

## **Profiling the larper - What is actually at stake**

By Thomas Duus Henriksen

### **“Profiling the larper - What is actually at stake”**

Larping in Denmark is not meant to be fun, and never has been. The question is, if it will ever be? It is no fun to sit on a stone, off game, having spent endless amounts of time on rehearsing a role, and money on the perfect costume, props, or whatever ones time and money has been spilled into, waiting for someone to come up, and with a mediocre talent of acting, pretending to play.

Larping it self is not fun, but some people are attracted to winning, achieving status, creating scenes, or merely being part of something. Others are drawn to dressing up, fancy weapons and armour, building props, rules, negotiating and manipulating, fighting, planning stories, organizing, or trying to be someone else.

My claim is that larping itself is not fun, but rather is a category of activities, a means for giving the individual an opportunity for pursuing certain interests of personal value. This opportunity to pursue certain interests is what drives the player to larping, and eventually into becoming a part of the scene. In order to investigate this, it is necessary to take just a tiny step away from the all-engulfing larp experience. This taking one step back is what this article is all about, and it reflects the perspective, from which it is written.

Seeing the activity as deconstructed instead of “*just a game*”, played “*.. because it is fun*”, which are the most commonly given explanations to legitimate larping, gives us an opportunity to reach beyond the common answers to why people larp. If we manage to take the famous step back, it allows us to take a look at the needs fulfilled by larping, and thereby giving us a better chance of figuring out who the larper actually is, and an opportunity to understand the struggle taking place between larpers, trying to define the content of the activity.

Some might claim that I have been looking too deeply into “The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism” (Weber, 1930) before writing this article, and that might be correct. However, even though the article contains my developmental recommendations, its is mainly descriptive. Reading applied psychology is often a provocative experience, especially when the reader is reflected by the application, and the reader should therefore be aware of how his or her bias is applied to the article when reading it.

*The main purpose of this article is to encourage larpers to reflect upon their own and others motivation for larping, and eventually on the developmental reflection created by the scene. Due to the fact that larping holds a limited, and not necessarily realised, learning potential, and that the Danish larp scene encourages childish behaviour and compensatory activities, my recommendation is to get out, and have an additional taste of the world outside. My recommendation is based on the fact that larping is a developmental sleeping bag; cosy, but not much else in the long run. Seeing this, one must bear in mind that the common Danish larper often is a person, who has lacked social impact in his or her daily life, using larp as a compensatory, essayistic*

opportunity for experiencing a feeling of success. *This is interesting because the larpers holds certain qualities, which are sought after by our contemporary and future society, but are rarely realised, due to the common larper's lacking ability to interface socially with and participate in his or her contemporaries. The easiest ways of achieving this, is by promoting the extrovert styles (such as the dramatist way), and for the larper to visit the real world once in a while.*

And this is really interesting, not just to the psychologist, but to the bridge builders trying to unite the larpers as a whole, as well as for those trying to interface larp with the world outside. Whatever the purpose, it is relevant to knowing what resources, which flaws, and what desire make larpers larp.

Besides the descriptive perspective, it is relevant to notice that the picture of the Danish larp scene is drawn from directly above. It shows variety and content, but lacks a perspective; height. It says something about the different contents, but not about how heights to which the different areas are represented. I am not saying anything about larpers outside Denmark, nor am I trying to define an archetype for larpers, I am presenting a descriptive set of traits, helping us to understand who the larper is, and why he or she larps. It may be a useful tool for a lot of things – please be aware of how, and for what purpose *you* use it.

The already presented conclusion has been formed by comparing a lot of combined theory with a look at larping, the larper and the scene. By combining the academic theories concerning play and socialisation, supplemented with the scenes' own theories and values, a very interesting perspective is produced, giving us grounds for stating differently than the “because it is fun”-answer, that a larper most certainly would produce. To be precise, the above conclusions have been created by applying a playmatch-, an entry- and a developmental need analysis with the 3-fold model, all founded in a solid understanding of play, onto the larp phenomenon.

Due to the subject at hand, the reader is not given access to the qualitative interviews that form the empirical foundation for the conclusions, as this would imply an ethical violation to the persons involved. Case stories and examples have not been used, as such would make the persons involved identifiable, which also would be an ethical violation. Even though it is a major methodological issue, the reader must settle without the opportunity of looking into the empirical data, which I hope that most readers are willing to accept.

### **Starting somewhere**

#### **Play being the prime core**

The core issue in live action role-playing is the play part. By playing an alternative reality based on a fictional recentering of our immediate perception (Ryan, 1991). We pretend that what we perceive is something else, and thereby creating an in-game experience of an object or phenomenon (Henriksen, 2002,2004). When we play a role-playing game, we apply a certain perspective, called diagesis (Hakkarainen & Stenroos, 2003) or frame onto our reality. This game perspective is usually given by the game master, and we play that we are a part of this diagesis by putting on a role. The reason why we play can be deducted by looking at the games we play. It is striking that we always play situations from perspectives that we do not have access to. As adults have access to more situations than children, this difference causes the

two groups to play in different ways, and in different quantum. This perspective was originally proposed by the Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1978), who claimed that we play in order to compensate for needs or desires, that we currently are prevented from fulfilling in the real world. We therefore create a fantasy (which can be carried out as play), in which we fulfil the given need. If we lack the ability to achieving status in the real world, we can compensate for the frustration this lack creates by playing that we achieve status. And this can be done through role-play, and the pleasurable experience created by this compensation is often perceived as fun. Play is often viewed as an experimental approach to learning, but it is relevant to notice that learning might be a beneficial effect, but not the motivation for the participant. As we grow up, our needs and opportunities change, and with them the way we play. It is no longer relevant for a teenager to play that he or she is brewing coffee due to the opportunity at hand, whilst the opportunity is out of reach for the toddler. The way we play (or larp), is at reflection of the match between our desires or needs, compared to our given opportunities, and this gives us an impression of both the needs on stake, and of the purpose of the given activity. Let us bare this in mind while taking a look at some well-known gaming styles.

### **3 approaches to larping**

The 3-fold model was originally introduced to the larp scene as a Norwegian analysis of the entry players background. According to the theorist Petter Bøckman (2000), the first larpers came from the tabletop role-play. These were coined gamists, and were driven by a desire to win, gain levels, and by a love for rules. Later on came the dramatists, who had a background from theatre. They were driven by a desire for drama, for creating scenes, and for the story it self. Last to arrive were the simulationists, who mainly consisted of re-enactors, whose desire was to recreate events and to explore and experience (mostly) historic circumstances.

This model has later been influenced by the Turku approach (Pohjola, 2000), and in the 3-way version (Bøckman, 2003), it describes the choice of gaming style after getting into larping. In the 3-way model, the simulationists have been replaced by immersionists, who seek to emerge into another consciousness (Pohjola, 2003). The 3-fold perspectives each give us a cue to understanding larp behaviour, whereas the normative element of the immersionist perspective makes the image a bit blurry. This is due to the fact that the 3-fold refers to natural causes for the participant to start larping, in contrast to the immersionist perspective is meant as a direction for the larper once started.

### **Gamists rules!**

The gamist perspective is probably the most common in Denmark, mostly due to the large body of relatively young players. The gamist approach is based upon rules, on optimizing and on winning. Rules are seen as the inventory of legitimate means during a larp, and cheating in larp is very common. Cheating is both seen as a mean of achieving a feeling of omni potency (Fine, 1983), and as a mean of unjustifying others actions in order to compensate for the feeling of defeat. Both gamist players and gamist organizers are ridiculed, mostly by the older members of the scene. The gamist perspective is often countered by a “No rules”-attitude, both depriving the gamist from his or her explicit rules, and on the same time allowing this (subclass) meta-gamist player to draw upon his or her social skills (/education) to gain the upper hand in the game.

- The gamist toolbox of resources consists mainly of a thorough understanding of the rules in play, combined with a sense of plotting, the ability to optimize, and the skill to manipulate others. The gamist player is often able to draw upon a wealth of introvert resources, which are often hidden from his or her surroundings. Participation is focussed on optimizing ones own situation, status, control, power, wealth and so on, and not paying much attention to entertaining others or giving away opportunities for others to create events.
- Each of the gamist's desires gives an impression of the needs at stake. It is striking that they are all centred among the issue of achieving power in the game, which points our attention to the everyday inadequacies of the gamist. The need for basing the interaction upon the strict obedience of rules (at least for the counterparts), points our attention towards a need for simplifying the otherwise complex social interaction. This need for participating in contexts of explicit ruling is very common among teenagers, so is the need for breaking the rules for ones own good.

### **Dead dramatist on demand.**

The dramatist perspective is probably the least common in Denmark, mostly because it has been ridiculed during the last few years. The dramatist perspective is based on creating scenes of drama, acting, taking responsibility for the storyline, and of involving other players in the game. An action becomes legitimate if it creates a scene, or if it creates something for other players to be a part of. To most dramatists, breaking the rules are often a mean for creating something spectacular, which puts the dramatists under constant fire from especially the gamists.

- The dramatist toolbox consists mainly of an ability to create attention, to entertain, to create a show, to act, and to gather a crowd. The dramatist actively uses the implicit rules of social interaction to achieve his or her ends. The dramatists participation is focussed on pleasing a crowd, gaining prestige by becoming a centre of events. Not much attention is paid to obeying rules, but rather to gather as much attention as possible.
- The dramatists tools clearly points to a need of social status, a need for positive attention, and a need for creating, and to be part of a community. This is often achieved without paying much attention to the needs of others, e.g. to the gamist's need for rules to lower the complexity of social interaction.
- The dramatist is a very extrovert way of larping. In contrast to the gamist and simulationist ways, which both heavily depend upon introvert values, the dramatist exchanges analytical depth with expression, precision with adequacy, and planning with a loud voice. The need for creating positive attention, social status is common among teenagers and up, whereas the lack of attention paid to the needs and values of others are mostly seen during the awkward teenage years, as is the justification to breaking rules.

### **The simulationist – knowledge is power**

The simulationist perspective is mostly seen in debates about the qualities of larp equipment. Like the gamist perspective, the simulationist perspective relies heavily on the obedience of rules, but not in order to win, rather in order to recreate certain circumstances, mostly historic events, but eventually also planned scenarios. Cheating (against game rules) is here seen as a mean to eliminate discrepancies between frame and how the simulationist thinks things should be. Cheating against the planned circumstances often results in a historic debate about the interpretation of facts, about the means to the common end.

- The tools of the simulationist are clearly precision, planning, coordination, acting skills and setting knowledge. The prime mean legitimating mean for the simulationist is knowledge (historic, mechanical, etc.) usable for recreating the specific setting, circumstances or chain of events, and status is gained through the precision of this knowledge.
- The simulationist displays a need for expressing knowledge and for being acknowledged for this knowledge. Another need seems to be security, due to the emphasis on predictability and planning. As with the gamist, the strict obedience of rules indicates some need for reducing the complexity of social interaction.
- The simulationist style relies on drawing upon introvert resources, especially those abilities concerned with precision and reproduction. The simulationist also manages to make use of an explicit set of rules in order to legitimate the expression and use of own knowledge.

### **The immediate immersionist**

As mentioned above, the immersionist perspective was introduced with the Turku school, and seeks to promote players to change their way of larping. “Immersionist’ is the style which values living the roles life, feeling what the role would feel. Immersionists insist on resolving in-game events based solely on game-world considerations.” (Bøckman, 2003, p. 14). The immersionist approach to larping is well-known in Denmark, and has been praised by some to be the only way of larping, while others have merely adapted the term as a fashionable description of their way of role-playing. Both are often used arguments for elitist positioning within the scene. Cheating is unheard of among immersionist, as the only way of cheating implies breaking character.

- The prime tool of the immersionist is clearly effort and the ability to stand ground. Rules and knowledge are only relevant if they are a part of the character, and in order to achieve this, the player must be able to create a full fictional recentering, in order to avoid interference from personal perspectives (se also Henriksen, 2004).
- The needs of the immersionist are harder to spot than the tendencies in the above approaches, although one need is clearly stated - the desire to be someone else. Additionally, due to the current approach in Denmark, the immersionists display an effort to ridicule the, according to the immersionists, inferior styles, and to present themselves as visionaries. This unbound

perspective seems to fulfil a need for artistic expression among the immersionist players, whereas the elitist positioning states a need for status.

### **Other sources of analytical inspiration**

#### **Entry level analysis**

Having described the need fulfilment for the common larping styles accordingly, an interesting picture can be drawn by matching the conclusions with some of the commonly encountered problems for teenagers.

According to McHanon (1992), the play as a compensatoric activity disappears when we reach the early teens, thereafter the compensatoric activities transmute into more adult processes. In contrast, the larper seems to continue using larp as a playful compensation, instead of, as his peers, distance himself to and reject the childish behaviour, which threatens to pull him or her back to the previous stage of development, thereby effectively halting the development. It is my impression that the common larper has problems establishing the adult means of compensation, and therefore recycles the childish compensatoric means by larping. It is also my impression that the larp activity (/scene) is being used as a simulated practice, a training field for developing social skills .

It is interesting to look at the needs of the larper at the entry level (when he or she starts using larp) seen across different ages:

#### **Late Childhood : 6-12 years (age of games)**

Entry players usually takes up the gamist behaviour, seeing larp similar to a board game, it all about winning. Such rule-based activities are most common for the given group. The usual point of perish for play is set to the thirteenth birthday, but in the real world, the point of perish is set to the beginning of puberty.

#### **Early Teens : 13-15 (age of insecurity)**

Players entering larp during early adult scene are likely to take up any of the three styles.

**Gamist:** These players have usually experienced problems coping with the social complexity of being a teenager. Not being quite ready, the game is being used as a demand free stasis, where the player can wait until he or she is ready for the real world. Fantasy and other black-white settings are preferred, as it creates a predictable and comprehensible frame for the participation. Satisfaction is achieved through winning and achieving power. This is the dominant larping style for this group.

**Dramatist:** These players seem to be actively developing an extrovert, social convention, but doing so under safe conditions.

**Simulationist:** Like the gamists, the simulationists try to achieve a sense of security through rules, but seek to achieve acknowledgment though knowledge and precision. This group does not seem widely represented.

#### **Late Teens : 16-19 (age of expansion)**

The picture here is the same as the previous group, but there seems to be movement towards the extrovert dramatist behaviour, as to the simulationist behaviour. The development of social skills has become more essential at this stage, and there seems to be a remarkable difference between the groups.

**Young Adult : 20+**

Only very few goes into larping at this stage, and those few seems equally divided. The motivating needs seem to fit the three styles accordingly.

The point of perish seems to exist among larpers too, but it is quite hard to investigate, as it usually results in the player leaving the scene. Some players stay in the scene without playing, usually because he or she has established a solid social network within the scene. These ex-players usually claim that they do not find larping pleasant anymore, which indicates a mismatch between that persons compensatoric needs and what larp has to offer.

INN FIGUR1!!!!!!!!!!!!

**Motivational analysis**

Players have diverse motivations for their participation. One is the compensatoric need fulfilment; another is the developmental use of the activity. Surprisingly enough, the use of larp as a self therapeutic mean is not an uncommon motivation in Denmark, and thereby creating three major motivational categories for larping; Entertainment, Developmental and Therapeutic (see figure 1).

**Entertainment as motivation**

This kind of motivation derives from the activity itself, from the mere feeling larping produces. It can be subdivided into Amusement and Play:

**A1 : Amusement**

Amusement is seen merely as a brief breakaway from unspecified factors in an everyday life.

**A2 : Play**

Play is seen as an essayistic attempt to compensate for frustration produced by perceived inadequacy (Vygotsky, 1978)

**Development as motivation**

Larping holds a great developmental potential for the participant, as gives access to a wide range of activities. Although the potential is present, one must be aware of a) that the potential is not necessarily realised, and b) of the limited level of skill/knowledge available (see Henriksen (2002,2004)).

**B3 : Learning an ability**

This kind of motivation derives from a specific interest in a larp related activity or craft. This could be e.g. learning how to build an armour, to fight, to act, to write an essay, to know something about the middle ages, to organize, or how to build a database. This implies both skill acquisition and training.

**B4 : Social skill training**

This motivation derives from the opportunity to develop social skills, and eventually establishing a social network. This could be the ability to give a speech, lead a group or a crowd, manipulate others, negotiate, sexual behaviour, or simply how to talk to other people.

**C : Therapy as motivation**

This kind of motivation derives from an urge to feel better mentally. It is not to be confused with playing, although they are alike. Although childish, play is a natural defence mechanism, whereas motivation from this category is caused by pathological conditions.

**C5 : Compensatoric hiding**

This motivation derives from the need for the mentally ill to establish normal usable peers, without sticking out too much. It also includes behaviour categorised as excessive hiding from the normative demands of ones surroundings.

INN FIGUR 2

**C6: Specific treatment**

This motivation derives from the participants need to work with a specific topic within a mental illness, but to do so outside the health system. Psychologists or psychiatrists in Denmark do *not* normally recommend this approach.

The six categories each present a benefit for the participant. Although the effect in some cases is likely, it is not guaranteed. The categories can be matched with the entry level analysis, thereby giving an impression of both the entry level motivation, and of the long term trajectories of participation a participant is likely to experience. The entry-level motivation is plotted into figure 1. The social learning potential is noticed by comparing the motivational trajectories for larp (figure 2) with the trajectories of e.g. classical dancing (see figure 3). Notice that the therapeutic motivation (C) is not normally linked to age, but is due to factors outside the game.

INN FIGUR 3

**The struggle for power**

The intriguing and power mongering rarely ends with the play – the Danish scene is clearly marked by an ongoing struggle for the right to define right and wrong among larpers. This struggle seems to be a culmination of the diversification of needs attempted fulfilled through larp. Due to the fact that larping helps the participants meet certain needs, larpers constantly struggle in order to secure that larping meets their needs. Armour enthusiasts unite with simulationists against foam and latex armour, gamists claim the need for rules to keep the game balanced, and meta-gamists the need for rule abolishment in order to ensure their means for maintaining status by outer means.

The purpose of this struggle is rather simple. Similar to the process of individual socialisation, the larpers merely attempt to create an opportunity to express the widest possible array of their personal repertoire in a context as wide as possible. According to the sociologist Mørch (1995), unsuccessful integration in a practice results in a participation, through which only a limited part of the participants qualities is brought into action, and that only in a limited part of the given practice.

The major threat to the individual larper would be a definition of larping, which does not meet that particular larper's individual needs. If, for instance foam or latex armour were accepted, the metal armour enthusiasts would loose foothold, and would undermine his or her benefit from larping. This brings about a discussion for the

bridge builders on how to develop larp as a whole, which is not taken here, but implies thinking beyond ones own desires.

### **Looking at the larpers**

Having used the theories for drawing a picture of the larper as playful, but immature and childish, it is relevant to take a look at the larpers in practice. The question is whether these immature tendencies can be recognized among the larpers, or if my theoretical application is unjust.

### **Armies of unskilled labour**

A popular, but often reality blinding approach would be taking a look at the resources present among the larpers, and would thereby attempts to falsify the childish labelling. Such attempt would merely reveal, that most skills or abilities (category B), associated with larping, applied by larpers, are similar to unskilled labour. The exceptions to this are those participants, who are educated within relevant fields, and who apply these skills to the larping scene. This is especially seen within the field of communication, among simulationists, and among meta-gamists.

### **Leaving childhood**

Two perspectives supporting the childish label. They come from looking at how larpers communicate as well as in dominant attitude expressed by larpers.

### **The way we talk**

Danish larpers have a distinct way of talking, and are often recognized by the way they talk, and it is said among non-larpers that role-players sort of 'taste' each word, and generally being very cautious on their pick of words. Others describe role-players as well shaken bottles of champagne. If you ask them about something they like to talk about, the cork goes off, and out comes an unstoppable cloud of bubbles rushing to surface.

Looking at the communicative transactions between larpers, it is noticeable how little a part of the communication is based on properly used, adult, neutrally loaded information. Seen from a transactional analysis (see Berne 1995), most players strive to take the position of the knowing parent, telling a child what to do. Another popular position, which is also often seen at bulletin boards, are the roles of the two old grumpy men from The Muppet Show, both knowing better and spending their time devaluating others. The final set of distinct roles, seen from the transactional analysis, are the roles of the cute children fooling around, playing innocent or adorable, and speaking as such.

The transaction becomes somewhat different when the larper is communication with someone outside the scene. Attempts to take the role of the all-knowing parent are quickly abandoned, and usually replaced with the role of the child being told what to do by a parent. Several hypotheses can be raised on why, but most likely it is because larpers communicative games are not accepted by the surroundings. At bit more banal explanation could be that the larper, e.g. lacks relevant knowledge or communicative skills to participate as an equal part, resulting in the given set of roles.

### **And the way we walk**

Danish larpers generally displays a very distinct fundamental attitude, distinguishing them from their surroundings. The more distinct features or (or values) of this discourse can be seen as:

1. a general acceptance of the idea, that it is ok to be weird.
2. an idealisation of the abnormal
3. an tense attitude towards normality (values of the non-larp society)
4. a claim for not requiring social acceptance.
5. a claim for being acceptant for others.

These values are widely recognizable among the common larpers, and are interesting, as they reflect an acceptance of the problems, which larpers are likely to experience in every day life. The above values are likely accepted by persons looked upon as weird, failing to meet the social demands of their surroundings, and thereby developing a tense relation to these surroundings and to the values represented by it. Many larpers bear clear marks from bullying, which is a major problem within the Danish educational system, and is a likely explanation, both for starting to larp, and for accepting such values.

Another common, observable syndrome among larpers is that larp values, attitudes, languages, mental models and such, are allowed to flood the participants' behaviour. It is usually manifested as a cultural push, played against non-larpers, and includes for instance saying "Greetings" instead of good morning in school, wearing a robe on everyday occasions, or by reframing situations into a role-playing discourse. The reactions created among non-larpers by this flooding are usually used by the larper to manifest a certain feeling of personal identity and cultural belongingness. Further readings on such social phenomenon can be found with Fine (1983)

### **Cast of characters**

Lets make turn away from the masses of common larpers, and brief look at the more interesting characters in play. Looking at the larp scene, two classes of characters puzzl me: What makes the exceptional players (not just ingame, but as a part of the scene), and why on earth are there so many mentally ill hanging around among larpers?

### **The exceptional characters**

One type of players has managed to grow as individuals, and thereby have managed to stand out as exceptional within the scene. This is often done by having and putting certain characteristics into the game, and by evolving those skills. Whereas some manage to grasp the present, although limited, learning potential of larping, and manages to stand out by having learned how to e.g. organise or similar activities, this is rarely a successful approach. A more commonly effective approach is achieved through bringing in knowledge acquired through formal education.

The latter approach is often used by the meta-gamists, striving for the opportunity to bring in their personal repertoire, thereby giving them the competitive edge ingame. Although the skills of some education are more relevant and applicable than others, the successful application allows the player to leap beyond the performance of his or her co-players, often creating a mixed reaction of envy and recognition. Another, and

just as relevant result of meta-gamism, is the feeling of personal success created, as it fuels the struggle to define the legitimate content of larp.

Not matter the strategy, those standing out as exceptional characters are often those who have managed to run a successful campaign, not necessarily as through being an organiser of a role-play, but rather through sheer use of personal marketing.

### **The special characters**

As mentioned (way) above, one motivation among larpers is the therapeutic purpose (category C motivation), and that the amount of mentally ill in the larp scene is mild to moderately overrepresented. *One classic, but wrong interpretation of this has long been, that participation in role-play activities produces incidences.* It might be true, that persons, who are socially or genetically predisposed for developing a mental illness, can be provoked to an incident through larping, but it is not likely to occur without the predisposition. Two likely explanations for the overrepresentation would be that

1. the scene is not centrally regulated, and that there are no explicit means for excluding a person. The scene is therefore deprived of the opportunity for regulating the right of entry to the scene.
2. the scene and activity bears characteristics, i.e. the claim for being acceptant to others, making the scene cosy for the mentally ill.

There seems to be a general acceptance towards the presence of the mentally ill. Also, there seems to be a certain openness concerning the specific attitudes, and on some occasions, a tendency to flash ones own weaknesses as a mean of gaining some accept. Being weird is seen as ok, and a bit mad likewise. Whether this attitude comes from larping, or if is a contribution from the mentally ill is not known. This tendency to attract mentally ill does not seem unique to the Danish larp scene. Rather, it seems to be a general phenomenon, as an example from the US shows:

*“While such games do not cause someone to become violent, and the majority of participants in the Live Action Role-playing groups (LARP) are just in it for fun and creative outlets, LARPs can attract mentally unstable people, who find encouragement for their delusions within them.” (Ramsland, 2005)*

Just as the larpers, the mentally ill present is not one coherent group, although three major groups can be identified, each bringing their contribution to the scene; the schizophrenic (F2), the affectively (F3) and those suffering from personality disorder (F6) (WHO-ICD-10). Due to professional secrecy, I cannot provide the reader with examples throughout the following part, as it would risk compromising the identity of several of my former patients.

### **The schizophrenic (F2)**

For the schizophrenic, larping holds an opportunity for using the schizophrenic behaviour in a normal manner during role-play. As the role-play basically is all about redefining the perception of an object into something distinct from that particular object (Henriksen, 2004), the schizophrenic is often able to blend in with the crowd. The schizophrenic rarely makes much of them selves in the scene, as they mostly

manage to blend in among the often bizarre actions, sayings and attitudes of other role-players. Although mostly labelled as odd, it is worth noticing that the schizophrenic often manage to contribute creatively, both to the specific game and to larp as a whole.

### **The affective disordered (F3)**

Like the schizophrenic, the affectively disordered rarely make much of them selves. The most common affective disorder among larpers is various degrees of depression, which usually forces the player to leave the scene during the peaks of the depression, for then to reappear some time after. Although rare among larpers, the mania-depressive participants manage to annoy their surroundings during the manic phase, making their disappearance seem as a relief when the depression strikes. The affectively disordered usually sticks to themselves, and do not seem to have a notable impact on the scene.

### **The personality disordered (F6)**

Most noticeable are the borderline girls (F6), who weaves their web of intrigues both ingame and offgame. Some seem to be in treatment, whereas others has left treatment, or have managed to stay below radar in order to avoid diagnostication. The borderline girls usually use the larp scene to hold court, creating a preserve, and keeping up an ever changing social acquaintances, based on intrigue, and are usually attracted to those larps, which gives them exactly this opportunity<sup>1</sup>. Although raising the stakes during intrigue play, the borderline girls' most distinct contribution is the personal failure they bring about whoever is lurked into getting personally engaged with them.

Almost unnoticed, but only really threatening group of mentally ill, is the handful of psychopaths, who are on the loose in the Danish larp scene. It is not my impression that a single one of them has been receiving treatment for the disorder, making the problem unaddressed in every single way.

As the psychopaths find it amusing bringing people down, the larp scene is a playground, as well as a training field for perfecting manipulative behaviour. Apart from the personal failure they like to apply to others, the contributions of the psychopaths to the scene have i.e. been legitimating of manipulative behaviour, as well as an excessive tendency to project and blame others, which both seem widely adopted. As with the borderline girls, they seek to establish and maintain a group of fans or tools, used for promoting their intriguing ideas.

There is an unattended discussion on how to cope with the presence of these special characters. However, as the main purpose of this article is to describe the variety among the larpers, I will leave the issue of the special characters here.

## **Summing up**

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<sup>1</sup> Eventhough borderline girls are attracted to intrigue larps, it would be wrong to assume that any girl playing intrigue larps as in this category.

All in all, profiling the larper seems as hard to do, as to define the activity of larping. There are just too many interests to adjust to. The sketched picture of the larper as a playful, but also a very childish individual is probably not very welcome among larpers, as well as having their leisure (if it can be called so), reduced to a process of the satisfaction of needs.

My developmental recommendation – to get out – or at least to develop an extrovert gaming style, is due the fact that most larpers lack the means for developing a widely founded participation in his or her surroundings. The development of a relevant array of extrovert abilities might help the larper bringing his or her resources into play other than when larping, eventually reducing the need for compensatoric activities by effectively bridging the larpers knowledge to his or her surroundings. It is about time that the debate on what resources are present among the larpers is supplemented with a perspective on what the individual larper actually needs.

To the bridge builder trying to create some kind of unity, I have tried to bring the diversity, as well as the reason for this diversity among the larpers to attention, in order to enable the bridge builder to create unity through inclusion, instead of internal distinction. And this certainly implies looking beyond ones own needs and desires, for which I hope this article has been helpful. The only question remaining is whether the larpers, as a whole or as individuals, are ready to take a look into the cards dealt, and thereby confronting the issues at hand, or if the game is to be played continuously with the cards closed.

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### About the author

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Thomas Duus Henriksen is 29 years old, and lives in Copenhagen, Denmark. He is educated as business psychologist, specialised in the use of games for educational and developmental purposes. He has been larping since 1992, organising since 1996, and has used this experience to design learning games for the public educational system and for supplementary education. Before becoming a business psychologist, Thomas worked 4 years with mentally ill young people as an environmental therapist at a psychiatric department. He is currently employed with a private company where he designs learning games for various purposes.