Fatland, 2005), and how one uncritically jumps onto stuff that is familiar if you can't see the attractors to lead you through the fog. Eirik Fatland suggests that when we enter a larp our minds get clouded, we enter the fog of the larp, and what leads us to action is what he calls attractors. Attractors signal a direction of action in the fog, things we can grasp onto and play on. Organizers can set up attractors using plots, groups, cultures, props and workshops before the game, but there will also be several attractors that come from convention, assumptions, and personal preferences and experience from players. As organizers, we compete with these attractors to guide the player through the fog towards the larp dramaturgy we want. In 2027, some of our attractors were positive drama, epic dramaturgy, the organization of the educational institutions and the

ideologies the game world was built on. These were not strong enough to be seen through the fog unless you were already familiar with them in some way. Several examples of this can be seen in comments from participants, mentioned by Annika Waern and Peter Munthe-Kaas (2013).

There were several players telling stories that were utopian and positive; a group marriage was celebrated, eco-farms were planned, norms were discussed and worked on, and people engaged in the future and pedagogies of the learning community. Generally speaking, the larp moved through the intended dramatic highpoints, with the organizers doing some not-so-gentle directing during breaks. Unfortunately, perhaps as much as half the larp ended up focusing on the conflict with the fascists

in the south, and the opposition between immigrants and those who were building the utopia. We saw more conflict-oriented gameplay than the utopian, positive drama we wanted in our vision, and we had to remind the players of what world they were in, and what the intentions of the vision were, while at the same time allowing for and encouraging people's own stories.

THEY FOUND THEIR
INDIVIDUAL
STORIES EASILY

During the game, some players had a hard time with the time jumps and epic dramaturgy, whereas some were blackbox extraordinaires with a great interest in developing characters in this way. They found their individual stories easily, without problems with time inconsistencies and story gaps. However, not everyone who handled the epic dramaturgy well got the positive drama down too. This is one clear example of our failure to get the utopian larping to the forefront of all players' minds, partly due to the epic structure, partly due to story and background choices.

The biggest dramaturgical problem was that which came out of the conflict between the immigrants and the resistance. The immigrants were introduced too early, and the utopia hadn't had time to gain enough stability amongst the players yet, causing the immigration to influence the mood of the game too much. The first two waves of immigrants should probably have been eliminated, since we wanted to focus on the utopia and not the transition. We had a game design ratio of one immigrant per three or four original members and ended

up compromising our vision due to popular demand with a ratio of two to three, a clear mistake from the organizers' side.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I do not think epic dramaturgy and utopian larps are intrinsically incompatible, but putting so many layers of complications for the players to deal with in one game did not help. Our design mistakes of bringing in resistance fighters and immigrants at such large proportions and so early, is in my opinion the main factor that broke the intended vision. The game became about the transition, not the utopia, because we did not prepare the players properly.

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Spring wind in bushes and trees
In sunbeams green clad figures pass stealthy
Artistic face paint, pointed ears, eyes
with a deep penetrating calmness
Tension in the air, wild bees buzz around
the early flowers

KOMYO GUNDEL

THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION AND PERSONAL
TRANSFORMATION THROUGH ROLE-PLAY

LESS LARP IN EDU-LARP DESIGN

MICHAŁ MOCHOCKI | When you design educational larps, you want learners to develop skills and knowledge. In political larps, you make people rethink their political/ideological/social positions (or you just try to impose your own views on them). The underlying idea is the same, anyway. Whether you aim at skill/knowledge building or personality/worldview formation (I've done both), the larp experience should result in specific learning outcomes (as edu-theory calls it). Your main concern is how to produce a lasting change in the minds of the participants. And the more experience and research I get, the more convinced I am it cannot be achieved with larp itself. Larp can only make a short-term change – if you want it to be lasting, you must focus less on larp and more on follow-up activities.

GLIWICE CONFEDERATION

My first large-scale larp was *The Gliwice Confederation*, a campaign promoting Dzikie Pola historical tabletop roleplaying game. We put strong (if tongue-in-cheek) emphasis on the development of national identity based on the Sarmatian cultural heritage. (Like *Albion* for England or *Gallia* for France, *Sarmatia* is a nostalgic name for the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of 16-18th c.: a unique socio-political mixture of feudalism and republicanism.) For many of us it has become a

YAY, THIS IS AS
MUCH BLEED AS IT
CAN GET!

deeply transformative experience, its influence still to be seen 10 years after the project ended. I wrote about it in my paper “Reliving Sarmatia” in *States of Play* (2012). We tend to use archaic language and historical honorifics; frequently refer to Sarmatia-themed films, music, fiction and games; and re-enact some 17th-century social interaction codes when we meet. And we are not roleplaying when we do all that. It has become part of our real-world identity (yay, this is as much bleed as it can get!).

But what worked with some of us didn't work with others. Some people came to one or two games and that was it, never getting involved in other fandom activities. The “permanent Sarmatisation” is typical of those who combined larps or tabletop role-play with writing texts, organizing events, online play, etc. That's why I think a single experience, even if emotionally intense, in the long run brings nothing. Null. No effect. Especially with teenagers, who casually try different hobbies and styles, getting overenthusiastic with one thing and soon dropping it for



another. A game can definitely light a spark of genuine interest – but the spark will quickly die out without fuel.

SOME THEORY

Okay, I have heard about one-shot games becoming life-changing eye-openers. But I believe it's possible only in exceptional cases. Emma Wieslander can tell you why:

I believe that one of the key factors in what is called "bleed" [...] is that the game events sometimes tie in to our personal myth, "the story" that we tell our self, in a way that fuels the story.

(Wieslander 2012: 129)

Like I said: the spark needs fuel. Sometimes the right fuel is already there. If the game content reacts with

**I'D ARGUE THAT
LARP DOESN'T
TRANSFORM PEOPLE**

your personal myth, then yes, it may have the power to produce a lasting change single-handedly. But that's not something we can guarantee or predict – it's accidental. Maybe

you could make correct guesses about people's personal myths in a well-known target group. But with general school audiences, don't count on it.

Beside these personal-myth exceptions, I'd argue larp doesn't transform people – it opens for transformation. A well-designed game can be a great beginning, but no more than a beginning. It has to be followed either with more role-plays in order to make it a repeated, not single, experience – or with equally well-designed reflective and creative activities.

Edu-larp research is getting increasingly aware of it. See e.g. Aarebrot & Nielsen's report of two extreme cases. One teacher used their larp as the basis for extensive in-class discussion for a long time. Several weeks after the game, students:

participated very actively in the discussion and used their own [game] experience [...] showed both an intellectual and emotional commitment [...] allowed previous attitudes to be discussed in the light of the new experiences [...] almost all the pupils participated on equal basis.

(Aarebrot & Nielsen 2012: 28-29).

Another teacher just moved on to another topic as if the larp hadn't happened. Results?

the class seemed unable to relate their own experience to the larger issues at hand [...] not realizing the strong link between the game and current day matters [...] did not transfer their experience to other situations [...] saw the game as an isolated event.

(Aarebrot & Nielsen 2012: 28)

A hard lesson for larp educators: if you stop at the larp itself, your work will often be a waste of time. I'm not the first to claim that: Aarebrot & Nielsen (2012: 29), Karalevich (2012: 42) and Henriksen (2010: 235) have made this point earlier. What I want to emphasize is the severe consequence it has for edu-larp design: follow-up activities should become an integral part of it, reaching far beyond the immediate debriefing.



THE DEMOCRACY PROJECT

We stepped in this direction with the *DEMOCRacy Project* (2012), funded by the Swiss-Polish Cooperation Programme and organised by the historical reenactment society *Polspolite Ruszenie Szlachty Ziemi Krakowskiej*. It reached 1100 15-year-olds in 64 larps structured on three levels. Firstly, 56 classes in junior high schools took part in larps simulating 17th-century sejmiks (local assemblies), each electing 3 members for the second-level games. The 168 elected representatives met on 7 general sejmiks (assemblies for larger regions), again electing 3 representatives for the national Sejm (parliament). In the final third-level larp, these 21 middle-schoolers formed the House of Representatives, while 11 historical reenactors played the King, Senate and royal court staff.

The primary concern of DEMOCRacy was not history but civic education. We targeted communes with the lowest voting turnout among the youth, the aim being to inspire civic-mindedness and encourage voting participation. Going back to 17th century was a trick to shield the organisers from accusations of political propaganda. Had we made schoolchildren reenact the present-day political scene, we could have been accused of campaigning for this or that party (strictly prohibited in schools!). Besides, this century is the core period of our reenactment society. And, guess what! Some of us had been involved in the above-mentioned Gliwice Confederation. Sarmatised as teenagers or young adults, in late twenties/mid-thirties we are still far from letting it go: yet more evidence for the lasting effect on identity formation.

Anyway, we wanted both: repeated play experience and carefully designed follow-up activities. Given the limited time and resources, we had to curb our ambitions. We had fiddled with the idea of ongoing online play with a weekly updated storyline and gamified forum. Students who wouldn't have been elected could still be active in the game, supporting their representatives all the way to the final Sejm. Unfortunately, we didn't have enough staff to handle that. We did maintain a website with a new diary/blog entry and bookmark on a map added after each game, but it lacked the participatory quality we had envisioned.

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In the schools, each first-level game was preceded with a multimedia talk and followed with a discussion, covering it all in one 3-hour meeting. I think any long-term edu-benefit for first-level players would be possible only if their teachers had skillfully built on the experience in subsequent weeks (and I regret we didn't have detailed lesson plans for them).

Second-level games were different. We ran follow-up group tasks introducing main concepts of political theory and facilitated full-blown debates, the quality of which frequently exceeded our expectations. Details will be forgotten over time, but I am convinced the 160+ players will long remember that Polish parliamentary traditions have roots in the sejmiks and Sejms of noblemen's democracy. And I bet they won't quickly forget the satisfaction of being elected in a public vote!

Even more so, if we think of the 21 who made it to the final Sejm. An unusual view, 15-year-olds listening attentively to professors discussing history and political science, made us realize we had done a damn good job.

FINAL THOUGHTS

We have to face it, friends. Transformative larps need 50% of larp design and 50% instructional design. Examples? Organize or outline additional meetings. Create online (e-learning?) content to extend the experience. If your larp is about politics and social activism, contact the players afterwards and make them involved in real-world action. If you target schools, write ready-made lesson plans for teachers. Ouch! All this will cost additional time and effort, while not carrying the creative thrill of scenario writing. But if we take our educational objectives seriously, I don't think we have much choice.

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