LARP & NARRATIVE

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Abstract:

Live action role-playing (larp) is a form of narrative play that engages participants in fictional words within the dialectic of experience (unorganized time) and narrative (organized time). In this thesis I explore the complexities of the fictional worlds created by larps and how the participation in larps constructs requires a different engagement with traditional thoughts about narrative. Discussing fictional worlds theory, Aristotle, Frye, and Ricoeur along side concepts from game studies, such as the magic circle and the frames of exogeny, endogeny, and diegesis, I propose an alternative approach to understanding narrative within larps that looks at the larp worlds and plot as being driven by a process of affirming the identities constructed to participate within the fictional worlds through the mimetic process.

Introduction

Preamble: Thesis & Stakes

Live action role-playing games (larp) create alternate realities, as any fiction does, in which the audience immerses itself.[1] Yet, bringing the audience into the narrative fundamentally changes the relationship between the 'reader' and the 'text.' In this work I want to explore how live action games warp narrative structure to allow meaningful interaction between the audience and the fiction. Unlike video games or tabletop role-playing games, larp does not relegate the action to a virtual space. Instead, larps incorporate constructed narrative events into the lived experience of the participants, creating a dialectic between lived experience and narrative, offering life as artifice and artifice as life. What is at stake in this blurring is the distinction between experience and narrative. I begin with the premise that experience is unorganized time and narrative is organized time. Ricoeur established that the relationship between time and narrative pertains to the "intentionality" of the experiences. Where it becomes relevant for our discussion is that larp establishes a dialectic between lived experience and fictional narrative, offering life as artifice and artifice as life. My goals in this project are to unpack this claim and to discuss how larps connect lived experience and narrative together. Largely, I will be focusing on the spatio-temporal qualities of larp, namely, how larps manipulate or control time and space in order to produce alternative or hypothetical narrative experiences and the construction of realities into which participants can project themselves.

In the first chapter I will expand upon the three frames of play — exogenous, endogenous, diegetic — introduced by Gary Fine in 1983 and used as ludic structures in Markus

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[1] In this essay I will be using "larp" rather than "LARP." Larp is used both as a proper noun to describe the activity, as well as a verb to describe doing the activity. It is the root for larping, larpwright, larper, larps, and larped.

Montola's work on larp; these frames form the elements of a narrative cosmology. I want to consider them as modes of reality that provide different possible worlds into which participants descend. In this chapter I will be arguing that the frameworks mentioned above create multiple possible worlds within larp, enveloping the players in a hierarchical, organized experience . I will begin by exploring the exogenous, endogenous, and diegetic frames as Fine and Montola present them, and from this base begin to build an argument for how these frames pull together the experience of actual and fictive space, the exogenous forming the uppermost, and the diegetic the lowermost interpretation of space. What this amounts to is an ontology of social being, a model for how individuals relate to the space around them in social games. The strength of the truth claim which the fictional world asserts depends upon the relationship between the three frames, and the opportunities for interpretation afforded to participants..

Typically, players experience the game by moving through a spatial realm. This holds true even for abstract and puzzle games where the manipulation and positioning of the puzzle pieces reflect a logical processing of the spatial information the player is presented with; but in narrative games, this translates into a navigation of the possible worlds of the game and the different modes of reality that are accessed during roleplay. It is not the focus of this work to dispute the construction of games and their possible worlds; however, this context is needed to understand the significance of the larp world, which is always both fictional and real, because a larp blends together the spatial reasoning of a game and the real space in which the game takes place. No matter the degree of separation or distance from the actual, the space-time of a larp's world is regulated by the space-time of the actual.[2] How participants navigate the fictional world

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[2] Theatre typically conforms to this restriction as well, however, the landscape plays of Gertrude Stein overcome this limitation.

binds it to the experience of the actual world. The designers of *Delirium* intentionally exploited this fact to fabricate madness in their players. They intentionally "employed jumps in both space and time" to create uncertainty about what was being experienced because "players and characters experience time as linear," which disorients because the experience of time and the organisation of events do not reconcile with each other.[3] Nonetheless, within each scene, linearity proves the rule. *KAPO*'s narrative of incarceration and abuse relies on the simulation, within the actual, of incarceration that is experientially compelling. The construction of Zeeland in *KAPO* differs greatly from the construction of an actual prison camp, but it is not the imitation of the prison, rather the imitation of something that falls between the precept (what *ought* to be) of incarceration and the example (what *is*) of it.[4] It is this aspect of the setting that makes it *sur*real; the reality of Zeeland extends beyond its fictionality or actuality as a physical space, alienating the participants from their capacity to understand and interpret their own experiencel.[5]

This duality of the fictional world, that it is both real and unreal, will be discussed in the Cosmology of Larp. Participants, I will contend, move between worlds real and imagined, shared and individual. This movement requires the participants to negotiate the twinning of actual and fictional existences. Their actions produce both real and imagined interaction within the magic circle, the space which regulates the interpretation of action within a playful context.[6]

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[3] Nordic Larp. *Delirium Documentary*. 11:38.

[4] Frye argues that "poetry exists between the example and the precept" (97). My claim, here, is that Zeeland occupies this space; as a structure that contains cells, guards, and other images of what we imagine a prison *is*, it produces the "recurrence" of the poetic image (97). Conversely, as a literary reconstruction of what a prison "ought to be" it participates in the "wish-fulfillment" which comes from the "desire" expressed by the precept (97).

[5] I will discuss this more later. *KAPO*'s design intentionally regulated sensory experience, preventing natural light from being accessed during the activities to strengthen the control of the diegesis over its participants.

[6] See Montola, *On the Edge of the Magic Circle*; Fine, *Shared Fantasy*; Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*.

The second chapter will begin with a discussion of Aristotle's *Poetics* and Northrop

Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, particularly the essays on historical criticism and ethical criticism.

The entry point of our inquiry will be the question of magnitude and unity of action that Aristotle

raises in his *Poetics* and the discussion will continue into questions about the ethical status of

characters relative to their players. How are characters represented as noble or base, better or

worse, relative to the player performing them? At first glance this question seems strikingly

similar to asking how an actor can portray a character more noble or vile than himself, but the

representation of characters within a larp is different from traditional drama. In drama, the

audience observes the actors playing the parts of the play; in larp, the audience is directly

engaged in the production of the narrative. This leaves no observational distance between the

players and the action of the narrative. Whereas in traditional drama the conventional separation

produces an awareness of the distinction between the performance of fictional or actual

identities, larp lacks a 'fourth wall'. Instead, the audience are themselves the protagonists of the

action, and the clear delineations of performance becomes liminal. Fictional performances of

nobility or baseness threaten to encroach upon the personal description of the larp (which occurs

in the first-person); it is much more difficult to form statements such as "s/he [the character] did

X in context Y" when the performance of X-in-context-Y is enacted by the audience member.

This reflects the need for the creation of policies regarding the use of third-person pronouns in

describing intense larp actions.[7]

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[7] These sorts of policies have been implemented at Nordic larps where the action of the plot involved performing acts of violence or moral turpitude, e.g. KAPO, Delirium, Panopticorp, &c.

Area of Study

      I will be discussing a few, oftentimes wildly different, larps. The following pages will offer as detailed a synopsis and chronology of these larps as is possible. My primary documents consist of collections of testimonials, documentaries, and records that orbit the ephemeral immediacy of the larp. Below I will describe the larps I will be discussing, their settings and genre frames.

      There are two kinds of larps that will be discussed in this project: the first, campaign larps, consists of the most popular form of larping that occurs globally. The second, Nordic larp, is a smaller field with roots in Scandinavia. These larps experiment with form and often engage in critical discourses around current cultural issues; *Delirium*'s designers sought to engage with questions around the representation and treatment of the mentally ill, *KAPO* reacted to the resurgence in right-wing populism and its proto-fascisms, in Denmark and the West more broadly; and *Mad About the Boy* challenges participants to consider ideas of gender and society. The Campaign larps can also engage with cultural issues consciously, as can be seen in the colonial themes present in the setting of *Epoch* or the racially stratified class structure and slavery in *Fantasy Alive*; however, these games also must engage with their audience's expectations regarding genre and its tropes (eg. the bold warrior, the clever wizard, the compassionate cleric, etc), and these priorities sublimate potentially radical social critique into less threatening narrative organization--slavery is looked down upon by the community of Yorick, but there is no political upheaval to end it.

Fantasy Alive
  1999-present

Set in the fantasy kingdom of Haredom, the players consist of a variety of notable figures who have collected in the small town of Yorick within an unstable region of the kingdom. Here they battle monsters and demons, survive the hostile wildlife and engage with the remote consequences of court politics and international or interplanar warfare that ensues as the various factions and villains vie for control of the region.

Originally written by Brett Moore and owned since 2003 by Doug Rene[8], the game has a persistent world that reimagines the local geography; Hamilton becomes Stelton, Milton becomes Yorick, etc. Michigan (Michian) is a neighbouring kingdom that was occupied by Haredom a few years ago.[9] These sorts of geo-political changes participate in the construction of a living world and epic campaign with political and military conquest, turbulence, and open opportunities for non-conflict related heroism (eg. aiding refugees, advising policy, selling crafted wares, etc.).

Epoch Toronto
  1990? - Present

Epoch, similar to *Fantasy Alive*, is set within a transformed world, with real-world maps providing the basis for the fictional world's geography. Where they differ most significantly is in the fictional, post-apocalyptic history that *Epoch* explores, which relies on a strong allegorical relationship to North American history, particularly ideas of ideological and nationalist expansion by an Imperial power into territories controlled by indigenous communities.

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[8] While this information is available on the website for *Fantasy Alive*, I learnt this information from conversations with Doug and Brett while attending events at the game years ago. The current iteration of the website is rather barebones and does not provide useful information on the setting of the game which new players would rely on to develop character histories.

[9] Apocryphally, this occurred during the 2006-2007 season. A brutal war occurred which left Haredom in control of Michian as a part of the post-war terms of peace.

Colonialism is a major theme of the setting, where players live within the Frontier which is pressured on both sides by factions interested in expanding their stake through violence and conquest, either to regain control of lost territories or to further expand the Empire. The Confederacy, a military alliance of tribal groups organized historically by a figure known as "Tecum-deth" presents the second major human faction within the game and ties their representation back to the nation building ambitions of Tecumseh during the War of 1812.[10]

These allegorical images form a backdrop to play but rarely are central to the stories being told. People tend to be uncomfortable with the process of embodying systems of racism. This might be a North American concern, one noted by Lizzie Stark in "The Unwritten Rules," and my experience of larp has corroborated this fact as well.[11] Since then, there have been attempts to revise the fictional world to reflect a more contemporary audience's concerns with appropriation and racism.

Mad About the Boy

This larp was first produced in 2010 by Margrete Raaum, Tor Kjetil Edland, and Trine Lise Lindahl for a set of performances in Norway.[12] The game explores issues pertaining to gender, sexuality, and parenting in the wake of a sudden disaster that leaves all but one man

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[10] See "The History of the Confederacy" within the entry on the Confederacy under People's of Epoch (http://www.epoch-larp.ca/?page_id=315). Accessed 31 May 2016. Unofficially, I have spoken to Kevin Nun, one of the creators of the setting, about this in 2013, and he confirmed the intentionality of the allusions to colonialism.

[11] "...few players practice the racism dictated by the rules, maybe because tolerance is so ingrained in players out-of-game, maybe because racist assumptions—even imaginary ones—create real-life discomfort." *Leaving Mundania*. "The Unwritten Rules."

[12] Mad About the Boy. "Earlier Runs." *Mad About the Boy*. (http://mad-about-the-boy-larp.blogspot.ca/p/earlier-runs.html) Accessed 6 June 2016.

dead. Runs of the game have been held as both all female or mixed groups and it has been reproduced internationally in the US, Netherlands, and Sweden.[13]

The setting thrusts the players into a post-apocalyptic world where the gender disparities of the pre-apocalyptic world have left nations reeling from skill loss in male-dominated industries. The action occurs around a government pilot programme to inseminate women using sperm stored in sperm banks in an attempt to restore the human race in the next generation. The stability of post-disaster governments, and their ability to run fertility programmes, is tied back to how disparate their populations and societies were before the men died. Just as the programme begins to take motion, in stumbles Isak, the last man on Earth. The women are confronted with the question of what to do with Isak, and whether the sudden arrival of Isak changes anything about the insemination programme they were about to implement.[14]

The onset of the narrative structures is highly controlled. Characters are named and designed in the script with their relationships pre-planned. This level of narrative authority is unacceptable in campaign larps, because often the appeal of these games is the ability to develop a character within a provided setting; however, this level of narrative authority does occur in Nordic larps, though not all universally. The control of the organizers over the narrative loosens the further into the action the players move, until, ultimately, action concludes in the manner that has been decided by the players through the process of performing their given identities and expanding them as they encounter situations and conflicts within the plot of the larp.

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[13] This information also comes from the "Earlier Runs" section of the *Mad About the Boy* website.
[14] Edland et al. "The Larp, the Methods, and the Pregame Workshop." *Mad About the Boy*. I have provided a synopsis of the action which is described in the published larpscript.

Delirium

Another 2010 larp, *Delirium* takes place within "an abstraction of a modern mental institution" wherein players are interred as patients for "psychological and social problems that they themselves are not aware of."[15] Non-player characters (NPCs) were institutional figures: doctors, orderlies, and nurses.

Staging for the larp relied on lighting effects to regulate states of control in the "revolution" within the institute. This particular feature will be dwelled upon because of the design intention of "break[ing] out of the usual connection between location and time that most games are bound by."[16] *Delirium*'s aim to disconnect space and time within the larp contradicts the association of space and time within narrative that challenges the ideas of narrative that Frye and Ricoeur are engaging with.

KAPO

KAPO was a collaborative, Danish production organized by Anders Berner, Jakob Hedegaard, Kim Holm, Juliane Mikkelsen, Peter Munthe-Kaas, Frederik Nylev, and Rasmus Petersen. Set in the near future of 2012, it speculated a world in which totalitarian politics had fundamentally changed the way of life in Denmark, leading to the internment of political prisoners within the brutal prison camp of Zeeland. Conditions in the prison were harsh and violence among prisoners was a systemic reality for the incarcerated subjects. A group of "kapos" formed the "ruling class" who enforced the camp from within.[17]

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[15] Heebold-Christensen et al. "Delirium." *Do Larp*. Ed. Lars Andersen et al. Rollespilsakademiet: Copenhagen, 2010. 74.

[16] Ibid. 75.

[17] Raasted. "What is KAPO." *The Book of KAPO*. Copenhagen, Denmark: Rollespielakademiet, 2012. PDF.

Purportedly a larp about the "dehumanizing social dynamics in a camp for political prisoners," participants were exposed to degradation by the institution, each other, and themselves.[18] The larp used the technique "ars amandi," which is a codified system of touches and gestures using the forearms to depict sexual intimacy, within the prison to simulate both consensual sexual interaction as well as rape.[19] The presence of sexual violence as a mechanically accounted for element of play makes *KAPO* one of the most difficult larps to imagine occurring in a North American context.[20]

The plot focused on the creation of a perpetuated cycle of trauma production within the participants. As the event progressed, the already incarcerated victimized the newly incarcerated; each new group of prisoners experiencing the pattern of dehumanization as they enter and try to survive in the institution. The option for escape from the system is to render one's self abject before the state, "admitting your guilt to the public and repent[ing] on public TV" to the crime of "endangering the State of Denmark."[21]

Panopticorp

First run in Oslo, 2003 by a creative team led by Irene Tanke[22], the game was reproduced in Copenhagen in 2013 by Claus Raasted and Eirik Fatland. The larp takes place within a

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[18] Ibid.

[19] To my knowledge, the use of ars amandi to simulate sexual violence was fairly novel to KAPO. Accounts of this use can be found within *The Book of KAPO* in the testimonials from players.

[20] This is in addition to the prison context and the focus on dehumanization. North American larp culture is very different from its European cousins.

[21] Ibid.

[22] The full team of organizers was Irene Tanke, Jared Elgvin, Eirik Fatland, Kaisa Lindahl, Cath Røsseland, Espen Nodeland, Rune Haugen, Trine Lindahl, Erling Rognli.
Cosmic Joke UK.. *Panopticorp Mini Documentary*. Online video clip. Youtube, 10 October 2013. Accessed 4 July 2016.

modern advertising company "from hell."[23] The company operates on a pure capitalist desire for profit without scruples or moral questioning. The satirical larp had participants pitching and mocking up advertisements for unethical companies, causes, and dictatorships. Players were encouraged to "leave their morals at home" when performing their characters.[24] Instead, they were to adopt the morals of the corporation and be willing to push the boundaries of what is acceptable. Many of the characters used cocaine,[25] partied, and worked late into the night to get their projects in.

History of Larp/Larp Scholarship

        Genealogy of Larp

Genealogical work about larp has garnered the attention of several critics[26] in the larp community. The question of what stands behind us in the history of larp has informed the works of Brian Morton and Lizzie Stark among others. Perhaps the lack, and impossibility, of an established canonical tradition helps to fuel the desire to establish some form of historicity for the medium; perhaps an unconscious, continued desire to be viewed as a "legitimate" dramatic form encourages the need to draw larp out from the darkness of the undocumented past. No matter what drives this impulse, it has become a crucial starting point for coming to understand what exactly it means "to larp."

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[23] Ibid. 00:51.
[24] Panopticorp. "The Experience." *PanoptiCorp 2013*. Rollespilsfabrikken, 2013. Web. Accessed 4 July 2016.
[25] The snorting of a white powder occurs repeatedly in the clips used for the mini documentary by Cosmic Joke UK. The larp maintained an aesthetic association between the high-paced world of the PanoptiCorp and the use of stimulants to fuel an impossible work-life balance.
[26] Such as Brian Morton, Markus Montola, and Lizzie Stark.

Most research on larp origins places it somewhere in the 1970s or 1980s.[27] The two-decade-spanning point of origin reflects the nebulousness of larp. There is no specific place or time which can claim ancestry for its modern incarnation. Brian Morton's phenomenal chapter in *Lifelike* (2007) does an excellent job of connecting larp to various historical dramatic forms: masques, theme parties, gladiatorial bouts, etc. However, it is an anachronism to claim that these cognates are themselves larps. In contrast to much of the existing scholarship on larp, I will be intentionally limiting the term in my definition. Where Morton's work is most effective is around the discussions of murder mystery dinners and the mid-20th Century developments in Drama, particularly, Moreno's Psychodrama, Spolin's Theatre Games, and creation of "mock parliaments" growing out of the work of Taylor Statten and Nellie McClung in Canada in the early 20th Century.[28]

My focus lies on these traditions because they are the most immediate precursors to larp, and, in the case of murder mystery dinners and mock parliaments, are often times so similar in form that distinguishing them becomes a matter of technicality rather than constitutional frameworks. These forms are important because they already draw influence from some of the historical forms which Morton lists and they are perhaps the closest cousins of larp.

Larp Scholarship

A considerable amount of scholarship around larp has occurred in other disciplines. As game studies have grown as a field, it has strongly influenced the study of larp. Game studies, or

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[27] Morton, Brian. "Larps and their Cousins Throughout the Ages." *Lifelike*. 2007. PDF. ; Heinze, Krystyna. "Developing Intercultural Competence." *Globalisation: Dimensions & Impacts: Global Studies Vol. 1*. Ed. Şiriner and Nenička. 2011. ; Stark, Lizzie. *Leaving Mundania*. 2009. eBook.

[28] Morton, Brian. "Larps and Their Cousins Through the Ages." *Lifelike*. Ed. Jesper Donnis, Morten Gade, and Line Thorup. 1st ed. Copenhagen, Denmark: Projektgruppen KP07, 2007. 245–259. Print.

ludology, is an interdisciplinary field that discusses the theoretical and practical concerns of games and game playing. Transmedia studies has also influenced larp scholarship, as have more traditional fields, such as psychology, drama and literature, sociology, and anthropology.

Within the existing field of larp scholarship, there are a few key authors whose critical works will be of particular value to the work I am doing, and whose scholarship is heavily cited by other academics exploring larp. Below I will provide an overview of the field, identifying prominent authors and publications in the critical study of larp. This will by no means be all-inclusive; rather, it will outline the key figures and some of their most important works.

Markus Montola's extensive work on pervasive gaming (games that extend from the computer into real life; see *The Black Watchmen* for an example of this), transmedia games (this would include most ARGs) that run concurrent to the player's life, and larps explores how the magic circle of play (a spatio-temporal boundary which distinguishes play from actual world), has sought to define larp, or at least offer a technically discerning framework in which to distinguish larp from not-larp, and has explored various theoretical concerns that arise in role-playing and pervasive games.

Jaakko Stenros' scholarship focuses around the experience of role-playing and its relationship to personal identity. His research has explored ideas of immersion and the player's experience. He has written several articles about the pervasive larp *Momentum*, and the blurring of fiction into everyday life during the larp's five week run time.[29] Additional work has been done on how we construct immersion in role-playing and issues around identity and role-playing games and role-playing games and popular culture.

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[29] See Stenros, Jaakko et al. "Play It for Real: Sustained Seamless Life/game Merger in Momentum." Proceedings of DiGRA 2007 Situated Play conference (2007): 121–129. PDF.

Lizzie Stark's well researched, but popular facing, book *Leaving Mundania*, and the annual *Knutepunkt* book series, which collects the conference proceedings and papers of the rotating, annual conference in Scandinavia about larping, also offer great entry points into the study of larp both as a form and content. Topics of discussion have varied widely over the past decade to encompass narratology and cultural studies within the frame of their conferences.

Current trends in larp scholarship have shifted more towards cultural studies. Addressing issues around gender, marginality, resistance, and the politics of larping. Concurrently, work continues to be done around aspects of design and development with the conference proceedings from Solmukohta 2016 (the Finnish version of the Knutepunkt conference) centring around these topics. However, more work still needs to be done on the narrative element within larp scholarship. My aim is to contribute to the current discussions on larp but to do so by focusing on a narrative based examination of larps.

Defining Larp

Live Action Role-Playing, or larping, is a difficult form to pin down. What is it that connects campaign larps to their Nordic cousins? What about jeepform[30] games? Do murder mystery dinner parties count as larps? These aren't easy questions to resolve because the relationship between the various things called, or arisen out of, larp aren't exactly clear. Most

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[30] Jeepform games can be said to consist of "freeform role-play" that has various inherently formal concerns: how the rules structure the interaction, how the narrative is presented, and in an renewed emphasis on the supremacy of plot, which I will discuss later (Vi åker Jeepen). These games tend to be shorter, political, and interested in player interaction. Jeepform encourages minimalist stage design and a focus on creating interesting and challenging experiences that experientially are more "everyday" than "epic" (Vi åker Jeepen). Nordic Larp Wiki describes Jeepform as "containted, experimental and sometimes controversial roleplaying games in the freeform tradition." (See footnote 7).

accounts of Jeepform would exclude it, as Lizzie Stark does[31] and, in fact, Vi åker Jeep (We go by Jeep) as well.[32] Nonetheless, there is a certain kinship recognized in the Nordic Larp Wiki's use of "larpwright" to describe the authors of Jeepform games.[33]

The definition of larp that I will be using here is not going to be ... definitive. Rather, it will be a functional definition for the purposes of our discussion, and will be more focused on the literary concerns that this paper will be addressing instead of the ludic concerns that provide the typical organization of what is and is not larp. To begin with, I am going to make the distinction that larp began somewhere in the late-middle 20th Century, nominally in the 1970s. This is not a perfect solution, but will limit the scope of larp to a period of time in which the concept of larp existed. Morton's article highlighting the many larp forms that have existed essentially since we began recording history is an insightful argument for the ubiquity of role-playing as a method for negotiating the primary (actual or real) world; however, Queen Anne would not have considered herself a larper nor Ben Jonson himself a larpwright after the 1605 performance of *The Masque of Blackness*, and it feels anachronistic to apply this terminology to them now. For the purposes of this essay, I will not be interrogating the question of whether a murder mystery dinner or theme party, partaken before or after the advent of larp as a concept, constitutes a larp. This is a complex question which must weigh the value of independent traditions against a technical claim that if larp is a combination of game structures (role-play) and participatory narrative then there

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[31] Stark, Lizzie. "Jeepform for Noobs." *Leaving Mundania*. 2012-09-17. 2016-04-26, http://leavingmundania.com/2012/09/17/jeepform-for-noobs/. "So jeepform is not larp, even though you act out the scene physically."

[32] Vi åker Jeep. "Jeepform." *Vi åker Jeep*. 2016-04-26, http://jeepen.org/dict/. Vi åker Jeep is the official source of Jeepform games. The group members, referred to as "Jeepers" are the founders and prominent proponents of the style. They describe it as freeform games, which they distinguish from larp.

[33] Nordic Larp Wiki. "Jeepform" *Nordic Larp Wiki*. 2014-05-30. 2016-04-26, https://nordiclarp.org/wiki/Jeepform.

are many historical modes that meet this definition; such a discussion falls outside our purposes here.

To begin, larps are both games and narratives. While there is a certain level of narrativity to all games, the narrative component of a larp is more similar to that of drama or literature than it is to that of chess. A simple chess larp, however, could be constructed by renegotiating the scope of the narrativity, expanding the magic circle to allow for more variance while conserving the rule structures of chess. For example, providing the Kings with motivations for conflict which chess symbolically reproduces would strengthen the narrativity of the game, allowing for role-play (another crucial aspect of larp) that would otherwise risk being too free-form and losing focus.

Larps are a form of role-play. Participants within a larp assume roles that only hold value within the magic circle of the event. Whether as a community organiser (exogenous), story-teller (endogenous), or prison warden (diegetic), the participants are not these things in their everyday life.[34] Participation in a larp is transformative. You become another; as such, identity construction is central to the experience of larp. How characters are developed varies from game to game. The organisational systems of Nordic larps and campaign larps vary significantly, and there is a tendency towards communal character development within Nordic games (allowing the organisers more influence over the final shape of the characters) whereas campaign larps tend to utilize an independent design system, where participants produce their own characters and present them to the organisers for approval. However, there is no reason why either one of these approaches could not work for either tradition of larp.

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[34] This is to say, even if the individual is a story-teller by trade, whether writer or professional game master, they are only story-teller in relation to the larp within the context of the larp's magic circle.

Space is renegotiated through larp. Larps are narratives which transform the spaces they are staged in. The scout camp sites used by *Fantasy Alive* or *Epoch: Toronto* are transformed by the setting of the fictional world. The narratives presented in these games reinforce the truth claim of the fictional world. This is not to claim that the sole purpose of plot is to create a compelling world; it is a critical object of larp to reinforce the truth claim of the fictional world in which the narrative takes place. If the fictional world is supposed to be dangerous, where monsters threaten civilisation, but the narratives present no monsters threatening civilisation, the game world loses the ability to assert that civilisation is under threat to monsters. Any narrative that fails to further the truth claim of a larp world undermines the diegetic frame of the larp and works against itself .

Larps are participatory, and that participation is a crucial aspect of larp.While it is possible to have "third-person" audiences observing a larp,[35] something which occurs in *KAPO* (2011),[36] the observation is either held distinct from the act of larping or the audience is brought into the role-play. *KAPO* did the latter. Audience members were able to send gifts into Zeeland for the comfort or use of the player-participants they were supporting. This makes them, in a sense, spectator-as-participant. The passivity of spectating is revoked and their presence as an audience becomes an active engagement with the diegesis.

Finally, larps are a form of oral storytelling. Guided by a predilection towards representational narratives—that storytelling relies on a referentiality that connects fictional to

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[35] By which I mean, a non-participating audience which experiences the larp through the third-person; "He did X, she did Y."

[36] In *KAPO*, spectators were invited to watch the larp, which connected the prison to the larger setting, a dystopic Denmark. Spectators could interact with their related participants, providing material goods for them to use within the staged prison. Claus Raasted et al. *The Book of Kapo.* Ed. Claus Raasted. Rollespilsakademiet: Copenhagen, 2012. PDF.

actual—larps are more related to oral storytelling than they are to literary structures. This is not to disavow the significant influence that literature, especially fantasy literature in the wake of *Lord of the Rings*, has had on larping, but rather to acknowledge that larp is performed live and more closely relates to spoken forms of narration than it does to the written forms of narration. We do not write dialogic scripts as one would in theatre. Instead, larp is documented after the fact. Gary Fine refers to "fantasy games" as being "similar to the theater, but with the difference that the games are *improvisational*" rather than scripted.[37] While Fine was speaking of tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs), such as *Dungeons and Dragons*, the distinction resonates strongly with larp as well. Improv theatre is more akin to larp than scripted plays; however, even this similarity remains thin. Larps operate with more independence between the players and strive to make coherent a collection of narrative moments that are too large to execute in an improv theatre setting.

Larp relies on a different set of systems and structures than theatre in order to produce a narrative that coherent to its audience. There are also elements that overlap with theatre and literature, which I will discuss later, however, these elements are entwined in the cosmology building game structures which allow for player immersion. The next chapter will discuss these tools.

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[37] Fine, Gary. *Shared Fantasy,* 205. Emphasis mine.

Chapter 1 - Modes of Reality

The 3 Frames: Fine and Montola

Exogeny, Endogeny, & Diegesis

Breaking down role playing, Montola draws on the works of Fine (1983), who examined fantasy role-playing games, and of Björk and Holopainen (2003) who worked on game rules. In role-playing games, Montola argues we can examine role-playing by looking at three rules: "the world rule, the power rule and the character rule" which he describes thus:

1) Role-playing is an interactive process of defining and re-defining the state, properties and contents of an imaginary game world.

2) The power to define the game world is allocated to participants of the game. The participants recognize the existence of this power hierarchy.

3) Player-participants define the game world through personified character constructs, conforming to the state, properties and contents of the game world.[38]

These three rules coincide with the three layers Fine used to describe the layers of role-playing: the world rule (1) applies on the exogenous layer (the site of external meaning); the power rule (2) applies on the endogenous layer (the site of internal meaning);

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[38] Montola, Markus. "The Invisible Rules of Role-Playing The Social Framework of Role-Playing Process." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 1 (2008): 22–36. Print.
    Excerpt from pp. 23-24.

and the character rule (3) applies on the diegetic layer (the site of narrative meaning).[39] All three frames are important for a discussion of narrative within a larp. An analysis of the American run of *Mad About the Boy* must consider how interactions of the players within the game reconstitute the world by expanding or advancing the player's understanding of what it means, for example, for a world to be without men through an interaction with a trans-man, a group whose concerns and values they might not have considered before interacting with someone in that position. An instance of role-play between a trans-man and a woman in the advent of the male extinction allows those players to redefine the world by their interpretation of what it means to be transgendered in a world where one sex has died off from a mysterious illness. It is through the interaction in such a scene that the players redefine the significance of trans-man surviving where cis-men had not. Similarly, the power hierarchy that allows participants to change the game world is reflected within the structures of the gameworld itself. The status of participants reflects their credibility in ontological assertions about the fictional world made by their characters. Newer participants, or participants whose credibility has been affected by their previous attempts to redefine the fictional world, will have varying degrees of credibility when their characters propose alternate states of affairs. The power rule also acknowledges the discrepancies created by exogenous and endogenous circumstances. Game organisers have more authority to change the fictional world (more breadth and depth of power) than the players who engage with the world from the bottom of the power hierarchy. Finally, the character rule illuminates the liminal position of the character: they act as our points of

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[39] Ibid.

entry into the fictional world. The constitution of which must conform to the states of affairs that are considered plausible within the fictional world. Therefore, the creation of a character reinforces the proposed state of affairs while also modifying it. Characters at *Mad About the Boy* were not capable of magic because magic was not plausible within the setting. The continued lack of magic with the creation of each new character reinforces the mundanity of the setting; that magic is not plausible within this fictional universe. This holds true in all larps. The process of developing characters, whether it occurs through workshops in Nordic larps or through independent design with approval from organisers relies upon the assertion of truthful statements about the fictional world. John Smith, last man on earth, relies on the affirmation that a man survived the extinction of his gender. Randalf, Wizard Extraordinaire, relies on the claim that magic is possible, but these truth claims extend beyond affirming the existence of effects that are mechanically accounted for. The historical relationships established between the character and the setting define what that world ultimately looks like. After characters are established, this process continues through the characters' engagements with the space and plot before them. What they consider important and what is ignored within the setting and narrative will prioritize some aspects of the fiction and eschew others. The character rule operates in the prelude to the larp and after its onset.

The world rule governs the constitution of the fictional world. Game rules are a part of the world construction. What actions are available to the participants defines how the player-participants can interact within the diegetic framework. For example, game rule systems in many larps include mechanisms for spellcasting and sorcery of various sorts.

Where these systems exist, characters can interact with the fictional world, and its other denizens, through spellcraft. Where it does not exist, the fictional world does not require rules which would allow for sorcerous interactions; the exogenous structure of the larp does not allow for the endogenous or diegetic expression of magic. The important distinction here is that the rules that allow for magic occur within the "primary framework" of the actual.[40] It is people (exogenous) who have established these rules for the game. The choice to cast a spell falls into the purview of the game, making it endogenous.

The power rule speaks to the collective negotiation and control over the fictional world by those who have a stake in its organization. This occurs on the endogenous level because it occurs within the context of the game, it is the relationship between players and game masters within the bounds of what the game rules constitute. The hierarchy refers to the organization of authority between the participants, within the scope of the game, and grants different participants different levels of authority over the fictional world. A game master at a larp, for example, can create a vampire character for the players to interact with; a player may not. These power structures are clear to all involved in order to maintain the coherency of the world during the process of constituting and adapting it. The endogenous power structure directly affects the exogenous world creation. The social sphere of the game—that there are real people playing and modifying the game as desired—interacts with the endogenous power structure since who may credibly propose changes to or new iterations of the game world is influenced by what authority they have within the scope of the game.

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[40] Fine, 186.

The final, diegetic frame incorporates the character rule. The character rule governs the subjective, individual interaction with the game world (including other subjective perspectives). Diegesis, Montola argues, is the "subjective view created by interpreting input from the other participants and environment, complimented by the participants own creative additions; this contrasts with the "collective" structure of the "game world."[41] Characters are the diegetic intermediaries between player-participants and the game world. Through them the textuality of the game world is experienced. Granted, the fictional world should be total[42] enough to be compelling to a non-participant who encounters it; however, the narrative experience of larp is mediated by both the subjectivity of the character and the player.

The exogenous, endogenous, and diegetic frames are structures of the game which organize how we play. I am introducing them here to emphasize the permeation of the extrinsic qualities of the game (such as rules, external social organizations) into the fictional world. All three frames interact to create the game world/diegesis. As such, the game-structure of larp participates in its narrative structure. The inscriptions of what is permissible within the game world regulate not only the setting of the narrative but also which characters and plots are plausible. This in turn establishes a sense of authoriality (power) in the organisers, which regulates regulates the hierarchy of narrative, permitting only subjective agency to players

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[41] Montola, 2008. 26

[42] Wittgenstein wrote that "die Welt ist die Gesamtheit der Tatsachen, nicht der Dinge" [the world is the totality of facts, not of things] in the beginning of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1.2). It is in this sense that a world must be as total as possible. If "die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist" [the world is all that is the case], then the possible world of a larp must contain a sufficient totality of facts that are the case for an outside observer to accept the world as plausible (1.1). This will be discussed in more detail when we turn to the works of Ryan and Pavel on possible worlds theory.

through the characters, whereas the storyteller is granted authorship of the larger narrative and the ability to modify and reimagine the setting.

The Magic Circle of Narrative

I have mentioned previously the magic circle, a concept that has developed out of the study of play and games as social activities. In his thesis, *On the Edge of the Magic Circle*, Montola explores the history of the magic circle as it has evolved through various thinkers, most notably Salen and Zimmerman, Apter, and Goffman, whose works have furthered the concept of the magic circle as a social space. For the purposes of our work here, I want to highlight a few of these elements that are most important to our discussion.

The magic circle is a "spatiotemporal separation of play and ordinary life" which is legible to participants.[43] The boundary of the campsite hosting a larp becomes the separation which indicates the transition from ordinary life to play. The boundary is spatiotemporal because it only holds this value for the time in which the larp is played. If there is no larp occurring on the campsite that weekend, the temporal separation precludes the space from being a part of the play. This separation may be recognizable to outside observers, such as in Huizinga's examples of separated social spaces,[44] but the boundaries of the magic circle can also be invisible to the uninitiated. The tree that counts as the children's spaceship, or in this case the edge of the campsite during a larp weekend, does not indicate a specific separation to individuals encountering it in ordinary life.

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[43] Montola 48.

[44] See Huizinga qtd. in Montola 48. Huizinga lists examples of spaces of play and ritual that are "temporary worlds within the ordinary world" whose significance is wrapped up in the "performance of an act apart" from ordinary life.

Berger and Luckman's account of the special realities of theatre that Montola highlights hints at the narrative connection to the magic circle, but he doesn't go so far as to discuss the significance of this relationship.[45] Particularly, that it is the act of narration that produces the magic circle of the stage, and that this has significance beyond the act of playing itself because it reveals that the magic circle is in effect a cosmological feature of storytelling. To differentiate the magic circle of the stage from the magic circle of the larp is simply to recognize that there are different conditions that obtain in the magic circle. In a theatrical performance, audience members are not participants; they exist at the level of ordinary life unless prompted by the actors. Conversely, the magic circles of larps allow for participation, and actions from participants carry a playful value as long as they do not otherwise violate the confines of the magic circle.

The most important concept for our purposes comes out of Erving Goffman's work, and I want to highlight Montola's analysis where he establishes the magic circle as "a social and cultural structure that contains endogenous meaning within."[46] This crucially emphasizes the interpersonal nature of the magic circle. How and what is recognized as a magic circle depends upon cultural conventions about ritual and play that allow us to understand that a strike with a fist on the stage or in a boxing ring are not acts of ordinary violence but are imbued with a special circumstance of play. However, it also anticipates Northrop Frye's notion of "play" as "the *barrier* that separates art from savagery."[47] Frye doesn't use the words "magic circle"; Salen and Zimmerman popularized the term after his time;[48] however, his idea of the barrier of play

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[45] Montola highlights Berger and Luckman's notion that the theatre creates its own world "with its own meanings.".
[46] Montola 51.
[47] Frye 43.
[48] Their book *Rules of Play* (2004) seems to be the source of an explosion in the terms exploration after they expanded it from Huizinga's work.

orbits around the same gravitational centre — that is, of drama and games — as Huizinga and his successors. The divorce of ritual from play in Frye--that "playing at sacrifice has nothing to do with any historical descent from sacrificial ritual" opens a vacancy into which the *symbol* of sacrifice slides quietly.[49] Which is to say that playful actions share a formal quality of being "between the example and the precept," that the playful sacrifice is the image of what we imagine sacrifice to be.[50]

The governing principles of the magic circle, "rules of irrelevance, realized resources and transformation rules," demonstrate a process of symbolic literacy.[51] Objects and actions become signs which represent their exemplary counterparts. The boffer[52] weapons of fantasy larps are transformed into swords whose material value as physical objects in the ordinary world isn't a consideration within the course of play; but this transformation is simply a matter of signification which permits an exploration of what conflict with swords could be like. Yet, the ontological status of the foam-coated stick is symbolic: it allows for the imitation, or mimesis, of swordplay.

In larp the properties of the magic circle are tied up in the cosmology of the fictional world, which I will discuss in the Cosmology of Larp, and the participants are engaging in a two-fold process of crossing boundaries. They are crossing a socio-cultural boundary which indicates playfulness, but they are also crossing a fictional boundary which changes how action is interpreted. Actions in larp are always already narrative. This is in contrast to ordinary life where actions only take narrative form in memory, when the heterogenous elements are refigured

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[49] Frye 43.
[50] Frye 77.
[51] Montola 49. Montola is presenting Goffman's ideas for how the magic circle operates.
[52] Toy weapons typically made of some form of pipe or rod covered in foam and made waterproof.

into a coherent order. The magic circle of larp prefigures the organisation of actions into a temporally specific sequence of causal and chance events.

The First and Third Person Audience in Play

Player-participants occupy an unusual position in larps. They are both the audience (it is, after all, for them that a larp is being run) and character. This changes both how the narrative must be written (or, in some cases, not written) and how it can be presented. There is no guarantee that the audience will see every detail of the plot in the order that the authors intend them to. As a result the fictional world bifurcates into a communal and a subjective experience. The communal experience represents the fictional world as an institutional entity (the game-world), that which is presented to current and prospective players as a canonical state of affairs. The subjective world is one in which divergence in the individualized experiences of the world provides for a more nuanced and specific understanding of the world (diegesis).

The subjective world is one which differs from the communal by degree, not kind. Even in circumstances where not all participants have been indoctrinated with the canonical representation of the world, they must be agreement on what kind of world is being navigated for the narrative to maintain cohesion. While the participants of *KAPO* might experience the prison differently, they all must recognize that the setting is a prison. Similarly, with the dominant fantasy games, the classifications of genre and rules regulate the divergence of fictional worlds. That there is an exogenous agreement that a red cloth packet of bird seed represents "fire mana" and that saying the words "with fire I burn your shield" creates a pulse of magic energy that burns a shield regulates the possible worlds.[53] In the possible world E, we can say that E′

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[53] Epoch Toronto. *Epoch Toronto Player's Guide*. Toronto: Epoch Toronto, 2015. 58. PDF.

contains all of the exogenous agreements contained within the rules, as well as all the officially prescribed details which are the case. Contrarily, E_A, representing Player A's subjective manifestation of the possible world, produces $E_A{}'$ which includes all canonical details of the possible world that the player accepts as being the case. $E_A{}'$ differs from E' in that the former does not require all canonical statements from the latter to be the case. In this case, $E_A{}'$ is a different world than E' because it could contain states of affairs that that are only relevant to the player's experience of the game. World $E_A{}'$ in *Fantasy Alive* could include the statement that "Beasts are less evil than non-Beasts" based on the subjective account of the world that player A has, where such a statement does not belong to E' because there is no canonical state of affairs that corresponds to this opinion.[54] Additionally, E_A can be further related to $E_A{}''$, which includes only the statements which are deemed true by the character's interpretation of the world. This is a separate state of affairs because the $E_A{}'$ is formed from the interpretation of the player as a participant of in the game and does not necessarily hold the same states of affairs that are present in $E_A{}''$ which are specifically internal to the metaphysics of the fictional world.

This layering of the validity of truth claims creates a universe of possible worlds which stratifies across the exogenous, endogenous, and diegetic levels of play. The possible worlds of the exogenous layer reflects the collectively agreed upon states of play. As such, the game rules can be understood as exogenous truth claims about the fictional world. The rules of the game regulate how players (and by consequence characters) can interact with the space of play. Rules establish what forms of interaction are permissible. These statements are maximal claims about the game-world. In the case of fantasy games, magic is ontologically constituted in the rules of

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[54] *Fantasy Alive*'s setting includes a class system that separates groups by species. Some types of people are socially lesser than others, allowing slavery of certain communities, such as Goblins or Minotaurs. The distinction in the fictional state's laws is whether or not a species are "beasts" or not.

play, not the arcana of the setting. This affects the types of narratives that can be told. The players' interpretation of the rules similarly asserts an endogenous state of affairs, producing the game world, which is recognized for its characteristic of being *of a game*. Finally, the character, which is necessarily regulated by the higher order worlds, establishes diegesis, which treats the propositions of the exogenous and endogenous worlds as natural and metaphysical laws. As such, the proposition, "if John jumps into the air, he will return to the ground because of gravity" obtains in the diegetic world because the diegetic world can only be possible if its statements do not violate the metaphysical or natural laws of the gameworld or real world.

The three layers form a hierarchical relationship. Within the exogenous, World 1 (W_1) delimits the social context of the game: "Within <location> special rules obtain for the purposes of activities within a determined community." On the endogenous later, the game world (W_2) establishes the interpretation of actions by participants: "Actions that occur within <location> obtain as playful if they do not violate any states of affairs in W_1." Lastly, the diegetic level (W_3) asserts the fictional space: "States of affairs which do not violate W_2 or W_1 obtain in W_3." It is only through the triple articulation of play that the magic circle is established.

The establishment of the magic circle is crucial to the establishment of narrative within larp. It is the contextualisation of experience through the tripartite structure of the game that allows for the experience of organised events as life-like. Where a proposition fails to be articulated through each of the layers, it is ejected from the magic circle, threatening the stability of its form, or changing it to accommodate for what was previously an impermissible state of affairs, or affecting an expulsion of previously permissible states of affairs which no longer obtain in all three worlds.

If W_1 expresses the social conditions of playing a game, it also asserts the laws of nature and logic as metaphysical constraints which the lower order worlds must address in order to be possible. Crucially, however, the states of affairs in W_1 are not intended to imply a metaphysical or even natural prohibition on the game world or diegesis. Rather, the states of affairs regulate the exogenous conditions of play: if you fall, you will hurt yourself; a foam covered stick is acceptable for striking people with, a knife is not. The states of affairs in the exogenous regulate the behaviour of the community, including the interpretation of objects belonging to play or not. The first world is the realm of the symbolic codexes which demand that fantasy characters remain grounded. The natural constraint that W_1 pushes on the game world is not the proposition "People cannot fly" but rather the proposition "No game mechanism that allows characters to fly will cause players to fly."[55] An established grammar of gesture can create flight within the gameworld; however, flight makes for a difficult state of affairs to reconcile with the exogenous awareness that the person remains on the ground and may prove destabilising for the diegesis to maintain.

The importance of this distinction, however, is that it allows for a gesticular code of symbols that communicate various actions and states of affairs between players. One such system within Nordic larps is Ars Amandi, which codifies a set of intimate expressions into signs (gestures) which abstract them enough from ordinary expressions of intimacy to permit forms of interaction that otherwise would not be possible for players in many circumstances because of exogenous social conditions. Without these tools, forms of interaction that put the form of the magic circle in tension, by making unclear what behaviours belong to the universe of play and

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[55] Of course, experience will tell us, that the former proposition obtains in W_1; however, it does not also obtain in W_2 and W_3.

which to ordinary life, are rejected as means of interaction with the world. A systematization of sexual intimacy such as Ars Amandi is no different in function than the boffer sword which allows for violent interactions without threatening the magic circle by producing non-playful violence.

W_2 establishes the game world through collections of states of affairs that are drafted exogenously. These literatures, such as rulebooks, setting books, historical narratives, etc. constitute the magnum opus of the game world. These books collect the special states of affairs that do not obtain in W_1 but which distinguish the curvature of W_2 and constitute the metaphysical and natural laws of the diegesis which do not obtain within W_3 as a consequence of obtaining within W_1. That people wearing yellow headbands or bandanas at an *Epoch* event are not a part of the game world is a metaphysical property that obtains in W_2 but not in W_1 where they are recognized as participants who are currently not in play. Nor does it obtain in W_3 because the conditions under which it obtains in W_2 preclude it from obtaining in the diegesis. In much the same way that the proposition that "a piece of pipe covered in foam and duct tape is a sword" does not obtain in W_3 because to do so would require for the diegesis to acknowledge the nature of swords as being made of plastic pipe and foam. However, W_2 shapes what does obtain in W_3, allowing the proposition that "when struck with a sword I will be injured" to obtain for playful swords, whereas only the related proposition "when struck with a sword I take a certain number of points of damage" obtains.[56]

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[56] In *Epoch*, *Fantasy Alive*, and other fantasy games how hard one strikes varies by experience and skill levels. One person might be inept with a sword, capable only of doing 1 point of damage, which deducts from a pool of hit points (how much damage a character can sustain before needing critical medical attention), that the defending player has. Not all games follow this system; in Cologne, Germany I participated in a game called *Die Katacomben* where weapon strikes operated on a 3 hit system that allowed for sword strikes to disable limbs. After three strikes, you were in critical condition and in need of a healer lest you die.

It is in this relationship between the various frames that the hierarchical relationship gets exposed. W_1 moderates W_2 moderates W_3. If $KAPO_1$ asserts that "The provided space is to be called Zeeland within the gameworld" and that "The players will be prisoners," $KAPO_2$ establishes "This is Zeeland" and "We are prisoners who behave as prisoners ought" which is established through the documents and workshops that produce the precept of what it means to be a prisoner within *KAPO*. The proposition in $KAPO_2$ relies on the former to obtain, and is only possible for as long as the social contract "we are playing *KAPO* and the rules of the game are valid" is accepted; in short, the validity of $KAPO_2$ is directly related dependent on the validity of $KAPO_1$. The diegetic experience of *KAPO*, or $KAPO_3$, further synthesizes this claim down to the assertions "I am a prisoner" and "I am in Zeeland." The diegetic level playing out within the psychological space of each player's mind, its propositions reflect the internalised nature of diegesis.

The direct engagement of participants with the fiction as a parallel to the actual causes an uncertainty regarding the frame of reference. Most evident in the institution of rules governing how participants may discuss their experiences in post-game group sessions, the engagement of players across multiple worlds simultaneously creates ambiguity about whether actions during the larp belong to the singular or third person case.[57] The social side of this, referred to as "bleed" actually inscribes a parallel narrative tension that sees the exogenous, endogenous, and diegetic frames become difficult to distinguish. In bleed, the magic circle becomes more porous, and the claim "I am a prisoner in Zeeland" no longer requires the related proposition "Zeeland is

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[57] A few Nordic larps have discouraged their participants from discussing the game-time in the first person, instead encouraging them to rely upon the third-person pronouns or their character names when relating their experience. This extends to how they are to speak of other participants as well. Sally did not kill you, Jane [Sally's character] killed Tomasz [Bill's character].

a prison in *KAPO*" nor "*KAPO* is a game taking place in Copenhagen for the weekend" to obtain

in order to be perceived as true. As a result, actions fail to be interpreted as playful symbols and

the magic circle is threatened by a real possibility of trauma (though not all instances of bleed are

so dire).

During the performance of a game, possible worlds within the universe E occur

simultaneously with A, the actual world. Actions taken by a player within E_A' might retain

contextual specificity within E_B' but not in E_C'. Instead, it might register within the context of A

(which similarly is predicated upon rules [truth claims] and subjective acts of interpretation),

assuming a place within the first person experience of action: "I slayed the monster." It is this

slippage that rationalises the colloquial explanation, or criticism, of these games as escapism.

Nonetheless, bleed is an important and powerful mechanism to consider in larp.

One participant in the 2013 performance of *PanoptiCorp* emphasizes the power of bleed

in the Cosmic Joke documentary. She noted that, while the participants were instructed not to

use the first person when discussing the actions of their characters, in this case she felt strongly

about it because the game's critique held greater force. While she was acting *in-character*, the

thought processes that structured and empowered that character's actions were her own.[58] This

particular claim is interesting because it demonstrates the power of agency. The powerful

recognition of the endogenous authoriality over the diegetic context sharpens the impact of the

satire, forcing the players not only to recognize that the unscrupulous advertising practices are

reprehensible,[59] but also that they have the capacity to make and succeed at them.[60]

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[58] Cosmic Joke UK.. *Panopticorp Mini Documentary*. Online video clip. Youtube, 10 October 2013. 11:18-11:54. Accessed 4 July 2016.
[59] Raasted discusses the ease with which players can slide into the "thought patterns" of the fictitious PanoptiCorp. A parallel, of course, for how easily people can adopt the corporate ideologies of their workplaces. Ibid. 12:20.

The power of these experiences, however, also threatens to render them indistinguishable from experiences of non-fiction. To assert that the actions of a character belong to the class "I" within the actual is to assert that the represented actions within the magic circle are actions without it, and that these actions hold power and scope within the actual beyond the norms of what would otherwise be permissible by the construction of the magic circle. If we read the magic circle as a liminal boundary which regulates the interpretation of actions within the context of the social condition of play,[61] then there is a necessary distinction between the world of play and the world of actuality. When bleed occurs within larp, the boundary is overwhelmed, allowing the social and/or psychological consequences of an action to be presented as both playful and actual simultaneously. When the consequences are psychological, this can be a form of trauma, and when social it can cause a disruption of the relationships between participants in the game. Of course, bleed does not have to be severe to register; feeling an impetus to apologize for your character's behaviour to ensure that the other person forms a good impression of you is also bleed.

To establish what bleed means for the state of our narrative world, bleed occurs when the proposition of one state of affairs obtains falsely in another. Rendered formulaically, bleed occurs when proposition p_1 obtains in world W_1 because p_2 obtains in the fictional world W_2. Thus we have the following:

1. P_2 obtains in W_2.

2. Therefore, P_1 obtains in W_1.

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[60] This is a particularly effective avenue in games. *Spec Ops: the Line* and *Undertale* both hold up the mirror to their players regarding the decisions they made while playing.

[61] See Montola, Markus. "Magic Circle of Play." *On the Edge of the Magic Circle.* For an overview of thought around the structure of the magic circle over time.

However, p_1 and p_2 belong to two distinct states of affairs that describe wholly different worlds. If p_2 proposes "*<Character> designed and developed morally dubious advertisements for PanoptiCorp*" then it only obtains in a state of affairs where (1) you are employed by PanoptiCorp (which in turn only obtains if an entity called PanoptiCorp exists) and (2) where you produced morally dubious advertisements. The fictional world, W_2, is one in which the propositions "*PanoptiCorp is an advertising firm*" and "*PanoptiCorp produces morally dubious advertising campaigns*" both obtain. Similarly, within W_2, the proposition "*I designed and developed morally dubious advertisements*" obtains because the character (the player's manifestation within the fictional world) did perform such actions, and the conditional requirements that the above propositions also be true is also met.[62] Since p_2 matches the circumstances of W_2 then that world holds that characteristic. The player, however, is not employed by PanoptiCorp, nor does the organisation exist in W_1, and this state of affairs precludes p_2 from being true in W_1. However, proposal p_1, which proposes, "*<Player> designed and developed morally dubious advertisements for PanoptiCorp*" erroneously obtains in cases of bleed. This proposition does not obtain because the actions of the player are better described by a third proposition, p_3, which proposes "*I participated in a game wherein my character worked at a company called PanoptiCorp to produce morally dubious advertisements.*" This proposition more accurately addresses the state of affairs in W_1 than either of the other two propositions. The vehicle for bleed occurring is the participant's awareness of their control over the actions of their character, but a failure to properly interpret the actions as playful.

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[62] This, of course, assumes that the participant did in fact engage in such activities as it is the premise of the game. Nothing within the fictional world precludes someone refusing to perform such labour, however, the exogenous level of the game does.

What I have just described is the mechanism through which the magic circle holds shape and integrates itself with the boundaries of the fictional world. The magic circle of *PanoptiCorp* is defined by which propositions obtain within an exogenous frame and which do not. There is an additional layer of spatial restriction on the magic circle, which proposes "The actions undertaken in *PanoptiCorp* are playful." and that "The space of play is limited to the spaces in which these actions would be recognized as participation in a game," thus restricting the site of the larp to the area designated and specially set aside for play. These distinguish it from the boundaries of the fictional world, which overflow the scope of the magic circle--*PanoptiCorp*'s world is global, it's space of play is not. However, these two forms are symbiotically related. The magic circle is given meaning through its regulation of the fictional world, and the fictional world is given meaning by its legislation of the magic circle; being within the magic circle grants access to the fictional world, which decides the curvature of the magic circle.

Cosmology of Larp

What this means for a Possible Worlds Theory of larp is that the document-built space of the fictional world is inseparable from the community-defined space of the magic circle;[63] our understanding of larp must reflect a concern for the reciprocal relationship between the text and community as the authority over any larp world. When tensions occur between the text and the praxis of a world, it will be the actual doing of the participants which creates the dominant claim

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[63] The magic circle as a communal or cultural space is fundamental to the understanding that we interpret actions differently within the circle than we would without. That the community recognizes the Boxer's punch in the ring as sporting versus his punch in an alleyway as violent depends on the communal recognition that punches thrown within a boxing ring are different than other punches.

for authority. However, when the participants are uncertain of tenements of the fictional world, the texts take authority over the praxis.

With living-game worlds, like those present in *Fantasy Alive*, or any campaign larp, the documents occur as an equally living archive of the world which changes with the community. The official documentation acts as a form of historical record, recording the scope and form of the world, as well as its inhabitants and culture as a tapestry of epochs and eras which reflect the exogenous cultural changes which have redefined the relationships between players and worlds. These sorts of changes can include updating the mechanics of gameplay (the metaphysical properties of the gameworld), changing in-game laws or descriptions of gameworld communities (the cultural and ethical properties of the gameworld) in order to bring these elements more in line with the concurrent expectations of the participants around representations of race, issues of game balance, or a desire for a renewed relationship with the gameworld. Crucially, the documents form a relationship with the community. The validity of the documents, and therewith the credibility of the fictional world, is balanced on the health of this relationship.

Single-event or limited run-time games, such as the Nordic larps, produce a different relationship between the documents and the community. The documents form a more authoritative contract to bind the magic circle. In these games, the documents can more strictly guide the modes of interaction allowed for the players with the game world because they do not have to compete with the participants' memories of prior events for authoritative status. How a larp has previously represented itself becomes a part of a cosmology a larp event. Each previous event produces its own fractured multiverse of remembered universes which exert a pressure on the set of worlds that arise from the next larp event. The larger multiverse that includes each

previous episode of play constitutes the cosmology of a larp alongside both the universes of the event, which can be found within the textual and documentary traces that precede and post-cede the actuality of the event, and the ineffable universe of the larp as a whole.[64] This latter is ontologically established on the premise that within this universe all the propositions that are held to be true within the individualised fictional worlds are also held to be true, even if they are contradictions; that the diverse experiences of the community can form a heterogenous entirety which is inclusive of divergent perspectives around an objective but unascertainable state of affairs.

The cosmology that I am describing is complex. It must address the relationship between the fictional world and the actual. Since larp belongs to that broad concept of *social games of coordination* that Pavel speaks of in *Fictional Worlds*, the parallels between our social existence and the social engagement with literature becomes more apparent.[65] Larp is ultimately a game of world creation, where *n* living participants engage through coordination to produce narrative and experience as one. I emphasize that the participants are living, as obvious as such a claim may be, because this distinguishes the form from theatre, which does not require a living author to participate in the coordination game of the stage. Larp's directors and organisers are active participants within the construction of the larp worlds, directly acting on the fictional world from outside of it and reacting to the actions other participants (such as players performing their

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[64] That there is a totalising "whole" of the event is manifest in the communal conception of the event as a shared activity that is communally experienced. That it can be said that "we were larping *Mad About the Boy* on this day and from this time to that time" asserts that there is a pluralized fictional world into which the community itself is projected, rather than individuals.

[65] See "Conventions" for his discussion of coordination games and their relationships to the concept of conventions in narrative and fiction.

characters) in order to produce a narrative that actively adapts to the players.[66] Since participants

are engaged in the process of coordinating within the presented context, the narrative is formed

from a two-channel sender-receiver dynamic; a much more conversational structure than the

typical novel or play.

Chapter 2 - Narrative Structures

Aristotle and Frye

Our starting point for discussing narrative structure in larp is Aristotle's *Poetics*. His

foundational text provides a crucial starting point for the discussion of narrative in larp. Larp is,

at its core, mimetic. Role-playing is about imitating a social role different from the participant's

normal one. The mimesis of larp, however, occurs in a strange tension with Aristotle's concept

of the unities. Aristotle's concept of the unities refers to the concept that "the plot manifestly

ought" to consist of "a single action, whole and complete" which is of a certain magnitude that

allows for the spectator to take it in in its whole.[67] This configuration of how narrative ought to

be composed creates the various aspects of narrative: its action, its time, and its place. These

edicts about composition similarly connect in Aristotle's notions of genre to ethical

considerations, tragedy is about the "imitation … of characters of a higher type," as opposed to

Comedy with is an "imitation of characters of a lower type."[68] A narrative's parts must also work

together, and for Aristotle this means that the whole must not be too long, or too spacious, or

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[66] In this case, the organisers act as an endogenous force, within the magic circle of the game but not acting in-character but as a force that controls the setting.
[67] Aristotle, XXIII. The further explanation is based upon ideas expressed earlier in the work in passage VII.
[68] Aristotle V.

pertain to characters whose character does not fit with the action that the narrative is about. Larps operate more similarly to the histories that Aristotle speaks of, dealing not with one single action but many actions within a space and time. Nonetheless, while the unities have widely been discarded in traditional theatre, there is still a relevance to them in larp because they act to smooth over the instability created by spontaneity and the collective authority over the narrative. The unities exert an unconscious pressure on larp: "unconscious," because this pressure does not derive from a neo-classical impulse; the pressure encourages organisers to maintain the sense of unity for the sake of clarity. The capacity of a larp to immerse its participants within the fictional world relies upon the accumulative credibility of the world as one which is plausible. Consequently, unity helps to reinforce the truth claim of the larp to its participants.

Modern concerns around the ethical aspect of unity confront not the purported moral, and therewith social, status of the characters which concerned Aristotle, but rather the conventional appropriateness of the characters to the genre of the narrative. As such there is no expectation in the fictional world that tragedy centre upon the noble nor that comedy centre upon the base.[69] Rather, the expectations lie upon a modernized notion of the unities wherein the qualities of the character must conform to genre conventions which the audience uses to negotiate the setting. As such, the focus lies upon whether a character would plausibly belong within a given setting. There are no CEOs in the fantasy worlds of *Epoch Toronto* or *Fantasy Alive*; however, there certainly are within the dystopic "doompunk" setting of *Elegy*[70] or dystopian society of *KAPO*'s

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[69] In part XIII of the *Poetics*, Aristotle argues that the subject of tragedy should be a man "who is highly renowned and prosperous." This gets further discussed in Ricoeur who identifies in Aristotle two limiting constraints on narrative, the first of which is the ethical distinction of characters being either noble or vile. See Ricoeur 35.

[70] Doompunk is a term coined by the design team of *Elegy*, which draws upon a collection of previous cinema and literature to describe itself. Derived from back formation "-punk" which spawned with the nebula of science fiction subgenres sparked from Bethke's "Cyberpunk." Arguably a derivative of dieselpunk in its aesthetics, doompunk is

prison setting. Conversely, it is common to encounter wizards in the former two games, but they would be out of place within the latter.

The appropriateness of characters to contexts within a game varies by style. It is hard, after all, to control precisely who is in what scene; but there is not much need to in games where characters are workshopped with players or submitted for approval before they are allowed to join a game. In these circumstances, the process of ensuring the unity of characters with the setting has already occurred. However, this process also helps to regulate the relationship between the characters and the action because it allows the action to be written according to what types of persons are represented in play. This is important because the affectation of immersion is effected more easily when the participants perceive a unity between character, setting, and action; that their character not only belongs in the setting, but that they would also participate in the action presented, whether willfully or because they had no other choice. This fosters the immersion that is so crucial to the experience of larping. Immersion we will define as being the experience of not being forced to think outside the framework of the fictional universe. This means that decision making occurs, as much as is possible, within the context not of "what would my character do?" but rather "I, <character>, am doing this."

The unities help facilitate this particular element of larp, but it is not necessarily a game's highest priority. There are different philosophies of design which gird the development of larp. Some larps encourage immersion as the ultimate experience of the game, whereas others encourage players to consider both what they would prefer their experience to be as a player, and what other players would like to experience; similarly games can be developed and played

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post-apocalyptic with an emphasis on the negative prospects and brutality of the new world (as opposed to an optimistic outlook).

around the philosophy that players should choose actions that would create the most interesting narrative experience. In these alternative systems of play, the role of the unities is less important, but the organisation of the setting around a larger physical space will maintain some aspects of them in order to allow players to orient themselves around the fictional space.

Even in surrealist larps, the unities coalesce the experience of the participants, making what could otherwise be a very difficult space to be immersed in more easily accessible. The unities prioritize the diegetic and endogenous frames as the locus of experience, focusing the player's attention on the subjective experience of the scene as a plausible sequence of events. It is important to remember, however, that immersion is not disassociation from reality, and experiencing the fictional events with a sense of plausibility or realness does not do away with the player's conscious exogeny; they are still people who are a part of a community that plays games, but their experience of being the other will draw more of their attention in the moment of role-play through immersion. You are only prisoner number 77 so long as the exogenous world permits the immersion to take place. As soon as the magic circle becomes threatened, the unities go with it and you return to being Jane Smith, until immersion is once more possible.

With this premise in mind, I want to consider the example of *KAPO*, the Danish larp by R-Boot that provided the player-participants with the opportunity to experience "the dehumanizing social dynamics in a camp for political prisoners" set in a near-future, fascist Denmark.[71] The scenography provided the participants with a surrealist prison camp known as "Zeeland" in which to explore their collective nightmare.

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[71] R-boot. "Introduction." *KAPO.nu*. Accessed 20 April 2016.

The largest movement within Zeeland was the primal impetus to do as told, and the desire to create a compelling, albeit surreal, experience creates a pressure in favour of unity. The setting remains consistent. Prisoners are not transferred from one prison or country to another, the run-time of the larp coincides with the scope of the action within the larp, and characters are consistently figures whose presence adheres to the expectations of the setting, as well as the social stature of the space portrayed. Despite its surrealism, *KAPO* is a larp whose space, time, and characters relate clearly.

In magnitude, however, *KAPO* is monstrous. A 1400 sq. metre area was used for play,[72] making it too complex and too large to absorb wholly as a spectator. This vastness runs afoul of Aristotle's sense of scale. In the *Poetics* he remarks that

> "[an organism] of vast size [cannot] be beautiful; for as the eye cannot take it all in at once, the unity and sense of the whole is lost for the spectator; as for instance if there were one a thousand miles long. As, therefore, in the case of animate bodies and organisms a certain magnitude is necessary, and a magnitude which may be easily embraced in one view; so in the plot, a certain length is necessary, and a length which can be easily embraced by the memory."[73]

His concern regarding the length of a plot can be extended into the spatial realm. If the space of the play is too vast, it will not be possible for a spectator (first or third person) to take in the whole of the plot. Two statements can, therefore, be said to be true about the setting of *KAPO*:

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[72] R-boot. *The Book of KAPO*. 34
[73] Aristotle, *Poetics*. VII

1. The setting of *KAPO* is a single, unified whole.

2. The whole setting of *KAPO* is too large to be unified.

Statement 1 concerns the staging within an endogenous frame; statement 2 concerns a diegetic frame. Taken in synthesis, the setting of *KAPO* is a collectively whole space which is experienced subjectively. This can be said to be true of all larps, depending on their size[74]. That larps can hold these two seemingly oppositional claims distinguishes them from theatre or literature in that with theatre, the diegesis is as whole as the possible world. Given an equally observant pair of individuals, the first attending a play and the other a larp, the former will construct a diegesis that envelops the whole plot. The latter, in contrast, cannot do so with the larp. The best they can attain is a partial narrative that conforms to the parts of the space they were engaged with during the course of the plot. This applies to the vast majority of larps, leaving only parlor games and other similarly sized exceptions.

The temporal element of a larp tends towards a unity of action, but does not require it. Most larps tend not to portray periods of time beyond the size of their individual events. Even campaign larps, whose longer running narratives can span the course of years, tend not to represent four days in the space to three. They also tend not to represent one day in the space of three, although both of these are possible. When the action of the plot does stretch beyond confines of the event, there is a resultant bracketing of the time that should have passed between Actions 1 and 2. The period of time between them is treated as narratively inert: time passes,

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[74] The size of a larp varies wildly. Some games vast, taking up multiple square kilometres of space, others can be as small as a single room with only a handful of participants.

nothing of consequence has happened. This solution, however, is inelegant and organizers must balance the disruption to the character experience against the narrative value of bracketing that time.

Bracketed time is essentially lost time. The characters cannot act, cannot think, because their players cannot act and cannot think. If time for Ricoeur "becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative" then, for larp, time becomes larp time to the extent that it is human time.[75] Characters cannot truly leap forward a year; months cannot pass elided into a heartbeat and yet larps have used oration to bracket time for the sake of their plots before. While it may be only retrospectively that larp time can break unity, permitting the players to imagine their characters' actions in a sort of "after the fact" manner, bracketing is possible and can even be done without disrupting the immersive qualities of the scene.[76] That two weeks have passed since the battle does not invalidate the preceding experience nor the post-bracket one. Instead, the experience of the time changing is like the clock's biennial adjustment. While we know that the time has changed back or forward an hour (assuming we are awake past the witching hour to witness the change), there has not been a corresponding change of reference points to relate the difference to.

Characters in a larp typically conform to the expectations associated with the setting. The validity of the setting is furthered by the presence of characters who conform to the expectations of the audience. Where characters do not match these expectations, the setting risks becoming incohesive. Workshops in Nordic larp moderate the selection of characters, and approval systems

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[75] Ricoeur, 3.

[76] This goes beyond the matter of the present skipping forwards a week, forcing the whole of it into the past; the events of the new present must be resolved in the present and it is only after when the is a narrative lull or the event is over that the reflection on what exactly your character would have done can occur.

in fantasy larps perform a similar function. The conformity is nuanced, but exerts conservative pressure on the game based upon genre identity. It would appear anachronistic for a fantasy game such as *Fantasy Alive* or *Epoch* to have cell phones; similarly the construction of characters, as was discussed in the previous chapter, is regulated around the metaphysical limitations of the setting. However, the result of these pressures is a tendency in narrative towards the unification of setting and character. The ethical considerations of character get inculcated into this, with characters whose moral dispositions match the expectations of the space. That Zeeland was a prison for political prisoners legitimizes and limits the variety of individuals who can participate in the scene. The presence of fascist partisans within the prison would have muddied the ontological purpose of Zeeland, invalidating assertions about both what it means to be in Zeeland and what it means to choose to submit to the totalitarian state.

KAPO, then, exerts an exogenous pressure on the ethics of characters. The characters must be tragically ironic. The tragedy of *KAPO* occurs prior to the onset of performance. The prisoners of *KAPO* are individuals whose pre-carceral lives were low mimetic; deemed "dissidents," the players were detained for political reasons. Tying into real-world concerns about discrimination of muslims and the rise of right wing nationalist politics in Europe, the game depicts the incarceration of people who are otherwise just like us. *The Book of KAPO* frames the narrative world with an allusion to Niemöller's famous poem "First they came for..." updating the list to account for the targets of far-right politics in 2011 Denmark, rather than Nazi Germany.[77] The player is brought into the camp as a dissenter who stands "accused of endangering the State of Denmark" for events that precede their character's entrance into the

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[77] "First they came for the islamists and anarchists. A few years later, the internet activist and socialists. When they came for you, there was no one left to speak out…" -- *The Book of KAPO* 3.

prison.[78] Nonetheless, these individuals are like us, and their tragedy is rendered the more

pointed by the ease of comparison the players have with themselves. In Alma Elofsson's

character "Max" was a musician, a part of a band with a few other prisoners, prior to detainment.
[79] Inside the prison, she became a "shit," the lowest social class within the camp, forced to wash

themselves in faeces and preyed upon by the rats and other groups within the prison.[80] The tragic

quality manifests in the demeaning of low mimetic, Max, into the ironic, I.45, prisoner of

Zeeland. The victimization of the characters inspires pity and fear. We pity Max and the other

prisoners because their lot is one of suffering and powerlessness; but we also fear them. Not only

because we fear the violence that the groups inflict on one another; there is a lingering fear that

promises that the capacity for this degradation lies within us. That we, like Max, could become a

shit or a rat if our circumstances were to change. The nature of larp further facilitates this, the

experience of degradation occurs within a performance that is always a deeply personal one. The

torture and abuse the prisoners endure is also a torture and abuse the participant endures with

them.

      The players directly witness the downfall of their characters; their pre-incarceration

identities struggling against the ruthlessness required of them to survive the hostility of their new

reality. There is no fourth wall to shield the participants from the downfalls of the characters.

This forces the participants to experience the violent movement from the low mimetic to the

ironic mode within the magic circle of play, but it also internalises it. The player not only

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[78] Ibid.

[79] Elofsson, Alma. "The Story of Max." *The Book of KAPO*. ed. Claus Raasted. Rollespilsakademiet: Copenhagen, Denmark, 2012. 170-196. PDF. 172.

[80] The relationship between the different groups of people within the prison can be seen within a few stories. "Attitude" and "The Story of Max" both discuss the experience of being a "shit" and becoming or being around the "rats" who abused the "shits."

experiences their own downfall but become complicit in the violence to bring others down when prompted. The "cage scene" cemented the dual status of the prisoners within its bars: entering the prison, the characters are victimised by the established prisoners, only to perpetuate this cycle with the next influx of prisoners entering the cage.[81] Raasted, in his discussion of the cage scene, emphasizes the importance of scenography to the effectiveness of the moment. The participants "couldn't avoid noticing when to go to the cage" because "the sound got harder … and worked like an insisting alarm."[82] Additionally, "[a] spotlight focused on the cage," drawing the attention of the players with two of the senses which organisers have used to control the participant's experience of the game world.[83] The consequence of this focus on the cage scene is that it becomes the anchor which defines the world of the prison to its inhabitants, first through the terrorization of being in the cage, then later through the cyclical audio-visual register it produces. The initial entrance to Zeeland through the cage becomes the first experience of the conditions of this reality on an exogenous level because it is the player's first encounter with the fictive space. In entering the cage for the first time, the player is exposed to the agreement they have with the other participants (the magic circle), granting them an awareness of the playful regulation of the space into which they are entering. Furthermore, it is a shared, endogenous experience of the community within the magic circle which defines the relative positions of the characters within the power hierarchy of the game world, marking the transition from the low mimetic external lives to the ironic internal lives at the entrance to the prison camp. It is here that the players begin being sorted into the various classes of prisoners that led Max to being a "shit." Similarly, it is the diegetic point where the person can only navigate the space that surrounds them through their

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[81] Raasted, Claus. "The cage in KAPO." *The Book of KAPO*. 62-3.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.

character. To analyze the information as a person or participant ceases to provide actionable information. Impactful decision making can only occur within the context of the character rule, and these decisions will define the game world to the participant. Whether you decide to resist the power structure or to submit to the arbitrary violence without pushing back will change how you understand and interpret the power structure of the world. The use of auditory and visual cues to signal the start of the cage scene further transforms the pace of the game, creating a cyclical experience of the cage scene, giving an anchor that the participants can organise their experiences around within the surrealist landscape.

The movement of the characters from the low mimetic to the ironic is integral to the critical message that *KAPO* presents: your status is fragile, and you need to protect it from the precipitous rise of far-right politics in Europe. Written in the wake of the rise of right-wing nationalist parties to the European parliament in Denmark and across the continent, the game imagines very directly what life could be like for the politically interred in a new era of fascism.

The narrative of *KAPO*, like many Nordic larps, is much more structured and controlled than that of campaign larps. Campaign larps, which constitute the majority of games and the largest audience, will often offer a large predominantly Tolkienesque fantasy that draws heavily upon medieval romance for inspiration. These games usually occur within persistent settings and offer opportunities to engage in a narrative which inverts the structure of the quest narrative.[84] *Fantasy Alive* and *Epoch: Toronto* are examples of such, as are *Shadowrealms*, *Underworld*, and *NERO*, all within the Greater Toronto Area. Campaign larps have a tendency towards the comedic, with the fortunes of characters going from bad to good, however there is also a healthy

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[84] Rather than the heroes setting out to obtain a relic or to eliminate a threat, the threat or relic comes to the heroes who must face it within their community.

predilection towards the tragicomic as well. Campaign larps tend to have a crowd of heroes for

their protagonists. I ran a season (2013) of plot for *Epoch: Toronto*, and have larped for a good

six years prior to that at various games. In that time I have noticed a tendency towards "good"

characters. These are characters who fit better into the hero model: armed, courageous, and

well-intended. However, there are also characters who do not adhere to this model, or who

might, in action, be better deserving the title of villain. This is a consequence of the freedom of

choice given to players when creating their characters for a larp.[85]

The biggest consequence of larp's participatory community is that it creates a crowded

field of protagonists. Players, collectively, are the protagonist. If you have 50 players, there are

50 protagonists and the game world must accommodate this. *Fantasy Alive* and *Epoch: Toronto*

(henceforth just *Epoch*) both manage this by way of an inherent exceptionalism. The town of the

setting is in the frontier of civilization; the threat faced by the town is unusually high both

because the player-characters are there and they need to be there because the town is under

threat. A diegetic vicious circle is formed: villains come to Carreg Wynn in *Epoch* because the

town is the site of power that needs to be reckoned with for any force to claim control. *Fantasy*

Alive relies less heavily on the exceptionalism, but the presence of so many heroic characters can

be justified with the explanation that there are special dangers inherent in the region.

Northrop Frye's "Theory of Modes" explores the five modes in which stories can be

categorized based on the status of their characters relative to other characters and to their

environment.

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[85] Generally, there is no requirement that a player creates a character who is morally good. Many characters are shades of grey. I have seen a town rescued by a man who tortured others for pleasure, murderers form lynch mobs over the murder of a local, and the saintly innocence intentionally betray their friends. As such, tragicomedy of all the classical genres best describes the mixture of fates that occur when you have 50 people portraying figures of different moral standing.

1. The mythical mode pertains to the supernatural figures who are "superior in *kind* both to other men and to the environment of other men"

2. The romantic mode is distinguished by a subject who is "superior in *degree* to other men and to his environment"

3. The high mimetic mode deals with one who is "superior in degree to other men"

4. The low mimetic mode focuses on a subject "superior neither to other men nor to his environment."

5. The ironic mode, finally, pertains to those who are "inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves."[86]

The five modes can be used to classify the distinctions between a narrative about Heracles from one about Don Quixote, or Hamlet, or Mrs. Dalloway, or an Anne Frank. A hierarchical classification of relative power is constituted in the five modes, which shifts a little in larp.

Having dozens of hero-class protagonists plunges the romantic hero into the low mimetic. If the romantic hero is "superior in *degree* to other men and to his environment," then what do we make of the larp heroes who are not superior in degree to one another, but are superior in degree to the majority of people in the setting, whether prince or pauper, and to their environment?[87] I argue that this affects a democratization of the hero. The romantic hero becomes a lower mimetic figure, forcing the otherwise low mimetic figures (ones with whom we can relate exogenously—the lower and middle classes) into the realm of the ironic. They are

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[86] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism. 31-32.*
[87] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism. 31* The fantasy heroes in larp often possess a supernatural aspect that makes them exceptional to their environment like the romance heroes (eg. wizards), however the antagonist often posess a similar exceptionalism.

helpless before the violence of the mythological threats and romantic villains that a collection of 50 romance heroes demands. They become pitiable, weak; victims of cruelty which the heroes must rescue from the violence of the supernatural and other abuses.

The environment of these fictional worlds looks, unsurprisingly, a lot like ours. Strange beasts and supernatural beings are represented by volunteers wearing costumes or using props. The heroes transcend their environment, capable of wizardly spellcraft and powerful rituals that allow them mastery over the environment or a seer-like view into the future. The common man, in contrast, is typically a peasant or merchant whose relative power is always lower than the characters played by the players. These figures might have magical power, like the merchants in *Epoch* whose sales of magical energy are only possible if they themselves are capable of seeing magic, but their prowess is significantly limited to make the player characters exceptional. The societal threat that walks into town cannot be managed without their intervention.

The more recent Nordic larps have a tendency towards the low mimetic and ironic mode. *Delirium* is an ironic narrative because the subjects of its narrative are prisoners in a Victorian asylum. They are lower than us, we look down upon them and obtain catharsis from the pity we feel for them. However, the ironic larp also drags its audience out of the low mimetic stature of the common man. Player-participants are engaged in the representation and performance of these prisoners. The characters' inferiority is expressed through the removal of power from the players. *Delirium* and *KAPO* both turn to a surrealism to disorient and destabilize the players' sense of the world. It forces them into an unfamiliar organization of time and space through the use of scenography and control over the access to natural light or other points of reference outside the game world in which they could anchor their experience.

Discussing the off-game room[88] in *KAPO*, Rasmus Petersen, one of the organizers, notes

that they had "sealed the room's windows so that the daylight outside would not disturb the

players' messed-up sense of time."[89] The ironic shift of the players' sense of empowerment and

control is occasioned by the organizers' control over the experience of time itself. Sealing up the

windows prevents the players from re-orienting themselves around the experience of actual time

in the day-night cycle. The organizers take total control over the players. How they experience

time itself is wrested away from them. Loise Amalie Juul Sønderskov's reflection in *The Book of*

KAPO about her experience in Zeeland reveals the effect of this stripping away of the experience

of time:

> Throughout the entire experience, the sound- and lightscape was an important
>
> part of the game design. ... The sounds never stopped, and even during nighttime
>
> there was still a lightscape to set the mood. Everything was decided from above,
>
> on the terms of the System. Even the way you were supposed to feel.[90]

The scenography was built in to the way in which the participants were to interact with the

System that was now in control of their lives within Zeeland. In effect, the System takes control

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[88] An off-game room is a room that is designated to the outside the game-world. It is a space for players to retreat to if they want or need a break from the fictional world. Typically it is discouraged to use the off-game room unless you need it; R-boot's "greatest fear was that players would use the room to escape the dilemmas in the game." The function of the room was not to avoid the politics of the text but to be able to provide a way to manage your own sense of safety and comfort while confronting difficult issues. Different larps will have different expectations for their off-game rooms.

  Petersen, Rasmus. "Offgame room in KAPO." *The Book of KAPO*. Ed. Claus Raasted. 2012. 95
[89] Ibid.
[90] Sønderskov, *The Book of KAPO*. 62.

of even the sensory experience of the world from the players. Nonetheless, this is not an elevation of a scene of bondage to the low mimetic. The heroes of *KAPO* are in a "scene of bondage" that the player "looks down upon" merely from having elected to participate in the larp and having the opportunity to stop the role-play at any time they require it.

Delirium uses light and sound to similar effect. The sensory input of light and sound is used to prompt the participants to behave in certain ways. Different colourations of light are used to indicate different states of control. White light for institutional control and red light for the patient overthrow of the regime. They used "islands of light" to indicate the spaces of play within the game world, characters were allowed to "move about freely," however, they "were only conscious as long as [they] were inside a lighted area." Furthermore, the organizers "had the possibility to turn off and turn on these lights" to "pace the story."[91] These mechanisms regulate the sensory information the players have access to, taking control away from them over what they can see and how to interpret what they see.

Aristotle, History, and the Ontology of Fictional Being

Another way to consider larp is to look at what Aristotle has said about the writing of history. For Aristotle, the key difference between the historian and the poet is that "one relates what has happened, the other what may happen."[92] This distinction helps to make sense of the productive roles that participants play in the formulation of a larp world. The storyteller projects that which may happen, and the players concretise it into the annals of the fictional past. Another way to put this is, that when the storyteller sends an incident out into the larp space, it holds onto

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[91] Andreasen, Peter S. *Fabricating Madness*. 3:47-4:20.
[92] Aristotle IX.

that quality of being "potential" that is inscribed in the open-ended "may" of Aristotle. Once the players have interacted with the larp space, it becomes something that *has* happened, bringing it more rightfully into the domain of history. Yet, it is *not* history. These events are only pseudo-real, belonging to the domain of a fictional world, and dealing with fictional characters. If the historian is one who tells of events that have occurred, for us to admit events from within a fictional universe as historical is to provide them with the same ontological status as non-fictional events, then why are not all fictions written in the past tense historical? Instead we call novels that fictionalize historical events "historical fiction" and we rightfully leave the entirely fictional accounts of worlds such as *Epoch*'s or of Terry Pratchett's Discworld to the domain of fantasy.[93]

This distinction is easier to make in literature, where there is a clear delineation between whether an event is fictional or real, but in larp this distinction is less clear because actions in the fictional world are embodied in play. One could point to theatre on this point, highlighting the similar presence of acting there; however, there is a crucial difference in the presence of a script. Larp plot is structured spatially, and is organised reactively. Something occurs, then something else occurs as a result. The chain of events is only partially curated. The organisers have no real means to foreknow the reaction of players to the content being sent to them, and this means that there is a lot of uncertainty about what will occur next.

Another distinction that larp makes from Aristotle's notion of narrative is that it takes for its topic a space, not an action. Larps, like other games, specialise in dealing with spatial storytelling. Campaign larps and Nordic larps do this differently, but the end result is the same.

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[93] These are both fantasy settings, but the same could be said of any genre of writing.

The narrative experience is centred upon a space, for *Epoch*, the town of Carreg Wynn; for *Fantasy Alive,* the town of Yorick; For *Elegy*, Bartertown. All of these spaces are central to the experience of the larp. Which characters are present from weekend to weekend is variable, and the larger narratives in these sorts of games focus more on what is occurring in these spaces than the people it is occurring to. That isn't to say that the characters aren't important, because it is their agency, their ability to perform actions, that allows for narrative to occur. However, plot in larps can easily be divided into categories based upon movement through space. Campaign plots generally follow structures wherein an entity-to-be-overcome comes to town, and the players confront it. This entity could be a supernatural threat, an environmental one, or some form of high mimetic or low mimetic one (ie. a hostile army). The ethical status of the antagonist does not move the focus of the action away from the space being represented.

Where larp can seek reconciliation with Aristotle is in the epic, though it takes some willful dishonesty to manifest. The "Epic structure," Aristotle tells us, is "one with a multiplicity of plots" as opposed to tragedy, which must focus on a single plot or as few plots as possible.[94] This resolves the problem the large campaigns have with the expansive narrative texture they offer, but it doesn't resolve the formal similarities to a historical account which grows from the spatial logic of the plot.

To establish a precise concept of larp, I propose that the action that is imitated in larp is the act of being in the world. It is in the refiguring of our relationship to that world that the plot becomes coherent. That the plot is *of* something else is only to identify the properties of the fictional world to which the action pertains. The narrative of a larp is about the formation of an

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[94] Aristotle XVIII.

identity within the fictional world (the character, after all, mediates the player's participation in the fiction). How a character interacts with the fictional world is a process of refiguring what it means to be that character. A game such as *Epoch* confronts players with questions around how they would conduct themselves without a legal system to establish morality.[95] Even simple encounters confront the player with ontological questions about their character: "Are you the kind of person who would kill a trader to steal their goods?" "Would you save a stranger's life without knowing whether that person is dangerous or not?" etc. The libertarian anarchy that reigns in Carreg Wynn (the remote frontier town in which the action takes place) forms a backdrop to identity formation, and as such is inseparable from it. That it is a fantasy setting does not prevent these questions from resonating with our ordinary life.

Fantasy Alive has a social space that is governed by an entrenched legal and social hierarchy. The criminal code in Haredom is asymmetrical based on class. Nobility confers a social status that precludes being charged by social lessers; enslavement of the so called "beast races" is legal, and nobles may call on a trial by combat instead of an evidentiary trial.[96] Actions within this world confront players with ethical questions about obedience to the law and the morality of participating in a society that is overtly discriminatory. Questions about the relationship to the community, what sorts of violence are tolerable, and about how one navigates the complexities of institutional racism and slavery are all manifested in player interaction with the setting.

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[95] The setting of Epoch places the area of play within a lawless frontier between the tribal Confederacy and the Tawdonian Empire. There have been attempts by players or organisers in the past to establish a local legal structure, but these attempts have failed and the region remains lawless.

[96] See Fantasy Alive. *The Book of Law*. n.d. PDF

Nordic larps build similar frameworks within their games as well. *KAPO* and *Delirium* both use the structures of their games to pose ontological questions to the players about how they interact with space. The fundamental transition in *KAPO*, the process of psychologically and emotionally becoming a prisoner, that is initially resisted but inevitably succumbed to, is an ontological confrontation between the identity that the players have developed for their character and the identity that the space inscribes on them. Sønderskov's account of her experience of *KAPO* in *The Book of KAPO* discusses the sense tunnel and cage scene as experienced both before the game, as a player, and during the game as a character. Describing her experience of the game, she notes that the "sense tunnel and the cage" were "strong experiences" even "out of context" but when it was re-experienced as a part of the game it "was entirely different" than before.[97] The shift that Sønderskov notices is the contextual shift that comes with transitioning from experiencing a space as a person who is afforded the knowledge of their security in our everyday world to a character whose social position is in conflict with the space of the cage. The sense tunnel marks the boundary between our world and the world of *KAPO*. Entering the tunnel, Sønderskov describes feeling impotent and powerless while moving through it.[98] This experience is important to *KAPO* because it brings the characters from an imagined past that is not unlike our own to a present that seeks to violently reconstruct their sense of self. The process of being in Zeeland is the process of becoming one who belongs in Zeeland. This pressure is structural within the game. Characters are being pushed to realign their identities to exclude components that exist independent of Zeeland's control. The prison rejects their prefigured identity, imposing

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[97] Sønderskov, Louise Amalie Juul. "Too close to reality." *The Book of KAPO*. 56.
[98] "The feeling of impotence and total lack of control was overwhelming, and didn't get less powerful when I was dragged into the cage. From there I saw nothing but faces." ibid.

instead an identity that classifies them as "shit," "chalker," et cetera in its push for control over the prisoners' identities.

The change is as total as the space. Sønderskov reflects on her "willingness to start fresh" in the prison when she was warned that "there would be consequences if [she] interacted with anyone [she] was not supposed to know."[99] In her subsequent reflection, "The Cage in KAPO," she expands upon this idea, highlighting the process of identity destruction and reconstruction that takes place in the cage scene. In the cage scene, the new prisoner "got a number "tattooed" [on to them], being their new identity" within Zeeland.[100] Interactions with the system were processed through this new identity which replaces the prior construction of the self.

The testimony of I90 expresses a similar experience.[101] The player discusses how they "had forgotten" half the alphabet after their character experienced a traumatic abandonment by their pre-incarceral husband.[102] Being a part of the group known as "Normalized" who were responsible for constantly updating the books and records on all the prisoners, I90's loss of the alphabet caused distress which culminated with being unable to "remember what once was outside the camp."[103]

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[99] Sønderskov, 59.
[100] Sønderskov, Louise Amalie Juul. "The Cage in KAPO." *The Book of KAPO*. 62.
[101] The testimony is published without the author's real name, only their photograph and prison number accredit the author.
[102] I90. "Fragments of I90." *The Book of KAPO*. 117.
[103] ibid.

The experiences of loss of self in *KAPO* were the consequence of an intentional design principle. The destruction of self-identity was the narrative object that was pursued by the organisers, and it is one that is affected through a rigorous scenography and uncompromising aesthetic vision. The cage is particularly iconic, built to look aggressive, the angular projections of the bars beyond the walls of the cage give the cage an oppressive, violent aesthetic.[104] It stands as a menacing reminder that you are not the ones in control during *KAPO*. However, larps do not need to rely on totalitarian settings in order to facilitate character focused plots. A game such as *Mad About the Boy* has just as much emphasis on the refiguring of identity built into its

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[104] The image of the cage scene is take from *The Book of KAPO*, 66-67

gameplay as *KAPO* without thematizing fascism and torture. The setting places the players in a near-future world where all men were killed in a devastating plague three years prior to the start of the plot. The characters are all women participating in a government-run pilot programme to inseminate women using sperm from pre-disaster sperm banks.[105] Gender and social roles are imminent concerns for a larp that begins with the sudden extinction of one half of the species. Players must interrogate their role in a society where gender no longer provides definition to what roles are encouraged or even available. After affording the players enough time to begin to configure their identity in an all-women society, the first act ends with the last man in the world entering the scene.[106] The transition to act two requires the players to refigure their conceptions of gender and social order. How an individual chooses to answer questions about what should be done with the last man on Earth or how the sudden reappearance of a man changes the newly established social order are values-based decisions. A character whose identity is predicated on the absence of men will react differently to the tectonic shift in their understanding of the setting (for discovery that it is possible for more men to have survived is nothing less) than one for whom the rediscovery reopens the wounds of loss. Why was a husband, son, or brother killed while this man wasn't? Perhaps a religious explanation offers refuge to an uncertain and religious woman. These sorts of questions constitute a refiguring of identity because it means creating or reinforcing a set of values in the wake of a new circumstance.

These moments of refiguring occur across all three frames of reality. I have already discussed at length how this takes place within a diegetic frame; however it is equally important that this process is occurring within the endogenous frame. The player refigures their

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[105] Edland, Tor; Margrete Raaum, Trine Lise Lindahl. *Mad About the Boy*.Laiv, n.d. 1. PDF.
[106] *Mad About the Boy*. 2. The game was organised into a workshop and two acts.

understanding of the setting alongside their character's understanding of the world and circumstances in which they find themselves. As the player is introduced to new information about the setting, they must refigure their own understanding of the gameworld. This process usually runs in tandem with the diegetic process, because in many cases the player receives new information as their character does, however, in longer running games, where players can participate in new roles, this process is separate. A player might know more about the setting than their character knows about its world. In this case, the player's knowledge of the game world changing would always occur alongside a refiguring of the character's understanding of their world, because a character cannot know something about their world that the player does not know about the game world; however, the reverse is not the case: a player could know, for example, that the king is secretly running a campaign of terror central to the current or most recent plot whereas their character knows the king to be a noble patron of the poor. This disjunction comes from the discrepancies in the limited knowledge of the character. The player might have spoken to a plot team member, or have been on plot team during that narrative arc, but their character was not aware of or present for the moment of recognition. It is important to recognize that this is not a complex operation. Participants are always are that they are participating in a fiction, and are capable of making distinctions between their knowledge and their character's knowledge of the world. As more of these distinctions accumulate they become subject to the limitations of our human memories. For Nordic larps, where there is limited scope, this process is less prone to complications. In the exogenous frame this amounts to a person's understanding of their own world changing as a result of their experience of participating in the community and action of the larp. Larping reduces the gap between the participant and the

thematic material or subject matter of the plot. This, of course, is the underlying cause of bleed, but it is also a powerful tool that has led to the development of educational and political larping. One of the major thoughts driving scholarship in larp this year has been the question of how to build larps that empower those who have been marginalised. Marxist, post-colonial, and anarchist larp theories have grown from the pursuit of a less middle-class, Western centred design concern to Nordic larp which has led to larps about refugees with Syrian refugees and Palestinian larps about occupation and escape.[107] Nordic larp has always been political, and the focus of many games on concerns around authoritarianism, race, and gender arise from the particular concerns of the communities who developed the larps in Europe. However, the massive influx of refugees to Europe since the beginning of the Syrian civil war has shifted the priorities of larp designers, leading to new games built in collaboration with peoples from occupied or war-torn states.

The idea driving the desire to collaborate with refugees is the notion that larp is an especially meaningful artform for negotiating social reform; that the structure of larp games make them particularly effective at expressing emotional and social meaning. Larp being a participatory medium with multiple modes of existing built into the narrative structure places the experience of catharsis, anagnorisis, and peripeteia within the the performance of the character. Unlike in theatre, where catharsis is experienced by the audience within the plot but from beyond the fourth wall, in larp the experience of catharsis is occurs in the character's expression of identity and the experience of action. The experience of catharsis is different in larp because it comes from the act of performing itself. It is through the participants' emotional investment in

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[107] See Larson Kasper and Tina Leipold's "Playing Stress, Guilt and Identity - This Ain't Politics, This is Syria" in *Larp Politics: Systems, Theory and Gender in Action* for a discussion about larping with Syrian refugees.

the performance that a cathartic experience arises. This minor shift brings catharsis to function

more like anagnorisis (recognition) and peripeteia (reversal) which are crucial elements that

influence the magnitude of the work. The cathartic experience in larp also factors into the

magnitude of the work. If of sufficient magnitude, the catharsis from the emotional release that

drives roleplay is obtained.

The role of anagnorisis in larp is minimally different from that traditional drama.

Recognition is still an important narrative change that furthers the plot; however, peripeteia is

more complicated. Campaign larps typically arrange the plot to ensure the long-term success of

the player characters. This means that the typical reversal moves from bad to good fortune, often

after a moment of anagnorisis where the characters discover a form of magic, weapon, or tool

that allows them to change their fortunes. Nordic larps have different structures in this aspect.

KAPO is particularly interesting because the moments of reversal are the cage scenes which

bring the new prisoners into Zeeland. On entering the prison, the characters have been forced

into a pitiable state: unjustly incarcerated, forced into squalor, and victimized by an all-powerful

institution. The characters have been developed in workshops prior to the larp, giving them

personal histories and narrative contexts which Zeeland incontrovertibly reverses their fortunes

for the worse. The moment of recognition comes later, when the character realizes the magnitude

of their downfall, that they have become a number, a Rat, a Normalized, a Chalker and in the

process of this have let go of whatever they were before. The catharsis in such a larp comes from

the pitiable conditions of the prisoners. They are terrible in the stark light of ordinary life,

wretched for the violences and injustices they commit on one another, and sad for their

deprivation; the game must go on until the players are brought to a state of profound pitifulness.

Delirium organises these elements differently. Once more a narrative that addresses confinement, the game builds up to the reversal through active scenes. The patients' fortunes reverse from a state of being controlled to a state of being in control when the plot calls for the patients to overthrow the orderlies and effect an escape. Yet, in this same moment, there is the tragedy of loss for those who either could not or would not escape. What is interesting about the reversal at *Delirium* is the manner in which it is performed. In the "Delirium" entry in *Do Larp*, the designers lay out the groundwork for how the event was run as a roadmap to future organisers who might be interested in running *Delirium* or something else like it. In the narrative synopsis under "Story," they remark that "[n]o revolt is ever played, instead the revolution happens piece by piece … and in the end some of the patients will become the new oppressors." [108] The organisation of the narrative does not allow for the revolution to be played out. Instead the surrealist impression of madness precludes the linearity of a unified, performed revolt. The consequence of this, however, is that there are multiple moments of reversal that are experienced differently by different players. Some might transition from their patient's gown to the red uniforms of the institution in "some of the early red lighted scenes".[109] Red uniforms "contained the power of the archetypes, and for all players the appearance of a character in a red uniform will be perceived as a member of the institution staff, including the player wearing it" which allowed the revolution to play out in a fragmented progression of red light scenes.[110] This separates the moments where power changes hands to any particular player, making the experience of reversal unique to each player. Later on, however, a more cohesive moment of

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[108] Heebøll-Christensen, Jesper; Kristoffer Thurøe, Peter Muthe-Kaas. "Delirium." *Do Larp*. Ed. Lars Andersen et al. Rollespilsakedemiet: Copenhagen, Denmark, 2011. 72-91. PDF. 74
[109] Heebøld-Christensen et al, 86.
[110] ibid.

reversal occurs with the presentation of "white staff uniforms" which "stress[es] the fact that [the players] have now become the masters of the institution" over the staff.[111] This wasn't the only way in which peripeteia was inscribed into the appearance of the characters. The costume design for the patients had the begin the game in "hospital clothes" but they were "gradually supplied with … materials they can use to transform their plain white hospital clothes into … costumes that portray the personas of their characters" during the course of play.[112] This process inscribes the transitional procession of power from the staff to the patients through an activity that is normally performed within the endogenous frame—costume design typically occurs on the level of the player preparing for the game, not during it—and brings it into the diegesis in order to express the increasing autonomy and power the patients have to refigure their space, time, and selfhood. What is at stake in the reversal of institutional power is the selfhood of the characters and the capacity for a tragic (oppressed) or comic (liberated) conclusion to the plot.

Threefold Identity

Characters are presented in three ways: (1) they are an always already formed identity which predates the start of the plot, (2) they are a configured identity in the present of the plot, and (3) they become a refigured identity through the mediation of the plot. If the representation of characters is the matter of larp it is only through the threefold mimesis of Ricoeur and the expression of identity through action that larp presents its matter. However, each of the three forms of mimesis is also stratified through the exogenous, endogenous, and diegetic frames and incorporates the world rule, power rule, and character rule into the process as well.

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[111] ibid.
[112] Heebøld-Christensen et al, 85.

Ricoeur identified three different types of mimesis in Aristotle, which he coined

mimesis$_1$, mimesis$_2$, and mimesis$_3$. The first, mimesis$_1$, is based on "a preunderstanding of the

world of action" that is necessary for "articulat[ing]" the "significance of some action" to another

individual.[113] Each actor within the world of action has a preunderstanding that enables their

participation and their preunderstanding is based on the nature of human action, which is

"always already articulated by signs, rules, and norms" that form the cultural foundation for

symbols.[114] To adopt an example from Ricoeur that is particularly useful for our discussion, I

want to consider the following idea:

> To understand a ritual act is to situate it within a ritual, set
> within a cultic system, and by degrees within the whole set of
> conventions, beliefs, and institutions that make up the symbolic
> framework of a culture.[115]

Here we have a familiar circumstance in the ritual, which itself is a magic circle of a sort. The

"ritual act," Ricoeur argues, takes place *within* a ritual, giving it spatiality; and within a "cultic

system" which provides it with an cultural structure; but we can just as easily work through the

language of Goffman and Montola to argue that to understand the ritual act is the situate it within

a magic circle with endogenous meaning engendered in the internal symbolisms and meanings of

the ritual, and exogenous meaning which arises from the cultic system. It also has a internal

meaning to each participant which is mediated by their interpretation of events.[116]

Mimesis$_1$ occurs across all three modes of reality. It has an exogenous component which

prefigures our understanding of actions through our understanding of action within ordinary life.

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[113] Ricoeur. 54.
[114] Ricoeur, 57.
[115] Ricoeur, 58.
[116] I intentionally avoid the word "diegesis" here to avoid conflating games and ritual more than necessary, however, inasmuch as the ritual act is performed by or observed by a participant in the ritual it is also diegetic.

This is the mode Ricoeur discusses when he invokes the cultural and historical prefiguring of action. The second prefiguring of action occurs within the endogenous layer, where, like in the ritual, conventions, beliefs, and signs are enclosed by the magic circle that ascribes different meanings that only hold significance to the participants within the ritual and differ from the exogenous level of meaning through a distinct tradition contained within the exogenous traditions but not accessible to outsiders. The diegetic frame further coarsens the texture of $mimesis_1$, adding further interpretive contexts which are internal to the actor within the particular network of actions. The ritual act derives its meaning through the ritualist within the ritual as well. I describe this as coarsening because the projection of $mimesis_1$ through each frame increases the complexity of the interpretive framework, adding more traditions, rules, and norms that are navigated in the process of interpretation.

In larp, the goal of the mimetic act is the projection of the self to other actors[117] within the game. The prefigured self is a confabulation based upon the preunderstanding in all three modes and projected backwards into the fictional world to precede its own conception. At the core of this lie the world rule, power rule, and character rule, which regulate the transmission of information within the larp world. In the world rule, the role-play is a process of defining and redefining the world. However, this process is mimetic; it is through the imitation of actions that the space is redefined. The power rule constricts mimesis through its regulation of which authorities each actor has over the space, acting as a set of rules governing mimesis. Finally, the character rule places the characters as the mediator between the person performing the action and

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[117] By actor I mean "one who performs actions."

the person interpreting it, which distinguishes it from actions taken by the participant which occur outside of the diegesis.

Mimesis$_2$ is the unguent between mimesis$_1$ and mimesis$_3$. It processes the present-past into the present-future through itself, the present-present. Ricoeur identifies a few ways in which mimesis$_2$ mediates: between events and whole stories, between the aspects of narrative,[118] and through its temporality.[119] The first form of mediation is what allows us to interpret events as being components of a larger narrative entity, and is a critical rationalising process for larp narratives, and is itself tripartite: the exogenous organisation of events into the story mediates experience into plot that incorporates the external information of the ordinary world as well as events communicated from one player to another from an outside-looking-inwards perspective. An endogenous iteration of this process incorporates both the events directly experienced and the events encountered through storytelling that belong within the game world. Herein the player transitions between the "sedimentation" of the character (as a set of behavioural traditions) and the invention of new behaviours. This process carries through on the diegetic frame as well; however, within the endogenous layer it is incorporates knowledge that exists beyond the character's limitations.

The final form of mimesis pertains to the present-future. It "marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader," connecting "the world configured by the poem and the world wherein real action occurs."[120] The perfunctory analysis sees in mimesis$_3$ the point at which the exogenous frame and the diegetic intersect. However, there is still a process of imitation that occurs within the exogenous frame for mimesis$_3$ that necessitates a closer

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[118] Ricoeur gives "agents, goals, means, interactions, circumstances, unexpected results" as examples here (65).
[119] Ricoeur, 65-68.
[120] Ricoeur, 71.

examination. First, we must consider that the exogenous frame extends through all three forms of mimesis. The exogenous frame is not necessarily the world of real action itself insomuch as it is a site where meaning external to the plot rests. This is a post-interpretive space that gets modified by real action rather than being the world in which real action takes place. Exogeny is only possible where endogeny is as well. It is itself a transitional framework which mediates the magic circle. Mimesis$_3$ is the end point of Ricoeur's model of communication. Mimesis$_1$ operates at the site of the author, mimesis$_3$ at the site of the reader, and mimesis$_2$ mediates between them. While this explanation might seem too linear for the cyclical model that Ricoeur offers, it is only to draw a line which proceeds through the "altitudes" of the meditation rather than to trace its centripetal cycle from tradition to invention.[121] Mimesis$_3$ after all occurs at the "intersection of the world of the text and the world of the *reader*" who, in the act of reading itself, necessitate the schematization of the events and change them because of their limited and different perspective.

Exogeny within mimesis$_3$ addresses the events that fall outside of the gameworld but in relation to the game. In the context of a larp, this would pertain to events such as the drive to the larpsite being atrocious because the immanent context is the larp itself but the event occurs outside of the scope of the larp. The event of the drive to the larp belongs outside of the game but within the narrative and is distinguished from the act of driving which occurs within the realm of real action by its narration. Mimesis$_3$ is internal to narrative, and must occur in the listener for it to bridge between the world of the story and the world of the listener. The three modes, then, define a tri-planar intersection of the horizons of the fictional world with the reader's. The endogenous frame marks the intersection of the gameworld within the narrative to the

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[121] Ricoeur reflects that he would rather view the circle as "an endless spiral that would carry the meditation past the same point a number of times, but at different altitudes" (72). This suggests its own linearity in the image of the spring whose spiral can also be measured by its "altitude" from bottom to top.

gameworld within the listener's world, and diegesis does similar for the diegetic horizons of the equation.

Larping itself, as opposed to just the retelling of larp experiences, participates in the mimetic spiral. Looking first at the expression of identity within the fictional world, mimesis$_3$ connects the horizon of the acted character's diegetic world to the diegesis of the character who is audience to it. By this I am not claiming that there is a circle of narrativity to the stories being told within the fictional world (from one character to another), which would be to suggest that the threefold present is also found in the framing universe wherein the Ancient Mariner's telling of his narrative to the wedding guests itself takes on the circle wholly within the text; or rather that the temporality of our own world allows us to inscribe temporality within fictional worlds, which I find to be self-evident. Rather, that the very participation in a larp bridges multiple worlds for each participant into a torus of narrativity. The circle of narrativity plays out diegetically, producing a narrativity that is internal to each character. Simultaneously, this process occurs within each player with respect to gameworld, and in each person present with respect to their cosmological extensions beyond the larp itself into their ordinary world where it intersects with the magic circle of the larp.

Whereas in Aristotle's organisation of narrative, character and setting serve to enhance the plot, in larp structures character is the primary element. The mimetic process inscribed in the circle of narrativity constitutes an amplification of the character across the temporal dimension. The present of the past of the larp world is constructed in its magnum opus, a living document that includes all characters in it as their prefigured selves. Within the action of the larp, the characters interact with the space within the magic circle (a threefold space simultaneously

exogenous, endogenous, and diegetic) in order to express the foundational qualities of their character. Herein I intend two things: (1) that the movement through space that occurs during the play of a larp is intended to demonstrate and affirm through action the ethical qualities of the persona and (2) that these assertions occur across all three modes within the magic circle. A diegetic mode looks at the movement through space within the conceptual network of action where the character serves as the agential force behind the actions. Herein the actions belie the priorities and motivations of the actor. The Normalized who voluntarily leaves his community in *KAPO* to become a shit under the rats does so to escape the pain of their shattered prefigured relationship. That "he believed it to be his fault" that his wife was imprisoned was a pressure that overwhelmed his ability to remain in the prison camp alongside but removed from her.[122] Becoming shit involves a movement through the space of the prison to participate in a new camp, and the movement reveals the burden of guilt, and the character's refiguring of their priorities: being near his wife becomes less important and he demonstrates a willingness to forgo physical comfort and even safety to escape the psychological horrors within his own diegetic experience. This incident also demonstrates the modal nature of the magic circle because these actions resonate differently within the endogenous interpretation of action.

Endogenously, the actions perplexed the fellow Normalized who did not understand why one of their ranks would voluntarily join the Rats.[123] It crosses over into the diegetic world of his character's wife, to whom the movement signified her "abandonment" by her husband.[124] There is in this moment also the reflection of the mimetic process that Ricoeur details: the action reveals the transition from the prefigured to the configured; he is refigured from the loving

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[122] Anon. "Fragments from I90." *The Book of KAPO*. Ed. Claus Raasted. 116.
[123] Ibid. "What? – He did it voluntarily; we didn't send him to the Rats he walked down there himself"
[124] ibid.

husband to the abandoning husband. In this, the centrality of identity translates a spatial movement into an expression of social position and priorities. The net weight of these actions within a larp is to establish an ontology of the social being within a space. The actions do not further a plot *per se*, but instead occur within the context of the plot to refigure identity and community.

Even within campaign larps this dynamic holds place. How characters navigate the spaces of the larp world reflect their social status, relationships with other characters, the priorities of the player, and values of the character. Where a character sleeps establishes a relationship with the space: that they belong to one part of the space and not to another; this can manifest itself through an affiliation (or lack thereof) with an in-game faction, such as is the case at *Epoch*, where different campsites have built communities around themselves with defined identities: the "Faunclave" is associated with playfulness and inclusivity, the Fey Enclave is associated with seriousness and aloofness. These qualities can be quasi-spatial: the proximity to the central lodge which serves as the Inn in the gameworld makes the Faunclave a common meeting point for evening fires, whereas the Fey Enclave, located much further away from the main meeting point has cultivated a sense of removal from the community through its remoteness: fewer players are willing to walk over to its location because it frequently removes them from the plot due since the game's leadership tends to organise the plot around the space where the players are expected to be. This is an exogenous concern that arises from the vicious circle that players express their interest in participation in the plot by where they socialise; when they want to interact with plot, they go to the main lodge, which is also the exogenous meeting point where concerns such as fire bans or bear warnings are also addressed at the beginning or

end of game. This behaviour is learned by experience: when they are not near the Inn, they do not encounter the plot. Conversely, when plot is sent to other areas of play, the plot frequently is not interacted with and must make its way to the Inn in order to find interaction. This creates an exogenous spatiality which organises players by what they want to express about their own identity within the larp community: a player camping away from the fields of battle expresses themselves as having less interest in those aspects of play.

When looked at as a whole, a larp presents a model society. That is not to say that it models our society, but rather that it speculates upon what a society within the gameworld and the space of play might look like, who would compose it, and how would they navigate their world. This is a fundamental shift in the conceptual network to prioritize actors rather than actions. I want to emphasize the reordering of the elements because centring character in larp makes cohesive the numerous threads of narrativity by collecting them into an expression of community. The change in priorities is reflected in the testimonials and stories about larp that are told in *The Book of KAPO* and other anthologies of documentation from Nordic larps. In the "Fragments of I90" passage, the author writes in the first person, presenting events in the form of "I was pulled out of the cage," "I went to work," and "I had forgotten half the alphabet."[125] In the omniscient voice, such as during Sønderskov's "The Cage in KAPO," the narrative lacks specificity, instead focusing on presenting an overall account of the significance of the cage.

Behind this distinction between the personal and the universal lies a key distinction in the temporal experience: the whole of a larp scene retains the concordance of organised plot whereas the individualized narrative retains the discordance of human experience. Arranged more

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[125] ibid.

precisely, the whole of the scene is built from discordant concordance and the individual's experience relies on concordant discordance as their underlying structure. Ricoeur's typification of discordant concordance in the moment of narrative reversal, such as occurs in tragedy.[126] Reversal in plot demonstrates the principle of discordant concordance through the disruptive nature of the constructed event. In reversal, the action that occurs demonstrates the discordance of life because it disrupts an inertial movement of the action towards a logical conclusion. Larps structurally require both a concordant discordance and a discordant concordance to be encoded into the space of the magic circle in order to function. As discordant concordance it is a prefigured plot which is refigured during play into a configured one. As concordant discordance, it is a prefigured self that is refigured through action to a configured self. It is in the hybridity of these two structures that larp gains its unique curvature, both narrative and experience simultaneously. The discordance of time is made concordant through the anticipation of narrativity within the magic circle; the lack of authoritative control over the character action by the organisers engenders discordant qualities in the plot.

  The circle of narrativity takes on a spatial configuration in Montola's world rule. In his argument that roleplay redefines the properties of the fictional world, he is proposing that through action a prefigured space becomes refigured to a configured space. Montola's world rule implies Ricoeur's threefold mimesis in how roleplay transforms the metaphysical properties of the fictional world. Roleplay consists of a sequence of imitations of actions which proceed organically from one to the next, forming the roots of the larger narrative they generate. If they "redefine" the state of the game world, they must do so through the mimetic process Ricoeur

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[126] Ricoeur 43.

outlines. This is necessarily the case because roleplay is itself an imitation of actions. During play, the fictional world is refigured spatially, temporally, and socially.

Conclusion

Live action role-playing fundamentally changes narrative structure. Built from the conflux of narrative and game structures within the temporal framework of ordinary life, larp produces a magic circle in which the narrative expression of identity reorders the components of narrative--plot, character, setting--to prioritize the role of character within narrative instead of plot. The starting point in an analysis of larp is an understanding of the magic circle, the spatio-temporal and social boundary which delimits the larpsite and the larpers from the outside world. Within the magic circle, actions are registered as playful rather than earnest. Actions within the magic circle that would be threatening outside of it are understood to pose no threat through this mediation. This boundary establishes a temporal beginning and ending to the game, as well as a spatial boundary that is known to participants. Crucially, this is a porous boundary that allows movement of people and information from the outside of the circle inside of it. This process is selective, and too much external pressure can disrupt the magic circle, bringing a game to a halt.

A crucial feature of the magic circle is that it is interwoven into the fabric of the fictional world. It is formed in play and through narration. Nonetheless, the magic circle of larp is different from that of theatre because there are different metaphysical properties to these realms: the audience in a theatre is expected to remain in their seats, not participate with the actors on stage. Differences such as these create fundamental difference in the fictional worlds of larp and

of theatre and the construction of the modes of reality and the magic circle. As a construct of the fictional world, the magic circle's properties reflect the metaphysics of the fiction and influence what stories can be told.

Larps take advantage of this system to produce fictional worlds in which players embody their avatars, the characters, navigating through the space of the larp to accomplish their goals and express their identity through interaction with the world and its denizens. Montola's three rules governing roleplay help to structure the experience of the magic circle by establishing three regulations on the magic circle: that roleplay is a process of refiguring space, which Montola calls the world rule; that there is a power hierarchy recognized by the players which regulates the ability to transform the fictional world, and that the player interacts with the fictional world through her character. Each of these rules corresponds to one of the three modes of reality: the world rule is an exogenous rule, the power rule is endogenous, and the character rule diegetic. The three rules correspond to the three sites of meaning because they the three modes are hierarchical. In roleplay, the refiguring of the properties of the fictional world applies to the fictional world through structures such as game rules which establish the metaphysics, the power to change the world is recognized within the magic circle between participants, and the character is an avatar within the diegetic mode. Nonetheless, it is important to avoid separating these three modes, keeping in mind that the three modes, and the three rules respectively, occur symbiotically, not independently.

Each of the three modes interacts within a cosmology that attributes multiple worlds to each participant. Exogenous worlds establish the circumstances of the magic circle, it's space, time, and context. Endogenous worlds produce the collectively agreed upon fictional world,

often represented in the magnum opera of the larps, which includes the documentation, established truth claims, and traditions of the world. Personal interpretations and understandings of the narrative belong to the worlds of the diegeses. The cosmology of a larp is a plurality of worlds within a complex universe governed by shared worlds and degrees of difference and divergence. The phenomenon of bleed in larps both reveals the existence of different worlds in larp but also the risk that actions will not be properly mediated by their respective cosmology, which can destabilize the magic circle revoking the protective deferral of action to the symbolic and playful realms.

Bleed's presence in larp betrays the proximity of the person and the character, whose ontological status is of primary importance to the diegetic experience. Actions taken during a larp communicate identity within the threefold present, establishing a prefigured identity of the character, which is the character at the beginning of the event; the configured character, which occurs in $mimesis_3$ after identity has been refigured through $mimesis_2$. In this argument, I have made the claim that actions in a larp create and express the imitation of identity. Combining the world rule with the threefold mimesis bridges the temporality of the narrative experience with the spatiality of game play. However, to the complete the understanding of how larp works we must centralise characters whose truth claims are expressed through the temporality of plot and the spatiality of play. In doing so, we acknowledge the central role of identity in the construction of larp narratives without doing violence to the value or importance of plot, which remains an integral component of larping.

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