Editorial
Transformative Play Seminar 2022:
Role-playing, Heritage, and Culture

We are pleased to introduce Issue 14 of the *International Journal of Role-Playing*! This special issue companions Issue 13 as the second part of a series of short articles reflecting work presented at the Transformative Play Initiative Seminar, held at Uppsala University Campus Gotland in Visby, Sweden on October 20-21, 2022. The seminar was organized with support from the Sustainable Heritage Research Forum (SuHRF) at Uppsala University and Region Gotland. As such, the main theme of the seminar was Role-playing, Heritage, and Culture, which is also the eponymous subtitle of this special issue. The topic itself is fruitful enough that we are likely to see more discussions related to heritage in the pages of the *IJRP*.

Even though analysis is the bread and butter of those of us in media studies, larps and TTRPGs in particular are not often discussed as mediators of the past. The recent surge of interest in edu-larp (see e.g., Geneuss 2021) is connected with larger efforts to respectfully render human history through multi-sensory, embodied experiences. What happens when we, in the present, simulate and embody that which happened in the past?

Such a seemingly simple act of role-playing one's cultural heritage is, unsurprisingly, mired in complexity. Previous work of one of our seminar keynoters, Michal Mochocki (2021), reveals historical reenactment, live-action role-play (larp), and tabletop role-playing games (TTRPGs) are all *media* that offer embodied, agentic representation of heritage and the historical record. Mochocki's (2022) keynote for the seminar, "Multilayered, Selective and Contested: The Heritage of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in Polish Role-playing and Reenactment," provides a specific example of such heritage work through his own cultural lens.

Such heritage work can also take place within more traditional established heritage structures such as museums, as evidenced by another keynote by larp designer and museum curator Nór Hernø-Toftild. Their lecture, "Historical Empathy: How Larp Can Facilitate Cultural and Historical Understanding" (2022), highlights how such interventions can give context and personal relevance to heritage work for museum-goers through embodied play.

These words, however — "heritage," "history," and "culture"— are also laden with inequalities and trauma. That pain must be acknowledged. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, the American decimation of sacred indigenous lands, and the Chinese internment of the Uyghurs all remind us that empires enforce what they believe to be "heritage" or "culture" at gunpoint, erasing or neglecting anything that does not fit their mold. In other words, the playful representation of the past via role-play has surprisingly high stakes.

Keynoter Mohamad Rabah opens the special issue with a statement revealing why he was unable to attend the October 2022 seminar in Visby, due to a delayed visa approval by the Swedish Embassy in Israel. The statement was read in person by co-organizer Kjell Hedgard Hugaas (Rabah 2022). Rabah is a long-time veteran of the international larp scene and has facilitated edu-larps in Palestine and other Southwest Asian/North African (SWANA) locales, as well as in various countries in Europe. Not only was his presence at the seminar missed, but also the geopolitics of culture were to blame. Re-kindling global collaborations following the forced separation of the COVID-19 pandemic has been difficult, in part, due to exacerbated local and international tensions everywhere. Rabah serves his communities

through edu-larps and other playful activities that impart cultural heritage and social dilemmas, and has much to teach the rest of us. His statement affirms play as a powerful agent of empowerment, while also recognizing the conditions of occupation and other forms of oppression that make belief in one's future and one's autonomy in the world heartbreakingly difficult.

In a similar vein, Weronika Szatkowska's "*The People*: A Serious Role-playing Game Designed to Address a Humanitarian Crisis" presents a case study of an educational role-play game created as a response to the migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border. The game was developed in cooperation with an engaged collective of researchers and groups of activists as a means to raise awareness around the suffering and imperilment of Belarusians forced to live in the Polish woods. Players are given characters with different motivations and abilities to support "the People," as they are called in this region, exploring the ethical dilemmas presented by trying to follow the law vs. administering humanitarian aid.

As already evidenced by these examples, heritage role-play assumes different forms around the world, a diversity that necessitates further study and discussion. Tadeu Rodrigues Iuama's "Towards the Post-Modern Art Week: Anthropophagic Reflexes in the Brazilian Larp Scenes" initiates this discussion by way of the arts in Brazil. Iuama discusses how much of the experimental art in Brazil is in genealogy with Oswald de Andrade, whose 1928 "Anthropophagous Manifesto" proposed that Brazilian culture cannibalizes and digests other cultures. Iuama proposes that larp, too, has anthropophagic tendencies, with its "critical digestion of the media and biographical contents." Rian Rezende and Denise Portinari offer a precise example of this very phenomenon in Brazil in "Playing with Wonders, Objects, Role-playing Games and the Cultural Legacy of Bispo do Rosário for the City of Rio de Janeiro." Their work is an homage to outsider artist Arthur Bispo do Rosário, who created beautiful objects out of trash during his 50-year internment in an asylum. Rezende and Portinari describe how Bispo do Rosário's improvised textile work inspired their own Storytelling Cloak project, in which participants interweave their own personal histories into living heritage objects. This also corresponds with other recent work seeking the meaning of materiality in our games and heritage practices (Germaine and Wake 2022).

But then there is the culture you cannot touch. In "Experiencing China's Intangible Cultural Heritage in Role-playing Games: Comparative Studies between MMORPGs and Larps," Yuqiao Liu explores "intangible" cultural heritage practices such as acupuncture and taijiquan, or Chinese Tai Chi. Chinese MMORPGs such as *A Dream of Jianghu*, *Justice Online*, and the Jubensha *The Secret of the Gauze Lantern* present and preserve these practices for their Chinese gamer audiences. His work compares heritage practices in MMORPGS to those in Jubensha, a popular form of larp in China, using specific case studies as examples. Entertainment role-playing, Liu argues, places UNESCO-level heritage in the hands of even the most casual player.

In "Playing With The Fictitious 'I': Early Forms of Educational Role-playing in Hungary, 1938-1978," Bálint Márk Turi and Mátyás Hartyándi examine intangible cultural heritage activities from their cultural background, a heritage that enriches our general understanding of how pervasive role-playing simulations were throughout the world. Turi and Hartyándi discuss how the Bánk education program promoted democratic and individualist values within the Communist context of mid-century Hungary. Role-play can preserve intangible culture, but role-play *itself* is also intangible culture. As such, we have scarce notions of how much we have already lost through lack of documentation and academic study, an issue this project seeks to remedy within the Hungarian context.

Role-play does not just seamlessly pass on culture, but rather mediates it through its own affordances. In "Jeppe and Maria Bergmann Hamming's Literary-Musical Larp Adaptations," Evan Torner takes on larp's re-enchantment of high culture in an essay on the work of a larpwrighting team from Denmark. Analyzing the Bergmann Hamming's larps based on artists (*Sarabande* 2013),

composers (*Deranged* 2015), and operas (*Encore* 2022), Torner finds in their work a deep engagement with the European high-art canon that is activated through logics shared between larp and music.

The ephemerality of adult pretend play lends itself well to exploring the ephemerality of art, even though much cultural infrastructure is needed to impart this heritage on the next generation. In "Larp as a Potential Space for Non-Formal Queer Cultural Heritage," Josephine Baird explores what this ephemerality means for mediating queer cultural heritage. Can non-formal and ephemeral spaces such as larps adequately capture a fraught, marginalized past in order to secure them for an uncertain present and future? Important to Baird are the "how" and "why" of particular queer practices, which are perhaps better embodied than simply imparted.

In "Bridging Historical and Present-Day Queer Community Through Embodied Role-playing," Hilda Levin pursues a similar line of thought: how larp is a safe, distanced space that helps queer larpers grapple with and further engage with their communities. The Nordic larp *Just A Little Lovin'* (2011; Groth, Grasmo, and Edland 2021), Levin contends, has catalyzed renewed and active activist engagement from the larp community in the ongoing fight against HIV/AIDS and homophobic bigotry. Levin's work demonstrates the power of role-playing to provide personal relevance and agency such that players feel the need to take social responsibility in the world outside of the larp. More work in this vein is needed to establish how, where, and under what circumstances role-playing games encourage participants to engage in processes of lasting social change in their various communities.

Issue 14 concludes with "Gaming Capital in Contemporary Role-playing Game Platforms," in which Henry Korkeila and J. Tuomas Harviainen outline a different intangible heritage, namely: gaming capital. Influenced by the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1986), gaming capital, originally formulated by Mia Consalvo (2007), also constitutes part of the heritage of RPGs, with power relations continuing as active agents within the games we play, discuss, and canonize. While not focusing explicitly on power, Korkeila and Harviainen bridge between what is inherited between analog and digital role-playing spaces, emphasizing information flow and social space perspectives.

When we think of the many crises present in 2023, whether they be political, economic, or environmental, we must ask ourselves: How do we adapt to survive, and how do we pass on what we have learned? As the authors of this issue show, role-play is a valuable tool in everything from daily survival to the long-term mediation of otherwise-endangered cultural heritage. Role-play *is* also cultural heritage itself, muddying the waters, as all media do. It is here where we note that the brevity of the papers in this issue is a provocation for future work. There is so much to be written on the topic, with this issue as an aspirational origin point of many conversations to come.

-- Evan Torner, Sarah Lynne Bowman, and William J. White
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Statement by Mohamad Rabah

Mohamad Rabah
Palestinian Circus School

On the 3rd of October, 2022, the Israeli Military Occupation assassinated Salameh Rafat and two of his friends near Al Jalazon Refugee Camp. Salameh is the son of our colleague at the Palestinian Circus School (PCS), and he was also a student at the PCS few years ago. Two weeks ago a Palestinian child in a small village near Bethlehem died from fear. The heart of the 7 year old, "Rayan," stopped out of fear while he was trying to escape from the Israeli soldiers on his way home from school. Salameh and Rayan are not an exceptional stories that you hear on the news once in a while. Every day in Palestine; we have new victims suffering from the occupation brutality.

At the PCS, despite all the challenges, we still manage to provide weekly circus trainings for around 400 children and youth, and we organized more than 50 circus shows for public. Managing all these activities is doable and achievable. What can be really challenging to do and achieve is to give hope for children and youth, to make them believe in themselves and in the humanity again, to allow them to dream of the basic human rights, and to imagine justice. This what really matters for children and youth, at every part of our world.

ORIGINAL KEYNOTE DESCRIPTION

Playing to Protect; Protecting to Play

In Palestine, young people and children live with little hope and few of them can see any light at the end of the tunnel, after 74 years of endless brutality of a military occupation that controls every aspect of their lives; what they can buy and sell, what they work; who they can love and who they can't; what they can eat; when they can travel or move from one place to another. What makes things even worse for young people and children is the corrupt and undemocratic Palestinian leaders and the agreement between the super powerful countries to keep the injustice status quo as it is.

From my personal experience as a young person who lived in this reality and as youth worker, who used role-playing as a tool since more than 10 years, and using social circus as a tool for 4 years, I can argue that different forms of playing can be a powerful tool to protect young people and children from choices out of anger and self-harm toward themselves and toward others. The other side of this exploration is: how young people are able to discover new participatory and inclusive approaches they are not used to it? Are we going to focus on protecting them, or protecting our play?

Mohamad Rabah is the Executive Director for the Palestinian Circus School and co-founder of the Palestinian role-playing organization Bait Byout. He is a youth work specialist with a Master's degree in Community and Youth Work from Durham University, United Kingdom. Mohamad's professional expertise cover community and youth policy and practice; professional and personal development of young people; management in community settings; research in professional practice; and using non-formal learning tools such as circus and role-playing games to support the development of communities and young people.

The People: A Serious Role-playing Game Designed to Address a Humanitarian Crisis

Abstract: In this article, I present a case study of the serious role-play game *The People*, which was created as a response to the migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border in cooperation with an engaged collective of researchers and groups of activists. The game combines elements of role-playing, a board game, and cards to present the complexity of the situation in the Emergency State Zone on the Polish-Belarusian border, especially on the practical, social, and institutional levels. The purpose of the tool is to raise the participants' awareness of the current situation and to enhance an active search for solutions to the crisis.

The game enables participants to adopt a perspective of a border zone resident or a refugee, and ultimately modify the rules governing the world to make it fairer. Providing the participants with agency to reconstruct the game environment during the debriefing made it possible to generate numerous possible solutions at the level of direct interventions; e.g., providing shelters in forests, training residents in first aid; legal, e.g., access by doctors and media, allowing humanitarian organizations; and executive, e.g., more effective enforcement of European law. Also, the exposure to goals inconsistent with personal views under significant immersion evokes various strategies to deal with the clash, including passive agreement, rationalization, gentle disagreement, and extreme disagreement. Such a game can inspire a positive change in the level of participants' understanding, interesting solutions, activist attitudes, and empathy towards asylum seekers. However, the game can also expose the dangerous, existing mechanisms that pose a challenge to society, and what should be monitored and possibly mitigated in the future.

Keywords: serious games, refugees, role-playing games, migration crisis, humanitarian aid

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1. INTRODUCTION

The troubled times of existing humanitarian crises call for specific and radical reaction means. In this paper, I present the design of a serious role-playing game, *The People*, as a tool to support the search for solutions to the humanitarian crisis currently taking place in Poland. Since August 2021, the Polish society has been struggling to solve the problem of illegal migration on the Polish-Belarusian border (Grupa Granica 2021; HFPC 2021). Despite controversial settings, it became crucial to raise awareness of the problem and initiate a dialogue about possible solutions and consequences from local and national perspectives.

The game was developed in collaboration with *Badacze i Badaczki na Granicy* (Researchers on the Border), NGO *Wolno Nam* (We Are Allowed), and NGO *Grupa Granica* (The Border Group, a collective of engaged activists, lawyers, and researchers) as a tool to facilitate the discussion with high school students and university students on the subject. *The People* is published as open access (print-and-play) for teachers, educators, and facilitators willing to search for solutions and raise awareness amongst youth. The article includes a brief description of the situation and an overview of the game.

2. SERIOUS GAMES AND THE POWER OF ROLE-PLAY IN TIMES OF CRISIS

The reason for applying a game in such a delicate area like the refugee crisis is the belief that serious games are significantly effective in teaching complex problems and explaining the big picture behind them in a comprehensive way (Duke 1974, 131-44). Serious games may be defined as experimental,

rule-based, interactive environments in which players learn by taking actions and self-assessing their efforts through feedback mechanisms. Therefore, gaming provides a safe, interactive, and cooperative environment based on a simplified reality in which participants can experiment with decisions and negotiations (Duke 1974, 131-44). While playing, participants "observe the outcomes of their actions, and take responsibility for decision-making via problem-solving competencies, thus leading to a more active, transformative, and experiential reception of knowledge" (Vlachopoulos & Makri 2017, 1-33).

There is a broad field of research showing a positive correlation between games, role-play activities, and learning. Games with a role-play aspect tackle four dimensions of learning: knowing, doing, being, and relating (Daniau 2016, 423-444). From a constructivist perspective, players build new knowledge by processing novel information in relation to the elements they have already acquired (Wadsworth 2004, 24-158), including beliefs, experiences, or attitudes. In sociocultural terms, participants create a shared, fictional reality where they interact and learn from each other.

In the face of humanitarian crises, games not only enhance learning but also have a proven contribution to triggering empathy towards refugees, exploring the tough circumstances the refugees face, or revealing inhumane practices (Plewe and Fürsich 2018, 2470-87). Convincing stories can establish a sense of empathy from a cognitive and emotional view to assist people to understand and experience the worldview of others (Lamsa and Sintonen 2006, 106–20). Storytelling constitutes role-play games: RPGs are based on interactive, narrative stories, and mutual sensemaking. Evoking the player's alter-ego provides unique experiences of alternative perspectives and motivations. Thus, when it comes to fostering empathy, it is essential to help participants (through their alter-ego) identify with the subject of the story and experience real emotions (Belman and Flanagan 2010, 5–15).

Structured role-play is a promising tool for finding solutions, acquiring knowledge, and training skills necessary to navigate within the existing social crises (Hammer et al. 2018, 283-99). In the case of migration crises, it provides the elusive resources needed to democratically negotiate migrants' integration strategies and understand the refugee perspective through the adoption of a new, temporary social role. At the same time, players have a chance to explore their own identity (Bowman 2010; Daniau 2016, 423-44) and form an attitude toward the problem of the refugee crisis.

In games with the theme of humanitarian migration crises, there are several key elements of design, regardless of the medium and mechanics. This is important because, from the cognitive perspective, the message through design is stronger than the verbal one. First, it is the gameplay and decision-making from the refugee perspective. Second, it is graphical aesthetics pointing out the challenges, harsh conditions, even the application of colors and providing real data, pictures, and stories (Plewe and Fürsich 2018, 2470-87).

Crookall (2014, 416-27) emphasizes that the most fundamental element of the serious game is its debriefing. And the essence of good debriefing is the engagement of the participants. Debriefing can be motivated by various feelings: joy, satisfaction, anger, sadness—but it should touch the depth of the player's feelings. However, the role of debriefing is dual: in role-playing games, it is also a time for de-roleing—a safe outro from the role. In games related to very serious issues, like refugee crises, it is especially important to not hurt participants mentally, especially those deeply immersed and involved emotionally.

Finally, there have been multiple games focused on the perspective of refugees in a variety of contexts such as *Bury Me My Love* (The Pixel Hunt 2017), *Path Out* (Path Out 2017), and *The Migrant Trail* (Gigantic Mechanic 2013). Such games most commonly explore the fleeing or the life of asylum seekers and foster awareness and empathy towards them. The contribution of this paper and the game *The People* lies in its exploration of the refugee problem additionally through the lens of the community affected by refugees in fragile socio-political settings. This gap is important to address because borderland residents not only need to be more aware and empathic towards refugees fleeing

from war, but they should also know how they can take more meaningful action in relation to the bigger picture and the problems that can arise in this process.

3. THE STORY BEHIND: HUMANITARIAN CRISIS ON THE POLISH-BELARUSIAN BORDER

In August 2021, the Belarusian president, Alexander Lukashenko, had started to organize a movement of asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Iraq with the promise of a safe passage to Europe, apparently in reprisal for sanctions that Brussels had imposed on his regime. Belarusian security forces transported thousands of asylum seekers to the Polish border for the purpose of escalating the crisis. Most of the people were caught, and illegally and brutally pushed back to Belarus by Poland's border guards (Grupa Granica 2021, 1-37).

Nevertheless, hundreds managed to escape into the forests. Trapped between the violence of the Polish and Belarusian authorities, families lived in makeshift shelters as night-time temperatures fell below zero. In response to the Belarusian threats, Poland increased the presence of border guards and troops in the area and created a two-mile-deep State of Emergency Zone (SEZ) covering 183 villages (Journal of Laws 2021a; Journal of Laws, 2021b). According to recent changes in the law, asylum seekers are obliged to leave the territory of Poland even if they make an application for international protection and without assessing the risk of human rights violation (HFPC 2021).

Dozens of checkpoints control the SEZ, which is inaccessible to humanitarian aid workers and media. The soldiers stop and search every car as police vehicles, drones, and helicopters monitor the area. Every day in the forests, border guards, soldiers, and aid workers try to reach the asylum seekers hidden among the trees. If the Polish forces arrive before the volunteers, they send the migrants back to Belarus, with the risk that their health may deteriorate. Many of those found in the woods can barely walk after traveling long distances on foot. Some have not eaten in days. The people often have signs of hypothermia. There are fatalities (UNHCR 2021).

The big picture of the situation on the Polish-Belarussian border is blurred and difficult to comprehend. Due to the complexity of the crisis, citizens are passive and do not engage in solving the problem. Also, SEZ dwellers are affected by the crisis in the professional, social, or psychological spheres. The tensions that arise within the community only make it difficult to act effectively.

4. *THE PEOPLE* ROLE-PLAYING GAME AS A SOCIAL INTERVENTION

The People was designed to address a social problem, evoke discussion, and eventually, initiate a change in the perspectives of the players on the ongoing migration crisis. It refers to the concept of games as social interventions: deliberate attempts to change societal assumptions. The game was informed by social intervention design guidelines, including an iterative co-design process, ensuring social realism and acknowledging sociable aspects of the gameplay, in particular the presence of other players (De Giuli, Zamboni, Tion, 2011). In *The People*, each of the game elements was intentionally designed to resemble the reality of the crisis setting.

The game itself simulates a social system in the State Emergency Zone. Players in the game take on the roles of local people living in the SEZ. It is played in groups of 4-12 people. One player represents groups of refugees fleeing. The title, *The People*, refers to the term local people call the refugees in forests.

Goal of the game: The goal of *The People* is to reflect on the complexity of the refugee crisis environment, by immersing into a game set in the Polish-Belarussian border zone. Participants discover the conditions that the refugees face but also deal with the social implications of the crisis in a small, interconnected community living in the State of Emergency Zone. The game raises awareness of the shortcomings of current solutions, being a call to action for the participants.

Goal in the game: The goal in the game is dependent on the hidden motivation (see Table 1). Players either support the fleeing of refugees or block it. If the motivation is to block, players win if more groups of the people manage to leave the SEZ. Oppositely, if players have a hidden motivation *to support*, they win if more groups of the people escape from the forest on the border.

Roles in the game: Players in the game take universal social roles typical for the villages located in the SEZ. Their roles represent either armed forces or civilians. The first group consists of employees of the army, police, or national services (policeman, soldier, border guard, national park guard, volunteer army soldier). The roles that belong to the second group are examples of civil occupations in the SEZ (shopkeeper, lumberjack, teacher, activist, researcher).

Roles in the game are interconnected in a simple way by family ties, friendship, love, or everyday life. This information is underlined in the brief descriptions of the roles that players are given at the beginning. Quite often players face a dilemma: either to follow their motivation or respect the ties described in the role brief. The game depicts the real divisions within the communities – at home, between friends, and among mutually dependent neighbors.

4.1 *The People* Gameplay, Resources, and the Feedback System

The People is an RPG-based mix of a board game with card drafting and simultaneous action selection. The gameplay consists of placing cards on fields face down on the board and discussing them with other participants through the lens of a role. The board represents the Białowieża forest in Poland, where the refugees try to pass every day. The board is divided into 4x6 fields. There is no limit to placing cards on a certain field. The game is played in rounds (days). Every round a group of refugees represented by a pawn (or groups, if there are more) moves forward, or forward to the left/right. One of the participants controls the asylum seekers, by moving the pawn by the end of each round. If the pawn stands on a field with cards placed by other players, the cards are revealed immediately, starting with the top card. Each card influences the movements of the people (pawn) somehow and creates a continuation of a storyline. Citizens do not know where refugees will go, nor do asylum seekers know what to expect in each of the fields, which reflects the uncertainty in the borderland.

The end of the board is marked with a car and the word "cousin," which informally means a person that transports the people illegally to another country, most frequently to Germany. In real life, the refugees contact the cousin via phone and discuss where, on the forest edge, they could be picked up.

Players who support refugees aim to help them to cross the board, while players whose goal is to block intend to stop the people by placing suitable cards on the board. There is no order for card placement to reflect the chaotic setting and lack of communication between actors of the crisis. Each round players may place up to two cards on the board on a chosen field. Players may try to identify the motivations of their peers by the focus on the revealed cards and the order of placement; however, it is challenging due to confusion and lack of communication.

The movement of the pawn and the storyline based on cards is the basic feedback system. Each

group of refugees has an additional marker showing how many supplies they have left (see Figure 4). It provides information on how many rounds/days the people have for getting to the end of the board (see Figure 3). At the end of every round, the people consume one supply (see Figure 2), which is marked by tearing off the piece of paper. However, the players have a chance to bring additional supplies to the refugees by using a suitable card.

In terms of the decision-making system, players decide by picking supportive or blocking cards (see Tables 2-5) and placing them either on chosen fields or applying them on a player, the latter of which influences the capabilities of other players by blocking their movements for 2 rounds. Decisions depend on internal motivation and strategy. Players either place a card on the board, place a card "on a player" to block/unlock him/her, or exchange up to 3 cards for another from the pile if none of the cards is suitable. Therefore, players decide if they use a card or exchange it. Placing a card gives a possibility to support/block the people in the forest. Applying a card on a player enables excluding him/her from the game for 1 round; however, it always requires a narrative explanation. Therefore players represent e.g., conflicts between family members who intend to get their relatives or friends arrested. However, sometimes people are in conflict with other players who, in fact, share their motivation, but adopt different strategies.

Cards represent means of basic support in the forest, means of legal support, actions of uniformed forces, natural obstacles, and interactions between the community. In fact, they have four specific roles:

- **Educational:** provide information on the situation, means of intervention, and sources of conflict.
- **Decisive:** represent consequences of contradictory actions, lack of an existing solution for the crisis, and negative consequences of chaotic, illegal humanitarian aid.
- **Underline the complexity of the situation on three layers:** social, legal, and ethical.
- **Compose storyline:** develop the story with new events as a result of the collective actions of the participants.

When a group of refugees (a pawn) reaches the "Cousin" or gets 2 International protection cards, the players discover the story behind their migration. If a group of refugees loses all the resources, players never get to know their story and who they were. In the end, motivations are revealed and participants who achieved the goal by blocking or supporting the refugees can recognize each other.

After the gameplay participants reflect together on the cards that should be added to (or excluded from) the game in order to achieve their goals and find a satisfactory compromise for representatives of various organizations. They can also modify the rules of the game, to come up with an ethical, responsible solution for the crisis at the policy or everyday life levels. In total, the game and the debriefing take around 120 minutes.

6. SUMMARY

Playing role-play games promises various social benefits, also in terms of solving problems of migration crises. Games, designed as interventions, have a chance to be a source of new solutions, raise awareness in society, break taboos, but also increase empathy towards people affected by the crisis.

However, it is essential to consider how the design process is conducted, who the stakeholders are to co-design the intervention, and what the presumptions are. There is no objectivity in game design; nevertheless, a purposeful iterative process, and play-testing stakeholders with different points of view provides a chance to translate the reality into a fair experience.

In *The People*, gameplay was designed to emphasize the human dilemmas faced by the inhabitants of the borderland and the psychological mechanisms that guide people with different motivations. Among those mechanisms was also violence justification in the name of obeying orders. However, on the meta level, it serves as a trigger for discussing these attitudes among youth and raising self-awareness.

Therefore, the game functions as a tool for learning, awareness building, and self-reflection, but also as a pretext for generating new ideas in times of humanitarian crisis. In the future, qualitative and quantitative analysis will be carried out to investigate the changes in the awareness of participants, activist attitudes, as well as the long-term impact of the game on its participants.

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Appendix A

Figure 1: Examples of character cards for a member of the Armed Forces and a Civilian.

Figure 2: An example of a secret motivation marker: to Block "the people" from crossing.

Figure 3: Model of the board: map of the forest.
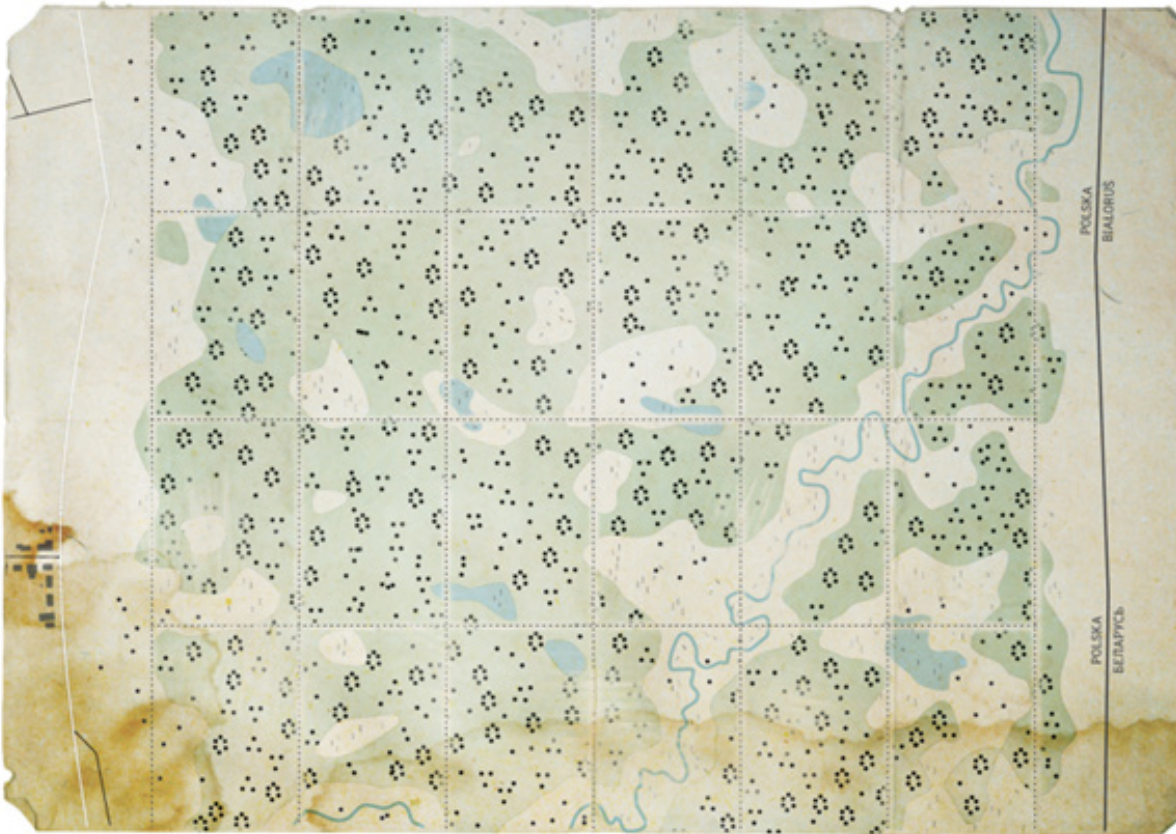
Figure 4: The table with resources such as packs of supplies.

Table 1: Conditions of victory depend on the hidden profile (motivation) of whether to block or support.

Motivation	Victory conditions
To block	More groups blocked than escaped
To support	More groups escaped than blocked

Table 2: Table with card events of basic support.

	Event Name	Description	Impact on the gameplay	Quantity in the game
Cards of basic support	Sleeping mat	People who enter the forest are often unprepared. They sleep on the ground and get sick easily.	The refugee group moves forward (+1)	3
	Sleeping bag	People who enter the forest are often unprepared. They sleep on the ground and get the flu easily.	The refugee group moves forward (+1)	3
	Smartphone	A smartphone is the main navigation tool. People also use it in case of emergency or to contact their relatives.	The refugee group moves forward (+2)	2
	Powerbank	Power banks are essential to use smartphones - crucial tools for navigation, emergency, and contact with relatives.	The refugee group moves forward (+2)	2
	Backpack with supplies	Activists (alone or organized in groups) often look for refugees and bring them backpacks with essential supplies. They hide from uniform services to avoid push-backs of the people.	The refugee group does not spend resources on this day (round).	4
	Tent	People who enter the forest are often unprepared. Tents provide minimum thermal comfort and protect from rain/snow.	The refugee group moves forward (+1)	2
	Food in jar	Activists cook meals for the refugees hidden in the forests and bring them secretly.	The refugee group moves forward (+1)	2
	Medicines	Refugees are often sick because of poor conditions: freezing, hunger, thirst, fatigue and wounds after beating by uniformed officials.	The refugee group moves forward (+2)	2
	Chocolate bar	Sweets are easy in consumption, light and provide energy for further walk.	The refugee group moves forward (+1)	2
	Drinking water	The people often suffer from thirst: water in the swamps is dirty and leads to diarrhea.	The refugee group moves forward (+1)	4
	Green light	Residents of the Zone light green lamps to show refugees-friendly, welcoming houses. Though, hosting a refugee threatens a prosecution of people smuggling. Also, such houses are observed by uniformed services.	The refugee group moves forward (+1)	4

Table 3: Table with card events of natural obstacles

Cards of natural obstacles	Frost	People face tough conditions conducive to hypothermia, e.g. low temperatures, humidity, and dehydration.	The people don't move despite other cards.	6
	Swamp	There are numerous swamps in the Białowieża forest. People get quickly wet (and cold) by falling there or even drowning.	The people go backward (-2)	4
	Fallen trees	Fallen trees make it difficult to pass and walking over exhausts the people.	The people go backward (-1)	2
	Dirty water	Thirsty people often drink water from swamps or puddles as they quickly run out of drinking water. It leads to diarrhea and serious stomach problems.	The people don't move despite other cards.	4

Table 3: Table with cards of uniformed services.

Cards of uniformed services	Push-back	The illegal procedure of pushing-back the people to the Belarussian border where they are often beaten by Belarussian corps and forced to come back to Polish territory again (and again).	The people go back to the border field (beginning).	4
	Drone watch	Forests are monitored by military drones. If the refugees are found, they are immediately pushed-back to Belarus and start their walk again.	The people go backward (-1)	2
	Helicopter watch	Forests are patrolled by helicopters. The people are afraid of them, so they hide in the forests and wait for a long time. If found, they are pushed-back to Belarus.	The people go backward (-1)	3
	Destroyed phone	Uniformed officials sometimes destroy phones or SIM cards belonging to the refugees to prevent them from coming back to the border.	The people go backward (-2)	4
	Military vehicle	Professional military vehicles with armed soldiers patrol the forests.	The people go backward (-1)	3
	Border guards with dogs	Border guards patrol the forests with dogs to find the people who hide there.	The people go backward (-1)	2

Table 4: Table with cards of legal support.

Cards of legal support	RP Ombudsman	Ombudsman is an official appointed by the government or by parliament to protect the freedom and rights of the people.	Deletes all actions on the field.	5
	Interim	Refugees may obtain the internationally recognized status of refugee. It's a complex procedure, taking up to 24h while they're waiting hidden in the forest.	If 3 are collected, the group is SAVED.	6
	Power of attorney	The people can apply for the power of attorney. Despite that, sometimes they are pushed-back anyway and the papers "disappear."	Deletes all actions BELOW the card.	5

Table 5: Table with cards of interaction between community members.

Cards of interaction between community members	Police	Police in the Zone intervene when it's necessary and control cars/people entering or leaving the Zone. They check trunks and car interiors.	Chosen player is blocked for 2 rounds.	10
	Media	Currently neither media nor humanitarian aid is allowed to enter the Zone. Nevertheless, sometimes media representatives pass illegally and document the situation.	Unblocks the blocked player (including yourself)	10
	Happening	Local people sometimes try to influence the government by organizing happenings - pickets, marches and blocking streets.	Unblocks the blocked player (including yourself)	2

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Towards the Post-Modern Art Week:
Anthropophagic Reflexes in the Brazilian Larp Scenes

Abstract: The Brazilian Modern Art Week of 1922, a milestone in the Brazilian artistic avant-garde, completed its centenary last year. The intention of this text is to reflect on larp using the concept of anthropophagy: a cultural metaphor created by Oswald de Andrade, one of the members of the Art Week. Anthropophagy is characterized by the de-hierarchization of the hegemonic places of culture and by the critical digestion of the Other. Andrade's reflections crossed time: they influenced literature, theater, painting, cinema and music, to name a few. Applied to larps, the concept of anthropophagy is discussed from the point of view of the communicology of Vilém Flusser, who was also influenced by Andrade's thought. Finally, this essay seeks to reveal larp's resonance with the Theatre of the Oppressed, proposed by Augusto Boal – also one of those influenced by anthropophagic thinking. With this resonance, I seek to highlight the transformative potential of anthropophagy, here considered inherent to larps, interpreting one Brazilian larp as a case study. Although this essay does not commit the naivety of treating larp as a panacea, its ultimate intention is to highlight the dialogical and social character of larps, as well as their potential to challenge power structures.

Keywords: anthropophagy, larp, art theory, Brazil, Theatre of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal

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1. INTRODUCTION

This text emerges from the maturation of a previously published manifesto (Iuama 2018a). It reflects, after having our waves of Dark Coke and Caipirinha with Nordic Ice (Falcão 2014), what the characteristics of larps produced in Brazil would be.

For this, it makes use of bibliographic research (Boon 2017), as well as taking advantage of the fact that the author circulates through this subculture in an autoethnographic essay (Bolen 2017). Instead of seeking to outline an overview of larp, it seeks to study (Norander and Bradhorst 2017) a single larpscript.

2. MODERN ART WEEK: ANTECEDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

At the beginning of the 20th century, Brazil underwent several changes: industrialization was consolidated and European immigration policies were enacted. Thus, cultural exchange with Europe started to intensify (Nascimento 2015). In this context, the 1922 Modern Art Week emerged as a manifesto of Brazilian artistic production – at that moment, in dialogue with European avant-garde movements, especially Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism and dadaism.

Later, in 1928, Oswald de Andrade, one of the creators of the Week, prepared the "Anthropophagous Manifesto," in an attempt to recollect the anthropophagy of the Tupinambás (Brazilian autochthonous population) as a cultural metaphor (de Andrade 2011). For Andrade, Anthropophagy means the Brazilian tendency towards dialogue with the different, in search of a critical digestion, both of the Self and the Other, with the goal of producing the new (Iuama and Silva 2022). Anthropophagy is both a critique of culture and a poetic model characterized by the de-hierarchization of the hegemonic places of culture and an assimilation of values guided by otherness (Silva 2020). It is worth noting that Oswald de Andrade had more dialogue with the European population than with the Brazilian autochthonous population, given the long periods he spent in countries such as France, or as part of the Brazilian elite

– notoriously white. Therefore, more than historical accuracy, what is projected here is a metaphor, with the intention not of rescuing a cultural heritage, but of building one.

Anthropophagy is certainly the movement that most yielded results from the Modern Art Week. It gained popularity in the 1950s when rescued by the Noigandres group, who started Concrete Poetry in Brazil. In the 1960s, there was a profusion of artistic movements whose source is Andrade's anthropophagy (Xavier 2017). In the plastic arts, in 1967 Hélio Oiticica created the exhibition Tropicália, formed by a garden-labyrinth with poems-objects that advocated, among other themes, that cultural purity was a myth. In cinema, it influenced Cinema Novo, with its aesthetics of hunger, and tensions between the roles of colonizers and colonized. In music, Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso founded Tropicalismo, a movement that takes its name from Oiticica's work and is recognized as one of the most important heirs of Andrade's provocation. In education, Paulo Freire is indicated as an author whose work dialogues with Andrade's manifesto (Silva 2021); in legislation, Gilberto Gil, at the time Brazil's Minister of Culture, endorsed the global launch of Creative Commons in 2004 (Branco and Britto 2013).

Despite a myriad of examples, the most notorious heir of anthropophagy for the present work is theater. José Celso Martinez Corrêa (commonly called just Zé Celso) led Teatro Oficina, a theater group founded in 1958. Among the authors that Zé Celso directed in his career, Augusto Boal stands out, who would later propose the Theater of the Oppressed, and would advocate that Anthropophagy is "a citizen's duty" (Boal 2009, 36).

3. WHAT ABOUT LARPS?

First, it is necessary to recognize Theater of the Oppressed as an interactive drama related to larps (Bowman 2010), with propositions about the former appearing as pertinent to discussions about the latter (e.g. Montola 2008; Harviainen 2016; Iuama 2021). It is possible to infer that when Boal instigates the taking over of the means of cultural production, in the sense that spectators become actors themselves, he is still trapped in a time whose paradigm does not admit a non-hegemonic artistic expression, as is the case of the larps. When read in the light of 21st century RPG Studies, the expression Theater of the Oppressed, in his work, is easily replaced by larp, without prejudice to understanding. Hence the argument that larps are the heirs of a movement that has the Theater of the Oppressed as one of its precursors (Bowman 2010; Hoover et al. 2018), to the point that knowledge of Boal's work "has explicitly influenced the development of larp art" (Pohjola 2015: 54).

Second, considering that Media Culture is one of the pillars for role-playing game studies (Deterding and Zagal 2018) and that the role-playing process is, in essence, a bleed-in (Montola 2014; Bowman 2017; Bowman and Baird 2022) from the player's biography to the character (Iuama 2018b), it can be said that anthropophagy appears as a critical digestion of the media and biographical contents that will be mixed and transmuted during the role-playing process; with identity being built from the constant digestion of contacts with other individuals, these being both concrete individuals and fictional individuals (accessed by the most varied media), everything that spills over from the person to the character during the role-play is a by-product of an anthropophagic phenomenon. And, consequently, everything that spills over from the character to the person will be a stimulus to be critically digested in a new step of the continuous process of identity construction. Hence the main relationship between anthropophagy and larps: the construction of the character is per se an anthropophagic process, a digestion between the different media and biographical references of the person and his interlocutors; during larp, the bleed-in and bleed-out phenomena reinforce the anthropophagic exchange between person and character; after the larp, the same becomes an element constituting the set of references to be continuously digested by the person.

Finally, when considering larp as a medium, the communicational discussion proposed here receives support from Vilém Flusser, another of those influenced by Andrade's thinking (Klengel 2013; Iuama and Silva 2022). For Flusser (2014, 35) "human communication is the storage, processing and transmission of acquired information." When placed in dialogue with other authors, other terms assert themselves as equivalent to storage, processing and transmission: respectively culture, dialogue and discourse.

According to Flusser, studying communication is less about studying messages than studying structures, hence its communicology, that is, the "meta-discourse of all human communications in such a way that the structure of such communications becomes evident, in order to be able to modify it." (Flusser 2007, 272) In summary, it is appropriate to seek to modify communication structures in order to transform society.

There are four information transmission structures (Flusser 2014): circle, amphitheater, pyramid, and bundle. The circle is the structure in which receivers and senders are in a position to respond to each other, so that reversal to information processing is always possible.

In the amphitheater structure, the circle is broken up into stage and audience. The individuals who are on stage are privileged to transmit to the individuals who are in the audience – thus creating the split between active transmitters and passive receivers. It is worth mentioning that it is precisely this theatrical structure that is questioned in the Theater of the Oppressed (Boal 2019).

The pyramid structure includes the notion of relays, which disseminate information from a sender to a receiver. The sender's inaccessibility by the receiver for information processing builds the notion of authorship, here taken as synonymous with authority. It is the basis for creating an elite that wields authority over a mass.

Finally, in the bundle structure, the sender becomes invisible. It sends in the void, and the receivers tune into this void, ideally precluded from any possibility of processing. For Flusser, it is this structure that characterizes the mass media and fascism.

In this sense, the communicational structure of larps, essentially dialogic (Iuama 2021), stands as an important counterpoint to help in the modification of contemporary hegemonic structures, essentially unbalanced to the discursive pole.

Since the purpose of this text involves comparing larps with the Theater of the Oppressed, definitions of both are appropriate. Briefly speaking, larps are "embodied role-based interactions and physically performed role-play" (Harviainen et al. 2018: 87), with role-play being the activity in which "players usually individually create, enact, and govern the actions of characters, defining and pursuing their own goals, with great choice in what actions they can attempt." (Zagal and Deterding 2018: 46).

Theater of the Oppressed, in turn, starts from the premise that "the words oppressed and spectator are almost synonymous. A dialogue requires at least two interlocutors. . . The obscenity begins when the dialogue turns into a monologue, when one of the interlocutors. . . specializes in *sending* messages and the other, in *receiving* and *obeying* them." (Boal 1980: 26) In this sense, the theater, which once was "the people singing freely in the open air: the people were the creator and recipient of the theatrical spectacle" (Boal 2019: 11), suffered two setbacks throughout history: first, the hegemonic powers separated the actors from the spectators, then created hierarchies among the actors. Thus, Theater of the Oppressed is the theater's return movement in that sense of popular manifestation where the sender and receiver roles would no longer be crystallized. The main differences between both reside in both the role of the director, liable to be ignored in larps (although, sometimes, the role of GM sometimes replaces it), and in the need for exercises to increase the performance skills of spect-actors in the Theater of the Oppressed.

In the context of Theater of the Oppressed, the essential difference between an exercise and a game is that, while the former is a monologue, the latter is a dialogue (Boal 2014): it presupposes

the Other. In accordance with its anthropophagic root, it is guided by otherness – therefore, it is fundamentally political. Thus, it can be considered "a process of sensitization of the body, the look and the performance of the subject in his daily life" (Canda 2014, 22). The same can be said about larps (see Bowman 2010; Iuama 2021), although in this case the fictional layer involves other issues: at the same time that the distancing of the body from everyday situations can distract from this sensitization of the body, the metaxis (participation of the fictional world in the social world) can allow a body to perform situations that, without this fictional layer, could be impossible to be expressed and, consequently, sensitized (Boal 2002).

It is worth noting that the transformations do not operate only in the social aspect, but also in the psychic: one of the confirmations of this statement is the *rainbow of desire* method (Boal 2002), which, although it contains differences, is often compared to Jacob Moreno's psychodrama (Oliveira and Araújo 2012). The central concept of this method is *metáxis*.

During the theater (and also during a larp, as defended here), the individual creates images produced from the oppressions of his daily reality. In this sense, metáxis[1] is the statement that "in the second (aesthetic) world, a person exercises itself to modify the first (social) world" (Boal 2002, 57). In this way, an individual makes use of his imagination and the playful structure to operate transformations both in the internal world(s) and in the social reality, an affirmation that builds bridges with the creation of communities, problem solving, and identity exploration – functions of role-playing games (Bowman 2010). In summary, we could define metáxis as an anthropophagic process between fictional and social realities.

4. PARTICIPATORY AWARENESS AND PLAYFUL CONSTANT: THE BRAZILIAN SCENE(S)

It is fruitless to try to encompass the diversity of Brazilian larp scenes: documentation is scarce, dialogue between them does not often take place, and dissemination is precarious (Iuama and Falcão 2022). What can be said is that the first anthropophagic mark is notorious: the *blockbuster* – a larp genre that is characterized by the use of an aesthetic exuberance and a combination of puzzles, events, power hierarchies and conflict agendas (Fatland and Montola 2015) – is not common for us, whether due to the financial precariousness of the designers and organizers, or the lack of interest in this aesthetic.

Thus, the anthropophagic aesthetic appears less as pastiche, more as palimpsest. It is not the attempt to achieve a blockbuster aesthetic, without the corresponding budget. This also exists in Brazil, of course. But it is not the main characteristic of Brazilian production. As a palimpsest, it seeks the critical assimilation of foreign influences, without losing its own verve: an overlay logic. In larps, this cultural exchange took place by devouring other larp traditions (Falcão 2014). As anthropophagi, Brazilian larpers digested it in their own way.

In this context, *Evangelho 2020* (Prado 2021) is a larp that represents anthropophagic poetics very well. Created in 2021, the game reflects the social chaos experienced by Brazil in 2020: a government that flirts with fascism on a daily basis (Arruda and Iuama 2021), the Covid pandemic reaping more than 200,000 people, economic catastrophe, environmental destruction, and the tearing of the social fabric, to cite just a few examples. In the larp's fiction, a streamer carries out shows, in the near future, where he applies a truth serum to former supporters of the president, so that they reveal the reasons that made him support the "messiah" (a joke about the president's middle name), despite the atrocities perpetrated.

While one of the players plays the role of the streamer, the others are Evangelists (nickname

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1   It is important to emphasize that Boal's metaxis is a subversion of Plato's metaxis, since, although it starts from the same notion of participation (to unite without confusing), in Boal's case, metaxis is the search in the fictional world for improvements in the social world - a premise that goes against the notion of fiction as an imperfect copy of an imperfect copy (Plato 2017).

that the zealot supporters of the messiah have received). Both must research before larp starts: while the streamer must search for news of government atrocities, evangelists must research comments on social media from real supporters, and build their characters from the profiles of those supporters.

The larp plays out like a talk show. The innovation is that, as a parody of the profusion of *live streamings* that took place in 2020, the larp should itself be a live, broadcasted on social media. Anyone who is watching, despite not being inserted in the magic circle and in the larp social contract, can comment and these comments must be considered by the streamer – a social expansion of the contract that distinguishes players from non-players that characterizes pervasive gaming (Montola, Stenros, and Waern 2009).

The author himself points out that "[He] believe[s] that understanding the reasons of those who support horror is crucial to devising strategies of struggle. [He] also believe[s] that larp is the production of knowledge and an instrument of combat" (Prado 2021, 3). In this sense, it purposely weakens the barriers between in-game and out-of-game, and takes advantage of the playfulness of the experience to expand the players' political repertoire. It is overtly politically positioned, so that it evokes the notion of *political poetics* - the original name Boal called his Theater of the Oppressed (Boal 2019).

It does this by borrowing and stacking different techniques and aesthetics: the fever of live streamed podcasts from amateur interviewers, the countless number of digital influencers who support the president, the identity poems (Holter 2012), and the mockumentary trend, to mention a few. This combination makes the larp sound like a pastiche with the goal of becoming a parody: a sharp social critique. It is based on the premise of being an unpretentious comedy fiction, to actually deliver an instrument of political awareness and discussion about events in the social world.

5. CONCLUSION

"Only Anthropophagy unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically." (de Andrade 2011, 67). This is the opening part of the 1928 Manifesto. Perhaps this is the greatest truth he proposes. On the one hand, it does not matter if we are roaming the cities like vampires from the World of Darkness (wearing trench coats, despite the tropical climate); if we are crossing swords in a medieval battle (despite this weapons that were never part of the history of Brazil, who saw no need for metallurgy until colonization in the 16th century); if we are wandering through an event while hunting international criminals; or if we are locked in a room aiming to change the future of our country: only anthropophagy unites us. Poetically.
On the other hand, larp, regardless of which country creates it, is the Other's game. It presupposes the dialogic. It is, therefore, anthropophagic, since "all that matters is what is not mine" (de Andrade 2011, 67). It dies, in the absence of cultural exchange. Despite the geography, only anthropophagy unites us. Playfully.

Within the scope of RPG Studies, the notion of anthropophagy is seen as a coherent tool with the blurred (if not non-existent) perspective of the division between sender and receiver, I and Other, product and process, researcher and researched. Everything participates.

This essay does not seek to close an argument. Instead, it intends to launch a series of uncertainties, to be discussed. The anthropophagy is not exclusive to Brazilian larp production: perhaps we, who are familiar with breathing it artistically, only have a term to describe something that happens to most of us players. The Theater of the Oppressed metaxis perhaps explains the social activism sometimes seen in larpers. Flusser's circular communicational structure is perhaps indicative of why the fascist communicational structure (the word equivalent to bundle in Latin is *fasces*, which gives rise to the term fascism) often bothers us. Perhaps it is precisely in these marginal theoretical strands, in these

oppressed studies, that some of the understandings of why we continue to be fascinated by this "Game of the Other" are to be found.

Finally, both Andrade and Flusser placed their bets on *Homo ludens*, on the player, as the hope for a more ethical future. "The active life of this being of the future will be the ethical creation of deliberate and replaceable worlds. And the contemplative life will be the vision of the dependence of all these worlds on the ineffable" (Flusser 2017, 374). Such a statement sounds very close to the daily life of a larper. For both, in addition to these idealized beings of the future being players, they are guided by intersubjectivity, by otherness. In the bottom line, maybe what these (among other) authors are implying is that we do not role-play because we are human. We are only human because we role-play: occasionally we not only feel what the Other feels – empathy – but we *are* the Other.

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Playing with Wonders: Objects, Role-Playing Games, and the Cultural Legacy of Bispo do Rosário for the City of Rio de Janeiro

Abstract: We know that objects shape thought, as bearers of meaning and as the focal points of memory. Our question as artists and larpwrights was how those objects might affect the act of thinking itself. From this initial thought, we developed the notion of Living Objects — elements created to cause people to have strange new ideas and awaken thoughts beyond those prompted by reason alone — and sought to employ them in the micro role-playing games we presented to people in Rio de Janeiro in order to stimulate such an exploration of fantasy, desire, and daydreaming. The theoretical underpinning of our work relies upon the recovery of wonder discussed by critics like Kareem, Brain, and others. Within this endeavor, we presented Living Objects as fragments that provide a joke (*witz*). Witz is a concept explored by the Jena Romantic philosophers, in which poetic fragments of words influence thought or cause strangeness in normal ways of thinking, and cause derangement in the current logic. With this, they enable new creative paths for imagination.

In doing so, we drew upon the cultural heritage of the city of Rio de Janeiro, especially the art of Bispo do Rosário, who produced a number of distinctive artistic objects during the decades that he was a patient in a psychiatric hospital. And in this work, we focus especially on a piece called "The Presentation Cloak."

These objects are central elements of micro role-playing games that we created to encourage people to experience the stories linked to the life of Bispo do Rosário and the spaces he imagined about Rio de Janeiro. These games also inspired the participants to create stories from these objects, realizing how the influence of these elements stimulates imagination, belief in wonder, and immersion in the cultural universe created by Bispo do Rosário.

Keywords: cultural heritage, role-playing games, Bispo do Rosário, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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1. INTRODUCTION

"One day I just showed up."
– Arthur Bispo do Rosário

This work began with an initial reflection: we know that objects reflect thinking, perception, and storytelling; the question is how far can this be pushed so as to spark imagination and open new modes of thought? This thought was intensified from the contact with the artistic work of Arthur Bispo do Rosário, an artist who spent almost all his life as a patient in a psychiatric hospital, and produced more than 800 artworks, and became one of the biggest names in contemporary art in Brazil.

We asked new questions: how can objects influence our knowledge about the culture of a place? How could an object be used to rescue stories and memories linked to a city, and thereby expand the existing cultural heritage of the place? How can storytelling and role-playing connect with these objects, and from this mixture emerge narratives and role-playing games that involve the history of Rio de Janeiro? These questions are guided by Sarah Tindal Kareem's theories about the marvelous; Robert Silverman and Thomas Hankins' ideas about instruments of the imagination; and Luciana Hidalgo's observations about the life of Bispo do Rosário. With the questions and theories established, we carried out experiments with volunteer participants, through the use of the Storytelling Cloak — an object inspired by the work of Bispo and aimed at creating stories. These experiences, and the reflections on them, will be narrated in this paper. First, we will make a presentation of Bispo do Rosário and the theories that served as base.

2. BISPO DO ROSÁRIO AND HIS ART

Arthur Bispo do Rosário was a patient who, between comings and goings, lived for about fifty years in Colônia Juliano Moreira. This hospital for decades was used as a space to house, in addition to those classified as sick, the marginalized and unwanted of society. Diagnosed as schizophrenic, he created more than 800 artworks, using fragments and materials he could obtain at the asylum. According to Luciana Hidalgo:

> At first, in the absence of material, Bispo would have unraveled the Colony's own blue uniform to reuse the threads in his embroidery. Undoing his own uniform, deconstructing one of the great symbols of psychiatric power and reusing the raw material to build his parallel universe, his utopia. (Hidalgo 2011)[1]

His creative process consisted of resignifying elements and creating objects, which referred to people, places, and memories. Whether they were real or imaginary, Bispo mixed reality and fiction in his pieces, building worlds in the midst of the space that had been restricted: "He began to pick up objects from the hospice and reorder them in a different aesthetic, colorful, playful, subjective" (Hidalgo 2011).

It was this process that inspired us to structure a way of creating stories, fueled by the "poetics of delirium," a concept that is defined by João A. Frayze-Pereira in the preface to Marta Dantas' book about Bispo:

> . . . the word delirium suggests not the strict meaning fixed by psychopathology, but the broader meaning that it receives when in the art field context: deriving from "lira" or "furrow," delirium means moving away from the groove, that is, from the straight path of reason, in this case, of artistic rationality.[2] (Frayze-Pereira, foreword to Arthur Bispo do Rosário A Poética do Delírio 2009)

Based on this poetics that goes beyond reason, and also on the three characteristics that Luciana Hidalgo points out as striking in the Bispo's works — the autobiographical, autofictional and historical elements — we use this triad as a basis for the experiences we carry out. For this, we created a cloak, inspired by one of the most famous pieces by Bispo do Rosário: the Presentation Cloak.

3. WONDER, STRANGENESS, LIVING OBJECTS, FRAGMENTS, AND WITZ

One of the hypotheses on which we base this work is that the objects created by Bispo do Rosário cause wonder and enchantment in people. This process facilitates thinking that goes beyond reason. In this we follow the understanding of Sarah Tindal Kareem who, when studying the Wonder in the fantasy literature of the 18th century, said that this type of sensation involves two forms: ". . . both wonder at and wonder about objects. These two types of wonder correspond to two distinct meanings of the English verb wonder, denoting surprise and marvel on the one hand and doubtful curiosity on the other" (Kareem 2014, 8).

In this way, the pieces created by Bispo caused enchantment among those who had contact with them, even more so when they left the places in which they were created and began to circulate between

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1   Translated by the authors.
2   Translated by the authors.

museums and exhibition spaces. The generation of this kind of enchantment leads to what Charles Lefort defines as the unthinkable, as João Frayze-Pereira reminds us. According to Frayze-Pereira: "Claude Lefort defines the unthinkable of a work as the work that it itself performs with the receiver (reader or spectator) and that, therefore, it depends on the receiver to make itself think, to consecrate itself as a proper work"[3] (Frayze-Pereira, foreword to *Arte por um Fio* 2022, 21). In other words, we can understand unthinkable to mean an ineffable property or quality whose significance or meaning can only be realized in an observer's active engagement with a work.

This unthinkable, and the questions generated by the contact with the cloak, make a conceptual bridge with what we define as living objects: "Living objects are a developing concept, but at this moment, they represent objects created to have their own lives, better yet, to influence and be influenced. They have an inherent narrative, a story to tell, which contains empathy and sympathy" (Rezende, Araújo, and Portinari 2016, 31). Since the objects created by Bispo do Rosário are aimed at representation and communication, and which cause the unthinkable and questioning in those who establish contact with them, we understand them as living objects.

In addition to the questioning made by the cloak itself, the elements that the participants use and encounter when creating the experiences are totally foreign to them, and function as a romantic fragment of a joke (witz). This concept (the witz) emerged with the romantics of Jena; they pointed out that certain poetic fragments, certain words, when launched, worked as sparks, inspired illuminations in thought, and also — which causes estrangement and forces who come into contact with them to think out of the box, which skewer like a hedgehog (Schlegel 1997). The joke (witz) fragments can have their origins from several elements, as Schlegel points out: "A dialogue is a chain or garland of fragments. An exchange of letters is a dialogue on a larger scale, and memoirs constitute a system of fragments" (Schlegel 1971, 170). One of these living objects, which causes this joke (witz), is the clipping of this research, and it occupied decades of work by the author — the Presentation Cloak.

4. THE PRESENTATION CLOAK

The Presentation Cloak was the piece that Bispo do Rosário made through embroidery, names, drawings of objects, fragments of stories, and various historical elements.

Figure 1 and 2: Arthur Bishop of Rosario Presentation Cloak / Fabric, thread, paper and metal. 118.5 x 141.2 cm. Credit: The Bispo do Rosário Museum Contemporary Art Collection / City Hall of Rio de Janeiro. Photo: Rodrigo Lopes.

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3   Translated by the authors.

This work inspired us to develop the Storytelling Cloak, which works by connecting with various biographical, fictional, and historical accounts of the participants, weaving a web of narratives between people, their stories, and their memories in and about the city. We chose the cloak because it represents the work of Bispo, it makes it easier for us to take it to experiences with people, and also because we wanted an object that could be created, re-signified, and thought of in a unique way by each participant.

The cloak was conceptualized by us together with the designer Paula Aragão, responsible for the material development of the object. It has a double-sided format and can be used on either side. One of its faces is brown, and the other is raw cotton, because our idea was to present two possibilities of use for the same piece. We also thought of a structure that would allow people to create elements for the cloak, to reconfigure it, but not permanently, so that with each interaction, new stories could be told through the new objects and created for it: these same elements could be removed, put away, and the cloak would once again become a "blank slate" and be used by someone else. In this way, we thought that the elements to be used in the cloak would be secured with small safety pins, so that new cloaks could be created and dismantled as people used them.

For the use of materials, we were inspired by what Jorge Anthonio e Silva said about the material process created by Bispo:

> Through the touch of art, the nature of materials, in their finite reality, expands the meaning of the object beyond its physicality. The latter loses its functional quality. . . to objectify itself with the aura of matter touched by a source of sprouts. (Anthonio e Silva 1998, 87)

Functioning as a source of renewal, the cloak continues to exist, and the narrative fragments created by people form a material repertoire of stories, which are collected according to the use of the Storytelling Cloak, and which can be used, resignified and also recombined for the creation of new autobiographies, autofictions, and historical narratives. Thus, the cloak not only helps in the creation and telling of narratives, but it also collects and incorporates the stories wherever it goes.

Figure 3 and 4: Storytelling Cloak (brown side) and Storytelling Cloak (raw cotton side).

5. EXPERIENCES WITH THE STORYTELLING CLOAK, INSTRUMENT OF IMAGINATION, NARRATIVES, AND ROLE-PLAYING

Participants in the experiments were chosen from a mix of people who had experience creating stories and role-playing, and people who did not. In addition, participants included people who knew Bispo do Rosário and also people who didn't know him.

The experiences with the Storytelling Cloak are basically the following steps: the participants were asked whether or not they knew the work of Bispo do Rosário, and later they were introduced to the Cloak and the elements that could be used in it.

People were also instructed that they could create new elements in addition to using existing ones. After this information, three experiments were carried out, inspired by Luciana Hidalgo's definitions of Bispo do Rosário's work: each participant was asked to create an autobiographical narrative, a fictional one, and finally, a historical one, related to Rio de Janeiro. At the end of each process, a debrief (Atwater 2016) was carried out, as well as a collection of feedback and suggestions for the next activities.

The idea of these experiences was, in addition to testing the creative process with the cloak, rescuing the Bispo's practice and presenting his art to the participants, also to collect stories, characters, places, adventures and memories linked to the city of Rio. The objective was to make the cloak a living object, and an instrument of the imagination (Hankins and Silverman, 1999) so that it could serve as an exploratory tool of knowledge, while at the same time concentrating and connecting, through the material elements created by the participants, stories that are part of the intangible cultural heritage of Rio.

The experiences presented to the participants were also designed to incorporate narrative and role-playing elements. These ideas were based on Markus Montola's theories, pointed out by Rafael Bienia: "Role playing is in line with rules that govern the social interactions between participants, characters, and the story world" (Bienia 2016, 62). Bienia continues: "Montola explains that the structured social process works as a mindset. It allows a player to optionally use role playing as a method of game playing for any game" (Bienia 2016, 62).

Participants are introduced to these elements: characters, places, and the construction of a narrative world. These elements are used, combined, and reconfigured by the participants as ways of creating stories. And the narrative and role-playing are the structural basis and mindset that guide this creative process. The union of these theoretical elements with practice are presented through the experiences carried out and the stories created by the participants.

By showing the elements that compose the world imagined by Bispo do Rosário, and pointing out the rules for those who wish to enter this space using the Storytelling Cloak, we make the connection between world, characters, and rules. The world is in the cloak, and the characters emerge from this object and from the memories, people, and places created. The mindset is created from interactions with the cloak, the material elements used, and the sharing of personal, fictional, and historical stories between people. The narrative and role-playing process takes place through knowledge of the rules. Contact with the world takes place through the cloak, which works as an intersection portal between this space imagined by Bispo and the one created by the participants.

6. CREATED STORIES

"I NEED THESE WORDS — WRITING"
 Bispo do Rosário

In this part we will tell some of the stories created by the participants, the narrative experiences developed by them, and also how it was to use the cloak during this process.

A participant, from the experience of creating an autofictional narrative using the cloak, told a story that narrated the development of his childhood until the present day, including incorporating the pen used to write on the fabric as one of the props on the cloak, representing the time in which he began to enjoy drawing.

Figure 5 and 6: Participants wearing the Storytelling Cloak.

He later created a micro-roleplaying game, in which three or more people participate in creating a character's life, from beginning to end. In this gameplay, each person uses a fragment of their personal life to narrate a stage in the character's life, and each person continues the story from where the other left off. In the third experience, he related reports and memories of the city, creating a narrative in which Rio de Janeiro is reported from three points of view from different socioeconomic groups, which reflect the enormous social difference that marks the city. After that, the participant described how this story could be turned into an installation:

In this experiment, when reflecting on my view of Rio de Janeiro being always limited to my sociocultural context, I was inspired to try to talk about Rio de Janeiro from a set of different perspectives. From there, I had the idea of a public mobile installation, in which people from each place would write (or represent it using any other graphic expression capable of communicating the same idea) about their perspectives of the place where they live, about their pains and their pleasures. And inside the installation are writings/expressions and from other people who have been elsewhere. Physically it would always expand from a center each place a new installation takes place, in such a way that new participants are always on the fringes. Conceptually, it would be a way of getting to know this city better from the perspective of the people themselves, and not necessarily from the physical space, first decentralizing our perspective and then getting to know others who would possibly be outside our social bubble, despite coexisting. in the same space.

Figures 7, 8, and 9: Elements created and used by participants.
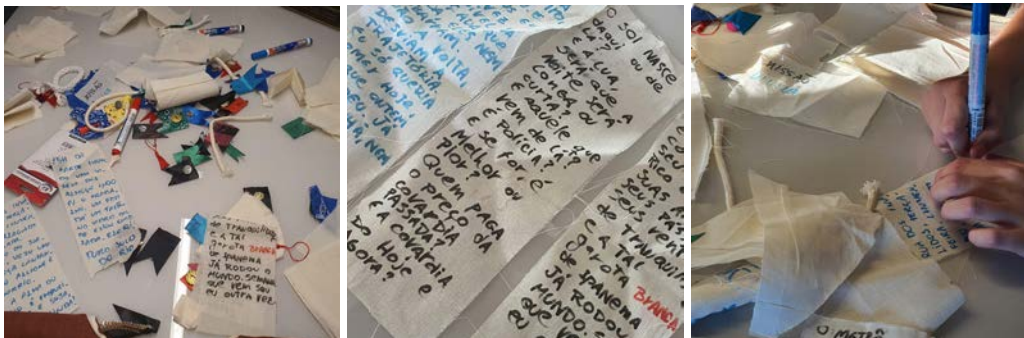
In another experience with the cloak, a participant told a story from a personal aspect. She used the spaces of the cloak as a mapping of feelings — elements that represented aspects of her affection were positioned next to the heart area, and other elements were scattered over other parts of the cloak.

Other participants also used the cloak exploring its spatiality, placing elements not only on the front, but also on the inner side and on the edges, as if exploring an imaginary cartography, and using these resources in the stories and narrative games created.

Another participant, a nurse, who happened to have an internship at Colônia Juliano Moreira, the hospital where Bispo lived, created a series of striking elements of this period for the first experience of autobiographical narrative. The most curious thing was a tile from the hospital, which the participant got from a patient who had lived there for many decades, and she told him to always carry that object with him, so he would never forget it. He made the tile by folding a piece of fabric, added it to the Storytelling Cloak, and narrated that story. This symbolic tile is now part of the materials that can be used on the cloak.

In the second experience the participant created an interactive fiction structure using various story elements and fragments, which had already been created by the other participants. He set up a configuration on the cloak, in which each door of the labyrinth where the character is involved, leads to a narrative fragment created by another participant. And whoever is experiencing the character of this experience has to create a narrative for this element, which works as a kind of fragment of the romantic joke (Brain 2007), as it encourages the participant to create from something that is totally strange and unknown to him.

Figure 10: Elements fixed in the heart area. **Figure 11:** The narrative labyrinth created.

7. DEVELOPMENTS AND REFLECTIONS

There are still other objects created by Bispo do Rosário to be explored, such as the banners, and there are still many stories to be told. But the experiences with the Storytelling Cloak pointed out new possibilities in the use of objects as forms of creation, which explore the spatial use of the body (and objects) in an inventive way, as well as the boundaries between material elements, imagination, memory, and the intangible heritage of a city. They were rescued and materialized in objects: characters, places, and stories of Rio de Janeiro. In this kind of Collective Imaginary Cartography of the City, the space of a place expands beyond its physical borders, whether through narratives or role-playing created by the participants, it incorporates feelings, memories, and creations — real, fictional, or historical — of those who wear the cloak. And through this process, a city's historical and cultural heritage grows, incorporating official, unofficial, and marginal elements. Or as Bispo do Rosário said: "One day I just showed up."

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Experiencing China's Intangible Cultural Heritage in Role-playing Games: Comparative Studies between MMORPGs and Larps

Abstract: In recent years, considerable attention has been devoted to preserving intangible cultural heritage (ICH) through games. From a combined game studies and heritage studies perspective, role-playing games (RPGs) have a unique advantage in that they immerse the player in a character to experience and understand the basics of culture in an engaging way. Among different types of role-playing games, live-action role-playing (larp) and massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) have a great potential to promote the learning of intangible cultural expressions and traditions that make them available to a wider public. In China, MMORPGs have had a positive impact on preserving China's intangible heritage in virtual space and larps, specifically in the form of Jubensha, are also playing an important role in the same way.

The purpose of this study is to delve into how the ICH of China is being represented in MMORPGs and larps as an educational tool. With that target in mind, a close reading of selected MMORPG games -- *A Dream of Jianghu* and *Justice Online* -- and a larp game -- *The Secret of the Gauze Lantern* -- was conducted. The goals of this research are to understand what cultural experiences are integrated in those role-playing games to introduce Chinese ICH and explore the main differences between them in representing those intangible cultural elements. After analyzing these RPGs in-depth, I argue that both MMORPGs and larps show potential to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage of China; while MMORPGs present national-level intangible elements from different regions of China, Jubensha as a kind of larp focuses more on the indigenous traditions and customs of small-scale local areas.

Keywords: Role-playing games, intangible cultural heritage, Jubensha, MMORPG, China

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1. INTRODUCTION

China is a country with a rich diversity of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). So far, China has 42 elements inscribed on UNESCO's List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and a total of 1557 nation-level ICHs recognized by the Chinese government (Yang 2021). To give some examples, acupuncture and moxibustion contains the wisdom of the ancient Chinese in the field of medicine. Taijiquan, or Tai Chi, is one of the traditional physical practices from ancient China, which can be found in various martial art movies. However, a noticeable fact is that most of these intangible heritage treasures are at stake because of the lack of young successors. In recent years, role-playing games (RPGs) have become one of the hottest platforms for promoting the awareness of intangible cultural heritage in China. Importantly, China's young generations show a strong interest in participating in RPG games as a part of their lifestyle. For this reason, merging intangible heritage elements with RPG games is a possible method to safeguard endangered ICH of China.

A Dream of Jianghu and *Justice Online* are two popular MMORPG games among China's Gen Z, which portray a part of ICH elements during the in-game activities. Meanwhile, the local government of China tends to promote the audience to experience indigenous intangible heritage examples through playing *The Secret of the Gauze Lantern*, a kind of larp game, also known as Jubensha in China. The object of this study aims to understand how China's ICHs are represented in MMORPGs and Jubensha, and compare their similarities and differences in depicting intangible heritage elements between these two types of RPG games through case studies.

2. THE INTANGIBLE HERITAGE OF CHINESE CULTURE

Heritage is a concept that *is primarily not about the past, but instead about our relationship with the present and the future* (Harrison 2012). Traditionally, researchers focus more on physical cultural heritage, such as buildings, artifacts, books, and landscapes. However, culture is a living and continuously evolving aspect of human life, and immaterial cultural elements play a significant role in representing the living culture of human communities, their evolution, and their continuing development. In 2003, UNESCO officially defined intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups, and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage."

As a multi-ethnic country, Chinese culture is a broad concept that contains various ICH from different ethnic groups. While the majority of ICHs are mainly associated with Han people, minority groups in China have also kept their traditions and customs throughout its long history and enclosed living environment. However, many ICHs are in danger due to cultural uniformity and globalization. For this reason, the Chinese government issued the Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China in 2011 and had specific long-term plans to protect ICHs (Cao et al. 2018). At the same time, the Chinese government has invested a total of 7.76 billion yuan (about $1.2 billion) over the past decade in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage projects.

In recent years, games have shown their great potential to represent China's intangible heritage. Researchers within China demonstrate that digital games have a positive effect on safeguarding and disseminating ICHs, such as Hangzhou cuisine culture (Cui, Zhao and Wang 2021). An increasing number of offline board and larp games contain ICH elements with historical settings.

3. ROLE-PLAYING AS AN INTANGIBLE HERITAGE PRACTICE

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term "role-playing" means changing one's behavior to fulfill a social role. Researchers point out that role-playing is an ideal pedagogical method for experiential and active learning (Russell and John 2010). Participating in role-playing exercises is considered to be particularly effective for enhancing multicultural understanding (Junn 1994). This means that role-playing as a practice has its unique advantage of connecting with cultural and heritage studies.

Considerable scholarly attention has been focused on the potential of merging role-playing and intangible heritage studies. Hannigan (1998) uses the word "edutainment" to mean the "joining together of educational and cultural activities with the commerce and technology of the entertainment world." At present, the gap between role-playing games and intangible heritage works continues to close. Mochocki (2020) states that intangible heritage permeates almost all types of role-playing games, such as tabletop role-playing games (TRPG), live-action role-playing games (larp), and hobbyist historical reenactment. Looking closely at computer role-playing games, *Virtual Warrane II: Sacred Tracks of the Gadigal* is a great example of safeguarding the Aboriginal intangible heritage of Australia through an immersive role-playing experience (Majewski 2018). Although the depiction of intangible cultural heritage is still limited in RPG games, role-playing as a practice is a useful pedagogical tool to encourage participants to experience cultural activities and understand the value of intangible heritage from all over the world.

4. JUBENSHA IN CHINA

Jubensha, also called murder mystery game, is a kind of live-action role-playing game popular in China. A typical Jubensha game usually takes place among a group of 4-12 players and lasts for 3-5 hours each session. During the course of the game, players will be given their own identity and background story in a murder mystery story and then placed in specific environments which are built and decorated to simulate the setting in the storyline. They are required to find the "Murderer" within a short time by interacting with NPCs, collecting criminal evidence, and discussing with each other.

Jubensha was initially from the West but grew rapidly in China's role-playing game market. In 2013, the game *Death Wears White* was translated and introduced into China, which gave Chinese players an opportunity to experience this sort of offline role-playing game for the first time. The name Jubensha, also created at that time, implies the game usually involves murder mystery scripts in Chinese language. Over the next few years, an increasing number of tabletop role-playing games entered the Chinese game market but were only popular among small groups of board game lovers. Since 2016, Jubensha has seen explosive growth in its popularity owing to the hit TV show *Who's the Murderer,* which premiered in 2016 and spanned 102 episodes over seven seasons. The game has steadily become more immersive and larger-scale, with costumes and scene decorations. At present, there are more than 30,000 Jubensha studios and stores in China, expecting to reach 23.89 billion yuan (around $3.76 billion) by the end of 2022 (Meng 2022).

It is no doubt that Jubensha has become a huge hit among China's Gen Z. According to the 2021 report on physical Jubensha consumer insight by Meituan (2021), nearly 75% of Jubensha consumers are under the age of 30, and over 60 percent play Jubensha more than twice a month. Chinese young people consider Jubensha as an ideal way to release stress and get away from the daily grind of life.

The success of Jubensha has significantly boosted the Chinese larp game industry, and new forms of larp games have emerged and been favored by customers. Today, visitors in Wuhan are invited to play a larp game, *The Riddle Reef*, with experienced actors and actresses and experience traditional performing arts on board a steamship. In other cities, an increasing number of specific themed hotels for larp games in China have emerged in recent years.

5. METHODOLOGY

Role-playing games contain plenty of heritage information, which is not obvious and is often hidden in the game world. For this reason, I will be doing a close reading of selected games. Close reading is an effective research method to deconstruct the structure of a complex passage and analyze its meaning in detail. Traditionally, close reading has been considered as a research method for deep analysis of how a literary text works, from poems to novels. But nowadays, game researchers utilize close reading as a way to analyze the representation of games and study meaning within a game.

The close reading process of this paper will start with playing these RPG games repeatedly and carefully noting down the key messages that can typically represent Chinese intangible cultural heritage. Ultimately, I will analyze the similarities and differences between selected MMORPG and Jubensha games.

6. ROLE-PLAYING GAME ANALYSIS

6.1 *A Dream of Jianghu*

Developed and published by NetEase, *A Dream of Jianghu* is a Chinese MMORPG based on martial arts culture. At the beginning of the game, the interface allows players to create a character avatar and determine their martial arts identities, from Shaolin to Wudang. During the journey, players can experience a diverse martial arts life in the world of Jianghu; update their equipment and skills; and learn various martial arts through main quests and daily tasks.

Although the game is largely set in the fantasy world of ancient China, it contains various experiences related to intangible cultural heritage through game activities. In 2019, *A Dream of Jianghu* added the game content "Intangible Heritage Block," which allows players to participate in learning and experiencing eleven of China's intangible heritage examples from different areas of China. Take the representation of Wood-block New Year Pictures as an example. First, after interacting with NPCs, players can have a basic understanding of this folk craft, such as its origins and popular themes. And then, side tasks guide players toward understanding the process of making a wood-block picture and ultimately require them to create their own. Finally, as a reward, players can not only get experience points and game coins but also receive a wood-block picture as a limited-edition prop.

Another example is Miao embroidery. Unlike the other ten intangible heritage examples portrayed in the game, which draw upon Han ICH, Miao embroidery is the remarkable handicraft technique utilized by the Miao people, who are ethnic minorities in southwest China. *A Dream of Jianghu* gives players an opportunity to experience the remarkable intangible techniques during play.

6.2 *Justice Online*

In *Justice Online*, the representation of intangible heritage has a close connection with game activities taking place during traditional Chinese festivals. For example, during the Lantern Festival, players can experience a nation-level ICH, *Lantern Riddles*, through various celebration activities and game tasks. In real life, guessing lantern riddles is a significant part that requires lantern owners to write riddles on a piece of paper and post them on the lanterns. If visitors have solutions to the riddles, they can pull the paper out and go to the lantern owners to check their answer. If they are right, they will get a little gift as a reward.

Justice Online gives the lantern riddle a second life in the digital world. At the beginning, the player needs to receive the tasks from NPCs and walk to the Lantern Riddles block in the city. Topics of these riddles often contain game content, common sense, and traditional Chinese culture. After giving the correct answer to these riddles alone or with friends, they can receive plenty of in-game rewards. Although guessing lantern riddles is only a temporary game that occurs once a year, it has become one of the best festival activities for players who can receive various rewards by using their wisdom. In the digital age, rapid urbanization and fast-paced life challenged the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, but computer RPG games keep this tradition alive in the virtual world.

Another intangible cultural element we can find from in-game festival activities is Mooncake gambling, which has been registered in the second batch of The National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of China. It is a 300-year-old custom designed as part of the celebration of the Mid-Autumn Festival in the Fujian Province. In the game, the representation of Mooncake gambling reflects its core gameplay and traditions in an accurate way. Six players are assigned and roll six dice in turn. According to the dice combination, the player will receive a title of rank, from Xiucai to Zhuangyuan, and win specific game rewards.

Therefore, Mooncake gambling retains its core mechanism and rules in the RPG game world, which gives players a chance to learn this intangible heritage by playing. As the design team of the game said on the social network platform Weibo, "We must resolutely keep walking the path of passing on China's cultural essence."

6.3 *The Secret of the Gauze Lantern*

Supported by the government of Gansu province, *The Secret of Gauze Lantern* is a famous Jubensha that introduces one example of China's intangible heritage: the Gauze Lantern. During this offline RPG game, the identity of each player is a time traveler from modern times, and their goal is to find the real secret in the chaotic town by deducting the critical information and discussing it with peers.

Walking through the Hekou ancient town, the player navigates and makes choices by interacting with non-player characters (NPCs) in different buildings. In order to collect critical clues and decrypt the secret behind the game narrative, they are required to understand the story and production process of Gauze Lantern at the beginning of the game. Then, Hekou Masters will give players various main and side quests based on the Hekou traditional folklore, and feedback from NPCs helps players discover the truth of the secret. Finally, players need to work together to make a Gauze Lantern by themselves, which is a considerable element influencing the end of the game. In addition, during the game journey, players can also get in touch with other local intangible heritage examples, such as the Huanxian Shadow play, pitch-pot game, and Dingxi paper cut. As a result, this Jubensha, as an offline RPG game, contains various intangible heritage experiences of the Gansu province and promotes experiencing them in an immersive game environment.

7. CONCLUSION

This article aims to map out how China's intangible cultural heritage is represented in MMORPG and larp games. With the support of literature reviews, the analysis shows that both Chinese MMORPG games and Jubensha depict the ICH elements with their design and play a positive role in preserving Chinese intangible cultural heritage. While MMORPGs have the advantage of showing traditional crafts and folk activities from different areas of China in a fast and economical way, Jubensha, as a subclass of larp game, encourages participants to experience indigenous traditional skills in a hands-on fashion and by hand during through play and provide them in-depth knowledge of intangible culture and customs in the physical world.

Noticeably, MMORPG games tend to portray various forms of intangible cultural heritage of different minority groups through gameplay and festival activities but usually introduce the ICH knowledge at the introductory level. Conversely, Jubensha, as a type of larp game, mainly focuses on one or two specific customs and traditions of the majority ethnicity, the Han people. For this reason, designers of Jubensha often carefully embed their familiar intangible culture into the game narrative and gameplay and provide in-depth ICH experiences during play.

Due to space limitations, this paper only analyzes the representation of ICHs in two MMORPG games and one larp game. In the future, academic work should focus on finding and analyzing China's ICHs from minority groups within RPG games and evaluate their effectiveness in minority ICH protection and preservation.

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Playing With The Fictitious "I": Early Forms of Educational Role-playing in Hungary, 1938-1978

Abstract: In this article we interpret Eszter Leveleki's special vacation program at Bánk, Hungary, as an organization, and present it in terms of contingency theory. As a background, we introduce the context, strategy, and structure behind Bánk that brought remarkable behaviors to life during its existence, prevailing in politically repressive regimes for almost its entire history. The article qualitatively analyzes available sources, the recollections of those who took part in the vacation program, mainly from the '50s to the '70s, and diaries written on site in order to determine what forms of transformative play were present at Bánk that established a unique heritage of educational role-playing in Hungary. We go through all the identifying elements and themes and show how Bánk was a fertile soil for more complex forms of play to emerge. We compare our results with different definitions of role-playing and child's play in general in order to determine to what extent the more complex forms of play at Bánk can be called larp, what key characteristics of it might differ from those of larp, and whether these differences serve a certain purpose.

Keywords: Bánk, educational larp, camps, democracy, heritage, Hungary

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1. INTRODUCTION

Hungary's long-lived underground tradition of several-weeks-long summer camps for children currently takes the form of full-fledged edu-larps in which campers between the age of 10 and 18 become the citizens of fantasy kingdoms. However, this tradition mainly originates in Eszter Leveleki's private vacation program that took place on the lake-side of Bánk from 1938 to 1978. In its 40 years of existence it operated under oppressive regimes. The Bánk tradition represents a lineage of live-action role-playing completely independent of the *D&D*-based Western canon.[1]

The later decades of the summer vacations are well documented. The recollections of former vacationers were published from the '90s onward (Farkas 1992; Dávid et al. 2017). Their anecdotes and the contemporary diaries written on site provide the corpus of this qualitative study. The goal is to determine what more complex forms of playing appeared and evolved in the original manners of the Bánk tradition throughout its existence of 40 years, whether it can be compared to larp, and in that case what characteristics differentiate it from a larp and why did those evolve that way.

There has not been any thorough research on the topic, especially not in English (see Frazon 2015) which opens up the possibilities of further in-depth studies, particularly comparing it to other educational role-playing traditions.

2. BACKGROUND

The Bánk vacation program could be considered an organization, as it was a sovereign system of people and objects, with a permanent goal, clear boundaries, a formal hierarchy and purposeful rules (Hodgson 2006, 18). Basic information about Bánk camp is presented in contingency theory terms that are still used in organizational analysis. According to contingency theory, in simplified form, the external and

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1   We are aware that a comparison to participatory practices used in the Soviet Union in both propaganda and pedagogy would be possible; however, the scope of the research so far has not allowed it yet to make this comparison.

internal environment impacts the organization's strategy, strategy impacts organizational structure, structure impacts organizational behavior, and behavior impacts performance (Donaldson 2001). Key information about Bánk is listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Bánk as a quasi-organization in terms of contingency theory.
Authors' creation based on Dobák and Antal (2010, 42),

Environment (external & internal) Political oppression (far-Right & far-Left) Intellectual circles of the capital, participants predominantly from Jewish background From 6 to 14-year-olds
Strategy Quasi democratic environment Developing the individuum through living in a community Individual transformation
Structure From beginning of July until end of August, several weeks away from family Hierarchy: Eszter Leveleki > Room chiefs > Cubs, Bears, & Witches Quasi democratic
Behavior 1938 - 49: Physical activities 1949 - 56: World building - creating the mythology of Pipecland through play 1956 - 78: Creating cultural artifacts built upon the tradition and mythology of Pipecland
Performance Transformative experiences Later famous artists Two main lineage of successor camps

Leveleki's vacation program at Bánk had been going on for four decades, between 1938 and 1978. Arguably the most critical factor in its external environment is that Bánk had to prevail in politically repressive regimes for almost its entire history. Geographically, it was located on the outskirts of Bánk, a small settlement near a lake about 60 kilometers north of the capital, Budapest. The area was originally a rural environment with houses without water and heating. Over time, the area was parceled out and filled up with buildings. By the 1970s, the lake had become a popular tourist destination for locals and residents of the capital.

The internal environment of the camp, i.e., the participants, were mainly children aged 6-14 (occasionally younger, aged 3-4) from the capital, from an intellectual background, and often of Jewish origin.

Eszter Leveleki's "strategy," as she and others recall (Farkas 1992, Dávid et al. 2017), was to create a kind of miniature middle-class quasi-democracy for the children, where the individual could develop through living in a strong community. This strategy was, as one might assume, antithetical to the socialist regime's ideals.

The structure of the organization and the camp served these aims. The camp was organized

during the summer, running from the beginning of July until the end of August. Its hierarchy was transparent: camp leader Eszter Leveleki and the camp staff were at the top. Below her were the room chiefs, who were former vacationers above the age of 14, and below them the vacationers. The younger boys were called Cubs, the older ones Bears, and the girls Witches." All the vacationers were given nicknames that were almost uniquely used only within the Bánk community. The children were given a say in how they lived their lives at their own level: what they liked to eat and did not, what to play with, etc. Leveleki showed a strong preference of the children acting in a "boyish" manner, regardless of their genders, and did not really tolerate behavior that was traditionally considered feminine, such as wearing skirts, make-up, devoting extra time to hair, nails, or skin care.

Behavior at the camp became more complex and nuanced as the war era ended; gradually a particular Bánk tradition emerged including their own myths, particular use of language, artifacts, and the betwixt and between space of the Bánk vacations, which we will discuss in the Results section.

In contrast to behavior at Bánk, performance refers to the long-term accomplishments and real-life impact of the vacation program in terms of Leveleki's "strategy." It is worth noting that most Bánk participants described it as a radically life-changing experience, even in cases when they had only attended one session. Generations of famous artists, e.g., theater actor-director Tamás Ascher and composer-conductor Iván Fischer, and cultural elites have subsequently emerged from among the participants. Bánk essentially ended with the retirement of its founder, but the tradition lives on today in the form of numerous successor camps. After 1978, when Pipecland -- the fictional kingdom of which all vacationers were   citizens -- ended, many of the former vacationers created their vacation programs. These days there are around 20 summer camps that sprouted out of Bánk's legacy. The most spread out amongst them is the lineage of the Ring Camps originally established by Péter Rákos and János Mácsai. These camps by the end of the '80s took the form of fully-fledged edu-larps (Túri and Hartyándi 2022).

3. THEORY

Famous observations of children's free play and its development, like those from Jean Piaget and Mildred Parten, have been criticized and revisited in the last decades (Rubin 1979). Annika Waern (2021) characterized Swedish 7-9-year-old kids' free play by three features: play is constantly *negotiated*; actual in-character role-play *interaction* rarely happens for long; and most of the play can be described as imitative, dramatic, or *pretend play*.

Generally speaking, pretend play starts after the first birthday of a child (Fein 1981). Evidence suggests that, contrary to common beliefs, pretend play before age six is generally grounded in reality, strongly preferring ordinary imaginary elements to fantastic ones (Harris 2021). However, this previously ad hoc solo activity gradually develops into "durable preplanned counterfactual worlds, explicitly incorporating normative rules, social intentionality, and collective negotiation" that can help the child "anticipate unknown future real events" (Kapitany et al. 2022, 7). Pretend play serves crucial adaptive evolutionary functions (Lillard 2017) and thus, can set the stage for later transformative experiences. Recently it was proposed that the variance in complex pretend play could be best described by two factors: the level of physical embodiment and cognitive engagement (Kapitany et al. 2022, 9). The following research attempts to describe how much pretend play at Bánk goes beyond that of the literature.

4. METHOD

Data collection: In the first, exploratory phase of our research on role-play in Bánk we decided to work with already existing sources. We collected every publicly available book that contained memoirs or

recollections about playing in Bánk. After reading through these sources, we decided to contact the Leveleki Eszter Foundation to assess their private archive, especially the written memoirs. *Table 2* details the data items in the data corpus.

Table 2: Data corpus of the research

Item	Date	Type	Description
#01	1992	book (recollections)	*Leveleki Eszter koszorúi* [Wreaths of Eszter Leveleki]
#02	2017	book (recollections)	*Nyugodtan tegezz* [Call me by my first name]
#03	2015	written oral history	From András Forgách, a former Bánk participant
#04	1943- 1976	diaries	Written by vacationers on site from the years of 1943, 1957, 1960, 1966, 1970, 1976 – we included the diaries that were already transcribed
#05	1989	TV interview	*Eszter néni* [Aunt Eszter]

Data analysis: While reading through the data corpus, every text that answered the research question was included in the data set. The research question was:

- How did reframing child's play affect Bánk's complex play culture, and could that then be called a form of embodied role-playing akin to larp?

Qualitative analysis was carried out on these final extracts. The data were analyzed using a theoretical thematic analysis method that allows patterns to be searched and interpreted across the entire data set in a deductive way, based on a pre-existing theoretical framework (Braun and Clarke 2006, 83-84). In presenting the preliminary results, we have focused on the correspondences and striking discrepancies with the data expected from the literature.

5. RESULTS

In this chapter we outline the identified playful characteristics of Bánk. First of all we list the elements that technically fall into the category of child's play. This is mostly pretend play but also includes more structured games that children of this age develop or learn organically. Even if they have formal, preset rules, kids adapt them without adults, often modify them, and play on their own. Most of these were games that could be found in any children's camp in contemporary Hungary, such as football and other ball games, ping-pong, and button football, which is a tabletop football simulation game played with buttons.

      Number war is a large-scale game, usually played between two competing factions, in which every participant wears a series of numbers on their forehead, usually written on paper. The player is defeated and eliminated from the game if an enemy can read out their numbers aloud (Túri and Hartyándi 2022). This game later became the main mechanic for resolving battles between the residents of Pipeland -- the in-game fictional kingdom of the Bánk vacationers -- and their enemies, usually played by the room chiefs, older vacationers, or occasionally by visiting former vacationers. Other

large-scale, capture-the-flag types of games were also present, however less dominant. Ribbon duel is a one-on-one type of physical combat game where two ribbons are tied onto the upper arm of the participants in a way that they are easily untied by pulling the ribbon's end. The goal of the player is to pull off their opponent's ribbons.

Figure 1: *Number War*, 1975. Photo: Fortepan / Faragó László

There were several elements that distinguish the play at Bánk from child's play elsewhere. Eszter Leveleki preferred if the children played competitive games, and even less-complex forms of play were to be taken seriously, putting vacationers under constant performance pressure. One such game was *CAPITALY*, the Hungarian version of *Monopoly* printed in 1935 and banned by the communist authorities in 1952. Some form of it with house rules was still played at Bánk later on, and most likely the simulation of the economical side of the fictitious kingdom of Pipecland was heavily based on this game. However, familiarizing children with the characteristics of open market capitalism was substantially controversial in Stalinist and Post-Stalinist era Hungary.

Elements that went beyond child's play also originated in child's play. With the expected seriousness of playing, the encouragement, and facilitation from an adult authority figure, Leveleki elevated it to the level of traditions: gamified and ritualized routines; special events and celebrations; playful language and neologisms.

From the early years on, traditions were created. The accumulation of cultural artifacts started to form a well-defined subculture of the vacationers, a kind of alternate reality experienced fully only during the summer weeks of the vacation, fed both on reality and in-game fiction. It was represented both on a physical and verbal level. Many neologisms were created, through creative, playful use of language, such as *tradomány* - the combination of the worlds *tradició* and *hagyomány*, roughly translatable as the combination of tradition and heritage: *traditage*. However, its meaning for Bánk is much more complex than the combination of the two words. It means the continuation of something – mythology, memory, mystery, ritual – the elements that form identity; nevertheless it is free for reiteration, reform and, via play, new meaning creation.

The most prominent physical representations of these "traditages" – souvenirs from major game events – were put on display on the "Totem Wall" in Bánk. These items were constant reminders for the vacationers of their group identity; simultaneously they were exposed to be stolen by the enemies of Pipecland, providing further accumulation of history related to objects, thus further reiteration of their meanings.

Gamified and ritualistic elements framed both the everyday existence and special events at Bánk. The "Like-It-Or-Not" tabella allowed all children to list one food that they will not eat, while adding another one that they will get double portions of. The serving of semolina pudding – which was often on the menu – was always introduced with a small ritualistic poem, and vacationers were asked to choose sides whether they preferred the meal with cacao powder sprinkled on the top or stirred into the pudding. Based on this division they improvised debates. It is somewhat reminiscent of the two Lilliputian parties Gulliver encounters during his travels – a society deeply divided over the question on which end an egg should be cracked open – thus formulating a critique of false divisions in society.

Special events include the Anna Ball that took place each year on the 26th of July. It originated in the Hungarian tradition of pageant balls held at the same time around the lake Balaton since 1825. It was the only such event that was held during the communist era as well. It focused mostly on the performance of the vacationers. Based on the available sources in the early years there were more treasure hunt-like game experiences, while in the last period it is well documented that the focus shifted to actual theater and opera performances done in a funny, parodistic way, but prepared and performed in a serious manner. This event was open for former vacationers to visit, thus providing a meeting point for the wider Bánk community.

Another similar event was the 20th of August, which is the most prominent Hungarian national holiday, the one of the establishment of the country of Hungary, and of the new bread. A special meal of milk loaf with hot chocolate was served on this day, possibly a spin on the notion of the "new bread." The entry in the diary of this day was always written by the room chief of the Bears.

In 1960, Leveleki and the room chiefs were worried that the children were too occupied with their favorite football teams from the capital, creating rifts within the vacationers. The room chiefs came up with the solution that everyone in Pipecland has to root for the football team of the neighboring Karancslapujtő that was on the lower end of the third league tabella. Legend says that, as the vacationers kept showing up at the match of the team with signs encouraging the players, they started to perform better and better. However, what certainly happened was that a kind of friendship evolved between the participants of the Bánk vacations and the members of the Karancslapujtő football team that deepened throughout the years and the fandom of this football team became a cornerstone of the Bánk identity.

Another ritualistic moment in the life of the Bánk vacations was the moment of farewell, marking the end of a season with a goose feather given to by Leveleki and a speech delivered by a room chief or fellow vacationer to each participant. This practice created collectible items that also served as a way of counting for how many years they had been taking part in this shared experience that the children proudly kept records of.

There are entries on trials being held at Bánk; however they were rather parodistic and mocking in their nature. Even if their outcomes were somewhat humiliating for the accused, they tended to fall more on the benevolent side.

Creative endeavors became more prominent in the later period of Bánk (1957-76). A vast variety of arts and media were used with a serious approach, while still cherishing childish and imperfect aesthetics. They served not only as forms of self-expression of the children, but also as group identity forming elements. Theater pieces were created with great care, mostly parodies and satires. There were examples of completely improvised plays. Sometimes these plays theorized the "origin" of elements encountered by the children in-game, thus serving as myth creation within the fictional world.

Opera was a popular genre amongst the children of the late period of Bánk. They mostly consisted of musical parodies of well-known themes and adaptation of familiar tales. Once an opera was successful it became part of the repertoire and might have been performed year after year. One such piece was for example based on the story of Little Red Riding Hood.

Bánk had its own newspaper – according to the archives at least from the early '50s on – called *Bánki Béka Brekegi* (Bánk's Frog Croaks). It was a one-pager created by the children that reflected upon the daily happenings of their vacation, the matches played by the football team of Karancslapujtó, and the in-game events, anchoring them by creating their memory and myth.

The environment of Bánk – the isolation in time and space and the act of spending several weeks away from their family in a rural environment – helped to shape the community in itself. Throughout the years, street signs were placed in and around the house in Bánk, naming certain areas accordingly. Originally these were mostly street signs from Budapest. In a way they were holding the memories of home, while creating a betwixt and between space (Turner 1982) that is neither Bánk, nor Budapest, but both at the same time, and also none of the above, but the physical anchoring of the fictional kingdom of Pipecland.

The initial idea of Pipecland was born out of a game that the vacationers played in the 1950s where they tried out—in a social experiment fashion—how it would be to live in different countries. They simulated living in each country for a day and at the end they voted on which one they would rather live in. The winner was Denmark, a constitutional monarchy; thus they created their own fictional kingdom.

> The narrative foundation and the base of further play of Bánk was created during the most fearful Stalinist period: Pipecland, the constitutional monarchy. It was a game of life-and-death, which even in the sixties would not have been completely without danger. . . (Dávid et al. 2017, 100-16)

As Pipecland was a constitutional monarchy, its king did not really have any essential role: there is only a single mention of the king in the processed sources. It was a satire on several levels: mocking the former Kingdom of Hungary that had no king between 1920-44, a farce on the current Stalinist regime, and ridiculing all the adult world with its self-important politics.

Pipecland can be interpreted as an example of a *paracosm* (Cohen and MacKeith, 1991), a "long-lasting, heavily structured, and internally consistent" inner world created by children (Bowman, 2010, 130.). However, Pipecland was co-created by Leveleki and older children, and was taken very

seriously, becoming a quasi-reality of the Bánk program, manifesting in various externalities. We think these aspects go beyond regular child's play.

On the other hand, the emotionally relatable myth of Pipecland, a fictional monarchy with its in-game hierarchy and traditions, laid the foundation of an identity through the "affective ties" (Jackson 2002) it established and as such made the way for the more complex, role-play-like form of the Grand Play.

> The Grand Play was role-playing – that's what Eszter told me . . . I was so disturbed by all this that on the way home from the lake I told Eszter that I didn't understand it at all . . . She stepped out of the game and told me that it was all role-playing, like the theater, where everyone knows that there are actors on stage, but during the performance no one thinks of not taking the roles and the scenes of the drama seriously. (Dávid et al. 2017, 100-16)

The Grand Play most likely went through a natural evolution becoming more and more complex and elaborated. The participants of the Bánk vacation referred to it as role-playing (in the broadest sense of the word) but they related it to theater where everyone played their part, but following a unspoken social contract, consisting of suspension of disbelief, not breaking their roles, and avoiding to spoil their and others' fun by "peaking behind the curtains."

From the early days of Bánk we only have a few examples based on which we can tell that it was already a kind of proto-roleplaying, although it did not have the organized quality and complex characters. There was a greater emphasis on preparation – props, costumes and scenography – than on the actual play itself. Group roles appeared instead of individual roles, like being members of a fictional Native American tribe.[2] This sort of role-play was very common in the US and Europe in that era (Wernitznig 2007). In Hungary, the main focus of these plays was the fighting carried out through Number Wars.

We do not currently have any information from the middle period of Bánk (1949-56) regarding the Grand Play, as there are only handwritten diaries from two years (1954 and 1956) of this period. The processing of these sources could not fit into the research for this article.

In the late period of Bánk (1957-78) we found more examples of the Grand Play. The earlier examples from within this period show that these game events were often interrupted by external factors – rainy weather, lack of interest, etc. – thus it is often hard to form a complete narrative out of them. Later examples from within the period show more continuous play that went on for days. Their narratives became more complex, with several parties involved within the fiction, and their focus shifted towards diplomacy.

The narratives of these Grand Plays were based mostly on popular pulp literature of the time: Wild West stories, bandits, secret societies, etc. loaded with Orientalism and cultural appropriation. These stories did not take place in separate alternate realities, but seeped into our own reality – or rather into the liminal space of Bánk – in a very magical-realist fashion, blurring the line between reality and fiction. In this regard, Grand Plays could be considered a form of pervasive gaming (Montola, Stenros, and Waern 2009).

These stories, and especially the use of the language to retell them, intriguingly reflect on the reality of the Cold War Era, although it is hard to tell to what extent it was self-reflective or merely unintentional. The main element of these narratives was the attack of external enemies – often stealing memorial objects or kidnapping children – thus threatening the existence and/or the identity of Pipecland and especially of its citizens. The plots of the Grand Play were created by Leveleki and the room chiefs and their execution was also facilitated by them.

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2   It's important to note that such play may be considered offensive by Indigenous Americans, even if not intended as such.

The only game mechanic used was the Number Wars, which only simulated battles between groups:

> The Number War had strict rules, until suddenly saboteurs appeared with a green number that could not even be read. Often we didn't know the big boys who would suddenly appear among us and read everyone's numbers, both the ones written in red and black. (Data item #03)

In terms of props, besides the memorial objects stolen from the Totem Wall, the Grand Plays often leaned on the use of different media, like enemies or possible allies sending messages via letters, audio tape recordings or telegrams.

The main difference between the Grand Play of Bánk and most larps is the way roles were treated. Sarah Lynne Bowman (2010) lists several concepts of role-playing self that can be illuminating here. All participants of the Bánk vacations were also citizens of the fictional kingdom of Pipecland, thus being present in a group role. Some of them also bore titles within this kingdom, like ministers or chamberlains, thus being present also through their social roles. The vast majority of the children did not have a well defined role; however they still had a kind of character, a fictitious "I" through which they were present throughout the vacation. This led to role identities that were very close to their real self (Doppelganger Self). This alter ego was enforced by the nickname they usually exclusively used within the Bánk community as much as by the performance pressure coming from both Leveleki and their peers.

On the one hand, we can see that participants did not consciously create a character at Bánk. Their Pipecland role was often created by magnifying a fragment of their personality, emphasizing positive or negative traits (Fragmented Self) – as evidenced by the nicknames. The pressure to perform often meant that children had to behave as the best version of themselves, conquering their fears, to be the best they could be (Idealised Self). *Klasszság* (coolness) was expected from the children without being completely clear about what it exactly entailed. It can be summed up as being a good player, who is forthcoming, performative while being a good teammate, maintains the suspension of disbelief, and creates possibilities for others to shine. A high level of cooperation was expected from Bánk citizens, but co-creation processes like Playing to Lift (Vejdemo 2018) were not permitted to everyone. As children aged they gained more and more agency in the world building of Pipecland. Leveleki awarded a small knitted cap, *medvesapka* (bear cap) to those she found worthy, demonstrating this kind of coolness. It created a preposterous system of privileges. For example, everyone had to sit at the dining table bare-headed, except those who had bear caps could wear them then.

This lack of transparency had a certain pedagogical agenda – however a very questionable one – behind it, especially when it came to the lack of the clear boundaries between the vacationers' selves and their alter egos as citizens of Pipecland. Fear is thought to be the most powerful when it is experienced firsthand, without the safety of a well-defined character to hide behind. Leveleki's goal was to teach the children to face their fears and still be able to act. We can only theoretize how this could have been a post-War, post-Holocaust, Cold War era reflex from Levelki's side; nonetheless it remained an essential part of the Bánk tradition. One of the possible reasons why the upper limit of the vacationers age was 14 was that creating such a response of fear above a certain age is much more challenging and possibly less effective.

For the participants who were kidnapped by the enemy, the "truth" was inevitably revealed: they were initiated into the secret behind-the-scenes of the room chiefs and Leveleki, while they had to seriously maintain their roles in front of the others. As far as we can tell, the ones who got kidnapped were usually the older children, possibly in their last years as Bears or Witches.

The most complex roles were the ones of the enemies, which were reserved mostly for the room chiefs and occasionally to former vacationers or possibly external visitors. These can be regarded as full-fledged characters, with different names, personalities, speech patterns, and most likely costumes and some sorts of make-up, as it was important to keep them separate from their "normal" alter egos with which they were present every day at Bánk. However, being a good player also meant not to ruin the play of others, thus even if they recognized those who played the role of an enemy they should not have spoiled the game by revealing it to others.

Table 3 summarizes aspects and features that go beyond standard children's play and becomes comparable to modern larp.

Table 3: Remarkable aspects of Bánk

Child's play	Beyond child's play	The "Grand Play"
• Physical games • Football / soccer • Ping-pong • Button football • Other ball games • Number wars • Ribbon duels • Various pretend play	• Playing as seriously as possible • *Traditage* • Gamified / ritualized routines • Special events and celebrations • Playful language and neologisms • Making theater, opera, newspaper • The setting of Pipecland	• Pulp/Cold War narratives, external threat • Quasi-roles (citizen, kidnapped, enemy) • High expectations of playership • Number War as default game mechanic • Focus on negotiation and diplomacy • Totem objects • Media in service of immersion

6. DISCUSSION

If we take Harviainen's (2010, 176) description of larping, there are three criteria:

- Role-playing in which a character, not just a social role, is played.

- The activity takes place in a fictional reality shared with others. Breaking that fictional reality is seen as a breach in the play itself.

- The physical presence of at least some of the players as their characters.

The Grand Play of Bánk can fit into this category, if we accept that the fictitious "I" is a sort of character, even if not a full-fledged one. However it would also mean that the children were more or less constantly in-character – due to the external and the internalized performance pressure – while they were vacationing at Bánk, probably oftentimes not even being aware of their own performativity. However, the more complex forms of playing were only a small part of the Bánk experience, even at the late period of the vacation program. Our results fit with what Bowman (2014, 118-20) describes as role-playing, as in an edu-larp, all the three types of learning – cognitive, affective, and behavioral

– happened at Bánk, although not (only) through the Grand Play, but throughout the entire span of the vacation.

According to Montola (2008), the character is the player's presence in the game world, the focal point of the player's diegesis. However in a context where the line between the diegetic and non-diegetic world is on purpose and by design blurred, a less defined character – the fictitious "I" – serves as a perfect interface through which the player can interact with the game world.

Stepping out of a larp/RPG-centered point of view, we can suspect that Grand Play was never the ultimate goal of the Bánk vacations, but only one of the facets of a transformative experience, along with team sport competitions; the formation of a subculture with its own mythologies reflected in traditions; and the use of language, artifacts, and the betwixt and between space where the experience took place. However, in its 40 years of evolution, this side strengthened and developed even further in its successor lineages to full-scale edu-larps. It is important to note that the Bánk tradition was a phenomenon organically developing for 40 years, lacking a canonized point of view or moment of reflection that would have provided a self-definition beyond the one of "children's vacation program."

7. IMPLICATIONS

The sources are the main limitation of this article. The publicly available books and memoirs of former vacationers are subjective and retrospective. Moreover, they mostly lack important details on the characteristics of play at Bánk. Documents in their archive, however – a multitude of written records, Bánk diaries, and artifacts – are partially digitized, partially hand-written. The processing of these sources for our research line has only just begun.

To continue this line of research, the first step would be to get all the Bánk diaries transcribed thus producing a full timeline through contemporary accounts, also providing more details on how more complex forms of play evolved throughout the years and how Bánk's mythology took shape. Further steps could include in-depth interviews with former vacationers at Bánk.

As at the time there were no words for role-playing; their own points of reference were more related to the nomenclature of theater. It would provide another interesting angle to analyze the phenomenon of Bánk from the point of view of avant-garde theater or general drama (Harviainen 2018, 87-88).

Furthermore, the factors of contingency theory are often discussed in pair with managerial functions (Koontz and O'Donnell 2004), as planning impacts strategy, organizing influences organizational structure, leading effects organizational behavior, and controlling enhances performance. This implies that the work of Eszter Leveleki could be analyzed from a managerial point of view to gain new insights into her leadership style and evaluate how she planned, organized, personally led, and controlled her Bánk vacation program.

8. CONCLUSIONS

This study is based on the premise that the remarkable vacation program launched by Eszter Leveleki in Bánk, Hungary – prevailing in politically repressive regimes for almost its entire history – can be explained by its organizational nature, in a contingency-theory based interpretation. A qualitative, theoretical thematic analysis was carried out on diary entries made during the vacation program and later written and oral recollections. We selected excerpts that describe playing at Bánk. We looked for differences and similarities between generalized children play, larping, and Bánk.

All the elements that define Bánk – the seriousness of play; traditions; gamified or ritualized routines and special events; the playful use of language; the use of arts and media, the fictional setting of Pipeland – all nourished a special environment that enabled the creation of more complex form of play, the Grand Play, which is comparable to a larp in many aspects. However, by design, it blurred the line between the out-of-game and in-game, diegetic and non-diegetic world, in order to have a greater and more transformative impact on the players. The exact nature of this impact on the children is hard to determine based on our sources, the memoirs of the former vacationers. However Leveleki's agenda was to teach them to remain capable of acting, facing fear. The most prominent aspect reflecting it was the lack of a well-defined character, as participants were present – not only in the Grand Play, but during the entire vacation – through a Fictitious "I": the Bánk-citizen alter ego versions of themselves.

This article is only a first step in our line of research. Further processing of the sources could provide more in depth knowledge on the evolution of the more complex forms of play at Bánk.

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Jeppe and Maria Bergmann Hamming's Literary-Musical Larp Adaptations

Abstract: This article addresses the question of analog role-playing game authorship through an analysis of three music-based blackbox larps by Jeppe and Maria Bergmann Hamming: *Sarabande* (2013), *Deranged* (2015), and *Encore* (2022). The Bergmann Hammings' work over time bears their unique signature, using aesthetic idealism and high culture to explore issues of character decadence and downfall. With the increasing use of role-playing games to convey history and heritage, the Bergmann Hammings' design patterns both evince a particular interpretation of that history and also demonstrate how future designers might generally adapt such material into role-playable forms.

Keywords: high art, classical music, opera, popular culture, role-playing games, larp, freeform, Fastaval, Denmark

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1. INTRODUCTION

Role-playing games (RPGs) do, indeed, have authors (Nephew 2003). Correspondingly, these authors' body of design work can be analyzed for stylistic patterns (Kirk 2005; Li and Morningstar 2016). Play cultures (Williams, Hendricks, and Winkler 2006; Bowman 2017) and meta-play (Boluk and LeMieux 2017) drive most game design patterns (Björk & Holopainen 2005), particularly in the realm of tabletop role-playing games (TTRPGs; White 2020) and live-action role-play (larps) (Montola and Stenros 2010; Koljonen et al. eds. 2019).

Games emerge from community practices, never from lone actors. Nevertheless, as Elaine Fiandra (2019) articulates with respect to video games, tracing a single author's or studio's work is "still a commonly accepted way to analyze [media]" and, in particular, a valid method for games "made by an extremely low number of people." James Morrison (2018) describes the project of the *auteur* as dedicated "to the overturning the critical establishment's general preferences for refined, tasteful, polished, respectably packaged cinema" (49). Academic usage of the *auteur* can, in other words, *rescue* certain works from obscurity. More typically, it launches them into "high art" status, meaning that the *auteur*'s work can then accrue significant financial power as subjects with "taste" attach cultural value to it for purposes of class distinction (Bourdieu 1979). Fiandra uses Andrew Sarris' (1962) pivotal work on *auteur* theory to look at "patterns and expressions of a personal style in the games directed by the director in question" (Fiandra 2019), as well as thematic outcomes from actual play of their games. A game analysis method attentive to both *authorial style* and *play culture* is warranted, too, in the analysis of larp design, especially as larpwrights borrow much from each other and make more of their materials and creation process publicly available (Pettersson 2021). But we should never lose sight of the potential material and social benefits involved when a creator is labeled an "author."

Authors are not just creators, but also nodal points in social and cultural networks, channeling and being moved by various influences and cultures (Latour 2005, Bienia 2016). But despite the polyvocal nature of the final play "text" itself as well as version updates and new editions, RPG rules and scripts usually have a static team of authors whom we can point to and say: "They designed this game." Of course, that thought can also lead us to some stranger questions. Are RPG designers like puppet-masters, "mind-controlling" us with the rules? Or are they simply creating an open playground and disavowing any notion of control over it? These questions are, in my opinion, merely polemical starting points of inquiry, rather than ending points of discussion.

After all, RPGs are a "scavenger medium," in that authors are pulling different scraps of culture together to co-create a work of art with their participants (Schallegger 2018; Torner 2020). A decidedly pop-cultural space, RPG design draws on disparate material from one's own specific social and material context, game design patterns, existing local and global cultures of play, and the indescribable messiness of actual play itself. Having "authors," however, permits this cultural scavenging to achieve legitimacy as art, by which I mean: attaining legibility to the curators, critics, artists, and academics who balance between art being a creative act and it being a commodity.

Within the art world, where a piece's origins and meanings are both fluid, legitimacy is everything. As Niklas Luhmann (2000) argues, the notion of an "artist" and artistic intention "bundles expectations" (51) for effective communication with an audience expecting a particular sensory experience or *abstraction* from experience. Audiences will expand their range of possible feelings towards something that the social system of art considers to be "art." Even if RPGs still struggle in achieving that label (Novitz 1996), the rewards for artistic achievement are of significant social consequence. Bjarke Pedersen and Brody Condon's participatory performance piece *Level Five,* a larp about cultish behavior that strategically removed the term "larp" from its advertising, was exhibited at the Hammer Museum (2010) and the Berlin Biennale (2016). Anna Westerling's *A Nice Evening With The Family* (2007, 2018), a larp mash-up of numerous Swedish *bourgeois* tragedies by Vinterberg, Ibsen, and Strindberg, used its high-cultural material to secure public arts grants and even a century-old mansion as a play site. There are institutional, infrastructural, and even social-capital rewards for having these scavengers – RPGs – engage with high-culture "art" as well as become classified as "art" themselves.

This short essay focuses on the literary-musical larps by the Bergmann Hammings, specifically *Sarabande* (2013), *Deranged* (2015), and *Encore* (2022) to expand on scholarly conversations regarding RPG authorship, art adaptation, and aesthetic idealism. *Sarabande* is about a group of Parisian artists in the early 20th century desperately communicating with each other through art. *Deranged* concerns the life of German composer Robert Schumann as narrated through the perspectives of different important figures to him as well as his own musical pieces. *Encore* smashes together 11 different operas, reduced to their barest of components across 50 different characters, into a single space with live opera-punk music by Ras Bolding serving as interludes. These games have all run at an annual Danish convention called Fastaval, where many bespoke role-playing scenarios see their premiere.

The Bergmann Hammings' remarkable, Fastaval-fueled artistic signature becomes clear in these 3 games: simplifying and emphasizing the emotional weight of the original material for a lay audience while also activating game-appropriate player agency over narrative methods and story outcomes. Their work leans hard on the idea that art can be used to express personal truths and, moreover, that normally-high-art-averse geeks can trust themselves and discover the transcendental meaning in high art through larps. Larp, seen through the specific lens of the Bergmann Hammings, makes high art *embodied*, *visceral*, and *sincere*. Retreat into artistic worlds, their work seems to claim, can be productively tragic and fatal. With all the discussion of making cultural heritage "immersive" and/or "playable," (Mochocki 2021; Pearce and Fortugno 2021), the Bergmann Hammings succeed at making the whole fine arts apparatus playable using the tools of the Nordic larp design community (Koljonen et al. eds. 2019). *Sarabande*, *Deranged*, and *Encore* all deploy lights, sound, space, time, paper, bodies, and the most important game-design currency of all, player agency, in service of exploring characters' moral and artistic downfall, all with the enthusiastic consent and participation of sometimes 5, sometimes 50 players. Their musical blackbox larp work is, itself, undeniably art.

2. THE BERGMANN HAMMINGS, AESTHETIC IDEALISM, AND BLACKBOX LARPS

What is a blackbox larp? The shared medium of *Sarabande*, *Deranged*, and *Encore* emerged at the intersection between blackbox theatre and, interestingly enough, specific trends in freeform larp design

within the Danish scene in 2012-2013. Jaakko Stenros and Markus Montola (2019) define a blackbox larp as such:

> Larps that are played in a minimalistic set, with precise control over light, sound, and props, are called blackbox larps. The term comes from theatre black boxes which are one place where staging blackbox larps is handy. This is very much an aestheticized form, where clarity and elegance are often design goals and everything that is incidental is removed (20).

Blackbox theatre was created by Adolphe Appia in the 1920s. Blackbox became popular in the 1960s, as theatre artists everywhere liberated themselves from the theatre proscenium and expanded, by orders of magnitude, the number of spaces where theatre could theoretically happen. Rather than relying on sets and costumes, blackbox theatre shapes the action through lighting, projections, sound, and movement (Izenour 1977). As an "aestheticized form" of larp, to use Stenros and Montola's description, blackbox larp dutifully connects itself with the affordances and spaces of the post-1960s performing arts. The Bergmann Hammings' work in blackboxes mirror their artistic intent: stripping high art works down to their essences, especially via the bodies and movements of their participants.

Blackbox larping historically came from a collective Danish (and American) reaction to Swedish jeepform, an avant-garde RPG writing movement in the late 2000s that merged the strict rules and gamemastering of tabletop with the embodiment of larp. "Jeepform role-play," as Tobias Wrigstad (2008) writes, "is not about simulating, but about collaborative creation of tight, dramatic and story-focused role-play" (125). Jeepform scenarios are usually kitchen-sink dramas, with socialist-realist and sometimes-cruel design intentions. Games such as *The Upgrade!* (2004) subject players to the toxicity of reality shows; Fredrik Axelzon's *The Journey* (2010) puts them in a stark, depressing post-apocalypse drama. These designs often debuted at the Danish convention and competition Fastaval, granting writers such as Wrigstad and Axelzon a quasi-*auteur* status when they won awards there. I myself ran *The Journey* at Fastaval 2010 and used my experiences with its railroaded structure to write *Metropolis* (2012). The Bergmann Hammings, Essendrop, Hansen, and future blackbox larp organizer Charles Bo Nielsen all played *Metropolis* and took their inspiration in many different artistic directions.

Metropolis and later blackbox larps, including *Sarabande*, *Deranged*, and *Encore*, combined rigid act structures with scene-based role-play that greatly hinged on the movements and gestures of the players. Music, lighting, movement, and props replaced the strong jeepform gamemaster role, and the last 10 years have seen great innovation in blackbox festivals throughout Europe. It is the platonic-ideal form for research on larp authorship, thanks to its constrained conditions of production and intensive implementation of the designers' vision over the course of several hours of play.

Jeppe and Maria Bergmann Hamming are both creators in their own right, while also having backgrounds that straddle between the rarefied Fastaval scene and unpretentious boffer fantasy. I choose here not to focus on their biographies, but their artistic output. Maria's first Fastaval scenario, *Skyggernes spil* (1998) with Maiken "Malle" Nielsen, reflects on the nature of "role-play" itself through a 1990s gothic horror game, later adapted for the blackbox context as *A Play of Shadows* (Bergmann Hamming and Bergmann Hamming 2017). Jeppe's own Fastaval debut was in 2008 with *Stormen*, a late-1990s family drama set in a winter storm. *Sarabande* in 2013 marked an undeniable turning point in their design paths, winning the Otto (Fastaval Award) for Best Game Experience. *Deranged* swept the Ottos for Best Scenario, Best Game Mechanics, and the Audience Award, and *Encore* clinched the Audience Award as well. While their fae dancing larp *Spellbound* (Bergman Hamming and Bergman Hamming 2019) was pivotal to *Encore*'s dance mechanics as well, I am bracketing it out due to space concerns.

The Bergmann Hammings' blackbox larps are concerned with *aesthetic idealism*, or the conflation of art with philosophy and an artists' willingness to make sacrifices to achieve artistic expression. F.W.

Joseph von Schelling advanced this worldview during the height of German romanticism, responding to earlier positions held by Kant and Schiller on the aesthetic sublime (Seidel 1976). However, the Bergmann Hammings are concerned with fundamentals: art's capacity to communicate, as well as its connection to decadence and death. This material is by no means original, having been well-trodden by the Romantics in the early 19th century as well as many European *fin-de-siècle* artists in the early 20th. Yet the Bergmann Hammings distinguish themselves by *directly* citing these periods and their artists in their work, with the admonishment that the embodied nature of blackbox larp will yield yet a different interpretation of artistic and moral downfall.

3. *SARABANDE*

The typical Fastaval RPG scenario consists of 4 players and 1 gamemaster, with minimal props, costumes, or other requirements. The first clue that *Sarabande* was intended for the nascent blackbox larp movement, and not necessarily Fastaval, is its defiance of all these norms: 12 players; nearly 20 props required including "a top hat, a sixpence hat … a monocle, a palette…"; neutral clothing choices to match the lighting; wine glasses with different-colored juices; and some rudimentary set dressing to mimic an 1890s café in Montmartre, Paris. One can already pour on the *Moulin Rouge* comparisons, but then again, that's the design intention. In fact, the Bergmann Hammings make these goals explicit in the text:

> In this scenario, the focus is on music and the body as the basis of character generation. The participants are guided to use a piece of music for building the external characteristics of the role and the inner emotional life of the character. . . [This scenario] lets the scenes play out through the use of aesthetic means of expression. This way of playing focuses the dramatic intensity of the scenario (3).

For a scenario about free artists, *Sarabande* is surprisingly structured. Players are trained to form silent vignettes in the café that are then set to appropriate contemporary music, "La valse d'Amélie." The song evokes a quirky, creative life in Paris, and players demonstrate their daily Routines reflecting the song's mood through movement. This extremely direct mirroring of emotion can be found in the Bergmann Hammings' other games. Players use music to lend interiority to their nascent characters, to let emotions flow directly from the character sheet through the player and into the social situation at hand. This musical channeling is also present in *Deranged* and *Encore*. Also important in *Sarabande* is these characters' connections to *art*: the *only* way these characters communicate outside of the café routine, a sort of palette cleanser, is through *artworks*. There is no time for small talk, only grand, aesthetic gestures of Freedom, Beauty, Truth, and Love, the direct themes of the game. No feelings are trivial, all feelings can only be expressed silently or through art, and the game's archetypes and social groups are absolutely primed for drama. The Bergmann Hammings consign ambient play to the café Routine sequences, so that every scene has a dramatic spotlight and an incentive for a player to over-act, over-dramatize, and over-commit. These patterns can be observed in their later works over the next decade.

4. *DERANGED*

It might have been hard to guess that the best blackbox larp of the 2010s would take us back to the 1850s and revolve around the peculiar topic of Robert Schumann's sanity. In *Deranged*, Schumann's last day is narrated through scenes with other major composers at the time: Clara Wieck (Schumann),

Felix Mendelssohn, and Johannes Brahms. *Deranged* is exemplary in giving new life and meaning to Schumann's *Lieder*, as his life story is told through them, albeit out of order. *Sarabande's* themes of Freedom, Beauty, Truth, and Love are swapped out for "recognition, artistic integrity, love, lust, and family" (3). Players put the *Lieder* up on the wall, and then choose scenes by way of the songs. "*Deranged* is a scenario about a group of people who created wonderful music," the Bergmann Hammings (2015) write. "This music is the very core of this scenario. When you run this game, you are the scenographer and conductor of the piece, and your most important tool and effect is music." Music cognition is a social act of interpretation layered between the mind and body, revolving around a constant reassessment of state changes (Leman 2017). Narrative itself, as enacted through gameplay, is a simple state change, and the primary agency exercised by the players in *Deranged* is in (A) which scenes get told in what order, and (B) what small decisions the characters make as a result of their scene play. As with *Sarabande*, the characters' artworks speak louder than themselves, and as with *Sarabande*, the binary between periods of musical interlude and acted-out scenes helps structure the overall piece. Unlike the huge prop demands of *Sarabande*, *Deranged* only requires one to print out many sheets of paper as game tools, placing them on the wall like notes on a musical score.

Deranged explicitly reaches back to the German-Romantic origins of the arts crisis found in *Sarabande*. The Romantic era, roughly spanning from the 1780s - 1840s, was characterized by a turn away from the rationalized, capitalistic Enlightenment toward the mysterious powers of art and nature. Characters such as Blond Eckbert in Ludwig Tieck's eponymous 1797 novella or Nathanael in ETA Hoffmann's 1816 story *The Sandman* are themselves aesthetic idealists, moved very much by the powers of art and nature until they are, to their astonishment, consumed by madness. To make a game about Robert Schumann's final day in 1856, looking in retrospect at the 1830s and 1840s that carved his name into musical history books, is itself a Romantic act: the Bergmann Hammings anchor their design in the power of music, in the embodied-agentic rhythms of larp, and the mobilization of high culture to reveal decadence and downfall among the characters. Player-character story arcs lead not to progression, but to tragedy and dissolution. High-cultural art in *Deranged*, in this case so-called "classical music," is not to be subsumed in fan culture, but rather is elevated to the status of game-pivotal mechanic. *Which* song a player chooses determines which painful scene of Schumann's life with Wieck, Mendelssohn, and Brahms to re-live, and that sense of choice sutures the story and music to the player's bodies. This award-winning blackbox larp solidified what players around the world could identify as the Bergmann Hamming authorial style: a vivid experience of character-driven *fictional failure* (Juul 2013) via a sincere deployment of high culture and music as game mechanics. It then only makes sense that, during the real-lived *decadence* of the COVID-19 pandemic, they would come up with an ambitious opera blackbox larp.

5. *ENCORE*

Encore is an "opera punk" blackbox larp that explores the question: What would happen if the characters and plotlines of 11 different operas were compressed into a 4-hour play experience? Prospero, the magician from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, has invited characters from different operas for a one-night, three-Act magical party in which they may live out their passions. The 11 canonical operas include *Aida*, *Die Walküre*, *Nabucco*, *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Carmen*, *Il Trovatore*, *Tosca*, *Turandot*, *La Traviata*, *Don Giovanni*, and, as an outlier, the Mozart comedy *Così fan tutte*. Its adaptation of all this material is, itself, a monumental feat. Few have sat down and provided a detailed, character-by-character story breakdown of nearly a dozen operas. A collaboration with working synth rocker Ras Bolding, the larp escalates many of the Bergmann Hammings' favored design patterns — along with borrowed ones from Nordic larp *Inside Hamlet* (Torner 2021) — while also cranking up the scale to a 50-player maximum.

It is intensely structured, with both musical interludes in which the players are silent, but can express themselves through dance, and periods of intense interpersonal conflict, in which players loudly shout their characters' feelings at each other.

Aesthetic idealism in this particular larp comes in 3 different forms: fashion, musical acts, and operatic distillation. In terms of fashion, characters express themselves through "opera punk" costumes improvised from pieces the Bergmann Hammings themselves provide. Racks of hoop dresses, ostentatious wigs, studded coats, and other accessories allow players, who are clad all in white, to distinguish their characters from each other in the low-light blackbox conditions of the larp. In terms of musical acts, Bolding and his band put on a *real* live synth concert, which is both in homage to synth-operatic acts such as Klaus Nomi as well as the indulgences of punk culture. Bolding's performance chides the player-characters, goading them into feeling *something* so that they might translate their dancing into character motivations and dramatic action. The musical acts, as with *Sarabande* and *Deranged*, force players to directly engage with music as an actor in the game (Bienia 2016).

In terms of operatic distillation, *Encore* offers a brilliant literary analysis of 11 different operas' plotlines in the 50 individual playbooks. Players divide up into opera sub-groups, and they then intensely study together the playbooks of their opera's characters. These playbooks quickly summarize the operas, their core tensions, and the activities the player should engage in during *Encore*. They make opera immediately *playable* (Fortugno and Pearce 2021; Murphy 2022), granting total agency to the players over their characters while also gating key character decisions in specific Acts. For example: Will Zaccaria, the protective Jewish priest in *Nabucco*, "cast Ismaele aside if he chooses Fenena over the Jews?" (Bergmann Hammings 2022). Will he "surrender to temptation and seduce Abigail?" Will he grant the others forgiveness at the end of Act 3? These decisions are paced by the game, but made by the players. Drawing on *Inside Hamlet*, players are also not allowed to kill each other until the end of Act 3, when weapons are suddenly strewn about the playspace. Whereas in *Sarabande* and *Deranged*, characters have recourse to creating art to express their feelings, *Encore* uses dance and loud, over-the-top declarations of feelings to cultivate the necessary *exteriority* to drive plotlines. Once one is caught up in the spell of both one's opera and Prospero's party, the only way out is through re-writing one's fate, based on the gameplay and dancing.

6. CONCLUSION

The Bergmann Hammings' work is a case of RPG authorship *par excellence*, since the team works with clear continuity in themes and design patterns, and I am confident no larper would arrive at their final experience or intensified relationship with the source material without their specific, conscious design choices.

Their work pulls together a European *fin-de-siècle* sentiment about the fine arts with modern techniques of larp design, using humanity's natural relationship with music as a linchpin. In *Sarabande*, the players are silenced through music as they go about their "Routine," itself a form of improvised theatrical performance that places their characters in relation with others. Music communicates an inner world that cannot be expressed in words, and that complements both their characters' artistic practice as well as their story arcs. In *Deranged*, music expands its role to become *the* vehicle for accessing not only the characters' inner worlds, but the very plotline of the game itself. Schumann's *Lieder* become a rearrangeable road map of the characters' shared memories, ordered and co-created by the players. Music is directly connected to player agency and the primary themes of the larp, madness and genius.

In *Encore*, music is a necessary interlude to be used to work through the intense, stage-y emotions of opera through equally intense, story-relevant dancing. Whereas opera merges plotline

exposition, character interiority, and song, *Encore* separates the sung word from the individual operas themselves, instead allowing the players to work through their tragic character arcs by alternatively yelling at each other or simply dancing it out. Bolding's musical performances cut through the self-righteous seriousness of opera and encourage an "everyone is invited" playful attitude matching the Bergmann Hammings' masterful larp scripts. All three larps follow an aesthetic-idealistic approach to music: paraphrasing Aldous Huxley (1931), music lets the inexpressible achieve expression, even beyond what the already-highly-physical medium of larp allows.

RPG authors have readily identifiable patterns in their work and, should anyone hope to secure the artistic legitimacy of ludic role-play, we have to start *somewhere* in describing and analyzing them. The acclaim that the Bergmann Hammings' blackbox larps have received is well and truly deserved, and they as RPG authors have a strong emphasis in their design work on the power of high culture and the decadence of ever devoting one's life to it. In this spirit, a kind of white-Northern-European melancholy reigns; a positing of life's problems in such a way that high art — free-spirited Parisian paintings, moody German *Lieder*, bombastic European operas – becomes both the solution and the poison one takes to speed one's demise. Certainly no one in these Nordic larp circles has devoted themselves to a Bohemian art lifestyle or a tragic downfall – everyone has kids, day jobs, and reams of email like the rest of us. The Bergmann Hammings offer a straightforward escapist experience, only with negative emotion and artistic community.

Larp here does not co-opt the artforms, but rather enhances the players' connections to the raw material that made these works of art compelling in the first place. This is a modern response to the essence of the material, rather than its capitalistic cannibalization. These larps are work-intensive and expensive to produce, with no expectation of the players beyond their play itself, and no expectation of profit either. In this respect, as we global citizens collectively careen into dangerously uncertain times, the Bergmann Hammings offer us a means of aesthetically controlling our own descent and, at the very least, enjoying the ride.

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Larp as a Potential Space for Non-Formal Queer Cultural Heritage

Abstract: Queer experience has, until very recently, been invisible or significantly misrepresented in cultural and scholarly fields of record including history, sociology, and ethnography. Self-recording of our lives, communities, and culture has occurred almost exclusively through non-formal means. Queer heritage has seen recent scholarly study of these non-formal means in the form of archives of oral histories, ephemera, and ethnographies. This work emphasises the critical role safer community, social, and performance spaces play in containing, creating, and disseminating queer histories and heritage. Despite this increased visibility, the need for more grassroots expressions of nonnormative genders and sexualities remains crucial for queer people to find support.

As part of my wider work exploring the potential live action role-playing games (larps) might have for the exploration of gender subjectivity through play, in this paper I suggest that larps can also provide a space to document, disseminate, and educate on queer experience, history, and culture. Larp is a democratic form of expression that does not require performance skill or training, but rather allows people to experience empowerment, including for those who come from marginalized backgrounds, i.e., through emancipatory bleed (Kemper 2020; Baird 2021; Cazeneuve 2021). Larp has on occasion been used for non-formal education on queer history, such as in the larp *Just a Little Lovin'* (2011) about the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s, which includes educational workshops and debriefs on notable historical and cultural themes (Groth, Grasmo, and Edland 2022). Larp used this way is not dissimilar to the way queer social and performance space has been co-created as a container for both meaning-making and heritage for LGBTQIA+ people. On this basis, I argue that game design that seeks to reflect and represent this kind of queer cultural production in social and performance spaces may allow for the non-formal education on LGBTQIA+ lives and heritage, as well as opportunities for personal (gender) expression, exploration, and embodiment.

Keywords: gender, sexuality, LGBTQIA+, heritage, larp, non-formal education, emancipatory bleed

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1. INTRODUCTION

Typically excluded or misrepresented by mainstream socio-historical studies and heritage records (Stein 2022), LGBTQIA+ history has until recently been most often recorded, disseminated, and communicated in alternative sites and mediums (Stryker 2008, Burns 2018). As such, accounts of LGBTQIA+ histories and heritage have had to be formed and recorded within those non-formal and informal sites; with methods reflecting the concealed nature of the subject. For example, LGBTQIA+ oral histories have recently been collected as part of the *British Library Sounds* archive, and were recorded to document often-obscured historical experience from people who had to hide their identity during times of extreme socio-cultural discrimination and legal threat. These stories and information were simply not preserved in any other way, and might have been lost without these oral histories being recorded expeditiously.

Similarly, the *Hall-Carpenter Archives* located at the London School of Economics and the recently opened *Queer Britain Museum* collect stories and artefacts from the development of LGBTQIA+ activism since the 1950s in the UK. The material gathered is in the form of non-formal and informal records such as community-created printed materials, ephemera, accounts, and stories. Other archives specifically recognise the importance of social and performance spaces to the expression and communication of LGBTQIA+ experience, heritage, and culture. For example, the Bishopsgate Institute in London hosts several archives for particularly important social, performance, and community events and venues in the UK. This includes the *Wotever Archive*, which documents queer arts and culture predominantly in London with news, magazine, and zine articles as well as other audio-visual materials

for the years 1983-2019. The Institute also hosts the *Transfabulous* archive, which documents the six-year history (2006-2012) of a highly-influential series of arts and cultural events that sought to represent trans experience and communities.

Gender and queer theorists note how social and especially performance spaces function as sites for queer cultural communication, but also production (Case 2009; Erharter, Schwärzler, Sircar and Scheirl 2015). This includes, for example, drag performance, which is positioned not only as entertainment but often as a way to communicate queer experience and culture (Volcano and Halberstam 1999, Senelick 2000, Parslow 2019). Drag has seen recent significant public attention in popular culture, for example in the worldwide phenomenon of *RuPaul's Drag Race* (2009-), as well as documentaries such as *We're Here* (2020-) on HBO and *Queer Eye* (2018-) on Netflix, all of which have been either nominated for or won Emmys. Seminal queer theorist Judith Butler (1990, 1993) uses drag and gender performance in performance spaces as the foundation of her theories on gender normativities. These theories have been highly influential on theories of gender performativities, which I have explored further in relation to live action role-playing (larp) as a way to explore these notions (Baird 2021).

In his extensive exploration of drag and queer communities, Parslow (2019) argues that performance spaces function as a site for cultural production; personal and communal communication; and *queering knowledge*. They suggest that the forms of expression, community formation, and survival strategizing that occur in these environments map very well onto the queering of academic knowledge and practice argued for by queer theorists such as Halberstam (2011) and Muñoz (2009). In this sense, queer performance spaces are understood by historians and theorists alike as sites of queer knowledge. Ethnographers of queer social/performance spaces (Volcano and Halberstam 1999; Volcano and Dahl 2008; Moffat 2009) argue that queer social/performance spaces function *both* as the site for cultural production/queer expression but also as heritage sites in and of themselves. In this sense, we understand that these venues have become critical parts of queer history.[1]

These venues, the communities formed within them, and the stories that are made by people inside as well as told on stage, are in part a non-formal dissemination of knowledge, culture, and education. They are where we told our stories; expressed ourselves; shared our hopes and fears; and mourned our losses – when all of that was almost completely invisible or impossible in mainstream life. These are the spaces where we could share our truths, oral histories, and community. They were (and are) critical sites for the development of LGBTQIA+ culture, organised activism, and social support networks in many countries and times. The Stonewall Inn is famously the site where the US gay civil rights movement was sparked in 1969 (Stein 2019). The UK LGBTQ political lobby group, Stonewall, took their name from this critically important venue, which is true for a number of other organisations, such as Stonewall Housing in the UK and the Stonewall Community Foundation in the US amongst others.

In my own experience, I have been present at the formation of community and activist organisations, such the UK-based trans organisation *Gendered Intelligence*, within and through these performance spaces. Pride marches and festivals themselves are examples of the celebration and deployment of performance and social spaces to make political protest, but also to become a site of queer visibility, histories, cultural production, and heritage. In 2005 in Poland, whilst performing there myself, I witnessed the critical importance of venues like *Le Madame* in Warsaw which functioned as a cultural hub for queer people especially during violent social and political crackdowns.[2]

Elsewhere, I have argued that because of the still relative invisibility of LGBTQIA+ issues,

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1   See Stein 2019 on the importance of the Stonewall Inn and Dunton 2015 on the official heritage listing of the UK's oldest gay pub and performance venue, The Royal Vauxhall Tavern.

2   See Chełmiński 2021 for an excellent account through images taken of the club throughout its history before its brutal closure in 2006.

experience, and histories in formal educational sites, non-formal or informal education on our lives is often required (Baird 2022). Despite recent queer scholarship and pop cultural visibility, there remains a lack of LGBTQIA+ education and particularly heritage represented in formal academies, literature, and mainstream museums (Field 2022). Indeed, there is currently an alarming socio-political movement in several countries that may lead to a significant reduction of formal recording and education on LGBTQIA+ issues, by governmental and legal decree (see ECREA 2018; Human Rights Watch 2018; Phillips 2022). Non-formal and informal sites of education have been, and continue to be, critical therefore to the record of LGBTQIA+ culture and heritage.

As such, I have argued that games and perhaps particularly larp might potentially provide a marginalised group such as trans people the opportunity to explore, express, and embody their subjectivity in safer non-formal and informal environments (Baird 2021). I have suggested that because larp can potentially provide an alibi (Deterding 2018) and safer container of play (Bowman and Hugaas 2021), they may allow someone to consider their gender subjectivity in a way that might not be possible in their everyday lives (Baird 2021). I have drawn upon theory that suggests that *bleed-out* from a larp (see Bowman 2013; Kemper 2017, 2020), namely the retention of an experience within a game might allow for a transformative experience in this regard, particularly when paired with the application thereof outside of the game. Also based on larp theory, I have suggested that a potentially useful fiction for such a game might be a fantastical version of a social/performance space, such as one like the venues I have described above – arguing that this would provide a recognisable enough site, but with the application of enough of a fiction to provide suitable alibi for play (Baird 2021; Baird and Bowman 2022.). I have also co-designed and facilitated a larp based on these principles entitled *Euphoria*, researching the responses of participants (Baird, Bowman, and Toft Thejls 2023a, 2023b). In the present paper, I also contend that a game that reproduces such spaces might provide the opportunity for the communication of, and education on, queer heritage.

2. EDU-LARP, HISTORY, AND HERITAGE

Edu-larp (educational larp) is a form of role-playing that can function as a non-formal pedagogical method. Edu-larp can be considered in relation to other interactive or co-created educational and therapeutic approaches including, psychodrama, training scenarios, education through drama/theatre, amongst others (Bowman 2014). With a focus on experiential and situated learning, edu-larp has, amongst other features, the potential to simulate scenarios that are very similar to those of real-world experience, however with less negative consequences for practice, experimentation, and mistakes (Henriksen 2004). The collection of essays, *Larp Politics – Systems, Theory and Gender in Action* (Kangas, Loponen, and Särkijärvi 2016) features accounts by theorists and practitioners of a number of larps designed to convey specific, and quite complex, socio-cultural themes, communities, and histories. Cited therein are examples of larp recreations of the Russian revolution of 1905 (Pihl 2016), Fascism in Italy in the 1930s/40s (Trenti 2016), the financial crisis in Chile in the 1970s, and the function of the Roman Senate amongst others (Servetnik and Fedoseev 2016).

Mochocki (2021) distinguishes these kinds of larps from historical re-enactments, in that the former provides an opportunity for a "rich repertoire of modes of communication, semiotic resources, and interaction protocols," which "create and sustain" the worlds that are "co-created, represented and collaboratively enacted" (2021, 2). This contrasts with re-enactments, which are like a "low-interaction spectator activity" (Mochocki 2021). The immersive nature of the embodied experience, as Levin (2020) suggests, allows for a rich and complex involvement with multi-faceted socio-cultural issues. From this perspective, larps that attempt to reproduce specific historical moments, or heritage, can allow for a contextualised learning environment that facilitates the modelling of complex social processes therein (Henrikson 2004).

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I have noted elsewhere (Baird 2021) that there is a limited number of larps which specifically highlight LGBTQIA+ experience or issues, and this is particularly true for larps that reproduce queer heritage. A notable exception is *Just a Little Lovin'* (*JaLL*) (2011, Groth, Grasmo, and Edland 2021), a larp that represents a period in 1980s New York during the HIV/AIDS crisis and the impact it had on the queer community. *JaLL* can be seen to function on several levels, including the reported opportunities of players to explore queer subjectivity (Paisley 2016; Edland and Grasmo 2021). The larp also attempts to simulate a very specific and impactful period in history for the queer community, dealing with the very real rise of the HIV/AIDS epidemic at the time. The larp utilises several methods to not only allow for the co-created space of the larp itself but also activities that function in- and out-of-game, including workshops, educational opportunities, spaces to debrief and discuss, amongst others (Bowman 2015). All these engagements collectively form the whole of the larp experience and allow for the potential to convey the history and heritage of queer communal experience during, and arising from, that time period (Levin 2023).

There are, however, potential pitfalls in attempting to simulate an actual historical time-period and in attempting to provide an opportunity to enact marginalised experience and heritage. Leonard, Janjetovic and Usman (2021) warn that although role-playing marginalised experience may have positive impacts on players who may not have the same marginalised lives outside of the game in the form of potential empathy or personal self-exploration, there is also the possibility for negative outcomes of such an engagement. They draw parallels with *dark tourism*: the practice of privileged persons entering areas of recent or continuing disaster, potentially for the purpose of voyeurism or vicarious exposure, with limited consequence to themselves (Leonard, Janjetovic and Usman, 2021). In larp, they argue this practice can lead to: the commodification of marginalised experience; forms of *identity tourism* that reproduce and perpetuate harmful stereotypes rather than recreate more authentic representations of marginalised lives; misuse of cultural products and symbols; an imposition on those who are members of these marginalised groups during- or outside- of play including for information, resources, labour, or even microaggressions.

Torner (2018) notes that this was an initial criticism levelled at *JaLL* (2011) when news of its writing was reported. This was one of many reasons that Torner (2018) argues the game had to be so mindfully constructed. This is also because, as Cazeneuve (2018) notes, larp, like any other socio-cultural activity, has the potential, perhaps even the predilection, to reproduce problematic societal structures. This can happen easily if not reflected upon during the design and implementation process. From these perspectives, larps that seek to simulate a particular historical time or cultural heritage may fall prey to the problems of misrepresentation, marginalisation, and harm to the very communities they might purport to represent.

However, Leonard, Janjetovic and Usman (2021) note that the potential positive outcomes of playing marginalised characters can include outcomes such as greater empathy and less stereotypical understandings through an increased overlap of perception between the self and others. These benefits can be more readily achieved by intentionally and consciously playing with them in mind, as well as engaging in prosocial behaviour, which may also allow for engagement with emotion sharing, establish social bonds, and potentially support the well-being of others. They also emphasise the importance of the designer's role in steering play to these potential positive outcomes with a goal to encourage and facilitate bleed-out into everyday life. Finally, they note that, "Under ideal conditions, larping marginalized characters and experiences may even improve participants' ability to see the bigger picture of structural inequality" (2021, 32) and reduce prejudice. Overall, they suggest that larp can lead to greater community engagement, understanding, overlap, and cohesion outside of the game.

3. QUEER SOCIAL/PERFORMANCE HERITAGE IN LARP

JaLL (2011) features a fictionalised social and performance space as part of its narrative that reflects and represents the importance such venues served to queer communities at the time. Role-players create their own performances and enact them for each other in that environment, thus effectively co-creating fictionalised (though like real life) queer heritage (Levin 2023). *JaLL*, by including this as a central aspect of the larp, implicitly recognises the importance of these spaces in the context within which they were established and co-created. Larp, I have argued, is co-created in ways that parallel the establishment and function of many of these queer social/performance venues (Baird 2021). Simulating these queer social and performance spaces acknowledges their cultural relevance to LGBTQIA+ communities – which I have argued above. Simulating them might also allow for the education on and experience of this heritage. This education might be achieved through the recreation of a specific individual or types of social or performance spaces, but also may offer the potential positive outcomes for which Leonard, Janjetovic and Usman (2021) argue.

As noted above, reported evidence from *JaLL* (2011) has suggested there have been significant positive outcomes from role-playing queer characters in that fictionalised 1980s community. In their study of testimonials in the "queer larp studies: research group" on Facebook, Stenros and Sihvonen (2019) note that "it is easy to find testimonials online to the larp's power." In many such testimonials, the act structure (e.g., Torner 2018), the combination of randomness and fate play (e.g., Paisley 2015), the use of ritual (e.g., Bowman 2015), and framing activities (e.g., Waern 2012) are mentioned as particularly useful in relating the historical significance of the time period being represented.

Annika Waern (2012) discusses in detail the design features that are used to convey the personal, ethical, and historical features of the semi-fictional world, highlighting for example an act break in which characters were encouraged to engage with significant historical moments like the establishment of the "AIDS prevention campaign." The significance of these features was further emphasised by a post-game "world brief" with activists who worked with queer, AIDS, and HIV issues. Torner (2018) recalls a testimony from a player who had been a part of the New York City gay scene, who claimed that the larp accurately captured the spirit of the time. These types of *contextualization* activities can lead to increased learning (Westborg 2022).

But of course, the larp is not a one-to-one accurate representation of what happened in that period in that city. It is a fictionalisation, designed to give a sense of what it might have been like: what Paisley (2015) calls "a past that could have been" in his testimony. Stenros and Sihvonen (2019) find similar sentiment in one of the player testimonies they gathered: a gay man who said he was able to "participate in a facsimile of important queer history." In doing so, he was able to play out several *different* forms of gay masculinities, thus emphasising the multiplicities of experience that need to be accounted for in any understanding of queer subjectivities of the period. Bowman (2015) highlights this as well in her examination of ritual as a core function of how *JaLL* communicates queer histories, by emphasising the multiple influential subcultures of the time represented throughout (including for example, spirituality seekers, neo-tantra practitioners, drag queens, leather communities, and more). As complicated as that can become, Bowman (2015) notes, *JaLL* emphasises how the structure facilitated character relations, which is reflected in the testimonials of players she collected, who commonly noted the intensity of the connections the experience created. These relations "enhanced understanding of the struggles of countercultural movements during the period, and increased awareness about the AIDS crisis" (Bowman 2015).

On this basis, I suggest that larps that simulate a queer social and performance space specifically might allow for a greater understanding of queer communities, as well as experiential learning of the ways in which we have communicated and expressed ourselves, our culture, and lives in these sites.

Not only could specific historically located instances of such spaces be modelled to educate on history, but by engaging in the co-creative nature of these environments (through the similarly co-creative medium of larp) we might endeavour to facilitate greater understanding of the function of these spaces, educating about them and demonstrating *why* they have been so critical to our communities.

4. CONCLUSION

A queer performance tends to happen in only one time and in one place. This experience was something I discussed recently with Joe Parslow and Dr J Harrison (*It Is Complicated Episode 55*, 2023). It certainly was my own experience for a very long time. I found that most shows that I would write, produce, and perform were only ever done exactly once. This was because I would presume that the audience, who would often be the same people in the same venue, would not be interested in seeing it more than that. Or if I did it in another venue somewhere else, it was likely I wouldn't be able to go back there any time soon, presuming the event itself occurred more than just the night I was performing at. And this was very common for many of my fellow performers. I think it was also because our performances felt like they were "of the moment." During the time I performed in venues like the now heritage-listed *Royal Vauxhall Tavern*, I would notice that the shows we were doing were often related to experiences that were happening at the time, conversations we were having as a community, or reflections of our histories. In that sense, we would be making our shows together as performers, audience, and community, in constant shifting dialogue. Here now, and gone the next.

How could you capture such experiences in a traditional form of history? *You had to be there*, so to speak. But that is only true if we believe we need a literal recording of the moment in order to convey what was happening, why they were important, and why they are the sites and subject of our histories. As important as oral histories are, any account, including my own, would be subjective, after all. A video recording of a show that I did would not convey the complete significance of why I was doing that performance, then and in that venue. An ethnographer could give greater context and account, but they could not necessarily express the visceral, embodied, experience of being there, even if they happened to be in the right place, at the right time, for a given show night.

But a recreation of the kind of space that it was based on these accounts, modelling the kind of dialogue that was happening, and presenting the context that it was in might be able to communicate in an embodied way how these sites function as heritage in practice. In my wider research, I have argued that larp theory and practice suggests that a fictionalised environment that is close to lived reality, with a clearly defined container of play which emphasises respect for all attending, and integrated workshop and reflection activities, could allow players to express, explore and experiment with gender (Baird 2021; Bowman and Baird 2022). I have suggested that larp designed around a fantastical social/performance space might allow for drawing on the features of these co-creative spaces to develop the boundaries and dynamics of the play container – just as it develops a safer space for LGBTQIA+ people to exist in wider society (Baird, Bowman, and Toft Thejls 2023a, 2023b). With the understanding that larp can represent historical moments in time, socio-cultural heritage, and even educate on marginalised lives and develop empathy, I argue here that larps might also model queer social and performance spaces to allow players to experience our histories, our heritage, and how those have been co-created in these environments.

However, this practice must be done with tremendous care to avoid dark tourism and/or the reproduction of problematic social norms. I argue that this can be achieved by modelling these larps on the principles that LGBTQIA+ spaces have been using for years to achieve similar ends. As noted, nightclub and performance spaces have been sites for our cultural heritage, attempting to express and retell our histories through their expression on- and off- the stage.

By considering the careful reproduction of queer spaces in larp, we can attempt to record and convey their experiential, ephemeral, and sometimes fleeting nature. These are the principles I recommend for larp design that could show how our culture and heritage can be formed in the moment and by co-creation of its participants. I could never fully account for what happened at *Transfabulous*, one of the most relevant cultural festivals for trans people in the UK in the last twenty years, even though I was there. But were I to create a larp in which participants were encouraged to role-play the people engaging in the process of putting together the festival, in the context of the legal changes to allow trans people to change their birth certificates that had just happened at the time, in a socio-political environment that felt both hopeful and dangerous – perhaps I could convey not only what historically happened, but also the process by which our histories were made in those spaces. How and why we told our stories there, and continue to do so in places just like it, moment to moment.

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Bridging Historical and Present-Day Queer Community Through Embodied Role-playing

Abstract: *Just a Little Lovin' (JaLL)*, a live action role-playing (larp) portraying queer lives in the face of the HIV/AIDS crisis, provides an example of how a larp might connect participants to historical communities (Baird 2023). This connection may serve as a catalyst for an ongoing bond that might foster personal growth as well as present-day community building. There are many reports on the impact that the larp has had on the participants on a personal level (Baird 2021; Bowman 2015; Friedner 2022; Gronemann ed. 2013; Groth et al. 2021; Levin 2019, Stenros 2021; Stenros and Sihvonen 2019). Through the lens of emerging theories on transformational role-playing, new perspectives arise that enlighten these experiences further.

Taking into consideration metareflection (Levin 2020), transformational containers (Baird 2021; Bowman and Hugaas 2021), and different types of bleed (Bowman and Hugaas 2021; Kemper 2020), this article discusses what we might learn from role-playing queer history. I argue that in the affirmative space of the larp, playing queer personality traits that might have been suppressed has offered personal growth through emotional (Bowman and Hugaas 2021), emancipatory (Kemper 2020), and ego bleed (Beltrán 2012). However, continued development of marginalized personality traits might require extended integration work, for which post larp practices are just emerging. Through the feeling of belonging to historical queer movements that *JaLL* offers, participants have been spurred to reach out to queer communities of the present-day, and have also built their own queer communities, both of which may support prolonged integration and development processes. These perspectives might aid in a continued development on post-larp integration practices and community building, as well as open up the possibility for other marginalized groups and historical movements to consider how they might benefit from their own bespoke larps.

Keywords: community building, LGBTQIA+, queerness, larp, role-playing games, metareflection, bleed, integration

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1. *JUST A LITTLE LOVIN':* A LARP KNOWN FOR ITS IMPACT

Just a Little Lovin' (JaLL), a larp (live action role-playing) portraying queer lives in the face of the HIV/AIDS crisis, provides an example of how a larp might connect participants to historical communities (Baird 2023). This connection may serve as a catalyst for an ongoing bond that might foster personal growth as well as present-day community building. There are many reports on the impact that the larp has had on the participants on a personal level (Baird 2021; Bowman 2015; Friedner 2022; Gronemann, ed. 2013; Groth et al. 2021; Levin 2019; Stenros 2021; Stenros and Sihvonen 2019). Through the lens of emerging theories on transformational role-playing (Baird 2021; Beltrán 2012; Bowman and Hugaas 2019; Bowman and Hugaas 2021; Hugaas 2019; Kemper 2017; Kemper 2020), and by looking at the impact on a community level, new perspectives arise. These might aid in a continued development on post larp integration practices as well as open up the possibility for other marginalized groups and historical movements to consider how they might benefit from their own bespoke larps.

JaLL is a larp for about 60 participants, created in the Nordic larp tradition by Tor Kjetil Edland and Hanne Grasmo. It was played for the first time in Norway in 2011, and has since been organized in Sweden, Denmark, USA, Finland, UK and France. Within the Nordic larp community, it is considered to be one of the most impactful larps to play, with its strong themes on desire, fear of death, and friendship; bespoke design choices in act structures; workshops; and metatechniques; as well as a complex range of characters and social connections (Bowman 2015; Groth et al. 2021; Stenros and Sihvonen 2019; Waern 2012). I played the larp myself in 2016, and returned to organize it in 2022.

The larp is structured over three nights of celebrations, where people from the queer, alternative, and spiritual communities of New York are invited to celebrate the 4th of July together in 1982, 1983 and 1984. The HIV/AIDS virus is spreading throughout the queer community, leaving a huge impact on the characters and their festive gatherings. The day between each evening of in-game celebration is used for off-game contextualization and calibration, where the participants collaboratively consider what will happen in the following year (Groth, Grasmo, and Edland eds. 2021).

2. WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM ROLE-PLAYING HISTORY?

When we are role-playing, we interpret our bodies and surroundings through a layer of fiction. Through focusing on our interpretation, we may immerse into the fiction (Järvelä 2019; Levin 2020; McConachie 2013). And by zooming out, we may see both fiction and reality in relation to each other, and metareflect (Levin 2020), which might allow for a constructive relationship between our lives and the role-play. While we may also reflect on the experience after a larp, metareflections are an important aspect of the contextualization and personal correlations we might find while the larp is ongoing. At *JaLL*, the long breaks for calibration between each act allows for a shared metareflexive space that informs the larp, while still allowing for deeper immersion during play.

Participants use what they know and can imagine to inform the fiction they create. It is therefore relevant to ask: What can we learn from imagining history, or playing being gay, or playing being sick? What we might learn about real life in any larp relies on what is brought into play through the experiences, thoughts, and ideas of participants and organizers, meeting in a design informed by the experiences and knowledge of the larp designers. *JaLL* has a very good starting point, as the designers have extensive knowledge on queer lives, non-normative sexuality, and HIV/AIDS. Even though the larp is open for anyone, the larp's strong themes have always attracted a large amount of queer participants (but as their queerness is not necessarily visible, this is not always evident to outsiders or even other participants) that also bring their experience into the imagined universe (Stenros 2021). With all these contributions combined, there seems to be enough shared experience to create a fiction that is complex, nuanced, and that rings true, as has been affirmed by participants well rooted in the queer community at the 2022 run, as well as in earlier accounts (Torner 2018).

Infused by these combined efforts, "performances may energize people to make hundreds, even thousands of [interpretive] blends and meanings" (McConachie 2013, 73), which might lead to new insights. Through the shared fiction, participants that are not queer might also gain new knowledge through *memetic bleed* (Hugaas 2019; Bowman and Hugaas 2021) where values and ideas of other social groups might be more understood.

To allow participants to get the information they need to be able to improvise this history, there is recommended reading and watching sent out before the larp, and over a day of workshops before the larp starts. During the larp, short historical updates are given during each act break, before the participants develop how the story unfolds next. Some runs of the larp have also been followed by lectures on the history of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the present-day situation (*JaLL* 2022; Waern 2012).

Performance researcher Rebecca Schneider (2011) suggests that historical reenactments may be seen as a form of performative documentation. As other types of media, our own bodies may carry information from one time to another by recreating historical issues. While we also need stories where queer lives do not end in tragedy, insisting on the retelling and remembering of past struggles can also be seen as a form of resistance for marginalized groups (Malburne-Wade 2013; Stenros and Sihvonen 2019). While the deadly sickness is a prominent theme, it is the queer lives that we embody, fall in love with, and remember (Bowman 2015; Friedner 2022; Paisley 2016). In addition, the participants carry

with them the present-day knowledge that this crisis could have had a very different outcome, which adds a metareflective hindsight that challenges any deterministic narratives. What becomes visible is not a tragedy, but a crisis hitting characters that could have been us, that could have become our elders had they lived today, and how society failed them.

JaLL does not strive to be a historically correct document. The information sent out before the larp is very condensed, and to a large extent optional, and the aesthetics of the larp is more of an '80s dream than strictly realistic. With a focus on human relations, the participants are free to create stories meaningful to them within the themes presented. It might be contradictory to still call it a performative documentation, but rather than having the participants confuse the larp for historical accuracy, this approach insists on an open dialogue between our shared imaginative experience and historical facts, where the two might inform one another. This encourages participants to continue this dialogue, engaging in other historical documents and stories long after the larp has ended. Well aware that "when we blend concepts to create possible worlds, the end result is still hypothetical" (McConachie 2013, 27), it is after the larp that most of the factual learning happens.

Still, even though we know that our character fates are not facts, we carry with us over 60 different imagined human fates of *what it could have been like*. While resisting any conclusion on *knowing*, the larp gives a spectrum of experiences that people like us might have had: "Speaking to ancestors, body-to-body, we might not see eye-to-eye, *but we might*" (Schneider 2011, 137). While attending my second run of *JaLL* as an organizer, in the last act taking place in 1984, some characters had started a bright confetti-driven HIV/AIDS activist group called The Radical Fairies, inspired by a group that did exist at the time. I watched them perform in 2022, infused with memories from my earlier 1984 that took place in 2016. The props that one of the participants brought turn out to be actual props that they used in a similar activist group in the 2000s. In a beautiful moment of metareflection, "the 'liveness' of the event was itself syncopated with other times. The time, then, was not (only) now. It was (multiple) past and present, present and deferred into the future" (Schneider 2011, 183). I watched reality and fiction intersect, as queer histories intermingle in an intricate dance with the layers of time.

3. WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM QUEER ROLE-PLAYING?

While the role-playing is fiction, it provides an alibi that allows us to try out who we could have been, which might be followed by discoveries of our own of what we are, what we are not, and what we could be today. Returning to the larp in 2022 as an organizer, I saw a new group of participants dive into the *JaLL* universe. Extravagant '80s outfits, genderbending participants, drag queens, fairies and butches, leather and disco. The first evening, there was an atmosphere of being a bit out of one's comfort zone. *Is the outfit and the makeup too much, or not enough? Is this too weird, or could my character have worn it?* Throughout the larp, as if it were it a crash course in queer pride and ownership, I recognized players move like I once did, from braving awkwardness into carrying themselves with pride and ease in a variety of outfits, romancing, dances, or stage performances.

Many people entering queer communities for the first time have probably questioned if they are too queer or not queer enough to fit in. In the redeeming light of there being no such thing as "too much" in the '80s, the participants can try out almost any style and get away with it. With the alibi of character and fictional universe, there might be awkwardness, but there is no feeling of judgment or shame that might threaten trying things out in real life. Within the frame of the larp, extravagance and camp is unanimously celebrated both in- and out-of-game, as a gift to the queer party and to the shared effort of aestheticizing the larp. As such, the larp creates a transformational container (Baird 2021; Bowman and Hugaas 2021) for developing queer ownership of one's body and space.

Through this safer training ground, participants may try out being more explicitly queer than they would in their everyday life, and with the collective support around them, become more at ease with showing who they are. This might especially be of use for queer participants without an established network, who might then enter real life queer arenas with greater confidence.

At *JaLL* 2022, I learned through off-game conversations that a significant amount of participants try out things they have never done before, from wearing leather to same sex flirting or even having their first drag show. The alibi of playing a character who masters something, might actually heighten the participant's ability, which can be especially noted when seeing players with little previous stage experience excel in the larp's performances. Through *procedural bleed* (Bowman and Hugaas 2021; Hugaas 2019), these abilities, traits, and skills may be transferred from character to participant after having managed them in the larp. In this way, the larp offers an opportunity to learn skills in all things queer, from flirting to visibility, advocacy, and artistry.

For all participants, the larp may allow for *emotional bleed* (Bowman and Hugaas 2021) or *emancipatory bleed* (Kemper 2017; Kemper 2020) through inhabiting queer experiences that have been dormant, suppressed, or lacking opportunity in their lived lives. In addition, *JaLL* builds a supportive community where being queer is the norm and even celebrated, both in and out of game (Paisley 2016; Stenros and Sihvonen 2019). For queer participants who have lived lives with a lack of visibility, community, or dealing with shame, this process offers an opportunity for emancipatory bleed of belonging, affirmation, and appreciation. Exhibiting queer behavior in a supportive community is an important aspect of this impact of the larp, and many participants report that they continue exploring their gender identities and sexual orientation after the experience (Stenros 2021; Stenros and Sihvonen 2019).

4. INTEGRATING WHAT YOU FIND

In light of the emerging work on transformative larps (Baird 2021; Bowman and Hugaas 2019; Bowman and Hugaas 2021; Kemper 2020), I would like to look back on my own journey since *JaLL* 2016. The larp moved me like no other (see also Levin 2019). But at the time, my default tools to handle character and bleed were blunt and inefficient for an experience of this caliber.

I had been nervous to embody my assertive lesbian character, but while playing, she found a confidence in me that I didn't know I had. When she died in the second act, I was devastated. My grief when I could not spend more time with her didn't quite make sense to me intellectually, since the difference as a player was only half a day before all of us would have to leave the fiction anyways. In hindsight, I realize that I had lost an unexpectedly freeing alibi to keep exploring being a fearless lesbian in a tightly knit queer community. And with an ignorance spurred by an internalized idea that the "right thing to do" was to leave characters behind, I didn't go into the third act to keep exploring something similar. I set out to play something different and, unfortunately, more close to home, and reentered the larp as a bi newcomer in an overeager attempt to integrate my present self directly into the larp. But in an environment that had just allowed the queer sides of me to be so much more, playing closer to home was to put these sides of me back in their usual constraints. Instead of finding a shortcut to integrating my queer self, I ended up despising my new character for everything she (I) wasn't (yet).

Bowman and Hugaas (2021) explain that this habit of letting the character go is an important part of the larp alibi. Alibi lets us try out new behavior through the suspension of normalcy, which is then expected to be restored as we leave the fiction. Alibi might allow us to find new sides of ourselves, but can at the same time turn into a gatekeeper that hinder us from continued exploration (see also Baird 2021; Stenros and Sihvonen 2019).

When *JaLL* 2016 ended, the de-roling continued through distancing techniques. I left a piece of my main character's clothing behind: her rose clip. As I wrote her a letter, I came to realize that I couldn't let her go. My character was both fictional and dead, but I still could feel her strength in my body, to the point where I had a recurring sensation of her rose petals already tattooed on my skin. Despite what I thought was the "proper" way to leave a larp, I went back to pick up her rose and wore it for the rest of the summer.

I can now see that I experienced what Bowman and Hugaas (2021), Kemper (2017, 2020) and Beltrán (2012) and/or *ego bleed*, where the character allowed me to inhabit suppressed emotions and suppressed aspects of my identity. As a bi person struggling with visibility in a heteronormative society, playing an unapologetic lesbian had given a marginalized part of my identity an opportunity to reclaim its space. As Kemper (2020) suggests, larps may allow us to "explore the selves we could never be, or that we might have been. . . and it is within this space we might find some of the characteristics we have always wanted to exhibit, but we have been closed off or discouraged from being." She proposes that this aspect of larp is especially useful to people who live with a fractured identity due to marginalization (Kemper 2020; see also Baird 2021), and such experiences might help us to consider how to better affirm this part of us in our everyday life.

But even though I decided not to leave her behind, I had no idea of how to integrate a character that was very different from me into my own personality. Could I keep the aspects of her that I had cherished in my everyday life? Without the alibi and the support of my co-players? How could I integrate these traits with my current self, that had been assisting in keeping them dormant?

As a larp, *JaLL* excels in being a transformational container, with community building and calibration allowing for trust to explore marginalized sides of your queer self. When it was made, educational and transformational larps had just started to emerge. How one might work to integrate experiences, rather than reflecting on and overcoming them, is just developing. Theorists such as Baird (2021), Bowman and Hugaas (2019; 2021), and Kemper (2020) have started to map out how this process might be facilitated through actions such as "creative expression, intellectual analysis, emotional processing, community support structures, and taking action on goals" (Bowman and Hugaas 2021). Even with this advice, it can be genuinely hard to carry change out of the larp, as we usually have reasons to marginalize parts of ourselves. It may be as a response to a hostile society, and it might be that we have set up boundaries to protect ourselves that it takes a long time to tear down. We might have been able to find these aspects in a transformational container that made them more easily available, in a way that our real life has a limited capacity to enable. To know how to "*distill* the essence of the experience and *infuse* our lives with the meanings we uncovered" (Bowman and Hugaas 2021) can be quite daunting. In my experience, to really integrate marginalized parts of your identity may take years, and is a more complex and slow process than we usually admit. It might be a lot to ask of designers to structure this integration work for us (as proposed by Bowman and Hugaas 2019), given how different the personal finds and needed processes might be.

My change was slow, and even though I engaged in some of the individual processing activities suggested, what really allowed the marginalized sides of me to grow, was something much more close to what the larp had given me: Finding more communities where they could be affirmed and developed over time.

5. BUILDING TRANSFORMATIONAL COMMUNITIES

The participants from *JaLL* often form their own little queer community, transcending identity and orientation. Following the 2022 run, a participant invited the entire player group to keep meeting up

regularly, as they found that this kind of queer community was missing in their life. Baird (2021), Bowman (2015), and Gerge (2004) point out that it might not only be the queer fiction itself that helps create this connection, but also the recurring shifts between players and characters that build both in- and off-game relations. In Gerge's (2004) example, the larp *Mellan himmel och hav* was spanned by months of regular meetings before and after the larp, allowing for impressions and relationships to develop over time. This seems like a really interesting approach to allow participants from marginalized groups to build lasting connections.

The participants from each run often keep in touch in Facebook groups, where they share memories from the larp, facts, news, stories and events that concern queer lives and the HIV/AIDS virus, historically and today. The learning impact from *JaLL* then spans over several years after the larp, as the participants keep sharing new topics of interest with each other. Many also let their engagement grow into political activism. For example, at the unsanctioned solidarity marking after the shooting at Oslo Pride 2022, I met many of the Norwegian larpers, both queer and allies.

Schneider (2011) suggests that reperformances of historical events are aimed as much forward as backwards in time. When bringing history to life, information is transferred to today so that it may be remembered tomorrow. Experiences such as *JaLL* affect the participants' understanding of queer history, as well as how they relate to queer future. "Laboring at the pass between pasts and presents we might recognize our labor as collective" (Schneider 2011, 137). The larp's content connects the participants to a historical movement that is still active today. We do not enter actual history through role-playing, but we may enter the historical movement (Friedner 2022).

With an increased sense of belonging, many participants set out to find other queer communities after the larp. After the Danish run, both queer participants and allies joined the local Pride parade, many for the first time (Gronemann 2013). I had never been to Pride myself before *JaLL*, but I have since co-organized the Oslo Pride two times. Through finding queer communities to engage with in my everyday life, the parts of me that were marginalized have been able to develop. Being back at *JaLL* six years later, my old character had turned into a seed that had grown into an integral part of my identity, and I hope the new participants will go on similar journeys.

Since the first *JaLL* in 2011, a significant queer community building has happened within the larp community in addition to the player group of each larp. There is an international Facebook group that gathers *JaLL* participants from all runs, continuing the dialogue between the larp and real life, with new infusions of participants and discussions for every new run. After the Swedish run, a Facebook group called *Regnbågslajvare* (Rainbow larpers) was founded (Gronemann 2013), gathering queer larpers not only from the larp, but from all of Sweden. The annual conference *Knutpunkt* started having *JaLL* room parties, which has progressed to also having room parties for different queer subgroups and printing queer pins so that we might find each other (and see how many we are!); there's now an annual drag and variety show, as well as a large international Facebook group for all queer larpers. *JaLL* has made queer larpers more visible and more connected, which has made the hobby more inclusive, fun, and safe for a previously overlooked minority. More queer characters and larps have also followed in its footsteps (Stenros and Sihvonen 2019).

Following Baird (2021), Bowman and Hugaas (2021) and Stenros and Sihvonen (2019), the larp subculture itself may also be seen as a kind of transformational container, where many participants have been able to continue exploring queer aspects of themselves outside of the larp, as their network kept supporting them. Looking at the community development after *JaLL*, it is inspiring to see that marginalized groups might gather and build their own communities together, which might then begin to function as transformational containers, spurring further growth and affirmation. Could other bespoke larps connect other marginalized groups to each other and their historical movements? It seems a practice worth exploring.

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Gaming Capital in Contemporary Role-playing Game Platforms

Abstract: Gaming capital: a fifteen-year-old theory detailing how one's gaming knowledge can be conceptualized into something tangible. In her book *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Video Games,* Consalvo (2007) presented the term gaming capital to give a name and meaning to the collective understanding of both the individual player and the communities that entail the discussions about the game, genre, or the platform – including topics like knowledge, experience, and skill. Yet, there has not been much scholarly attention given to where one would situate gaming capital between cultural and symbolic capital, and where social capital would influence the transformation of knowledge to gaming capital. The discussion about gaming capital has been more about what it is, and what can be or cannot be gaming capital, but what steers gaming capital as an entity at their disposal has not been studied enough yet. The world of gaming has moved massively forwards in fifteen years, and the whole concept of what "gaming" is has subsequently changed, not only within the online multiplayer video game scene, but within analogue role-playing games too. Both mediums have their ways of accumulating and spending capital, and not everything is different in terms of gaming capital. Therefore, this study approaches the formation of gaming capital within both Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) and *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974) through information flow and social space perspectives.

Keywords: gamer capital, role-playing games, tabletop, MMORPGs, cultural capital, symbolic capital

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1. INTRODUCTION

Players' own motivations and approaches to any given game play loop or session steer their in-game actions. Collectively, for this study's purposes, the extra-game, or meta-game, things and variables that bleed into games and game play sessions is defined as, and through, the concept of *gaming capital*. Consalvo (2007) in her book *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Video Games*, presented the term gaming capital to give a name and meaning to the collective understanding of both the individual player and the communities that entail the discussions about the game, genre, or the platform – including topics like knowledge, experience, and skill. Yet, there has not been much scholarly attention given to where one would situate gaming capital between cultural and symbolic capital, and where social capital would influence the transformation of knowledge to gaming capital. The discussion about gaming capital has been more about what it is, and what can be or cannot be gaming capital, but what steers the gaming capital that an entity has at their disposal has not been studied enough (for studies about types of capital in video games see e.g., Korkeila 2021; Korkeila and Hamari 2020). The world of gaming has moved massively forwards in fifteen years, and the whole concept of what "gaming" has subsequently changed, not only within the online multiplayer video game scene, but also within analogue role-playing games. Both mediums have their ways of accumulating and spending capital.

More specifically, this study conducts a comparison of the affordances for accumulating gaming capital in analogue and digital settings through the game mechanics and games' social spaces. With the continuously rising interest towards all kinds of gaming, this study highlights that while medium, physical space, and social affordances vary, they can be approached and compared in a controlled manner. For this study, it is gaming capital, even if its original domain was video game playing and players of video games, because analogue game players are equally gamers. There is a need to bridge and combine different domains of the same activity in order for academia, players, and developers to better understand many of these underlying variables affecting the information and knowledge surrounding gaming. Shortly put, this study attempts to find answers to the following research questions:

Research question 1: How is gaming capital present in role-playing spaces?

Research question 2: What are the overlaps and clear differences related to gaming capital between analogue and digital spaces?

2. BACKGROUND, LITERATURE REVIEW

For the purposes of this study and to further contextualize the research aims, it is necessary to shortly situate the following concepts: gaming capital; role-play; analogue and digital spaces; and affordances in said spaces. Gaming in this study refers to the act of active gameplay, meaning everything that happens before or after the game play session is largely ignored here. This ensures a more comparable setting between the analogue and digital spaces. Active gameplay is naturally different between the spaces, and thus this study will mostly disregard the variance the interfaces bring to the gameplay. Interfaces in this case are printed character sheets, rulebooks, mouse, keyboard, and mobile devices used to search web sites for information and so on. In short, gaming means the act of gaming and the social and rule-bound space that is in effect during it (Harviainen and Stenros 2021; Stenros 2015).

For the purposes of this study, gaming capital means the resources an individual gains or has at their disposal during the gaming session. This means linguistic capital, information gained through playing, or extra-game resources (rulebook, guides on the internet), and other types of knowledge that a player needs and utilizes during the gaming. Information types can refer to and include the knowledge of how a party's abilities synergize together by partaking in meta-level exchange of information; where enemies and party members are; what the enemies are capable of; and the pacing of the fights and other encounters. Gaming capital has been utilized in earlier studies as something that is accumulated and utilized outside the gaming through social interactions (Consalvo 2007; Molyneux et al. 2015; Mäyrä 2010; Walsh and Apperley 2008). For this study's purposes it is more meaningful to think of gaming capital as a very dynamic combination of social and cultural capital where one's role in the social space (dungeon master, role in group, raid leader, main tank, etc.) is the defining factor on how much access they have to new or updated information, as well as what kind of information they are allowed, or able, to share with others (e.g., Harviainen and Hamari 2015). Some types of information and other related aspects of gaming capital could be re-checked before or after the gaming to negotiate how to weed out possible ruling errors or find a way to approach certain encounters differently in the future.

In essence, role-play has different definitions and applications depending on the medium and space it is used and exercised in. In the gaming world, it is often connotated with having certain degrees of freedom to play the character in multiple ways. Alternatively, if the character is predetermined, or if the game permits it, the game can be played in different ways from the technical standpoint (Bowman and Schrier 2018). For games deeply invested in role-play, every player has their own head canon on the details of the story and the world, while the biggest events stay the same: tragedies of loved ones lost, entire civilizations doomed to extinction, and same obstacles to climb throughout the story regardless or playstyle choice. How, when, and why the player approaches the gaming are the points where the role-play starts to shine. There are numerous differences and similarities in the analogue and digital spaces when it comes to how the role-play is possible to be carried out. Certain games and settings allow more freedom for role-play while in others, it is reduced to loosely fit into the definition of the word. Likewise, group dynamics and "staying together as a party" may have a strong limiting effect on possibilities in tabletop role-play games (TTRPG). (Dashiell 2017.)

The analogue space is closed in the sense that once gaming is on, no new players are allowed to randomly join, and even more rarely in the middle of a game round (be it a round of *Kimble* (1967) for example). While the social space might be open, such as a cafe or bar, the gaming happens with

a predetermined number of players and with restricted access to that space. Additionally, the gaming itself can be very dynamic and free in its form of progression, but the play itself happens within this *magic circle* that has its own operating language and rules (see e.g., Giordano 2022; Stenros 2012).

Digital spaces, however, refer to all the gaming that happens inside the game world, regardless of if the player is idle or focusing on the most challenging content of the game. Especially in the worlds of MMORPGs, the gaming can take many forms, including just idling in the game, hunting for achievements, and so on (e.g., Lehdonvirta and Castronova 2014). Due to the nature of the MMORPGs the interactions with other players are much more open in the sense that the game world itself is a rather large sandbox, excluding certain limited missions (e.g., instances). In the huge sandbox, people can come and go at their own pace, do their own things, and even choose how to interact with other players, or avoid that completely if they feel like it. Yet, the gaming is more closed in the sense that only those who commit to the game and own or subscribe to it beforehand can join other players.

The affordances for gaming capital also vary, and that goes more into how the gamespace is created and what the rules imposed by the games themselves are for the gaming capital to be accumulated. The affordances in this study refer to the type of information that can be exchanged, from which sources the information can be gained, how the information can be used, how the social hierarchy is built, how dynamic the social hierarchy is, and where the lines between social aspects are thinnest.

3. THE COMPARISON

To focus on answering the research questions through examples in order to provide a better overview on how different and similar gaming spaces are, this section starts with a focus on presenting how gaming capital is present in MMORPGs, then in a *Dungeons & Dragons* (*D&D*) setting. It finally draws more direct comparisons.

3.1 Information and Games

MMORPGs are already a relatively old genre in gaming, and their popularity has been fluctuating ever since the early days of *Dark Age of Camelot, Ultima Online*, and *EverQuest*. The market of MMORPGs is currently dominated by *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*), *Lost Ark*, and *Final Fantasy XIV*. MMORPGs, and various *D&D* variants, utilize their own terminology, some of which is shared with other games in the same genre. The linguistic terminology relates but is not limited to the names of classes, jobs, professions, skills, abilities, spells, items, places, and characters. How these are presented to the player and how players exchange comments and ideas between each game, and even the players themselves, have nuances. A game might press certain terminology to ensure that the connotation of the word, or concept, is conveyed properly to the player. The game world is designed in a way that its non-player character (NPC) inhabitants communicate with the player through these specific nuances in linguistics. It is up for the player to learn the "lingo" of the game, and thus enabling them to understand more of the discussions that happen between the players themselves in-game, and related forums. In the analogue setting it is up to the dungeon master to give cues to the players on the nuances of the communication in contrast to the static way of information conveying in digital setting.

Delving deeper into the uniqueness of games, each one has their own -- yet derived from earlier games or concepts -- terminology and language. For example, the gameplay of *Mansions of Madness* (2007) TTRPG is a derivation from *Dungeons & Dragons*, shares similarities such as dice rolls, character sheets, the role of the gamemaster steering the group, the number of players staying fixed after a campaign has started, and how dynamic the group's progress through the story is. The rulebook for the *Mansions of Madness* in all its totality spans 44 pages on the documents titled "Learn to Play"

and "Rules Reference" with separate documents for expansions and other additions (Fantasy Flight Games 2016). It will take time for first timers and novices to master the basics of the rulesets and its possibilities. Once learnt, this knowledge that is now gaming capital can be transferred to some degree to other similar TTRPGs and *D&D* campaigns as the games within their genre share the terminology and functionalities. Similarly, this applies to MMORPGs as within their genre specific terminology essentially means the same, for example "tank" or "support." Further, how games utilize and name their services differ. In *World of Warcraft* expandable storage is called a "bank" and is accessed through specialized NPCs, whereas in *Final Fantasy XIV* storage is tied to NPCs that each player can have two of for free and are referred to as "retainers." Therefore, future games rely and reflect on the previous installments in the same genre making it easier for players to switch games, and to make the massive amount of information role-playing games have more digestible.

This is related to the information gained by playing the game. The game decides how and when certain pieces of information are made available for the players. This means that the game holds back vital information, until it makes sense to the players (Harviainen and Hamari 2015), be it the reveal of the true antagonist, betrayal, giving more meaning to certain words, or names of phrases that expand the game world's story greatly. This therefore affects game-related information sharing, in order to avoid sharing or hearing spoilers (Sköld et al. 2015). Thus, the power struggle that is often tied to social capital is absent as such because the power is negotiated strictly between the rules of the game and the players. Meaning there is no relevant power play between different players or human actors for this study's purposes, yet its existence must be acknowledged.

Information is usually given at two levels: extra- and intra-gaming. Starting with intra-gaming, in addition to the story and game world building through interactions with the NPCs, games give information through flavor texts that are sometimes part of an item's description, the arrangement of items to depict death of a loved one, or a still steaming meal on the table with flipped over mug. Eavesdropping on NPCs as they interact with each other, listening to the music or other audio cues, and looking around the game's sceneries are each more subtle ways to convey information to the players, be it giving hints of where to go, answers to underlying questions players might have, scale to the happenings, or weighing in on certain themes giving nuance to them.

Extra-game, which also includes the meta level, information means the exact numerical attributes of abilities. For example, with "fireball" the game tells these things through the tooltip, in some way or another: exact damage range, can it critically hit, possible casting time, can it be cast while moving, what is the "cooldown" period for it, what resource(s) it takes to cast the spell, any other possible effects. This is not an exhaustive list, but this is the information that the game world does not know, but the player does. The game world might refer to "fireball" as "one of the more destructive and potent spells mastered only by few." Similarly, extra-game refers to any guidance officially supported, endorsed, or given by the game: guidebooks, exact sell value of items, the power level of items, what items drop from which areas, and so on (Consalvo 2017).

3.2 Information and the Gaming

When it comes to social spaces, the knowledge can be turned into social and maybe even symbolic capital, garnering gaming capital to the holder of knowledge, through reciprocal actions within the game space (see e.g., Lin 1999 and 2000 for discussion about social networks, capital, and inequality). In digital settings this can mean chatting in zone-wide channels, specific server-wide channels, guilds, parties, whispers, and to those in close proximity. In analogue settings this refers to the communication between the playing members and dungeon master. Showing off the tangible rewards from knowledge utilization, such as gear, titles, mounts, minions, and even a house, are ways to solidify one's cultural

capital aspect as gaming capital (Harviainen and Hamari 2015). As mentioned above, the social space in MMORPGs includes everyone on the same server, or instance, of the game world, where it is possible to simultaneously be in the presence of hundreds of players, and it is just as easy to be in solitude.

Negotiation of the social space is different because "playing *WoW*" is not the same as "playing a *D&D* campaign" from the social viewpoint. "Playing *WoW*" is not guided gameplay, like a "*D&D* session" is (see e.g., Hendricks 2006; Mizer 2019). *World of Warcraft* and other similar MMORPGs have been in the past described as amusement park games (Aarseth 2008). In these games the player steps into the game world (amusement park) that is co-inhabited by others simultaneously, the player can choose how they go around the game world, with whom, at what pace, on what very select attractions they want to focus or do they want a taste of everything, and so on. Attractions refers to various activities that can be done: battling enemies in dungeons, raids, outdoors or instanced areas; battling other players in Player versus Player arenas; gathering resources on their own or with someone to share the mundane part (travelling from resource to another); honing their skills in professions such as carpentry and cooking; taking part in social events such as in-game weddings or other specialized happenings (role-playing within role-playing world); or just away from keyboard ("AFK") somewhere in the amusement park and enjoying the alone time following others' actions.

"Playing *D&D*" is guided gameplay with focused parts of the session between resupplying and gathering information at settlements, travelling to the quest location, and fighting enemies. Some sessions can include all of these, but some focus only on one or two of them. Session length in *D&D* is also pre-determined, making the claim "playing *D&D*" much more descriptive of what the gaming entails. There are greater limitations on the types of attractions one can do as in many ways the sessions are active participatory for the duration of it. However, there is more freedom on how the interactions happen, as they are more akin to following social interactions between the group members, the dungeon master, and the dice roll results.

The difference largely lies in how the gaming happens, and how the information is gained that is then turned into gaming capital. In digital settings the information from the game, and about the game, is often non-negotiable as items have their set prices that cannot be haggled, and so on. The story, the world, is largely static and pre-determined. Whereas in analogue settings, the information gained is more open to negotiation and often relies on the preparations the dungeon master has done; how the players interpret hints or haggle prices for items; and so on (Mizer 2019). While the gaming is more social in analogue setting, the main part of the story is still static: the main purpose of the campaign is predetermined, either following directly a pre-made campaign, adaptation of such, or maybe even a completely custom campaign. The exact "how" is more open to the player group and their dice rolls. In digital settings, the world is much more static on the "how" part, especially when it comes to interactions between the game and player (e.g., Lehdonvirta and Castronova 2014). In analogue settings the dungeon master often works as the "game" who decides what rules are followed etc. (Mizer 2019). Yet, in digital settings there is often more freedom on when and how one wants to partake into the story, and if they want to do the story alone or with others (see Ducheneaut et al. 2006). In analogue settings, the gameplay largely focuses on advancing the campaign in some form and often in cycling between information gathering, resource/item gain, travel, and battle phases.

4. DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS

This study highlights how the socialness and information in game spaces operate from two different approaches, with select focus on comparable settings from the gameplay point of view. There are possibly more suitable focus pairs depending on the approach where different game genre or concepts are utilized. We have selected these two in order to showcase how even game types that use very similar types of information – in this case the quintessential role-playing game and a genre of digital games

strongly inspired by it – fundamentally differ as platforms for gaming capital. Further, the study wants to bring more attention to the concept of gaming capital, and the need to utilize it to further explain, explore, and exemplify the modern and contemporary gameplay spaces and settings. Additionally, this study touches very lightly on the limitation of the usage of gaming capital as a framework, especially its original conception, as there has been so much progress and evolution in both analogue and digital game spaces in the fifteen years since Consalvo's book (2007) was published. Still, the gaming capital stands true: it explains gaming subculture in more depth, by giving it a tangible touching point to outside and other theoretical concepts so as to study and investigate what gaming and gamers are.

This study highlighted some of the differences and similarities between analogue and digital game spaces regarding how the information flows, openness and closeness of the game space through the lens of gaming capital. Thus, this study brought forward the connectedness of analogue and digital game spaces, and that both should be approached with a similarly open mind when it comes to methodology and the choice of frameworks. There is, after all, a reason why many (MMO)RPG players have delved into *Dungeons & Dragons*, and one reason is the similarity in rules, progression, and communities.

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