

A GAMELIKE PERFORMANCE

- **Exploring the Gaming Process and the Ecology of Live Action
Role-Playing Games**

Marjukka Lampo

MA in International Performance Research

University of Tampere

University of Warwick

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ABSTRACT

A Gamelike Performance – Exploring the Gaming Process and the Ecology of Live Action Role-Playing Games is a study of live action role-playing games (larps) as gamelike performances. Situated between two separate fields of research, Performance Studies and Game Studies, it aims at demonstrating how the analysis of both the performatic and the gamelike aspects of the activity can be merged together to form a unified interdisciplinary approach to larping that celebrates all of its unique characteristics at once. To do so, the study concentrates on the gaming process of the players, i.e. the process in which the players come about to produce the activity called larping, and suggests an ecological approach to the examination of this process, as inspired by James J. Gibson's work. The focus of the study is on Finnish larping and it introduces the reader to the scene through an example larp, *Opera School of Arts IV – Valtapeliä*.

I have divided the study into four chapters, each of which provides the reader with a new point of view towards the activity. In the first chapter I will examine larps as performances and depict the phases and features of character construction in it. In the second chapter I will focus on larps as games and through the analysis of its gamelike features I will explain the sense in which the transportative performatic behaviour the players produce when constructing their characters can create gamelike behaviour. In the third chapter I will introduce the reader to the Gibsonian ecological approach and depict the process in which the players extract possibilities for actions from the gaming environment. And in the fourth and the final chapter I will seek to elaborate on these findings by proposing a scenario-based analysis model for larps as adapted from Diana Taylor's concept of scenarios.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study is about *live action role-playing games as gamelike performances*. Live action role-playing games, also known as *larps*, are a form of *role-playing games (RPG)* in which the participants simulate fantasy-world scenarios as if they were really happening. They are performances with no external audience; everybody is participating and everybody has a specific role character they aim to perform the story of. This happens through the means of improvisation and by doing so all the players take part in a live performance the result of which is never known before the game ends. For me, larping is a very peculiar activity because, at the same time, it can be regarded as a performance and as a game. It is somewhat comparable to theatre and other similar forms of performing arts but it also seems to be somewhat comparable to tabletop games and other forms of gaming. So, which is it? Or is it neither? After a long and thorough exploration of the matter, I have come to the conclusion that larps are, in fact, both. They are both performances and games. Hence, I have chosen to call them gamelike performances.

As an expedition to the performatic and gamelike features of larps, this study is situated in a space between two fields of research: Performance Studies and Game Studies. Studies on larping and other role-playing games have been stemming from the latter for quite a while already but for the former it is still a new object of analysis. Although the two fields of study stand as independent disciplines, they share a common ground of discussion which, I believe, can be revealed through the contemplation of larping. Thus, in this study, I will be examining the nature of larping through both Performance Studies and Game Studies and seek to demonstrate that, instead of remaining separate fields of research depicting different sides of the same coin, Performance Studies and Game

Studies could be merged together to form a unified interdisciplinary approach to larping that celebrates all of its unique characteristics at once.

The focus of this study is on the *gaming process* of larps, meaning the process in which the players come about to produce the activity called larping. It could also be referred to as the performance of the event, but because using the gaming terminology has already been established for the activity, I have chosen to continue with this canon. By the terminology being established, I imply to the fact that the activity is foundationally referred to as 'a game': it is a live action role-playing game. In addition, the previous research done on the matter has adopted the use of gaming terminology and, thus, throughout this study I will be referring to larps accordingly: the event of larping being a *game* and its participants being *players*. Through the exploration of different aspects in this gaming process I will seek to depict the nature of the activity and to set a basis for its analysis without neglect any of its unique characteristics. Thus, the main research question of this study could be formulated as follows: What is the gaming process of the players like in larps and what sort of features in that process constitute the nature of larps as gamelike performances?

I have formed an additional set of research questions that will guide the journey of the study. They are meant to frame the focus of each part of the study on the way, and they will be presented in a form of a dialogue in which each question seeks to complement the content of the one preceding it. The first question begins with a hypothesis concerning the purpose of larping as presented above: in larps *everybody has a specific role character they aim to perform the story of*. Hence, the first question is: in what sense are the players constructing these characters during the gaming process and what sorts of features affect this character construction? The contemplation on this question will lead me into proposing that what the players practically do while performing their characters during the gaming

process is that, they perform series of actions that represent the behaviour of their characters. Hence, another question emerges: supposing that larps are performances consisting of series of such actions, in what sense and to what extent can these actions produce gamelike activity? This question will lead me into a search for the meaning of games and gaming. What is a game and what does one practically do when playing a game? One of the possible explanations, as I will be showing later, is that games ought to be considered as *sets of possibilities* instead of sequences of predetermined actions. This brings up the next question: supposing that larps are gamelike because they consist of sets of possibilities for actions, what do the players do in order to extract these possibilities from the gaming environment? Through this question I will seek to get to the bottom of the player behaviour in larps and depict the gaming process of the players one phase at a time. This means exploring what it is exactly that the players do in larps in order to perform their characters and what the relationship between the players is like in these games? I will be unravelling these questions through applying an *ecological approach to larping* as inspired by James J. Gibson's work. And finally, after introducing this approach, I will seek to pull all the discoveries of the latter questions together by asking: when doing analysis on the gaming processes of the players in specific larps, what would be a feasible manner for doing so and what sort of details could be analysed from them through an ecological approach?

1.1. What Is It?

Now that I have introduced what this study is about, I would like to take a few steps back and tell more about larping itself. I have already explained the activity in a few words but in case the reader has not been familiar with larping before, I would like to explain it a little bit further. Live action role-playing games are a form of role-playing games in which the players assume the roles of their imaginary characters and execute physical actions

accordingly. Usually these characters have a whole story behind them: the game masters or the players have created background information that describes the characters, their history, personality, goals, etc. A lot of emphasis is put on costumes, props and location because the aim of these games is to simulate fantasy scenarios as if they were really happening. Hence, instead of seeing a small group of players gathered around a table to roll dice and move miniature figures like in tabletop RPGs or a highly concentrated kid with a game controller in his hands playing video games, you could see, for example, hundreds of people dressed up as medieval villagers and behaving as if they were living in a medieval fantasy world, or you could see an intensive group of twenty players dressed in black running around in a shopping mall as if they were members of rivalling mafia gangs trying to eliminate each other.

As a form of role-playing games larps could be considered to be a descendant of table-top RPGs. The roots of role-playing games lead to the 19th century war games. According to Daniel Mackay, who briefly summarizes the history of RPGs, the first war game was the chess based *Kriegspiel* developed by Herr von Reisswitz in 1811. *Kriegspiel* was used in Prussian military training but already in the late Victorian era such games were developed into a leisure activity. In the beginning of the 20th century author H.G. Wells adapted the idea of *Kriegspiel* into a new tabletop game called *Little Wars*. It was the first war game to use miniature figures instead of abstract counters. War games kept on growing in popularity all the way to the 1960's when Dave Wesely, a war-game innovator, first introduced the nonzero-sum games. In these games there were no more winners or losers but only different battle units with different abilities and goals. Dave Arneson, one of Wesely's players, further developed the idea by separating the units into single characters that the players controlled in fantastic medieval settings inspired by the works of J.R.R. Tolkien. In the beginning of the 1970's Arneson teamed up with Gary Gygax and other war

gamers to develop a new game based on all the ideas they had about fantasy genre and gaming. In January 1974, they published the first role-playing game, *Dungeons & Dragons*. (Mackay 13-16)

The history of RPGs goes on quite colourfully after the publication of *Dungeons & Dragons* but to keep the story short: the popularity of tabletop RPGs was followed by the birth of live action role-playing games. Supposedly the inspiration for this activity derived from a desire to physically experience fantasy-world settings but, since larping as an object of research is still young, finding a decent survey on the history of it has proven to be extremely difficult. Apparently larping started simultaneously in many countries around the world in the late 1970's and early 1980's and the style of playing altered from group to group. It could be said that two styles emerged: live combat and theatre style. As the names indicate, in live combat games the emphasis is on simulating battles and in theatre style on dramatic expression. However, these styles tend to merge and shift, so in practice the field is much more diverse. Guide books for larping systems have been published later on ¹ but many groups still do it their own way. The popularity of larping varies in different continents and the tradition seems to be the strongest in North America, Europe and Australia. ("History of live action role-playing games")

1.2. Nordic Larp Tradition

Since larp culture is so colourful and widely spread, I have chosen to narrow the object of this study to the way of larping I know the best: Finnish larping as a part of the *Nordic Larp Tradition*. Nordic Larp Tradition is a concept that has been developed in an annual role-playing conference *Solmukohta*. ² The event rotates between Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark and every year larpers from all of these countries – and nowadays from all

¹ See e.g. Pohjola "Myrskyn aika" for a Finnish example

² The conference uses four names depending on the hosting country. In Norwegian it is called *Knutepunkt*, in Swedish *Knutpunkt* and in Danish *Knudepunkt*. Here I chose to use the Finnish name, *Solmukohta*.

over the world – get together to discuss role-playing and to organize larps. Some of the lectures and discussions are of academic interest but the conference has also left room for less formal discussion on for example game design and criticism. The first *Solmukohta* was held in Oslo in 1997. This first gathering showed its participants that larping in the Nordic countries varied greatly. For example, a standard Swedish or Norwegian larp can last for a week whereas in Finland and Denmark the duration of the game is from four to twelve hours; in Sweden the biggest larps can have 250-1000 players but in Finland already 100 players is considered big; in addition, apparently only the Finnish larpers tend to write *character profiles*³ for every single player in the game. Because of the differences, a common vocabulary was needed and, hence, the discussion started. In 2003 the first annual *Solmukohta* book, *As Larp Grows Up*, was published and ever since a new volume has been compiled annually. These books contain writings on larping (both academic and non-academic) and together with the discussions and the organized larps in the conference they have created a continuum that has been referred to as the Nordic Larp Tradition. (Montola & Stenros, “Playground Worlds” 8-9; Fatland, “Knutepunkt” 16-17)

Although differences between Nordic countries exist, similarities have emerged as well. Some of these also distinguish the Nordic Larp Tradition from, for example, North American and continental European larps. First and foremost, Nordic larp greatly builds on the idea of *360° illusion* (Koljonen “Eye-witness”) where everything the players experience ought to fit the realm of the fantasy, starting from scenography and costumes and going all the way to the persistency of playing: behaving *out-of-character* is usually not welcomed and in many cases even sleeping is done *in-character*. If the setting of the game is, for example, a medieval fantasy village, no cameras, mobile phones, cars or other contemporary technology should be present. This ‘*what you see is what you get*’ demand

³ A character profile is narrative description about the character, its history, goals and attributes, often written in prose.

has been greatly criticized because of its impossibility: even when you do everything you can to maintain a medieval atmosphere, something uncontrollable like an airplane might still fly across the gaming area. Nevertheless, on an ideological level 360° illusion still remains the main characteristic of Nordic larping. Typical for Nordic larps is also the minimalization of game mechanisms and live-combat: the emphasis is on dramatic expression and conflicts are solved rather through improvisation than through explicit rule systems. The games are built more on, for example, diplomatic intrigue, big events such as marriage and other festivities or even just everyday life rather than on battles and wars as in combat-style larping. Hence, it could be considered that Nordic Larp Tradition greatly resembles what I earlier introduced as theatre style larping. (Koljonen *ibid.*; Fatland, “Knutepunkt” 15)

1.3. A Case of Finnish Larping

Although I consider the overall phenomenon of Finnish larping to be the main object of analysis in this study, I have also chosen to use a concrete case study larp to demonstrate some of my findings. I personally participated in this game in November 2009. It was called *Opera School of Arts IV – Valtapeliä*⁴ (*OSA IV*) and it was the fourth game of the *Opera School of Arts* larp series. The series was created and organized by two 20-year-old Finnish larpers and all of the games consisted of 20-40 players. In the fourth game there were 38 players the age of which varied from 15 to 24 years. The game was played in a villa-like camping centre building in Ylöjärvi, Finland and it lasted for approximately 12 hours.

The setting of the larp was a British boarding school called the *Opera School of Arts* and it was situated in contemporary London attached to an old opera house. This opera

⁴ 'Valtapeliä' is a Finnish partitive case for 'Power Game'. As a subtitle of *Opera School of Arts IV* it was meant to indicate that the game was about a power game between the characters.

house was imaginary as well as the school itself. Opera School of Arts educates children from the first grade all the way to college. The focus of the series was in the college students and their teachers. Teaching in *Opera College* concentrated mostly on theatre and music; the list of possible majors contained for example acting, directing, playwriting, singing and dancing. Other subjects were also taught. My character, for example, was the teacher of fine arts, *Miss Diana Thompson* (age 26 years). The other teacher characters present in the fourth game were: the school principal and the teacher of classic ballet, *Mrs Mary-Ann Charleston* (age 41 years); the vice-principal and the teacher of speech communication, *Miss Margareth Harris* (age 58 years); the teacher of audio-visual design and my character's fiancé, *Mr Thomas Lloyd* (age 27 years); the teacher of singing, *Miss Belinda Myers* (age 29 years); the teacher of acting, *Mr Ethan Westford* (age 24 years); and the director of the Opera and the teacher of history, *Mr Franz Reinfeld* (age 62 years). In addition to these characters, there were 31 students characters present in the game (age 16-20).

The structure of the game was an ordinary school day starting at 9 a.m. and ending at 5 p.m. During this time, the students attended lectures according to their personal syllabi, had lunch together and solved the problems and crises of their group dynamics and relationships. The teachers gave lectures and workshops for the students, had possible personal tutoring meetings with them and ran other errands concerning the school. I, for example, prepared and carried out two lectures (one on Surrealism and one on Jackson Pollock) and also organized a collaborative lecture about storyboarding with my character's fiancé, the teacher of audio-visual design, *Mr Thomas Lloyd*. After the school day there was time reserved for possible detentions, a meeting for the teachers to discuss issues concerning the school, voluntary club activity for the students and free time to deal with the group dynamics of the school. The game ended at 9 p.m.

The case study consists of three parts: interviews with the two game masters and the players of the teacher characters before and after the game, a questionnaire for all the players filled in after the game (see Annexes 1 & 2), and my own experience of the game as a player. This material is meant to offer me information about larping overall but also the specific events of the game and the players' understanding of these events. The case study material is relatively vast and, therefore, I have chosen to concentrate only on those details that are related to the issues at stake in this study. The findings of the material will be discussed along the study, but I need to emphasize that they are only meant to serve as examples that help to clarify my points, not as empirically qualified data that offers generalizable truths about the behaviour of larpers. In addition, I need to point out that I am aware of the challenges of analysing my own participation in the game. Nevertheless, I believe that, in order to get functional ethnographic research material of an example larp, it was necessary for me to participate in it myself.

The examples from the case study material will be introduced mostly in a form of a narrative. In these narratives the focus is put on one or two characters and their thoughts and actions in that example scenario. The narratives will be presented as indented free-standing paragraphs with a font of their own. The purpose of this specific framing is to indicate a change of writing style in the study and to emphasise the use of an example from the case study material. In addition, it should be noted that, although, the descriptions of the thoughts and actions of the characters will be based on the factual information provided by the case study material, the example narratives are set in a form of free playful interpretation on the events at stake. I have chosen to use this strategy because it offers the reader a change to better understand the atmosphere and the mood of the game.

1.4. Taking part in *OSA IV*

The process the players went through when taking part in *OSA IV* could be described as being similar to that which Richard Schechner suggests for the performers of *transportation performances*.⁵ According to Schechner, in a transportation performance the performer “leaves her daily world and by means of preparations and warm-ups enters into performing. When the performance is over, the performer cools down and re-enters ordinary life” (72). In the case of *OSA IV*, the *preparational phase* of the game begun in March 2009 when the game masters contacted the players of the previous *OSA* games and posted an announcement in *Larp-kalenteri*, an online calendar for upcoming Finnish larps (“Larp-kalenteri”). After this the players from the previous *OSA* games had the chance to express their possible willingness to continue with their old characters. Other players were to fill in an enrolment form in which they described themselves as players and told about their preferences concerning the game at hand. Because of the limited amount of characters, the game masters chose the players based on these enrolment forms and assigned characters accordingly. I had played *Miss Thompson* before in *OSA II* and chose to continue with the character in this game as well.

After the casting was done, the game masters announced the list of the players and their characters in the game’s web site. This web site was created for the purpose of informing the players about issues related to the game. In addition to providing the players with practical information, such as the schedule and location of the game, the web site was also used for offering the players information about the gaming world: the school, the characters, the recent events, etc. The players were expected to read up on these materials to better understand the context of the game. The preparational phase also included, for example, preparing one’s costume and props for the game and getting the

⁵ For more on the concept of *transportation performances*, see chapter 2.1 in this study.

personal, approximately 15 pages long character profiles from the game masters one month before the game. In addition, the players of the teacher characters were to prepare their lectures before hand.

The next phase suggested by Schechner, the *warming up phase*, could be understood as being the period of time starting from Friday on the first weekend of November 2009, and lasting until the game itself began on Saturday morning. During this phase, the players arrived at the venue, were introduced to each other and had the chance to discuss their characters with the game masters. This helped the players to get in to the mood of the game. It was also the time when I did the first interviews with the players of the teacher characters. Taking into account the amount of responsibilities the game masters had to take care of before the game, I had organized the first game master interview already a week before the actual event.

As suggested by Schechner, after the performance the performer “cools down and re-enters ordinary life”. The *cooling down phase* of *OSA IV*, could be regarded to have taken place from the moment the game ended to the moment the players left the venue. Right after the game, the players and the game masters gathered around to hear what everybody had done during the game. This meant giving every player a chance to tell the others about the highlights of their day. After this debriefing session the players continued sharing their experiences and socialized in a more informal manner. In the phase of *re-entering the ordinary life*, the players packed their bags, cleaned the venue and travelled back home. They were, however, still expected to send written *debriefs*⁶ about their characters to the game masters. In addition, because the conditions at the venue prevented me from doing the second round of interviews directly after the game (some of

⁶ A *debrief* is a prose-like narrative describing what the character did and thought during the game. In the Finnish larping scene, the players usually write these narratives about their characters after the game and send them to the game masters to let them know what happened in the game.

the players had to leave early), I chose to conduct email interviews with the players the next week. The second interview with the game masters took place two weeks after the game.

1.5. Previous Research

Larps as the object of academic research is a growing area of interest. Studies and papers have been written on them at least from the perspectives of Game Studies, Social Sciences and Education. Papers published on the matter can be found in, for example, the annual *Solmukohta* publications and the online scholarly journal called *Journal of Interactive Drama*. Because research done on larping tends to go hand in hand with the research done on other role-playing games, studies related on the topic can also be found in, for example, the online publication *International Journal of Role-Playing* and the numerous proceedings of video game and role-playing game related conferences, for example, the conference proceedings of Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA). In addition, there is a vast amount of books published on role-playing games, one of the classics, without a doubt, being Gary Allan Fine's *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds* (1983).

As I have pointed out earlier, there is not much research done on role-playing games as performances. An opening on the matter has been done by Daniel Mackay who, in his *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Performing Art* (2001), explores the topic thoroughly. However, there is a crucial detail that makes Mackay's study somewhat irrelevant for my purposes: his concentration is on table-top RPGs and not on larps. Although the two share things in common, they also differ greatly. In fact, the fundamental difference between table-top RPGs and larps lies exactly in their performance: where the former leans on oral narration, the latter is based on physical action. Even Mackay himself

takes this difference into account and has “deliberately steered clear of discussing the live-action role-playing game” in his book (175). This is why it is difficult, if not even impossible, to fully apply his work on live-action role-playing games and, therefore, I have found it necessary to explore larps with an approach of their own.

1.6. Structure of the Study

The structure of the study has already been somewhat introduced in the beginning of this introduction. This is because the set of research questions formed to guide the journey of the study also structures the set of chapters. The questions will be divided into individual chapters as follows:

- Chapter I: Starting from the view point that larps are about performing the story of one’s character, in what sense are the players constructing these characters during the gaming process and what sorts of features affect this character construction?
- Chapter II: Supposing that larps are performances consisting of series of performatic actions, in what sense and to what extent can these performatic actions produce gamelike activity?
- Chapter III: Supposing that larps are gamelike because they consist of sets of possibilities for actions, what do the players do exactly in order to extract these possibilities from the gaming environment?
- Chapter IV: When doing analysis on the gaming processes of the players in specific larps, what would be a feasible manner for doing so and what sort of details could be analysed from them through an ecological approach?

In the first chapter, I will be exploring the matter of character construction as the fundamental feature of the performance nature of larping. Thus, I will be contemplating the topic especially from the point of view of Performance Studies. This will mean, among other things, taking a look at the meaning of performance as suggested by one of the founders of the discipline, Richard Schechner, and his colleagues. In the second chapter, I will concentrate on the gamelike nature of larping. The focus will be on exploring the meaning of games as a subset of the larger phenomenon of play through the lens of Game Studies. The aim of the chapter is to find out what sort features constitute a game and seek to contemplate these features in relation to live action role-playing games.

An attentive reader might have noticed that the arrangement of the first two chapters turns out to be somewhat problematic: if the ultimate goal of this study is to establish a unified interdisciplinary approach to larping, why separate Performance Studies and Game Studies to their own individual chapters? The arrangement of the chapters is created intentionally to serve a two-step-strategy: firstly, they will provide the reader with introductions to the two fields of research at stake, and secondly, the dualism established in these chapters will be torn down in the third chapter where the use of an ecological approach as a solution for overcoming the dichotomies will be introduced. The chapter seeks to deepen the analysis on the gaming processes by treating individual larps as ecologies and by demonstrating what the process of extracting possibilities for actions in those gaming environments is like. And finally, I will continue to the fourth chapter which is meant to serve as an introduction to a scenario-based analysis model for larps and as a demonstration on how to apply the things discussed in the previous chapters in practice.

2. CONSTRUCTING CHARACTERS

A fundamental part of the gaming process of larps is the construction of characters. Basically everything starts from the character because it is the point of view from which the players access the game. A character provides its player with background information concerning the game and with personal perspective on the fictional world at stake. In addition, it sets the framework within which the player is allowed to or likely to interact with the other players. Because the gaming process starts from the character it is only natural that this study also begins with the examination of larp characters and their construction during the gaming process. Thus, in this chapter I ask: in what sense are the players constructing these characters during the gaming process and what sorts of features affect this character construction? By character construction I mean the process in which the idealized *diegetic character* gets embodied into a physical *performed character* during the game; in other words, the process in which the player performs an interpretation of his or her imagined character.

I will begin the chapter by discussing the matter of performance. I will show that larps consist of, what I call, *transportative performatic behaviour* and that this behaviour is the basis of character construction. Performatic is a term offered by Diana Taylor to “denote the adjectival form of the nondiscursive realm of performance” (6). By this she refers to the problematics of the widely used word *performative* which, according to her, is more a quality of discourse than performance. Performatic is meant to draw attention from the works of J.L. Austin, Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler back to what Richard Schechner calls *restored behaviour*. However, because performative is such a widely spread term, it

is also often used in this nondiscursive sense. I will seek to avoid such overlapping by keeping the division clear.

In this chapter, I will introduce my take on Taylor's concept of performatic by looking at some classic theories of performance and also some newer works, such as those from Marvin Carlson and Richard Schechner, that seek to create an overview on the matter. After this I will introduce my concept of larp characters which I divide into two parts, diegetic and performed characters. By diegesis I mean the fictional world of larps, or, as Markus Montola summarizes it, "a fictional world or the truth about what exists in a fictional world. Something within a diegesis is called diegetic, something outside it is called non-diegetic" ("Subjective" 82). As a counterpart for the diegetic character I will introduce my concept of the performed character, which is the interpretation of the diegetic character performed by the player. After this I will continue to the exploration of player's relationship towards these two levels of character through two main larping paradigms that have been dominant especially in the Nordic Larp discussion: *immersionism* and *narrativism*. In narrativist playing the aim is to be constantly conscious about the choice-making and execution of actions, and in immersionist playing the players seek to enter a *flow state* that in a sense automatizes the player activity. Simultaneously, while discussing these notions, I will seek to demonstrate some of the points presented here with examples from the larp *Opera School of Arts IV – Valtapeliä (OSA IV)*.

2.1. Larps as Transportative Performatic Behaviour

Larps are performances, as I have said. But what kind of performances? Marvin Carlson, for example, divides the word into three different meanings:

- 1) the display of skills;
- 2) patterned behaviour;

3) keeping up the standard. (3-5)

The display of skills is, for him, something that in performing arts requires “the physical presence of trained or skilled human beings whose demonstration of their skills is the performance.” The second meaning, patterned behaviour, creates “a certain distance between ‘self’ and behaviour.” Carlson notes that this is what Richard Schechner calls restored behaviour and it includes “any behaviour consciously separated from the person doing it – theatre and other role-playing, trances, shamanism, rituals.” Carlson doesn’t, however, explain why he chose to describe this ‘patterned’ instead of ‘restored’. The third meaning for performance according to Carlson is “the general success of the activity in light of some standard of achievement which may not itself be precisely articulated.” He continues that in these cases the task of judging the success of the performance or even whether it is a performance or not is the responsibility of the observer. (3-5) All of these different aspects of performing can be found in larping, but what now gets into the centre of my attention is the second one, patterned behaviour. It is the aspect of performance that I consider to be what Taylor calls performatic. Hence, to make the indication clear, I call it *performatic behaviour*.

As Carlson mentions, this second aspect of performance is what Richard Schechner calls ‘restored behaviour’. According to Schechner, all behaviour is restored or *twice-behaved*: there is no single author who is the inventor of that behaviour. If such would seem to occur, we cannot say that the individual has discovered a new pattern of behaviour but merely a new combination or edition of already practiced actions. (“Performance Studies” 35)

Restored behaviour is living behaviour treated as a film director treats a strip of film.

These strips of behaviour can be rearranged or reconstructed; they are independent

of the causal systems (personal, social, political, technological, etc.) that brought them into existence. (34)

Here Schechner uses a film strip metaphor to explain the process of performance: behaviour can be divided into smaller strips of action that can be cut and rearranged into the final performance. Performing a sequence of actions then would indicate a process of executing or *carrying out* a final product. This meaning for performance is offered by Victor Turner according to whom the etymology of the word 'performance' "derives from Old French *parfournir*, 'to complete' or 'to carry out thoroughly,'" and that "performance, then, is the proper finale of an experience" (Turner "From Ritual" 13, italics orig.).

Both Schechner and Turner seem to hit the point in performativity but I would still like to further contemplate the meaning of the word. If performative behaviour can be said to be consisting of smaller strips of action the carrying out of which is the performance, then, what is this action like? How do we know that these strips of action are meant to be a performance and not just everyday living? According to Carlson, the notion of strips of behaviour originally derives from Erving Goffman's *strip of experience*. Carlson writes:

"A strip of experience," he [Goffman] is careful to point out, is not necessarily a natural division for those involved, or even an analytical device for inquirers, but simply a "raw batch of occurrences (of whatever status in reality) that one wants to draw attention to as a starting point in analysis." Whenever such a sequence of activity is given coherence by some cultural frame, then it is subject to replication and transformation within the social world through two basic processes: fabrication and keying. (Carlson 46)

Keying and *fabrication* are terms that Goffman introduces in his *Frame Analysis* (1974) as devices for the interpretation of human behaviour within certain frameworks. Keying, for him, refers to "the set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in

terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else” (43-44). Fabrication, on the other hand, is “the intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage activity so that a party of one or more others will be induced to have a false belief about what it is that is going on” (83). For Carlson, keying is more directly connected to what is understood here by performance. Although Goffman’s own concentration, he notes, is in the sociological analysis, both keying and strip of experience have proven to be useful for studying performance (46).

So, to use Goffman’s terms, it would seem that something is to be understood as performance, when it is *keyed* accordingly. But how do we now when something should be keyed as performance? According to Schechner, performance is performance “when historical and social context, convention, usage, and tradition say it is” and “what ‘is’ or ‘is not’ performance does not depend on an event in itself but on how that event is received and placed” (38). This would suggest that performance depends both on the agency of the performer and the perception of the audience. In larps the players alter their everyday social behaviour to something else, namely that of their characters. This way the players signal each other that they are playing their characters and that what is being perceived is therefore a performance. For example, when *OSA IV* begun, I straightened my posture and dropped my strong South-Western Finnish dialect to signal the other players that at that moment I was to be regarded as *Miss Diana Thompson*, a sophisticated young teacher who had authority over the students, and not as my everyday self.

When the significance of perception in keying performances is at stake, one can’t bypass the fact that there is no outside audience in larps: no-one sits in an auditorium observing the players do what they do. If you are in a game, you are *in* the game. The only

audience the player has is him- or herself and the other players, who might occasionally be more interested in their own doings than the doings of their co-players.

The teacher of acting, Mr Ethan Westford, had a secret: he was a drug addict and he was smuggling drugs to the school. Some of the students were also involved as his clients. Mr Westford had a stash in the school basement and every once in a while he would sneak down there to get his regular dose.

Of course, in real life, the pills the player was eating were only breath mints that simulated drugs. When the player of *Mr Westford* would take them, it would be as if the character had taken drugs and the player would act it out accordingly. My question is: how do we know that the player actually walked down to the basement and ate the breath mints? Because there was no audience for this, there is no way we can know for sure that the player actually did this and didn't just say he did it. Carlson writes: "Performance is always performance for someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, that *audience is the self*" (5, italics added). Larps happen to be one of those occasions where the audience is, in fact, the 'self'. Therefore, both producing and keying performatic behaviour in larps is primarily the responsibility of the individual players themselves. They are the judges of their own doings and therefore also the player of *Mr Westford* was the judge for his own doings and it was up to him to decide whether he would actually execute the physical action of taking the "breath-mint-drugs" or not.

The drug issue in *OSA IV* offers us also another interesting example about the analysis of the strips of behaviour in larps, namely, the use of fabrication. As explained, fabrication is the effort of creating false beliefs about what is going on. It can take place inside keyings and, by doing so, it can create a complex behavioural structure the keying of which can be extremely challenging.

Miss Thompson started her day with a lecture on Jackson Pollock's work. After this she made the students try their own skills on the unique painting technique the artist had used. Right after Diana had given the instructions for the students and the splashing had begun, one of her students, Anna Winslow, came to tell her that the paint fume gave her a headache and that she needed to leave the classroom. Diana gave the student a permission to leave and take a rest. What she did not realize, was that it was not the fume that gave Miss Winslow a headache but the drugs she had bought from Mr Westford.

We could analyse this situation by taking a look at two things that the player of *Anna Winslow* was claiming: the cause and the effect, cause being the paint fume and the effect being the headache. First of all, when the player of *Anna* came to talk to me in this situation, I, as a player, keyed the headache as that of the character *Anna Winslow* and not that of the player of *Anna Winslow*. This was correct. What I did not realize was that the cause was false: *Anna's* headache was not the result of the paint fume but of the drugs.

Later that day, some of the students told Miss Thompson that Anna had problems with drugs. This was extremely alarming because Diana knew she wasn't the only student in the school with the same problem. Earlier that spring the principal had sent another student, Kenneth Doyle, into rehab. Diana wanted to help Anna because she considered it her responsibility to take action.

Finding out *Anna's* secret during the game made me re-evaluate the discussion my character with her in the morning. I realized that the player of *Anna* had fooled me into having a false belief about the cause of her character's headache and that the real cause was something that could have been interesting to get involved with during the game. Hence, I chose to start digging the situation. Unfortunately this didn't lead me too far

because at that point the player of *Anna* had left the game and therefore *Diana* wasn't able to "find" her.

Another significant feature for performatic behaviour, I'd still like to bring out, is its function *between* the everyday behaviour before and after the performance. According to Victor Turner, there can be two kind of playful human behaviour: *liminal* and *liminoid*. He uses these terms to explain the phenomena of ritual and play in, what he calls, the early agrarian societies and in the Industrial revolution. It is the nature of liminoid that characterizes larps, but to understand liminoid, we need to understand liminal first. It is the phase of ritual where the participant is "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" ("Liminality and communitas" 89). Another term Turner has used to describe liminality is *anti-structure*, which refers to the "dissolution of normative social structure" ("From Ritual" 28). Being in a liminal phase, therefore, means to be in a phase of ritual where all the social attributes, that have bound a person into his or her past and coming state, are being stripped away, and where no social constraints or structures prevail. Because Turner sees this "vanguenneppian"⁷ liminality as something that is connected to compulsion, he ends up using the term 'liminoid' to address voluntary playful human activities, such as arts and entertainment. "Liminoid," he writes, "resembles without being identical with liminal" (32). It takes its participants to a "threshold", an anti-structural state where the normative social constraints don't prevail, but it does so only by free will. Nevertheless, although Turner defines liminoid to be voluntary, it still manages to reach the anti-structural state, "the seedbed of cultural creativity", where "novelty will arise" (28).

⁷ Liminality was first used in this context by Arnold van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage* (1909).

It is important to notice that liminoid can lead to change, but not in the same manner as liminal. According to Schechner, liminal rituals *transform* the participants whereas liminoid only *transport*:

Liminal rituals are transformations, permanently changing who people are. Liminoid rituals, effecting a temporary change – sometimes nothing more than a brief *communitas*⁸ experience or a several-hours-long playing of a role – are transportations. In a transportation, one enters into the experience, is “moved” or “touched” . . . , and is then dropped off about where she or he entered. (Schechner 72)

This, I believe, explains the nature of larps: they consist of *transportative performatic behaviour*. During the game, they players assume the roles of their characters and behave as if they were those characters. This behaviour “transports” the players in these characters for the duration of the larp and after it drops them off around somewhere where they entered, hence leaving them to continue their everyday behaviour.

2.2. The Difference between Performed Characters and Diegetic Characters

If larping is performatic behaviour that transports the players in a character, what is this character exactly? Where does it come from and how does it guide the performance of the player? I would now like to introduce my take on this matter. Larp characters are basically the roles the players perform in the games. Depending on the larp culture either the players create the characters for themselves or the game masters create them for the players. Usually the characters are presented in a form of a character profile. These profiles might exist solely in the minds of the players but they can also be put down in

⁸ *Communitas* is Turner’s term for an experience of “the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses, enacting a multiplicity of social roles, and being acutely conscious of membership in some corporative group such as a family, lineage, clan, tribe, nation, etc., or of affiliation with some pervasive social category such as a class, caste, sex or age-division” (44).

words in a statistical character sheets listing the attributes of the characters or, as is often the case in Finnish larping, in a prose like narration. Creating the characters often includes coming up with a basic concept for them (*who, what, when, where and why?*) but also narrowing down detailed information on their history and personal characteristics such as appearance, temperament, skills and other attributes, as well as their goals and plans for the future. All this information structures what is called *a diegetic character*, i.e. something that exists in a diegesis.

When the game starts the players begin to perform their characters by embodying their behaviour. This creates *a performed character*, an interpretation of the diegetic character performed by the player. As I explained earlier referring to a metaphor used by Richard Schechner, performatic behaviour can be treated like a strip of film that can be cut and rearranged to create the final performance. In larps, the players execute the actions that represent their characters in a certain sequence. These sequences of actions construct the performance of the characters, i.e. the performed characters. (See also Gade 2003)

The division between diegetic characters and performed characters is important because of one particular reason: diegetic characters don't really exist. When a larper plays his or her character, what we see is not the diegetic character itself being summoned to the gaming scene but merely an interpretation of that character created by the player. As Carlson explains by referring to a notion made by Richard Bauman: ". . . All performance involves a consciousness of doubleness, according to which the actual execution of an action is placed in mental comparison with a potential, an ideal, or a remembered original model of that action" (5). This would mean, basically, that diegetic character is a potential or an ideal and performed character is the duplication of that ideal in a performance. It is also important to notice that because the player is always at least to

some extent restricted by his or her own subjectivity, the character also remains subjective in its execution. According to Markus Montola, all the players in role-playing games have their own subjective diegeses because it is impossible to share an identical, objective vision of a certain fiction ("Subjective" 83). This is yet another reason why it is so important to maintain the division between diegetic and performed characters: there is no one shared diegesis but multiple subjective diegeses, and hence, there is no one ideal diegetic character that guides the performance but rather multiple insights that all would end up in a different performance. In fact, it could be said that there can as many interpretations of a character as there are players playing that same character. Diegetic character is the map and performed character is the path the player chooses to walk in the territory described in that map. (See also Harding 2007)

It is important to notice that performed characters should be regarded as processes rather than self-standing entities. By this I mean that they don't exist if they are not performed. They manifest themselves through player-action and if there is no action, there is no character. Before someone actually goes and walks the path in the territory, it remains a plan on the map and it might still change on the way. This is why it is a process: the character is being constructed action by action and before the action really has been performed, we cannot know for sure whether it will be performed or not. It is also noteworthy that the performed character exists only for the duration of the game. When the player ends the performance, the performed character ceases to act. What remains is the diegetic character that, possibly, continues developing in the minds of the players. Thus, performing a character is constructing a character, i.e. performed character is the constructed character.

2.3. The Interaction of the Characters

Now that I've introduced my concepts of diegetic and performed characters, I would like to further develop their position within the previous role-playing research, namely that of communication in RPGs. This is crucial because not only does it offer some new perspective on the previous theory but it also relates to character construction in the sense that without interaction with other players, performing one's character and, hence, executing performative actions that construct the character would pretty much lose their meaning. Although diegetic characters are subjective and, in a sense, inaccessible to other players, it doesn't mean that the other players wouldn't be able to affect the way subjective diegeses are being constructed. As a matter of fact, diegetic characters could be considered to be interacting with each other. This interaction, however, is a bit different from the interaction between performed characters. I would call this *a biased means of interaction*. But before I can go any further with this concept, I would like to explain a little bit more about the basis of this claim.

To get to the bottom of my statement, I would like to introduce the classic model of interaction frames in role-playing games by Gary Allan Fine. With his model Fine seeks to explain the possibilities for Goffman's *keying* and *fabrication* in role-playing games. To quickly recap: keying is the process of transforming activity into a new frame of interpretation, and fabrication is the process of giving someone a false belief on what is going on. Fine notes that in the case of role-playing games the structure of these framing devices can be very complex because in RPGs "there are keyings (and sometimes fabrications) nestled within the original frame. Characters sometimes find it necessary to trick others by pretending that they (the characters) are someone other than who they 'really' are" (185). An example of this was seen above when I discussed the fabrication that took place in the actions of the player of *Anna Winslow*. To get to the bottom of this

complexity, Fine ends up classifying three main frames within which the players operate during a game. These frames are well summarized by Daniel Mackay as follows:

- 1) the social frame inhabited by the *person*;
- 2) the game frame inhabited by the *player*;
- 3) the gaming-world frame inhabited by the *character* (54, italics original).

According to Fine, the social frame is “the primary framework,” which shows “the commonsense understandings that *people* have of the real world.” It is where we operate as our everyday social selves, and perceive our fellow ‘inhabitants’ also as such. Within the game frame, on the other hand, the “players must deal with the game context; they are *players* whose actions are governed by a complicated set of rules and constraints.” If someone would deny these rules, that would break the frame and bring the interaction back to the primary framework. And lastly, in the gaming-world frame “the players not only manipulate characters; they *are* characters.” Within this frame everything that is diegetic is considered to be the truth and everything non-diegetic is to be ignored. (186)

To better suit my objective in explaining the performance of larping, I would like to further develop Fine’s set of frames by dividing the third frame into two: that of the performed character and that of the diegetic character. Hence the new set of frames would be as follows:

- 1) the social frame inhabited by the *person*;
- 2) the game frame inhabited by the *player*;
- 3) the *performatic* frame inhabited by the *performed character*;
- 4) the *diegetic* frame inhabited by the *diegetic character*.

In this setting we can see that there is a difference between the interaction of the performed characters and the interaction of the diegetic characters. The performatic frame

is the “real-life” frame where the players perform their characters and interact with each other as if they were those characters. The diegetic frame, on the other hand, is in “an abstract” frame in the minds of the players and cannot obtain a concrete ‘face-to-face’ interaction. I’m offering this division not because of a need to criticize Fine’s theory, but because I believe that this division should be taken into account in the case of larps. In a sense, my argument might seem a bit problematic because, in terms of communication, Fine’s division is still highly valid and my adjustment does not bring anything new to this setting per se because in both the performatic frame and the diegetic frame the communication still stays in the level of diegesis (i.e. communication *as character*). However, in terms of performance there is a difference and that is why I find a need to separate these frames from each other.

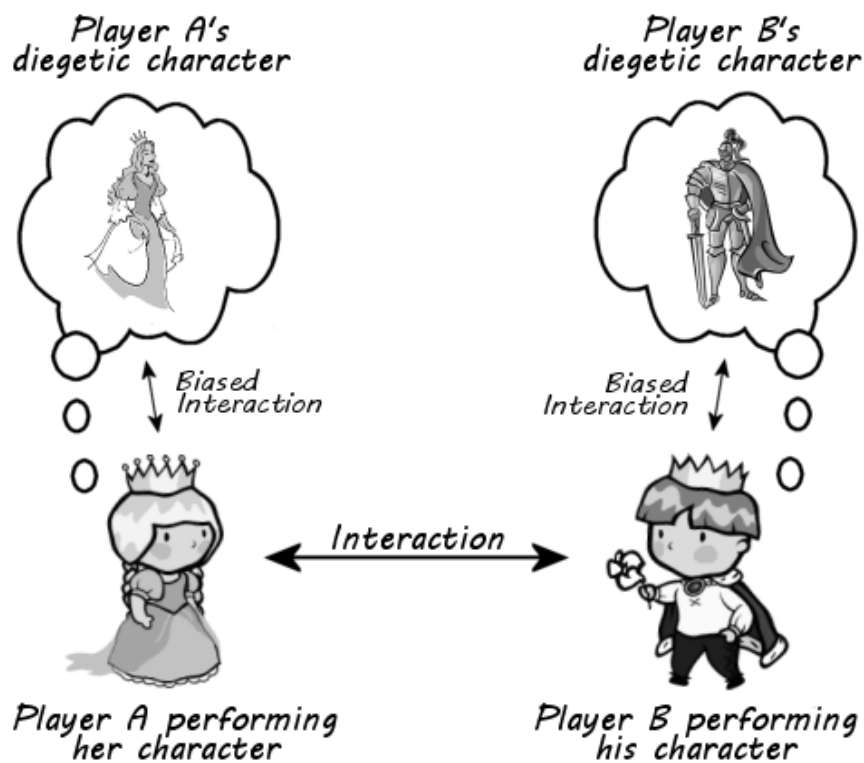


Figure 1 The interaction of the performed characters and the biased interaction of diegetic characters

In this setting of frames it is clear that there is interaction between persons in the social frame, players in the game frame and performed characters in performatic frame. But in what sense are diegetic characters interacting if they are always subjective and exist only in the minds of the players? Wouldn't this mean that one has to be telepathic to establish interaction? As I mentioned earlier, I believe that diegetic characters interact in a game through biased means. This means that they interact through the performed characters. In other words, diegetic characters use the 'former' frame as their medium (see Fig. 1) In a sense we could say that all the frames use the former frames as their medium: players need social persons to mediate them and performed characters need players to mediate them, but in the case of diegetic characters this need is more concrete than with the others. This is why I call it the biased interaction.

2.4. Looking at the Paradigms of Larping

In the preceding chapters I have introduced my take on character construction by explaining the performatic behaviour of larping and the different levels of characters that structure this behaviour. Through these notions I have come to state that performing character is constructing character, and thus performed character is the constructed character. In this chapter I will deepen this knowledge by showing how the player's relationship towards his or her character can vary according to the dominant larping paradigm. By 'paradigm', I mean the set of values, beliefs and attitudes that guide the player's actions and preferences in the gaming situations. In the examination of character construction it means the player's relationship to the diegetic character and the carrying out of performatic actions accordingly.

I divide the larping paradigm roughly into two: *immersionism* and *narrativism*. These paradigms stem from a set of Nordic larp writings and manifestos that have sought to

define and categorize larping and, basically, declare how it should be done. The publication of these writings started in the late 1990's and even after its peak in the turn of the century some papers still show up every now and then. Since the canon of the manifestos is relatively vast, I won't be presenting all of them in detail here. Instead, I have chosen to discuss some of those that I find most relevant to the matter of character construction including, for example, *The Threefold Model FAQ* (Kim 1998), *The Three Way Model* (Bøckman 2003), *The Manifesto of the Turku School* (Pohjola 2003), *The Meilahti Model* (Hakkarainen and Stenros 2003), and *The Storyteller's Manifesto* (Westlund 2004).

2.4.1. The Basis of the Paradigms

One of the first writings to influence the paradigms I'm proposing was John Kim's *The Threefold Model FAQ* (1998). It was originally developed by debaters on a role-playing related newsgroup called *rec.games.frp.advocacy* and subsequently published by John Kim. The Threefold Model is a model for tabletop RPGs but in the first annual *Solmukohta* book *As Larp Grows Up* (2003) Petter Bøckman presented his larp related revision of the model called *The Three Way Model*.

In both models there are three types of role-players. In Kim's model they are called *dramatist*, *gamist* and *simulationist*; and in Bøckman's model *dramatist*, *gamist* and *immersionist*. In these models, *simulationist* and *immersionist* indicate the same style of playing but to avoid confusion among larpers, where the term 'immersion' was already being used, Bøckman preferred to use the latter.⁹ According to the models, *dramatist* players aim at creating satisfying storylines for their characters; *gamists* at solving problems and other challenges such as combats, mysteries and politics; and *simulationists* / *immersionists* at living the character's life and feeling what the character would feel.

⁹ It could also be added that the word 'simulation' has a slightly different connotation than the word 'immersion'. Simulation connotes the attempt of creating something realistic or truthful whereas immersion connotes the attempt of focusing or concentrating on something.

I'm basing my set of larping paradigms into this classic player model. However, the reason why I have chosen to narrow it down to two is that, although we can clearly see three different goals for role-playing in the models, I believe that there are only two attitudes towards the character construction present. These are the immersionist attitude and the narrativist attitude. In the former the player seeks to immerse into the mind of the character and to exclude every piece of information that is not perceived by the character; in the latter the player perceives the character as a kind of a social mask that enables his or her enactment in the diegesis and is possibly willing to use metainformation¹⁰ if it helps in achieving the desired character construction. In the following, I will discuss these paradigms more thoroughly.

2.4.2. Narrativism

What I'm suggesting with the narrativist paradigm is that the two player types from *The Threefold / Three Way Model*, dramatist and gamist, could be categorized under the same paradigm because they both aim at staying "outside" their characters by making planned choices that build up narratives for their characters. Narrativism is a term from Ron Edwards' similar RPG model called the *GNS-model* (2001). In his model the three types of playing are called gamist, simulationist and narrativist. The model is similar to *The Threefold / Three Way Model* with the apparent exception that in his model dramatists are called narrativists. I chose to use this term in my paradigm model because both dramatism and gamism could be regarded to have narrative aspirations.

There are a few key elements that I consider to characterize narrativist larping. The first element is that the player has an "outside" attitude towards his or her character. This means that during the game the player treats the character rather as a social mask that

¹⁰ Metainformation in this context means non-diegetic information that is perceived by the player but not by the character (Harviainen "Information" 38)

enables his or her enactment in the diegesis than as a personality that overtakes the player and replaces his or her identity with that of the character's (Harviainen "Information" 17). The second element is that, since the player takes an "outside" position to the character, the performative actions the player carries out are usually consciously chosen or planned to enhance the story of the character. The third element is that the narrativist player can be open-minded about the use of metainformation if it helps creating a desirable storyline. However, this doesn't mean that it is always if not ever done; the player can also choose to ignore the metainformation and see where the use of diegetic information will take the character. The fourth and the final element is that in narrativist playing action is valued over thought. The internal processes of the character are not considered relevant to the story unless they get expressed physically during the game.

Some of the larp writings that call for the narrativist playing are, for example, *The Manifest Sunday* (Boss et al. 2001), *The Meilahti Model* (Hakkarainen and Stenros 2003), and *The Storyteller's Manifesto* (Westlund 2004). The first and foremost objective of *The Manifest Sunday* and *The Storyteller's Manifesto* is the primary storyline and the delivering of a message:

The larp should be centred on a story with a clear theme and a strong message. The larp should intrigue and pull the players into the story, and at the same time it should lead to contemplation and new thoughts and ideas about the theme or the message that is told through the story. (Westlund 250)

All characters are to be created and interpreted with the intent of serving the story's purpose. The character and the actor are different entities, even during the enactment. (Boss et al. 68)

The writers of *The Meilahti Model*, on the other hand, emphasise the need for interaction. According to them, "a role-playing game is created in the interaction between players or

between a player and a game master” and “what one does alone” is called “daydreaming” (Hakkarainen and Stenros 62).

2.4.3. Immersionism

When the narrativist paradigm takes an “outside” attitude towards the character, the immersionist paradigm does the opposite by emphasising the “inside”. This is the first key element of immersionism because the basic idea of the paradigm is that, when the game begins, the player’s personality becomes that of the character’s and everything the player perceives and experiences during the game is perceived and experienced through the character, i.e. the player is “inside” the character’s mind. The second key element of immersionism is that, since the player ought to think and act like the character, the performative actions the player carries out ought to be unconscious or automatic, as if it was the character behaving instinctively. The third key element of immersionism is the negative attitude towards metainformation; addressing anything non-diegetic during the game would mean not being true to the objective of “insiderness.” And finally, the fourth key element is that in immersionist playing thought goes before action. This means that players value the internal processes of the characters and regard dwelling in them to be just as much role-playing as interaction with the other players.

Immersionism became highly debated among the Nordic larpers after *The Manifesto of the Turku School* (Pohjola 2003) was first published in 1999. It was the flagship for the larpers who vowed in the name of immersion and the headache for those who did not like the arrogance of the declaration. According to the *Turku School* “role-playing is immersion . . . to an outside consciousness (‘a character’) and interacting with its surrounding” (34). In their manifesto they vowed, for example, to refrain from using non-diegetic methods and to avoid stage acting. What mattered was not the other players’ response to the character, but the player’s own relationship to his or her character:

Later on the author of the manifesto, Mike Pohjola, offered a new reading on immersion by explaining that the ideal “complete immersion” the *Turku School* tried to achieve is not possible (“Autonomous” 81). He argues that immersion is pretence and that “more than *pretending to be* the character, the player *pretends to believe she is* the character” (84, italics orig.). Pohjola continues by noting that “the longer the player pretends to believe, the more she starts to believe,” and that, “immersion is the player assuming the identity of the character by pretending to believe her identity only consists of the diegetic roles” (84-85).

A similar reading on larp immersion is offered through Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s theory of *flow*. According to Csikszentmihalyi, the flow state is something where:

. . . action follows upon action according to an internal logic that seems to need no conscious intervention by the actor. He experiences it as a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which he is in control of his actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment, between stimulus and response, or between past, present, and future. (“Beyond Boredom” 36)

He also specifies that in the flow state:

Concentration is so intense that there is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant, or to worry about other problems. Self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time becomes distorted. (“Flow” 71)

Heidi Hopeametsä, for example, applies the concept of flow to larp immersion by noting that flow is an “experience of immersive engagement” but also points out that “immersion is not the same as flow: it is a means of achieving flow” (190). Nevertheless, such reading on immersion is quite similar to that of Pohjola’s even if the two have a completely different strategy for addressing the issue. Thus, it could be summarized that in immersionist

playing the player seeks to become so focused on the performance that everything else is forgotten for the duration of the game.

2.4.4. ... Or Something in Between?

I have briefly introduced the concepts of narrativism and immersionism with some examples from the discussion that has been going on about the topic in the Nordic larp scene. As we can see, the key elements I offer for both sides are pretty straightforwardly the opposites of each other. Also, the overall presentation of the two paradigms has been highly dichotomic. This has been completely intentional although not definite. I don't mean to claim that such opposites would truly exist in practice. Already Kim and Bøckman make it clear that the playing styles they present are merely ideals and that in actual role-playing they tend to overlap and mix. They are not self standing entities and, as far as my experience goes, most larpers may not even know that such ideologies of playing exist.

The reason why I wanted to offer such a presentation of these two paradigms is that, on a theoretical level, we could consider them to point out aspects of larping that characterize the process of character construction. We could, for example, note that in immersionist larping the construction of the performed character is being automatized by the flow experience, whereas in the narrativist larping the same occurs in a planned and organized manner. I will be offering more reflection on this later, but before going any further, I would like to say a couple more things about the overlapping and mixing of the paradigms.

In his field study done on the perception of identity during larps, J. Tuomas Harviainen came to the conclusion that "player types' as they have been suggested in earlier role-playing analysis do not exist in larps" ("Information" 41). What does exist, however, is a difference in the patterns of participation and immersion influenced by the

“cognitive variables that affect information seeking behaviour during play” (ibid.). In his study, Harviainen comes to the conclusion that there can be at least seven different “player patterns” that affect the performance of the players and have, for example, different attitudes towards the purpose of the game and use of metainformation in it. I don’t find it necessary to go through all these patterns here but what I want to point out is that, as Harviainen notes, they can vary from game to game and even between moments during one game. “Players may have preferred ways of in-game presence or default playing-styles, but fixed, immutable player *types* appear very rare” (27).

The questionnaire I made for the players of *OSA IV* also showed that not all the players identified themselves with just either or – immersionism or narrativism.

What kind of a larper are you, i.e. what is your relationship towards playing and how do you usually play? (*Place your answers in the scale!*)

Immersionist	1	2	3	4	5	Narrativist
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Out of the 33 player who answered the questionnaire, seven players (21 %) placed themselves to ‘1’; fourteen players (43 %) placed themselves to ‘2’; nine players (27 %) to ‘3’; two players to ‘4’; and one player to ‘5’. Although a clear emphasis on is the immersionist side, I would like to point out that almost one third of the players chose ‘3’, which would indicate that they did not identify themselves with either of the paradigms. Also, the majority of fourteen players who chose ‘2’, apparently leaned towards immersionism with some cautiousness that might leave room for interpretations. Therefore, it could be concluded that most of the players in *OSA IV* did not want to identify themselves with either of the extreme ends of larping paradigms but rather somewhere in between. (See Chart 1)

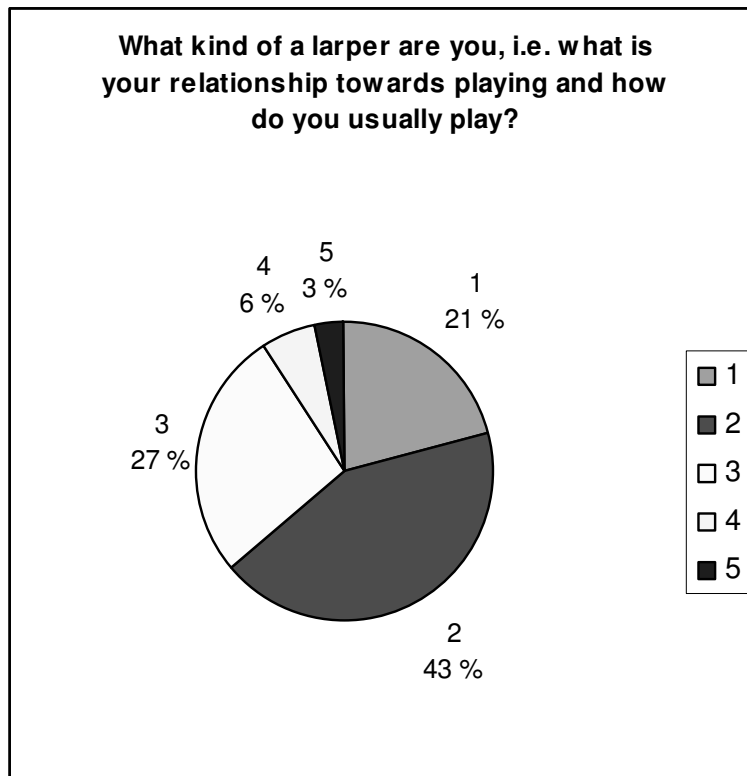


Chart 1 What kind of a larper are you, i.e. what is your relationship towards playing and how do you usually play?

2.5. Final Notes on Character Construction

I would now like to summarize what has been discussed in this chapter and to answer the question: in what sense are players constructing their characters during the gaming process? I regard larping as transportative performatic behaviour that consists of performatic actions. These performatic actions carried out by the players are based on their ideal diegetic characters and the embodiment of those ideals creates, what I call, performed characters. It is the final product of the player's performance and, hence, the construction of the character created by the player. Performing character is constructing character, and thus performed character is the construction of the character.

But what about the other question posed in the beginning of this chapter? What sorts of features affect the construction of characters? I have suggested that we could base our

analysis of the character construction on the dominant larping paradigm at stake and see whether the construction of the character consists of an intentional process of planning and organizing the performance on behalf of the player (i.e. narrativism) or of an unintentional process of automatized behaviour created by a flow state (i.e. immersionism). If we place emphasis on the former, we could say that the performed character is merely one of the many possibilities the player could have constructed during the game, and, if we place the emphasis on the latter, we could consider the performed character to be a result of specific moments in specific circumstances the player encountered during the game. And, to get back to the map-territory metaphor, it could be said that in both cases the player walks a certain path in the territory according to the map given to him or her, but the difference in walking the paths is that in the immersionist playing the player chooses to rely completely on the map and walks the path blindly from one side to another. The path walked by the player is then considered to be the one and the only possible under the circumstances given to him or her. In the narrativist playing, on the other hand, the player navigates in the territory according to the map, but is also ready to try side paths and short cuts found in the territory. The path walked by the player is then the one that he or she chose to walk that time but not necessarily the same the player would walk the next time.

Be it either or, immersionist or narrativist playing, in the following chapters I will be further exploring the gaming process of players as a process of decision making, i.e. as a process in which the players come about to choose which performatic actions to carry out. At time to time this exploration might seem to put emphasis on the narrativist paradigm because the discussion might seem to assume that the player is aware of his or her doings. This, however, is not the case. My intention is not to neglect the immersive effect of larping because, as Harviainen has shown and as far as my experience goes, the

playing patterns can vary from moment to moment in a game and the paradigm of playing can shift from narrativism to immersionism and vice versa over and over again during the event. Therefore, when I talk about the player's decision making in the following chapters, I wish the reader would recognize that this choice making can be as much conscious as it is unconscious. Although my objective is not to go too deep into the psychology of the human mind and to the levels of consciousness in the cognitive processes of the player's performatic behaviour, I intend to carry this notion in the analysis throughout the study, even if it will not get expressed explicitly all the time.

3. THE GAMELIKENESS OF LARPS

When the nature of human behaviour in larps is being under examination, one can't bypass the fact that larps are fundamentally a form of play. This play is very similar to that of children's pretend play, but still slightly different. Richard Schechner has pointed out, without even talking about larps in specific, that "what children do, adults organize" ("Performance Theory" 13). This notion, although for my purposes perhaps completely unintentionally, manages to indicate something that fundamentally separates larps from children's play: larps are planned and organized and children's play is something that usually just happens. Nevertheless, going deeper into the meaning of this notion is not the purpose of this chapter; rather it was meant to serve as a trigger to open up the actual theme that will be discussed next: the *gamelikeness* of larps.

As the name of the activity indicates, live action role-playing games could be considered to be *games*. However, the current understanding on the matter within Game Studies seems to be that role-playing games are not games in the strictest definition of the term but rather ought to be regarded as a "limit case" (Salen and Zimmerman 81). Hence, I chose to use the term 'gamelike' to indicate that, when I talk about larps as games, I recognise the problematics behind the comparison.

Another thing that might cause confusion is my use of the words 'play' and 'games.' My experience has shown that it may not always be clear why there has to be a separation between the two terms. Aren't they the same thing? My answer would be yes and no. People play games and games are play. However, these two concepts are not completely synonymic. Here, I understand them the way Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman put it: *games* can be seen as a subset of *play*, and *play* can be seen as a component of *games*

(72). By this they mean that there are many kinds of playful activities but not all of them are games. Games are very specific and structured activities that share the crucial feature of being playful. Hence, when I talk about games, I mean an activity that is a subset of play, and when I talk about play, I mean a phenomenon that is larger than games.

The idea of larps being gamelike has been troubling me quite a bit. Because they so fundamentally seem to be performances it has been difficult for me to understand why they are called games. This was something I kept on bumping into when taking part in larps: especially in the Finnish larping scene people talk about *playing* larps, not about *performing* them. Hence, I started asking: can a performance be a game? If a larp is a performance and hence a series of performatic actions that the players produce during the game, in what sense and to what extent can these performatic actions become gamelike activity? After a long search I finally came to the conclusion that yes, to some extent larps can be games, and yes, to some extent they can produce gamelike activity. This is the journey to my discoveries.

In this chapter, I will first discuss the matter of play. What is play? How do we recognise it? In what sense larps are play? I don't even try to claim that I will be able to answer these questions thoroughly because only the first question, 'what is play,' would demand a whole study of its own. Nevertheless, I believe it is important to understand something about the concept before looking at games. Therefore, I will begin the chapter by briefly going through some of the classic play theorists and their findings and also some more recent discussion on play and larping. After this, I will proceed to the examination of games and the gamelikeness of larps. My means to do this is to begin by looking at some definitions for games that are being used in the current game research, and analyse what, according to them, makes games what they are. After this, I will compare these qualifiers to role-playing games and explain what makes them "limit cases." Finally, after the

examination of the strictest definitions for games, I will turn my gaze into a more qualitative approach: the ludological structure of larps. Hence, by the end of this chapter I will have introduced my take on the gamelikeness of larps and shown how, instead of looking at the macro level of gaming (i.e. the activity as a whole), we could understand gamelikeness as something that emerges from the micro level of the activity (i.e. individual scenarios and their ludological structures).

3.1. Defining Play

Just as 'performance', also 'play' is a term difficult to pinpoint. It is ambiguous, pervasive, and, in fact, pretty much everything in life could be regarded as play. The two classic play theorists, Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois, both define play as a free activity that has its own concept of time and space. As Huizinga famously summarizes, play is:

. . . A free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means. (13)

Caillois, on the other hand, ends up with a more systematic list of the features of play. According to him play is free, separate, uncertain, unproductive, governed by rules, and make-believe (Caillois 9-10). By looking at these two definitions we can see that, despite a few exceptions, they both describe play pretty much the same way: it is free, separate from "ordinary" time and space, unproductive or unprofitable, and it is governed by rules.

What is interesting is that, in his analysis on play, Caillois neglects Huizinga's notion about secrecy by stating that play is "nearly always spectacular or ostentatious," and tends to expose secrecy (4). Instead, he chooses to define play as make-believe. This make-believe, for him, is "accompanied by a special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real life" (10). This definition, I would say, hits the point in larping, for it is most definitely make-believe, that creates a separation between the self and the behaviour. However, I must emphasize that Caillois' concept of make-believe does not only mean believing in fictional characters and fairytales (as the word might indicate) but overall believing in what one is doing. Hence, it could be said that a crucial feature for a play to succeed is that the participants believe in the *double effect* of the activity.

This double effect is best explained by Gregory Bateson, who, after observing animals playing in the Fleishhacker Zoo in 1952 and forward, came to the conclusion that play is a *paradox* because at the same time it does and does not stand for what is being signalled. ". . . The playful nip denotes the bite, but does not denote that which would be denoted by the bite" (Bateson 183). This means, as Caillois had pointed out, that play deals with an awareness of a secondary reality, and that in this secondary reality the actions of the players may signal something else than they would in the ordinary life. Erving Goffman calls this a *transformation* of "a strip of fighting behaviour into a strip of play" (41). Thus, the double effect of play means that it creates a secondary meaning for the signals the players send to each other. For example, it is common in Finnish larps that dangerous and intimate situations like fighting and sex are chosen to be simulated by other means than the real action itself. This is considered to improve both the safety and the equality of the players. In *OSA IV*, kissing was simulated by rubbing noses. This meant that the players had an agreement that if anyone saw two players rubbing noses during the game, it was to be interpreted as the two kissing, not as the two just rubbing noses.

A specific characteristic of larps as make-believe is that they are based on pretence. An interesting analysis on larps as such an activity is offered by Erling Rognli according to whom they are intrinsically an adult form of *pretend play*. He uses the concept of pretend play to address the activity in which children pretend to be something else than what they are. "Pretence," he specifies, "is constituted by the conscious projection of a manipulated mental representation on the physical and social reality, and by acting in accordance with the projected representation while being aware of its counterfactual nature" (200). He proposes that "larpers employ the same fundamental skills and basic cognitive capacities to larp as children do when they play pretend games" (203). This idea of pretence might make it easier to understand the concept of make-believe as something larger: make-believe is something that occupies all aspects of play while pretence is merely one side of make-believe especially typical for larps.

A pure necessity for the make-believe to take place is the creation of the *magic circle*. It is a term that originates from Huizinga's work but is borrowed by Salen and Zimmerman to describe the special time-space sphere of games (94). In Goffman's terms, it is the frame of play. It keys the behaviour accordingly and enables the make-believe to take place. It has its own concept of time and space: the participants of the play can, for example, pretend to travel back in time or leap forward to the future. In practice, the creation of a magic circle can be both a mental and a physical thing. It might be something that the players just know to be present but also something that is being created by temporal or spatial signs. For example, in larps the players might agree that the game starts at midday and ends by midnight, and that they are allowed to play only in the courtyard and not leave the area.

An interesting example of the boundaries of the magic circle in larps is the *off-game sign*.¹¹ If there is a need to interrupt a game for awhile, the most commonly used system in the Finnish larping scene is to raise your fist in front of your forehead to indicate that what follows is not the doings of your character but something that you do as yourself. For example, in *OSA IV*, the player of the singing teacher *Miss Belinda Myers* ended up in an awkward situation that required the interruption of the game with the off-game sign.

The school's student driven newspaper BackStage's computer was infected with a virus. The students managed to save the latest, unpublished volume of the paper to a USB flash drive. Unfortunately, the flash drive soon disappeared mysteriously. The situation evolved into quite a scandal and the teachers felt a need to interfere. Miss Myers was appointed to solve the situation by interrogating the students involved in the mess.

After the game, the player of *Miss Myers* told that during one of these interrogations she explained one of the students that she had heard *Derek Ludlow*, a student, accusing the chief editor of the paper, *Feodore Oswald*, of losing the flash drive and asked the interrogated student what he thought about this. Suddenly the player of this student raised her¹² fist as the off-game sign and told the player of *Miss Myers* that she was actually the one playing *Feodore*. The player of *Miss Myers* then realized that she had mixed the player to someone else and now had to change the tone of the interrogation. After the player of *Feodore* lowered her fist, they continued the game as if the mistake had not happened.

There are still two aspects of play defined by Huizinga and Caillois that I would like to discuss. The first point is the one they both mention before anything else: play is free. What does it mean? Huizinga and Caillois emphasize that play is free in the sense that it is

¹¹ Also known as the *out-of-character sign*. The usage of the term depends on the country. In Finland larpers use the expressions *in-game* and *off-game* to indicate the status of their behaviour, but, for example, in the United Kingdom the corresponding terms are *in-character* and *out-of-character*.

¹² The player was cross-playing a character of the opposite sex.

not obligatory. But can it really be so? Victor Turner, for instance, divides play into liminal and liminoid; compulsory and optional. He argues that play can be a fundamental part of, for example, such rituals that are seen as a necessary part of life cycle. It is also doubtful, he notes, whether an activity can be considered free if there is no juxtaposition between work and leisure: the concept of leisure emerged with the Industrial Revolution, but the concept of play has existed long before that. (“Liminal to Liminoid” 30-32) In this sense, we can’t take it for granted that play is free as in voluntary. What we can say, nevertheless, is that play is free in its form. There is no one correct way of doing it but rather as many ways as there are players. Hence, play is free.

The second point I’d still like to discuss is rules. Both Huizinga and Caillois mention that play is governed by rules. They are needed because, without them, maintaining make-believe might become too challenging for the players. For example, there can be rules about what should and should not be a part of the reality of the play: a playful nip equals a bite but a real bite is prohibited. However, because play is free, as we have just learned, rules can get blurred and the activity might get driven into chaos. Richard Schechner, for example, writes about *dark play* in which some of the players may not even know they are playing, such as in a con game (“Performance Studies” 199). My point is that, true, play is governed by rules, but the concept of these rules can vary so greatly that talking about any fixed or formal rules would be too restrictive. Hence, play can have rules but is not necessarily defined by them.

3.2. Classifying Game

In the beginning of this chapter, I made a preliminary division between play and game by using a definition from Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman: games are a subset of play and play is a component of games. In this study I talk about games as a subset of play. Play is

a wide phenomenon that relates to human behaviour in all parts of life, whereas games are something playful but more precise in nature. This preciseness can be found in several widely cited game definitions, one of which is that of Bernard Suits' where he states that:

. . . To play a game is to engage in activity directed towards bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by rules, where the rules prohibit more efficient in favour of less efficient means, and where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity. (Suits 34)

Here Suits addresses, I would say, the two most common features given for games: goals and rules. Games are directed towards a goal, a specific state of affairs, and the means to reach this goal are limited by rules, usually in favour of the less efficient means. For example, in chess the players can move the pieces only according to certain patterns; they can't just randomly place them on the board to checkmate the opponent's king. Or, for example, in a running race, as Salen and Zimmerman note, one can't leave the track and cut across the field to get to the finish line first; everybody has to stay within the white lines (77).

To take a look at other, more recent definitions for games, we could compare those from Salen and Zimmerman and Jesper Juul. Salen and Zimmerman see game as:

A system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that result in a quantifiable outcome ("Half-real" 80).

With artificiality they mean pretty much the same thing as Caillois did with make-believe: games occupy their own reality aside "real life", and in that reality there is a conflict that needs to be solved. Jesper Juul offers what he calls a classic game model. It is a combination of earlier definition, including that of Salen & Zimmerman's, but also those from e.g. Huizinga, Caillois and Suits. According to Juul:

A game is a rule-based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels emotionally attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are negotiable (36).

What these two descriptions share, is that they both emphasize the quantifiability of the outcome. This relates to what David Parlett calls formal and informal games. Informal games are undirected play, whereas formal games have “a twofold structure based on ends and means” (qtd. in Salen & Zimmerman 74). By *ends* Parlett means that formal games have objectives which can be achieved by one of the players (or teams). Achieving the objective is followed by the ending of the game and someone being the winner. *Means*, on the other hand, indicate the rules and the equipment needed to achieve the objective. Both Salen & Zimmerman and Juul seem to consider games strictly as such formal systems.

3.3. Role-Playing Games as Games

If games are seen as strictly formal systems, it should be quite clear whether something can be considered a game or not. This preciseness of defining games is well seen in how Juul emphasizes that whenever all the six features of his classic game model constitute an activity, it can be called a game (45). This leads him into the conclusion that some systems, which are being called games, are, in fact, merely borderline cases – role-playing games being one of those cases (43). A similar statement is given by Salen and Zimmerman, who discuss RPGs as a “limit case” (81). What is limiting in RPGs as games is, according to Salen and Zimmerman, that they do not seem to have quantifiable goals (81), and according to Juul, that their rules are not fixed beyond discussion because they use a human game master (43). Therefore, both goals and rules, the intrinsic

characteristics of games, are being questioned when RPGs are at stake. But why do we still talk about role-playing *games*? Is there still something gamelike in them?

Role-playing games can be called open ended or “zero-sum” games where there are no winners and losers. But this doesn’t mean that there are no goals. As Salen and Zimmerman admit, there can be quantifiable characteristics in RPGs as well. By this they refer to Greg Costikyan, according to whom character improvement is the key concept in stating whether there can be goals in RPGs or not: the players can make their characters become more skilful and powerful by gaining hit points (13). This, however, is more related to tabletop RPGs and, for example, online MUDs (Multi-User Dungeon) such as *World of Warcraft*, than to larping. At least in Finnish larps hit points are seldom, if not ever, used.

Although Salen and Zimmerman explicitly emphasize the need for quantifiable goals, I would argue that character improvement in RPGs is not only about collecting hit points. It can also be about qualitative values, such as character’s social status and knowledge. But, there can also be goals that don’t necessarily have to do with improvement per se; players can have all sorts of tasks their characters have to complete. These tasks can be assigned already before the game in a character sheet or during the game in the interaction between the players. These goals, as Costikyan notes, are implicit (14). It means that they emerge from the players and the game masters themselves and do not necessarily constitute the explicit structure of the game.

The teacher of singing, Miss Myers, was hiding something: she was having an affair with one of her students, Michael Hemmington. Despite their strong emotions towards each other, the relationship had to be kept secret because of two major reasons. The first reason was, of course, that teachers were not allowed to date their students. The other reason was that Michael was also dating Vivian Nash, another student of Miss Myers’. This made her extremely jealous and she was ready to do everything to get rid of Miss Nash. During the day, the director

of the Opera complex, Mr Reinfeld, asked Myers for an advice. He wanted to know who where the most talented students in her class because the Opera needed singers. Realizing that having a contract with the Opera would mean lots of absence in the school, Miss Myers started praising Vivian Nash to the director. Mr Reinfeld was convinced, Vivian got the part, and Miss Myers smiled.

This is a good example of an implicit goal in a larp. The players of *Miss Myers* had a goal to get rid of *Miss Nash*, and by making the player *Mr Reinfeld* believe that *Vivian* was the right choice for the Opera, the player of *Miss Myers* achieved this goal. Afterwards, the player even told that this was her biggest achievement during the game.

Another big question regarding larps as games is the question of rules. As Juul stated, tabletop RPGs or *pen and paper RPGs*, as he calls them, and therefore larps as well, do not have fixed rules because they operate with human game masters. Therefore the rules of the game are not fixed beyond negotiation. But this doesn't mean that RPGs wouldn't have any common rule sets. Markus Montola proposes that there are at least three rules for role-playing: the world rule, the power rule and the character rule ("The Invisible Rules" 23). The world rule implies that role-playing is "an interactive process of defining and re-defining the state, properties and contents of an imaginary game world." The power rule shows that "the power to define the game world is allocated to participants of the game." And finally, according to the character rule, the players "define the game world through personified character constructs." Montola argues that the presence or the absence of these three rules defines whether a game is role-playing or not and therefore ends up stating that role-playing is, in fact, a game of formal make-believe (24). This is to say, that make-believe in RPGs is not completely free but has to follow these three rules. In this sense, we can see that there actually are rules that prohibit the effective means of reaching the game's objectives in favour of the less effective: the players can define the

diegesis only according to the current state of its affairs and only through their own personified characters.

3.4. Towards Ludology

Now that we have discussed the gamelikeness of larps by taking a look at how games are being defined, I would like to suggest another approach. One way to think about larps as gamelike could be to take a look at their construction of narrative. Larps create stories about the characters in them, and these stories will live even after the games in the discussions and debriefs the players write. I'm wondering: in what sense are these narrations being created during the game? Is there such a thing as a gamelike way of telling stories?

. . . The story of an event is not necessarily the same as the event itself, and stories can be told about things other than stories, luckily. Furthermore, there is no reason that the basic elements of narrative cannot be used for other purposes. For instance, both stories and games of football consist of a succession of events. But even though stories might be told about it, a football match is not in itself a story. The actions within the game are not narrative actions. (Aarseth 94)

Here Espen Aarseth, the author of *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (1997), argues that a game is not a story because *the story of an event is not the same as the event itself*. Although stories can be told about them, why is it that such an event like a football game is not a story in itself? Juul explains that comparing games to narratives is not possible because games are based on the interaction of the player and the game, and, as he notes, "there is an inherent conflict between the now of the interaction and the past or 'prior' of the narrative" ("Games Telling Stories"). By this he means that you can't have narration and interactivity at the same time because "there is no such thing as a continuously interactive story." Satu Heliö, talking especially about Finnish larps, continues

Juul's statement by declaring that although "the actual actions of a game do not make it a story" – just as living our lives don't make them stories – role-playing games have "strong narrative aspirations" (68-69). Nonetheless, this narration is created after the game, not during it – just as we create our life stories using the events from the past.

But if actions within a game are not narrative actions, what are they? Aarseth asks the same question and suggests that the proper adjective would be *ergodic*. The term derives from the Greek words *ergon* and *hodos*, the first meaning 'work' and the latter meaning 'path' (1). Ergodic "implies a situation in which a chain of events (a path, a sequence of actions, etc.) has been produced by the nontrivial effort of one or more individuals or mechanisms" (94). It is the result of choice making, basically. With Aarseth's opening in mind, Gonzalo Frasca elaborated on the discussion by suggesting the term *ludology*¹³ to refer to the study of such ergodic activities.¹⁴ His basic thesis is that where a narrative is "a set of chained actions," a game is "a set of possibilities," and, thus, they ought to have a study of their own.

According to Frasca, the "set of possibilities" includes the alternatives of winning and losing, the components that, for him, are crucial for games to be games. He uses a scheme borrowed from narratology to demonstrate that the set of possibilities can be a net of options for "a willing agent" or, in his case, for a player (See Fig. 2).

¹³ According to Johan Huizinga, the Latin word 'ludus' stands for 'play' (35).

¹⁴ In his article, Frasca does not use the term 'ergodic' per se, but since he does make a reference to Aarseth's work and places his own work into a continuum with that of Aarseth's, I dare to assume that the term can be used to indicate the ludological process he is writing about.

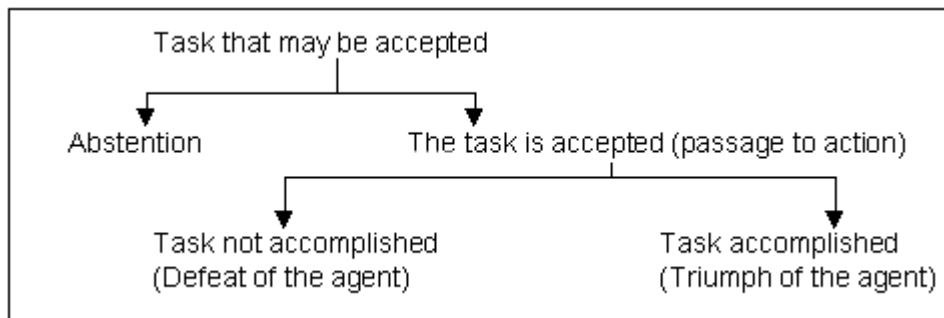


Figure 2 The net of possibilities for a willing agent from Gonzalo Frasca; “Ludology Meets Narratology”; 1999; Web; 28 Dec. 2009.

In this scheme the player confronts a task that can be either accepted or ignored. If the task is accepted, the result can be either that the task is accomplished or not accomplished. This creates the basic structure for a game and, therefore, helps to demonstrate whether the game has a quantifiable result or not; whether it is a game or not. As noted earlier, larps don’t necessarily have quantifiable results, but this doesn’t mean that such structures wouldn’t exist in them. They may not characterize the game as a whole but the players can confront these situations during larps.

According to Juul, playing a game includes awareness that the game session is just one possibility out of many others that the game offers (“Games Telling Stories”). If we think about it this way, we could assume that players are, at least to some extent, aware of the choices they make during games. The choices they make take them into new situations where they have to make new choices. Thus, the player chooses a path, a sequence of events that constitutes the plot of the game and, afterwards, becomes its narrative. This structure is based on the concept of hypertext, a term coined by Theodor H. Nelson in the 1960’s. Hypertext for Nelson means “non-sequential writing – text that branches and allows choices to the reader, best read at an interactive screen. As popularly conceived, this is a series of text chunks connected by *links* which offer the reader different pathways” (qtd. in Landow 2-3, italics added). In the words of Roland Barthes,

these “text chunks” could be called *nodes* (Landow 2). Although Nelson talks about written text, the concept of hypertext can be seen in games as well. Take chess, for instance: each setting of pieces on the board is a node. The players get into another node by moving one of the pieces into a new location on the board. The moving of a piece can be seen as a link into another node.

I argue that the hypertext phenomenon occurs in larps as well. When larpers interact with each other in the game, they offer each other impulses. A basic impulse could be, for example, asking a question or offering a gift. By receiving such an impulse, the player has to make a choice on how to respond: answer the question, accept the gift, etc. An impulse offered by one player, can be seen as a node for the other. These impulses can be either intended or unintended: a player discussing with another player may not be aware of them creating an impulse for a third player who is following their conversation from a distance. The response given to the impulse by a player is a link to a new node, i.e. a new situation in the game. By choosing the link, the player gives the other player an impulse back and therefore creates a node for him or her as well. This creates an interaction loop where the players create nodes for each other by choosing links away from their own nodes (See Fig. 3). Let’s take a look at the scene between *Miss Myers* and *Mr Reinfeld* again.

When Mr Reinfeld was looking for a student to whom he would offer a contract with the Opera, he could have started solving the situation by, for example, going through the student files; interviewing the students; or by consulting the teachers. He chose to do the latter. He did not know that by asking Miss Myers, he offered her a change to get rid of the girl who was constantly cuddling with her lover during the classes. When Reinfeld asked Myers for help, she could have, for example, recommended the students that actually deserved the part or she could have offered Miss Nash. She did the latter and, hence, Vivian got the part.

In this scenario, the first node was that of the player of *Mr Reinfeld* because he had the goal to recruit someone to the Opera. When he chose to consult *Miss Myers* on the matter, he threw the ball to her. Now, the player of *Miss Myers* encountered a node where she was expected to tell *Mr Reinfeld* about her students. By choosing to recommend *Miss Nash*, the player acted in favour of her character’s personal goals. After this, the player of *Mr Reinfeld* was in a node where he had to choose whether to accept the tip or not. He did, and the player of *Miss Myers* achieved her goal.

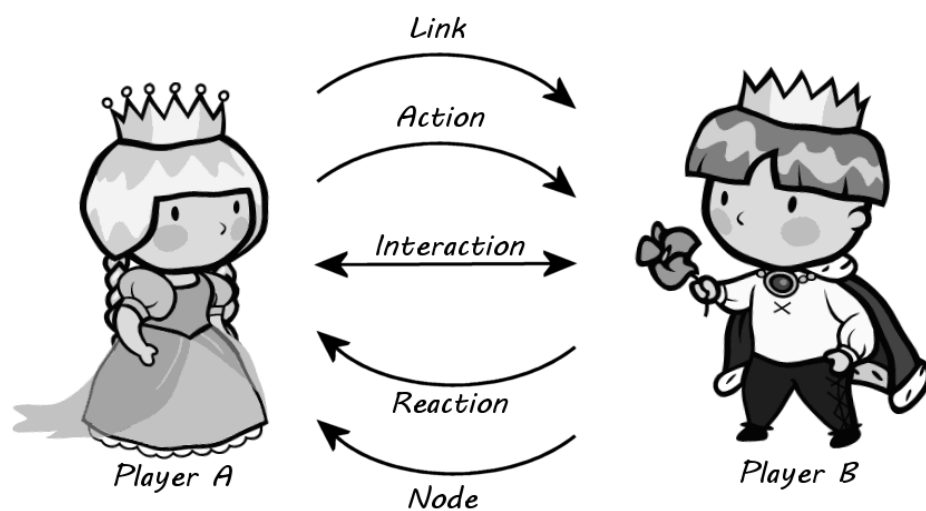


Figure 3 The creation of nodes and links in larp

Although we have already learned that role-playing games may not have such quantifiable results for explicit goals as other games have, they can have qualitative results for implicit goals. The example of *Mr Reinfeld* and *Miss Myers* could be considered as one, but another example could be taken from my own experience as a player. As Frasca noted, the possibility of not accomplishing one’s task is a part of what makes games games. Although he refers to a quantifiable failure, I would like to apply this notion to “a qualitative failure”:

Although Miss Thompson was engaged to Thomas Lloyd and was carrying his child, she was having a crush for the teacher of acting Mr Westford. It started out as an innocent one, but

something happened that day. She didn't know what it meant, but for some reason she started longing for a look, or a smile, or a word... Why didn't he notice her? Diana was desperately trying to get a contact with him and whenever the two were left alone in the teacher's room, her heart jumped. She smiled and she flirted, but Ethan didn't seem to care. During lunch, she even "accidentally" slipped her feet to lightly touch his leg, but with no response. Oh dear, what was wrong with her?

My character, the teacher of fine arts *Miss Diana Thompson*, had a crush for the teacher of acting, *Mr Ethan Westford*, although she was engaged to the teacher of audio-visual design, *Thomas Lloyd*, and was carrying a child for him. I, as a player, wanted to take an advantage of this setting and see how far it could go. Therefore, during the game, I tried to flirt with the player of *Mr Westford* whenever I had the chance. This included both situations where the player of *Mr Lloyd* was present and situations where it was just the two of us. Although my actions could be considered to be successful in the sense that the player of *Thomas* did notice the flirt and drove the character into a serious jealousy peak, my actions also encountered a failure: the player of *Ethan* did not respond to the flirt. This could be seen as "an error" in the interaction loop because, through out the game, I tried to send the player of *Ethan* the same impulse again and again with no reaction. Therefore, it could be said that I, as a player, encountered a qualitative failure with the action I chose.

Although encountering such a dead end was an extremely interesting experience, I don't regard failure to be a requirement for something to become gamelike. Being gamelike does not have to be about encountering failures and successes, but rather about the presence of possibilities. As Juul noted: ". . . Playing a game includes the awareness that the game session is just one out of many possible to be had from *this game*" ("Games Telling Stories" italics orig.). To find out whether this was the case in *OSA IV* or not, I decided to ask the players what they thought about it after the game:

I could have been able to perform a completely different story for my character during the game if I wanted to.

4 Strongly Agree

3 Agree

2 Disagree

1 Strongly Disagree

Important Not important

Out of the 33 players who answered the questionnaire, the great majority of 25 players (76 %) answered that they either *strongly agreed* or *agreed*. Also, out of these 25 players, the majority of 18 players (72 %) considered this to be *important*. What was extremely interesting was that, out of the 8 players (24 %) who did not agree on the possibility of performing a different story, 4 players still *agreed* or *strongly agreed* on the statements “I was thinking about the consequences of my actions before performing them” and “I chose my actions according to their possible consequences.” I believe this hints that, although these players felt like the ways they performed the stories of their characters were the only possible ways, at some level they were aware of other, apparently inconsiderable, possibilities. (See Charts 2-4)

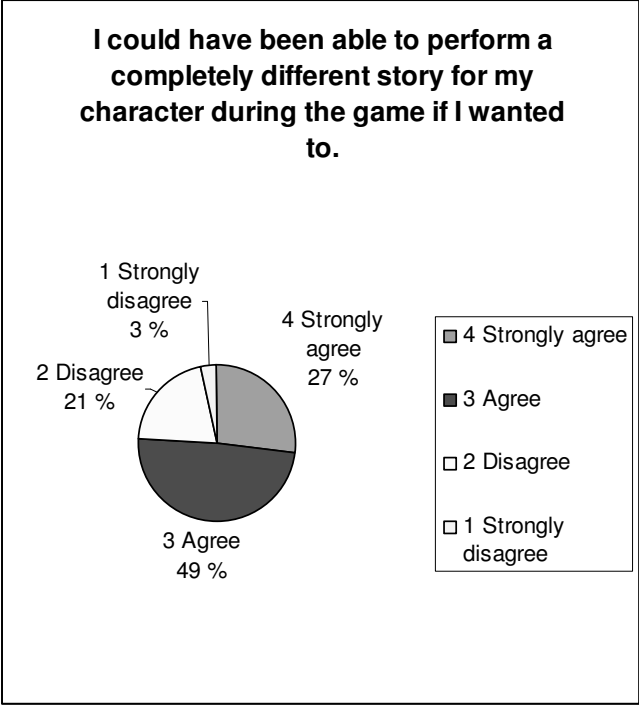


Chart 2 I could have been able to perform a completely different story for my character during the game if I wanted to.

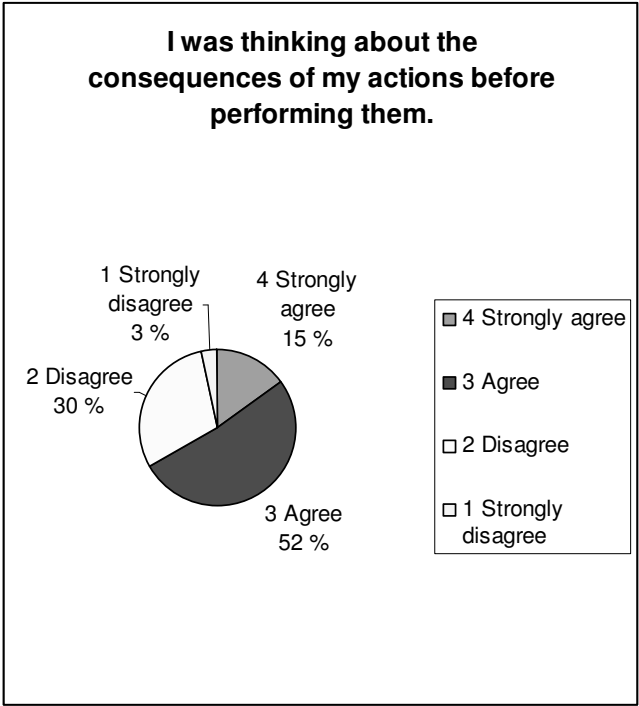


Chart 3 I was thinking about the consequences of my actions before performing them.

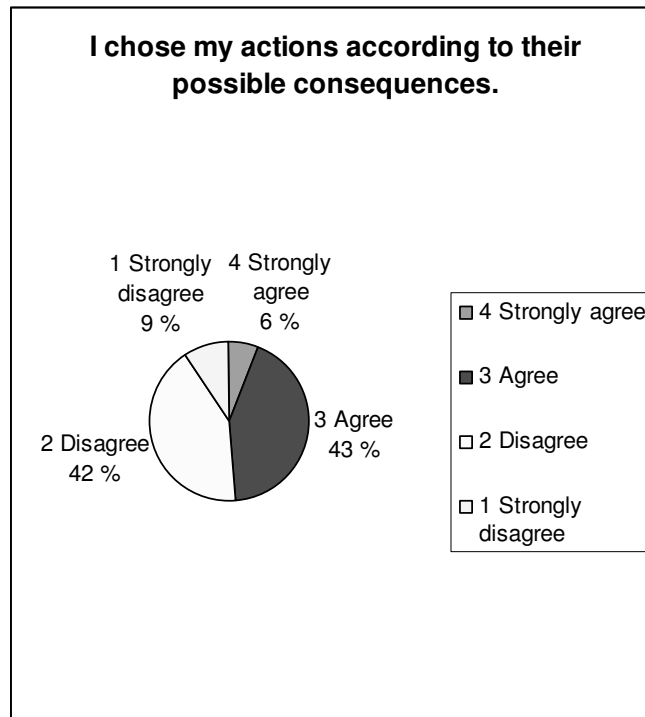


Chart 4 I chose my actions according to their possible consequences.

3.5. Final Notes on the Gamelikeness of Larps

Larps are performances that create gamelike activity. This activity is created in the process where the players construct their characters by carrying out performatic actions, and where this character construction creates interaction between the players. The interaction of the players is gamelike in the sense that it is based on the exchange of actions and reactions, as if it was a hypertextual exchange of links and nodes. Larps could also be considered gamelike in the sense that, although being the “limit case” of the phenomenon, they narrowly address the two most crucial features of games: rules and goals. Larps operate with a few rules that limit the possibilities of interaction, and, although the strictest definitions of games demand the presence of quantifiable goals, implicit and qualitative goals can also establish gamelike activity. Thus, being gamelike is not necessarily about the game having formal rules and quantifiable goals in a macro level (i.e. game as a

whole) but about the ludological structures and implicit rules and goals in a micro level (i.e. smaller sequences).

Before proceeding to the next chapter, I would like to take into consideration that, at this point, one might criticize my use of hypertext because it originally referred to text, not to human behaviour. As Nelson put it: hypertext is non-sequential *writing* where chunks of *text* branch and offer choices to their *reader*. One might say that human behaviour cannot be systematized like chunks of text and certainly not claimed to operate as if a computer game would. Human mind is not a computer and creative behaviour cannot be restricted to a certain amount of possibilities. Yet, using text as a metaphor for human behaviour is not at all a new method of analysis. In fact, it has already been applied to role-playing games as well (see e.g. Loponen & Montola 2004; Stenros 2004; Harviainen 2009). And what comes to comparing human behaviour to a computer game: I completely agree that human mind is not a computer and that humans don't operate like computers do. This subject will be further discussed in the next chapter, where I will seek to elaborate the findings of this chapter and discuss the matter of extracting possibilities for actions out of such larp scenarios as I have presented above.

4. THE ECOLOGICAL APPROACH TO LARPS

René Descartes was sitting at a bar. The bartender came over and asked if he would like another drink. He replied, "*I think not.*" And he vanished.

This joke shows how Descartes made a fatal assumption about our existence: had he not disregarded the importance of physicality by prioritizing mind over body, would he now be walking home after a refreshing drink. Just as Descartes, this study has also been constructing dualism: the dichotomy of immersionism and narrativism was presented in the first chapter and the dichotomy of quantitative and qualitative premises for gaming in the second chapter. In fact, the whole setting of the first two chapters was based on dualism: larps as performances and larps as games. For the purposes of those chapters such arrangement worked well because it helped in framing the focus and, thus, in building up the arguments. However, such dualistic strategy is not pleasing to a certain point – and we have now reached that point.

Let me demonstrate what I mean: if we would analyse larps as games and disregard the fact that they are also live performances, we might fall into such false assumptions like suggesting that larps are as much games as, say, video games. Or, if we would analyse larps as performances and disregard their gamelikeness, we might falsely assume that larps can be prewritten like dramas, or that the players' actions are sequences of complete chaos with no rules at all. Exploring larps as gamelike performances cannot rely on dichotomies. It has to evolve into something else, something that works in favour of all its unique characteristics at once. Otherwise we might risk something crucial to vanish.

I propose the ecological approach to larps as the solution. It is an approach based on James J. Gibson's *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (1979) where he explores the process of visual perception as something that is rather the result of an interdependent relationship between the human and the environment than the result of the interior operations of the brain. According to Gibson, perception is a process of *information pickup* where we perceive the *ambient optic array* of our *environment* and extract *affordances* from it. I will explain these concepts more thoroughly later on but let it now be briefly said that what Gibson means is that we always perceive the environment from our own perspective. He clarifies that "in one sense the surroundings of a single animal are the same as the surroundings of all animals but that in another sense the surroundings of a single animal are different from those of any other animal" (7). He also goes to say that "no animal could exist without an environment surrounding it" and that "equally, although not so obvious, an environment implies an animal (or at least an organism) to be surrounded" (8). This means that the animal (or human) and the environment have a reciprocal relationship and that one could not exist without the other.

Gibson's theory clearly implies the falsification of the mind/body split. The Cartesian prioritization of mind over matter has been considered to be the dominant assumption of Western science and humanities and it has even gone as far as to the comparison of the cognitive processes of the human mind to that of an operational system of a computer. From Gibson's point of view such an approach is highly problematic, and other critics have emerged as well. For example, Antonio Damasio considers the 'I think therefore I am' mentality *Descartes' error* and concludes that the human mind must "be related to a whole organism possessed of integrated body proper and brain" and it must be "fully interactive with a physical and social environment" (252). This means that the human mind is

fundamentally attached to the brain and the body and that this “complex living organism” intensively interacts with its environment.

These are the premises for an ecological approach to larps. Through further consideration on the matter I will seek to deepen my analysis on the gaming process of the players and answer the question posed for this chapter: if larps consists of sets of possibilities, what do the players practically do in order to extract these possibilities from the gaming environment. In addition, I will seek to demonstrate that, just as perception is an interdependent phenomenon between the person and the environment, larping could be considered to be an interdependent phenomenon between its performatic and gamelike aspects. We need to get away from the *performance/game split* established in the two previous chapters. Through further contemplation on the gaming process and especially on the meaning of perception and action in this process, I will seek to demonstrate how the performatic and the gamelike aspects of the gaming process could be examined side by side without any dualism.

I will begin the chapter by explaining the meaning of the term ‘ecology’. This will be done through the examination of Baz Kershaw’s take on the matter in his *Theatre Ecology: Environments and Performance events* (2007) and through the contemplation of some previous writings on larping that depict a similar phenomenon. After this I will take a look at Gibson’s ecological approach and also at Tim Ingold’s related notions in his *The Perception of the Environment* (2000). With these works I will examine the process of player perception in larps and the way players extract possibilities for actions in them. After this, I will explore the embodiment of those possibilities, i.e. the process in which the players choose which possibilities to carry out, and the factors involved in that decision making. I will do so by taking a look at Antonio Damasio’s work and especially his concepts of *perceived* and *recalled images*.

4.1. What is the Ecology of Larps?

In his *Theatre Ecology*, Baz Kershaw explains the term 'ecology' as follows:

'Ecology' references the interrelationships of all the organic and non-organic factors of ecosystems, ranging from the smallest and/or simplest to the greatest and/or most complex. It is also often defined as the interrelationships between organisms and their environments, especially when that is understood to imply interdependence between organisms and environments. (15)

According to Kershaw, 'ecology' would imply the interrelationships between things. He goes to apply this meaning to the nature of theatre and performance by suggesting that:

'Theatre ecology (or 'performance ecology') refers to the interrelationships of all the factors of particular theatrical (or performance) systems, including their organic and non-organic components and ranging from the smallest and/or simplest to the greatest or/and most complex. (15-16)

Also, citing the deep ecologist Arne Naess, Kershaw specifies that theatre ecologies "constitute a 'relational total-field' in which everything is interdependent and cannot always easily be assigned to clear distinctions, say as between 'organisms' and 'environments'" (16). This echoes Gibson's notion about the interdependence of the animals and environment in the sense that, if one cannot exist without the other, one cannot be separated from the other. Therefore, I would conclude that ecology is *a comprehensive interdependent system where all the organic and non-organic components support each other.*

Just as Kershaw applies ecology to theatre, I would like to apply it to larps. The ecology of larps would mean the interrelationships of the players and the other organic and the non-organic components of the game. In this ecosystem each player would be dependent on the other players and, hence, it could be said that the actions of one player

are dependent on the actions of the other players. This takes us back to the notion of the interaction loop presented in the previous chapter: in an interaction situation the players offer each other impulses and, by responding to them, they establish a loop of impulses and responses. In such a situation, the actions of a player are depended on the impulses offered by the other players and, hence, in order to maintain the interaction situation, the players are depended on the participation of each other.

Now, a question emerges: If the actions of one player are depended on the actions of other players, couldn't we then draw the conclusion that by simply controlling these actions we could control or perhaps even predict the end result of the game? Such possibilities in relation to larping have already been discussed by, for example, Ryan Rohde Hansen and Markus Montola. Although neither writes about ecology per se, their suggestions echo a great deal of such thinking. According to Hansen, a role-playing game is "an emergent phenomenon arising from the individual player's interaction with the other players," the result of the game then being "the total sum of interaction from all players" (72). He goes to suggest that in role-playing games the organizers can be, more or less, able to predict the next steps of the players but have no way of knowing how the game as a whole might end. Montola, elaborating from Hansen's notions, ends up in a similar conclusion. By examining larps as *chaotic systems*, he suggests that, although unpredictable, larps can be somewhat guidable because "chaotic systems tend to follow *attractors*," i.e. dynamic patterns of behaviour ("Chaotic Role-Playing" 158-159). By using such attractors or *incentives*, as Eirik Fatland (2005) calls them, the game master could lure the player to carry out certain desired actions in the game. This however, can be extremely difficult because, as Montola suggests, larps can be as unpredictable as the weather system: "It is said that the flap of the wing of a butterfly can cause a sequence of accumulating changes to cause a tornado some weeks later on the other side of the globe" (ibid).

Diana didn't understand why she felt that way about Ethan. But whatever it was, it clearly drew her towards him and over and over again made her flirt with the guy. She didn't realize Thomas might get suspicious, and later that day, she had to face the consequences when he pulled her aside to have a private talk. Soon it turned out that not only was Thomas jealous of Mr Westford but also of all the other men in the school. Luckily, Diana managed to calm Thomas down by assuring that nothing was going on.

Take my actions as *Miss Thompson* in *OSA IV*, for instance: by doing small things like glancing at *Mr Westford* while *Diana's* fiancé *Thomas* was present, I managed to cause a situation where *Thomas* became so jealous that he regarded every single man in the school to be a threat for his relationship. This was not my intention for I simply wanted the player of *Thomas* to notice *Diana's* crush for *Ethan Westford*. Nevertheless, for me, my actions created an uncontrollable "butterfly effect" that I could not have foreseen: *Thomas* was jealous of all the men in school. Later on, however, it turned out that the game masters had planted this incentive into the game: the character profile sent to the player of *Thomas* before the game said that the character had been suspecting that *Diana* might have something going on with the director of the school, *Mr Reinfeld*, because the two had been having lots of intensive meetings about the quality and the future of *Diana's* teaching. My character sheet mentioned these meetings as well but clearly stated that the tone of those meetings was purely professional. Nothing was going on with *Diana* and *Mr Reinfeld* but, since such a suspicion was planted on *Thomas's* head, no wonder seeing *Diana* flirt with another man made the player of *Thomas* draw the conclusion that something was seriously wrong.

Although the game masters of *OSA IV* did manage to guide our game to a desired direction, there was no way they could have foreseen the way us, the players of *Diana* and *Thomas*, solved the situation. We could have, for example, ended up in a huge fight

between the characters or perhaps even in the cancellation of the wedding. What happened, however, was a peaceful talk during which *Diana* convinced *Thomas* that nothing was going on and the couple continued as if nothing had happened. Taking it from this example, we could recognize the possibility of the organizers of larps being able to guide some player actions in the games but, just as Hansen and Montola noted, predicting the end result of the whole event would be too much of a challenge.

Nevertheless, I propose that larps could be considered to operate as ecological systems where the players are interdependent of the other players and where the game masters have the possibility of affecting player action to a certain degree if they so desire.¹⁵ Every single action a player does might affect the whole entity of the game and by planting incentives to the game the game masters might be able to guide the game into a desired direction. However, one never knows which spark sets the fire and, therefore, it is impossible to predict the complete course of the game before hand. Rather, the game masters can merely expect and encourage things to happen. But what if there were no incentives? Or what if there were but the player would intentionally ignore them? Can we still expect certain things to emerge from the game? I would claim yes. We can expect certain player behaviour to take place although the framework for such things to occur is rather loose. But how is this possible? If the actions the players carry out emerge from the ecosystem of the game, what is the process of this emergence like and in what sense and to what extend can we expect certain emergence to occur? To offer an explanation I would like to begin with Gibson's ecological approach to visual perception and my adaptation of it.

¹⁵ I need to emphasise that I do recognize the fact that not all larp game masters want to control the actions of the players during the game. What I mean is simply that larps are the kind of activity where such intentions are possible if the game masters so desire.

4.2. The Perception of the Gaming Environment

James J. Gibson begins his *Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (1979) by noting that environment, for him, is the “surroundings of those organisms that perceive and behave” (7). It is not the same as the physical world, which consists of atoms and galaxies, because then animals and humans would be regarded as objects rather than as perceivers and behavers.

This way of thinking neglects the fact that the animal-object [or human-object] is surrounded in a special way, that an environment is ambient for a living object in a different way from the way that a set of objects is ambient for a physical object. (ibid.)

The environment does not consist of “objects in space” but of *medium*, *substances*, and *surfaces*. Medium, for Gibson, is where animals and humans can move about: gas or liquid. “Air,” for example, is for humans “a better medium for locomotion than water because it offers less resistance” (16). What is characteristic for a medium is that it is *insubstantial* and, thus, enables locomotion. Substances, on the other hand, are *substantial* and do not “freely transmit light or odor” like medium does and, therefore, do “*not* permit the motion of bodies” (19, italics orig.). According to Gibson, “animals [or humans] need to distinguish among the different substances of the environment” because they have “different biochemical, physiological, and behavioural effects in the animal [or the human]” (20). Some are, for example, edible, some inedible and some are toxic. Finally, surfaces are what separate the medium from the substances. They all have, for instance, a certain layout, texture, and shape, the persistence of which “depends on the resistance of the substance to change” (22). These three components are what, according to Gibson, constitute the environment that we perceive.

To better explain what he means by the difference between the perception of the physical world and the perception of the environment, Gibson suggest that what an individual perceives in the environment is the *ambient optic array*, i.e. the structure of light reflected from the surfaces of the environment as perceived from a certain point of observation. According to Gibson, “to be an *array* means to have an arrangement, and to be *ambient at a point* means to surround a position in the environment that could be occupied by an observer.” What is important about this point of observation of the ambient optic array, I believe, is that it can be either occupied or unoccupied. Thus, it is a point of observation “where an observer *might* be and from which an act of observation *could* be made.” This means that a certain array can be observed by a certain individual but it can also be perceived by someone else. As noted earlier, “the surroundings of a single animal are the same as the surrounding of all animals but that in another sense the surroundings of a single animal are different from those of any other animal.” (65, italics orig.)

If the surroundings of a single observer can be perceived by other observers as well but yet the surroundings are always different for different observers, what is the cause of these differences? Taking it from Gibson, it is the relativity of the *affordances* in the array.

The *affordances* of the environment are what it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill. The verb *to afford* is found in the dictionary, but the noun *affordance* is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementary of the animal and the environment. (127, italics orig.)

Gibson continues explaining the concept of affordances by noting that they “have to be measured *relative to the animal*” (ibid. italics orig.). This means that we perceive different affordances in the environment depending on our posture and behaviour. A flat surface knee-high above the ground, Gibson exemplifies, affords sitting for a human but not for an

animal. But “knee-high for a child is not the same as knee-high for an adult, so affordance is relative to the size of the individual” (128). Because affordances are relative, the perception of the environment is also relative.

Dan Pincheck has applied the concept of affordances to games studies. He specifies that an affordance in a video game is “an allowed action which can be extracted by a user.” He also notes that an “affordance is a quality designed and embedded into a system” and “what is possible within a game is hardwired into the system as a network of affordances.” Obviously, if we want to apply this to larps we need to forget about the “hardwiring” and other pre-determining work related to computer game design; after all, we are talking about human behaviour. Nevertheless, we could say that, in larps, the players encounter situations that afford certain actions and to some extent this is what makes it possible for us to expect certain behaviour to emerge.

According to Pinchbeck, affordances can be divided into two categories: those related to gameplay and those related to diegesis. The former has the “capacity to affect other objects” and the latter “do not, but may still exert influence upon the player’s experience.” In the case of larps, I believe, the incentives planted into the game by the game masters – and also the desire to play against such incentives – could be thought of as gameplay affordances. The diegetic affordances, on the other hand, would be something that do not take the game towards a goal-driven direction but are merely phatic. Such phatic actions could be for example discussions about the weather, walking around the venue, and eating lunch in the game. However, since we are talking about creative human behaviour, differentiating all the possible affordances of the gaming process into these two categories might be too limiting in terms of producing comprehensive analysis about larping. Thus, although Pincheck’s framework of affordances can be handy in larp analysis, we should not restrict it with them.

Another interesting thing about Gibson's ecological approach is the process of *information pickup*, i.e. the process in which the observer collects information from the environment and extracts affordances from it. According to Gibson, his concept of information pickup differs radically from the traditional theories of perception. The most crucial point is the way it neglects the prevailing conception of information as 'knowledge communicated to a receiver.' Information is not something that *needs* to be communicated; rather it is just there to be picked up. Gibson writes:

. . . Picking up information is not to be thought of as a case of communicating. The world does not speak to the observer. Animals and humans communicate with cries, gestures, speech, pictures, writing, and television, but we cannot hope to understand perception in terms of these channels; it is quite the other way around. Words and pictures convey information, carry it, or transmit it, but the information in the sea of energy around each of us, luminous or mechanical or chemical energy, is not conveyed. It is simply there. (242)

Here Gibson lays out one of the most foundational statements of his approach: words and pictures convey information but the environment, *the sea of energy around each of us*, does not. *It is simply there.*¹⁶ This notion is extremely important because it demonstrates the difference between a human as an ecological self-aware entity and a computer as an artificial inanimate object. People don't work like computers because they actively pickup information from the environment whereas computers only passively receive it. Gibson disregards the traditional theories of perception, which seem to assume that perception is about processing inputs – inputs meaning the “sensory or afferent nerve impulses to the brain” (251). In such a process, he specifies, the “sensation occurs first, perception occurs next, and knowledge occurs last” (ibid). Before perception could take place, the sensory

¹⁶ It should be noted that I'm not trying to disregard the presence of communication in larps. My intention with using this notion from Gibson is only to exemplify that the players do not only passively receive communication but also actively search and create it themselves.

inputs should be filtered, organized and past experience, or memory, ought to be applied to them. Only after this, it seems, the substances in the environment could be perceived. However, Gibson notes that there is a problem in this assumption: if the sensory inputs should be organized into categories and then applied to memory, what happens if no appropriate category exists? Gibson explains that:

The error lies . . . in assuming that either innate ideas or acquired ideas must be applied to bare sensory inputs for perceiving to occur. The fallacy is to assume that because inputs convey no knowledge they can somehow be made to yield knowledge by “processing” them . . . Knowledge of the world cannot be explained by supposing that knowledge of the world already exists. (253)

For Gibson, perceiving begins with the picking up of information, not with the reception of inputs. Or, in other words, perceiving begins with the initiative of an active perceiver to start picking up information from the environment, not with the passive reception of the sensory inputs and their processing into knowledge. But in what sense does the information get processed then? If information pickup occurs first and knowledge occurs last, then what happens in the middle?

Something about this has already been hinted above: according to Gibson, when an individual perceives the ambient optic array of the environment, he or she needs to *distinguish among the different substances* in it. This is what Eleanor J. Gibson and Anne D. Pick have later on come to call *differentiating*. Talking especially about learning, they point out that the process of perception is “one of discrimination rather than of association or making inferences” (10). Perception of the environment, then, becomes “skilled and finetuned for certain occupations, such as tea tasting or differentiating qualities of snow or performances of ballet dancers” (ibid.). These notions have been applied to game studies as well: in their attempt to outline an ecological approach to computer games, Jonas

Linderoth and Ulrika Bennerstedt propose that through the process of perceptual learning, a gamer becomes more and more “attentive to the differences in the perceptual field which shows her/him the game specific affordances in the situation at hand.” (608). Thus:

. . . the gamer has a perceptual field (ambient optic array) which is “unique” i.e. it differs from what it would have been to see the “real” objects and the “real” events which the games depict (since they show a completely different set of affordances).
(ibid., brackets orig.)

As Linderoth and Bennerstedt note, it is the process of differentiating between the game specific affordances that characterizes the perceptual learning process in playing video games. To me, this seems to make sense in the context of larping as well: what the players need to do when picking up affordances in larps is to differentiate between those affordances that actually relate to the game’s diegetic frame and those that are not valid in it. Or, in other words, the players need to distinguish between actions that are considered “proper” in the gaming world, like addressing another player with his or her character’s name, and those that would not be regarded as such, like addressing the player with his or her “real” name.

Taking it from here, we could recognize that in larps the gaming environment for an active player consists of all kinds of information that the player picks up. This information is processed into knowledge by the means of differentiating and through it game related affordances get extracted. Affordances, then, would mean the player’s possibilities for action in the diegetic frame. But how does one move about in the gaming environment? If no innate ideas or pre-existing knowledge about the environment exists, how does the player know where to go and what to do? And, if the affordances of the gaming environment simply *are there*, what does the player practically do in order to find them?

4.3. The Complex Process of Finding Possibilities

Exploring the process of wayfinding in the environment, Tim Ingold offers an answer to the question. According to him, we simply “know as we go” (229). This means that, just as Gibson has criticized, we do not have pre-existing, innate knowledge about the environment, or “cognitive maps” as Ingold puts it, but rather our knowledge “undergoes continuous formation in the very course of their [our] moving about” in the environment (230). For Ingold, such *wayfinding* is a metaphor for *a complex process*, not for *a complex structure*. The latter “holds that even before the individual steps forth into the environment, he has already had copied into his mind . . . a comprehensive description of its objects, features and locations, and the relationship between them” (220). In terms of larping, such a structure would mean that the player knows the game’s events and all the information about the other characters already before the game. What the player would then have to do, is only to *navigate* through the sequences of actions that he or she already knows to take place. But, as we have noted earlier, although we can always expect certain player behaviour to take place, it is impossible to predict the whole course of the game. This is why we need to discard the complex-structure metaphor and consider the complex-process metaphor instead. According to Ingold, a complex process holds that:

. . . Little or no pre-structured content is imputed to the mind. Instead, wayfinding is understood as a skilled performance in which the traveller, whose powers of perception and action have been fine-tuned through previous experience, ‘feels his way’ towards his goal, continually adjusting his movements in response to an ongoing perceptual monitoring of his surroundings. (ibid.)

In terms of larping, this would mean that, rather than having pre-existing knowledge about what is going to happen in the game, the player *feels his or her way towards the goal continually adjusts his or her actions in response to the ongoing interaction with the other*

players. Thus, a larp is an interdependent ecology where the players tell the stories of their characters by feeling their way in the gaming environment and extract possibilities for actions from it by differentiating their relevance and functionality for the game in response to the ongoing interaction between the players.

Another metaphor from Ingold that clarifies the gaming process of larping is the metaphor of *dwelling*. He applies the concept to explain why we build things in our environment. In a sense, just as wayfinding is about *knowing as going*, dwelling is about *building as dwelling*. For Ingold, “we build houses so that we may dwell in them” – dwelling meaning “to occupy a house, a dwelling place” (185). Quoting from Martin Heidegger, Ingold summarizes that “we do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell, that is because we are dwellers” (186). This means that, what people build arises from “the specific relational contexts of their practical engagement with their surroundings,” not from innate or pre-existing ideas about what they need to build (ibid.) I’m intrigued about this metaphor because, for me, it echoes something fundamental about the construction of characters in larps. As I stated in the first chapter of this study, each player constructs his or her character according to their own subjective diegeses, the performed character, thus, being the interpretation of the diegetic character created by the player. By applying Ingold’s dwelling metaphor to this, we can see that it is not only the picture of the diegetic character in the mind of the player – the subjective diegesis – that constructs the character in a larp, rather it is the sum of that subjectivity and the prevailing circumstances of a certain player, i.e. *specific relational context of the player’s practical engagement with his or her surroundings*, that form the performed character.

When I interviewed the players of the teacher characters in *OSA IV*, I asked them what it was exactly that they did in larps. I wanted to enquire what they practically did in order to get “into” the character and what they did when performing it. I posed the

questions: “How do you get into a character, i.e. what do you do when the game starts?” and “What do you do and think in a character?” Some of the interviewees mentioned that, among other things, they pay attention to what the other players do.

. . . But otherwise I follow the others and, well, try to, sort of through that, find out what to do; to react to what the others do rather than to be some kind of a stimulus for the others. I’m rather the receiving part in that situation. (Laine) ¹⁷

Well, mostly the first thought is that “what will I do next?” and “what will I say next?” I look at the environment, what is in there and what can be heard from there. So, perhaps, the first thing is to follow the environment and to react to it . . . And then I’ll start exploring how the others create the world, and that way I myself get to be a part of it. (Söderström) ¹⁸

The way these players tell about how they begin engaging with the game indicates that they consider themselves rather as dwellers in the environment than as the builders of it. By following what the other players do when the game begins, they start picking up things that they need to or would like to do in order to become a part of the gaming environment.

Taking it from here, I would argue that what the players do in a gaming situation to extract possibilities for actions is that they start dwelling in the gaming environment looking for affordances. When suitable affordances appear, they carry out performatic actions accordingly and start feeling their ways towards the goals. But would all larpers answer the same way? In fact, one player told me that she is not even aware of what happens when the game starts. The reason why I’m offering the conclusion that larpers are dwellers is because, whether they begin the game by following the others or by concentrating on

¹⁷ “... Mut muuten mä seurailen muita ja tota sit yritän tavallaan varmaan sitä kautta löytää sitä tekemistä; reagoida siihen mitä muut tekee enemmän kuin olla se jonkin sortin ärsyke muille. Vaan et mä oon enemmän se vastaanottava taho siinä tilanteessa.” (Laine)

¹⁸ “No yleensä eka ajatus on se, että ”mitä mä teen seuraavaks?” ja se että ”mitä mä sanon seuraavaks?” Ja katoo sinne ympäristöön, mitä siellä on ja kuuluuko mitään ääntä. Että ehkä ensimmäisenä niin kun seuraa sitä ympäristöä ja sitten reagoi siihen . . . Ja sitten lähtee tutkiin enemmän sitä . . . miten muut sitten luo sitä maailmaa ja tälleen pääsee ite mukaan siihen.” (Söderström)

themselves, none of the players know before hand how the game will end. Thus, larpers are dwellers.

Yet, a question emerges: if the players extract possibilities for actions both according to their character profiles and according to the way they dwell in the perceptual field of the gaming environment, wouldn't this mean that there is a fundamental loophole in the complex-process metaphor because it assumes that no pre-existing maps are given to the players? Haven't I just argued in the first chapter of this study that *the diegetic character is the map and the performed character is the path the player chooses to walk in the territory described in that map?* Why am I now claiming that no such map exists?

As I stated in the beginning of this chapter, no dualism ought to be conducted in this study anymore. Therefore, having or not having a map in larps should not be a dichotomical question either. Rather the performed character is *the sum of the diegetic character and the relational context of the player in the gaming environment*. This means that when the player feels his or her way in the larp, it is both the picture of the diegetic character in his or her mind and the context of the specific, prevailing circumstances of the gaming environment that form the construction of the character (the performed character). Even Ingold does not deny the existence of some pre-existing ideas prior to the wayfinding or dwelling experience:

It is true that human beings – perhaps uniquely among animals – have the capacity to envision forms in advance of their implementations, but this envisioning is itself an activity carried on by real people in a real-world environment, rather than by a disembodied intellect moving in a subjective space in which are represented the problems it seeks to solve. . . . In short, people do not import their ideas, plans or mental representations into the world, since that very world . . . is the homeland of

their thoughts. Only because they already dwell therein can they think the thoughts they do. (186)

I repeat: *only because they already dwell therein can they think the thoughts they do*. This suggests that the fact that we can envision things before hand, i.e. write character sheets and imagine diegetic characters prior to the performance, does not mean that those ideas would somehow get divinely imported from outer-space to cover a comprehensive idea of the circumstances to be; rather they are just ideas and plans about what might be needed when and if the circumstances so require. We can expect things to happen and, ergo, we can speculate what sort of information is required of the character profile. But why is this so? Why are we able to speculate on things that the player might encounter during the game? If larps are about picking up information and extracting affordances during the game, and if these affordances are what makes us able to expect certain player behaviour to take place during the game, in what sense can we anticipate the affordances the player will carry out?

4.4. The Embodiment of Possibilities

Antonio Damasio, in his *Descartes' Error* (1994), poses that “the factual knowledge required for reasoning and decision making comes to the mind in the form of images” (96). These images constitute our thoughts and they guide our behaviour as we move about in the environment. There are two kinds of images: *perceptual* and *recalled*. The former are formed in the moment of perception and the latter in the conjuring up of “a remembrance of things” (96-97). Images can consist of landscapes, music, surfaces, shapes, colours, movements, and tones – anything perceivable or recallable for the observer. Recalled and perceptual images occur side by side in our mind and, as Shannon Rose Riles puts it, affect our thinking in an “intentional process of layering” these images (454). This means that when we reason and make decisions, we are at the same time affected by the things

we currently perceive and the things that we recall from the past. Mark Fleishman has come to apply this notion to theatrical improvisation. He proposes that improvisation “involves a play or dialogue between certain core elements of the existing tradition and the spontaneity of the moment” (132). Thus, the performers respond “to propositions in the present moment” and, at the same time, engage “with what has been discovered at earlier stages of the research” (133).

In a sense, we have already discussed the formation of perceptual images from the ecological point of view: they are constituted in the process where an individual perceives the ambient optic array at a certain point of observation. The recalled images, on the other hand, are formed in the process of remembering what has been perceived before. Gibson, however, criticizes this notion of remembrance by stating that:

. . . There is no dividing line between the present and the past, between perceiving and remembering. A special sense impression clearly ceases when the sensory excitation ends, but a perception does not. It does not become a memory after a certain length of time. A perception, in fact, does not *have* an end. Perceiving goes on. (253, italics orig.)

Perception is a continuous process and, therefore, there is no need to distinguish between perceptual images and recalled images. It is not the perception that ceases but only the sensory stimulus. Or, put in other words, “what we see *now* refers to the self, not the environment,” because “the perspective appearance of the world at a given time is simply what specifies to the observer where he is at that moment” (254, italics orig.). This means that we perceive a continuous “stimulus flux,” as Gibson calls it, but we are also aware of things that are not currently being perceived in that flux because our perception “can also operate without the constraints of the stimulus flux” (256). Thus, “to remember” is actually to be aware “of surfaces that have ceased to exist or events that will not recur” (255). In

this sense, our thoughts are constituted of the perceptual process and the skill of differentiating moments in that process; memory is not needed.

If we consider this approach to memory and perception we need to recognize that our thinking is not affected by a set of images but by the process of perception and information pickup. However, I would not dismiss Damasio's theory of images just yet because, although stemming from the theoretical framework that Gibson so highly criticizes, his take on the human mind has lots of common ground with Gibson's approach. This is because, just as Gibson, also Damasio recognizes the reciprocity of organisms and environment. Although he accepts the theory of input processing and the categorization of mental images, he still rejects the thinking of a disembodied mind; that "the mind can be fully explained solely in terms of brain events, leaving by the wayside the rest of the organism and the surrounding physical and social environment" (250-251). Instead, Damasio suggest that:

. . . the comprehensive understanding of the human mind requires an organismic perspective; that not only must the mind move from a nonphysical cogitum to the realm of biological tissue, but it must also be related to a whole organism possessed of integrated body proper and brain and fully interactive with a physical and social environment. (252)

Besides this seeming similarity between the two theorists, it should be noted that where Gibson's concentration is solely on visual perception, Damasio's take on perception is only a part of the whole phenomenon he seeks to depict: the role of reasoning and emotions in decision-making. Thus, excluding Damasio's work solely on the basis Gibson's criticism to remembering might be too hasty.

Let us consider this from another point of view: learning and development. As noted before, Eleanor Gibson and Anne Pick postulate that we learn through perceiving

affordances and by differentiating them from one another. At some point of this learning process, we begin forming “conceptual categories” of the things we have perceived and attach meaning to them. “Developing a concept,” therefore, “begins with experiencing a number of encounters involving the same affordance; whatever is invariant in these encounters . . . is abstracted by the system” (187). This is to say that we learn through repeated encounters with the same affordances. These encounters help us categorize the affordances and give meaning to them when we encounter them again. But what are these conceptual categories if not recalled images of a sort? When we encounter affordances, we differentiate them, *recall* similar encounters with them, and react to them according to those previous experiences. In this sense, it seems like some sort of concepts of mental images could, after all, be applied to the ecological approach. The difference between the application of these images and the images criticized by Gibson, I understand, is that while the images Gibson criticizes are of the theory that suggests the existence of such innate mental images that would provide the individual with knowledge of the world prior to the actual encounter, the images Damasio suggests are formed in the process of *dwelling herein*, as Ingold would put it. Thus, by following Damasio’s theory and Riley’s and Fleishman’s contributions on it, I argue that our thinking is, after all, constituted of *the intentional process of layering perceptual and recalled images*.

I have discussed this layering of images for a great deal now without any word on how it all relates to larping. That ought to be corrected now. Since larps are fundamentally about the improvisation of performatic actions, we can assume that the players also engage with such an intentional process of layering perceptual and recalled images as do the actors in theatrical improvisation. This means that the reactions the players carry out to the impulses picked up from the gaming environment are the result of reasoning within the moment according to the affordances posed to the player and according to the reflection

on similar past experiences as differentiated from the process of perception. Since improvisation is a dialogue between tradition and the spontaneity of the moment, as Fleishman has noted, they both are equally crucial in the process. However, if we would speculate some minor differences in the intermingling of these images, we might, for example, note that immersionist players and narrativist players might have a slightly different approach to this dialogue; immersionist players, for instance, might count more on the intuitive spontaneous reactions (perceptual images) where as narrativist players might engage more with their previous experience in order to recognize the affordances that would serve the construction of a desired storyline (recalled images). Nevertheless, such differences, I believe, are merely peripheral because, although one might intentionally seek to rely more on either or, that doesn't make the other vanish completely. Both are always present because we are, at the same time, the products of our current state of affairs and of our previous experiences.

Since the improvisation of the players involves a dialogue between the perceptual and the recalled images, the possibilities the players choose to embody are the results of this dialogue. Therefore, by finding out what the images perceived by a certain player are we could narrow down the actions the player will most probably carry out. This might sound a bit extreme: how on earth could we get inside a player's mind? We can't. But we can speculate things based on the fact that we share some perceptual and recalled images in common. As Gibson has put it, *the surroundings of a single animal are the same as the surrounding of all animals*. Although these surroundings are always relative to the observer, we can perceive the same ambient optic array to a certain degree and, therefore, we can anticipate the circumstances the player is dealing with and what possibilities for action he or she might choose to carry out based on those circumstances. After all: we possess the talent of creatively *imagining* events. Gibson has specified that "to

expect, anticipate, plan, or imagine creatively is to be aware of surfaces that do not exist or events that do not occur but that could arise or be fabricated within what we call the limits of possibility” (255). Such imagination is also included in Damasio’s concept of recalled images: “Images of something that has not yet happened and that may in fact never come to pass are no different in nature from the images you hold of something that already has happened” (97). Therefore, because we can be aware of things that may or may not occur and because we share some perceptual and recalled imagery in common, we are able to expect or anticipate certain kind of events to occur in larps based on their prevailing circumstances.

4.5. Final Notes on the Ecological Approach to Larps

Before proceeding to the next chapter, I would like to briefly summarize what has been discovered in this chapter. I have explored the ecology of larps and proposed an ecological approach for depicting the players’ gaming processes. I understand the ecology of larps as *a comprehensive interdependent system where the players are dependent on the participation of the other players*. In this system, the players move about the gaming environment extracting possibilities for actions from it. These possibilities are found through the process in which the players dwell in the gaming environment and pick up information from it. This information is differentiated and affordances, i.e. possibilities for actions, get extracted from it. In addition to these perceptual images formed during the process of perception, the players deal with recalled images conjured up by memory. These two images form the thoughts of the players and affect their decision-making in an intentional process of layering the imagery. When applying such an ecological approach to larps, we come across with the possibility that the actions the players carry out might be expectable. This is due to the fact that we share some perceptual and recalled images in

common and, based on them, we possess the ability to creatively imagine events that might occur within certain circumstances.

At this point, one might raise a question: how does such an approach to larping differ from human behavior in everyday life? Isn't the process described above the same in all our moving about the environment? True, it is the same. In fact, it is what larping could be considered to be about in the first place: rather than being a prewritten play or a quantifiable game, it enables the players to behave as if their characters were living their everyday life and facing all sorts of situations while moving about their environment. The difference, however, lies in the fact that the performative and gamelike aspects of the activity separate the players' behavior from that of their everyday behavior. Although not always necessarily self-consciously, the players do limit the possibilities for actions they extract from the gaming environment according to the nature and the framework of the game, thus, making the process of their moving about in the environment slightly different from that what it would be in their everyday life. The ecological approach to larps offers a way to explore this process more thoroughly and to demonstrate the sense in which the players' come about to carry out the behavior they do. But how do we proceed from here? What can we practically do to lay out the possibilities for actions we anticipate the players to extract? What kind of a structure would their depiction require and, overall, what would be a feasible manner for analysing larps as gamelike performances through the ecological approach presented above?

5. ANALYSING LARPS AS SCENARIOS

In order to lay out the possibilities for action we could imagine or expect the players to perceive during the gaming process, and to depict the probabilities of those actions to get carried out, we need a proper basis for analysing larps as gamelike performances. We need a structure for analysis that guides us through the jungle-like ecology of the game and helps us to pick up the material we need for our analysis. Since larps are performances where the events take place simultaneously everywhere in the venue at the same time, it might feel confusing or even overwhelming to start dissecting what is in there: the player actions, the possibilities, the probabilities, and the images – all the things that affect the gaming process. Thus, a feasible and efficient model for analysis is needed.

As mentioned earlier in this study, there is already quite a canon of analysing role-playing games as texts. However, this approach does not quite seem to conform to the nature of larps: how can one explore their performatic and gamelike aspects as a text without neglecting any of their unique characteristics? Because games constitute of sets of possibilities instead of sequences of actions, one might question if the linearity of text is capable of grasping that multidimensionality. Also, because performances constitute of embodied human behaviour, it is questionable if text as a method of analysis can comprehensively preserve all the nuances of that behaviour.

In this chapter, I will seek to grasp this problematics and propose an alternative: a scenario-based model for analysis as inspired by Diana Taylor's concept of *scenarios*. Thus, in this chapter I will introduce Taylor's take on scenarios as the basis for analysing performances and show how it can be applied to analysing the gaming processes of larps. I will also introduce my own concept called *scenario entropy*. It is a derivative from Taylor

theory and meant to serve as a tool for laying out the possibilities for actions the players might extract from the gaming environment. With the use of scenario entropy we can efficiently depict the probabilities for the actions to get carried out in scenarios and analyse the factors that might have affected the formation of those probabilities. I will demonstrate the use of the concepts through a brief analysis done on a recycled example scenario from *OSA IV*: the scenario in which *Mr Reinfeld* consults *Miss Myers* about her students.

5.1. What is a Scenario?

In her *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in Americas* (2003), Diana Taylor notes that there is a tendency in cultural studies to “treat all phenomena as textual” but that Performance Studies fundamentally differs from this trend (27). She postulates that, in general, the Western epistemology tends to value the *archive* over the *repertoire*, that is, the “supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones)” over “the so-called ephemeral repertoire of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)” (19, parentheses orig.). When analysing performances such prioritization becomes problematic because, as Peggy Phelan puts it, “performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representation” because “performance's being . . . becomes itself through disappearance” (146).

Based on these premises, Taylor ends up suggesting that “by shifting the focus from written to embodied culture, from the discursive to the performatic, we need to shift our methodologies” (16). Therefore, she goes to suggest that “instead of focusing on patterns of cultural expression in terms of texts and narratives, we might think about them as scenarios that do not reduce gestures and embodied practices to narrative description” (ibid.). Taylor proposes scenarios as the basis for analysing performances and I will

suggest them for the basis of larp analysis. With the use of scenarios, we can focus our attention on a specific event that took place during the game and examine its content without reducing the embodied practice or the sets of possibilities in it to narrative description.

Taylor explains that a scenario, “a sketch or outline of the plot of a play, giving particulars of the scenes, situations etc.,’ like performance, means never for the first time,” and goes to compare them to Roland Barthes’s *mythical speech* which consists of “material which has already been worked on” (28). Further, we can discover Taylor’s linkage to Schechner’s concept of *restored* or *twice-behaved behaviour* because, as he put it, “all behaviour consists of recombining bits of previously behaved behaviours” (“Performance Studies” 35). Thus, a scenario “makes visible . . . what is already there: the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes” that form that behaviour (Taylor 28). This would suggest the same as Damasio’s recalled images: scenarios conjure up the images we have perceived and imagined in the past. Everything from our individual and communal experiences to the images, sounds, and stories of our culture and tradition are at stake in scenarios. Thus, a scenario is a dialogue between tradition and the spontaneity of the moment.

“Sometimes,” Taylor explicates, scenarios “are written down as scripts,” but even then it “predates the script and allows for many possible ‘endings.’” This is why using scenarios as the basis for analysing larps is so compelling: because they *allow for many possible endings*, scenarios conform to the gamelike nature of larps. When looking at larp scenarios, we do not only look at the narratives of the sequences of actions the players carried out, but we also look at the sets of possibilities for actions in those moments. Thus, in addition to using such textual tools as narratives and plots, Taylor suggests that scenarios “demand that we also pay attention to milieux and corporeal behaviours such as

gestures, attitudes, and tones not reducible to language.” When analysing scenarios, we should simultaneously pay attention to their *setup* and *action*. “The setup,” for Taylor, “lays out the range of possibilities” because “all the elements are there: encounter, conflict, resolution, and dénouement, for example” and, therefore, “actions and behaviours arising from the setup might be predictable” (ibid.). In Damasio’s terms, I would say, setups consist of the perceptual and recalled images at hand and, thus, the actions arising from it might be *expectable*.¹⁹

As noted, the concept of scenarios complements the gamelike structure of larps very well. In ludological terms, scenarios could be seen as *nodes* in which players face different situations, and actions in scenarios can be seen as *links* that transfer players into new scenarios. A scenario can consist of smaller sequences of links and nodes, such as small gestures and their responses, but they can also be seen as larger, yet manageable, events that can be “cut off” from the process of larping and taken under examination, for instance, a discussion between some characters at a specific moment in the game or a certain relation between two or more characters that gets manifested throughout the event. In the previous chapters I have already explored some scenarios like this from *OSA IV*, for example the scenario with *Mr Reinfeld* and *Miss Myers*.

5.2. Measuring the Entropy of Scenarios

My thesis throughout this chapter has been that we can expect certain actions to emerge from the setups of certain larp scenarios. But, what can we practically do to lay out these possibilities we anticipate? I suggest the use of a concept I have developed to complement Taylor’s theory of scenarios: *scenario entropy*. *Entropy* is a term originally used in thermodynamics but applied to communication theory in the form of *information entropy*.

¹⁹ Although Taylor uses the verb ‘predict,’ I would still stay cautious about using such an assertive expression.

According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, information entropy is the “measure of the average information rate of a message or language” (“Entropy”). A low rate of information would mean a high level of entropy. In the case of language this would mean, for example, that, if you type a set of letters according to a certain language, there is a certain rate of letters that can follow in order to the set to form a reasonable word (perf... → perfect, performance, perfume, etc.). If a lesser amount of letters is typed, more options will arise (per... → percent, perfect, perhaps, peripheral, permanent etc.). Basically, the more information we have of a certain message, the more we are able to anticipate the rest. In terms of scenario entropy this would mean that the more information we have about the setup, i.e. the more perceptual and recalled images dealt by the players are known to us, the more we are able to anticipate the actions that will take place in that scenario. Thus, scenario entropy is the average rate of possibilities for performatic actions afforded by the scenario for an individual player.²⁰

The strength of the scenario entropy is that it is meant to help in depicting *the average rate* of possibilities, not the rate of all the possibilities. This is important because, as the object of our analysis is creative human behaviour in larps, the amount of all the possibilities for actions the players extract might be too overwhelming to depict. By examining the entropy of the scenario, we can concentrate on the actions that seem most probable. We could picture scenario entropy as a collection of thought clouds that wander in player’s mind. Certain thoughts would appear stronger and clearer than others, thus, depicting the possibilities for actions that are more probable than the others (see Figure 5).

²⁰ See also Kershaw (2007) for discussion on entropy.

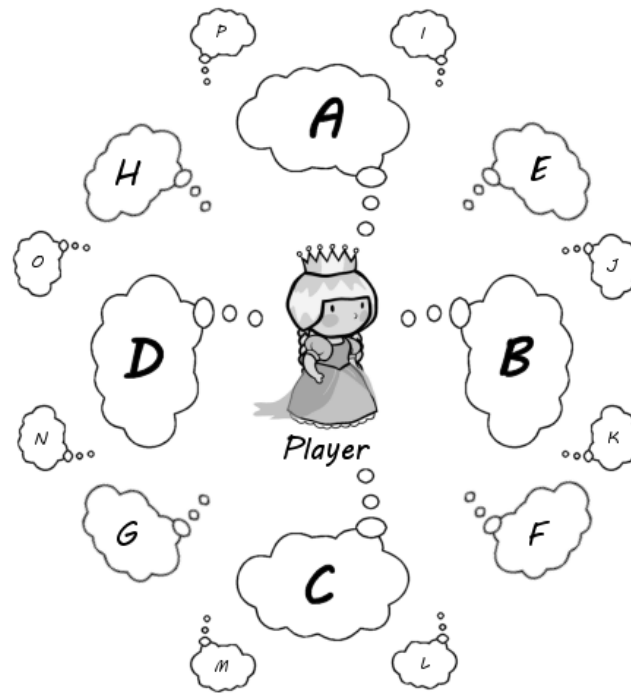


Figure 4 The strength of options in scenario entropy

What is interesting and useful about scenario entropy is that it could also be used to analyse *localized* behaviour, i.e. behaviour that is specific for a certain location or culture. “All scenarios have localized meaning,” as Taylor postulates (28). Our actions and behaviours can be expectable because they are rooted to certain cultural frameworks, traditions and conventions that guide them. They are “a seemingly natural consequence of the assumptions, values, goals, power relations, presumed audience, and epistemic grids established by the setup itself” (Taylor 28-29). Take my character’s fine arts classes in *OSA IV*, for instance: I planned the classes I taught as *Diana Thompson* according to the Finnish fine arts classes I had attended in the past. This made the classes, which were supposed to be located in a British boarding school, fundamentally localized by my Finnish background. Had I been familiar with the arts education of the United Kingdom, I probably would have planned *Diana’s* classes accordingly. But, since I did not possess such knowledge, I decided to “finnishize” the classes intentionally. When analysing the sets of

possibilities at stake in larp scenarios, we could explore the probability of certain actions based on their localized meaning. By analysing what sort of cultural traditions and conventions are hidden behind them, we could find out which of the possibilities are most likely to be carried out. In my case, for example, it was more probable that the classes I taught were based on the Finnish education agenda than on the British agenda because I was not familiar with the latter.

On the other hand, scenarios could also depict such models and stereotypes that are rooted in, more or less, *globalized* imagery. For example, larps can often be based on fanhood over books, films and other similar products of global popular culture and, therefore, the player behaviour in these games might also be guided by such imagery. In the case of *OSA IV*, for example, we could suppose that the players drew inspiration for their performance from such products of popular culture as the *Harry Potter* books and films and the numerous blockbuster Hollywood movies situated in the American high school environment. In fact, the whole setting of the *OSA* series is probably affected by the popularity of *Harry Potter*. After the first film, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2001), came out, the Finnish larping scene faced a boom of larps situated in *Hogwarts*. The linkage with *OSA* is not as obvious as with the games that deliberately categorized themselves as *Harry Potter Larps*, but since the setting is a British boarding school, just like the setting of the books, and the timing of the series is parallel to the “*Harry Potter* boom”, one cannot but draw the connection. Hence, we could assume that the sets of possibilities for action perceived and extracted by the players of *OSA IV* were most likely influenced by the imagery created by these books and films as well.

5.3. The Encounter of Mr Reinfeld and Miss Myers

To demonstrate how to apply scenarios and scenario entropy for analysing larps in practice, I would like to take a look at one of the *OSA IV* examples discussed in the earlier chapters of this study: the encounter of the Opera's director, *Mr Reinfeld*, and the teacher of singing, *Miss Myers*. In this scenario, *Mr Reinfeld* consulted *Miss Myers* about her most talented students because he needed to recruit singers to the Opera. I have already presented this scenario in a form of a narrative from the perspective of *Miss Myers* in the second chapter of this study as follows:

The teacher of singing, Miss Myers, was hiding something: she was having an affair with one of her students, Michael Hemmington. Despite their strong emotions towards each other, the relationship had to be kept secret because of two major reasons. The first reason was, of course, that teachers were not allowed to date their students. The other reason was that Michael was also dating Vivian Nash, another student of Miss Myers'. This made her extremely jealous and she was ready to do everything to get rid of Miss Nash. During the day, the director of the Opera complex, Mr Reinfeld, asked Myers for an advice. He wanted to know who where the most talented students in her class because the Opera needed singers. Realizing that having a contract with the Opera would mean lots of absence in the school, Miss Myers started praising Vivian Nash to the director. Mr Reinfeld was convinced, Vivian got the part, and Miss Myers smiled.

In addition, I have also offered some speculations on the possibilities for actions the players of *Mr Reinfeld* and *Miss Myers* had in this scenario as follows:

When Mr Reinfeld was looking for a student to whom he would offer a contract with the Opera, he could have started solving the situation by, for example, going through the student files; interviewing the students; or by consulting the teachers. He chose to do the latter. He did not know that by asking Miss Myers, he offered her a change to get rid of the girl who was

constantly cuddling with her lover during the classes. When Reinfeld asked Myers for help, she could have, for example, recommended the students that actually deserved the part or she could have offered Miss Nash. She did the latter and, hence, Vivian got the part.

These scenario descriptions were based on the email interview done with Elena, the player of *Miss Myers*, after the game. In this interview, I asked her to tell what her character did during the game and what her biggest accomplishments were. The player wrote that, among other things, her character tried to get rid of Vivian Nash and that her biggest accomplishment was indeed to get her recruited to the Opera. In addition, the player described the scenario in a form of a debrief attached to the email interview as follows:

Belinda was extremely jealous of *Michael* but she couldn't get a hold on how to get rid of *Vivian* because *Michael* kept convincing her it was better to keep up the façade. Therefore, she decided to get the girl out as soon as possible when *Mr Reinfeld* started asking for good singers. Luckily for *Belinda*, the girl got a contract with the Opera and, according to various sources, would have to be away from the school quite a lot. Kindly, *Miss Myers* promised that *Vivian* wouldn't even have to participate in the music classes anymore. She would prep her in private lessons so that she wouldn't have to watch *Vivian* being glued on *Michael* during the choir rehearsals. (Liski) ²¹

Teppo, the player of *Mr Reinfeld* did not mention this scenario in his email interview, but he did describe another, similar, scenario which gave me an idea of what the scenario with Elena might have been like from his point of view. For the question about what his

²¹ "Belinda oli tuhottomoman mustasukkainen Michaelista, mutta kun ei saanut otetta siitä, miten pääsisi Vivianista eroon, kun Michael edelleen vakuutteli, että oli parasta vaan pitää kulissia yllä, niin päättipä sitten toimittaa tytön mahdollisimman nopeasti pois, kun herra Reinfeld alkoi kyselemään hyvistä laulajista. Belindan onneksi tyttö sai kiinnityksen oopperaan ja joutuisi useiden tahojen mukaan olemaan tämän vuoksi paljon poissa koulusta. Ystävällisesti neiti opettaja lupasikin, ettei ainakaan musiikin tunneille edes tarvitsisi osallistua. Preppasi oikein yksityistunnein, jottei tarvitsisi katsella Viviä enää jatkossa kuoron aikana liimautuneena Michaeliin." (Liski)

character did during the game, Teppo briefly answered that, among some other things, his character recruited two students to a production of *The Duchess Theatre* and that this was also the most interesting situation he had during the game:

The situation was interesting because it was a competition between the characters and *Reinfeld's* decision would have a long-term effect on the careers of the persons in question. The decision also gave a reason to increase gaming by interviewing these students and, in some cases, by giving fatherly advices for improving their careers. In other words, the situation in-game was challenging (the right person was to be chosen to give this unique opportunity to) and off-game it increased the possibility for gaming. (Suontakanen)²²

Teppo was assigned this task to recruit students to The Duchess Theatre directly in his character profile. In addition, although the task to recruit students to the Opera was not directly mention in his profile, such an affordance was planted in by the game masters. What follows is a direct quote from the character profile of *Mr Reinfeld* send to Teppo before the game:

. . . Observing the students was useful in other sense as well. While doing so, he could see who were seriously devoted to their studies and who could be of scholarship material. On the other hand, talented youngsters could also be used more in the productions of the Opera itself: it would be economical, it would give the students an actual working experience and they could also be well-motivated and enthusiastic labour for the Opera. ("Franz Reinfeld")²³

²² ”Tilanteesta teki mielenkiintoisen siksi, että kyseessä oli kilpailutilanne hahmojen välillä ja Reinfeldin päätöksellä tulisi olemaan kauaskantoisia vaikutuksia kyseisten henkilöiden uran kannalta. Päätös antoi myös syyn lisätä hahmon pelaamista ja toimintaa haastatteleamalla näitä opiskelijoita ja muutamassa tapauksessa antamalla isällisiä neuvoja uran parantamiseen. Toisin sanoen tilanne oli in-game varsin haastava (piti valita oikea henkilö, jolle antaa tämä ainutlaatuinen mahdollisuus) ja off-game lisäsi mahdollisuutta pelaamiseen- [sic]” (Suontakanen)

²³ ”Opiskelijoiden tarkkaileminen oli muutenkin hyödyllistä. Hän saattoi samalla katsoa, ketkä tosissaan panostivat opiskeluunsa ja ketkä saattaisivat olla stipendiainesta. Toisaalta erityisen etevää näyttelijänuoria voisi käyttää oopperan omissakin ammattilaisproduktioissa nykyistä enemmän: se olisi taloudellista, antaisi

The character profile of *Mr Reinfeld* suggests that it might be a good idea to start recruiting students to the Opera. Thus, during the game it was up to Teppo to decide whether to notice this possibility or not. Although the player himself did not mention doing so, based on the description of Elena, we can assume that he accepted it.

To begin the analysis of this scenario, I would like to start by taking a look at Teppo's choice to play the possibility of recruiting students to the Opera. What made him choose to do so? We can find at least two reasons that could have affected the player's decision-making: the first factor would be Teppo recalling that the character profile afforded such a possibility and the second factor would be that he perceived this possibility to be similar to that of recruiting students to *The Duchess Theatre*. This would mean that he differentiated these affordances from the character profile and placed them under the same category. Because he perceived that playing "the recruiting affordance" once was pleasing, maybe he decided to play it again.

After choosing to play the affordance, Teppo faced a new set of possibilities: there were several ways to play this affordance. As noted earlier, he could have, for example, gone through the student files; interviewed the students personally; or consulted their teachers. He could have also observed the music class and chosen the students accordingly; asked the students to write applications for him; organized an audition; or even just picked up the students randomly. All of these possibilities might conform to the conventions of acting in similar scenarios and, therefore, might have been included in the set of recalled images the player might have remembered or imagined to be suitable for the scenario. If we wanted to analyse which of these possibilities might have appeared to be the most probable ones for Teppo, i.e. which of these possibilities were the strongest in the scenario entropy, we could start by assuming that he might have wanted to choose a

opiskelijalle kokemusta todellisesta työstä ja he olisivat motivoitunutta ja innokasta työvoimaa." ("Franz Reinfeld")

possibility that could be thoroughly carried out during the game; otherwise the action would have been postponed to a time or date in the diegesis that would not have taken place during the game. This could exclude such possibilities as organizing an audition and making the students write applications because doing so might have been too time-consuming. Another factor that could be taken into account could be the temper of the character. Based on the character profile, *Mr Reinfeld* is serious in nature and precise and rational as a director. Therefore, if we assume that Teppo was faithful to this description, we could exclude the possibilities of him choosing the students based on a random pickup, or on what he happens to hear in a music class because doing arbitrary decisions would not be probable for a character like *Mr Reinfeld*. This would leave him with three options: reading the students files; interviewing the students; consulting the teachers. Why did he choose the latter? We cannot know for sure but we could assume that since Teppo had already done interviews with the students, he might have wanted to try a different approach for a change.

The next phase of the scenario is the action: the encounter of the two characters. The material we have about the scenario does not provide us with an exact description of the action but examining the scenario entropy can provide us with some ideas. It is probable that the encounter begun with Teppo's initiative to start the conversation. He might have, for example, asked Elena to have a word with him after her class or to meet him in his office. The conversation might have started with Teppo going straight to the topic of enquiring about *Miss Myers'* best students. It might have also started with small-talk or with him asking about, for instance, her teaching, other issues relating to the school or her personal life. The latter, however, might be unlikely based on *Mr Reinfeld's* character profile. It might also be that the conversation was initiated because of other issues and the idea of consulting *Miss Myers* on the matter of recruiting students to the

Opera popped into his mind during the discussion. The initiative might have also been that of Elena's: she might have had something to discuss about with Teppo and during this conversation he decided to bring up the topic of recruiting students. Whatever initiated the encounter, the result is that in the game *Mr Reinfeld* told *Miss Myers* about his plans and *Miss Myers* recommended *Vivian Nash* for the part.

Since we don't have any scripts or other recordings of the conversation the players had, it is impossible to know what they did and said exactly. However, based on the experience I have on interacting with the players during the game, I can offer some contemplation on what sort of gestures and expressions they might have used in the scenario. For example, Teppo used a cane during the game and he tended to lean on it quite a lot. Therefore, if we assume that the characters were standing during the conversation, it is likely that he rested his arms against the cane also in this scenario. Another thing he did during the game was that while I was having a conversation with him in his office, he was constantly writing notes and going through some papers while listening. This might have also happened in the scenario with Elena, had the meeting been held in his office. Supposedly Teppo used these performatic actions to mark his character's position in the game. Leaning on the cane and going through paper work during a conversation referred to *Mr Reinfeld's* hierarchical superiority over the other teachers: being the oldest character in the game, the cane reminded of his "elderly" position, and being the director of the Opera, going through papers reminded of his authority in the school. In addition, throughout the game Teppo tended to pace his speech calmly but forebodingly making it sound almost threatening to the other players; it was impossible to predict where a conversation with *Mr Reinfeld* was leading to with that tone of voice. Perhaps he used it as a strategy to construct an ominous terror around his character.

And what about Elena? What sort of gestures and expressions she might have used in the scenario? Her character profile describes *Miss Myers* as a lively and outspoken person. Accordingly, the player's posture during the game was laid-back and her behaviour less formal. Thus, we could assume that during the conversation with Teppo, she was balancing with this unreserved straightforwardness of her character and with the fearful nervousness evoked by the presence of the director. In addition, because Elena cunningly recommended *Vivian Nash* for the placement, she included a frame of fabrication to her performance. This means that she fooled Teppo into having a false belief about her sincerity. To do so, she might have, for example, shown great confidence in her voice and gestures when mentioning *Vivian's* name and praised her talent and devotedness towards singing.

The analysis above is but a fracture of what could be done with the scenario. We could continue by analysing the possibilities for actions Elena might have perceived in the situation and the possibilities offered to Teppo after her actions. However, since the amount of information about the scenario is so limited, further analysis might get too speculative.

5.4. Final Notes on Larp Scenarios

In this chapter, I have suggested the use of scenarios as the basis for analysing the gaming process of larps. Scenario-based analysis enables us to acknowledge the ephemerality of performances and to recognize the ludological structure, i.e. the sets of possibilities, at stake in larps. It complements the ecological approach of the gaming process and, especially, the dialogue between the recalled and perceptual images in such a manner that enables us to depict and explore the probabilities of certain actions to get

carried out in larp scenarios. I call this the scenario entropy, meaning the average rate of possibilities for actions in larp scenarios.

The entropy rate of a scenario can be reduced according the amount of information we have about the scenario but the concept can also be applied to such cases where we have only a limited amount of information about the event. Under such circumstances there is a risk that the analysis might turn into such speculations and assumptions that might not be verifiable with the actual events. In such cases, one needs to be cautious about what is being argued. In the analysis above, for example, I sought to be as transparent about the relation of information and speculation as possible. However, although greatly based on speculation, the analysis leans on three factors that help me draw conclusions on the situation: the prevailing circumstances of the game at hand; the contemporary conventions of the Finnish larping scene; and my own experiences as a Finnish larper and as the co-player of the players under analysis. Thus, the conclusions offered in the analysis have been rooted to the imagery the players were engaging with during the performance.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In the beginning of this study I specified that the focus of this study is on the gaming process of larps, meaning the process in which the players come about to produce the activity called larping. The main research question for the study was: what is the gaming process of the players like in larps and what sort of features, in that process, constitute the nature of larps as gamelike performances? I have sought to answer this question through an additional set of questions that I formed for the four chapters of this study:

Chapter I: If larps are about performing the story of one's character, in what sense are the players constructing these characters during the gaming process and what sorts of features affect this character construction?

Chapter II: If larps are performances consisting of series of performatic actions, in what sense and to what extent can these performatic actions produce gamelike activity?

Chapter III: If larps are gamelike because they consist of sets of possibilities for actions, what do the players do exactly in order to extract these possibilities from the gaming environment?

Chapter IV: if we would like to do analysis on the gaming processes of the players in specific larps, what would be a feasible manner for doing so and what sort of details could be analysed from these gaming processes?

In the following, I would like to summarize the discoveries made in this study and offer some further contemplations and conclusions on the matter.

6.1. Larp – A Gamelike Performance

I began the journey by exploring larps through the lenses of both Performance Studies and Game Studies. In the first chapter of this study I explored the performatic nature of larps. I began the contemplation by introducing three different meanings for the term 'performance' as listed by Marvin Carlson. These meanings were the display of skills; patterned behaviour; and keeping up the standard. Although all of these aspects of performance can be found in larps, I chose to focus the study on patterned behaviour, or on what Diana Taylor calls performatic behaviour. I came to the conclusion that larps could be regarded as transportative performatic behaviour that consists of performatic actions. These performatic actions carried out by the players are based on their ideal diegetic characters and the embodiment of those ideals creates, what I call, performed characters. It is the final product of the player's performance and, hence, the construction of the character created by the player. Performing character is constructing character, and thus performed character is the construction of the character. In addition, I suggested that we could base our analysis of the character construction on the dominant larping paradigm at stake and see whether the construction of the character consists of an intentional process of planning and organizing the performance on behalf of the player (i.e. narrativism) or of an unintentional process of automatized behaviour created by a flow state (i.e. immersionism).

But what about the other aspects of performance? In what sense can they be found in larps? Firstly, although larps are not essentially about displaying skills, such an aspect can be included in the games because performing a skill can be a part of performing one's character. For example, in *OSA IV*, teaching classes for the students could have been regarded as, at the same time, performing one's character and performing one's teaching skills. Secondly, the aspect of keeping up a standard is related to larps in the sense that all

the players have a diegetic character they seek to live up to. Diegetic characters set up ideal standards for the players and during the game the players seek to perform those ideals. Thus, although I have framed the focus of this study to larps as performatic behaviour, all of the three aspects of performance are at stake in them. In fact, another definition for 'performance' I have introduced in this study could be used to cover all of these different aspects of the activity: according to Victor Turner, performance is an activity of 'completing' or 'carrying out' something. Whatever the purpose of the activity – displaying skills, patterning behaviour, or keeping up the standard – the nature of it is always the same: the performer seeks to carry out and complete the activity. Taking this into account, we could actually notice that separating games from performances is not even possible because *games are performances*. In games, the players *carry out* the act of gaming as guided by the rules and goals of that specific game.

This takes us to the second chapter of this study in which I asked: in what sense can performatic actions produce gamelike activity? I began the exploration by finding a definition for play and, after that, by classifying games as a subset of play. I discovered that the two most fundamental characteristics of games are rules and goals and that, based on these quantitative premises, larps are regarded as a limit case. Hence, they should be considered rather as gamelike, than games per se. To find an additional approach for defining games, I proposed that we could consider the qualitative premises for gaming. This means that we could define something as a game based on its ludological structure. I came to the conclusion that larps could be regarded to be gamelike based on the fact that they consist of sets of possibilities rather than of predetermined sequences of actions. Thus, I proposed that being gamelike is not necessarily about the game having formal rules and quantifiable goals in a macro level (i.e. game as a whole) but about the ludological structures and implicit rules and goals in a micro level (i.e. smaller sequences).

To combine the gamelike features of larping with its performatic features, we could conclude that larps are gamelike performances in which the players physically alter their behaviour to represent that of their diegetic characters and in which the players extract sets of possibilities for action for performing those characters. Hence, by choosing which possibilities to carry out, the players construct the performance of their characters. The actions the player may carry out are being restricted (or guided) by certain gamelike features of the activity: the players need to obey certain rules and guidelines depicted by the setting of the game. In addition, the players' diegetic characters might sometimes have certain goals that the players would like to achieve during the game. Thus, in this sense larps are both performatic and gamelike.

6.2. Gaming Process – An Ecological Approach

In the third chapter of this study I sought to deepen my analysis on larping by shedding more light on the gaming process of the players based on the discoveries made in the first two chapters. To explain and explore the gaming process more thoroughly, I introduced an ecological approach to larps as inspired by James J. Gibson. This approach enabled me to examine the activity carried out by the players during larps in such a manner that would not neglect the performatic or the gamelike aspects of the process. According to the ecological approach to larps the players extract sets of possibilities for actions from the gaming environment. These possibilities are found through the process in which the players dwell in the gaming environment and pick up information from it. This information is differentiated and affordances, i.e. possibilities for actions, get extracted from it. In addition to these perceptual images formed in the process of perceiving in the moment, the players deal with recalled images conjured up by their memory. These two images form the thoughts of the players and affect their decision-making in an intentional process of layering the imagery. When applying such an ecological approach to larps, we come

across with the possibility that the actions the players carry out might be, to some extent, expectable. This is due to the fact that we share some perceptual and recalled images in common and, based on them, we possess the ability to creatively imagine events that might occur within certain circumstances.

While writing these conclusions, I noted that one thing in this description of the gaming process seems to contradict what has been said earlier in this study. It is a small detail presented in Shannon Rose Riley's concept of the intentional process of layering images: she argues that the process is *intentional*. In the first chapter of this study I suggested that character construction can be affected by two larping paradigms: narrativism and immersionism. Although I have also come to question the reality of these paradigms, I still consider them to come in handy in depicting the specificities of the gaming process. In the narrativist paradigm the gaming process is regarded as an intentional process of planning and organizing the performance on behalf of the player and that in the immersionist paradigm it is regarded as an unintentional process of automatized behaviour created by a flow state. The question is: if immersionist larping is defined as an *unintentional* process of automatized behaviour, in what sense can it still be an *intentional* process of layering perceptual and recalled images?

Although in immersionist larping player's decision making is considered to be unintentional, i.e. the player rather leans on his or her intuition than on the deliberate planning of actions, the process of layering the imagery affecting that decision making, i.e. the constitution of one's thoughts as a set of images, could still be regarded to be an intentional one – otherwise it wouldn't be what it is. By this I mean that an individual cannot stop or be separated from layering these images: they are what fundamentally constitute one's thoughts. Based on the Gibsonian ecological approach, one cannot stop layering recalled and perceptual images because in perception *there is no dividing line between the*

present and the past. Gibson has postulated that the concept of memory is not needed because perception is a continuous process. Therefore, layering images of things that do not or have ceased to exist and images of things that are being perceived at the moment are nothing but individual cases “cut off” from the one and the same perceptual process we are continuously engaged with. In fact, whether this process of layering the imagery of our thoughts is intentional or unintentional is not even a question: we do it anyway. It is neither intentional nor unintentional. It just is. Thus, we could drop the ‘intentional’ from Riley’s concept completely and call it just *the process of layering* the imagery instead.

6.3. Scenarios – Depicting Local and Global

In the fourth and final chapter of this study I proposed a scenario-based model for analysing the gaming process of larps. I suggested that scenario-based analysis enables us to acknowledge the ephemerality of performances and to recognize the ludological structure of larps. It complements the ecological approach of the gaming process and, especially, the dialogue between the recalled and perceptual images in such a manner that enables us to depict and explore the probabilities of certain actions to get carried out in larp scenarios. I also introduced my own concept of scenario entropy in the chapter. It is the measure of the average rate of possibilities for performatic actions afforded by the scenario for an individual player.

With the examination of the scenario entropy, we could have the opportunity of doing analysis on the local and global aspects of the player behaviour in larps. This means that we could reveal aspects of the player behaviour that are locally affected, meaning affected by the imagery, traditions and conventions posed on the player by his or her local circumstances, and aspects that are globally affected, meaning the imagery, models and stereotypes known to larpers on a global level. However, this notion does not come

without problems and, therefore, I intentionally avoided its application to the example scenario. There are a few points that make me cautious about making any final conclusions about the matter and, therefore, I have chosen to keep the contemplations concerning it in a state of minor suggestions instead.

The first point concerning me is the definition of the terms: what do local and global mean in this context? If I claim that larps are a global phenomenon manifesting the models and stereotypes produced by global popular culture, wouldn't I be stating that the activity is, indeed, known and practiced *all over the world*? I dare to question this because, although larps might be practices in every continent of the world, the magnitude of its popularity seems to be so marginal that I wouldn't dare to call it global in the same sense as, say, football. And, on the other hand, if I claim that larps are a local phenomenon manifesting the traditions and conventions of certain local groups of people, wouldn't I be neglecting the fact that larps do draw inspiration from the Western-based popular culture known *almost* in every part of the world? Depicting the local and global aspects of player behaviour in larps can be problematic because the line between local and global in larps is also problematic. In what sense and to what extent are larps global and local? This is an interesting question that could open up possibilities for future contemplations on the nature and the gaming process of larps.

Another point concerning me is that, suppose we could and have defined global and local in the context of larping, wouldn't we also collide with the question of contradicting the two phenomena? Can one even exist without the other? If something in player behaviour could be regarded as being globally affected, wouldn't it also be locally affected? After all, as Gibson has pointed out, the perception of the environment is always relative to the observer. Wouldn't this mean that what could be regarded as the global aspects of larping are also, in the end, local because they are fundamentally perceived by

a localized complex living organism? Thus, in order to examine the global and local aspects of larping, we ought to make a thorough research on the effects of players' localized perception to their possibly globally affected behaviour. This, again, could open up possibilities for future research.

6.4. Final Notes

In the beginning of this study I suggested that this is a study in between. It is in a space between two fields of research: Performance Studies and Game Studies. In addition, I have applied theories from Cognitive and Ecological Psychology to enable a more thorough exploration of the gaming process of players, thus, situating the study between, in fact, more than just two disciplines. The aim of this study has been to demonstrate how these different fields of research can be merged together to form a unified interdisciplinary approach to larping that celebrates all of its unique characteristics at once. I call it the ecological approach to larping because this study is, more than anything, an ecological one: it includes everything under the same approach without wasting any valuable characteristics relating to larping.

At time to time, however, this study might have seemed to put more emphasis on Performance Studies than on the other fields. This is a natural consequence of the fact that the background of this study is in Performance Studies. It is the point of view that originally made me interested in the phenomenon of larping and, thus, it is unavoidably the lens through which I perceive everything relating to the activity. Yet, one might still ask: why should we call larps gamelike performances and not performatic games? This could be considered to be just a matter of preference but there is also a specific reason for my choice of words: as noted earlier, games are performances. They are about carrying out and completing tasks. They are about keeping up a standard, about displaying skills, and

about patterned or performatic behaviour that creates a separation between self and the behaviour.

Whatever special features we find in larps, all of them eventually lead to the fact that larps are most fundamentally performances: to larp is to carry out transportative performatic actions that represent the behaviour of the players' diegetic characters. The carrying out of these actions is restricted by a certain set of qualitative rules and possibly guided by an implicitly developed set of goals. Instead of being predetermined, the actions the players carry out derive from sets of possibilities that the players extract from the gaming environment they are dwelling in. The extraction of these possibilities occurs through perception and differentiation, and the actions the players choose to carry out are the result of a process of layering recalled and perceptual images. A fundamental feature that characterizes this process is its ephemerality: it is what it is because it disappears. What makes larps so unique among other forms of performances and games is that they are, at the same time, gamelike and performatic – they are gamelike performances.

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ANNEX 1

Questionnaire - Opera School of Arts IV – Valtapeliä

This is a questionnaire for the players of the game Opera School of Arts IV - Valtapeliä, played 7.11.2009. The questionnaire is a part of my MA dissertation for the Erasmus Mundus Master of Arts in International Performance Research programme.

This questionnaire is meant for gathering information about this live action role-playing game and therefore your answers will be most appreciated. Please be kind enough to fill in this questionnaire. We most sincerely thank you for participating in the research!

About yourself

Name (optional): _____

Your age: _____

Gender: Male Female

How many games have you been to? 1-4 5-9 10-14 15-19 20 <

When was the last larp you participated in (before OSA IV)? _____

Have you participated in Opera School of Arts game before? Yes No

Have you played the same character in Opera School of Arts game before? Yes No

Character's name (optional): _____

My character is: Student Staff

My character's gender: Male Female

My character's age: _____

What kind of a larper are you, i.e. what is your relationship towards playing and how do you usually play? (Place your answers in the scale!)

Experienced 1 2 3 4 5 Inexperienced

Active	1	2	3	4	5	Passive
Social	1	2	3	4	5	Anti-social
Curious	1	2	3	4	5	Uninterested
Strategist	1	2	3	4	5	Intuitive
Competitive	1	2	3	4	5	Conciliator
Immersionist	1	2	3	4	5	Narrativist

About the game

What was your character like according to the character description?

(Place your answers in the scale!)

Central	1	2	3	4	5	Marginal
Active	1	2	3	4	5	Passive
Social	1	2	3	4	5	Anti-social
Curious	1	2	3	4	5	Uninterested
Competitive	1	2	3	4	5	Conciliator
Strategist	1	2	3	4	5	Intuitive

What was your character like according to how you played it during the game?

(Place your answers in the scale!)

Central	1	2	3	4	5	Marginal
Active	1	2	3	4	5	Passive
Social	1	2	3	4	5	Anti-social
Curious	1	2	3	4	5	Uninterested
Competitive	1	2	3	4	5	Conciliator
Strategist	1	2	3	4	5	Intuitive

The following questions will use a scale of answers from 1 to 4. Choose your answers according to what you think of the statements. Choose also whether you consider the statement important for larping or not.

4 = Strongly Agree 3 = Agree 2 = Disagree 1 = Strongly Disagree

I was able to immerse into the game world during the game.

- 4 Strongly Agree
- 3 Agree
- 2 Disagree
- 1 Strongly Disagree

Important Not important

My character had goals in the game.

- 4 Strongly Agree
- 3 Agree
- 2 Disagree
- 1 Strongly Disagree

Important Not important

I was able to achieve my character's goals during the game.

- 4 Strongly Agree
- 3 Agree
- 2 Disagree
- 1 Strongly Disagree

Important Not important

I had goals in the game.

- 4 Strongly Agree
- 3 Agree
- 2 Disagree
- 1 Strongly Disagree

Important Not important

I was able to achieve my goals during the game.

- 4 Strongly Agree
- 3 Agree
- 2 Disagree
- 1 Strongly Disagree

Important Not important

I was thinking about the consequences of my actions before performing them.

- 4 Strongly Agree
- 3 Agree
- 2 Disagree
- 1 Strongly Disagree

Important Not important

I chose my actions according to their possible consequences.

- 4 Strongly Agree
- 3 Agree
- 2 Disagree
- 1 Strongly Disagree

Important Not important

I was able to perform my character's story during the game.

- 4 Strongly Agree
- 3 Agree
- 2 Disagree
- 1 Strongly Disagree

Important Not important

I could have been able to perform a completely different story for my character during the game if I wanted to.

- 4 Strongly Agree
- 3 Agree
- 2 Disagree
- 1 Strongly Disagree

Important Not important

During the game I ran into a situation where I was expected to have information about something that I didn't have but my character had.

- 4 Strongly Agree
- 3 Agree
- 2 Disagree
- 1 Strongly Disagree

Important Not important

This information was related to my character's

- nationality.
- studies.
- age.
- gender.
- history
- something else. What was it? _____

Important Not important

This situation made immersing into the game difficult.

- 4 Strongly Agree
- 3 Agree
- 2 Disagree
- 1 Strongly Disagree

Important Not important

I was able to get away from the situation without interrupting the game.

- 4 Strongly Agree
- 3 Agree
- 2 Disagree
- 1 Strongly Disagree

Important Not important

To get away from the situation I improvised the information.

- 4 Strongly Agree
- 3 Agree
- 2 Disagree
- 1 Strongly Disagree

Important Not important

To get away from the situation I ask a game master for an advice.

- 4 Strongly Agree
- 3 Agree
- 2 Disagree
- 1 Strongly Disagree

Important Not important

To get away from the situation I ask a co-player for an advice.

- 4 Strongly Agree
- 3 Agree
- 2 Disagree
- 1 Strongly Disagree

Important Not important

Thank you!

Marjukka Lampo

ANNEX 2

Questionnaire Results

About yourself

Players' age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	15	2	6,1	6,1	6,1
	17	4	12,1	12,1	18,2
	18	5	15,2	15,2	33,3
	19	4	12,1	12,1	45,5
	20	5	15,2	15,2	60,6
	21	6	18,2	18,2	78,8
	22	4	12,1	12,1	90,9
	23	2	6,1	6,1	97,0
	24	1	3,0	3,0	100,0
	Total	33	100,0	100,0	

Players' gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	10	30,3	30,3	30,3
	Female	23	69,7	69,7	100,0
	Total	33	100,0	100,0	

How many games have you been to?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-4 games	2	6,1	6,1	6,1
	5-9 games	6	18,2	18,2	24,2
	10-14 games	5	15,2	15,2	39,4
	15-19 games	7	21,2	21,2	60,6
	20 < games	13	39,4	39,4	100,0
	Total	33	100,0	100,0	

When was the last larp you participated in?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Within the last month	17	51,5	53,1	53,1
	Within the last 3 months	9	27,3	28,1	81,2
	Within the last 6 months	2	6,1	6,2	87,5
	Within the last year	3	9,1	9,4	96,9
	More than a year ago	1	3,0	3,1	100,0
	Total	32	97,0	100,0	
Missing	System	1	3,0		
Total		33	100,0		

Have you participated in OSA before?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	23	69,7	71,9	71,9
	No	9	27,3	28,1	100,0
	Total	32	97,0	100,0	
Missing	System	1	3,0		
Total		33	100,0		

Have you played the same character in OSA before?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	18	54,5	56,2	56,2
	No	14	42,4	43,8	100,0
	Total	32	97,0	100,0	
Missing	System	1	3,0		
Total		33	100,0		

My character is:

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Student	29	87,9	87,9	87,9
	Staff	4	12,1	12,1	100,0
	Total	33	100,0	100,0	

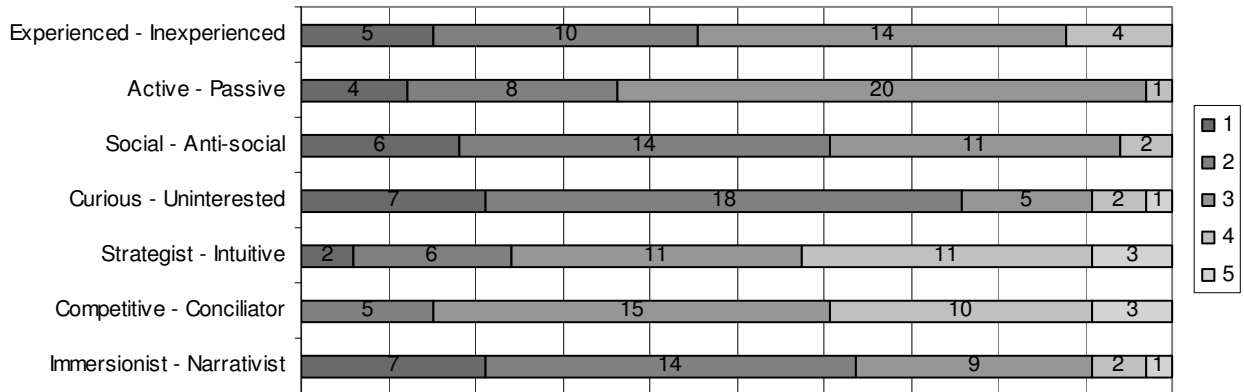
My character's gender:

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	16	48,5	48,5	48,5
	Female	17	51,5	51,5	100,0
	Total	33	100,0	100,0	

My character's age

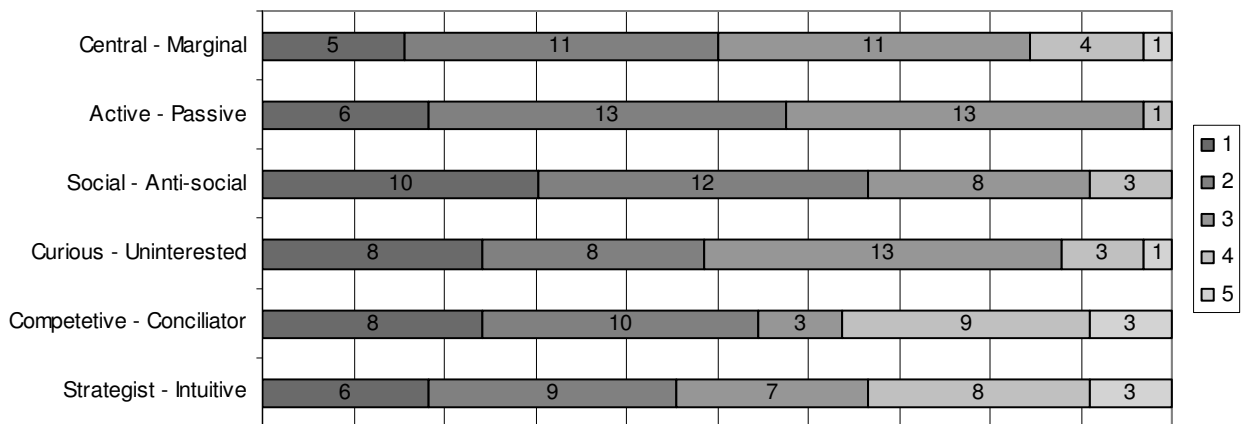
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	16	6	18,2	18,2	18,2
	17	3	9,1	9,1	27,3
	18	3	9,1	9,1	36,4
	19	14	42,4	42,4	78,8
	20	3	9,1	9,1	87,9
	Other	4	12,1	12,1	100,0
	Total	33	100,0	100,0	

What kind of a larper are you, i.e. what is your relationship towards playing and how do you usually play?

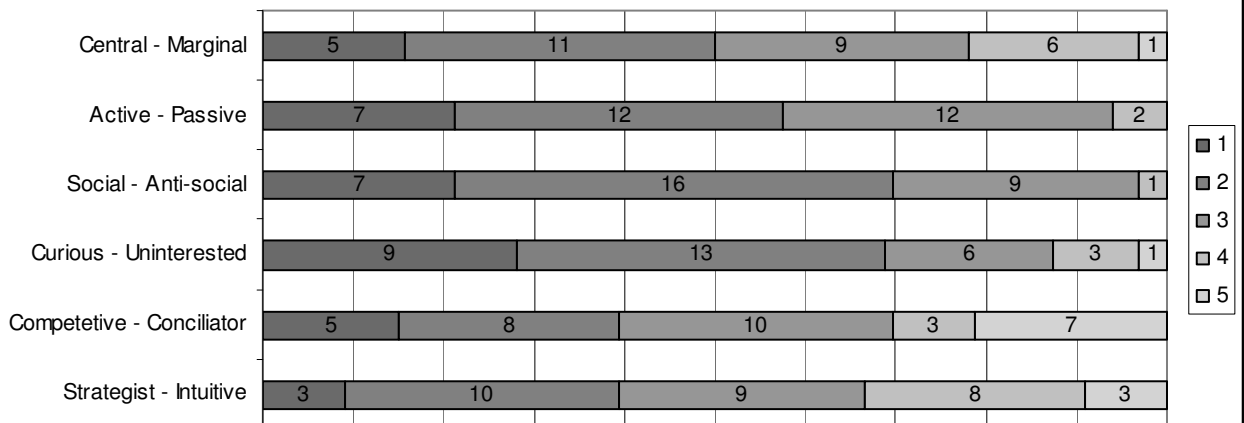


About the game

What was your character like according to the character description?



What was your character like according to how you played it during the game?



I was able to immerse into the game world during the game.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	1	3,0	3,0	3,0
	Agree	18	54,5	54,5	57,6
	Strongly Agree	14	42,4	42,4	100,0
	Total	33	100,0	100,0	

This is important / not important.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Important	33	100,0	100,0	100,0

My character had goals in the game.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	5	15,2	15,2	15,2
	Agree	15	45,5	45,5	60,6
	Strongly Agree	13	39,4	39,4	100,0
	Total	33	100,0	100,0	

This is important / not important.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Important	23	69,7	71,9	71,9
	Not important	9	27,3	28,1	100,0
	Total	32	97,0	100,0	
Missing	System	1	3,0		
Total		33	100,0		

I was able to achieve my character's goals during the game.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	6	18,2	18,8	18,8
	Agree	18	54,5	56,2	75,0
	Strongly Agree	8	24,2	25,0	100,0
	Total	32	97,0	100,0	
Missing	System	1	3,0		
Total		33	100,0		

This is important / not important.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Important	16	48,5	53,3	53,3
	Not important	14	42,4	46,7	100,0
	Total	30	90,9	100,0	
Missing	System	3	9,1		
Total		33	100,0		

I had goals in the game.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	6	18,2	18,2	18,2
	Agree	20	60,6	60,6	78,8
	Strongly Agree	7	21,2	21,2	100,0
	Total	33	100,0	100,0	

This is important / not important.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Important	19	57,6	61,3	61,3
	Not important	12	36,4	38,7	100,0
	Total	31	93,9	100,0	
Missing	System	2	6,1		
Total		33	100,0		

I was able to achieve my goals during the game.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	12	36,4	37,5	37,5
	Agree	16	48,5	50,0	87,5
	Strongly Agree	4	12,1	12,5	100,0
	Total	32	97,0	100,0	
Missing	System	1	3,0		
Total		33	100,0		

This is important / not important.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Important	15	45,5	50,0	50,0
	Not important	15	45,5	50,0	100,0
	Total	30	90,9	100,0	
Missing	System	3	9,1		
Total		33	100,0		

I was thinking about the consequences of my actions before performing them.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	3,0	3,0	3,0
	Disagree	10	30,3	30,3	33,3
	Agree	18	54,5	54,5	87,9
	Strongly Agree	4	12,1	12,1	100,0
	Total	33	100,0	100,0	

This is important / not important.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Important	12	36,4	41,4	41,4
	Not important	17	51,5	58,6	100,0
	Total	29	87,9	100,0	
Missing	System	4	12,1		
Total		33	100,0		

I chose my actions accordingly.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	3	9,1	9,1	9,1
	Disagree	14	42,4	42,4	51,5
	Agree	15	45,5	45,5	97,0
	Strongly Agree	1	3,0	3,0	100,0
	Total	33	100,0	100,0	

This is important / not important.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Important	15	45,5	51,7	51,7
	Not important	14	42,4	48,3	100,0
	Total	29	87,9	100,0	
Missing	System	4	12,1		
Total		33	100,0		

I was able to perform my character's story during the game.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	7	21,2	21,9	21,9
	Agree	18	54,5	56,2	78,1
	Strongly Agree	7	21,2	21,9	100,0
	Total	32	97,0	100,0	
Missing	System	1	3,0		
Total		33	100,0		

This is important / not important.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Important	26	78,8	83,9	83,9
	Not important	5	15,2	16,1	100,0
	Total	31	93,9	100,0	
Missing	System	2	6,1		
Total		33	100,0		

I could have been able to perform a completely different story for my character during the game if I wanted to.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	3,0	3,1	3,1
	Disagree	7	21,2	21,9	25,0
	Agree	15	45,5	46,9	71,9
	Strongly Agree	9	27,3	28,1	100,0
	Total	32	97,0	100,0	
Missing	System	1	3,0		
Total		33	100,0		

This is important / not important.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Important	20	60,6	71,4	71,4
	Not important	8	24,2	28,6	100,0
	Total	28	84,8	100,0	
Missing	System	5	15,2		
Total		33	100,0		

During the game I ran into a situation where I was expected to have information about something that I didn't have but my character had.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	8	24,2	24,2	24,2
	Disagree	10	30,3	30,3	54,5
	Agree	12	36,4	36,4	90,9
	Strongly Agree	3	9,1	9,1	100,0
	Total	33	100,0	100,0	

This is important / not important.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Important	18	54,5	66,7	66,7
	Not important	9	27,3	33,3	100,0
	Total	27	81,8	100,0	
Missing	System	6	18,2		
Total		33	100,0		

This information was related to my character's

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Studies	6	18,2	37,5	37,5
	History	3	9,1	18,8	56,2
	Something else	7	21,2	43,8	100,0
	Total	16	48,5	100,0	
Missing	System	17	51,5		
Total		33	100,0		

This is important / not important.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Important	7	21,2	63,6	63,6
	Not important	4	12,1	36,4	100,0
	Total	11	33,3	100,0	
Missing	System	22	66,7		
Total		33	100,0		

This situation made immersing into the game difficult.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	3	9,1	18,8	18,8
	Disagree	10	30,3	62,5	81,2
	Agree	3	9,1	18,8	100,0
	Total	16	48,5	100,0	
Missing	System	17	51,5		
Total		33	100,0		

This is important / not important.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Important	10	30,3	83,3	83,3
	Not important	2	6,1	16,7	100,0
	Total	12	36,4	100,0	
Missing	System	21	63,6		
Total		33	100,0		

I was able to get away from the situation without interrupting the game.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	2	6,1	12,5	12,5
	Agree	4	12,1	25,0	37,5
	Strongly Agree	10	30,3	62,5	100,0
	Total	16	48,5	100,0	
Missing	System	17	51,5		
Total		33	100,0		

This is important / not important.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Important	12	36,4	80,0	80,0
	Not important	3	9,1	20,0	100,0
	Total	15	45,5	100,0	
Missing	System	18	54,5		
Total		33	100,0		

To get away from the situation I improvised the information.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	3,0	6,2	6,2
	Disagree	4	12,1	25,0	31,2
	Agree	4	12,1	25,0	56,2
	Strongly Agree	7	21,2	43,8	100,0
	Total	16	48,5	100,0	
Missing	System	17	51,5		
Total		33	100,0		

This is important / not important.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Important	8	24,2	53,3	53,3
	Not important	7	21,2	46,7	100,0
	Total	15	45,5	100,0	
Missing	System	18	54,5		
Total		33	100,0		

To get away from the situation I ask a game master for an advice.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	10	30,3	66,7	66,7
	Disagree	4	12,1	26,7	93,3
	Agree	1	3,0	6,7	100,0
	Total	15	45,5	100,0	
Missing	System	18	54,5		
Total		33	100,0		

This is important / not important.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Important	6	18,2	46,2	46,2
	Not important	7	21,2	53,8	100,0
	Total	13	39,4	100,0	
Missing	System	20	60,6		
Total		33	100,0		

To get away from the situation I ask a co-player for an advice.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	6	18,2	40,0	40,0
	Disagree	4	12,1	26,7	66,7
	Agree	4	12,1	26,7	93,3
	Strongly Agree	1	3,0	6,7	100,0
	Total	15	45,5	100,0	
Missing	System	18	54,5		
Total		33	100,0		

This is important / not important.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Important	6	18,2	42,9	42,9
	Not important	8	24,2	57,1	100,0
	Total	14	42,4	100,0	
Missing	System	19	57,6		
Total		33	100,0		