

Genesi

This paper will take the reader through my early theories on larp, and the forming of the idea of "Genesi". The first part of the text concerns communicating a fantasy. This I believe is the base level of understanding any larper may attain, with the goal to communicate a homogenous piece to a heterogenic audience. The second part pertains to making the participants inhabit Fantasia. The larper who reaches this understanding has identified the complexity of the individualized context and begun to see that it is about "being there". In the last part of the text I vision about another possible way of thinking about larp. This afterword talks about the fundamentals of delivering the fantastic.

This is a rather lengthy treatise on a rather long time of larping. Following the chronology in which the theories evolved I will show how I ended up, after ten years of research, in my own taboo Gray Field, with a radically different perspective.

Allow me to backtrack briefly to when my brother, my cousin and I set out hunting trolls in the Stockholm archipelago. As a troll hunting child ninja I came to meet the forest and my compadres, within our collective imagination. A swamp became an ancient marshland, filled with the grassy heads of hatching trolls. My friends were true-to-life heroes. Sometimes this hindered me from seeing things for what they were, but more often it enabled me to see the world more clearly. From a theatre perspective Keith Johnstone¹ describes a similar experience, when an environment becomes truly visible only after he renamed every object, colour and element in it. However, I know now that this was more than just maturing in my perception of reality, casting off preconceptions. This was the beginning of my search.

It is my task in this paper to present the arguments behind my methods and it is sometimes a bit more theoretical than the topic deserves. By no means I expect my formulas and graphs to be used in meticulous analysis of the living dreams. But they will be useful for design, preparations and review. And they do give us tools for starting to decode the enigmatic core of our art.

Although all art has a presence, a "something" quality, larp is defined by the fact that it *only* exists in this vibrant moment of living dreams. Being too preoccupied with

¹ *Impro: Improvisation and Theatre* (1981) theatre theory book by Keith Johnstone, originally published by Eyre Methuen Ltd.

the splendour of all the related arts involved in the omni larp piece, we have yet to understand our own qualitative heart.

And most importantly, while this text is in a way an ontology of larp, the standpoint I give here is less about mastering the life force of larp, and more about using larp to understand the force of life. What is it that gives us energy and what makes inanimate things come to life?

I would like to thank Elge Larsson and Gabriel Sandberg, for their invaluable comments and other feedback.

Communicating the Fantasy

It is a natural thing to want to communicate the fantasy to the invited, when one sets out to make a larp in the world of choice. Lit inside by a fire only the first power of creation can give, the larper starts to plan. How to make people feel the drama? How to explain the subtleties of the culture? How to enact the magic? Posed with these divine questions it's only natural that she wants to create a coherent image. This is the origin of the so-called "First Letter"² sent out in most larps.

Some Swedes continue to call it the first letter, although today it is more often not some sheets of paper in the mail, but instead a printed book or a dynamic web site. Still, the prevalent source material has inherited this primal urge to communicate the inner world of the author.

My original work was about categorising this written material, and specifically to clarify what portion of the text should be implicit, respectively explicit in mode.³ In traditional fantasy larp the writers tend to mix old and poetic linguistic usage with contemporary prose. The models clarify the effect of this tendency.

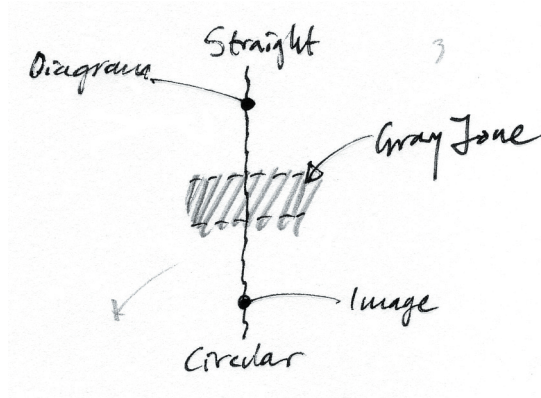
The elements of a larp can be defined along a Horizontal range, from "In" to "Out". Source material is classified as In if it pertains to or exists inside the Larp Space, that is within the duration, area and idea of the diegesis⁴ of the larp. An example could be a handwritten spellbook. Out elements are those that exist in the mundane space, the non-diegetic reality, outside the Larp Space. This could for example be a printout with spell hit-points (see ill. 1).

The Horizontal range division in the Simple Balance Model is important to larpers, because they create an imagined reality that is to be open to the participants, instead of a finished piece of fiction. Material that deals with the fictive (such as the wardrobe, food

² The First Letter, Practice initially held by Swedish larpers around the Stockholm suburb of Sollentuna. The first big mail out before a larp is called "The First Letter" and the second one is predominantly called the "World Letter", containing world and rules description, followed traditionally by "The Group Letter" containing character specific source material.

³ My models of simple and complex balance emerged during the production of *Trenne Byar* (1992 – 1994) and was presented at Knutpunkt 98, an international larp convention held in Stockholm, Sweden, February 1998.

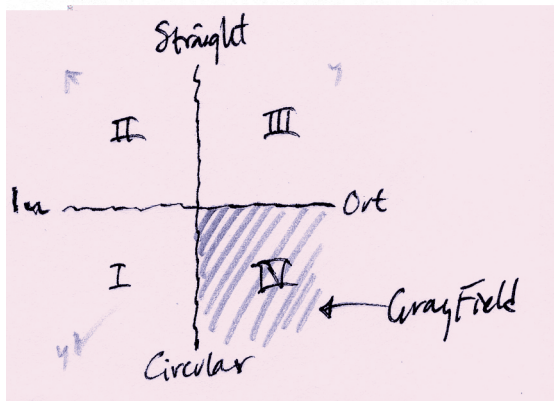
⁴ Diegesis, the story world.



The first quarter (I) of the matrix is the “Emotive Field”. The model classifies as Emotive all In-Circular material, pertaining to the diegesis and communicating indirectly. An example could be a fantasy culture’s cuisine. Rather than stating or clarifying the fiction, this material sets the mood and stirs emotions.

The second quarter (II) of the matrix is the “Connective Field”. The model classifies as Connective all In-Straight material, pertaining to the diegesis and communicating directly. An example could be a background story on how the cooking evolved. Here the material still acts within the Larp Space, but with a direct modus, so that it explains the nature of the fiction.

The third quarter (III) of the matrix is the “Directive Field”. The model classifies as Directive all Out-Straight material, pertaining to the non-diegetic and communicating directly. An example could be rules on lighting a fire for safe outdoor cooking. This



kind of source material helps defining the realities of the larp, setting the frame with no uncertain terms.

The last quarter (IV) of the matrix is the “Gray Field”. The model classifies as Gray all Out-Circular material, pertaining to the non-diegetic, but communicating indirectly. An example could be the rule described in verse. The original gray zones of the two scales are replaced by this Gray Field. One could maintain that there must be a gray zone on the borders along the two axes. For the purpose of making a clear and potent model this distinction in detail within the four fields has been omitted.

Based on the Complex Balance Model it is clear that descriptive directions should be conveyed in a direct and straight manner. It also shows that emotive material works poorly on the Out issues, and vice versa that a direct mode is inappropriate for emotive communication. This is, of course, still simplistic but it clarifies the base mechanics of the source material for a traditional larp. The model applies equally to the overall body of text, as to its smallest building blocks, such as a sentence or its clauses. For example:

(A) *“A fire bolt throws the target to the ground, stealing a piece of the life force.”*

What does it really mean? It is clearly written as In text, not a bit of it breaking the fantasy of the Larp Space, still it is also clearly a rule text. The first part of the sentence is Straight “bolt throws the target”, whereas the latter is Circular “stealing a piece of the life force”. Here is the example normalised:

(B) *“A Fire Bolt spell brings down the target, causing the deduction of one hitpoint.”*

If the codes of the text are universally known by the participants (i.e. a piece of life force equals one hitpoint), then the sentence is less ambiguous, but otherwise it is in the Gray Field. The insight here could of course be to name rule elements so that they can exist in a diegetic context (rename “hitpoint” to “life force”). Experience however has shown that participants tend to misuse this. When it is easy to have game rule discussions without directly disturbing the game, acting tends to decline. Instead of playing out a staredown, participants simply say: *“Noble knight, what is your life force?”* This reduces the larp to talking heads, or a re-enacted game. A better solution would then be to keep in this case magic in the Emotive. An example sentence could be:

(C) *“Fire thrusts into the hero like a battering ram, almost crushing him as he is thrown to the ground.”*

This sentence gives little rules but all the emotions a role-player would need to act out the effect of the spell.

I would propose that the insight taught here is to write in a mode suited for the purpose – direct for rules and poetic for tales. In the examples above maybe an edited version of B (Directive) and C (Emotive) plus a Connective sentence would be best:

(D) *“The Fire Bolt is a dangerous spell, that like a flaming battering ram throws the target bleeding to the ground (deduct one hitpoint).”*

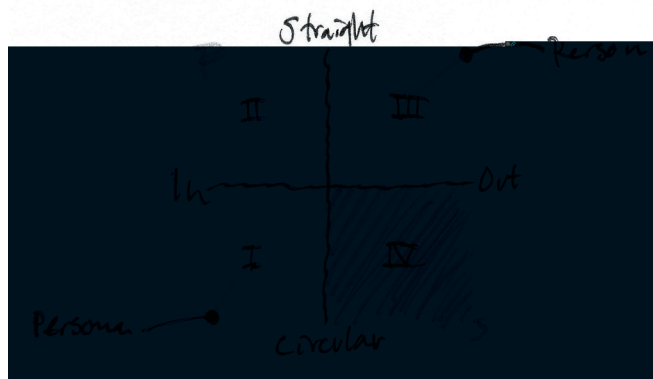
Thus a new theorem of Complex Balance can be deducted:

The norm should be to avoid the Gray Field and to have equal amount in the first, second and third field, balancing emotive, connective and directive source material.

The model promotes an equilibrium between such source material that informs the participants on the framework of the event, and that, which creates feelings and understanding of the fiction. Historically, the common division in source material for Swedish larps follows roughly the Complex Balance Model. The participant typically gets a written description of the world, containing inspirational lyrics and pictures, descriptive prose and rules. As a rule of thumb, the more material in the Grey Field, where the text is multi-modal or ill-phrased for its purpose, the less quality the larp. A balanced First Letter would include a Fascination section (quarter I, inspiring the feel of the drama), a Fiction section (II, outlining the story and world) and a Framework section (III, setting the form and rules of the larp). When applied on a participant's personal information we might get a poem on the heroine (I, the image and self-image), a background description (II, the history and story) and a set of functions throughout the game (III, the roles and purpose).

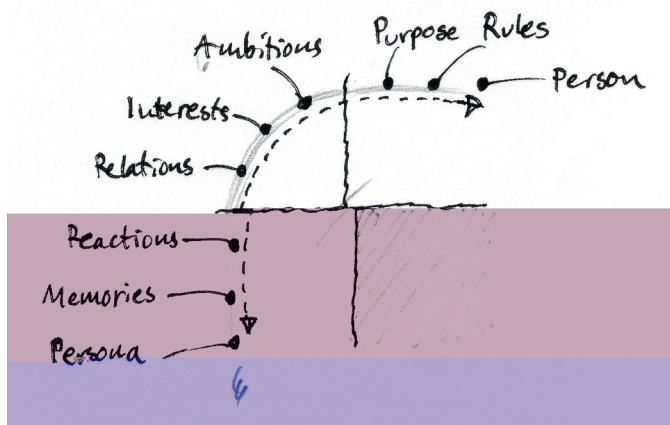
As with the Simple Balance, diverging from the norm, as long as it is deliberate, may potentially be very interesting depending on the project.

To better understand the mechanics of larp communication we need to add the concepts of "Person" and "Persona". Person is the role-playing individual herself – placed in the Directive field of the matrix. It represents the most concrete and real part of the larp for the participant. The Persona is the alter ego, the fictive person within the Larp Space, placed in the Emotive field of the matrix. Traditionally the terms "role-player" and "character" are used, but that represents a subdivision, and mechanisms within



the Person and Persona, as will be described below. For now the important thing is the division between the participant and what she plays (see ill. 4).

Using the theorem of the Complex Balance Model the Persona is conveyed in the source material with equal amounts of Emotive material (such as memories, reactions), Connective material (relations, interests, ambitions) and Directive material (purpose, rules). This forms an emotional and intellectual link between the Person and the Persona, and the same applies for the connection between the Person and the game world. In an ideal situation an equal amount of source material in each field would make for a perfect connection between the participant and the fictive heroine and her world (see ill. 5).



In any communication there is a sender-receiver relationship, although in a collective piece such as larp the responsibilities may shift. The Balance models and the concept of The Link could be seen as a contribution to the debate on Auteur and Audience in larp. Larpers have always taken great pride in the fact that they have no “audience”, but saying there is no originator of a fantasy is a sure way for no one to take responsibility for it. Also, it seems that the co-authorship of the participant is mostly selfish (costume, intrigues, living quarters), and not for the whole larp. I’m a strong believer of the co-creating audience in larp – just in a totally different way than we are used to from non-participatory art.

Constructing the source material as outlined above will effectively communicate the world to the participants. As stated in the opening, this is the base level of understanding larp mechanics. Limiting the thinking to “communication” is an attitude that causes many problems in larp.

Inhabiting Fantasia

The world is at the participants' feet, and now they need to journey into it, assimilate with the culture, feel at home. Again the author starts to plan, this time quickened by the will to guide others into the land of Fantasia. What really triggers the participants' commitment? How can they learn to become natives? What makes them immerse? How may the mechanics of the rules help?

First one must look at what layers of creative human expression make up the larp art. Knowing that is knowing what governs the participants' transformation.

Over the years no larp debate in Sweden has been more persistent than the one about Props versus Acting. The fanzines *Fëa Livia* and *StrapatS*⁵ became this polarisation personified. The mainstream of larp originated from a will to enact the games and fictions loved by that type of role-players. For them the play of rules and the contest of skill with a padded sword was the inspiration. Fancy acting was not a pre-requisite. They would be called "Gamists" today according to the *Three Way Model*⁶, with *StrapatS* as their forum at that time. Alongside them were the thespians, alive with the will to explore alternate forms of play and improvisation. They claimed that a larp could be held without a fantasy prop in sight – that the drama was the key. The fanzine *Fëa Livia* was founded by this crowd and has remained a channel for the drama and art oriented larp debate. In the *Three Way Model* the story-oriented larpers are divided into Immersionists and Dramatists.

The real picture of larp style is more complex. Larpers of any grouping praise acting, props or rules as important for engaging with the experience, but the debate polarised into these two camps. Pages up and pages down argued for "the joy of play without the yoke of drama practice", against writings on "the art of live acting over the dumb rubber sword swashbuckling".

Approaching the debate from the *Genesour's* point of view yields a new theorem:

The fully participatory larp piece, which only exists in the shared fantasy, has an inherent craft at the core, making all other disciplines external.

Perhaps the foremost element in the nature of larp, that elevates it above other participatory art forms is the fact that the participation *is* the piece, and that it truly exists in the collective moment when the play and fantasy is shared (although it touches on expressions outside the larp). This means that the fiction is inseparable from the expression, and that the impression is inseparable from the narrative. It all exists

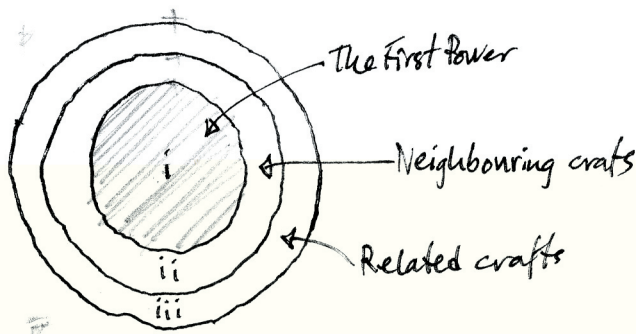
⁵ *Fëa Livia*, Swedish larp fanzine with a circulation of up to a 1000 copies, first published by the founders (Samir Belarbi and others) in 1993. *StrapatS* is another Swedish larp fanzine, edited and published all through the years of its existence (1992–97) by the founder Jonas Nelson.

⁶ *The Three Way Model: Revision of the Threefold Model* (2003), by Petter Bøckman in the Knudepunkt 2003 book *As Larp Grows Up – Theory and Methods in Larp*, published Projektgruppen KP03.

in a singular point where the consumption of the message becomes the message. Elge Larsson theorises that “*In larp the ‘form’ and the ‘content’ switch places*”.

As an example the stage version of *Hamlet* is content to the “theatre form”, whereas the participatory *Hamlet*⁷ can be seen as a form for the “larp content”, an arena for the moment of unity. Since larpers can borrow methods for packaging larp in game-like, theatrical, novelistic or cinematic experiences, but lack the methods for the larp heart, it seldom rises above physical gaming, improvisational theatre or simulation. It becomes “darp”; dead action role-play.

Instead of weighing acting, drama, involvement, rules, props and milieu against each other they should be seen within concentric layers around the core (see ill. 6).



Starting from the outside in, the Concentric Model classifies as Related crafts (layer iii) all those disciplines necessary to pull off the event, but largely independent of the larp form. The layer includes event administration, logistics, safety and sanitation, e-learning and information technology, engineering, and economy and private and public funding. Perhaps the best book written for larp on the topic of production is *Saga Mot Verklighet*⁸. And make no mistake, whether it is as a committed participant or a serious author, the larper needs to be a bit of a renaissance man, apt in many related vocations.

The second layer (ii), the Neighbouring crafts, includes such cultural and societal activities that exist within the omni-form of larp. That is, because we create a snippet of an imagined reality, we are forced to represent and animate all relevant elements of it. For a more re-enactment-oriented larp this would entail contextual expertise for

⁷ *Hamlet*, a participatory version of the Shakespearean play, including theatre, film and larp elements. Turn of the century furniture, antique and theatre costumes, fictive news-reels, food and drink and written roles was prepared for the participants. The event was held in a large cave under a church in Stockholm.

⁸ *Saga Mot Verklighet – Att Arrangera Levande Rollspel* (1998) (*Saga Against Reality: To Produce Live Action Role-Play*) Swedish book on larp production by Henrik Summanen and Thomas Walch, published by Natur och Kultur.

The larp piece only exists in the shared fantasy, which means that the larp is both a mental and physical form of human expression that can only be realised in unity. This unity is a cycle of creation and consumption. Thus the notion of “no audience” doesn’t ring true:

It’s not that larp lacks an audience and has no use for an audience theory, in fact it has a radically different audience situation, but so far lacks a tailored theory.

In literature, fine arts, film and theatre, where the concept of consumer/audience is more clear, the connection with the text is a secondary identification with, for example, the protagonist. That is about recognition, suspension of disbelief and sense of wonder. Because in larp participants create the fantasy *and* inhabit Fantasia it is easy to think that there is no bystander. Everybody is the heroine. Sometimes there is also talk about the “inner scene”, a much too egocentric and exclusive description of the larper experience. Consequently many larps are merely a forum for the selfish lust to be grand, to experience being the heroine – far from the vision of shared fantasy.

In fact every participant is a sort of a spectator. This however is not through a passive and personal secondary identification, but by the means of active and collective direct identification with the Personas and their world. The larp “audienceship” therefore depends on *both* a personal connection *and* a collective commitment. The mechanisms of the larp audience, and its relationship to the piece, are based on two principles. The first one is the *Feedforward Principle* of collective commitment:

Larp is a recursively reinforced, shared and enacted fantasy.

The easiest way to understand the principle of Feedforward is to think of larp as a relationship. “What you put in is what you get out”, is half the truth. Whatever the participants invest will be the larp. Regardless of if it is sewing clothes before the larp or singing a campfire song during it, it is important to remember that this is not about nice props, acting et cetera, but about the energy that a participant personally invests. Nothing seasons a meal better than catching and preparing the fish yourself. The other half of the truth is that whatever one participant reflects will feed or drain the other. A team in unity will grow and the total will be greater than the sum of the parts. The collective side of the larp audienceship is especially apparent when it comes to enacting status. Regardless of how into the act the King is, there will be no supremacy if there are no humble subjects. If the King’s authority is reflected in the adoration and fear of the people, then he will be crowned. The other participants’ presence is a larper’s personal game manoeuvrability, and what she projects back will be the fuel of their fantasy.

The second principle is the *Heroine’s Gaze* of the diegetic view:

To see the living Fantasia the participant must become an intimate part of it.

The principle of the Heroine’s Gaze states that every participant must enter the diegesis as much as any other element of the larp. If you don’t become a part of the fairytale,

you won't see the fairies; the Magician will remain some guy waving his arms; your lost love will continue to be the girl from school, whom you might not even like. But if you connect, if you become a native, then your friends may do that too. And beware, for you will fall in love!

The way to relate to Fantasia (thinking, touching, looking, listening, tasting), must be as a "Fantasian". It helps to think of it as child's play. For the believer the fir cones with needle legs are small livestock!

This dictates a radically different audience perspective than that in mass media and non-participatory art. In larp there is a perspective of collective active gaze, instead of that of individual passive spectatorship. The piece is not merely "finished" in the spectators' mind, it is created by the participants that can only fully meet the piece they help create, by becoming an intricate part of it. This active and direct position for the participants is a network of first person views. Together the two principles form the basis for the theorem of the *First Person Audience* (FPA):

The mundane and private spectator must become an active part of a first person audience – an intimate part of the Larp Space – looking together through the eyes of fantasy heroes.

The task is of course not as simple as communicating the fantasy effectively. It is about making the participants feed into each other, fully entering the larp world. How the author makes them live the idea will be the impact of the piece.

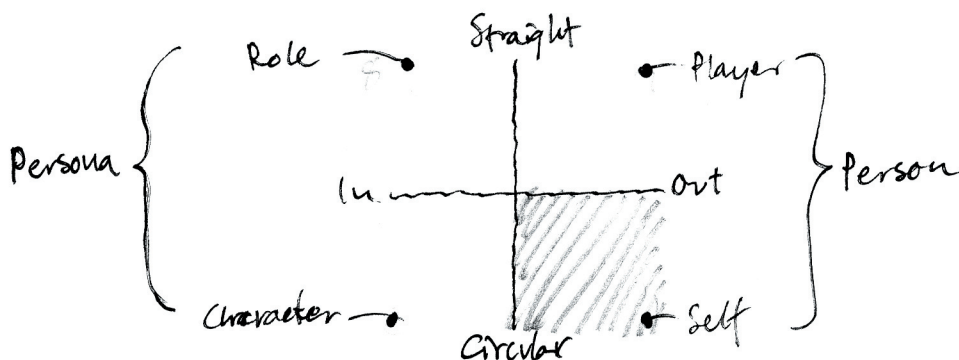
To understand the mechanisms of making a participant become a heroine, one needs to look closer at the concept of game personality. The Link for communicating the fictive Persona to the real Person requires no subdivision of the two, whereas the act of participation does.

There are parts of the human psyche that lay in the open and others that elude introspection. The concept of Person is thus divided into "Player" as the Straight part and "Self" as the Circular. The Player can be described as "the active will to play", the articulated part of an individual that has decided to partake in a larp. In one perspective the Player is a role that the Person takes on when she becomes a participant – a role necessary for the migration to a FPA. The Self of that individual can be understood as "the inner mechanisms of the participants' ability to participate". In other words it is that which is not directly under control of the will. To become a collective participant, the larper must exercise a will to partake, overcoming her inner constraints. Such things as personal history, situation and personality traits affect the competence to larp.

Likewise, the fictive Persona is made up by concrete results of underlying processes. I divide the Persona into the Straight "Role" and the Circular "Character". Put in various situations the Persona will (like a real individual) take on different Roles. Consequently a Persona will have many Roles in a larp but only one Character. The Character represents the innermost mechanism of the diegetic Persona. It is the "internal machine for role selection", corresponding to the game context. Since this

has been mostly an ad-hoc and non-articulated response by the Person (and not of the Persona as it should), the Character is defined with certainty only in retrospect. As source material the Character has been that which lies between the expressed elements of the personal drama. It is the cause and effect of the goals, relations, intrigues, function and background. The “Character-Role” relationship works like a simpler version of the “Self-Player” relationship. In other words it is the implicit identity of the fictive person, dictating how she acts and reacts, and consequently which Roles she takes on in different situations.

Note that I use Role as described by The Meilahti School – as a “subject position within a set discourse”.¹² The Meilahti School however defines Character as “a framework of roles”, whereas I use it as a Role selector. My term Persona is perhaps synonymous with Character according to the Meilahti School, a distinction however that needs a closer look at the underlying theories of identity in both approaches (see ill. 7).



By these internal subdivisions of Person and Persona, we see respectively how the Self influences the Player and Character influences the Roles. And more importantly, we may now look at the cross-dependencies of the “Role-Player” and the “Character-Self”. The Role-Player is an individual that is exercising her active will to play the Role suitable for the specific larp situation. In a perfect larp situation (and those occur) there is no difference between the fictive heroine’s role and the real person’s role. The Role-Player is as much an expression of the heroine as one of the larper. The Meilahti School describes Roles as “an artificial closure articulating the player within the diegetic frame of the game or in a real-life situation. [...] in fact player is a role as well”.

The Character-Self is the inner mechanisms governing *both* the fictitious and the real expression of the individual.

¹² The *Meilahti Model* (2003), by Jaakko Stenros and Henri Hakkarainen, published in the KP03 book by Projektgruppen KP03.

To make your participants change to First Person is an inner journey from Role-Player to Character-Self and back again. This cycle with no start or end, where one element influences the other, is the *Moebius Cycle*. The Player negotiates with the Self, and the Character negotiates with the Role, and the object is for the Player and the Role to merge. Then the choice is no longer whether to play a part in a larp, but what part to play in Fantasia. And eventually this is as little a choice as it is in mundane life – the role becomes nature, a matter of relating and reacting. The Self and the Character is one, and there is only one expression of the individual at a given moment (the Role-Player). Instead of an inner relationship between Character and Role in the Persona, corresponding to the Self-Player relationship in the Person, we have a Character-Self governing the Role-Player. Because the Role-Player is FPA, the role the individual takes on (when she is in the larp situation) is synonymous with that which the heroine takes on (in the specific situation in the larp).

One major factor in the FPA process is the diversity of play modes (specifically from more rule oriented to more narrative), or *Larp Gestalt*. The assimilation of participants into Larp Space is influenced by the individual nature of the participant, the various game situations, and the general game structure. Craig Lindley¹⁰ describes this in computer games, defining the concept of game gestalt, and Bøckman touches on it for larp in the Three Way model. First there is various “participant attitude”, or different styles of experiencing the larp. Predominantly the beginners tend to be Gameists and the older larpers Dramatists or Immersionists. A serious author needs to design a larp that achieves a balance between the rule oriented and the narrative oriented Larp Gestalt. Managing the Larp Gestalt, the way the participants engage, is about more than managing participant attitude; it also includes controlling different game situations. Typically the larp will shift gestalts for most participants during the game. The mornings can be low on acting and the night high on fighting. Likewise the beginning of a larp is typically weak in acting, and the end heavy on fighting. The location will also prompt gestalt shifts, from dramatic in the social areas, such as the tavern, to more rule and skill related in places of conflict, such as the crossroads and keeps. Why does a larp follow these patterns and how may we control the change of gestalt for a more coherent and effective larp?

Lindley writes that “Good game design achieves better integration of the gameplay and narrative structures of the game”. He talks about how engagement in one pattern of gaming limits the ability to engage in others:

[T]he apprehension of an experience as a narrative requires the cognitive construction of a narrative gestalt, a cognitive structure or pattern allowing the perception and understanding of an unfolding sequence of phenomena as a unified narrative. [...] Within the range of effort required for immersion and engagement, if gameplay consumes most of the player's available cognitive resources, there will be little scope left for perceiving complex narrative patterns [...] Conversely, focusing on the development of the sense of narrative [...] reduces the player's need and capacity for a highly engaging gameplay gestalt. (Lindley 2003)

Translated to larp this means that the ability to perform in the game (create and experience the larp) is a negotiation between rule and story for the participants' attention. If the larp is poorly designed, so that the game situations don't deal with the participants' attitudes, the game will fail. In the ontology of larp one needs to attend to the dynamics between playing the structure of the larp and playing the narrative of the larp. In larp the equivalence of "gameplay" could be said to be such elements as the direct activities of boffer fighting (damage and hitpoints) and magic (ability and effect), but also more complex rule bound activities such as negotiations (contracts and conflicting interests). The narrative elements in larp are such activities as intrigues (relations and agendas), or missions and larger turn of events. As in a screen-based computer RPG, the larp event entails both gaming and narrative. A larp narrative can be both a dynamic turn of events (story) or a static experience of a setting (exposé).

All narration requires rules and all rules must impact on the continuation of the narrative.

Boffer fights without real consequence, with the same yrchs attacking every dawn, are very disturbing. Likewise, negotiations become idiotic when none of the participants know how to measure power or determine veto. This falls back to the simple idea of "The Constant Currency" that *Trenne byar*¹⁵ organisers formulated – all services and objects in a larp are measured against the available meals.

This follows the logic of Maslow's pyramid, but for a lifestyle instead of a lifestyle. Who cares about a magic parchment scroll when there is mead and wild bore to be had? The answer is of course: "not a single starved person, but every hungry hero!" Only when the game mechanisms and game narrative are equal will the scroll become important. As Lindley phrases it:

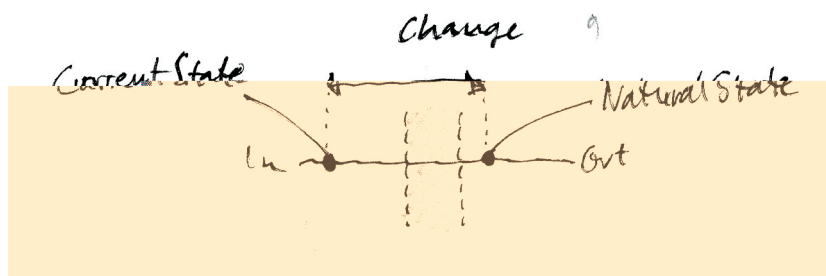
Notice, however, that at the lowest level of the dramatic structure of a game, the conflict within the detail of the gameplay experience is never actually one of the player-character's survival, but one involving tradeoffs within cognitive, emotive, and performative effort. (Lindley 2003)

Of course, the scroll will only become magical to the participants who have entered the diegesis wholeheartedly.¹⁴ A capturing fantasy is not as simple as rules (Gameism), or engagement in the experience (Immersionism), devotion to the story (Dramatism) or meticulously coffee-stained paper (Simulationism).

¹⁵ *Trenne byar*, (Three Villages), A one week long fantasy larp in Sweden, in the summer of 1994, with 1000 plus participants from Scandinavia and some international participants. Three villages were constructed and the "off-live rune" was introduced as a means of demarking Out elements within the larp area. About ten thousand copper and tin coins were hand hammered and several languages constructed, with words, grammar and runes. The larp was a rather chaotic mix of many fantasy concepts, packaged in a unique Swedish flavour. Although much didn't work out as planned it is perhaps one of the most important milestones in Scandinavian larp, bringing a higher standard of rules, acting, costume, houses and role material.

For the purpose of analysing and steering the modes of play within a larp, the concepts of *Larp State* and *Larp Force* are defined.

Using the Simple Balance model one can see that an element takes a synchronous position as having a state of more or less In or Out, at a given place and time in the larp. This is true for inanimate elements (concrete ones such as a jacket, or abstract ones such as an intrigue) and the live participants themselves. The position also changes revealing a diachronic image of the element's Larp State (see ill. 8).



Instead of perceiving varying Larp State as a change in the position of the objects, they can be seen as static quantum objects, around which the participant is forced to change state. As stated above, the natural position may be more In or Out. A naturally In element in a fantasy larp could be a chain mail. An element with a naturally Out Larp State could be, for example, a telephone wire.

Every element has a Larp Force. If nothing influences them the Force will be a pull from the Current State to the Natural State, much like a stretched rubber band's will to contract. If put in the hands of a larper before the event a chain mail will have a strong Force back to its Normal State of In. As for a telephone wire in the middle of Fantasia, it will pull heavily to its natural Out State.

The First Person Audience is an In Game State. FPA has been reached by an expressed and inner will to participate. This will has different expressions (Larp Gestalts) and is influenced by external game elements. To become first person the participant has to generate a Force that starts a change from Out to In. A participant needs to overcome any Outwards Forces of all larp elements to reach the In Game State

¹⁴ On the fourth grade my class set up a fictive economy and a friend and me got to design the bills. For a semester we could all trade stuff and use our own "Tjatteran" currency. The teachers sold notebooks, erasers and pens. After some time I had thick bundles of money while all of my classmates had piles of school utensils. When the experiment ended and everybody else had hard currency I wondered if I had made the right choice. Now the handmade childhood bills are an invaluable treasure in my collection of magic money from numerous larps. I doubt that any of my former classmates fiddle with dreamy eyes through their collection of standard orange erasers.

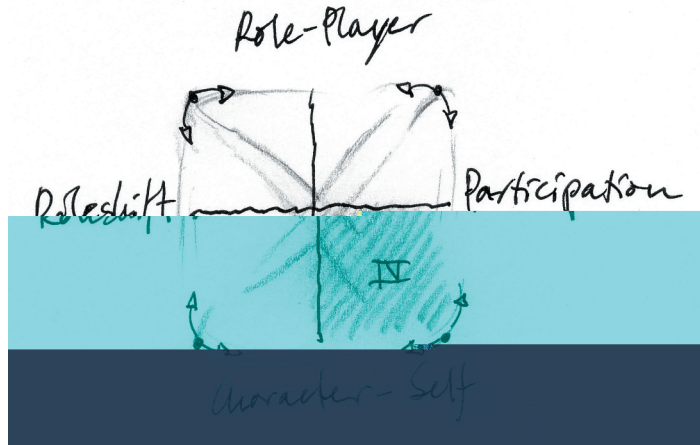
of FPA. Elements with an In Game State and/or an Inwards Force will assist the journey. These elements can be external (such as the chain mail or the telephone wire), but also internal (Role, Player, Character, Self). Summing up the effort to achieve a desired change against the Forces of all elements at a given moment reveals the cost of “getting into character”. Negotiating between Self and Player takes effort. Changing Roles takes effort. Merging the Character and Self takes effort. And relating to the environment and story helps or hinders.

I believe that a human being has a natural Force towards the fantastic. It is our inherent affinity to dream, love and fantasize. In our society though we have a contextual Force pulling us to a subjective perspective dictated by our culture. We need additional energy to change view. I also believe that the world has a natural State – that reality is not a viewpoint. I do however believe that this reality is transformable and without boundaries. Changing State therefore takes effort, and is not about immersing into a fantasy, but about bringing the fantastical world (see table 9). ial p vs

In the example above the effort for the change to FPA is equal to the sum of the Forces of the internal and external elements.

Looking closer the real Force required for a participant to become Fnt t9

- 2 The Character-Self merger is a battle of energies. The natural state of the participant is Out and to maintain an In Game State takes dedication. Depending on the nature of the participant (the Self Force above), and the validity and attraction of her overall function in the game (the Character Force), this will result in a more or less strong Character-Self Force. It is my belief that all people have an ability to play (resulting in a positive Force), but that a non-inspiring larp or disturbing life situation can hinder the merger.
- 3 The changing of Roles is demanding. Every time the Character needs to change Role it is an active achievement, where the Force of the Character is weighed against that of the Role. If the Character to Role relationship is good, one feeding the other, the process will generate an Inwards Character to Role Force.
- 4 The fourth internal element is the Forces for maintaining the Role-Player relationship. Although the unified role (the same for the heroine and the participant) is an effect of the other elements in the process there is a tension between what we perceive as the “real” endeavour to play, and the heroine’s “fake” striving to take a certain stand. In fact there is no dirrf triv e e



Analysing these axioms shows that certain elements have more impact on the larp becoming In, than others. The energy loss is constant and therefore the participants eventually need to be refilled. In some larps the solution has been to arrange an off-game area, for recuperation. This has however often been a spartan place, under the faulty rational that a comfortable off game area would only encourage participants not to immerse wholeheartedly. In Hamlet several longer breaks were arranged in the event, for the participants to gain energy. The food was also designed so that it would be heavy on sugar in different segments. A larper may not ignore the entropy of the larp.

The strain of Roleshift is another important factor, as constantly having to shift from “happy farmer to distraught survivor of the yrch attacks” is draining. Hamlet was designed so that there would be general characteristics every participant could take on in the different acts. There were in a way only three Roles in the larp, corresponding with the themes (Decadent, Intriguing, Homicidal).

Also, it is the Character/Character-Self that negotiates the potentially very draining Roleshifts, and that the Player is working against the potentially very negative Self Force. Two generic tools created by Ministeriet – Interaktiv Utveckling¹⁵ to address this are *The Portal* and *The Bridge*.

The Portal is a clearly defined passage over the border between the mundane and the Larp Space. The idea is that every participant gets a kick in the first moment and on the first step into the larp. In other words, it helps the Player-Self relationship of the Persons. Many larps use a trumpet signal and a road from an off-area as the Portal.

¹⁵ Ministeriet – Interactive Utveckling HB (1995–97), (The Ministry of Interactive Development), a Swedish corporation using larp as a method for learning and team building. Notable customers where The Swedish UN, Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Kulturhuset (the national Culture House in Stockholm).

Another, perhaps even more frequently used, Portal is “the morning after a nights sleep”. The agreement then is that when a participant wakes up, she is “in character” and the larp is on. Whatever Portal is used, the key is to have a clear code that is commonly known and agreed upon by every participant. Its purpose is to be a singular time and place where the participants know they are in Fantasia.

The Bridge is a complementary method that starts when the Portal is passed. This is to help the Character-Self relationship and limit the strain on the Character from Roleshifts. The idea is to let the participants have a period of less extrovert and more reflective larping in the difficult first moments of the event. “Performer and spectators” is a useful bridge tool. The participants get to be spectators of a speech or perhaps a stage play in the beginning of the larp. Instead of enacting their full Persona, their task is limited to praise, indifference or dislike of the performance, such as applause or the throwing of tomatoes. This way they are not forced to interact or change Roles dramatically, which is too much effort while establindne e u E nD

The Moebius Cycle shows that larping is not a Cartesian process, separating body and soul, larper and larp. In fact the process is a unified feed, where one reinforces the other. That which happens in the participant, influences that which happens in her surroundings and in the other participants. Equally, all that which happens in other things and people, affect her. It is not many separate fantasies, division between inanimate and animate, but a unified dreaming where the attitude and commitment of the one governs the whole, and the whole governs the one. Larp is a meta-entity.

The concept of Role – the mundane Player and the diegetic ones of the Heroine – tells us that the change is real in the participant. What one expresses in Fantasia is what one expresses, period. The change of State in any element is a true change, not merely a shift in perception. Instead of looking at objects as quantum elements around which participants shift, they should be seen as shifting entities. The world we create in a larp, can be more real than merely the enactment of a figment of our imagination.

The term *Genesi*¹⁶, comes not from the Biblical creation of the world, but from the biological term “partenogenes”, when a higher biological life form spawns a new one by division, instead of reproduction. This is what larpers do, they split a fantasy from themselves, seeing this fantastic thing continue to live, have self-life. And that is *Genesi*, a self motivated living fantasy.

The anthropologist Victor Turner¹⁷ talks about the power of liminoid states. He describes human Flow, when identity is lost and actions takes place seemingly autonomously. In the liminoid states a *Communitas*, a collective Flow, has been reached through rituals that brings the participants out of the cultural dogma. Another relevant thinker, awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1927, is Henri Bergson.¹⁸ Bergson talks about the memory of matter, how a place or an object can get its own will, filled with the memory of a powerful event. Then we have Marco Pogagnic¹⁹, who describes how a landscape has an intelligence and how this may be healed using what he calls “lithopuncture”, an acupuncture of the earth. All these thoughts are building blocks of what could be the reality of the fantastic.

The *Communitas* of the First Person Audience and the memory of objects in the Force and State of an element are synonymous to what truly defines the *Genesi*. It is the play of intelligence in a larger system. This is why the aforementioned fish tastes so good – it has truly changed. The same is true for all participants; investing in the larp changes

¹⁶ In Autumn of 2003 I wrote on the idea of *Genesi* and how it relates to larp. The text was written in one non-stop draft and was later published, virtually unedited, at *Interacting Arts Magazine* (an online channel for the Society of Interacting Arts at www.interactingarts.org). It contains the very essence of this article.

¹⁷ *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (1982), by Victor Turner. Published by PAJ Publications.

¹⁸ *Matter and Memory* (1896), by Henri Bergson. Published recently by Zone Books. Henri Luis Bergson (1859-1941) was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1927. His works include *Time and Free Will*, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, *Creative Evolution*, and *The Creative Mind*.

¹⁹ *Nature Spirits and Elemental Beings: Working With the Intelligence of Nature* (1997), by Marco Pogagnic. Published by Findhorn Press.

you. Eventually the costume *will* become the hero's wardrobe and the intrigues will grow to vibrant relationships.

Genesi is perhaps either the result of the unpredictability of complex systems (chaos theory), or the triggering of the innate energy of any element of reality (animism). Larpwright Martin Ericsson would assume that the freedom of play enables the individual to see through the illusions of reality and take control. I think that the freedom of play makes us better equipped to understand the unlimited reality. Both positions say that contemporary cultural dogma blinds and shackles us – but does the path of participation give us the power to dictate the truth or does the truth empower us? Perhaps there is no truth, only being in touch and touching beings. I don't think there is a mystical supernatural that we can reach by engaging, but I'm convinced that there is a clarity, flexibility and independency to be reached in abstract as well as concrete, inanimate as well as animate things. My standpoint is firmly set in the position that giving, sharing and meeting life is the only fruitful guiding light for our art.

So, to conclude, what about the Gray Field?

I've shown above that the change to a merged Role-Player is a real change. Knowing that the Role-Player is governed by the Character-Self, the fourth field of the Complex Balance Model cannot be ignored. In fact it has overwhelming importance. Equally, inanimate things may be rendered alive, with a momentum, a will, by investing Force and changing the State. That is not a process at the fictive In, but one of fundamental change in the real Out! The ultimate task of the Geneseurs is then *not* to communicate the fictive out to the player, or taking the player into the fictive, but to change the soul of reality, delivering the fantastic.

The Circular Out part of a larp, that portion which corresponds to the Emotive Field of the diegesis, is what makes the larp dream real. You must change the nature of the participant, and mould reality. As Plutarch said: "The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled".

Fully aware that this will irritate all those patient enough to read this far, I have decided to change the name of the Gray Field into the "Red Field". It is there the quickening force of Genesi must first be sought.

Games

Hamlet (2002) by Martin Ericsson and Christopher Sandberg in collaboration with the Swedish Nationwide Theatre JAM. Sweden.

Mellan himmel och hav (2003) by Emma Wieslander and Katarina Björk, Sweden.

Trenne byar (1994) by Ett Glas; Christopher Sandberg, Alexander Graff, Gabriel Walldén, Aigars Grins, Joakim Skog, Berta Angerbjörn, Gabriel Sandberg and Martin Ericsson, Victoria Henriksson and Jonas Henriksson and others. Sweden.