

# Making and maintaining frames

**A study of metacommunication in laiv play**

**By Geir Tore Brenne**

**Cand. polit thesis  
Department of Sociology and  
Human Geography,  
University of Oslo**

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# 1.

# Summary

Laiv is a leisure activity that is organised and practiced by a network of involved people in Norway. They usually have a middle class background, and are between 16-40 years of age. From time to time, groups of players organise unique plays that they take part in. These plays last from a couple of hours up to a week. They take place in a geographical location that is selected in advance by organisers. The plays are about simulating a make-believe setting, which has its own characters, conflicts and dramatic events, culture, and background history.

People who are acting together, or communicating with each other, always do this in the context of a specific definition of a situation. My research question is to look at how the laiv players make and maintain their play situation. A definition of a situation implies a variety of structures that influence the interaction of the participants. The participants of the situation act in accordance to a set of roles, as well as a normative background that regulates what one should and should not do. These structures also include the background information that one uses when interpreting the meaning of the actions of others. In other words, the study of the process by which a situation is defined is a study of the process by which the social reality becomes

structured. Researchers that study this topic have focused on the relation between general structures – in the form of shared conventions and knowledge, habits and so on – and particular actions that are done in unique contexts of interaction.

This study takes an ethnographic approach to this question, with analysis of interviews, observations, and internet texts being the primary method. To play, each of the players is assigned a character in advance. The players emphasise a 'realistic' resemblance of physical traits, in order to play the character. Maybe this makes it easier to communicate a character. Nevertheless, players are usually capable of ignoring a lack of resemblance in relation to such traits as height and physical build. Then they increase their ability to structure play in the way they want. External influence from the surrounding culture makes it difficult to ignore lack of resemblance to some traits such as gender and ethnicity.

Some players may lose their involvement in play, or one may risk that players become too involved and fail to separate play from 'real life', or actions in play may develop in such a way that play cannot continue. The play situation can then break down for these and other players. The players have a repertoire of techniques to

handle this. The play may be stopped, the problematic events sorted out, and then the play can be restarted. Another way is by accepting the performance of one's co-players, without scrutinising or denying any inconsistencies. This also greatly decreases their need for communicating details.

On the one hand, the players and organisers use a variety of preparations and rehearsals in advance of play in order to shape their actions in play. On the other hand, this rarely determines actions completely, leaving considerable room for improvisatory action during play. When improvising, the performance becomes more stereotypic, and this is less 'realistic' in some players' eyes.

The players try to have a visual similarity between their material world and the material world in play, and they select and shape their objects and surroundings to achieve such similarity. They are limited by their resources when doing so, but they are capable of ignoring inconsistencies that are impractical to fix. Material objects and surroundings have communicative effects on play in terms of their being shared symbolic signs, and in terms of their physical effects. Players use both of these to communicate the situation of play itself, and to make distinctions in play clearer.

To sum up, the process of making and maintaining a definition of a situation involves both using pre-existing structures - in the form of general conventions and particular knowledge of and habits in a situation that are learned and rehearsed in advance - and the use of techniques actively to shape and maintain the situation when acting during play. There is a close relationship between the pre-existing structures and action in context in the process of making and maintaining the play situation. This is par-

ticularly clear in five ways throughout the text. First, the players have a great capability of adapting the process of making and maintaining a situation to the demands and possibilities of the particular context of action. Second, the use of conventions that exist in advance of play are intertwined with the interaction in the context of performance. Third, at several places one sees clearly how action is both structured according to pre-existing structure, while simultaneously structuring future action. Fourth, the material environment are a given structure constantly intertwined in the context of performance. Fifth, looking at how the definition of the situation can break down, provides information about the relation between the general conventions of play and the demands of the context of performance.







# 2. Introduction

## Amaranth

Before approaching the field, I had some experiences from briefly visiting another play as a player, 'Amerika', in September 2000 when a friend of mine took part in it. This play was special in that it took place in public, and allowed for outsiders to take part through brief 'visitor roles'. This is very uncommon in laiv plays. When I decided in early June 2001 to go ahead and do a study of laiv, I searched for a play that was of some size and close in time. The time for joining was overdue, so when I first contacted the organisers they refused to give me a role. Two weeks before the play they called me and offered me a vacant role as a slave from a player that had withdrawn. 'Amaranth'<sup>1</sup> was scheduled to take place at the end of that month. In this play, about 30 players gathered at an old farm in the wood north of Oslo. For 5 days, the players played a household set in Roman times in Thrace around 50 BC. I attended some of the preparations and parts of the play, and I will introduce the reader to laiv by recapitulating how this particular play was planned and played out.

The organisers - 3 young women from Oslo - had started to organise the play as much as a year in advance. There were many important tasks they had to do. One thing was to find a place to play. The setting for the play was a Roman mansion. Not so many buildings appropriate for that setting are available for rent in the area. Further, laiv players do not like audiences - they consider interference from non-players interruption to the play. Thus, the old farm was chosen due to its placement out of the way of the general public, not too far from Oslo, and being within the limited budget of the play.

Organisers also planned the Roman setting. The central themes of this play included conflict between two factions of the nobility that were rivals for power, the religious experiences of many sects at that period of time, and dramatising the radical class differences between slave, free citizen, and nobility that characterised the Roman era historically. In order to convey the setting to the player, different 'compendiums' were written. These were short booklets, describing aspects of the setting that the players needed to know. One compendium described

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<sup>1</sup> 'Amaranth' was actually titled 'Amaranth III', as it was the third of a series of plays that used similar topics and characters in play. However, the setting and action of these plays has differed. For the sake of simplicity, 'Amaranth 3' are referred to as 'Amaranth' throughout the text.

aspects that all players needed to know. This included basic facts about religion, language, history, political struggles and class structure, and some basic knowledge about the different 'groupings' in play. A 'grouping' consists of characters that belong together in play. In 'Amaranth', the groupings included the noble family of the Senator, the slaves, the Legionaries, Praetorians, and a group of Christians. Some of the groupings also had a special compendium for their grouping, where knowledge that they only would know. The compendium also described what costumes the players should wear during play.

The organisers also had to plan the casting of characters. Each player received one character sheet written by the organisers. The sheet has its origins from fantasy role playing. It contains about one half A4 page long description of the character. This description included the basic personality type, some biographical details, and some points regarding the character's motives and goals. There were not many details in the description. The organisers refrained from giving more instructions about the character, stating it was up to the player to do any further interpretation and preparation of his character.

Players were recruited through advertising on a web site, and through the network of the organisers. The date deadline for enlisting to the play was three and a half months before the play was to take place. There was a participation fee for the players, varying between 300-1000 NOK (between 40-125 USD). This was to cover the expenses of the organisers. When players had enlisted, they could make wishes regarding the category of role they wanted. The organisers then cast them in characters as they saw fit.

Practical things in relation to play were fixed by the organisers, or delegated to other persons before play. Food was to be served to the players

playing nobility, so some persons had to organise that. The rest of the food was brought to the site of play by the players themselves. Basic sanitary facilities for the players also had to be provided. Fortunately, the old farm had an outdoor toilet; also, it was not far away from a lake that could be used for washing.

When players had got a role, it was their responsibility to prepare their play further. They had to think out a more detailed biography, and study the material on the setting provided by the organisers. Many must also have studied some additional sources on the history, since the information in the compendiums was somewhat limited. Players received a list of other players, and could contact the players who played characters they have a relation to in play. One opportunity to do so was the pre-meeting organised two weeks in advance.

The pre-meeting is an important event before a play. In 'Amaranth', this took place in a weekend two weeks before the play. Here all the players were gathered together with the organisers. Many players met for the first time here. The organisers first talked in front of everybody about their visions for this play. They also gave some more information on the background of the setting and history of the play. Players got the chance to ask questions. Some basic safety rules during play was talked about, in case players would feel too tired. There was a longer discussion between them, in relation to how they should play sexual relations - how far should the players be allowed to go during play?

Much time on the pre-meeting was spent on smaller drama rehearsals led by a drama student. These rehearsals focused on trust, improvisation and acting out status differences. The different groupings also conducted separate meetings. The different groupings had by and large differ-

ent religious affiliation, so each spent time rehearsing the religious ritual that they would later perform during play. After the formal schedule, most of the players went out to a pub together.

The play itself began by the players assembling at the place of play in the afternoon. The farm was from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It had one large red barn, which was next to a larger residence. In the middle, there was a small courtyard. Next to the residence, there was a small out-house. The buildings were surrounded by grassland in front and forest in the back. In play, the large grouping of slave characters was to reside in the open room of the barn, while the nobility and some free citizen characters resided in the different rooms in the house. About two hundred metres from the farm, the Legionary players had put up two large old-fashioned tents in which they resided.

The play was set to start at 21hrs in the evening. In the hours before, the players were packing up the equipment they were going to use in play, as well as putting on costume and even make-up for some players. Around the time of start, all players gathered and started the play by performing the sequence that they had rehearsed in advance. Afterwards, the players played by trying to act as their character at all times.

When the players were playing, much of the time was spent doing things that are similar to 'everyday life'. A considerable amount of time was spent preparing and eating food. Meals were prepared from scratch, and both eating and cooking was a social process. Another frequent event was rituals. In the morning, most of the players took part in a morning ritual together with other members of their respective religions. These rituals were fairly relaxed. One that I attended was performed in the morning sun be-

fore breakfast. We gathered together in the field of grass a some distance away from the main buildings. Each then gave a small sacrifice in the form of some picked flowers. Then we said a pre-rehearsed small prayer together. Other rituals were conducted in the evening. Then they were performed in a much more spectacular manner and as a central part of play. The player engaged in a lot of small talk during the time in play. They talked about simple everyday topics such as food or the weather. The players were playing continuously for five days. Naturally, a considerable amount of time was also spent sleeping. The players also had more dramatic motifs that they engaged themselves in. These were various topics that players used in order to play dramatic situations and narratives. For example, two characters in 'Amaranth' had a secret love affair. They could then 'play on' the love affair. This is a term the players use. It points to how they use something as a topic for meaningful interaction in play. In this example, the love affair they played eventually had a tragic end. The female character was forcibly separated from him. Someone else played a wise slave character. This character was a teacher to an incompetent young nobleman. The two players could use the teacher-student relationship as a topic for their interaction in play. Their actions in play developed as a story the time the play lasted. The wise teacher eventually did such a good job that he was freed from slavery near the end of the play. For the players involved in the above examples, their actions eventually became a small tragic or happy story that they had taken part in. Unlike a theatre, the players had not decided in advance exactly what they should do. Instead, it involved a lot of improvisation during play. There were also some major events taking place that involved many players during play. One of these was a power

struggle between two rivalling factions of the nobility - the Praetorians and the Legionaries and their leader. Eventually the Legionaries won this struggle and arrested their opponents. These events also took the shape as a story, with a peak occurring at the final day of play right before the play was finished.

Amaranth used a system where characters were instructed to perform certain actions at specific times in play. This was done in order to facilitate the creation of some central stories. But players also spontaneously came up with ideas of topics to 'play on' themselves during play. Once the play was started, the organisers had few means of influencing the events. They took part in the play themselves, as slaves. However, one method they used was to go into the outhouse. Here they stopped playing their characters, and as organisers they wrote letters, which were sent to significant characters in play. These letters could influence the flow of events. For example, one letter that they sent to the Praetorian characters was interpreted by the players to mean that the Roman emperor had died. The organisers did not know exactly how the characters would respond to their letters, but it did have considerable impact on what they did.

The ending of the play was right after a peak on the final day of play. The organisers announced that 'Now, the play is over!'. All players then stopped playing their character. The following hours were spent talking together about what had happened in the play. Players whose characters had been enemies communicated happily about their view of the play. Each player had had his own experience of what had happened, and had different stories to tell from play. Before leaving, the players cleaned up the farm they had been playing on together. Props were packed down. The costumes were changed for

ordinary clothes and put into backpacks. Leftovers of food were packed away. Everything was transported back home.

In the evening of the day after the play had ended, the players gathered for a great party after play - the 'afterlaiv' party. This is an institution in laiv. The players gathered in a pizza restaurant, which was filled with the players. Some players made speeches that thanked the organisers for their effort in creating a very good play. A huge applause followed. The talk about the play continued around the tables. The main topic was events in play. Who had been experiencing what? How did the character feel about this and that which had been done to him in play? Other things were also discussed. An important topic was news and information about other players in the laiv community. Many of the players only knew each other as laiv players. Sometimes, when referring to other players, they referred to him or her using the name of the character he or she had played instead of his real name. After a while, the gathering moves to a dark and worn out pub. The pizza place was chosen for its low price on beer. During the night, talk about play continues while drinking more beer. Between some of the players there is the flirtatious atmosphere common in pubs. A smaller core of players moved home to someone and continued the party into dawn the next day.

## Doing laiv

The above presentation should have given the reader a small taste of what a laiv play is. It is difficult to explain what laiv playing is, to those who are unfamiliar with the hobby. As a leisure activity, it combines elements from a range of different activities:

- traditional and improvised theatre

- FRP (fantasy roleplaying) such as Dungeons&Dragons, or Vampire<sup>2</sup>
- boys scout activities
- make-believe play of children, such as 'cow-boys and indians'
- performance art
- historical re-enactments

The name itself, 'laiv', points to a core issue of their activity. It is a Norwegian re-writing of the English word 'live'. It gives associations towards being present, spontaneous and unplanned, in the centre of real action.<sup>3</sup> Laiv players, who read parts of my text, reacted to my use of the word in English. 'Laiv' was Norwegian - why didn't I use the word 'larp' instead? Larp is an English acronym for 'Live action roleplaying game' and is the term used to refer to a similar activity undertaken in Britain and the US. Laiv players who talk about their activity in English, refer to it as larp. However, I question the extent to which there is a similarity between larp and laiv. I don't think there is any reason to take this connection for granted. There are some connections to players in Nordic countries, but even in between them there are significant differences. To me, there appeared to be few connections to English speaking countries. Therefore, the use of the Norwegian word 'laiv' is meant to highlight the local foundation of the conventions involved in the practice.

As it is common in subcultures, the laiv players have developed a vocabulary for their activity. The shared vocabulary<sup>4</sup> counts over 100 special expressions relating to aspects of play. Many of the words are similar to words in the general culture, or are terms taken from film, theatre, and literature studies. But the meaning of many expressions, are special to the laiv culture. Some of the concepts are constitutive of the activity. To be able to play, one needs to have a basic understanding of them. Often, the players do not agree on the definition of key concepts, as the interpretation of these may have implications for the way they play. The various subgroups have different ideas of what is important to do.

On an explicit level, players follow a code of egalitarianism in relation to admitting players. In principle, anyone willing to spend some time to prepare, and pay the participation fee in time, may be allowed to play. The organisers in the plays I took part in did not do any active recruiting outside the closed circle of laiv players. Thus, in most plays the players have a background from, and knowledge of, laiv. If someone with no experience wants to become a player, he or she needs to take initiative in order to learn about how to become one. New players are recruited through friends that are into the hobby or, more seldom, through hearing about the hobby in the media. Prospective players learn to play mainly through taking part in practice. Only some basic

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2 Fantasy roleplaying is a game in which the players partly improvise a verbal narrative, being led by a main storyteller, the 'GM'. It takes place with 3-6 people gathered around a table. For an ethnographic description of this culture, see Fine (1983)

3 'Laiv' originates as an abbreviation for 'levende rollespill' in Norwegian. The noun 'et spill' in Norwegian, may either be translated both to 'a game' or as 'a play'. The phrase may therefore translate directly to English as 'live roleplay' or 'live rolegame'. Likewise, the verb used to denote the act of participating in laiv – 'å spille' may be translated as either as 'to game' or 'to play'. I have chosen to consistently use 'a play' as the noun, and 'to play' as the verb. This can give associations to the informal and creative play of children or to the performance in theatrical plays. I feel such associations are in line with the nature of laiv

4 Surveys of terms is given in Grasmø (1997) and Bøckman (2002)

conventions are verbally instructed upon before play.

Recruiting players for play partly follow a 'first-come-first-served', since there are limited available spaces for characters. It is also common that organisers invite specific players whom they know, to play particular characters. Therefore, being part of the informal network of players is of high informal importance. The players often use age restriction. It is regular practice to have a 16 or 18-year age limit in order to become a player. The arguments used to legitimise this are of a legal nature. The players claim the reason is that they want players to act responsibly in relation to their actions, and they don't want to have any legal responsibility for any young players' actions. The fee for participating is usually relatively small, maybe around 300-1000 NOK for a laiv lasting a weekend. The players are a small group, and experienced players can expect many players to be familiar to them. At the same time, the community of players is so large that they can also expect to meet players that they do not know.

The duration of the plays varies considerably. The plays may last from some hours up to a week. The most common duration for a play is about two or three days – making it suitable for a weekend. In order to take part in laiv activities, a person needs the time and ability to go someplace and concentrate completely on the play for its duration. Such an escape from obligations in 'real life' is not easy to do for everyone. It requires a flexible job and few other daily obligations. Parents, for instance, can have a hard time participating in such events and may need to bring their children with them as co-players.

Organisers rely on players themselves to decide whether a play is appropriate for them to take part in. Thus, players decide themselves if

the setting, plot and harshness of the play is something for them. There is a consensus among the players that organisers have a responsibility to signalise what type of play it is in advance, so that prospective players have sufficient knowledge in order to make such a decision.

An important part of preparing a play is the casting of characters. Before a play, the players get a 'character' to play. It starts as an abstract idea about a person written down on a sheet of paper. The author of this draft is the organiser, often in collaboration with the prospective player. There is a great variety in the content of this description. Some of the following may typically be included:

- Character traits and skills. A list is provided of the traits of the character is, i.e. "good-willed", "aggressive", "humorous", "strong", "clumsy" etc, and of particular skills "hunting game", "cooking", "sword-fighting" etc

- Questions, supposedly to make the player think through different aspects related to the role. These questions can be related to the past biography of the role – like "What did you do in your childhood?" and 'How did you respond to your father's death?'. Questions can be related to the relations of the role – like 'How is the relation to your sister?'

- A list of other characters important for the player to contact and clarify aspects of their relation in the play.

- An overview of the daily routine tasks for the character

- A short biography of the character (usually, no more than half a page).

(An example of a character sheet, is shown in appendix V). The written description is further developed personally by each of the players. Each prepares their character's biography, personality and behaviour further before play. They



must also get hold of an appropriate costume, and talk to the other players which will play characters whom they have a relation to in play. The players also allow one player to play several characters during play. Usually, this happens if a character 'dies' in play, in order for his player still to take part in the play. But they do not allow several players to play the same character.

The players by and large reuse a limited selection of character types that the players are familiar with. In other words, one can say that they are *standardised*. A general rule of casting is that players get and are expected to play characters that they have some visual similarity to. But there are a range of exceptions to this, which I will come back to later. The list below sum up characters that two players who are also experienced organisers described as common:

A laiv play also has a 'setting' that differs from play to play. This is the background characteristics of the imaginary realm where the play occurs. The history, location, general culture, or metaphysics of that realm, is all part of it. The players learn about it through texts given to them by organisers before play. Different 'settings' implies the use of different props and costumes. Different groups tends to favour different types of settings. Some groups may also reuse one setting in several different plays. There are some settings that the players are generally familiar with, and that are used frequently – they are also, to some extent, standardised.

The organisers must acquire a physical place to play for the period of play. Players prefer this not to be so close to too many other people. The place and props required influence the difficulty of finding such a place. Laiv plays do not usually have a high budget, so the price paid for rent cannot be high. Organisers can exert considerable creativity in finding places that they find

**Table 1.1-List of common laiv characters according to interview with experienced players**

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strange girl or boy that is completely into his/her own world without saying much to others.</li> <li>2. Powerful and mystic female, that can be frightening in some way, that plays on sex.</li> <li>3. Local guards, soldiers, or similar, played by young men that want to be tough.</li> <li>4. Upper class noble characters, who are very arrogant and exploit their subjects.</li> <li>5. Siblings, who are a pair of jokers.</li> <li>6. Proud knights, completely lacking a complex personality.</li> <li>7. 'volver', a mystical Which-like female character. Herbalist.</li> <li>8. Wizard, kind and silly. Often only accessible to men.</li> <li>9. Young and very virgin-like female girls</li> <li>10. Farmers, which have a intense relation to potatoes or turnips, and speak dialects of Norwegian</li> </ol> <p>This list describes characters in a fantasy setting. The interviewees underlined that the same types appeared in other settings, adapted to those settings. Further, the list is only an example: it is not exhaustive.</p>
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match the setting. Table 1-2 presents examples that show the variety of laiv plays, their physical setting, and theme.

During play the players also utilise many material objects. This includes costume, weapons, sleeping material, cooking equipment, and decorative props. The players denote all this as 'stash'. This 'stash' must to some extent be appropriate for the setting. For example, in 'Amaranth', this implied that it had to seem in line with the historical Roman time period. Thus it can be difficult for players to get hold of 'stash'. It must be manufactured by players before play, or be acquired in second-hand stores or borrowed through special connections. Due to the difficulty of customising material objects, getting hold of the 'stash' is a significant part of the preparations for each player. In Oslo, each organised play is a finished unit. Players do not go back to the same play-

**Table 1-2 Examples of the diversity of laiv plays their physical setting and theme**

Name of play	Year	Physical setting in 'real life'	Make-believe location and time in play	Theme and central motifs (keywords)	Note
'Amaranth 3'	2001	Old farm in the wooden terrain outside of Oslo	Trache about 50 AD	Power struggle and intrigues between groups, social status differences at that time, Religion and Christianity	referred to throughout this text
'Amerika'	2000	Central square in downtown Oslo (Youngstorget), a trash dump built as an artistic installation and surrounded by a fence	Fictional community for outcasts of to regular society. Encounters between trendfreaks, social workers, trash sellers, and corporate people	Society critical, political. The trash dump community are invaded by people in search of awinning lottery ticket.	Play took place in public view, happens very rarely. More info in Norwegian at: <a href="http://weltschmerz.laiv.org/amerika/">http://weltschmerz.laiv.org/amerika/</a>
'Kybergensis'	1997	A closed mental hospital outside central Oslo, with windows and exits covered so that the place seemed isolated	Underground fictional community in the future	The theme was ystopian science fiction inspired by George Orwells novel '1984', took up themes such as totalitarianism, surveillance, power, status difference in totalitarian society, betrayal, resistance.	
'1942'	2000	A small desolate island community in rural Western Norway	German occupation of a small Norwegian community in 1942	Conflict between the island community and the German occupiers, intelligence and resistance, regular day-to day life of the local people	
'Baghdad Express'	1999	A rented veteran train from the Norwegian state railways	Orient express in the 1920s	Murder and mysteries, agatha-Christie like intrigue	
'P-13'	1998	An old bus, small desolate rural cabin	Rural midwestern USA in the 1970s	Hijacked bus, hostage taking situation, police, special forces, negotiations and eventual storming	
'Kalde Brenninger'	2000/2001	An old deolate Lighthouse on the western Coast of Norway	Contemporary, different people gather to hear the will of a rich man	Dark mysterie, horror, zombies and splatter, action	Involved a lot of special effects. Arranged twice.
'BL4'	2002	An old style rural village desolate in the woods, under construction to be reused by laiv players as a setting for plays	Contemporary, group of archeology students, professors, and highschool students on an archeological expedition close to the Russian border	Group encounters a secret pharmaceutical lab and is affected by mysterious virus, taken prisoner by Russian special guards, horror, death and suspense	
'Europa'	2001	Rented place with buildings and cabins, outside Oslo	A contemporary refugee camp, with refugees from an area with armed ethnic conflicts similar to Yugoslavia in the	Ethnicity and nationalism, hate, difficulties faced by refugees and the immigration authorities, alienation	English info at url: <a href="http://weltschmerz.laiv.org/europa/">http://weltschmerz.laiv.org/europa/</a>
'Mellan himmel och hav'	2003	A 'Black box' theatre owned by the Swedish national theatre	Utopian future society, not unlike the feminist utopian societies described in the fiction of Ursula Le Guin.	Different ways of constructing gender relations, sexuality and gender identity.	Described in Tidbeck (2003). Swedish play, but with Norwegian participants
'PanoptiCorp'	2003	Red brick factory building, with large spacious modern offices	Characters are employed in the Newly formed Oslo-unit of a large international corporation doing public relations	Satire on the post industrial market society, characters doing on work with hopeless deadlines, goal to climb the ranks and get 'cred' from their superiors	Online review at url: <a href="http://giaever.com/op/panoptiCorp.htm">http://giaever.com/op/panoptiCorp.htm</a>
'Once Upon A Time'	2005	Reconstructed Western street built by shooting enthusiasts in rural Norway	Small Western village of Gibson, in midwestern USA in the 1887	intrigues and characters modeled after the 'spaghetti western' movies of Sergio Leone and other movies	English information at url: <a href="http://western.laiv.org/gibson.htm">http://western.laiv.org/gibson.htm</a>

frame or use the same roles again. Each laiv, is a unique event. However, it may sometimes happen that one laiv play is run several times, but then with different players. Also, when the setting is reused, the players may then start with the characters at a different point in time, or with new characters.

In chapter 4, I shall discuss how the conflicts between the role as a researcher and the role as a player were a source of insight in the activity. Now, I consider how I learned about several implicit but important conventions of laiv play by breaking them as a player. After playing my character in 'Amaranth', I attended the customary 'afterlaiv' party. I learned that some of the other players were unhappy about my performance. The criticism was that I had been 'playing badly'. What did this imply? It meant that my actions as a character in-frame, differed from how *they* regarded it as appropriate to play this character. One thing was that I had failed to act in accordance to what they considered as realistic and historical correct given the Roman setting. For example, the character as a slave would require one to show deference to players of higher status. This meant to follow certain proper forms of address - such as, never to speak directly to ones Masters while other ones were present. It meant that one should be ready, to do small services for superiors - such as cooking food, serving wine, holding and fetching things, or just be present, whenever requested. It meant to maintain a specific bodily posture, and avoid gazing at anyone of higher status in the eyes. Playing

laiv, requires one to have some degree of reflexivity and control of details of the details ones behaviour. I was not good on this. Another thing, is that playing is physically and mentally demanding. Walking around and following the role, were more difficult as the hours passed. I had to be constantly within reach by the others. I did take a break after playing for two days, but this did not seem so popular. As a character in a laiv play, the players who play other characters depends on you. Laiv players stress that the performance of the play is the result of a collective and relational effort. In my case, failure to play appropriately, or taking any breaks, implied that the Roman Legionaries lacked an important means to perform social status in play. A third thing, was that when I eventually got more disillusioned and left play, I talked about it with my co-players but I did not talk about it with the three young women who organised the play. In the play, they played the characters of dance-slaves. After the play, they were furious that I had left play without talking to them. They regarded it as my duty to do this. As organisers, they were responsible for the event proceeding successfully. I had not realised that the organisers, while being low status in play, were actually the commanders of the whole carefully monitored an coordinated event. They enjoyed very high authority from the other players.

In addition to stressing that one should perform ones character in accordance to the setting, the laiv players also stress that the players shall *feel the emotions and experiencing the physical*

*surroundings in a way similar to how their character would have done if the play had been a reality.* This latter aspect distinguishes the conventions of the laiv players from most other performance activities. Their explicit rationale to emphasise that the material objects and surroundings—must resemble the real situation as closely as possible, is that it make the involvement in the characters they play more easy.<sup>5</sup> Taken together, the different aspects concerning realistically recreating a setting are sometimes referred to as ‘immersionism’.<sup>6</sup> Viewed from the outside, this appears as a strong normative and very ambitious ideology.

## The background of the laiv players

Laiv play began as an activity in the 1980s, undertaken by more separate groups and individuals. During the 1990s, the activity evolved. More plays were organised, and as more people became involved in the hobby, a stable community of players scattered around the country emerged.

There is no quantitative study of on the persons involved in playing laiv. Therefore, many of the estimates following is based on informed guesses by me, or based on guesses from sources that are part of the network. The people I interviewed estimate the number of active players to be around 1000. ‘Active’ is then defined as participating in one or more laiv plays a year. Everyone is involved on a hobby basis only, there are no one working professionally with the laiv ac-

tivities. The organisation of plays is undertaken by smaller groups among the culture. Such groups consist of people who know each other and who meet more often. They vary in size, maybe numbering from a few to 100. Previously, plays were announced on private mailing lists. Now this is primarily done through the Internet, through a shared web site, ‘laiv.org’.

During my time of contact with the community, I primarily met players in Oslo. To some extent, the local community of players were divided into separate groups. Players in these groups had more social contact with each other, and had also more similar ‘real life’ interests. Plays were often organised by persons who had a background from the same group. However, there were no stable social boundaries between groups in relation to participation of plays – players took part in plays that were organised by other groups than the ones they had background from.

Several players noted that there had been a sharper polarisation between groups in the Oslo community early 1990s. One player presented his view on early rivalry between two groups. Ravn was a group that at that time consisted of players with a higher middle class background, who attended the more prestigious schools in the city. Some had done military service, and saw some military skills as positive and useful in relation to playing laiv plays. This is not unnatural, as many laiv plays involve living in the woods and had military elements in play. Furthermore, they put a higher emphasis on making historical laiv plays,

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<sup>5</sup>The players appear to have a strong belief in *their own* ability to shape the emotions they feel as characters. This is reminiscent to Hochschild (1979) study of airline waitresses. The waitresses also appeared as able to manipulate their own feelings and display of emotions throughout a busy workday, by maintaining a strong internal discipline.

<sup>6</sup> It is not a word in the Norwegian dictionary. In English, the verb immerse has a related meaning: ‘To plunge into, to bury, imbed, involve or include in other things.’ (Search on OED online, url:<http://www.oed.com>)

and aimed for a high degree of historical realism. The plays this group organised often involved considerable and thorough planning. On the other hand, the group Nar involved more people with a working class social background. They had stronger connections to amateur theatre. Some of the members had artistic ambitions, both in 'real life' and in relation to the plays they made. Many members of Nar had political affiliations leaning to the left. They did not have so much respect for or interest in military service. They were less concerned with historical realism in the plays they organised. In addition, they also were less concerned with organising and planning the play in advance – instead relying more on spontaneity.

Two of the players noted that one of the requirements of being a good player is to relate to people that are very different from oneself in 'everyday life'. Meeting the other players in the preparation process implied that one had to cooperate closely with these people. Players could have widely different social backgrounds and 'real life' interests. However, everyone shared an interest in laiv play. Based on this common factor, one had to be able to work and cooperate together. This could be a social challenge, but both players I spoke to about it mentioned that they also had learned more about relating to others.

A common conception that the players themselves shared, was that the community involved many people who in some way were unique. One player said that he felt that laiv players were either very social people – who would talk to all kinds of people in different settings. Or, they were very unsocial and introvert – typical 'nerds'. During play, however, the latter type of people also flourished socially, in a role that was different from their everyday self. By and large, a common conception among both people out-

side of the laiv community, as well as insiders, was that a majority of the players had 'nerdy' interests involving computers, science fiction and games, and had little experience with the opposite sex. I do not think that this description does justice to the laiv community, from my point of view it appeared as a community with people who were different both socially and culturally. Nevertheless, some factors appeared to me as more typical among the players.

A number of players had background from working with IT. Many had also a considerable interest in history. A good deal of the players were connected to alternative youth cultures. They dressed in 'freaky' clothes. This involved dressing in black, and often using boots and chains. They would listen to and attend shows that featured dark rock music of a 'goth' kind, and one could often meet other laiv players at the places that featured such music. A good deal of players had background from amateur theatre, particularly for the female players. The players I had the chance to meet were from 16 to around 40, with the average maybe around 23 years old. There seemed to be a slight majority of males, but a lot of females are also involved in the community. Many players had background from educated middle class families. With one exception, all the players I met had ethnic background from western countries. This is conspicuous, as Oslo has a large population of immigrants from eastern countries such as Pakistan or Turkey. Nevertheless, there was also diversity among the players. To me, this was most evident when I met the players for 'Amaranth' together on the pre-meeting. By looking at the clothing worn by the players, the differences were clear. There were the young and 'freaky', the sporty, the casual, and the more grown-up formal styles.

How important the laiv culture was in the players' lives varied considerably. Some players had it as their main interest, spending considerable amounts of time with other laiv players, engaging in written discussions about laiv topics, and organising events. But the majority had it more as a side activity, participating in one play from time to time, but less involved on a regular basis. A few of the players used laiv as a basis for organising related activities professionally. This includes special events in private businesses, or special plays with a pedagogic intention. For example, the Norwegian Red Cross has had regular arrangement with plays were the participants – people from the general public, or from schools, play refugees in a refugee camp. These plays have a lower intensity than plays organised for the player community, but the intention is to give people an increased understanding and empathy for the difficulties faced by refugees in their situation.

As a Scandinavian country, Norway is a relatively safe place to live. Education is covered by the state, making it attainable by everyone. The unemployment rate has remained low. It is likely that the wider social background from living in Norway, shapes the way the players relates to the activity. The topics that the players deal with in plays span a variety of topics. Many plays are focused on adventure and fantasy, but others deal with topics of a serious kind. In the play of 'Amaranth', sexuality, religion and social status were important topics. The latter involved the players performing extreme status differences in play. Other plays have used political topics such as the high level of consumption in western counties, fascism, or modern warfare. A primary way that players use laiv is precisely to approach contemporary issues that are of importance or concern to them in their life.

The importance of their social background can become visible when Norwegian laiv players encounter players engaged in similar activities that have a very different social background. One Norwegian player told me of one example that he had witnessed. In the winter of 2001, a group of Norwegian organisers organised a play called 'Europa'. The topic of this play was related to the wars in the Balkans that had gone on during the 1990s. During the wars, a huge number of refugees fled the conflict zone. Some were granted a residence permit in Norway. In the play, the roles had been turned. Scandinavia was fictively thought of as a place of ethnic wars between the different Scandinavian peoples. The setting of the play was a fictive refugee camp in a country in the Balkans. During play, the players intended to focus on ethnic conflicts and violence as well as the traumatic process of fleeing to another country and applying for political asylum. In order to strengthen the feeling of alienation for the asylum seekers, a group of Russian players were invited to play the guard characters who received and questioned the refugees when they arrived. The characters they played were to treat the refugees in the harsh manner known from such encounters in 'real life'. They performed their characters well. After the play, the Russian players noted that they had found the play stressful, and that they completely failed to see the point of such a type of play. In their real lives, they had to struggle in the day to day existence. The unemployment rate was high, and they had poorer living conditions. They lived in a society that had an authoritarian past. To them, the plays they played in Russia usually involved adventure and fantasies, which moved them away from the harsher reality of 'everyday life'. Their 'everyday life' could be stressful enough, and they did not need to play stressful plays as well. It is clear that

players from different countries can share some of the general conventions of playing, but these are twisted and adapted to their own local social context of play.

The hobby is not easily accessible to outsiders. The laiv players do little to actively inform others about their hobby. Media exposition usually takes the form a feature article once in a while by an outside journalist presenting the activities in an exotic way. Further, the players shy away from public attention while in play, the ideology claiming that the visible presence of non-players will ruin their "experience" of the play. Sometimes, laiv groups have been associated with occult activities by outsiders not understanding the make-believe dimension of laiv. All these factors contribute to a significant symbolic boundary between persons who are into laiv and persons who are not – a typical trait of subcultures (Gelder&Thornton, 1997).

### **Research question: Making and maintaining the definition of the play situation in laiv**

Having given a basic overview of the activity, I now turn to presenting the perspective from which I study it. The research question of this text is: How are laiv players able to make and maintain the definition of the situation of play?

The processes of making and maintaining situations are general throughout social life. For example, a theatrical play rests upon the ability to engage the audience in the situation that the actors on stage perform. This involves a variety of factors. For example, the theatre building isolates the stage space from possible interruptions from outside. The audience also knows that they must sit tight and accept the make-believe of the actors on the stage. The actors know that they must

communicate in a clearly spoken and vivid manner, in order to successfully communicate to the audience. Competitive games also count on the ability to make a situation. When playing a game, players must accept and make a certain definition of the situation in order to make the game work. By creating and maintaining an imaginary situation on the chess boards, for example, the players are enabled to play and compete in it. Similarly, everyday situations also depend on the participants' abilities to make and maintain situations. Think of a casual conversation with a group of friends around a cup of tea or coffee. A shared situation is made and maintained by the participants. Each conversational partner is allowed to have his or her say. The participants must pay attention to what the interacting partners say, and politely contribute to conversational subjects that are viewed as interesting. Certain things are defined as irrelevant and must be ignored. In all these examples, the participants are competent at both initiating and ending situations without much hassle. Sometimes, persons who are engaged in a situation fail to maintain it. A person engaged in storytelling can suddenly forget the punch line in the middle of his story. As a consequence, the involvement of his listeners vanish, the situation breaks down and changes to a different situation. A person in the audience of a theatre can receive a phone call on his cell phone during the play, thus breaking the situation on stage for everyone present. Organisations may be broken by bankruptcy, and even the highly institutionalised situation of a nation state can be broken by revolution.

On one hand, the process is influenced by various pre-existing structures in advance. My use of the term 'pre-existing structure' here, denotes a pre-existing factor that influence the ongoing interaction. One type of pre-existig struc-

ture, are conventions. Everyone who takes part in a situation, bases their actions knowledge of rules pertaining to a situation. This knowledge informs what one should or should not do in such situations. For example, consider the normative rules of chess, tea-drinking and theatre considered above. The knowledge also provides a contextual background when actions are interpreted. For example, a tea-drinker who speaks can start to talk about a new topic that is known to the others present. Relying on prior knowledge, the other participants know that this is a way to suggest a new conversational topic. They may reply by continuing to talk about the new topic, using their own knowledge about it. Another type of pre-existing structure that influence the process, is the material surroundings. In order to talk and drink tea at all, the tea-drinkers need tea to drink. Different physical places, such as a café or a living room, may be more easily associated with tea-drinking than a sidewalk in a city, or a swimming pool. The communication is physically constrained and enabled by physical characteristics of surroundings. For example, it could be difficult to maintain a shared definition of a tea-drinking situation if there is very loud music that makes it impossible to talk. Or consider that the topics of the conversation may be affected if the physical surroundings enable others to listen. One of the participants may have prepared specific issues or material to discuss in advance, and use this to guide the conversation.

On the other hand, participants of a situation actively create and shape the definition of a situation by actions that are suitable in that particular context. For example, the tea drinkers choose to continue to talk, and they choose what to say. The content of their talk must be adapted to what is considered acceptable by the people within hearing range. If there is a limited amount

of noise around – for example, that of other people talking - a speaker may adapt by talking somewhat louder and a listener may adapt to this by bending his or her head more close to the talker. Someone can use non-verbal cues to indicate if he or she is not comfortable about talking about a particular conversational topic. They must continuously use facial expressions and body posture that indicate that they are involved in the situation. The participants themselves can make signs show the beginning or end of the tea-drinking situation in some way. The definition may also change through their talk: For example, participants can start arguing and then fighting each other. Or, if the participants are a man and a woman, they may use their tone of voice, topic of talk and body idiom to change a regular tea-drinking situation to a romantic date. Furthermore, while participants share pre-existing conventions and an understanding of what a 'tea-drinking' situation is, each particular situation has unique elements. Each situation may have different people, different material surroundings, or a different temporal and historical context. Thus, there is a constant interplay between the pre-existing structures and the actions adapted to a particular context. Therefore, no tea-drinking situation is ever completely the same, the resulting actions are contingent on the creative actions of participants in a unique context.

I set out to describe the techniques used by the laiv players to make and maintain the situation of laiv play. Like the tea-drinking situation, the definition of the laiv play situation is not given from the outset. Its is contingent on a wide variety of techniques the players use to make, shape and maintain the situation of play– both those involving pre-existing structures, and those involving active action in the context of performance.



More specific, the term 'pre-existing structures' here refers to explicit planning and instructions in advance, which is done at its most extreme in theatrical plays. It also refers to the knowledge of pre-existing conventions known by a specific group, such as the knowledge about laiv play that laiv players share; and more general given conventions of interaction, shared by most people in the surrounding culture. Finally, it also refers to the influence of the given material surroundings in that surround the interaction situation. On the other hand, the term 'action in the context of performance' refers to the actions that are originate unplanned during interaction. These actions are not regarded as pre-determined by conventions or the material surroundings in the outset, but involve spontaneity and creativity. I use these terms as theoretical ideal types to enable analysis (Weber, 1971). In practice pre-existing structures always involve some degree of improvisatory action in the context of performance, and vice versa. By emphasizing the importance of actions in the context of performance, I shall show that despite the presence of pre-existing structures, the definition of the situation in laiv play is not pre-determined but the result of an ongoing social process among the participants.

The process of defining situations is of high importance to a wide range of questions and topics in social life. When communicating, people need to have a background context in order to understand each other. When performing a task together, people need a shared conception of the situation in order to be able to conduct their work. Definition of situations also involves questions of power and conflict. How power is distributed to the actors is a question of how the situation is defined. Also, conflicts between people usually rest on the parties having some kind

of shared definition of the situation. In fact, any type of interpretation of a message relies on a conception of the contextual situation around it. Thus, this context must also be made apparent in some way - it must be created and maintained. My point of departure is that it is the same basic process that goes on in 'everyday life' and laiv. The reader shall gain insight into questions of very general value from this special point of view.

### Previous works on laiv

There has been some work done on laiv play, but most of them are from dedicated insiders and aimed at the laiv community. Grasmø (1997) provides an overview of the activity from the standpoint of an insider journalist. There have also emerged some collections of articles from the annual Knutepunkt convention, most notably Montola&Stenros (2004) and Hutchinson&Bøckman (2005). These have many abstract debates and how-to guides which are primarily useful for insiders, but some articles provide interesting descriptive accounts of plays as well as providing information on the background and demographics of the network. A few of the contributions, also has a theoretical perspective relevant to social research. Of most interest is Choy (2004) article 'Theatricality in Larp'. Very limited research has been done on laiv from University scholars. Røe (2003) in descriptive ethnography, use a perspective from pedagogic and anthropology to discuss play itself. Bergset (1998) uses perspective from theatrical studies to discuss the interpretation of the plays. From anthropology Pederesen (2003) describes how players enters and leaves plays by using ritual action, and as well as the influence the hobby has on the players' personal development.

## Social research on the process of defining the situation

There are many different traditions in social research that have been engaged with the process of defining situations. I will limit my review to three approaches: Sociology, psychology and communication.

### 1. Sociology

In sociology, W. I. Thomas' 'Thomas Theorem' was one of the early ways to turn to the importance on the cultural and phenomenological factors in the process of defining a situation: 'If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.' (Thomas and Thomas, 1928:572, quoted in Collins, 1987:265). Thomas derived his theorem after cooperating with Znaniecki. Znaniecki himself did the first major empirical work in American sociology in his study of Polish immigrants to the USA (Znaniecki, 1918-1920). Znaniecki had a focus on definition of the situation implicit: if the poles defined themselves as American, they would become American (Collins, 1987:266). Later, different approaches in sociology have studied this topic with different emphases. These have been based on a mainly ethnographic and qualitative approach.

Several research traditions in sociology have studied the definitions of the situation at the micro level of situated social interaction. The symbolic interactionist approach followed three basic principles, with the local context of interaction as a point of departure (Blumer, 1969). First, human beings 'act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them' (ibid., 2). Second, the symbolic interactionist approach implies a strong emphasis on the interaction that takes place in the local context of interaction, at the expense of the surrounding cultural or material world. Finally, the way the way this happens

is through a process of interpretation between the persons present (ibid: 2-5). The meaning is negotiated on spot between the people present. Ethnomethodology focuses on knowledge, cognitive reasoning, and trust in relation to defining a situation. (Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 1984). Goffman's frame analytical perspective also concerned the definition of situations. He was initially concerned with how people presented themselves and situations in a way analogical to a theatrical performance, (Goffman, 1959) as well as the structure of games (Goffman, 1961; 1970), and communicative ritual behaviour in 'everyday life' (Goffman, 1967; 1963). Combining these inspirations, he presented a formalised approach to the studying how situations are defined. Since Goffman also takes into account influence on interaction that is outside the face-to-face situation, it has raised opposition from symbolic interactions (Gonos, 1977) Goffman approach will be presented in more detail in the next chapter, as it is the main theoretical approach used in later analysis.

### 2. Psychology

Social cognition is a sub-discipline of social psychology that deals with the influence of cognition on social behaviour. Social psychologists have studied topics which are related to the process of defining a situation. Schank & Abelson (1977) work on scripts were one of the founders of a cognitive perspective on social behaviour. Three concepts in this tradition are particularly related to the study of definition of the situation: Schema, and two subtypes of schemas: prototype and script. A schema is '(...) an organised body of knowledge about past experiences, used to interpret present experiences.' (Deaux, Dane & Wrightman, 1993:16). In relation to my concern, schemas are essentially used when defining situations. Knowledge about situations, such as

fishing, going in the park, attending a lecture, are stored in different schemas. A prototype is a schema that collects an abstract set of features to one category. For example, a prototype of 'going to a movie' is the thoughts and expectations that immediately come to mind about such situations. A script is a subtype of schema that points to 'a conceptual representation of a stereotyped event sequence'. (Abelson, 1981:715; quoted in Dane, Deaux and Wrightsman, 1993:91). For example, going to a restaurant involves a particular sequence of behaviour applying to those situations. Social cognition explains behaviour or perceptions by modelling cognitive processes in a sequential way based on an analogy to information processed in computers. A vast amount of experimental research has been undertaken in relation to these concepts (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). While both social cognition and some of the sociological approaches focus on the micro-level of interaction, they are notably different. Social psychology primarily relies on experimental method, and attempts to explain behaviour through considering at general causal mechanisms internal to the individual. It therefore differs sharply from the emphasis that sociology has on social factors

### 3. Communication

From his standpoint in anthropology, Gregory Bateson (1955/1972) was one of the first to discuss the importance of communication and the definition of the situation. Studying the play-fighting monkeys in the San Diego, he noted that they had to be able to communicate to each other that 'this is play'. Bateson termed this metacommunication, meaning that it was communication about context - or situation - of communication. This metacommunication, decided how one should interpret the ongoing communication.

Following the philosophical concerns on the importance of the social context (Wittgenstein, 1997; Searle, 1995) the field of pragmatics developed as a subdiscipline of linguistics focusing on the relation between speech and the context of use. However, structuralist linguistics in the 1960s and 1970s strongly emphasised the causal importance of pre-existing structures in language use, following the influential work on syntactic structures by Chomsky (1957). Therefore, early pragmatics saw the context created by the use of stable grammatical rules that were encoded in the structure of language (Levinson, 1983:9, in Sawyer, 1998:17). On the other hand, sociolinguistics followed a different approach. They were concerned with the relation of language use to society in a broader sense. As part of this, they also looked at how situations could be defined during talk. They used culturally linked concepts like 'speech style' and 'conversational code switching'. These concepts refer to how ways of performing speech - pronunciation, choice of certain expressions, dialects - could be used implicitly to influence the definition of the situation during talk (Gumperz, 1982). Similarly, from literary studies Bakhtin (1981) used the term heteroglossia to refer to the way distinct ways of speaking is connected to specific roles and characters.

Performance studies looks at how acts are undertaken with a reflexive awareness of the signifying potential to others - how they are performed before an audience (Carlson, 1999:Introduction, chapter 1). Doing a performance implies defining a certain situation in the real world, and the field of performance studies focuses precisely on the ongoing communication in performances. Performance studies are particularly perceptive to other modes of expression than language. Researchers have studied the

ritual of traditional performances (Turner, 1974; Turner 1995; Schechner 1993), various types of theatre (Schechner, 1985, Burns, 1972, Mason, 1992), political rallies (Schechner, 2002) and gang behaviour (Conquergood & Siegel, 1990; Conquergood, 1992).

Lately, researchers who study language use and performance have also become concerned with the tension between structure and action. Schechner's concept of 'restored behaviour' is used to note the tension between the way performance repeats rehearsed and conventional behaviour, and the fact each performance occurs in a new context and has novel elements (Schechner, 2002:28-29). In linguistics, this is echoed in a tension between, on one hand, the semiotic, the linguistic, the symbolic - all abstract elements and structures, and, on the other hand, the specific physical context that never repeats itself (Carlson, 2002:62, Bauman&Briggs1990). Many later researchers (such as Bauman & Briggs, 1990; Silverstein, 1979; Sawyer, 1997, 2001, 2003) have criticised tendencies to regard the use of language in everyday situations as pre-determined by prior structures - the main emphasis of earlier structuralist linguistics. Also, there is an emphasis on how the context of language is not given, but actively created and shaped by participants during interaction.

## Following chapters

Now, I will give a brief presentation of the topic of each of the chapters that follows.

In the next chapter, I will introduce some theoretical perspectives that will serve as a basic typology useful for studying the process of defining situations. The presentation is also meant to sensitise the reader to several analytical questions that are part of the general topic of how the play situation in laiv is made and maintained.

In chapter four, I discuss the methods used to create this text. I first describe the collection of the various sources. Next, I describe the process of analysis, and I discuss the use of theory in this text. The aim of this chapter is to give the reader insight into the empirical and analytical foundations of this text. Furthermore, I also want to show how my experiences from the time which I collected and analysed data also provide many insights into the research question.

In chapter five, I look at some of the basic techniques that the players have developed to maintain the keying during play. Many of these techniques are used by the players to respond to potential problems that may interfere with the keying process during play. When the players are playing, they are not acting only as their character - they must constantly monitor and manage the keying actively to maintain it.

In chapter six, I look at the use of suspending disbelief during play. This is a cooperative process which implies that *all* players have to blindly accept and support the actions of everyone else. If someone rejects a co-player's action as not part of the key, the keying may break, not only for him, but also for everyone else present. I briefly look at the use of this technique in relation to regular situations in play. But a closer demonstration of the process is achieved by looking at transformations that take place *within* the laiv play - so called second-order keyings. Due to increased difficulties to make such transformations, the players are *particularly* dependent on suspending disbelief.

The plays take place in a material environment that varies from play to play, and the players use and relate to many material objects during play, both physically and symbolically. Chapter seven examines how this influences the making of situations during play. I consider how the mate-

rial objects and surroundings are used actively to create a difference between the situation of play and 'everyday life'. Thus, it is a useful tool to maintain the situation of play. I also look at how material objects and the environment contribute to creating meaningful distinctions and experiences inside the situation of play.

In chapter eight, I turn to the topic of casting – what characters are assigned to which players. To some extent, the players try to maintain some visual similarity between some aspects of a player and the aspects of a character. It is not possible to have complete similarity on all aspects of player and character. The players are able to accept the transformation of some characteristics, while they deny others. I discuss how their casting practice gives them more options when choosing the type of character they want to play, and helps make a play situation which is more different from 'everyday life'. On the other hand, their casting practice is influenced by social and cultural considerations external to their activity, which limits their possibilities in play.

Chapter 9 is devoted to considering how the performance of the play situation itself are made and shaped. For example, the players of 'Amaranth' used a variety of means in order to perform the Roman setting with its characters and ongoing narratives. This included improvisation, reliance on conventions, preparations and planning in advance, and organiser direction and intervention during play. I discuss the possibilities and limitations of each of these techniques.

Above, I mentioned how a definition of a situation may be broken. This is also the case for the realm of play in laiv. In chapter 10, I examine the various factors that may lead to the situation of play breaking down and being replaced by the situation of 'everyday life'. I also consider the variety of techniques of repair work that the players

utilise in order to maintain play when it is danger of being broken, and the techniques the players use to start play again when the situation has been broken. Understanding what may make the play break enables one to get more insight into the factors that are necessary for maintaining play.

The objective of the final chapter is to sum up the main themes in this text. I show how the process of making and maintaining the play-frame is a continuously ongoing process that involves both utilising pre-existing structures and creative action in the context of performance.

Before I begin the analysis of the laiv players, I wish first to present a range of concepts that enable more insight into as well as posing more questions about the process of defining a situation. This is the object of the next chapter.



# 3.

# A frame analytical perspective

## Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to briefly present a skeletal outline of a frame analytical perspective. This is patched together from several theoretical approaches, as I see fit to my analytical needs. This chapter will give the reader comprehension of basic analytical concepts, and sensitise him or her to a range of questions related to the study of definition of situations. Later chapters shall add more meat to the perspective – by providing a range of examples, by extending the discussion of many concepts, and by launching new concepts that add to the frame analytical understanding of laiv play.

I begin by considering the concept of frame, as well as separating between four different subtypes of frames that are of relevance to this study. This concept is the most basic unit of analysis, giving a way to classify different definitions of a situation. Afterwards, I look at frame breaks – how a definition of a situation may fail to be sustained, and break down to be replaced by a different definition. My theoretical approach

is primarily taken from Goffman's study *Frame analysis* (Goffman, 1974). I also briefly present the notion of Becker's notion of convention. This is taken from the sociology of culture.

## Frames, metacommunication

Frame refers to a definition of a social situation. For example, the different situations reviewed in the previous chapter are defined as different frames: The chess frame, the tea conversation frame, the theatrical frame, and the subway frame. I separate between four different basic subtypes of frames that is useful for this study: Primary frames, keys, and complex frames (Goffman, 1974).

The first type is *primary frames*. This refers to our immediate basic understanding a social situation (Goffman, 1974:44). Most situations of 'everyday life' are based on understanding through primary frames. We use the frame of 'walking down a street together' when walking down a street with someone, or 'eating lunch' when eating lunch with someone, or 'chopping

wood' when we see two persons that appear to be chopping down a tree.

The second type is key. Goffman defines key as: "a set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something else". (Goffman, 1974:44). For example, in a theatrical play, two actors could mimic the chopping of wood with their body behaviour. Despite lack of tools, or any real tree, the audience would be able to transform the mimicry into 'chopping wood'. Similarly, the playframe in laiv is based on the laiv key. The verb 'keying' denotes the process of transformation of a frame to a certain key. A key is constituted by a set of conventions that guide the transformation. Let me illustrate with the theatrical key. The audience and stage actors rely on certain conventions in order to transform the behaviour on stage to a frame of play on stage. Some of these conventions are listed in table 3.1. A key is the type of frame that most of the discussion throughout this text is related to. The question of study concerns precisely how the players manage to *transform* the action *from* the regular primary frames of 'everyday life', *to* the make-believe of the playframe.

The third and fourth type of frame are *fabrication* and *second order transformation*. A fabrication is also a transformation of a primary frame, yet in a different manner than by the use of a key. Fabrication occurs when *someone is deceived to believe something that is not the case*. This includes the works of conmen and the deception of subjects in psychological experiments. (Goffman, 1974:chapter 4). A second order transformation occurs when a keyed and fabricated frame are keyed or fabricated once more - such as when a theatrical play take place in a

**Table 3.1 Conventions of the theatrical key**

- the physical boundaries of the stage as a space which is transformed into make believe, the seating area of the audience is not part of the make-believe universe
- Ignorance of the fact that the action is pre-determined in advance, the actors pretend that their actions as characters are spontaneous
- the lack of a 'fourth wall' on the stage space, which allows the audience to see into the room where the stage players are present
- the loud speaking of the actors, to let everyone in the audience hear what they say
- the use of lighting to emphasise parts of the stage where actions goes on

theatrical play. Fabrications and second order keyings increase the complexity of framing, making it more difficult for the players to know what frame they are in, and to separate between different frames. This is precisely why it is interesting as an object of study. By looking at this process more closely, one can illuminate more closely some basic factors of making and maintaining frames as the players become more dependent on these for their success.

I will also use the term *metacommunication*, which is taken from Bateson's (1955/1972) study of play-fighting among monkeys in the San Diego Zoo. Bateson used metacommunication to point to the communications that made the monkeys able to know that acts similar to real fighting were only part of a playframe. In other words, it is the communication about the present frame. Metacommunication in laiv play may include the use of techniques that are verbally explicit and discussed by players, or based on practical tacit knowledge that the players are not reflexively aware of. Some metacommunication may be intentional, while some may be due to unconscious reasons, or causal influences beyond the direct control of individual players. I use



the term 'metacommunicative technique' to point to the specific factors involved in or techniques used by the players when making and maintaining a specific frame. While my use of the term 'technique' here may seem to imply an active intentionality on behalf of the players, this is not the case. In most cases, I lack the data to make exact judgements on whether metacommunication is explicitly intended, or if it can be accounted for by other explanations.

A note must also be made regarding my use of the words *role* and *character*. Throughout the text, the term 'role' refers to of the role of a *player* or *organiser in relation to the laiv key*. This role is governed by the off-frame keying conventions. The term *character*, however, always refers to the performance of an in-frame character. I use it in this way to avoid possible confusion. The laiv players themselves use the term 'role' to refer to an in-frame character.

### Involvement and frame breaks

Actions in a certain frame are noted as *in-frame*. For example, a laiv player who is acting according to the laiv playframe during play is acting in-frame. Off-frame, denotes an action or event that is not a part of the active frame. Exactly what is perceived as off-frame, is governed by conventions. An example of this can be taken from the stage. Actors are ready to ignore and treat as not occurring the noise from audience coming late, going to the toilet, sneezing or coughing and so on. But they will not ignore pictures being taken, or the cell phone ringing. The norms in regard to this are culturally dependent and vary throughout history (Burns, 1972). I will later consider how the laiv players' involvement conventions are not as straightforward as one could think - they too are governed by detailed

conventions that appear to be the result of a range of factors.

A frame *breaks* when it is no longer able to sustain the definition of the situation, with the required involvement of participants vanishing. For example, the theatrical frame breaks once the audience is no longer engrossed in the illusion of the play, but rather view the persons on stage as normal actors. I separate between 3 different basic types of frame breaks. *Upkeying* occurs when a participant in a frame loses involvement in a particular frame, switching off-frame to another frame. On the other hand, *downkeying* occurs when a participant is becoming *too much* involved in a frame – in the sense that it becomes 'real' to them. For example, think of how young children can become carried away by the play they are involved in – forgetting that it is merely play. The concepts in relation to frame breaks are useful since they allow closer focus on the mechanics by which the maintenance of a frame fails. By gaining insight into this one also – indirectly – gains insight into what *sustains* a frame.

### Levels of focus

The study of frames ranges from micro to macro. For example, think of the previous example of a game of chess taking place in the park. At the most micro level, we can look at communicative glances, or talk, that occur while the players are involved in the chess game. A level higher up is that of the chess game itself - with its conventions regarding goals, legal moves, and the transformed space of the game board. This frame is above the more micro frames of communicative interchanges that involve the players. The chess play by itself takes place within a public park, which also may be regarded as pertaining to a frame.

Note also a distinction in role according to the different levels. A person is a *player* when he acts in relation to the laiv key, a *character* within the playframe, a *conversation partner* in a conversation in the playframe. Table 3.2 and 3.3 sums up the different analytical levels in the chess play example and laiv respectively. Note that while separating between *levels of frames*, this *does not* imply that one level is *more true or real* than another level. It is simply a question of *where the analytical perspective is*.

In this text, my focus is primarily on frames in the meso level, the level in-between macro and micro. In relation to the activity of laiv, this corresponds to the playframe and the laiv key. This narrowing of focus is much a matter of convenience - by concentrating the focus on this level, I can limit myself to something that practically possible to study within the scope of this text.

## Conventions

The concept of 'convention' is a useful tool when analysing given structures. Following Wittgenstein (1953/1978) discussion of the way rules are embedded in social practice and Lewis (2002) emphasis on the importance of coordination for convention, a convention is essentially a rule concerning action which is known by a group of people. There must also be an intersubjective understanding of how the rule shall be interpreted in relation to practical action. The rule must also be followed.

**Table 3.2 An example of different analytical levels - two persons playing chess**

Level:	Frame:	Role:
Micro	subframes within play	
	chess game frame	black or white
meso-1	chess key, subculture of chess players	chess player
meso-2	park behaviour	park visitor
Macro	western capitalist city culture	citizen

Looking at the use of conventions in art, Becker (1983) stress that they exist in interdependent systems that involve other artists, audience and the material world. The conventions are in essence 'earlier agreements now become customary' (Becker, 1983:28). Conventions become shared and taken for granted by an entire art-world, are *standardised*. Artists relying on conventions benefit by easier communication and coordination – it greatly *enhances* their capabilities of action. Taken together, Becker's view on conventions is that they are pre-existing structures that *predetermine the possibilities* of action. Yet, at the same time, they *enables* intentional action that uses the structured conventions as tools to do things that might otherwise not have been possible to do.

The conventions are of three different origins. First, there are those that are acquired through being part of the general surrounding culture. For example many of the conventions regarding the in-frame characters and settings displayed on table 1-1, are part of the shared knowledge that everyone who has grown up with the surrounding Scandinavian culture. Secondly, some of the conventions are shared by the subculture of the laiv players. An example of this, are the basic keying conventions that form a taken for granted backdrop for most laiv plays (see chapter 2). Finally, there are the conventions that are prepared

**Table 3.3 Different analytical levels of frames in relation to laiv**

Level:	Frame:	Role:
micro	subframes within the playframe	Character's role as brother, mother, enemy, lover etc to other characters within play
meso- 1	Playframe in a play	Character
meso-2	laiv key, the subculture of laiv	laiv player
macro	Oslo city culture	young adult

and learned before each laiv play. Examples of this are special off-frame rules that players may agree upon before a specific play (see chapter 5), or the preparation and definition of a of specific in-frame aspects before play – such as the casting of in-frame characters (see chapter 8), or the preparation of specific details about the setting.

### **Final remarks**

By now, the reader should have achieved some insights into a set of basic concepts that will work as a skeleton for the following analysis. The review has also given rise to many additional questions, which have emerged with the perspective. Together, these will be broadly discussed, with numerous examples, in the text that follows.

The theoretical concepts here are selected on the criteria of whether they provide useful insights in relation to my material on Laiv play. Nevertheless, I must emphasise that in their later use in discussions in this text, useful general insights are also provided. The use of these concepts allows one to tie a discussion of a particular laiv practice to general notions and mechanisms.

In the next chapter, I shall consider the development of this text. This includes its emergence as an idea, the collection and analysis of data, and the narrowing down of the analytical perspective.



# 4. My process of learning and writing about laiv play

## Introduction

In this chapter, I shall present and discuss the process of collecting and analysing data.

I have two main objectives. First, I want to give a background so that the reader can better understand the empirical, theoretical and analytical foundation for this text. The second objective is to consider how my experiences during the time I collected data, also reveals something about the process of keying in laiv.

This chapter is divided into five sections.

In the first three sections, I look at each of the three different types of data utilised: Participant observation, talk and interviews, and text and discussions from the internet. When I initially decided to study laiv play, I had a curiosity of play itself. I decided to use observation to do so. Since the non-participating audience is not allowed to be present according to the laiv key, my role dur-

ing the collection had to be as a full participant. I soon experienced a conflict between the restricted role as a laiv player, and the freedom needed in the role of a field researcher. It shaped the data I got, and I decided to use different types of talk as sources instead. Nevertheless, the conflict that I experienced tell something about the special demands that the players face during keying.

During the early phase of data collection, I had got curious about how players created the play. When analysing the data, I gradually adopted a frame analytical approach that became the main perspective in the study. As my study developed, I relied mostly on sources from the Internet. This enabled me to search for specific issue became relevant to my chosen perspective as the study progressed. Below, I will discuss the individual sources more closely and consider what we can

learn from looking at how the frames occurred and shaped the resulting data.

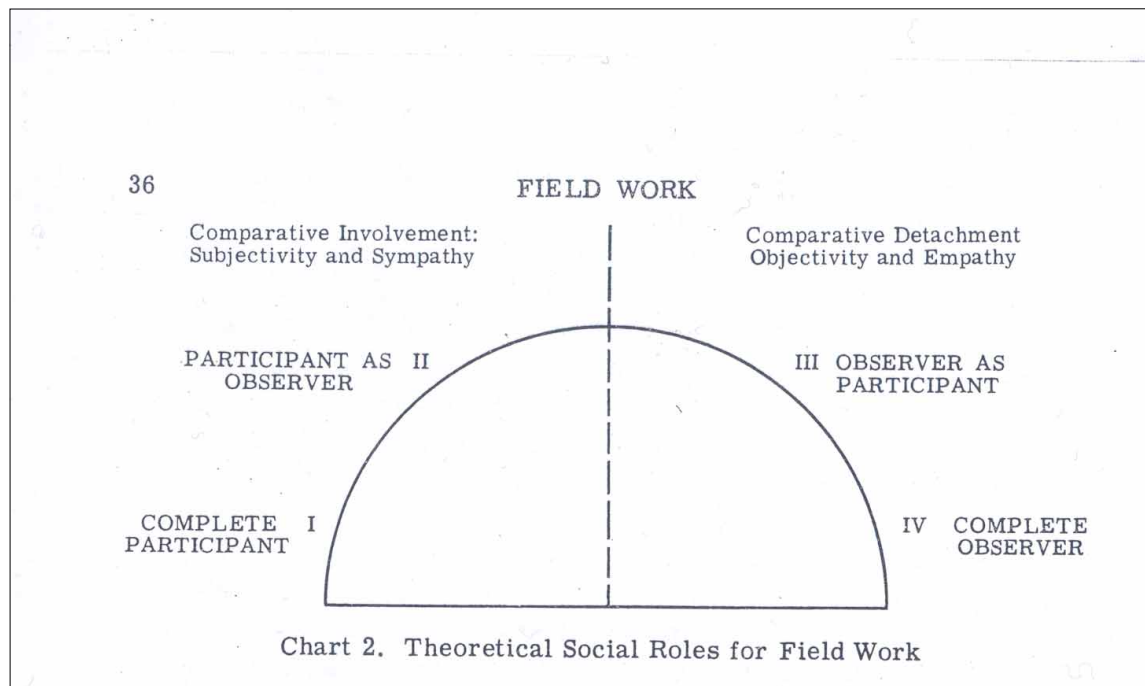
In the fourth section, I look at analysis. I distinguish between two basic analytical approaches used on the data. The first approach is open and associative in order to come up with new ideas about the material. The second approach implied a more careful examination of the data based on the specific ideas that had emerged earlier. In the fifth section, I discuss the use of theory.

### Entering the field by participant observation

In the introductory chapter, I described my first experiences from participating in laiv plays. I shall now describe more closely how my role as a researcher worked during this participation. I

will look at how this illuminates some general aspects about the laiv keying process, and how it shaped the type of data that I got. Let me begin by outlining the role of a social researcher more closely. When looking for data, one can think of an abstract 'researcher role' that someone doing social research should act in accordance with to do research in practice. On the other hand, the concept of 'field role' refers to the practical social role adopted by the researcher when interacting with the subjects doing the activity under study. Junker discusses the field role in relation to different degrees of participation in the practical activity under study. The possibilities range from a continuum from 'complete participant' to 'complete observer'. (See figure 4.1) A complete participant is fully engaged in the activities, while a

Figure 4-1 Junker (1960:36) model of researcher roles in field work



an 'obeserver as participant' has the role more as an observer and less as a participant<sup>1</sup>. In the laiv plays, the keying conventions required everyone – including me - to take the role as a player of a character. As a result of this, my field role when observing play had to be that of complete participant. This conflicted with my researcher role in three ways. However, Looking more closely at precisely how, throws light on important aspects of play.

First, the laiv key extensively regulates the behaviour of the individuals involved, and requiring discipline of the participants. External discipline has been described by Foucault (1977). He looked on how discipline in the army, school or prison was imposed by detailed monitoring of minute bodily behaviour of others. Likewise, the laiv players also monitor each other, to make sure that their co-players follow the key. This surveillance concerns nearly everything the players see each other doing during play. The way of walking, talking, sleeping, washing – everything must appear as in-frame. Following the obligations of the researcher role requires some freedom to use the body. However, both my ability to perceive what was going on, and the ability to take notes was very limited while in-frame. When I was close to other players, I would be expected to act and respond closely in according to my character. When taking notes, it had to be done in a way that was in accordance with the playframe. I could not ask questions or interact with players in ways that was not appropriate for my character. For example, two of the nobility characters in 'Amaranth' belonging to the Praetorian guards, had blue feathers attached to their helmet as a part of their uniform. On the third day at 'Ama-

ranth', there was a rumour among the other characters that one of these feathers had been destroyed. This turned out to be true. The praetorians wanted to find someone responsible for this. All the slaves, including myself, were summoned to a square in front of the main buildings. One of the Praetorian characters held a speech, asking the responsible character to step forward. No one did. It was announced that everyone was to be interrogated by the master of the slaves afterwards. As a researcher, I wanted to watch the response of the other slaves. I wanted to see how the nobility characters would perform this scene. How would the characters then perform their in-frame social status, with their body idiom? How the scene be organised? However, playing a slave character, the only right thing to do was to look down. A general rule used when playing on status was that low status characters, were never allowed to look straight at high status players. I was limited by my role as a player to observe this closely. Yet, this experience contributed to my understanding of the strict rules regarding keying in laiv. My experiences can be compared to Solberg (1982) also experienced a conflict between her role as a researcher, and the role on the field. She set out to study a mental hospital, but while observing the patient's work room where they did manual work earning the hospital money. Solberg got pushed by the staff to to contribute to work, but by doing so she got less ability to collect data by interviewing the patients. Nevertheless, her experienced gave her much information about the pressure on working as well as there being room for freedom within the restrained system that she eventually exploited. On my behalf, I realised that on one

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<sup>1</sup> Junker rightly stress that the pure role as a 'complete observer' is entirely theoretical, it does not exist in social life. Following Skjervheim's (1958) arguments against objectivism, all meaningful description of social life presumes some degree of participation through learning and understanding shared communicative symbols.

hand, the players have much freedom in relation being able to using a high degree of improvisation when they are in-frame. On the other hand, the keying is very tight, and strongly limits their actions. One can compare my situation here to that of covert research, such as that of Wallraff, (1979). He went undercover to be able to critically study the journalistic practices of a German news magazine. Walraff also had to take the field role as a full participant, in the form of a fictive identity and being acting as a regular employee in the magazine. My engagement in field research on laiv was not directly covert, but, due to the strictness of the laiv key it had to *appear* as covert during play.

Second, Junker (1960:35) warns that the field role as a full participant: '(...) tends to block perception of the workings of the reciprocal relations between the in-group and the larger system' (...). My perspective on the activity, reflected the view of my character. But it could have been important to observe what the players actually both 'in-frame' and 'out of frame'. To make the point clear, consider the different ways of observing a theatrical play. One perspective would be to pay attention to the story, the complexities of the characters, the plots and intrigues displayed in the realm of the performance. Another perspective would be to focus on the theatrical keying, like how the players move about in relation to the audience and the walls on stage, how the lightening and sound is used to enhance involvement in the play, and so on. It is difficult to have both perspectives in mind at once.<sup>2</sup>A roll of film that I took before play in 'Amaranth', was an interesting exception to this. For a long time, I left them in my drawer, I believed that the quality

was too bad to use them properly. But when I finally got them enlarged, they they were perfect to look on, reflect upon, and enlighten my memories. I also found several perfectly suited as illustrations to several analytical points.

My third point, concerns the importance of knowledge. Like other new players, I only received instruction of the most basic laiv conventions before entering play. 'Amaranth' featured a lot of conflict and meaningful action going on in-frame. I got bits and pieces of information about things that happened around me, but this made me confused. I did not get the picture of the development of the central narrative described in the introduction. This was frustrating, because I wanted to understand what was going on within play both as a researcher and as a player. It was not until after the play, when talking to other players, I learned about the many narratives and events that had taken place. I understood that Becker's (1982) perspective on conventions was useful, as this approach emphasised the practical necessity of implicit pre-existing knowledge in practical action – knowledge that I did not fully have.

## Learning more about laiv through talk and through the web

In the course of my participation, I developed a curiosity in relation to many aspects. Their practice regarding material objects and surroundings in the keying seemed highly inconsistent to me as an outsider. How could they go around in the toy-like latex-swords and consider this as a 'realistic' re-creation of the past? I was also puzzled to hear many of the other players who played slaves

<sup>2</sup> Similar to Wittgenstein's (1953/1978:194) discussion about Jastrows 'duck figure'; seen to the right. This drawing could either be seen as a duck or as a rabbit, but not both at the same time as it implies different perspectives





talk about their experience as a slave as a rewarding experience, sometimes fun. Many of them had had a much harder role in play than me. Why did the players feel like that about such experiences? Were the players in-frame all of the time?

For a while I focused on interviews and talk as source. I presumed that this would be a more flexible way to gather pinpointed information. I did nine interviews after taking part in 'Amaranth', in addition to one interview done just before the play. These were recorded and transcribed in detail.<sup>3</sup> The group of interviewees was limited to a cluster of the laiv network that I had got to know during my time in the field. In addition to the interviews, I utilised casual talk. This was subject to the constraints regarding everyday conversations about what topic that is socially appropriate to talk about.<sup>4</sup>

Several analytical insights can be gained by looking at how the players talk worked as actions by itself (Silverman, 2002). In the players own narratives of play, they talked much about their 'inner experience' of their personal emotions as characters during play. Interestingly, when I compare the narratives to my own observation, much of the action during a play consist of regular 'boring' 'everyday life' actions such as, sleeping, cooking food, small talking, cleaning and so on. But these actions were rarely mentioned. Emotional narratives were also a popular topic for players who met outside of play. The telling of these can be seen as actions with meaning in itself. The players showed that they were 'good players' - they had got around in play, that they had been engaged in a 'right' way, not going off-frame much, and that they had had 'inner experi-

ences' which is important in the laiv key. By doing storytelling afterwards, players applied the distinction between the keyed playframe and real-life. If actions had occurred in-frame that were ambivalent in relation to this distinction, they could be retrospectively classified either in-frame or off-frame. I will discuss ambivalence of frames more closely in chapter 10.

It is also useful to consider how the talk differed according to my background knowledge. Some of the early talk was framed as a conversation between an 'insider' and an 'outsider'. The understanding of elementary concepts was not taken for granted, and more time was spent talking about this. Eventually more of the talk I did was framed as talk between 'insiders' to the laiv key and laiv culture. A lot of knowledge was then taken for granted. When I attended the Knutepunkt conference with debates and lectures for Scandinavian laiv players in the spring of 2002, it also made this clear. In one debate, the debaters from Sweden were discussing narrative in play laiv. I understood little about their discussion, despite that I had considerable knowledge of the Norwegian practice. Perhaps their debate referred to local framing conventions that were not well known to players from other countries.

## Searching the World Wide Web for data

When I adopted the frame analytical approach, and it gave me questions that I had not focused on during the earlier data collection. Did the framing conventions differ geographically? How? What precisely did the organisers do during

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<sup>3</sup> Most of the players asked to be interviewed, accepted right away. One player did not want to, another player agreed to but I did not manage to get hold of him and set up an appointment afterwards.

<sup>4</sup> Hammersley & Atkinson (1996:152) support an eclectic approach in the type of talk used to gain data.

play? I began utilising the Internet for data collection, in particular the web site laiv.org., that became influential since its inception in 1999. The site included a discussion forum, that was organised by topics and threads, similar to most Internet discussion boards. I could search through the forum archive with specific keywords, and then get a list of texts with that keyword. This discussion occurs in a frame that presumed a very high amount of knowledge about play. Like other internet texts, it was also fairly abstract. (Mann&Stewart, 2000:182).

## Analysis

Writing was of high importance throughout the entire analytical process. It involves craft like technical skills of using a computer and organising a readable text<sup>5</sup>. It does not take place in a straightforward way. It happens more as a disorganised and messy activity. New ideas can be suddenly be made, and seemingly in a coincidental way. The activity of writing is intertwined with continuous thinking on the analytical subject. Organising my thoughts as a text, it illuminated the weaknesses as well as additional insights and parallels. By going through the text again and again the main topic was further developed and expanded, irrelevant issues deleted, important points were repeated and underlined. Also, as English is not my mother tongue, using it was a way to switch into an analytical mode of thought.

Chalmers (1999) distinguish between the 'context of discovery' – how scientific ideas are invented; and the 'context of justification' - how scientific ideas are proofed. Some philosophical approaches to scientific practice, such as the critical rationalism of Popper (1934/2002) renders

the 'context of discovery' to mysticism or the working of the mind of genius. This is particularly little suitable to qualitative social research, since it entirely depends on the successful creation of fresh perspectives on social phenomena. In my analytical work I distinguish between using two basic approaches to the data, which can be seen as analogue to Chalmers distinction above. The first way was the free and spontaneous handling of the data, thinking freely about it. I thought this was essential to invent creative perspectives and associations to the data. This part of research is often overlooked, and it is difficult to describe. Coming up with a new idea is often based on seeing analogies to other phenomena. I tried to get a diversity of new associations and perspectives connected to it inductively. To do this, I used analytical techniques reminiscent of brainstorming. I could look at a segment of the data. I could get many associations of sociological or other kind. I then wrote keywords in the margins, which referred to those associations. Some of my ideas were sketched and written down in the form of keywords or rough drafts. The second approach, was the detailed study and writing based on the initial ideas. After thinking about the initial associations, I selected some that was most interesting and coded data more thoroughly and detailed by the use of these. Attention was paid to details in the data, which could or could not fit the ideas. While doing this I wrote longer notes to the text in which I tried to work out coherent analysis based on my coding. The smaller notes eventually became a skeleton for the final text. A more detailed description of 6 different practical analytical techniques, are presented in Appendix II.

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<sup>5</sup> The importance of writing was partly made clear to me by Johansen (2003)

## The generality of theory

Now I want to make some remarks about the use of theory in this text. This study uses the particular case of laiv play as its empirical material. The main difference from the process of making and maintaining frames in everyday interaction and in laiv play is that the way the laiv players relate to the playframe in a more explicit way. They may involve a goal oriented and skilful use of many metacommunicative techniques, some of which may be more obfuscated and harder to observe when used in everyday interaction. Thus, laiv play has worked as a prism by which one may throw better light on these. There is connected to the underlying presumptions about the use of theoretical generalisations in this text. The use of general theory is essentially about connecting events that are particular in time, to abstract concepts that postulate a certain degree of general validity across contexts of time and space. There is an old debate in social science, concerning the view on how general theory can be. Some argue that researchers should, to some extent, try to make general theoretical claims regarding social action. On the other hand, other argues that researchers should instead focus on interpretation of meaning and description of action in singular cases.<sup>6</sup> It is beyond the scope of this text to go into the details of this. Yet I want to underline that, following Goffman (Burns, 1992), I do not mean to say that the process of defining a situation in 'real life' only has overt similarities to how this is done in laiv plays, or other performance genres. Instead, *it is my view that these are manifestations of the same underlying microme-*

*chanics*. Thus, the view on theory in this text is more related to the former perspective. There is a similarity here with the general theme of how general pre-existing structures relate to a performance situated in a particular context. The particular context is always varied, and never completely similar. In the section above I noted how the analytical work itself shifted between free association given by the data, and more thorough analysis based on abstract concepts. A social researcher must pay close attention to the abstract theoretical similarities between similar phenomena, as well as appreciating how a particular case, at the same time, requires unique adapting of theory to its particular context.<sup>7</sup> Thus, in this text, the general theory of framing, must be adapted to the the unique possibilities and demands of the context of laiv play.

There is also a tension in relation to to the extent to which the use of general frame analytical theory presuppose a view on the players action as pre-determined by general structures. It is fruitful to consider this in relation to Giddens (1984:17) remark about an ambiguity in the structuralist tradition of:

*'whether structures refer to a matrix of admissible transformations within a set or to rules of transformation governing the matrix.'*

The linguistics and psychological research exemplified by Chomsky (1957) and Schank&Abelson (1977) which was noted in the beginning, would be 'structuralist' in the former sense: The general causality implied by concepts as 'schematas' and 'scripts' would tend to imply social

<sup>6</sup> These and related issues were discussed widely in the 'positivism debate' in Norwegian social science. (see (kjervheim 1959, Næss 1936). Lately, authors such as Smith (1990) Boudon (1985) and Giddens (1984) has discussed the use of general theory in social science.

<sup>7</sup> The process of abstracting general theory is discussed by Glaser&Strauss (1968), Merton (1968:chapter 2), Becker (1998), Boudon (1985), among others.

behaviour is 'matrix of admissible transformations'. This makes it unable to analyse how interaction both affects and is affected by a constantly changing context. The perspective of frame analysis used in this text are 'structuralist' in the latter sense. This study looks on how the players' playframe is the result of certain 'rules of transformation governing the matrix'. This implies that the performed interaction is not a result of context independent structures, but by structured rules governing a dynamic relationship between pre-existing structures and a changing and heterogeneous context of interaction.

## Final remarks

The first objective of this chapter was to provide insight into the data and analytical process of this text. I have given a thorough description of the background of the different data sources as well as analytical techniques. One should have got an idea of my own position in relation to the activity of laiv play, and how the data and analysis was shaped by practical possibilities and limitations in the context of data gathering. I also discussed how there is a tension between the use of general theory and particular data, and the way that the frame analytical perspective regard social reality as structured.

My second objective was to begin to give insights into the process of making and maintaining the laiv playframe. While I myself experienced a conflict between the demands of the researcher role and the role as a player, I have used this as a source of insight on the sometimes conflicting demands and conventions of the player role. Following Solberg (1982:123, my translation from Norwegian)

*'The researcher role may feel as a block in order to get an overview of an insight in the social system you study (...) But this experience are due to a wrong understanding of how knowledge is made. We are not only learning of what we see and hear others do alone or to each other. Perhaps we learn even more of what the other participants does to us and what we do to them, if we manage to see it.'*

I have also touched on the influence of the material world, when noting the importance of external discipline in relation to the keying, and the importance of conventions.

This chapter has presented the keying as relatively tightly structured by pre-existing keying conventions. In the following chapters, I will show that this is only a part of the process. The players have a considerable capability to flexibly suspend disbelief during play, when keying conventions are broken. In the next chapter, I will consider some of the basic keying conventions in more detail. I shall specify the pre-existing conventions that guide keying in more detail, and show how these are complemented by a set of techniques that players may use actively to maintain the keying during play.

# 5. Managing the keying

## Introduction

In the first chapter, I introduced laiv play and noted that players try to be in play all of the time. An important distinction the players use is between being '*in-laiv*' and '*off-laiv*'. A player who is '*in-laiv*' is actively involved in the playframe. Being '*off-laiv*', refers to having gone out of play - not acting according to the playframe, or having lost the involvement subjectively<sup>1</sup>. This distinction corresponds to the frame analytical notion of keying, from being in-frame contra off-frame. In the previous chapter, I noted how the players have strict conventions regarding how to behave when they are in-frame. I showed how the players' emphasis on staying in-frame conflicted with the researcher's role.

However, in this chapter I shall go closer into exactly how the players manage to switch from being off-frame to being in-frame. I will show that one may not straightforwardly assume that players stay in-frame automatically once the keying begins. The maintenance of the keying is the process that depends on the players actively using a variety of techniques to maintain it during play. Furthermore, they do not strictly stay in-

frame throughout the keying. In this respect, laiv play differs from other keys such as film - where all that takes place on screen for the duration of the film is usually in-frame. This makes it easy to know if something is part of the film, or not. In laiv play, many of the techniques used, as well as other possible incidents, involve off-frame action. These can be both verbally explicit, and implicit. This creates an additional communicative challenge for the players, since they need to show when they are in-frame and when they are off-frame, as it makes it less easy for them to simply assume the former.

Many techniques that the players use to maintain frame, are done in-relation to handling framebreaks. This may often require players to do communicate off-frame or even temporarily break the keying, in order to handle it appropriately. Another challenge is actions which they cannot do 'for real' in-frame - such as magic, or real fighting. Since these actions cannot be done directly in-frame, they must be indicated in some way. The following text is organised into five different sections, each looking at a type of technique used by the players: opening and closing

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<sup>1</sup> To go 'offlaiv' is called 'offing', or 'to go off' (norwegian: 'å offe'). Some players also use the term 'meta considerations' to designate action that is in-frame, but subjectively motivated by off-frame considerations.

brackets, interruption of the keying, verbal talk (double-voiced), action and body idiom, and off-frame rules. I will consider how communication works in relation to these techniques, and the purpose of using them, as well as looking at how the techniques themselves are done in a way that does not interrupt the keying.

### Opening and closing brackets

Brackets are specific ritualised signs that are used to mark the beginning or ending of a key (Goffman, 1974:chapter 8). In the theatre, the opening bracket is stage curtains uncovering the stage, the lights coming on to the stage, and the entrance of the actors to the central stage space. The closing brackets are the closing of the curtains, dimming the floodlights on the stage, and the actors' final bow to the audience.

In a similar way, the laiv plays I attended also used signs that worked as brackets. 'Amaranth' used a scene that had been rehearsed on the pre-meeting as an opening bracket. This portrayed the encounter between a grouping of wandering Christians and the Roman nobility. When players were ready to start play after dressing up and packing out, everyone lined up in previously prepared positions and began the rehearsed sequence. This scene lasted for about 5 minutes. Afterwards, the players continued to behave in-frame, but then they were improvising following the keying conventions. By smiling and not talking in a fully serious intonation, the players seemed to display a certain ironic distance in the beginning. However, after five to ten minutes, this vanished. 'Amaranth' used a standardised bracket to mark the ending of the play. Namely, to stop play in a public gathering, right after a final climax in the action. This occurred right after a confrontation between two rivalling groups of nobility. The organisers stopped play-

ing their characters, and announced that '*Now the laiv is finished!*' Everyone switched off-frame. For a few hours afterwards, the players talked intensely to each other, before they went to sleep and cleaned up the place before departure the following day.

'Inside/Outside' used other brackets. After the players had dressed up in special costumes provided for them, the players were blindfolded. They were then led down to the small square room of play. Lying down, a countdown sequence followed. A voice was heard which, in a hypnotic suggestive manner, counted down from ten to one. On the count of 'one', the players were in-frame. When the play stopped, the light went dark and the characters lay down with eyes closed. This time, it was a count upwards - from one to ten. In the same manner as hypnosis, the players woke up off-frame on the count of 'ten'.

### Interrupting the keying during play - 'cut'

The laiv players have developed conventions which enables them to interrupt the playframe during play. This is a response to a possible ambivalence in the keying in play. Let me clarify this by comparing keying in laiv play, with the keying in a sexual play of SM. This is an erotic play, usually undertaken by couples in private. During play the players take a role as either 'dom' (dominant) or 'sub' (submissive). The content of the game is that the 'dom' beats or whips the 'sub', while forcing him or her to do degrading sexual acts. An important part of playing 'sub' is to *act the role out expressively*. He or she is supposed to ask for mercy, to cry with pain, and to try to escape. Essentially, *it is not 'for real' but part of a keyed frame*. In SM it is important to express pain. There is no logical way for observers to know for certain whether expressed pain are 'for real', or a

keyed part of the playframe. This creates a risk of downkeying. A 'sub' may think that the play is too harsh and feel real pain, but it would be difficult to express this in-frame. SM has developed a keying convention to manage this. When a player is feeling that play is too harsh and downkey, he or she can say a 'codeword', a word that they have agreed on in advance that will stop the play.<sup>2</sup> To make it unlikely to interrupt the keying by accident, this word is often unrelated to the activity.

Laiv players have a similar problem: Expressing pain and stress may be an important part of playing the character, while it may also be a signal of downkeying. The 'cut' convention deals with this problem. It is strikingly similar to the 'codeword' of SM. When 'cut' is spoken in-frame, players must immediately switch off-frame. This applies to the players that are near the player who have said 'cut' - other players remain in-frame. 'Cut' should preferably be used out of sight and hearing from other players, thus minimising the scope of the framebreak. Players shall do this if they are in physical pain, are ill, or experiencing too much stress causing them to downkey. 'Cut' can also be used if there are important issues that must be discussed off-frame. The organisers of both plays I attended stressed its importance thoroughly at the pre-meeting. The organisers of 'Inside/Outside' also included a practice session right before the play. They practiced 'cut' rule, by playing intense situations and using 'cut' on them before play.

However, the players report some complications with the 'cut' rule. First, it might be difficult not saying 'cut' by accident in-frame since it is a common word. Another thing is that it can be difficult to *hear* 'cut' being said if there is back-

ground noise, or if someone is in the middle of a heated argument. Some players use the making of scissors with two fingers as a visual substitute to the word 'cut'. This compensates for the dependency on audio signals, but it has its own problems regarding visibility. Second, it is well known in the laiv community that it is difficult for players who are downkeying *to actually take action to 'cut' play*. Consider the following example:

*'I have participated in a lot of laiv plays, and I have used the cut rule once. But then it didn't work. I was crying a lot, and didn't manage to say cut to all those people who were taunting me. 40° of fever didn't help me either. I was finally able to whisper to someone who knew that something was wrong. He got everybody else to go away, and got me a bed and a lot of water as well as fever reducing pills (Thank the gods that he, who is a professional first aid man, doctor and so on, understood.)' (From discussion on laiv.org)*

There are probably different reasons for this problem. A player might not have the courage to break the playframe for other players present. Or a player might be too inexperienced with the conventions of play to dare cut the play. Also, perhaps most importantly, when they are downkeying, the players are likely to be too involved to think about cutting; they don't keep the necessary distance to their in-frame actions in their minds. As a result, players seem to rely on a co-player *to say 'cut' instead of the player who is actually downkeying*. This adds some communicative complexities, which I will get back to below.

Another thing is that players also note that simply *knowing* about the 'cut' rule makes it feel

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<sup>2</sup> The 'codeword' convention appears in a formalised form in the official rules of an SM-organisation on the world wide web - see url '<http://www.smil-norge.no/norsk/info/infosett.htm>'. Baumeister, (1992) and Hansen (1992) give psychological accounts of this subculture.

easier to play under more pressure and engage in more risky play. They feel that they can take the chance of more loose and risky play, and thus become more involved in the playframe. This does not depend on 'cut' actually working as intended.

When the frame has been interrupted by 'cut', then help can be provided if someone has physical problems, or players can cool down and reconcile off-frame. Afterwards, they may engage repair work to go in-frame again. One interviewee gives an example:

*'She and another female player had been in the woods, together with a group of less experienced boys in a fantasy play. They were beginners. She, and her friend, also a younger and less experienced player, had been kidnapped during play. They had entered the dark forest. The atmosphere had been a little scary. While she had not been afraid, she had noticed that her younger friend seemed scared. The male players had begun talking about rape. Then, she "cut" the play. They discussed the situation, and she had informed the other boys that they shouldn't have played on rape. She suggested that they should return to the camp, and that they made up a reason for their characters' return to the camp. According to her, the play further had progressed fine.'*

## Using talk metacommunicatively during play

The players may also use talk metacommunicatively while the in-frame interaction is ongoing. I separate between two ways to do this, verbally explicit or implicit.

### 1. Explicit off-frame talk

First, one metacommunicative technique is to explicitly comment or talk about the playframe off-frame while the keying is ongoing. The following describes how it was used in 'Inside/Outside' to clarify the keying:

*'But after a while, two guards suddenly entered, they looked around in the room, and began beating me (with padded weapons, so it didn't hurt). I acted dramatically, and lay down and twisted myself and caught when they had left. It appeared that someone had come to my assistance, and stopped the guards from beating me. They had taken some strokes themselves. It was terribly exciting, but also boring, I thought, because now I might have to play severely wounded throughout the play? A kind co-player let me lay my head on her leg, while patting my head. That was very kind! The same co-player had whispered in my ear if I was okay after being beaten, which I was'. (from my fieldnotes )*

There is some violent action, and some of the characters get hurt in play. If the players are hurt 'for real', it is necessary to interrupt the play and get help. Lise clarifies what happened to me by asking me off-frame if I really was hurt. The whispering tone of voice, the way she acted to keep what was said secret from the other players, and the content of the question itself, made it obvious to me that her questions to me were off-frame. The other players disregarded the back-channel talk. Such explicit metacommunication is similar to how a lecturer who, holding a lecture, may give explicit remarks about the lecture frame – such as, informing the listeners of when they can take a break – while going back to the



lecture topic afterwards and maintaining the lecture frame.<sup>3</sup>

A second way of using explicit metacommunication is by saying 'break' in-frame. This works as a standardised codeword, but differently from 'cut' the use of it does not signal a shift of frames. Instead, it sends a message that the speaker thinks play is too intense or too harsh and that the players should ease the play. Some players argue in laiv.org discussions that it is easier to use on situations in which players did not dare to use 'cut'. Searching through data, I found few examples of reported break situations, thus it might be little used. The following extract was an exception:

*'I have used break to maintain safety in play. A girl was engrossed in a hunt. She tried to climb up on a bus through a pile of unstable wheels. I got in touch with a couple of the other players, and they helped me to stabilise the wheels. That worked very well. It was so quiet, that I do not think people around took any notice.*

*(From laiv.org)*

Some players report similar problems with 'break' as with the 'cut' convention: Despite avoiding some of the problems of cut, players *do not* actively use it when they should.

## 2. Implicit 'double voiced' talk

When discussing the communication in literary texts, Bakhtin (1983) distinguishes between the 'voice' that explicitly depicts the actions of the character and events in the text, on one hand, and the deeper story and meaning of the work that the author is conveying through the text, on the other. The latter is implicit, and metacommunicative. The term 'double voiced' referred to how

the literary text contained both voices at the same time (Sawyer, 2003).

This is parallel to a technique that laiv players use to say something both in-frame as character, and metacommunicatively off-frame, at the same time. Their talk is double-voiced. This is done in the following way. When something drastic is about to happen in-frame (a fight, a kiss, a wound) then a player may say out loud something that he would like to do in-frame. Then he must see if a character rejects that, also in-frame. If the other character seems to do so, the player of this character has off-frame told other the player that he does not want it to happen. I can paraphrase an example from another player. About to hit his co-player in the stomach, he may speak out loud: *'Now I am going to hit you hard in your stomach!'* If his co-player responds negatively, for example by saying *'No, you won't manage to do that, you stupid fool!'* then this sends the message that the player does not allow this to happen in-frame. If, on the other hand, his response were silence, or approval of some form, it would have sent the message that he was ready to 'play out' the suggested action. By using this convention, the players succeed in asking someone for permission while remaining in-frame.

## Using action as a metacommunicative technique

Another way for the players to metacommunicate about the frame, is through cues implicit in the action that itself belong to a frame. For example, a primary cue for a frame shift to a conversational frame is to start to talk to somebody according to a chosen topic. The frame is maintained by the continuing action within it at the

<sup>3</sup> Goffman (1981) presents a sophisticated analysis of the framing in a lecture.

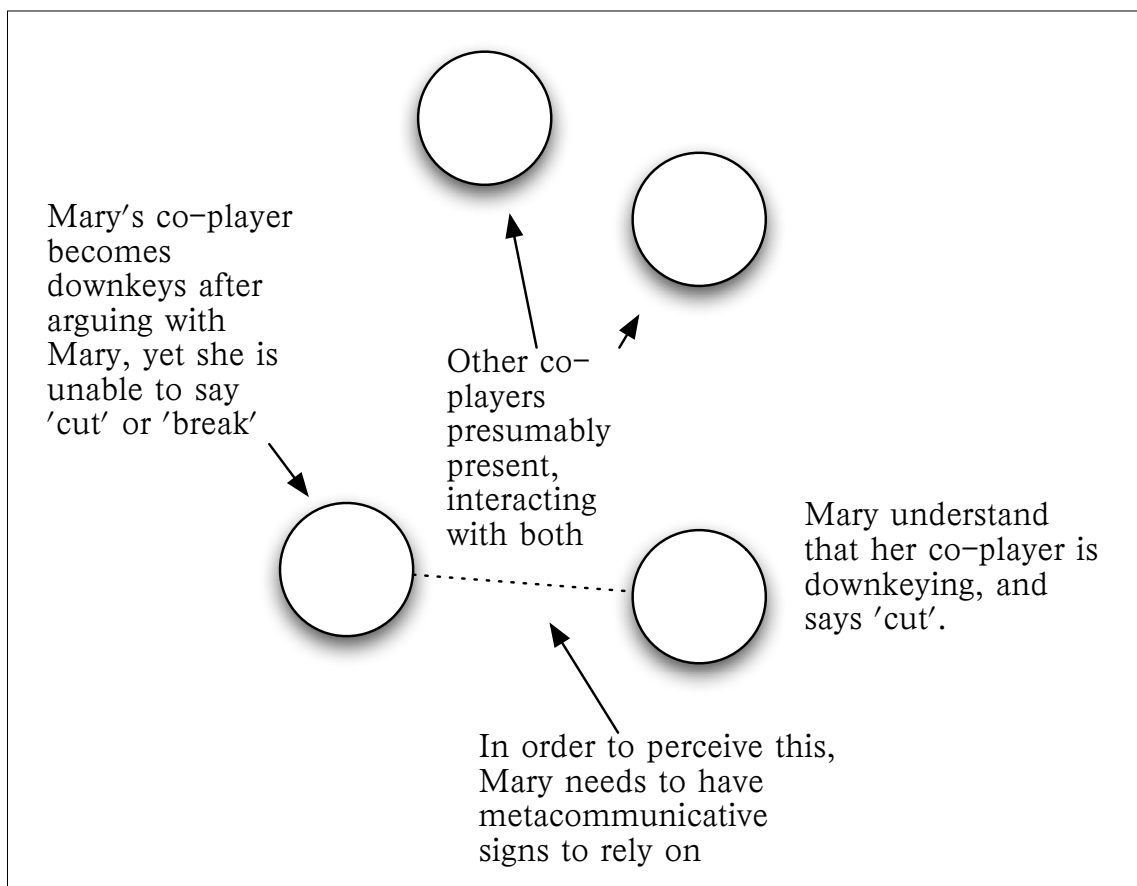
same time. In a conversation, this means to contribute to the topics of the conversation. When someone stops talking in a conversation, by for example reaching for a book and starting to read, this action communicates an end to the conversation frame. Album (1996:209) explains it as follows:

*'One of the strongest means to announce shifting to a new frame, is to start behaving as if this frame is one that is active. In that case, the communication about and the communication within the frame is the same. From the perspective of the previous frame, this new behaviour can be both meaningless and a break of rules.'*<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, when players are *acting* as their in-frame character, they might *at the same time* be showing that they are part of the laiv key. This presumes that their behaviour as characters is *clearly distinguishable* from their action in 'everyday life', and that it makes sense when one views it as pertaining to the laiv key. When using this type of technique, the action is structured by the pre-existing structures of the keying, while *at the same time* contributing to structuring future action by working metacommunicatively.

In order to exemplify the importance of this type of communication in laiv, I will consider how it may be of crucial importance in downkeying

Figure 5-1. An abstract illustration of Mary's 'cut' example



<sup>4</sup> My translation from Norwegian.

situations. When considering the use of the 'cut' convention in the practical context of action, I noted that players who are downkeying themselves, fail to say 'cut' on their own. Instead, their co-players says 'cut' on their behalf. *This implies that the downkeying player must be able to meta-communicate by some implicit cues to his co-players, that he or she is off-frame.* Sources indicate that a primary metacommunicative technique used to signal this, are the cues implicit in in-frame action itself. In one example, Mary talked about a laiv she attended. There, she had had a good friend of her with her. Her friend was only 16 years old whereas Mary was 23. Her friend played Mary's servant, while she did not have any experience of play.

*Mary: 'My co-player was a first-time player. During one of the hard times I yelled at her, she began to cry. I was not sure about how I should interpret that. The other players interpreted it as if she was crying within play, and just walked away. I had a bad feeling, so I followed her and asked her if she was all right. It turned out that things weren't all right. She was tired and sorry, and was feeling very unhappy.'*

*Geir: 'Did she know about the cut-rule?'*

*Mary: 'She knew about the cut rule, it had been notified in advance. From me, in the texts we got before play, and before start. But then, we talked a lot about it. (...) If I hadn't done that, the play would have just continued. She would probably have felt very sorry.'*

Another witness of this situation noted that what initially caused this, was that Mary's co-player had initially miskeyed Mary's aggressive behaviour – she had thought Mary was angry 'for

real' at her. This made her respond by downkeying, and feeling unhappy 'for real'. Mary herself noticed implicit cues in her action that she was not only unhappy as a character, but unhappy 'for real' - and thereby downkeying. This situation shows the collective dynamic and complexity involved in metacommunication. It is illustrated in figure 5-1.

An interesting question to ask here concerns what the precise nature is, of the metacommunicative cues which indicate that behaviour that on the surface could be in-frame, are off-frame and downkeying. A different example, throws some light on this question:

*'A laiv in was organised in Sweden that had the theme of police brutality. The players played out confrontations between a brutal police force and suspect young demonstrators that were held in custody by the police. During play a considerable amount of physical and psychological pressure on some of the players took place. One player told of an incidence where the play was cut. He had played a policeman that was questioning a young female demonstrator. During a questioning in play, he had used force to bash her head into the floor. One time, he suspected that he had bashed her head too hard, hurting her for real. He used "cut" to interrupt the play. It turned out that she was not hurt at all, she didn't mind the harsh play - she claimed rather it enhanced her play experience. The Swedish player explained that in this situation he had misunderstood the signals of his co-player. When bashing her head, he had failed to see much in-play response of her character. She had, for a moment, stopped "playing on" the*

*situation. For him, this was a signal that she was out of play.*

According to the Swedish player, actions are indicated as clearly in-frame through a characteristic over-dramatised voice, and continuous overdramatic motions.<sup>5</sup> Such cues were absent in the situation described above, and this led to the perception of the female player as off-frame

This example illustrates a basic point concerning how the meaning of communication is not based on individual intentions, but on collective social context. This is apparent in the way the way the female player were lying still and not clearly showing that she was in-frame, was interpreted as a cue that she was off-frame. However, she has apparently not intended her response to be interpreted in this way. Goffman notes how one is 'giving off' expressions inadvertently is relevant to this:

*'The legitimate performances of everyday life' are not "acted" or "put on" in the sense that the performer knows in advance just what he is going to do, and does this solely because the effect it is likely to have. The expression it is felt he is giving off will be especially inaccessible to him.'* (Goffman, 1959:73-74)

One cannot control this, because the signs are interpreted in the context of socially shared conventions of meaning, and not in relation to the inner intentions of individuals. As a consequence, what one does may be given communicative meaning even if there is no underlying intention to communicate anything. It is *impossible* to avoid one's actions being given a communicative significance in light of these conventions when one is perceived by others.

While the basic 'cut' convention are explicitly known and discussed by players, the indirect use of it in play appeared to be less explicitly known and discussed by the players. I found some discussions from a limited number of players on laiv.org, which indicated that at least some players were explicitly aware of the indirect use. These players saw it as an explicit responsibility to watch out if someone was downkeying, and be prepared to say 'cut' on their behalf.

## Off-frame rules

Now, I shall look at how players may use pre-existing off-frame rules as a metacommunicative technique in-frame. I separate between two main uses of off-frame rules. The first use of off-frame rules is to guide the transformation of actions that are prohibited or impossible to do 'for real' in-frame. While the actions are not done 'for real', they are done in a make-believe way in-frame using certain off-frame rules. The following three areas exemplify this:

### 1. Magic

Magic may be performed in-frame using off-frame rules. One player commented that this had earlier involved the use of explicit verbal remarks. For example, a player could say to another player 'makikus' followed by another command that players had agreed upon in advance. His co-player would then have to play his character as if he were subjected to specific magical effects. More recently, the players appear to rely less on verbal off-frame remarks and instead use more implicit symbols. For example, in 'Amaranth', the organisers used pearls with special colour codes as signifiers of magic spells. The organisers

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<sup>5</sup> On the annual 'Knutepunkt' convention for Scandinavian laiv players, the participants were often engaging themselves in small playful dramatic situations. For example, two participants could suddenly start fighting in the hallway with swords, taunting each other, and in a pompous way pretend to be insulted. In particular, the clearly overdramatic action, talk and body language made it clear to everyone watching that they were just playing.

posted the rules used for magic on a board in the toilet in order for the players to check and remember during play. When a player found a pearl in his or hers food, the colour signified what magical effects that the player should 'play out' - for example being poisoned, in love, or angry.

## 2. Sex

In relation to sex one sees a conflict between an apparent need to maintain a role distance to the character one plays, and the degree of 'realism' in ones in-frame action. On one hand, the players may use certain techniques that specify in advance that certain actions symbolise sexual intercourse in-frame. One technique, are to giving shoulder massage or regular massage to each other and then make-believe that these actions represent sexual intercourse. A second technique, are to sit next to each other and simulating sexual noises only, making something like a 'radio theatre' to the co-players who can listen. A third technique, are to play out sexual behaviour as in 'real life', only maintaining ones clothes on. Some players regards it as a problem that these techniques - particularly the two first - make it hard to make-believe sexual behaviour since the actions does not resemble sexuality as it is in 'real life'. Thus, some players prefer to play sexual behaviour in-frame similar to how it is done in 'real life'. When they do this, then the players appear as capable of ignoring that the use of contraceptives in the form of a condoms arte inconsistent with the playframe in many historical set plays. Sex 'for real' are not without problems - in chapter 10 I will consider one example of how this can increase the risk for downkeying. One may speculate that the lack of one consistent standardised convention on how to play sexual behaviour, give the player more room for negotiation between themselves how they shall perform it in-frame. The players have a

rule on sexuality that is standardised in all plays by default: Any kind of performance on or reference to rape in play is strictly prohibited by default. Nevertheless, this rule may also not be taken completely for granted - there is some well known example that such play has occurred.

## 3. Alcohol and drugs

Many plays prohibit drinking alcohol, or the use drugs, for real. But players may still play intoxicated as characters. The players may then use water, often mixed with hot spices and liquor essence, as a symbolic substitute for 'real' alcohol in play. Drugs can be symbolised in a similar way. For example, the players have used baking soda to symbolise a drug that gives the user strong hallucinogenic effects; the player then acts out these effects when they take it in-frame.

A second use for off-frame rules is to coordinate in advance what people are willing to do to during play. In 'Amaranth' part of the preparatory process was to discuss with other players how 'harsh' play one could have against each other. But this can be difficult to remember, if one has to talk to many players. One player in 'Amaranth' had to choose arbitrary punishments for the slave characters. Before play, he systematically interviewed all the players of slave characters. He noted their respective boundaries in a notebook. He could then check what he had written during play, and based his in-frame action on this. In a different play, the players chose between three categories on whether they wanted to engage in 'harsh', 'medium' or 'soft' style of play. The chosen category of a player was signalled in-frame by a coloured sign. These signs were not foolproof; a player noted that he had had a very harsh time from the organisers, despite his C rating. Note the way these techniques are hidden in order to minimise the amount of off-frame interference in the keying.

Thus, the players' situation is analytically similar to that of those who must undertake metacommunication in secrecy. For example, consider the standardised handkerchief codes in the European gay community.<sup>6</sup> The placement of a visible handkerchief in the either left or right pocket, signalise to others familiar with the code that he is either a passive or an active (penetrating) homosexual. The colour of the handkerchief further symbolises the type of sexual activity he prefers. Presumably, these secret codes are due to gay behaviour having a negative stigma in many places. Like the laiv players, the gay men can adapt to a context that limits explicit communication by using implicit signs that are hidden from the attention of others.

## Final remarks

Like the previous chapters, this chapter has also showed the use of shared conventions. Yet, these conventions do not pre-determine actions – how and when they are used depends on the players' own initiative and actions during play. The background of these conventions is different. The use of action and body idiom in metacommunication, is something that most people have basic competence in. Other metacommunicative techniques are known only to the laiv players. An example of this is the 'cut' rule or specified off-frame rules in a play. The type of conventions that are described here may be described as a pool of resources that *enables* the players to perform certain actions in a specific context. Thus, this shows how the pre-existing structures and action in-frame intertwine.

These techniques differ as to how explicitly off-frame the character is when employing them as well as the extent to which they threaten the

keying to break. Players can be explicitly off-frame, and break the playframe by using 'cut'. But players may be explicitly off-frame without breaking the playframe when they use double-voiced talk. We saw that when players were using magic for instance, they had symbols that had an explicit off-frame meaning but they avoided any verbal off-frame remarks. In general, the players appear creative in making and using techniques that minimise the degree of off-frame explicitness. Nevertheless, both explicit and implicit techniques appear to be essential to maintain the keying.

A related issue is whether the players themselves are explicitly aware of the techniques they use to maintain the keying. Some techniques are explicitly discussed by the players. A few, such as the 'cut' and 'break' rules, are near formally codified as well. One may think that players are more likely to be reflexively aware of techniques that are verbally explicit – such as explicit off-frame talk. The players appear to be less explicitly aware of the use of other techniques. Only some were aware of how implicit talk and distinct action was used as a technique. The similar was the case for the actual use of the 'cut' rule – I argued that this was done by players mutually monitoring each other and relying on implicit cues to 'sense' if the action had to be 'cut' or not. This question is interesting, because it is closely linked to the question of intentionality – if players are not reflexively aware of a technique, one may suggest that they are less likely to use the technique intentionally. This is related to the validity of the text. The techniques that the players are explicitly aware of, are more certain since I could base my analysis on the players own discussions and writings. My observation was too

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<sup>6</sup> See url: '<http://www.slm-oslo.no/norsk/Torklekoder.html>' for examples.

limited to map out all the implicit techniques they use in detail.

The way the players use these techniques tells of a flexibility they exert by being able to adapt their communication to the other stimuli that is present. First, they are by and large able to ignore explicit off-frame communication when this is connected to the maintenance of the keying. By doing this, they increase the repertoire of techniques that is available to them. Second, players also adapt by being able to follow closely the cues that may be of metacommunicative significance, while disregarding other stimuli that is present in a specific context of action. Goffman, making a note about this phenomenon, refers to the latter as going on in the 'disattend track':

*'Observe that what is carried in the disattend track can be blotted, in fact as well as appearance, but not so directional cues, for these must be kept in mind enough so they can do their work. And because what they do has a framing effect, structuring (or dramatically restructuring) what came before or what comes after, the quietest impropriety here can be heard as very noisy.'* (Goffman, 1974:214)

This chapter has introduced some of the tools used to maintain the keying. In the three next chapters I will look further into the range of keying techniques available to the players by considering how suspension of disbelief, the material world, and casting extend the players' repertoire of keying techniques. I will also look at how the various techniques intertwine with making and shaping the content of the playframe. In chapter 10, I will expand upon some of the specific issues discussed here when considering the techniques players use to do repair work. In the next chapter, I will turn to studying how maybe the most important keying technique works.

Namely, how the players use suspend disbelief to maintain the keying.





# 6.

# Suspending disbelief

## Introduction

By now, the reader should have gained basic insight into some of the keying techniques used by the players. In this chapter, I will continue this focus. I shall look at what in what Coleridge (1817/1985:306) called the 'willing suspension of disbelief for the moment'. Coleridge coined this term, in order to point to how the reader of a book had to ignore what was not realistic and let the imagination 'go along with the ride'. Similarly, a theatrical onlooker has to disregard the fact that he *knows* that the characters on stage are played by actors, that the entire action is pre-determined, that there is a fourth wall lacking on stage in order to let the audience be able to see the action, that a prop with a door painted on it is not really a door, and so on. If, instead, the audience refuses to suspend disbelief – viewing all the actions with a critical ironic scrutiny – their involvement in the play is likely to break.

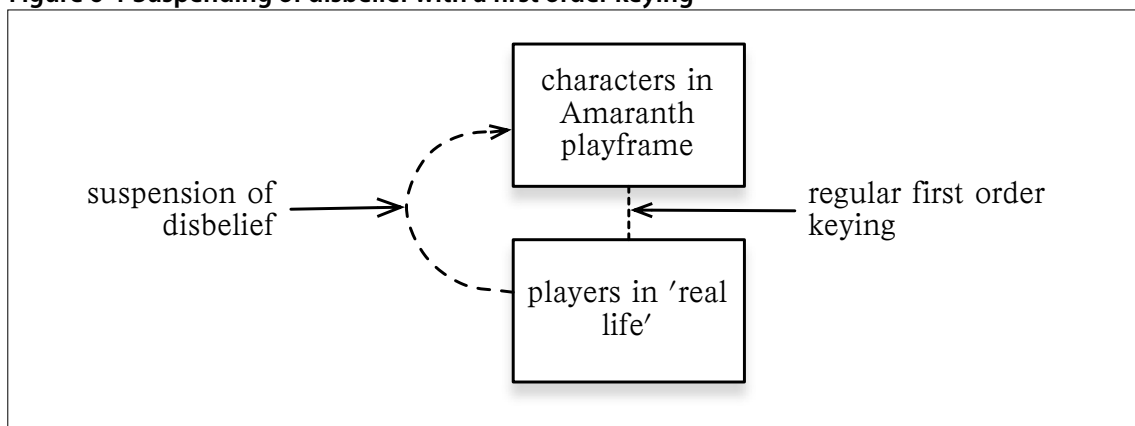
The 'don't deny' principle is an important part of suspending disbelief. Studying improv, Sawyer (2003) notes that the action in such plays is not pre-determined, therefore the improv actors have to suspend disbelief for all actions that their co-actors are coming up with during the performance. The 'don't deny' principle are an important part of this, and it points to the improv ac-

tors' convention that they *never deny* a proposition made by a co-actor during a scene. If, for example, an improv actor introduces himself as a fireman in the beginning of a scene, his co-actors must play along with this, and not do anything that contradicts this 'fact' until the scene is over. If, for example, they ignore his introduction and address him as something else they would have denied his proposition. This would make the playframe inconsistent.

The use of suspension of disbelief in laiv is parallel to Garfinkel's (1968) reasoning that pre-existing trust in a taken for granted context, is essential in order to enable any verbal communication at all at a cognitive level. Similarly, Goffman (1959, 1967) look at how people's communication is enabled by a biologically based ritual support and acceptance of themselves by others. Rawls (1989,1990) argue that these mechanisms creates the basic social order between humans in society.

In the following chapter, I shall look more closely at the micro mechanisms of suspension of disbelief - how does it actually work in laiv play? It is one of the primary techniques to maintain the keying that the players have at their disposal. I shall begin by describing how it works in regular keying situations. However, in order to

**Figure 6-1 Suspending of disbelief with a first order keying**



make its effects and importance clearer, I shall look more closely at *second order transformations* – situations where there is an additional transformation taking place in-frame. I will show how the suspension of disbelief is crucial in maintaining such situations, and look at how they break when it is absent.

My methodical approach in this chapter is to study a set of peculiar situations described in the source material. Each of these tells us something about the way suspension of disbelief works during play. The analysis below relies to a great extent on drawing conclusions that may be seen when applying the logic of frame analysis to the depicted situations. In the next section, I shall begin my discussion by considering regular first order keying situations.

### Suspension of disbelief in first order keying

Suspending disbelief actively is a prerequisite for maintaining the playframe. For example, consider the morning ritual that I took part in during play. As players, we pretended that we were playing characters in this setting. The ritual had been rehearsed once at the pre-meeting, but we pretended that it was an old habit. Everyone tried to

avoid doing something that contradicted this. Thus, everyone *accepted* and *played along with* being characters that were taking part in a ritual. If someone had refused to accept this, and acted as if this was not the case – then the frame could have broken.

When the frame breaks, then everyone involved *has to* stop suspending disbelief until they start play again. However, players may also *actively* choose *not* to suspend disbelief. In that way, they upkey intentionally *and their failure to suspend disbelief may in itself be a cause for a framebreak*. This can be done by consciously starting to talk or act in a way that is *explicitly incoherent with the playframe*. Players that I spoke to described that they had experienced such actions, and noted that this could often cause a framebreak for everyone present. I never saw or heard of a player who admitted to have done it themselves. It seemed as one of the major conventions of play *never* to act in this manner. Mary retells a typical example:

*‘For example, I attended a laiv play in 1997 where I sat around the main campfire with a whole group of people. And then, they start to sing Voice, which is that year’s winner of the Eurovision song contest. And they started to talk about the Kari Bremnes*

*cd they had gotten, and asked if I could sing a song that they knew I knew. But it was in English - and English was defined as a non-language in this laiv. I was not up to that. Then, I just walked away. That was totally incompetent - when you do not manage to stay within the laiv world at all, then you should do that outside of the campfire.' (Note on context: Kari Bremnes is a known Norwegian singer).*

.I will discuss the topic of framebreaks and varieties of upkeying more closely in chapter 10. Now, I shall instead go more deeply into the micro-mechanics of suspending disbelief. Figure 6-1 shows an abstract illustration of suspension of disbelief in first order keying. I here separate between the keyed playframe, and 'real life'. The arrow going from the latter to the former, is meant to visualise that suspension of disbelief supports the maintenance of the playframe. What is it that makes suspension of disbelief such an effective technique to maintain keying? In order to answer this question, I will turn to second order keying. Unlike regular first order keying, such situations have an additional complexity that illuminates how the process works.

## Suspension of disbelief in second order keying

1. In my first example, I will consider another ritual that took place in 'Amaranth' and which was described to me by sources. It differs from the ritual referred to in the above section, in that in this ritual there is an additional keyed frame that is part of the ritual. My objective is to show how the ability to use *taken for granted* suspension of disbelief as a keying technique is reduced when more than one lamination is involved. Instead, players must *first* be able to separate be-

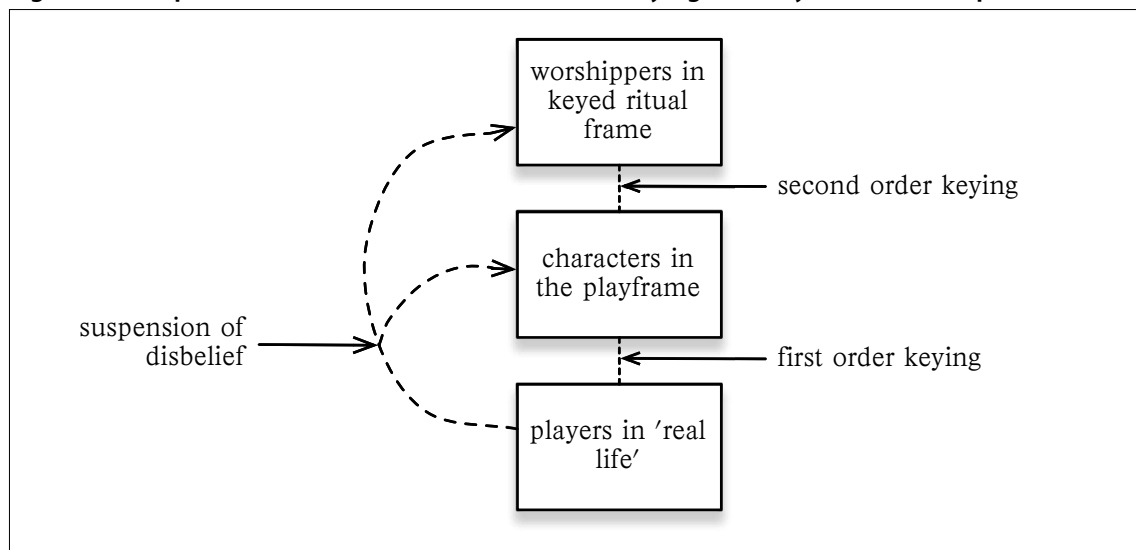
tween different laminations, *and then* suspend disbelief based on this knowledge.

Part of the storyline in 'Amaranth' was for the nobility characters to find characters that could become possessed by certain powerful gods, in order to utilise their divine power for personal gain. The nobility carried out rituals of worship according to their religion at midnight in the dark wood. In these rituals, the worshippers met at an appointed place and time and made a circle. The participants were chanting loudly together while the dance-slave characters were dancing around in the circle. One character was the priest of this religion led the ritual. In these rituals certain characters could become 'possessed' by powerful gods if they were taken into the centre of the circle in the ritual. This implied that the control of the character was taken over by powerful god-like beings. Which characters this was, was not known. The nobility had to try the characters one by one in the ritual, and see if they became possessed. When they found one, they would try to manipulate the god-like being to their advantage.

In this example, there is an additional lamination added to the regular keyed playframe. Some characters were *transformed* to gods in the ritual taking place in-frame. There are then 3 laminations present: 'real life', the characters in the playframe, and the ritual where a character becomes possessed by a god.

The players and organisers carefully planned and rehearsed the sequence of the ritual on the pre-meeting. Further, each player had a secret written down on his or her character sheet, which said how the character would behave if he or she became the focus of the ritual. (A technique of 'fate-play', I will consider this more closely in chapter 9.) Some characters had written instructions that they would act out being

**Figure 6-2 Suspension of disbelief in a second order keying - the keyed ritual example**



possessed by a certain god. If they became the focus of the ritual circle, they would stop playing their character and instead play this god for the duration of the ritual.

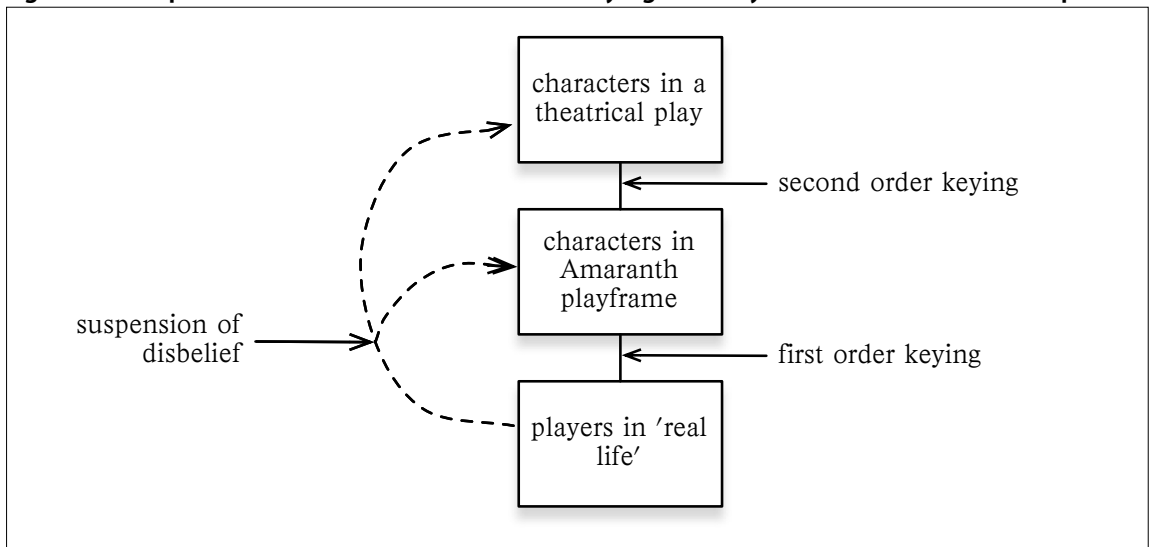
Figure 6-2 illustrate the laminations of the above situation. The addition of an extra lamination has consequences for the players' use of suspension of disbelief. When there are only two laminations, players can *take for granted* that the actions of their co-players are part of the first-order playframe. They may then more or less automatically suspend disbelief for these actions. When there are three laminations, the players can no longer make this assertion: Their co-players may then be *either* in the regular playframe, *or* in the second-order keyed frame. For suspension of disbelief to work, the players must know the relation between the actions they see, and the frame laminations in the situation.

The consequence is that players *have to rely on more detailed metacommunicative cues*. In the above example, the players rely on several such cues. Since they have rehearsed the scripted play carefully in advance, they *know* the opening and closing brackets and when and where characters in frame become 'possessed', and transformed into a god. Those who acted out being possessed, may have rehearsed and prepared this performance in advance since he or she was informed on his character sheet which god he would become possessed by. They can be able

to use the body or voice in a particular way they have prepared, to convey other metacommunicative cues than when improvising in regular play. As a result the players taking part can then *know more specifically when someone is acting in the first order playframe, and when someone is playing a character that is transformed to a god*. Recall that suspension of disbelief involves accepting the illusion that is performed and playing actively along with it. If players do not know what frame the action of a co-player belongs to, they can neither know what illusion to accept, nor can they know the right way to respond to it.

2. A theatrical play staged in-frame works as my second example. This is also a situation where it is difficult to separate between two laminations. The example will demonstrate suspension of disbelief directly work at work, when a player, faced with different ways of interpreting a co-players action, actively chooses the interpretation that is most in line with accepting and thus maintains the illusion in the playframe.

Before 'Amaranth', some players had prepared to stage a small theatrical play as characters in-frame. They also integrated rehearsals and organisation as an activity in play. In-frame, the actors were low status slave characters and the play was set up to amuse the nobility. One player who played an actor told me about how they had made a successful performance. In particular,

**Figure 6-3 Suspension of disbelief in second order keying - the keyed theatre in-frame example**

he emphasised the performance of one of his co-players:

*Mike: 'What was so fantastic with it, was that I remember the one that played the soldier. And he, in the beginning, wasn't so lively. So I, Mike, thought that "perhaps this person isn't a person we should have taken with us on this mime-thing, because it does not seem as if he is confident with himself, a bit scared to make a fool out of himself. But I recognised that I was wrong, because, he improved a lot. He had movements, and each time, they became greater and greater. You noticed, in fact, that it was a person here, who played a slave who from the outset didn't know anything but he learnt very fast, who understood things. Instead of me - who had from the outset a background with a very solid education and went straight in and started acting. It was a lot of fun - he went from zero to 100, and before our performance, he became a very good character in the play, I think. That was very exciting.' (Note on context: Mike played an educated character)*

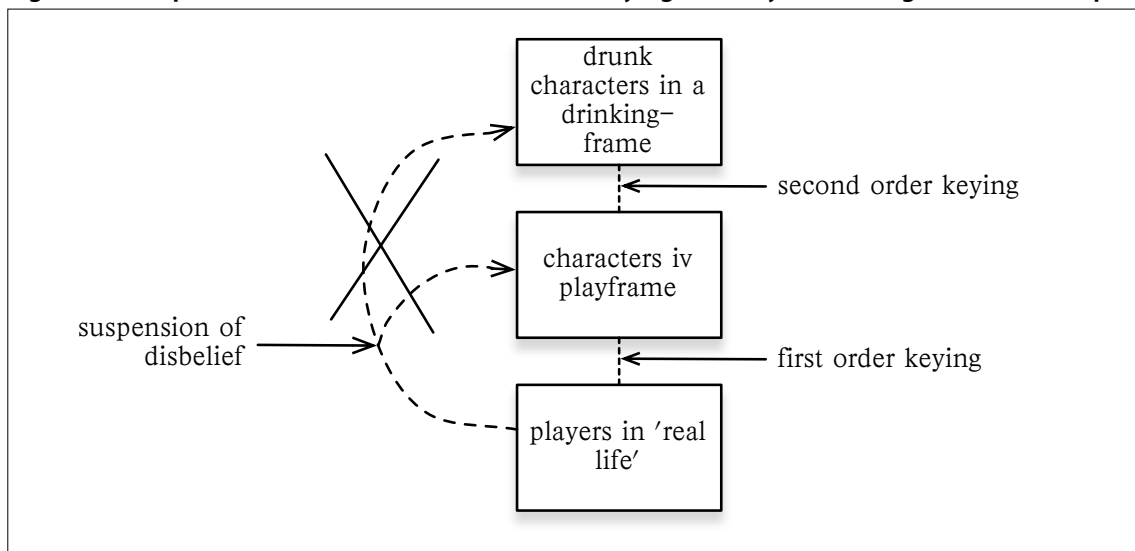
The three laminations in this example are: 'Real life', the keyed playframe, and the keyed theatrical frame that take place in the playframe.

For some time, he is uncertain whether the lack of acting abilities is part of playing the char-

acter of the playframe, or whether it is due to bad skills that he has as a person and off-frame. The metacommunicative cues observed are vague. By interpreting his co-players action as good play in-frame, he is actively suspending disbelief by choosing the interpretation that is *most in line with the keyed playframe*.

The above example is illustrated in figure 6-3. Here it becomes clear how suspension of disbelief involves a substantial degree of trust. The player above must *trust that his co-player intends to be in-frame*. Lack of trust creates scepticism and scrutiny of the frame of action – which is strictly opposed to suspension of disbelief. Trust plays a similar role in 'everyday life'. Garfinkel (1968) argues that taken-for-granted trust is required to use the right frame when interpreting talk in 'everyday life'. In the same way that the laiv players' active metacommunication is unclear and ambiguous, language used in 'everyday life' can always be interpreted in many frames. Persons must therefore have some amount of trust in each other's willingness to interpret communication in the appropriate way. One cannot be *fully rationally certain in advance* about whether this trust is justified. In the same way, the laiv player in the above example cannot be *fully rationally certain* about his interpretation being

**Figure 6-4 Suspension of disbelief in second order keying - the keyed drinking in-frame example**



right. In my next example, trust, or lack of it, is also an issue.

3. My third example concerns a situation in which players drank alcohol in-frame.<sup>1</sup> I will regard *acting out intoxication as acting in a keyed frame*. Thus, characters that are intoxicated in-frame are engaged in second-order keying. In this example, I shall consider how some players chose not to suspend disbelief, and indicate how this may be a result of lack of trust.

At one laiv play, the organisers of the play allowed for consumption of 'light' amounts of alcohol during play. After the play, there followed a debate on laiv.org. There appeared to be divergent opinions regarding their co-players drinking. Some players regarded their actions when drinking as upkeying. This was *in spite* of the fact that the drinking behaviour could very well be part of characters in-frame. One player wrote:

*'The party Friday night began very well. A lot of good food to eat, and wine to drink. We had eaten the food, but the drinking*

*continued. I went to bed early, but I lay awake all night. I had hoped that much of what I heard was people who were playing drunk. But I have later heard from several players that this was not play. When I got up 6 am Saturday and went for a walk, there were still two players left by the campfire. They were singing in a way I would have done, if were to play very drunk. The problem was that they were not playing.'* (from laiv.org)

Other players appeared to regard the incident as part of play:

*'Yes, some people went over the line. But, yes, the fact that we did drink real wine made my laiv experience much better. What was most worthy of critique was that we did not have a more separate area were we could have played throughout the night. Because that was what most of us was doing: playing, not partying. On the famous last night of the play, I was one of those who were left at the campfire. It was good and dry for me who had just been in*

<sup>1</sup> See MacAndrew&Edgerton (1977) and Fekjær (1987) for research documenting that the alcohol drinking situation and its accompanying norms is socially constructed.

*the river, but it was also very atmospheric. I would not have been without that late nice evening by the campfire!"(from laiv.org)*

This situation also has three laminations: 'real life', the keyed playframe, and the keyed drinking situation that take place in the keyed playframe.

Figure 6-4 provide an illustration of the above. The 'X' over suspension of disbelief, is meant to show that it did not work in that case. Like Mike in example two above, the observing players appear to lack enough cues to separate between the two frame laminations – whether the observed drinking behaviour is part of playing a character in-frame, or whether it is off-frame. In this example, they appear unwilling to suspend disbelief. Logically, the overt physical behaviour both if the drinking players are in-frame *and* if they are off-frame is very similar. Thus, it can be that the unwillingness the observing players have is *not* due to the overt physical behaviour not matching the keyed playframe. Instead, it may be that there is a lack of initial trust in the drinking players' intentions to actually play. If so, this would differ from example two, were the player trusted his co-players intentions and selected the most favourable interpretation of the ambiguous actions he saw. Perhaps the observers' lack of trust is due to a general negative attitude towards alcohol, viewing everyone who is intoxicated with scepticism and scrutiny.

## Suspension of disbelief and second order fabrications

In this section, I will continue to look at suspension of disbelief and trust. In the previous section I have showed that that *the players can normally rely on other players* to suspend their disbelief, as this is an essential convention for

maintaining the keying. I also argued that this was based on trust. In this section, I will show the effectiveness of suspending disbelief in a different manner. I shall consider how players can instrumentally use it for their own gain. By relying on others to suspend disbelief in relation to their action, they may then dupe them more easily to accept fabrications as well.

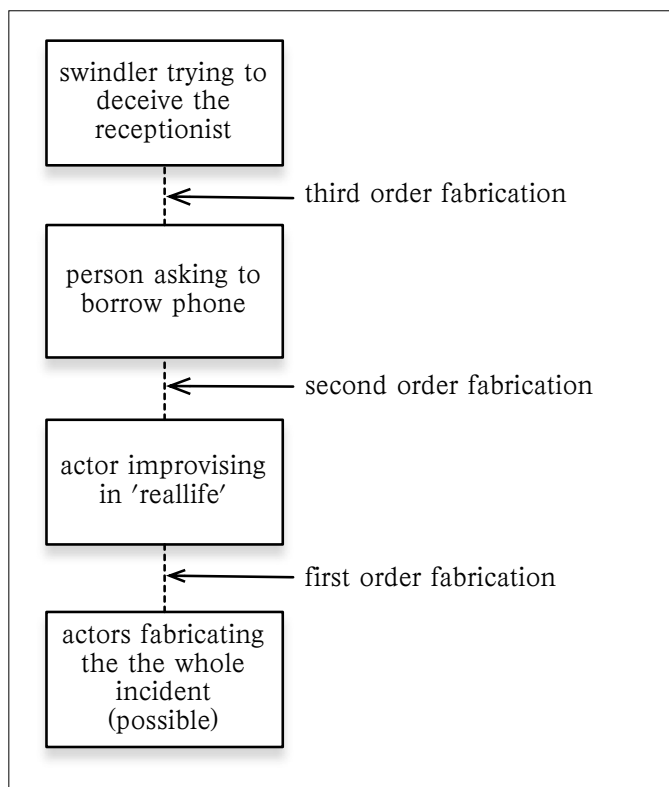
I shall first present an example from 'everyday life'. Conmen or tricksters often rely on others' trust and willingness to suspend disbelief when maintaining frames in 'real life'. They are often lay sociological experts, with extensive knowledge about everyday interaction.

I watched one example on a hidden camera TV-show.<sup>2</sup> A person enters a hotel, and asks to borrow the phone to report to the police that his wallet has been stolen. Instead of calling the police, the man calls his friend in the US, and starts small-talking about other things. His goal, in relation to the viewers, is to maintain the call for as long as possible. The receptionist at the hotel can hear that he isn't calling the police. Yet several minutes pass, without any interruption. The receptionist interrupts the man and asks if 'he wasn't supposed to call the police'? The man excuses himself, and says that he just *has to* talk to his friend to borrow some money. The receptionist leaves him, and he continues to small talk about other issues. Some other interruptions happen, but the receptionist does not shut the line by force until more than 10 minutes has passed (the television viewers could view the clock). *It is clear how the conman counts on his presentation being trusted and the receptionist suspending disbelief.* He had calculated that she would hesitate to stop him in order to avoid rejecting his presentation of himself and create an

<sup>2</sup> TVNorge, May 2003.

embarrassing situation. In frame analytical terms, this situation was a second order fabrication - *a fabrication of a fabrication*. The first fabrication is the dupe of the receptionist by the conman. But the conman was not *actually* a swindler - but posing as such to fabricate an amusing scene for the hidden camera tv-show. The duped person appeared to be unaware of *both* laminations. There is another complexity in this situation that is also of interest. It is not possible to know whether the duped person actually was an actor and the entire scene scripted by television producers. This would make it a third-order transformation, a fabrication of a fabrication of a fabrication, the duped ones being the television audience. This situation, is illustrated in figure 6-5.

**Figure 6-5 Possible third order fabrication - the example of the hidden camera swindlers**



Next, I shall consider two examples that each show how similar mechanisms can operate in laiv.

1. In the same way that the ritual cooperation in 'everyday life' is used by conmen, the laiv players may utilise other players' reliance on suspending disbelief to dupe them in-frame more easily. In one play, a female player had talked to the organisers and arranged for her to play an executioner in a medieval play. This character appeared to be male. She made a male voice, had clothing and make-up that underlined male traits. The player acted out the character, as a male character. However, the player had planned this as a fabrication. Her character was *actually* a female character that *pretended* to be male. The other players did not approve of this:

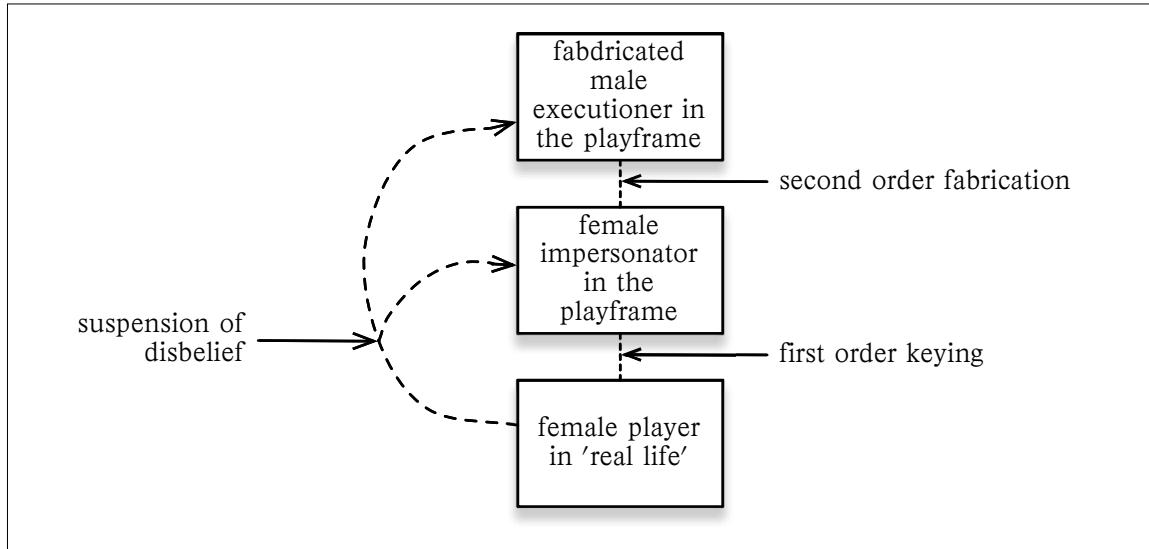
*'For me, the biggest and most "stupid" event, was when Sylvia on one summer play, played "a woman who played a man". I though that was exceptionally stupid. I, as a player, thought that it had to be okay if Sylvia played a man, therefore my character did not pay attention to this. When it then turned out that she played a woman who played a man, the whole thing turned ridiculous. I had no problem seeing that the executioner was a woman dressed up as a man. But I counted on this being "artistic freedom"'*

There are three laminations here: The fabricated male executioner character in frame, the keyed female character who impersonated him in-frame, and the player Sylvia in 'real life'. This example, is illustrated in figure 6-6.

When the players saw the male executioner in-frame, they saw several inconsistencies which they thought they could have regarded as upkeying. However, believing that this was not intentional but simply a slip, they nevertheless



Figure 6-6 A second order fabrication - the example of Sylvia's play



suspended disbelief and accepted the actions in play.

The ease of Sylvia's deception of the other player is a result of logic of the second order keying situation. Like the second order keying situations considered above, it is difficult to separate between the different laminations. It is hard to separate logically between inconsistencies stemming from the characters actions in relation to the second order transformation, and inconsistencies that are stemming from the players actions in relation to keying.

Ideally, the players could scrutinise the fabrication in-frame, and suspend disbelief in relation to the keyed frame. However, there is a lack the clear metacommunicative cues to separate between these two laminations. *They have to suspend disbelief at all times, or else risk breaking the frame.* This can then be used instrumentally by a player pursuing his or her own benefits by duping other players.

2. As my second example, I will show that a player may willingly suspend disbelief *even when*

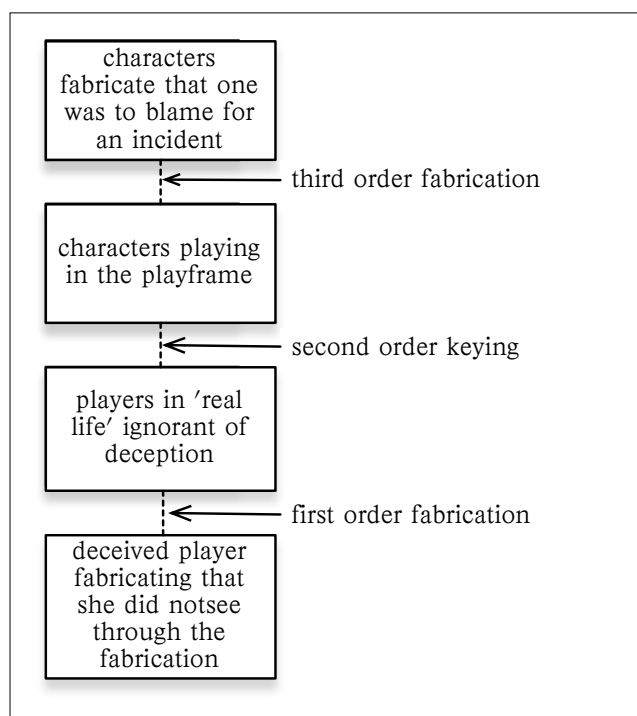
*knowing that he or she is being duped.* In that way, the player may actively take part in playing along with a good scene.

Ingrid tells about how she played the character of Claudia Major, who belonged to the nobility. She was courted by the leader of the Legionnaires, the Tribune Julius Terentius. Earlier, she had received a love letter from him. However, he had been doing the same to her sister, which she had found out. The confrontation ended by Claudia Major being deceived into thinking it was an error. Here is how she recollects the event:

*Ingrid<sup>3</sup>: 'Julius Terentius had written a love letter to both Claudia Major and Claudia Minor. I had a lot of slaves and ran down to him, the whole legion had lined up. I ran down and said: "Oh, Julius, you have won me by your beautiful words." And then I began to read up from the letter he had written to me. "No wait a minute - this is the letter from my sister!" That was incredibly good. His face just dropped. And*

<sup>3</sup>The interviewee - Ingrid Storø - requested that her real name would be used.

**Figure 6-7 Possible third order fabrication - the example of Ingrid**



*then, one of the Legionnaires came up with an idea, and threw herself out and said: "Oh no, it was me who did it. I was drunk!"*

*Geir: 'It was obvious that it was he who...'  
Ingrid: 'No, it was not obvious, because she did it before he had managed to row himself on to the shore'*

There are many other characters watching the event, and deception like this presents an opportunity to make a good scene out of this deception. Ingrid, as a player, realises what is going on. She knows that she could break the deception, without breaking the frame. But she chooses to *continue* to co-operate despite this. By doing so, she suspends disbelief and accepts her co-player's proposition. Presumably, she understands that the scene is entertaining to the other players as well as herself and wants to contribute to this. This situation, is illustrated in figure 6-7.

Note that Ingrid here skilfully *fabricates the ignorance* of her awareness of what was actually taking place. It is important for her that her response in-frame seems spontaneous and natural, as laiv players generally resent planning and off-frame considerations ('meta considerations') by players during play. This adds an additional third lamination. Thus, one can compare this to the TV scene cited earlier. I mentioned that one could not know for sure if this scene was actually scripted and performed by actors. The latter alternative would make it a third order fabrication like Ingrid's situation, also with the same objective: To create an entertaining scene

### Final remarks

This chapter has argued that suspension of disbelief give the players distinct advantages at a cognitive level in terms of metacommunication. It enables them to take a range of issues concerning the playframe for granted. This reduces the need for detailed metacommunication during play. It also enables them to ignore obvious contradictions in the context of performance. This is a very effective technique to maintain the keying.

The usage of suspension of disbelief to maintain the keying may be regarded as a way the players adapt to the communicative possibilities of the performance situation. Recall that laiv play involves considerable non-determined, improvised action; that the players only have limited preparations, and are not professional actors. Goffman noted that complex transformations involving more than one lamination were most likely to occur in closely scripted and directed mediums such as theatres, movies, and books. Only in such artificial, performed situations could the required metacommunicative cues and the action be so finely tuned and rehearsed that the

audience would grasp the different frames. In the case of the laiv players, the pre-existing structures guide the action in much less detail. Inconsistencies, errors and bad play are more likely to occur due to the contingencies of the context of action. Suspension of disbelief becomes a very useful and important tool in light of such limitations. The adapted use of suspension of disbelief is apparent throughout the text. In chapter 5, I showed how the players were able to pragmatically adapt to and ignore the use of off-frame communication when it was necessary. In the following chapters, I will show how something similar is the case for the use of material surroundings and environment, the process of casting, the making and performance of in-frame motifs, as well as framebreaks. In all these instances, the players show a strong ability to pragmatically adapt to inconsistencies that are practically necessary due to the context of the performance. They ignore these, and continue to suspend disbelief while maintaining the playframe. It is interesting that due to the close cooperation presumed by this technique, the players become much more dependent on *the collective group of players to successfully perform their own character*.

This chapter illuminates a more basic point about the micro-dynamics of framing. It is apparent that human beings have an extraordinary ability to grasp which frame one is in, maintain it, and to go into and out of new frames, during ongoing action. The players have a reflexive awareness of the basic conventions of suspending disbelief, but not its detailed usage. The importance of suspension of disbelief is not always directly visible – I think it is often taken for granted.

An interesting issue that has not been discussed, are how suspension of disbelief as well as

keying in general, are related the players social status in 'real life'. I could suspect that players with high status, could get play with more inconsistencies and less co-operative and self-centred more easily accepted, compared to players with less status. However, the data did not give any good examples of this, perhaps because it is a touchy subject.

So far in this text I have mostly focused on largely cognitive or embodied techniques. But making the playframe in laiv also heavily involves the surrounding material world. In the next chapter, I move on to looking at how playing involves material aspects of the three dimensional world: clothes, food, smell, space, and so on. I will discuss more closely *how* these aspects of the material world are intertwined with techniques to make the playframe..



# 7.

# The material environment

## Introduction

In the introduction, I noted that the process of defining a situation involved both pre-existing structures and creative actions adapted to the specific context of performance. I have earlier looked at the way pre-existing conventions shape the keying in advance. I have also looked at how players are greatly able to adapt their use of these to the requirements of the context of action by using a range of techniques during play. In this chapter, I will turn to another type of pre-existing structure, namely the material environment. The players may, to some extent, shape the structures of the material environment used in play by selecting the costume, place, and food used. At the same time, they are limited by their available resources – changing the material environment can demand substantial resources. I will look at the interrelationship between the given structures of the material environment, and ways by which the players actively adapt to and utilise it by metacommunicative techniques during play.

The material environment has two different ways of influencing metacommunication. First, aspects of the material environment may work as symbols carrying information that is connected to the framing. Different food, costumes, and

props can all be signifiers with different conventional meanings. Second, the physical context also has an influence by its direct physical properties. Clothes are felt and regulate body heat, food gives taste and saturation, and the surrounding place provides the spatial surroundings for the players' framing.

I divide my examination into two sections, according to three different parts of the material environment. I start by looking at the costume and the personal equipment of the characters. Then, I consider the physical space and regions. These sections are further divided in two subsections: First, keying; how does it influence the transformation of actions from 'everyday life' to the playframe? Second, in-frame action; how does it influence the distinctions and meaning of the make-believe playframe? Note that reviewing three different aspects of the material world separately is an analytical abstraction from how the framing works in practice.

I must note that the concrete data that I have is limited on some accounts. The textual material and interviews give insight into how the players relate to food and clothing in advance of play, but it says less about how they use it actively as means during play. My written observational notes were not particularly geared towards place

either. Despite these limitations, I patch together an analysis below that suggests some insights into the topic.

## Costume

### 1. Keying

When looking at how costumes work in relation to keying, I separate between 1 a.) its effect as a visual communicative cue; and 1. b) its ritual effects.

**1 a.)** Street theatre performances take place in public, and actors have costumes as one of their few means available to communicate the keying. When the performers are dressed up in a costume distinct from the clothes of their 'everyday life', players can easily catch it as a keying cue (Mason, 1992). The same is the case among the laiv players. When dressing up for play in 'Amaranth', for example, I could easily identify others present as players by seeing their relevant costume. When another person approached the region play from far away, this could be seen as obvious by the group of players I was with, and one of them could therefore run and warn the person against interfering. Furthermore, by showing off a costume they showed others that they have invested the time, care and effort needed to make or get hold of it. Thus, others can see that they are already focused in their actions on taking the key seriously.

**1 b.)** As I observed it, their usage of costumes had ritual effect on the keying in two ways.

First, one thing is that costume from a shared setting symbolically binds the players together as a group. It wipes out their off-frame differences, in the same way school uniforms hides social differences between pupils who wear them. On the pre-meeting, the players had their different cultural affiliations attached in their style of clothing. Two of the players came in

dressed in sport training gear. Some others wore pale black jeans and sweaters. Others again wore alternative clothes from second-hand stores. Others again wore non-fashionable jeans with a regular t-shirt. And so on. When the players put on costumes before play, they had transformed from being visually diverse group, to being unified symbolically by sharing costumes from a shared setting.

Second, the use of costumes also appeared to have a magical keying capacity. By this, I mean that the players believed that the presence of costumes had a keying effect by itself - beyond being a symbolic cue. Let me explain this by comparison to a situation of drinking alcohol at a party. As people drink, an 'everyday life' situation is keyed to a frame in which the participants usually take on different roles and codes of conduct. Containers with alcoholic beverage, as well as the taste of the drink, and the feeling of intoxication, undoubtedly work as communicative cues. However, another factor is that the participants share a belief that the drinking of alcohol has a magical keying capacity of the frame by itself. I am admittedly speculative now, but I think that the costumes of the players exerted a similar capacity. The players related to their costumes as if they had a sacred, magical, property. Preparing the costumes was one of the activities that players would spend most time on when preparing for a play. The importance and time they spent on making and preparing details in relation to costumes was far beyond what one would think was necessary if it worked only as a communicative cue. The players themselves emphasised that that 'realistic' costumes was an important goal in itself. Some players treated the costumes as near sacred objects. They paid close attention to minute and nearly invisible details, such as type of fabric, machine seam or hand seam, the type of

thread used in the seam, the way it had been coloured, and so on. However, the degree of detail required appeared to be adapted to their ability to make detailed costume. For example, on the pre-meeting to 'Amaranth' the players discussed whether it was okay to use artificial fabrics, or whether they had to stick to the 'realistic' options of linen and wool. They agreed that artificial fabrics could be okay if it did not look too artificial, as it would require too much effort to only use 'realistic' material. Another example, regarded shoes: While laiv layers have a good ability to make clothes, making shoes are more difficult and more modern footwear (sandals or even boots) was present in-frame. I shall come back to off-frame breaks in costume in chapter 10.

The players appeared to primarily use costumes when in-frame. An exception to this was the final day of the pre-meeting in 'Amaranth', where some players wore costumes. Nevertheless this was connected to doing the drama rehearsals of in-frame relevance, and trying to play their character. None of the players wore their costume at the 'afterlaiv' party. I spoke to the players about this, and it appeared to be a taboo to do so. They noted to me that they resented costumes at the 'afterlaiv' party, apparently others had worn costumes there previously. After the class divided play in 'Amaranth', they related to each other as equals again, telling stories and laughing ironically at their behaviour in-frame. When the players met in the 'afterlaiv' party after play, everyone had switched their regular clothes back on.

## 2. In-frame action

Costumes are also important in relation to in-frame action. Considering this, I separate between 2 a.) the symbolical effects, and 2 b.) the physical effects.

2 a.) In 'everyday life', clothes can frequently work as symbols that in various ways communicate distinctions that are of in-frame importance. A clear example of this is the uniform and insignia system in the military. These provide minute details about what group a person belongs to and his position within the status hierarchy. Clothes work in a similar way, although more implicitly, in regular life. Bourdieu (1984) has also shown how the style of clothing communicates affiliation to social classes or social groupings.

In a similar way, the laiv players use their costume to communicate their character in-frame. In 'Amaranth' the players used the colour of the costume to communicate social status. The nobility wore togas in bleached white colour, or nice quality clothes in sharp colours. On picture 7.2, some of the slave characters are depicted, while picture 9.2 shows the nobility characters. One sees how the slaves mainly wore simple or dirty clothes, without sharp colours or off-white. A consequence was that playing a high-status character in 'Amaranth' required more of the player's craftsmanship, since he or she needed to make or otherwise get hold of better and more complex costumes.

Several characters used clothes as a means of signifying that they belonged to a particular grouping of characters. For instance, there was an important distinction in-frame between two different groupings of the Roman army - the two Praetorian guards, and the regular Legionaries. One of the Praetorian characters is depicted on picture 7.1, A visually salient distinction is that the Legionaries wear red tunics, while the Praetorians wear pale blue tunics. By using clothes as signs, the characters showed clearly to the others that they were part of different groups of characters. Furthermore, on the pre-meeting, the organisers emphasised that they wanted the gen-



*Picture 7-1. The blue tunic and lilac feathers on the top of the helmet identifies the character as a Praetorian guardsman. The components of his costume require much work to hand craft in advance. This make it advantageous to reuse the costume in many plays.*



der division to be more prevalent in the playframe than in 'everyday life'. Especially within the high status characters, the women characters should have less significance and power and behave according to a 'traditional' gender role pattern. One way that this was expressed was by assigning clearly feminine clothing to the high status female characters. Interestingly, not all female players played feminine women. The organisers allowed for some female characters as Roman Legionaries. These characters were not supposed to be feminine. Their clothes then reflected this: they had the same military costumes as their male counterparts.

2 b.) Players regarded the tactile physical feelings due to costumes as a being a part of the keyed frame. Whether a player feels cold, warm, or wet, depends on the type of clothing. Costumes from different settings of the playframe may vary in their capability of regulating warmth and moisture. This is particularly important when outdoors. Costumes can feel notably different than 'normal' clothes. The old-style garments often required to play female characters may be very tight and only adapted to a limited feminine way of moving. I asked a player on e-mail about how it feels to wear chainmail armour, a common costume made of metal:

*'Chainmail is not so bad. Mine weighs approximately 13-14 kilo now, a bit less than a usual backpack when trekking. To move in it is okay. You can run with limited speed, you get tired much faster, and it is in fact not so bad to sleep in (no sharp edges). You get very tired in the shoulders after a while, but if you have to, then you may with limited training walk with it permanently. If you additionally have to march, you need a light backpack, 10 kg in addition to the mail is heavy to carry and hinders the march a good deal. (...) Plate armour*

*makes everything worse. You cannot run with plate, it may be possible, but I think it would work badly. I have never tried this, though. To climb or swim is hopeless, to run is okay.'*

Such special physical feelings distinguish the in-frame sensations from those of 'everyday life'. Such use of clothes as a metacommunicative technique differs sharply from the way most other performance frames use them. In the theatrical frame, for example, only the visual symbolic effects of clothing are part of the performance frame.

## Physical space and regions

### 1. Keying

I start my examination by noting how certain frames being symbolically linked to specific regions in physical space. Album (1996) noted how interaction among patients in a hospital was connected to regions. The hospital corridor, smoking room and patient's room had different frames of behaviour attached to them. Something similar is the case in the theatre. In chapter 3, I considered how conventions of the theatrical frame and in particular the region of the theatrical stage historically became attached to physical regions of the modern stage building. Other examples are easy to come up with – sidewalks, restaurants, a park, a bedroom and so on – all have certain frames linked to them.

The keying of a laiv playframe, is also linked to a specific region. Players are obliged to be in-frame when they are within this region. Furthermore, the players are allowed to go off-frame if they want to take a break for some reason. An easy way of doing this is to walk out of the region of keying. For example, in 'Amaranth' I encountered a person who was taking a break to have a smoke. Smoking was not considered suitable



*Above, picture 7-2. Slave characters used grey, off white and neutral colours to signify social status. It also identified them as a grouping..*



*To the left,. picture 7-3. A player smoking before play. Smoking occurred discreetly in-frame, despite being anachronistic to the setting..*

action in-frame, since it was not historic. But he had moved away from the centre of region of keying, close to the boundary of the playframe on one of the roads leading away from the region. When I met him, he acted in-frame, but discreetly continued to smoke. Having moved toward the exit, he showed that he was not fully engaged in-frame (see picture 7-3)..

The boundary of the keying region in 'Amaranth' was only defined orally, in a somewhat ambiguous way, by the organisers before the play – such as 'included in the area of play are the green field from the farm leading down to the lake, the road leading to the farm as far as it is possible to see'. In 'Inside/Outside', the play actually took place in a sealed off room. But one of the 'walls' of the room was made of a piece of cloth. The players were instructed to treat the cloth as if it were a real wall, and not lean against it. Note that players must cooperate and find in-frame reasons for their character to stay in the region of keying, even if he or she might have good reason to leave.

In 'Amaranth', this meant that the players had to avoid walking off the region of play. This was not always straightforward. For example, one of the characters - Brutus - was revealed as a deserter. He escaped, but was hunted by his captors. He went off-frame, out of the region of keying. Now, his character may have had many good reasons to remain far away from his hunters. But this would be pointless from the point of view of the play. So, he (as a player) had to return to the keying area as a character in a way that was coherent with the action in-frame. In 'Inside/outside', three out of the four walls in the room which the players spent most of the time, were highly physical. But the fourth one, being merely a sheet, required a careful cooperation of all players not to lean against or attempt to go

through it. It is not only in laiv plays that the physical boundaries of a frame depend on the co-operation of the players:

*'Of course, theoretically it is possible to for boundaries like thick walls to close the region off physically; almost always, however, some communication across the boundary is physically possible. (...) The work walls do, they do in part because they are honoured or socially recognised as communication barriers, giving rise, to the possibility of "conventional situational closure" in the absence of actual physical closure.'* (Goffman, 1963:152)

In the examples above of other frames in 'everyday life', they are all permanently associated with a region by institution. This is usually not the case in relation to laiv keying, and it was not the case in 'Amaranth'. The region of keying was therefore noted both implicitly and explicitly.

I noted two ways in which the region of keying was implicitly signalled. First, similar to street theatre performers, the laiv players use props. Street theatre is performed on public streets, and naturally the performers do not have any stable physical region of keying. Instead, they can set up visible props that they carry with them to signal a region of keying (Mason, 1992). In 'Amaranth', some props were notably present in the region of play. In the garden behind the main building, the organisers had built a sacrificial altar. The players also kept their individual objects at places around the region of play. The camp of the legionaries had old-style tents, a campfire, and other equipment of the legionaries (shields, arms) lined up. A second implicit sign was that there were no visible objects that were not in accordance with the setting in the region of keying. The players discreetly covered all their 'off-frame' objects that were used in play. In picture 7-5, one can see how the modern sleeping bags



*Picture 7-4. The main building of an old farm was transformed to a Roman mansion in-frame. It was also the centre of the keying region.*

that the players used, were covered carefully from view by wool blankets.

The keying region was delineated by informing players explicitly on where the boundaries of the was. This may be done before play, through the written information delivered to the players, or orally on the pre-meeting. They also hung up visible written notes on the entrance to the region, which were oriented to people passing by.

The region of a frame can also have specific sub-regions that are off-frame. For example, in 'everyday life', the bathroom is usually a place where an individual can be relieved from a frame and engage in off-frame behaviour. In 'Amaranth', I could see this in two places. First, the outdoor toilet was an off-frame sub-region. Another such was the smaller building next to the main house. This was informed as an off-frame region before play. It was used as storage space for the off-frame equipment. Backpacks, mobile phones, and regular clothes were all notably visible here. Also, the organisers went there when they needed to conduct off-frame business of organising the play (see chapter 9); it was generally not accessible to others.

Finally, I want to underline how the surrounding physical environment is related to the presence of external discipline when keying. Foucault (1977) has noted that discipline is intertwined with how the physical architecture of a place enables monitoring. A prime example is Bentham's Panopticon prison design. Here, the architecture allowed all the inmates to be watched by central guards. A parallel example is noted by Album (1996). Patients would be able to maintain a small private space that others did not have to intrude on, if the physical architecture of the rooms allowed for this. In the corridor, the bed was in a space that was public and the

patients had to follow the conventions of a frame in public.

In 'Amaranth', the architecture allowed for separate rooms accessible to the noble characters, which they could retreat to private quarters. The players playing slaves were limited to staying in public view. Picture 7-5 shows their living quarters in the barn. The open space meant that they were in full public view of the others. This increased the need for them to maintain discipline in relation to the keying. The spatial surroundings of slaves meant that they were observed constantly by other players. The nobility, on the other hand, could retreat to private rooms and thus more easily avoid the monitoring of others. Nevertheless, both groups still had the possibility to move outside of the keying region to take a break, since there were no stable physical boundaries to the surrounding area. In Inside-outside, all players were present within one small room with no possibility to go outside this keying region. The players were right next to other players at all times during play. Even minute whispering of the other players could be heard. Players noted afterwards that the play had been very intense and stressful at times. This may have been due to the action in play. However, I think it may have been due to the fact that the physical environment enabled players to constantly monitor each other, giving very little room to avoid the keying.

## **2. In-frame action**

Now, I turn to looking at how the performance of the playframe is shaped by the surrounding region. I limit my discussion here to one specific example, namely the performance of social status in relation to place in 'Amaranth'. I shall show how the performance of in-frame social status was intertwined both with physical and symbolic properties of the surrounding region.



*Picture 7-5. The inside of the barn. The open space inside the barn, the living quarters of the slave characters. Notice that in order to follow the keying, the sleeping equipment is carefully concealed and covered to look 'old'.*

To a great extent, the players were explicitly aware of the way the spatiality of the region was utilized to enhance the status distinctions. How the different groups were to behave in relation to each region was carefully explained and to some extent rehearsed in advance.

The high status characters of the nobility resided in the central house. They were allowed to move about and do things freely in the common rooms in this building, although they had to show respect for other members of the nobility and not invade their privacy. The most prominent members of the nobility used private rooms, other members lived in shared rooms. Any slaves they met were obliged to avoid them or treat them with high deference. They had one important limit: they did not have access to the large barn, which was the domain of the slave characters. The norms regarding in-frame inter-

action between the nobility and the slaves was linked to the region it took place in. In general, the interaction was limited to simple commands when it occurred in public places where other characters could see them, but it could happen in a mutual way when they were in private.

In-frame norms regarding low status slave characters were also intertwined with the physical region. They could move about relatively freely, and talk to other characters that were not members of the nobility, when they were inside the barn. In the public playing space, they were still relatively free but they had to avoid meeting and intruding upon members of the nobility if they met them there. During a substantial period of time, however, the slaves were bound to a place by having to do work for their masters. This work consisted of cleaning, cooking, following them around, and so on. They were not

allowed to go into the house of the nobility, unless they had business there, or their master resided there. However, if they had business - such as cleaning, or serving - the slaves were free to move about. The players of the nobility were instructed on the pre-meeting to ignore slaves doing their work, and continue to talk about private issues as if they were not present.

## Final Remarks

This chapter has considered the importance of the material environment in play. Each laiv play takes place in a unique material context, which the players must relate to during play. Laiv plays differ from other performance mediums such as theatre and movies, in that more aspects of the material environment are linked to the framing process.

The players shape the context in advance to suit their needs. They bring with them particular food, select a place and make and get hold of costumes. Yet, at the same time, they are limited by the stability of the material world and the resources they have to change this.

The players also adapt to the context of action in the sense that they utilise all the means available to them as metacommunicative techniques in play. Both the physical and symbolic aspects of costume and region are turned from a necessary activity to a means of framing the ongoing playframe. Furthermore, as I have showed in the previous chapters, the players also appear very capable of adapting their keying conventions to

the requirement of a particular context. For example, I showed how the players would cooperate and avoid going out of the keying region as a character, or how they adapted the requirement for visual 'realistic' costume according to what was practical in the context of performance.

The pre-existing structures of the material environment intertwine with the actions during play. For example, the costume of the characters are acquired or made in advance but it is worn and felt during play. They give the players some possibilities in relation to how or where he or she can move. The physical properties of space influence how isolated the region of play is, or how much the players may see each other, in relation to keying. The spatial characteristics also give the players some possibilities and limitations when they perform social status. The food the players have available can be used intentionally as gifts, or eaten together in shared meals.<sup>1</sup>

I will come back to the topic of the material surroundings in chapter 9, when I discuss its relation to conventions more closely. In the next chapter, I will look more closely at how the players' use of casting possibilities as a means of framing. At the same time, these means are limited by contemporary cultural considerations.

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<sup>1</sup> The way the material world influences action also shows that there are factors that influence the framing process beyond the intentions of single individuals. This is particularly visible in relation to the region. The precise structures of the region chosen for play – such as the farm that was used in 'Amaranth' – are the result of a process that involved the intentions of many people throughout history. This is interesting in relation to 'everyday life'. The surroundings of people in 'everyday life' are the result of complex economic and social processes. In order to have a full understanding of framing, one would also have to map out the processes that have shaped the surrounding material environment.





# 8. The possibilities and limitations of the laiv players casting

## Introduction

In the previous chapter, I looked on how the players used techniques in connection with the material environment to shape the in-frame aspects. In this chapter, I shall continue my examination of how the players make and maintain the frame by studying the process of casting of characters. This is both related to keying, and the performance of in-frame aspects. The casting defines which characters the players play. This is one of the most important in-frame aspects. However, the process of casting process is governed by a range of keying conventions which sets some possibilities and limitations in relation to the use of casting to shape in-frame aspects.

In order to play a character, a player must be seen as eligible to be keyed to that character within the playframe. Ideally the players shall 'realistically' resemble characters, but it is not

possible to resemble everything in practice. Naturally, the players enter with their own given physical characteristics. The casting itself is regulated through a set of keying conventions. These define what characteristics which is required of a player in order to be eligible to play a character in the playframe. I shall review how there is a systematic difference in the difficulty of keying the various physical aspects of a player. Some aspects - for example, age - are keyed with ease. Other aspects - for example gender - have its keying resisted by the laiv players. I will consider the factors that related to the keying conventions. On one hand, by pragmatically adapting to the keying and suspending disbelief, the players can ignore lack of visual resemblance to the character. On the other hand, I will show that their keying possibilities are significantly limited by the social and cultural structures external to the activity of play itself.

In this chapter, I rely primarily on analysis of the players own discussions in the texts on laiv.org. I also have some limited data on casting from my interviews. I feel that the data is good enough to be reasonable certain about the general patterns in the local laiv network.

I will begin by doing a review of their discussions in relation to keying different aspects, including height, physical abilities, age, gender, sexual orientation, and skin colour. Afterwards, I will discuss various factors that may shape these factors.

## Reviewing the keying of different aspects of players

In the Internet discussions, the Laiv players did not seem to regard height as an important factor in casting for characters. In a debate on casting of skin colour, a player pointed out that people were considerably smaller in earlier ages, especially the poorer classes. However, my observation also confirmed, it was not considered a criterion for casting in plays in a historical setting such as the middle ages. I think this is generally right. I must also mention that I height did not appear as completely irrelevant in the casting for 'Amaranth', as the two powerful Praetorian guard characters were cast to two tall, stout men.

The players appear to considered physical appearance as easy to key. Those who played Legionaries in 'Amaranth', did not strike me as having a particular muscular or well trained appearance, and no one minded that. Non-human characters such as elves or trolls may sometimes appear in plays, although none of the plays that I was in had such characters. Playing these can involve using heavy make-up and a mask.

Age is an aspect that is frequently keyed by the players. Old players may play younger characters. In a recent play that the players discussed on

laiv.org, a large group of characters in-frame represented a high school class at the age of 16. They had all been played by older players aged 20-30. Players reported afterwards that the keying to young teenagers had worked out very fine. Further, characters that are old are nearly all of the time played by much younger players. In 'Amaranth' there were several old characters, including one of the players I interviewed. To play this character, the player changed his voice, put on some make-up, and dyed his hair grey.

Generally, male players play male roles, and female players play female players. There are exceptions, but they are not common – and then it is usually in the form of female players playing men. The stability of gender, were tacitly taken for granted in the players discussions. If and how straight players could be transformed to homosexual characters, were also discussed. Initially, a gay player reacted to remarks by other players that noted homosexual characters as 'extreme'. But several players responded by defended it. One argument was that homosexual characters were historically 'unrealistic':

*'It is quite extreme to play homosexual in most of the time periods that laiv plays are set to or inspired of (read: the medieval ages). It is a little like saying that it is extreme to play Christian in a heathen setting, or pacifist in an military army camp.'*

Another argument used, was that homosexual characters too easy would end up as resembling the cultural stereotype of gays. This was regarded as 'unrealistic':

*'The problem about a character like that, is not how extreme one find it one plays it out on the laiv. (...) You are supposed to look at a man, and interpret what you see as if this was a woman (if you are straight). And*

*then the question is, "how do I approach in order to seduce him?" You should take the character and find a sensible approach, and I do not think that the overly pompous, feminine drag variety is the right solution for this character if it is supposed to have any kind of deeper value.'*

In chapter 9, I shall get back to how the players use standardised conventions as a tool in play, also when performing characters. My findings suggest that it is in fact easier to play stereotypical characters since they make the communicative process simpler. One player used a somewhat opposite argument. Homosexual characters would be too close to the reality of 'everyday life'. It would be harder to maintain a separation between the character in play and 'everyday life', which is considered necessary to maintain a required role-distance in play. A different player wrote that it was difficult to act out homosexual behaviour, when he was straight. This implied such things as looking and talking flirtatious to other male players, which was especially difficult for heterosexual males. A gay player noted, ironically that he did not find it difficult to play heterosexual roles. Other players expressed more positive attitudes towards homosexual roles. They argued against homosexual roles being particularly difficult to play, or stereotypical, compared to other characters:

*'(...) no, I would absolutely not say that it is any more extreme to play gay than, for instance, vampire or a psychotic mass murderer. The whole point in laiv, is that you shall not be yourself. So, I would like to play gay on laiv!'*

Lesbian characters was also mentioned in the debate, but appeared to be accepted by female players.

The players were also sceptical towards the transformation of skin-colour. Elisabeth, a black

player, notes that she was usually required to make her character have her 'real' skin colour it could not be transformed. Considering that Oslo has a large ethnic population, there are notably few players in the laiv community with this background. The player noted here is one of the few (and well-known) exceptions. She had to make up stories to account for her different skin colour in the playframe. She took part in 'Amaranth', and co-operated with the organisers to have a character with a special background from Africa. But Elisabeth was not happy about always being limited to black characters. She responded to the prospects of playing a black character in the western play 'Wanted' as follows:

*'But, for instance, on wanted I felt that the skin colour became such an important part of the "costume" that it became difficult. It is wonderful to go to a laiv play and become someone else. But it is also nice to be able to come home, take off the costume, and become oneself again. I did not want to be black in USA right after the Civil War, but I would have liked to taken part in Wanted.'*

Many players were sceptical to this. Some claimed that if such transformation went directly opposite to knowledge of history, it should not be allowed since it could break the frame. One player called skin colour a 'very important part of the costume', much harder to disregard than, for instance, presence of glasses. But some players expressed positive attitudes. One argued that transformation should be allowed, since it was bad ethics to discriminate a player's repertoire of roles according to skin colour.

Finally, I also want to note that typecasting as a factor that shapes the casting. Then, the casting of players is not influenced by general characteristics, but rather through by the virtue of being a known individual. An example of this was a



*Picture 8-1., left and right page. A variety of players play a variety of characters in 'Amaranth'. However, which player plays which character is not coincidental.*



player playing the equivalent of a Roman Sergeant in Amaranth. I learned that this player was often cast into a type of characters that emphasised masculine leadership. Speaking to him about it, he noted that this was often not due to his wishes. Instead, he was often given such characters by organisers. Presumably, since the other players knew that he usually played this type of characters they could easily associate a set of character traits to him.

### **Casting as enabling and limiting**

While the players explicitly talk about their casting by noting the need for 'realism', it may hide more subtle metacommunicative effects. Some visual similarity between the player and the character can work as a standardised cue of the type of character played. This implies that seeing a certain physical characteristic, the laiv players may by default assume that a range of associated in-frame aspects about the character is defined. One may consider how this is something may lead to confusion about what a character is in the playframe – such as the appearance does not match an expected character. Such is the case, for example, when a male player plays a female character; or a coloured player plays a white character. This can leave the player uncertain about what aspects of the playframe they shall take for granted when suspending disbelief. One player argued on that this was an important factor, but he also noted that a way to handle this could be to make it explicitly clear during the preparatory process what traits of the physical appearance the players should pay attention to. Typecasting is another metacommunicative technique, which also is connected to the visual aspects of the player. In this case, the relation between a specific person and a charac-

ter type is standardised. I argued in chapter 7 that standardisation of the material equipment proved limiting for the range of settings that the characters could play. In a similar way, the standards on casting, also involving material aspect in terms of the human body, are limiting the selection of characters available to each. At the same time, the in-frame communication is also enabled by the presence of the standards above – since they may allow players to take more in-frame aspects for granted. I will come back to the communicative advantages of standardised conventions in chapter 9.

Nevertheless, the review above indicates that visual similarity is not of critical importance for successful keying. Above, one can see how the keying conventions are flexible and widen the repertoire of characters that the players can play. Their demand for physical similarity between character and player, are adjusted pragmatically according to the resources available. When these permit them to customise their casting to match small details, the conventions emphasise approximating casting more close to the imaginary playframe. On the other hand, players willingly suspend disbelief and accept the keying of age, when no other age group is available among the players. The similar is the case for height, physical abilities, and the keying into non-human races.

Looking at casting throughout the history of movies, it seems to have been adapted in a similar way. Nowadays, moviemakers have the ability to use much money on make-up as well as character selection in order to customise them to the character in the imaginary film frame on even minute details of action and appearance. The audience, on their hand, expect such close coherence. But this has changed through history: In American science fiction movies of the 1950s and 60s cast human actors into the role of aliens.

They had less advanced make-up and visual effects at their disposal. When these movies are screened today to an audience who is used to the high-tech digital effects, the casting conventions has changed and they may not accept the keying.

A question still remains. Considering the player's expressed need for 'realism', or the usefulness of standards, we still see that the players are capable of pragmatically adapting their keying conventions what is practically possible. *Why are they negative towards the keying of some characteristics, compared to others, whose lack of visual similarity to the character of the playframe is equally high?*

A likely reason for this, lie in the cultural context beyond the activity of play itself. External social and cultural factors may make some behaviour done as a character in the playframe, stick to the player as a person. This is in line with a point made by Goffman, that 'technical arguments' are often used to legitimise 'social considerations' in casting practices (Goffman, 1974:270-271). In the review above, we saw that players wanted to play heroic fighters or attractive maids, and accepted this keying. As one interviewee noted, some player's may want some characters because it makes them able to explore and confirm such values for themselves. Further, players may deny the casting of characters whose in-frame traits are regarded as negative by many in the surrounding society - such as homosexuality and transgender characters. When players avoids playing such characters, they are at the same time ensuring that that they are not associated to the negative characteristics they have in the surrounding culture.

A final comparison of the casting in laiv with that of other keying practices, raises some interesting questions. Many of the persons who play

Laiv, have background from the Norwegian FRP (fantasy role playing) games. FRP players play characters in a game where they create a shared narrative seated around a table together (Fine, 1983). In FRP, there is more loose connection between person and role. FRP players frequently play roles off the other gender, or other races. This practice could be viewed as a pragmatic keying mechanism, since there were originally mostly male players. In later years however, there has been recruited many women to FRP in Norway, but from my own knowledge of this culture, cross gender casting remains frequent. Furthermore, homosexual and cross-gender casting also appear in movies. While Goffman reported that actors avoided them in the 1960s (Goffman, 1974:277), they have more recently become accepted as parts for straight actors that may be even be played with prestige. For example, actor Tom Hanks did a performance of a gay lawyer with aids in the movie 'Philadelphia', which won him an academy award and critical acclaim. Furthermore, people do not in any way assume that he is homosexual.

*Thus, the above analysis of casting tells something about the strength of the laiv key, in the form of the power the key has to insulate the 'person' from the role he or she has in a keyed frame. Other keying practices in the surrounding culture, appears to have more of this power than laiv play.*

## Final remarks

Let me first present a brief summary of the main points of this chapter. The empirical review of the players casting practice showed that they had an emphasis on visual similarity between person and character on some aspects. On other aspects, it was less important. I have argued that visual similarity may have some limited advantage in play, due to a possible standardisation

connecting it with character types. Nevertheless the players seem to enjoy considerable flexibility in relation to this, being at times capable of ignoring the lack of visual similarity on a many aspects of the character. They are then suspending disbelief and adapting to the requirements of the context of the performance, in a way similar to how this has been described in the previous chapters.

However, some aspects are still regarded as important to have consistent from person to character through the keying. I have argued that this difference is due to influence on the keying conventions from the social context, and this limits the players possibilities in keying. Such limitation is opposed to what we have seen elsewhere in the text: that players are competent in shaping the action in the playframe by using all the means they have available to them. Instead, there is a clear tension visible between the influence of the cultural structures of the surrounding society, and the needs of adapting to the context of performance by suspending disbelief.

It may be interesting to reflect some more about this latter point. What is it about race, gender and male sexual orientation that make it so difficult to key? It may say something about some cultural views on human nature. Paraphrasing Goffman, a female player playing a female character would appear to 'be' a woman 'naturally' in 'real life', as well as within the realm of play (Goffman, 1974:283-285). Keying gender implies a view that gender is not more than a performance. Following feminist research, the behaviour as a woman is precisely this: social defined role. It is no more natural than other social roles. But while the essentialist view of gen-

der view has been put under critique,<sup>1</sup> it still remains a widespread cultural belief. The same is the case for homosexual behaviour.

In the next chapter, I will look more specifically on how players make and play in-frame aspects. To some extent it always intertwines with the keying. Like the use of casting, all the rest of techniques used to make and shape the in-frame performance must blend into and not break the keying.

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<sup>1</sup> Nissen (2001) provide a summary of this critique from the field of feminist theory, poststructuralist gender studies, and queer theory.







# 9. Making and playing motifs in the playframe

## Introduction

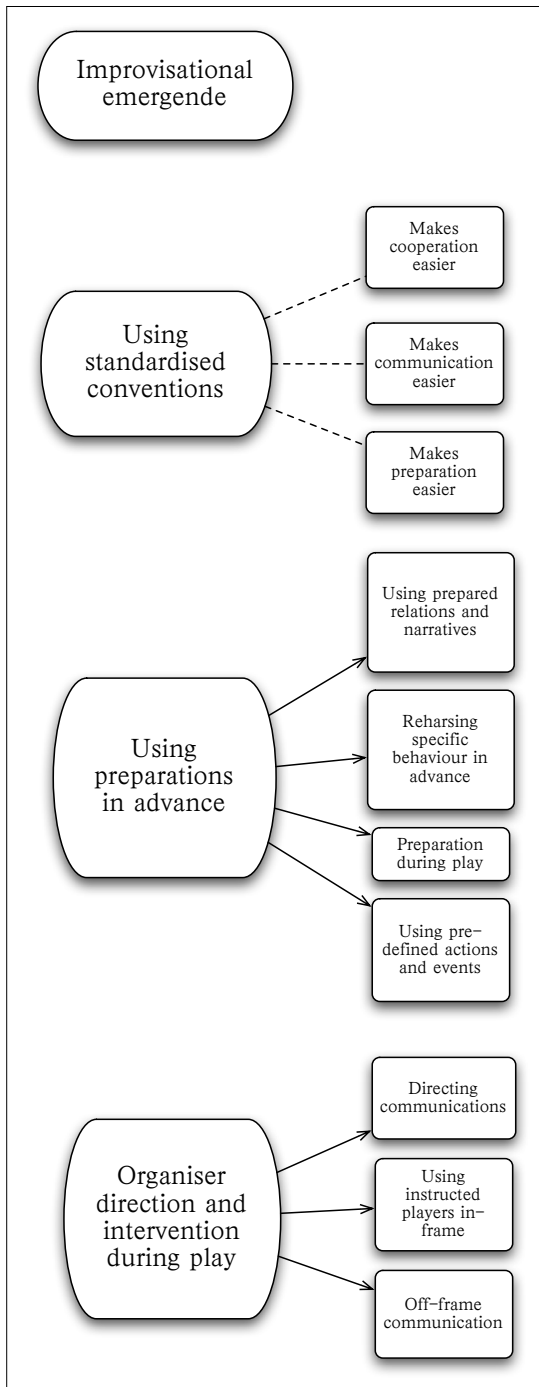
Up until now, I have had the primary focus on keying. However, in chapter 7 I considered how material objects and environment were used in a variety of ways in relation to shaping the in-frame action and chapter 8 showed how a variety of factors influences the repertoire of in-frame characters. In this chapter, I shall move my focus to dealing explicitly with the interaction in-frame. This is mostly related to various motifs. How do players come up with these motifs, and how do they play them?

There are a variety of terms used by the players that tell us something about their play of motifs in-frame. The terms 'playing out' or 'playing on' something refer to the performance of certain motifs in in-frame action. The players also use the concept of 'plot' to refer to the use of in-frame narratives that are used as motifs in-frame. This also has the form of a verb: 'to plot' to describe the action of engaging themselves in these narrative motifs. I separate between two different types of this. I use the term central narrative

point to refer to the 'plot' that is central to the playframe and involve all players. In most local plays, this is an important part of the play and follows a general standardised narrative sequence. Beginning at a low level, the action slowly builds up until there is a final public showdown just before the end of the play. Small narrative, on the other hand, refers to the smaller 'plots' that involve fewer players. The players also use other characteristics – such as relations, character idiosyncrasies, social status, that may also be used as motif for interaction in-frame.

I will pay close attention to how the play of the motifs involves a close relationship between pre-existing structures and creative action adapted to a specific context. The techniques differ greatly in both how and in the extent to which pre-existing structures shapes the action in the context of play. The concept of frame complexity refers to how much dramatic frame information is part of a frame. For example, a frame that includes character assignments, defined relationships and topic for joint activity is more complex than a frame that has defined character assign-

**Figure 9-1 The different metacommunicative techniques used to play in-frame motifs**



Note: the dotted line from standardised conventions, indicate that the three subtypes represent advantages of using conventions. The other boxes, represents subtechniques.

ments but no joint activity (Saywer, 2003:82). This is only a rudimentary definition for now, but I shall discuss frame complexity more thoroughly when looking at the ways in which it is connected to the techniques the players use to make and play the in-frame motifs.

The chapter is divided into 4 sections, each looking at a different type of metacommunicative technique used to make and play motifs. A chart of the various techniques and subtechniques, are seen in figure 9-1 to the left. First, I begin by looking at improvisational emergence. Players may spontaneously come up with new motifs actions during play, and improvise the further action as it develops, in a way that is similar to how improvisation occurs in improvised theatre. Second, I look at the use of standardised conventions when playing motifs. In a third technique, players rely on preparations made in advance to guide action in-frame. Generally, this is then reminiscent to the way theatrical actors rely on preparations when performing a theatrical play, but at the same time it also allow for considerable interpretation and improvisation. The fourth technique describes how the organisers may intervene actively in order to shape the way the players play motifs in-frame.

### Improvisational emergence

All techniques the players use include some improvisation, but in this section I shall consider how motifs may emerge exclusively by improvisation. This works by players defining aspects related to the in-frame motifs spontaneously, during play. Taken together, I have a limited amount of data on the use of improvisation in-frame. In their own discussions, the players emphasised the importance of 'natural spontaneity' in relation to 'immersionist' play of a character. Their own understanding of what this implied

was vague. Presumably, the use of improvisation in-frame largely relies on tacit knowledge. Furthermore, my own observations were too limited to give me many details about this. I nevertheless make some propositions about the use of improvisational emergence below.

I shall begin by comparing the use of improvisation laiv with the use of improvisation in improv. In improv, actors have very few structures of the playframe defined and specified in advance. Often, the basis is only a single keyword given spontaneously by members of the audience. Instead, a detailed playframe emerges due to improvisation by the performers during play. The extract presented in table 9-1 is an example of this process. In this scene, the improv actors make up aspects to use as motifs. In the outset very little was defined. The definition of Ben as a bus passenger occurred in turn two when he started fishing in his pocket and turn three when Andrew addressed him as a bus passenger. Then, his character was defined as a bus passenger. Still, when defined as this there are still many aspects of his character that is not defined. In line 7, Andrew says that he saw him trying to get in on the bus some stops back. He then adds another aspect. In chapter 6, I noted that a fundamental convention for the improv actors is the 'don't deny' rule. If player denies a proposition made by his co-player in play, the playframe can break. Furthermore, there is a convention in improv that actors shall systematically keep adding additional aspects to the scene. As a result, there is a changing and unpredictable development of the playframe on stage. Also the improvisation invention of aspects leads to higher and higher frame complexity. More and more aspects of the characters, relations, and setting are defined as time passes. Since the improv actors cannot contradict any of these when following the 'don't

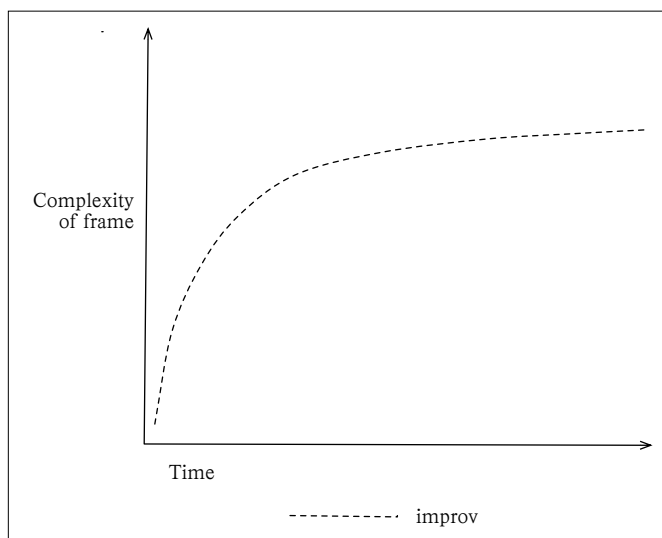
**Table 9-1 The beginning of a 2-minute scene at the Improv Institute' from Sawyer (2003:3)**

1		<Andrew steps to stage center, pulls up a chair and sits down, miming the action of driving by holding on an imaginary steering wheel>
2		<Ben steps to the stage center, stands next to Andrew, fishes in pocket for something>
3	Andrew	On or off?
4	Ben	I'm getting on, sir <continues fishing in his pocket>
5	Andrew	In or out?
6	Ben	I'm getting in! I'm getting in!
7	Andrew	Didn't I see you trying to get in the back door a couple of stops back?
8	Ben	Uh...
<p>'At the end of this exchange, Andrew and Ben have developed a reasonably complex drama. Andrew has become a bus driver, and Ben is a potential passenger. Andrew is getting a little impatient, and Ben may be a little shifty, perhaps trying to sneak on.'</p>		

deny' rule, there is an increase in the frame complexity. Figure 9-1 is a copy of Sawyers (2003:82) visual presentation of this development.

Compared to improv, the laiv players are more prepared and have more aspects and details specified in advance. Nevertheless, their playframe is not as specified as that of conventional theatre, where all motives and chronological action are specified in advance. This is partly due to the limits on memory and on the time spent preparing, which reduces the amount of details about the playframe that the players are practically able to define in advance. Furthermore, it is also due to the openness of spontaneous behaviour in the keying conventions. The development of the playframe during play remains unpredictable. In turn, this increases the difficulty relying on preparation, since how can a player prepare if

**Figure 9.1 Increasing frame complexity as the play elaborate in improv from Sawyer (2002:82)**



he or she does not know in advance how the playframe will be?

When the laiv players use an improvisatory technique, they always blend it with the aspects of the frame that are already defined. Thus, when they begin play the playframe has a higher degree of frame complexity than what improv has at the outset. They use an improvisatory technique that follows conventions similar to that of the improv actors: They are inventing and defining new aspects of the playframe during play that builds on the playframe that are defined in the outset. It was difficult for me to judge exactly when players were using this technique, and when they were acting through planned behaviour since the overt behaviour in both cases are similar. Nevertheless, I gained some insight when learning to use this technique myself. When in play, I had not planned and memorised my biography in detail in advance. When I, as a character, was asked by my co-players where I was from, who my parents were, what I had been doing in

the recent months and so on, then I had to come up with answers quickly. And once I had presented myself as something, I strove to remember it since if I acted inconsistently it would not be regarded as appropriate play. I think it would be difficult to manage to play laiv, without managing to use this technique. An example of the players own awareness of using improvisation is provided by Mary:

*Mary: 'I then talked a little about how I should treat her, and then talked with a third man in my group. The two of us made a shared story on what we had experienced back before the time of the play. I rehearsed both on play, and sat down in the real world to find out how the history was. It's about things like, that she does not suddenly say "Yes, you were employed last year!" - while I have a picture that I have been there since I was born, you know. Because, if you haven't agreed on something in advance, then it is like, the first one who suggests something wins. You just have to play along with it. You have to change your impression of the role, and that isn't fun. Geir: 'Improvise?'  
Mary: 'Yes. But it shouldn't be too much like that - if you have made up your impression of the character in relation to this and that.'*

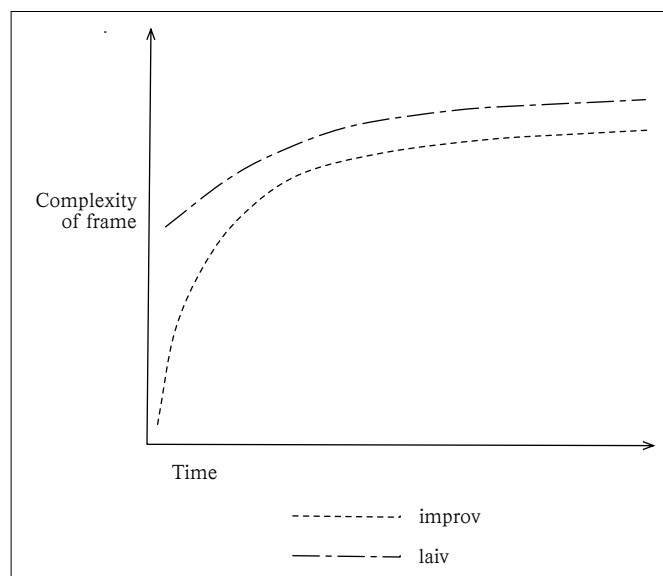
Similarly to an improv performance, once a definition of the playframe is made during the performance it cannot be denied. Note how Mary reflects on the strategic consequences of making and shaping motifs this way. When she is prepared, it gives her resources to have the initiative for control of undefined aspects of the playframe that relates to her. Like the improv players, the laiv players are bound by the 'don't deny' convention to suspend disbelief. Each definition, are part of the playframe for the remainder of the play once it has been made. Thus, Mary feels that this is a strong incentive for her to be prepared.

In other words, she can then exercise more power over those aspects of the playframe that relates to her own character. Like the improv players, the 'don't deny' convention makes the frame complexity increase over time thus limiting the possibilities of action. Above, Mary recognises that when someone has defined a relation with her character in-frame, it limits her possibility of defining it herself as something else for the duration of the play.

The main difference of the players' use of improvisation to that of the improv actors is that laiv players usually start out with a whole set of aspects of the frame defined in advance through preparations. In the example of Mary above, many aspects such as her characters name, her significant relations, the setting, and so on, has been defined in advance of the play. Below, I will go more deeply into how the players rely on preparations in advance when playing motifs. The concept of frame complexity shows how in frame action are both *based on pre existing structures* (since it need to match the given structure at any time), and at the same time *structuring future behaviour* by continuously elaborating the given frame-complexity. It limits future action that could be inconsistent, while at the same time enabling actions that are based on the given frame complexity (Sawyer, 2003).

Now, consider figure 9-2. It presents a visual abstraction of the elaboration of frame complexity in laiv compared to improv. I will point out that the use of preparations makes the frame complexity of laiv play much higher than improv at the time the play begins. After a short time of play, more aspects of the playframe may be defined. However, this would flatten out as the frame complexity increases, and fewer aspects are open for improvisation. Since the laiv players generally utilise a wider range of metacommuni-

**Figure 9-2 Increasing frame complexity as the the play elaborate in laiv and improv**



cative techniques than improv, one could expect the frame complexity to remain higher throughout a performance.

Compare this to how frames in 'everyday life' also vary according to the degree of frame complexity from the outset, and in the room for improvisational emergence. Some frames, such as a formal board meeting of an organisation, has a high frame complexity from the outset: all participants are ascribed defined roles, the timeline of the meeting is specified through an agenda, and everyone present must follow closely a set of rules and conventions governing how, when, and what to speak about. On the other hand, situations in public regions – such as in a café – may have much lower frame complexity from the outset. The roles of the people present can be much more open. Whether or not one talks to someone, what one talks about, and how the situation develops, may be settled there and then through improvisational emergence. When there are fewer aspects of the frame defined, as in the lat-

ter example, there is more room for negotiating the frame, including one's roles and relations.

When the playframe increases in complexity due to improvisational emergence, the players must work to remember many details that may emerge quickly. This can be stressful. The following example shows this. Lise tells of her experiences from a play in genre of laiv where almost everything of both the setting and character is made up by improvisational emergence. This throws light on some of the limitations of this metacommunicative technique. Lise explained that each player got a name and a setting defined. The players then begin play:

*'What we learned was that it was supposed to be a emergency meeting for a psychology department in a Norwegian university. Then you learned what position you had within the department. That was that. No one knew what the crisis was about, no-one knew anything. What happened was that we met each other, sat around a table, and began talking. Suddenly, someone coughed up an emergency. They said, yeah we are sitting here because we are going to talk about this and that. And then we had a crisis, all of a sudden. We improvised ahead. It is called improvised laiv, and it usually does not last for more than a couple of hours. Because it is too tiring after a while.'*

In this case, the players have spent no time preparing and learning about the playframe in advance. Instead, they have to rely exclusively on short-term memory. Lise mentions that this type of laiv becomes 'too tiring after a while' – the play lasts only a few hours, which is much shorter than the regular duration of plays. This can be due to the stress caused by the need to remember more details as the frame complexity increases. Maybe this is an important reason why

preparations are so important for the laiv players. Since laiv plays lasts for many days, it would be technically very difficult for memory if the players were to improvise everything.

Furthermore, if the players only used improvisation, one might imagine a problem of coordination. In the improvisational example referred to by Lise, the play only involved a small group of players gathered around a table. Laiv plays usually have some size, creating a small community. It involves players that are separated spatially. It would be difficult for one group of players to know what aspects of the playframe a spatially distant group of players had improvisationally invented. Thus, there could soon be major inconsistencies if players defined more basic characteristics of the playframe differently. By using preparation in advance, a large number of players have time to learn of a frame with the basic frame complexity - religion, setting, characters, narratives and so on – being consistently defined in the outset.

One can compare this challenge with the problem that criminals who are suspected of a crime face in police interrogation. They can try to trick the police by improvising a fabricated story that give them alibi. This often fails, as the police manage to find inconsistencies in their stories, and eventually breaking their frame. These inconsistencies may be within their own accounts. Alternatively, there can be inconsistencies in relation to the accounts given by others on separate locations. If, on the other hand, the criminals has thoroughly prepared and rehearsed a shared story in advance, they have a smaller chance of appearing inconsistent.



## Using standardised conventions of in-frame aspects

Use of standardised conventions in relation to in-frame aspects is not a technique that is used separately, by itself, but in conjunction with the other techniques. I have noted throughout the text how a variety of aspects of play, are based on conventions. Many aspects of in-frame motifs, are also based on conventions. A range of examples, are presented in table 9-1. Now, I shall first consider 3 different advantages about the use of conventions in-frame. Then, I shall argue that the low frame complexity make the players more dependent on these advantages.

### 1. Cooperation

Becker (1982:55-57) note cooperation as important for a many cultural activities. For example, consider the scale used in western music. That all musicians take for granted the use of such a scale greatly eases co-ordination among them. If no such convention existed, the musicians would have to spend much time and effort to agree upon a synchronized way of playing before every performance. This effect of conventions in laiv play is important in relation to the performance of motifs in laiv. For example, in 'Amaranth', the Legionaries were enemies with the Praetorians. During play, the conflict escalated and the Legionaries got hand of more and more evidence that suggested the Praetorians was involved in treason. I noticed the grouping of Legionaries talking about having a showdown with their enemies early in play. They were itching for action. But they didn't do anything as the time went. 'Why are they so unable to act, when they say they want to act?' I wondered in play. But if the players had taken decisive action at halfway in play, would have been a serious break

**Table 9-2. Examples of standardised conventions in play of in-frame aspects**

Aspect:	Example:
central narrative chronological structure	slow build up of conflict after start of play, a peak on the final day, play ends right after
small narratives	love, jealousy, enemy, personal
characters	witch, kind old wizard, stupid farmer,
genre/setting	western, '1984', fantasy, 19 <sup>th</sup> century Empire
relations between characters	Teacher-pupil, servant-master, parent-child, romantic affair, lovers, knight-squire

of conventions. Both they and their enemies knew that the showdown would come on day 5, the final day of the play. To do this earlier would have broken down the coordination that is needed to make the final showdown occur on the final day of the play.

### 2. Communication

This is frequent in many types of performances. Becker (1982:43) describes how a performance of the classical ballet 'Romeo and Juliet' takes place before an audience having a general knowledge of the nature of romantic attachment, of traditional gender roles, and of the basic story of Romeo and Juliet. This makes it easy for them to grasp what is going on on-stage. The audience are able to recognise some basic cues in the dance of the performers, and can 'fill in' what is missing based on their background knowledge. In a similar way, laiv players rely on cues in play that refers to certain standards. For example, I have showed how the different characters in Amaranth used costume to show which

grouping they belonged to. In the case of the roman Legionaries, for example, the costume they wore - Roman armour and uniform -also immediately referred to shared conventions. One could use this to infer that they were soldiers, that differences in armour and uniform corresponded to difference in rank, that they might pretend to speak Latin, that they would be concerned with honour, that they maintained discipline.

### 3 Preparation

By using conventions in this way, it also becomes easier for the players to prepare before play. In the example above, the players would not have to learn and memorise so many details about Roman Legionaries since they already share knowledge of basic aspects about them. In the case of the Legionaries, the preparations for the Roman Legionaries also included material components - namely, getting hold of appropriate costume. This included a chain mail, helmet, sword, and sandals - as seen on picture 7-1. All these items must be specially crafted by hand in advance, and this is a time consuming and resource demanding process. Most of the players of the Legionaries themselves, belonged to a group that specialise in appearing as Romans at various occasions - also in Laiv plays.<sup>1</sup>Therefore, they had most of the equipment ready made. One sees here how the conventions of one grouping - the Roman Legionaries - were embedded in permanent material equipment. By relying on the use of this grouping in-frame, the total preparations needed are reduced..

Having reviewed the advantages by using conventions, I shall now consider why laiv players have to rely on them. In the theatre, the actor receives detailed instructions and detailed scripting of actions of the characters in advance of the

play. Professional theatrical actors are also very skilled in rehearsing the control of minute details of bodily behaviour after years of practice (Lagercrantz,1993). Taken together, this makes the frame complexity much higher than in laiv. As many more in-frame aspects are defined from the outset, the theatrical actors have much less freedom for spontaneous actions during the theatrical performance. The advantage of this is that it enables the theatrical actors to present an intricate and original narrative to an audience, with unexpected twists and turns. Furthermore, it makes them able to perform characters that appear complex and nuanced, with contradictory intentions. They do not have to rely on so simple stereotypes that are easy to grasp to communicate to their audience. On the other hand, I showed above that laiv plays use metacommunicative techniques that define fewer aspects from the outset of the play. Their lower frame complexity makes detailed communication more difficult than in the theatre. This makes the laiv players depend increasingly on standardised conventions in relation to the performance of in-frame aspects, as they are more dependent on using this as a metacommunicative technique to handle co-ordination and communication.

The players dependence on conventions, illuminates tensions between the context of performance and the general keying conventions. On one hand, too high frame complexity in advance would result in a lack of freedom during play that would breach the requirement for 'natural' spontaneity in the ideology of immersionism (see chapter 2). On the other hand, some players argue that the characters in laiv play are too stereotypic, and that the narratives are too predictable and filled with clichés. Some claim that

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<sup>1</sup> The homepage of this group is: [url: http://legxv.uio.no/leg-history.html](http://legxv.uio.no/leg-history.html)

this should be changed to be more complex and original, to be more in tune with their conception of realism. Yet given the above analysis, this would require breaching the ideology of immersionism and have a much higher frame complexity from the outset. Furthermore, this can be compared to the similar tension between authentic individualism and standardisation that exist in modern life. In modern urban life, people know less about each other and meet each other for shorter time in separate contexts (Christie, 1982). Like the laiv players, urban citizens strive to communicate a complex and unique identity quickly and easily at the same time. They also rely on conventions as a primary communicative tool – in the form of one of the limited number of consumer goods that have a widely known standardised brand. Yet, precisely because it is standardised, they become less individualistic and unique at the same time (Dokk Holm, 2004; URL: <http://www.ddlifestyling.com>)

## Using preparations in advance

Having now looked at both the use of improvisation as well as the use of conventions, I shall now consider three different ways that preparations in advance are used to make and perform motifs in-frame.

### 1. Using prepared relations and narratives as a motif in play.

The social relations of one's character is one of the primary subjects of preparation. To some extent, relations are based on standardised conventions (see table 9.1). By itself, a relation creates a motif since the involved players can use it as a topic of play. Having relations with status difference, romantic relations, family relations, enemies and friends, provides an opportunity for interacting on these issues. For example, in 'Amaranth' one player played a slave with high philo-

sophical knowledge who worked as a teacher to a young and ignorant member of the nobility. Both the players could use the teacher-student relationship as something to 'play out' during play.

The laiv players are very aware of that a wide range of events in the playframe cannot be played out by only one character, it is a collective effort. These events may depend on having someone in play to 'play up against', someone who responds. Picture 9-1 illustrates how players in 'Amaranth' viewed the performance of social status as based on relations. Mike explains:

*Mike: '(...) on laiv plays in General, everyone should play out their role as if they were part of a whole. Our submissiveness as slaves was a necessity for the creation of a nobility. We could not make them by saying, "Ho ho, I am the great nobility!". It was dependant on them playing down, and that in that way, the atmosphere was built up by both the Nobility and slaves playing according to this. This is opposite to the first example, where you played your character as if it would be your role. Then, there is more attention on yourself than what you make.*

*Geir: 'You are a part of a unified whole?'*

*Mike: 'You become part of a unified whole. You shall play out your character, and be a part of something greater - the atmosphere, experience, the story, the picture that is about to be painted.'*

In connection with preparing the relations, players also prepare more specific small narratives. These are closely related to the relations and extend these in some way that adds possibilities of dramatic action. Organisers may suggest small narratives on the character sheet, or players themselves can plan and talk about it before play. Differently from the central narrative, small narratives only involve some of the players

in play. To a considerable extent, the players rely on standardised conventions when selecting the topic for these stories (see section above). For example, Hans played a 'secret love affair' in 'Amaranth'. He had arranged in advance that his character was secretly in love with the character of another player. As a slave, he was not allowed to engage in this type of relation. He used this prepared topic as something to 'play out' during play:

*'The second thing was that I had a small sweet and innocent love-plot. It was very innocent, because we were not allowed to. So the only thing we did was that when we passed each other we stroked each other in the hand, or on the back, or something like that. Or, we could look at each other - we had moments where we had eye contact for several minutes. It was sweet and nice.'*

In 'Amaranth', the players' and organisers' preparations for the central narrative included making and distributing background reports about the playframe setting to the players. These provided description about the historical period, the various important characters and groups of characters in-frame, the various religious deities present in-frame, and about the costumes and equipment required. These were between 10 to 25 A4 pages long. They also used the pre-meeting to give information to all players about the in-frame power struggles related to the central narrative. Each player was also given a 'character sheet' – about one half A4 page giving a written description on his or her character.

The main motif of the central narrative was a conflict of power. The organisers defined different groupings with different interests, within the Roman nobility. The most significant of these were the Praetorians, the Senator and his family, and the grouping of Roman guards led by the

Tribune. During play, these groups had different interests. The Roman guards and the Praetorians were antagonists, and wanted to destroy each other and gain powerful influence with the Senator. The family of the Senator were defending their political power and could try to summon gods and demons through mystic rituals, in order to get access to divine power. In play, the players could rely on these preparations to engage in heavy 'plotting' against the other groups. This is a term the laiv players use to denote the performance of narratives in a more or less competitive manner.

The preparations themselves rarely determine the chronological development of events in the playframe. Instead, they are used as a resource for a more improvisatory action connected to the motif during play. How it is performed and what happens are decided in the context of action. One player gives an example of this. Part of his prepared character was a secret that he was the father of another character in-frame:

*'I had this secret fatherhood which was to be revealed. I planned that in advance - how I should proceed, who I should tell it to first, and then... You get response when you play things. Many things happened there that I had not expected. I told it to Ambrosia first. And she ran furious into the living room, and told Claudia. Suddenly, a whole lot of people knew. I had to hurry to tell Druscilla - my daughter - before she heard from anyone else. I had not expected it to happen so fast then. I had planned something in advance, but I had to adapt to what happened.'*

## **2. Rehearsing specific behaviour in advance.**

A second way is to prepare more specific sequences of behaviour that one or more player can play. When the players are using such rehearsals, it resembles the way actors in the thea-



Picture 9-1. The laiv players regarded the creation of status differences in-frame as built on the performance of relations between characters..

tre prepare for a play by rehearsing their bodily behaviour.

One player may prepare certain routine behaviour, which may be used as a motif in-frame. An organiser separates between two different types of this: 'hook' and 'signum'. The former point to using idiosyncrasies to express his character to the other players. One player write about this on laiv.org:

*'Hook is a peg the player may "hang" his or her character on, that will make the role distinct both to the player and to the rest of the participants. Examples of hooks may be a funny gait, a dialect or accent, unusual mannerism, an often repeated phrase, peculiar dress etc. (...) Giving a player a good hook will let him or her get a "feel" of the role, and may also serve to structure the game if the hook is chosen wisely.*

*Choosing a hook should be done in co-operation with the player. (...).'*

On the other hand, a 'signum' points to the use of an idiosyncrasy that makes the player able to 'feel' his character when he is alone and not active in social play:

*'A good signum should reinforce the image of the role: I.e. a spiritual role might meditate, a carpenter should have a wooden spoon to work on, a soldier might want to play dice, a lady-in-waiting might groom her hair or try on dresses etc. The important thing is that the task is simple, not tiresome and is connected to the role'*

For example, in 'Amaranth' the Legionary characters spent a significant part of the time brushing and oiling their rather large armour. This was dull work, and they did it much by themselves. Nevertheless, they did it several times over. Pre-

sumably, they regarded it as a simple way to perform a motif in-frame.

Another way is for a group of players to rehearse more extended behavioural sequences, and use them a motif in the performance during play. For example, all the players in 'Amaranth' took part in shared drama rehearsals on the pre-meeting, focusing on bodily behaviour. These were lead by a professional actor. They practiced how to 'play out' the status, with the use of their body idiom: low status was indicated by looking at the ground, having a crouched body, a low voice, positioning oneself below or behind the persons of higher status. High social status was displayed by standing upright, looking firmly ahead or in the eyes of other people, and being positioned in front of, or above, the low status characters. These were small exercises lasting a few minutes, done by a rotating group of players with the others as audience (see picture 9.2). Notice that the use of this technique resulted in a noticeably higher frame complexity, as it defined many details about the physical performance of in-frame relations.

Another way was that players that had characters with similar religious affiliations, were divided in groups the practiced how to perform their respective religious rituals in play. In picture 9.3, one sees a separate grouping of players playing dance slaves of the nobility. The characters of the three organisers were part of this group. Before play, they rehearsed sequences of choreographed dances that were reflected the mood of the Roman setting. This was used as a basis for using the dances as a motif to perform in the playframe. At the same time, the organisers intended that the dancers should try to match their style of dance to underline a shared

mood in the playframe. This was inspired by the workings of the choir in the ancient Greek theatrical plays. When the organisers were among those who played dance-slaves, it could also work as a metacommunicative technique controlled by them.

Language is an aspect that may also be prepared to be used as an aspect in relation to play on in-frame motifs. For example, the setting of the playframe in the play 'Europa' was set in a contemporary refugee camp. The players were participants from different countries, and were to use their own language during play. This in order to facilitate the creation of ethnic difference and conflict in-frame. A feeling of alienation among refugee characters were created by having players from Russia playing the guard characters. They were speaking Russian - a language that no-one of the refugee players understood<sup>2</sup>. Another play organised, 'Panopticorp', had a setting in the office buildings of a multinational public relations company. The players here learned to use a special set of linguistic terms in advance, to shape the in-frame play. Widing (2003:204) write about this:

*'Only one thing was given to the participants in printed media. The corporate dictionary, CorpDic. The contents of this folder framed the whole event, putting focus on certain perspectives while marginalising others. It presented dozens of concepts, transforming language, and the usage of it:*

*"Corpspeak - The 'slang of Corpers. Since Corpspeak embodies Panopticorps Corpfil [the corporate philosophy] and organisational structure, mastering CorpSpeak is not just a question of "fitting in," but a measure of understanding how*

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<sup>2</sup> Part of the preparatory material from Europa is reproduced in Appendix III.

*PanoptiCorp works.” (PanoptiCorp CorpDic, 2002)*

*Language is a way of positioning. The dictionary certainly structured the character interpretation and expression in certain patterns.’*

It is interesting that the laiv players in the latter case has a a reflexivity concerning concernig language use not unlike that of the research tradition of discourse analysis:

*‘DA [discourse analysis] has an analytic commitment to studying discourse as text and talk in social practices (...) the focus is(...) on language as (...) the medium for social interaction(...) One theme that is particularly emphasised here is the rhetorical or argumentative organisation of talk and texts; claims and versions are constructed to undermine alternatives.’ (Potter, 1997:146;, emphasis in original; quoted by Silverman, 2001:179),*

What make the laiv players approach special, are that they *intentionally use such knowledge to shape* the social reality of the playframe.

### 3. Preparation during play.

The players also use preparation during play. The way this occurs is reminiscent of the way one in ‘everyday life’ can think about something special to say, or do, right before a particular social occasion. It draws upon a general reflexivity humans have in all situations of how one's behaviour is perceived by others.<sup>3</sup> David remarks the following about it in relation to laiv play:

*‘Laiv is not like film. You are, in a sense, both in front and behind the camera all of the time. Yeah, it's just like when you are by the bed with a woman. And, at least as I do it -*

*you think that “now it would be very cool to lead her elegantly down on the bed”. Then I see that it lacks a pillow. So, while I kiss her, I lift a pillow into the bed, so that it lies right. Then lead her down. That is how it is in laiv as well. You have a lot of people who have a ritual. And then you have many things to make a fire with.’*

Thus a player may think about how something special to do in a certain situation, or a special way of doing something. This is not from the perspective of the character, but rather from an off-frame perspective of what makes a good situation in-frame, a good performance for one's co-players. For example, one player noted how he would use the time in the evening before he went to sleep to think about and plan roughly what he should do. In ‘Amaranth’, David played character Brutus, a former Legionary had taken him captive after finding that he was a deserter. This coincided with the fact that the player of Brutus had to go to work off-frame the next day. The player told me how he used the time while he was away to think about how he he had been doing in play. He thought up and planned a scene that would make a good event in-frame. He got up on the roof, to have the attention of the other players. He would then hold a speech about Christian values, which he planned in some detail. When he went into play again, the scene went much according to plan. Eric, who played one of the regular legionaries, noted how he experienced this scene:

*Eric: ‘He went up naked on the roof, and preached. We were not allowed to shoot him. It is very dangerous to shoot at people, when they are balancing at the roof<sup>4</sup> of a building, you know. We have to take*

3 In social science, this reflexivity has been discussed by both Mead (1934) and throughout the works of Goffman (1959, 1961, 1967).

4 As the common practice in laiv is, the legionaries used bows which had the front end padded with a round pad filled with soft fabric.



*Picture 9.2. The nobility, with the Senator in front. In advance of play, the players learned to use physical positioning, posture, and gaze as means to perform status differences.*



*considerations like that.*

*Geir: 'But it was cool that he stood there?'*

*Eric: 'Yeah, that was very good play.'*

*Claudius came and said "Yes it is not so dangerous where you go, but just get off my roof". It was kind of like, "lets make some show!". Perhaps a little like planned and directed play. It worked very well for the other players. It was like he had planned it for himself.'*

This technique is very flexible as players may respond to unforeseen developments in play, while at the same time be more prepared and thorough than if they had to use improvisational emergence.

Preparation during play faces a challenge in relation to the keying. In 'everyday life', it is not accepted if behaviour on informal social occasions appears too self-conscious and planned. If an opening line is too stiff and appears over-planned, it may result in a break of frame. A similar attitude is present in improv, where planning ahead over the next turn of talk during a performance is regarded as inhibiting the improvisational freedom of the others, as well as limiting their inventiveness during play (Sawyer, 2003:chapter 5). In chapter two, I noted how the laiv ideology of 'immersionism' emphasised the importance of 'natural' spontaneous actions. This conflicts with planning during play, as this is based on off-frame plans and reflections. In the example above, we see that Eric sensed that the action was planned (lines 12-13). Nevertheless, he suspended disbelief and disregarded that it could have been planned. Unlike preparations in advance, there is no way to know for certain what a player plans by himself during play. Players may fabricate that in-frame behaviour is spontaneous and not planned if they wish to do so. In the example above, David must have pretended that he was not acting in a carefully

planned way. This is similar to the challenge faced by hosts of TV-shows who must fabricate the performance as improvised and spontaneous, when it is actually carefully rehearsed and produced.

#### **4. Using pre-defined actions and events**

A fourth way of using preparations in advance is by comprehensive scripting of actions in advance. Scripting of actions is primarily used as a means to make and perform the central narrative. This is because exactly how the players play the motifs in relation to the central narrative remains unpredictable. A player on laiv.org writes:

*'The biggest factor of chaos on any laiv is the players. There is little doubt about that. You can't expect that the players do anything that an organiser has planned, if the player is not explicitly informed about this. When the player gets the character, it stops being a creation of the organiser, instead being controlled by the player. Unless it is explicitly described single acts that the role shall do, an organiser cannot expect that a character act in a specific way.'*

In spite of relying on regular preparations in advance and conventions, the players' behaviour remains very unpredictable. In the next chapter, I will show that the action may develop in such a way that the frame breaks as a result. A way to try and avoid this is to pre-define certain actions or events in advance.

One frequent technique players and organisers may pre-define a basic timeline of certain important events in the playframe. The players are then instructed that these events are important to actions in the playframe. The outcome of these events does not need to be pre-determined. Mary told how the central story in a play was centred on an announcement of the King to the location of a new Monastery that was to be an-



*Picture 9-3 show the dance slaves performing.*

nounced. The characters were from two different towns that were interested in having the Monastery built at their place. Through their play, they could affect the King's decision. The set timeline dictated that the decision was to be announced on the final day of the play. It was a peak in the ongoing narrative of conflict between rival towns, with a victor being announced. The play could end right after, in due time.

'Fateplay' is the name of a second technique with more extensive and detailed scripting of the actions of individual characters. This was developed by a group of organisers who found that the regular organisation of narratives in laiv play – involving the techniques described above – give the players so much improvisatory freedom that it became impossible to organise a more complex narrative. This group drew inspiration from theatrical scripting, and created a new metacommunicative technique. When using 'fateplay', the organisers take out the skeletal essence of a story. This essence is specified down to the minimum necessary pre-defined actions,

for each individual character. These actions are referred to as 'fates', by the players. Each has the responsibility of memorising his or her pre-defined actions and carrying them out in play. (Fatland, 2000). In a text about organising fateplays, Fatland (ibid.) gives the following example:

*'Let us imagine we are making a contemporary Fateplay for a small number of people, and want to base the story on that of Shakespeares "Hamlet". We decide to let the characters be central persons in the Shipping Business and call the play "Offshore", duration of one weekend. We then proceed to list up the main characters of the Hamlet Storyline:  
Eric Windgraven Senior, the wise owner of "Bantam Shipping Ltd."  
Melissa Windgraven, his wife  
Eric Windgraven Junior, their son (the hero of our story)  
Judas Windgraven, Senior's envious brother.  
(The characters correspond to the Old King, the Queen, Hamlet and the New King of*

*Shakespeares play). The Fate of Senior is simple enough: "You shall be killed by your brother on Friday. On Saturday morning you shall return as a ghost to tell your son about the murder and crave revenge.". The Fate of Melissa: "When your husband is dead you shall immediately marry his brother. On Sunday Dinner you drink of the cup your husband offers you." The Fate of Judas: "On Friday you shall poison your brother. On Saturday evening you shall send your son to a mental asylum. On Sunday Dinner you shall poison Junior's wine. You shall drink of the cup he gives you, and then offer some to your wife." The Fate of Junior: "On Saturday you shall pretend to be mad. On Sunday morning you shall return. During Sunday dinner you shall give the cup your father gives you back to him, suspecting the wine is poisonous."*

Furthermore, the pre-defined actions may be scheduled to happen in two different ways. One way is to instruct players to do them in relation to a chronological point in time – for example, 'On the second day of the game, you shall...'. Another way is to use the actions of others as a trigger. For example, 'When a woman is calling you little man, you shall...'

'Moirais Web' is the name of the play that first used this technique. The central narrative was here based on the myth of the love story and marriage between Orpheus and Eurydice in Greek mythology. In this play, the organisers wanted to 'play out' the narrative so that the same basic tale happened as in the 'original' story. Without explicitly instructing the characters to do certain actions, they could have acted in different ways than in the 'original' narrative (Fatland, *ibid*).

Fateplay was also utilised in 'Amaranth'. All the players received one pre-defined action for each

day of the play. This was required to be done sometime during that play. Thus, each player did not have many actions that were pre-defined - only four. Thus, only a rough storyline could be pre-defined by the organisers. This is related to the context of the keying. A player had to learn each fate in advance – and due to the limit on memory mentioned above, the shared number of actions they can remember is limited. Furthermore, I do not know the precise details of how exactly the organisers planned and wrote these pre-defined actions, and the extent to which the major in-frame events was pre-defined. They were given to the players, rather haphazardly, a few days before the play by e-mail. I would assume that using 'fateplay' requires extensive work. If 50 players had 4 pre-defined actions, it totals 200 pre-defined actions. Thus, it would probably be very practically difficult to organise a play with that many players that involved more extensive use of pre-defined actions.

How the players were to perform the pre-defined actions was a topic of discussion on the pre-meeting. Interestingly, the organisers emphasised that the pre-defined actions was not mandatory. Rather, they stressed that it had an optional attribute – if a pre-defined action did not feel as a 'natural' action to do in-frame, one did not have to do it. For example, one player of 'Amaranth' told me how his character had been given a pre-defined action, in the form of doing an aggressive action towards another player. But, during play the relation that his character had to him had developed in a rather friendly manner. He did not feel that the 'fate would be an appropriate way of behaving, it would feel unnatural' given the friendly way their relation had developed in-frame.



*The picture 9-5 on the upper part of the left Page shows the three organisers discussing their final plans and decisions about the play. The picture 9-6 on the lower part of the right page shows the final briefing before play, lead by the three organisers on the stairs. The organisers are the leaders in a laiv play, making important decisions concerning both the play of in-frame motifs and off-frame practical issues.*

This shows how the use of pre-defined actions may conflict with the general keying conventions in two ways. On one hand, the ideology of immersionism regards the 'natural' freedom of the characters as essential to the keying (see chapter 2). Thus, a strict use of pre-defined actions – as in the example given by Fatland above – would likely be seriously at odds with this as it could be perceived as a constant artificial off-frame influence on their action. It may also reduce the suspense, and the competitive play related to 'plotting'. On the other hand, there remains a possibility of a break of internal consistency since the laiv key still involves considerable unplanned improvisation. When only a skeletal outline of a narrative is pre-defined – as explained above – other in-frame issues that are not pre-defined may develop in ways that may result in apparent inconsistencies with a pre-defined action. An example of this would be the paradox that had resulted if the player noted in the example above actually had been aggressive toward his in-frame friend. Thus, by making the pre-defined actions optional, the 'Amaranth' players and organisers were able – in a contradictory way – to adapt their use of this metacommunicative technique to the general conventions and requirements of keying. Finally, in terms of frame complexity, 'fateplay' seem to have a more powerful impact and is leading to a higher level of frame complexity than the other preparatory techniques discussed in this section. It specifies action down to

relatively small detail, leaving relatively less room for improvisatory emergence and negotiation.

## Organiser direction and intervention during play

Let me present this technique by a brief comparison with the theatre. Once a theatrical play has started, there are not many ways for the instructor to influence the performance. He or she has a very passive role (Lagercrantz, 1996). The organisers of a laiv play, on the other hand, do not remain passive, but actively influence the playframe during play. A limit of my analysis of this topic is that organisers start planning and preparing how they can direct influence the playframe up to a year in advance, but I do not have much data on what they actually do in this process. Similarly, it was difficult for me, to follow closely where the organisers moved and what they did. Nevertheless, below I present 3 different metacommunicative techniques used by the organisers to direct the action in the playframe.

### 1. Directing communications.

One way is for the organisers the organisers may send 'letters' to characters in the playframe to influence events in play. In 'Amaranth', letters were received from 'outside' the place of play. These letters were actually written by the organisers. Their content could influence the action playframe in an active way during play. One time they did this was in relation to the character Brutus. He was Roman a legionary who was travel-

ling with the grouping of Christians and proselytising to the other characters. On day two of play, the head of the other Legionaries received a letter from 'Rome' - actually written by the organisers during play - that Brutus was a deserter, and should be arrested. His arrest and execution became a significant motif in the playframe. Both the players of the Legionaries and the player of Brutus used it extensively as a motif in the later half of the play. In a similar way, (Koljonen, 2004) reports on their use of telephones in the Swedish play Hamlet. Inside the playframe, players had access to telephones. They could ring other fictive characters such as their fictive family, friends, or other contacts when using these phones in-frame. The organisers had special instructed players take these calls off-frame, replying in-frame as the person the character called.

### 2. Using instructed players in-frame.

Organisers can use special players<sup>5</sup> that are instructed to do some certain actions as characters in-frame. Their purpose is to help the organisers make in-frame events that are part of motifs. Such players were used in 'Inside-outside'. Each of the characters was called into 'interrogation' through the door into an adjacent room. When I was playing my character, I was summoned into the room and got a question about what I knew about the other character's personal history. The questions came from a speaker behind a wall made of sheaths. I refused to cooperate in answering the questions. An armed and masked guard then appeared behind me. This was an instructed player. He did not say anything, but the voice from behind the speaker made it clear to me that it would be unhealthy not to cooperate. So I did as I was told. Later in the play, several

guards stormed the small prison room of the characters, and brief fighting erupted. I will tell more about this instance later. The special instructed players played a significant role in shaping the motif of imprisonment, interrogation and cooperation in play. They were continuously instructed by the organisers, who in this way influenced the play of the in-frame motifs.

### 3. Off-frame communication.

Organisers can also use off-frame communication, in order to explicitly influence the in-frame actions of players during play. One player tells of his experiences from a play set in 19<sup>th</sup> century France. He was playing the secretary of a lawyer. In-frame, he experienced an inconsistency in the lawyer's behaviour that made him uncertain if he was upkeying unintentionally, or if it was a deliberate in-frame deception. Thus, like the examples discussed in chapter 6, this inconsistency was connected to the metacommunicative complexity of second order fabrications in-frame. He asked the organisers to guide him on whether he should interpret inconsistencies in his co-player's behaviour as deception, and if not, how the in-frame reality should be defined:

*'I had learned in advance that I and the Lawyer should say the laws in play. However, we also had a copy of the Laws – the historically original 'Code Civil'. During play, I as a character became suspicious that my employer – the Lawyer - was deceiving us. I checked if his practice of the law was similar to the laws in the 'Code Civil'. I found a range of discrepancies and errors, and was considering reporting him to the higher police officer in play. However, I suspected that he might have acted in good faith. I went into the servants in the kitchen. They were played by the organisers.*

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<sup>5</sup> The players have a special term for such players, 'sis'. Some claimed it was an acronym for 'organiser instructed player'. Others said it simply meant 'monster'.

*I went out of my role, and asked them if they could make clear what was frame of the reality in play. We agreed that I should not report the lawyer to the police, since it would change the balance of play (...). We agreed that everything he said was actually in accordance with "Code Civil"*

All of the three ways of organiser direction and intervention described above, poses a challenge in relation to the keying. This is in the sense that the organisers cannot speak or act in an off-frame way in the vicinity of in-frame players. When interfering in the playframe, then the organisers must conduct their business, without appearing to break the laiv key. This was solved in different ways in the two plays I observed. In 'Amaranth', the 3 main organisers all had the role as dance slaves to the central members of the nobility in the play. This choice of character gave them reason to be present at the central in-frame situations that involved the nobility. Further, before play they announced an off-frame rule of action (see section 5.6) regarding their characters. None of the other players, especially those playing their masters, were allowed to stop them from going someplace in play if they insisted on doing so as characters. The organisers also had small out-house at their disposal. This was only available to them. The rooms inside were defined as off-frame. Here, the organisers could go when they needed to do things off-frame. In Inside/Outside, the organisers were not characters in play. They monitored the action of the players through a camera and microphone that covered the small region of play. Since this room was sealed off by walls to the rooms where the organisers were, they could conduct their off-frame organising responsibilities without any risk of breaking the key.

My impression was that the intervention of the organisers during play in 'Amaranth' had less

power and importance for the resulting action than all the other techniques. Nevertheless, the organisers enjoyed great respect and authority from the players. What they said was listened to with great weight. The organisers also carried the main responsibility into seeing that the keying worked okay. They decided when and how players that had been off-frame could enter the playframe, or when a player could leave. They had the responsibility for seeing that appropriate action was taken if someone fell ill. On the picture above, the three organisers of 'Amaranth' are seen in the final briefing before play. They are clarifying how they wish to play a range of issues according to their vision – how to approach religion, status, sexuality, fighting, and 'plotting' – the in-frame narratives. They are clarifying the rules regarding the region of play, the sanitary and hygienic conditions. They are giving the final underlining of the 'cut' and 'break' conventions. This picture nicely illustrates their leadership authority. The organisers are elevated, everyone pays attention to them. Like the conductor of an orchestra, or the officers of a military unit; their words have the power unlike those of any others, to influence the frame.

## Final remarks

The laiv players have a unique context of keying, differing from theatre, improv, and other performance mediums. They appear very capable of coming up with metacommunicative techniques that make the most out of the unique possibilities and restrictions that are in the laiv keying situation. I have showed that the way the players make and play motives in-frame is not straightforward. Further, it is also clear that the performance of the playframe is a continuous process that involves the active use of a range of markedly different techniques that blends pre-

existing structures and creative action in the context of performance.

The use of the different techniques is related to the level of frame complexity at the outset of play. The laiv key is typically characterised by a lower initial frame complexity than theatre, yet higher than improv. The possibility of using improvisational emergence increases when the frame complexity is low, as more aspects of the frame can then be improvised. Nevertheless, using improvisational emergence throughout play will gradually increase the frame complexity. All techniques imply some reliance on conventions – which itself is a pre-existing structure. Yet, this reliance appeared more extensive when the frame complexity is low. The effects conventions have on simplifying coordination, communication, and the memory workload are essential in the latter case. The use of these conventions made clear a possible tension between the needs of the context of performance and the general pre-existing keying conventions. Some players resented using conventions extensively, since it broke with the ‘realism’ they expected. Using preparations in advance extensively increases the frame complexity. This is particularly the case with the use of pre-defined actions, which may increase the frame complexity from the outset so much that the players feel the loss of freedom and spontaneity in-frame is at odds with the keying conventions. Organiser intervention works as a way for organisers to try and retain a certain degree of central control, despite the unpredictability that a lower frame complexity implies.

All the metacommunicative techniques reviewed involve a challenge of adapting and making them fit the general keying conventions. The players must work to hide any off-frame actions from the view of in-frame players. They are fabricating that they are acting spontaneously, when

they are acting in a planned manner. They find inventive techniques to make up issues used as motifs in-frame, given the possibilities and limitations of their position. The players and organisers also appear able to stretch their possibilities, by suspending disbelief in relation to some factors that could conflict with the keying. For example, the organisers may sometimes use instructed characters in-frame, or use off-frame rules regarding the organisers behaviour in-frame, and they can disregard the fact that their co-players are acting in an artificially and planned manner. One may regard this as ways to adapt to requirements of the context of performance.

By now, I have considered all the techniques the players use to make and maintain the frame. However, from time to time the, the players fail to maintain the playframe in spite of all the techniques they use to maintain it – and it breaks. This is the topic for the next chapter.



# 10.

# Breaking the key

## Introduction

In previous chapters I have considered how the performance of the playframe is a result of a variety of techniques that involve pre-existing structures and actions adapted to the requirements of a particular context of action. Sometimes, however, the players fail to maintain the playframe during the in-frame performance, and it breaks down. That is the topic for this chapter. This provides interesting information into the topic of making and maintaining frames in several ways. First, one may learn how the actions that may cause the framebreak emerge during the action's performance. Furthermore, by considering how the players respond to such events, as well as the precautions they take to void it, one also learns indirectly about techniques they use to maintain the frame. I have also written about framebreaks in the earlier chapters. Here, I wish to present a coherent analysis of all framebreaks together. I divide this into sections in accordance with three main types of framebreaks (see figure 10.1).

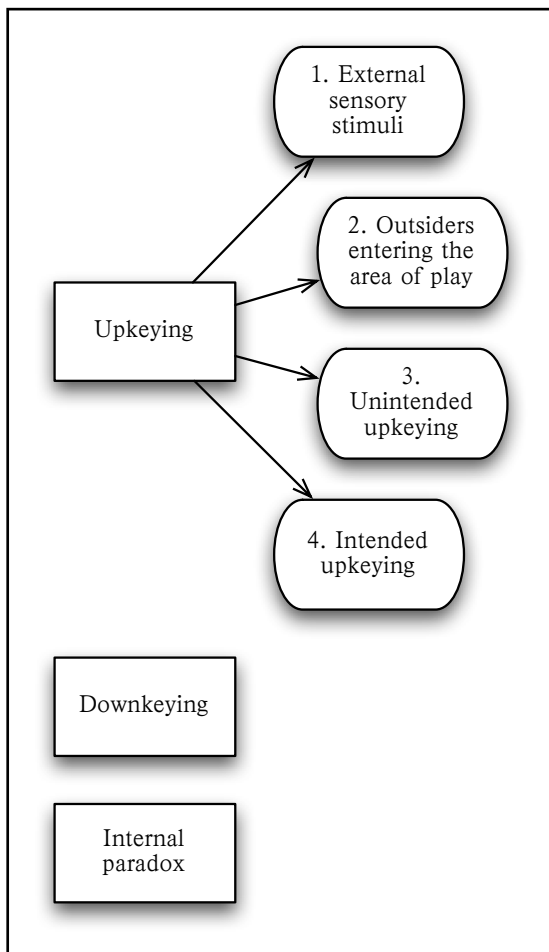
The first type I consider is upkeying. This is how players can lose their involvement in the keying, and fall back to the frame of 'real life'. I divide between four different subcategories of upkeying. First, outsiders entering the the region of play can cause interference that makes players go off-

frame. Second, various types of external stimuli such as planes or cars may also interfere with their involvement. Third, players can be perceived as being off-frame themselves by accident, usually by making a slip. Fourth, players may go intentionally off-frame by switching back to the frame of 'real life' during play. Finally, I also consider the ways players try to prevent upkeying from occurring as well as the repertoire of repair work used to avoid framebreak caused by upkeying.

Downkeying is the second type of framebreak that I will look at. This occurs when the keying loses its grip and the in-frame events are experienced as 'real' for a player. Thus, this is a result of too much involvement instead of too little. I considered this in chapter five, when I discussed a range of metacommunicative techniques that the players uses in order to know if a co-player was downkeying or not.

Thirdly, I look at breaks caused by paradox in-frame. This refers to the frame breaking due to the in-frame dynamics of action breaking down. In laiv play this can occur when the central in-frame narrative develops in such a way that the in-frame action cannot continue.

**Figure 10-1 Types of framebreaks in laiv**



## Upkeying

Upkeying is the type of framebreaks that appeared to be most frequent and richly described in my data. I distinguish between four different ways in which upkeying may happen. The two first categories focus on upkeying originating from outside of the playframe, while the two last focus on upkeying done by players who are part of the playframe. In the final part of this section, I shall look more closely at the repair work done to maintain the playframe.

### 1. External sensory stimuli.

Almost all plays must deal with some form of external stimuli that does not match the play-

frame. This can noise from cars driving by close, or as in this typical example, planes passing by::

*'Some of the players were gathered around the campfire to eat their evening meal. A shining thing that looked like a star is visible on the sky. Some of the players begin to comment what star this may be - something in accordance to the playframe. After a while, it turns out that it appears to be moving in the sky. It grows bigger, and appeared to approach closer. There is an increasing sound in the background. It became impossible not to notice that it is an airplane. One of the players comments more silent: "oh, is it a star like that." The players move on to discussing something different, and the attention towards the "star" has suddenly waned. The play goes on like before.'* (From field notes)

In the 1984-style play *Kybergenesis*, the frame broke as a result of the direct physical effects of external sensory stimuli which the players could not ignore. The play took place for 5 days during the Easter of 1997. It turned out to be an unusually cold Easter. The play took place in a building, which had formerly been used as a mental hospital. But the heating system was out of order and the place of play became very cold. This was not planned as part of the setting, and became a health hazard to the players. The organisers eventually had to interrupt the play for a day, and get a heating system up working again.

### 2. Outsiders entering the keying region

I considered in chapter 7 how the keying took place in a certain region. Sometimes, people who have no part in play can enter the region by accident. Laiv players are very excluding towards non-participants in their keying. Even the passive presence of outsiders as an audience may cause a framebreak. This differs from other performance keys. Regular theatre audiences have no

part of the performance frame, but can nevertheless be present if they do not make noise, and sit still in their seats. For instance, street theatre tolerates a more noisy audience, and in addition the performers also work hard to include people passing by into the keyed frame (Mason, 1992).

In the play 'Amaranth', a female walker was walking towards the Roman-style tents of my group. Presumably, the person approached the region of play out of curiosity. One of the other players saw it. She ran to the person who was passing by, and talked to her. The walker went away. Players noted to me later that this was a common event in areas accessible to the public. A usual way to handle such occurrences was to ask the person to avoid entering the region of play, or at least avoid any interaction with the laiv players.

Upkeying situations may get additional complexity, if outsiders themselves do a downkeying error, and mistake the players' make-believe ac-

tions for real ones. In some instances, non-participants may interfere physically. Box 10-1, illustrate how a framebreak may occur as a result.

### 3. Unintended upkeying by players.

I have earlier showed how the players stress that the behaviour, clothes and material surroundings, actions, and talk should be consistent with the keyed playframe. There are times when this norm is not followed, due to an accident or slip by one or more players. They may then be perceived as upkeying, but without any such intention by the respective players. This concerns some actions being inconsistent. Such inconsistencies commonly occurred in relation to costume. For example, in the picture 10-1 below a small off-frame label is visible in the costume but without any of the surrounding players noticing and caring about it at that time. Presumably, the player is not aware of this slip. Furthermore, when I played I once mistook the name of a character in-frame. Another time, I forgot the

#### Box 10-1 The konstfach incident

*'Inspired by the growing larp hobby, the Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts and Design decided to host an event on "modern youth culture" in Stockholm, March 1993. As part of this, they organised a short detective game, which took place partly in public places and on city streets. Two of the organisers took up position in a Pizzeria. The owner of the Pizzeria was informed of the game, but this turned out to be far from enough. At least one of the organisers had a replica gun in his pocket, and this gun caught the eye of another customer. This customer silently contacted the police, and organisers soon felt real guns in their backs. Before any of them had any chance to explain, the police searched them and forced them out to the waiting police van – which was full of armed policemen. After some time of awkward explanations from the two organisers the police realized that they were not dealing with dangerous criminals at all. Not surprisingly, the organisers got a real scolding from the angry policemen. One of the police officers, is reported to have said "I don't know what you usually do, but I can guarantee that you've never before been so close to being shot!". It was pure luck that the two organisers had noticed the police van when it pulled up in front of the pizzeria, since the policemen who entered the pizzeria were wearing civilian clothes, and the organisers might have thought that the guns in their backs belonged to other players. This incident could have turned out really bad...'* (Nelson, 2001:51)



*Picture 10-1. shows an example of something that could have been an unintended upkeying. A player is drumming before play in the front, and a small off-frame label is visible down to the right on the wool carpet that she use as a costume. Unintended inconsistencies like this occurred during play, but rarely appeared to cause a framebreak.*

appropriate way of greeting. Hans also notes how he perceived an inconsistency by another player as upkeying:

*Hans: I was a slave, a kitchen slave. There were two things we knew: You cannot use potatoes, and you cannot use tomatoes. And then another player told me in private that they would use tomatoes to throw at us if we played badly in the play. I could not handle that. It was to great collapse for me. So then, just "cut! No tomatoes, no tomatoes!". I used the cut rule. It was just the two of us, it wasn't any point in stopping the play - I was just going to say, "don't say tomatoes, please!"*

Hans played a character in 'Amaranth', and he personally has considerable historical knowledge. He knew that tomatoes and potatoes did not arrive to Europe before the 15th century.

Unintended upkeying vividly illustrates a general problem of communication. In the example cited with Hans above, he notes that he regards tomatoes as unsuitable in the Roman setting. Using his background knowledge as a history student, he knows that tomatoes did not appear in Europe until after trading with the American continent became common. Presumably, his co-player is not aware of this fact. In general terms, the different background knowledge of the players can make them interpret actions in a different manner. However, the widespread use of standardised conventions presumably reduces this problem.

Another example shows that there can be tensions between the needs of the playes, and the possibility of upkeying. Like the rest of the material surroundings, food are expected to be in line with the setting of the playframe. Stine here tells about a play that lasted one day and with the theme of a hostage taking situation:

*Stine: "It was P13. It was very scary to be an organiser on that laiv, because there was something... I feel that from the organisers' view, it went very well. We did a great job. But it was a very difficult concept. To be a hostage was difficult. We told people in advance that 'if you can't stand being hungry, then store a chocolate bar in your purse. Everyone did that. Everyone had 3-4 boxes of biscuits and chocolate bars in their purse. All of the time, they sat and ate chocolate and candy bars. It was completely out of our control. It was perhaps, like we thought that one should be grown-up enough to think that the play would last for 12 hours, and perhaps you could manage without. We wanted it to be part of the experience. It should be a craving for food and water, because that was a part of the negotiations between the police and the hostage takers. But at the same time, we put people in a situation they were not prepared for in advance, so it was difficult to decide whether they needed in advance."*

Their attempt to use hunger as a means was only partly successful, since players had brought with them food in their purses. Many players regarded their perceived right to food as more important than the conventions of having only food appropriate for the setting. Thus, there was a tension between the players need for food, and the requirement to stay in-frame and avoid upkeying.

#### **4. Intentional upkeying**

The fourth type of upkeying is also caused by participating players. In chapter 4, I noted that the laiv frame had a relatively high amount of external discipline. Sometimes, players themselves fail to maintain this discipline. Goffman called this 'flooding out', and one example he cited was secondary school children - who are often are tempted to upkey by behaving in ways

that are inappropriate to the tight school frame. In the same way, some players do not manage to maintain this degree of involvement. They can also fail to maintain involvement, and instead engage in off-frame activities. In this case, they do not maintain an alignment to the playframe but intentionally upkey. I separate between two subtypes of intentional upkeying. The first way is to upkey in a relatively explicit manner. I have already discussed the first type in section 6.2, when I considered how intentional upkeying could lead to a framebreak. The second way is to upkey in an implicit way. This may happen through insinuating remarks that are made within the playframe, which has a double off-frame meaning. Some players call this 'meta-humour.'

*Mary: 'The worst thing, what is most disruptive for the illusion, is off-laiv comments. It does not matter if it is put directly, "Yeah, Aqua-Lene this-and-that, or if it is said indirectly. Like, if people sit and laugh of Monty and his snake, like Monty Python, or if they talk about the nice (sålen/container) with Lerum - like in Lerum Lemonade-factory, you know. They can just say: "Aurax" real fast - and then be finished. Not start with long explanations about what Aurax is, and "Auraxius the bull ... the salve from the horn." The only thing they accomplish, is to make it believable for themselves. Because we others, we don't give a shit about it. We know they talk about Aurax on tube that doesn't belong in the middle ages. If you want to give information that is off-laiv, do it as quickly as possible.'*

*Note on context: Lerum Lemonade-factory is well known Norwegian producer of lemonade, Aqua-Lene was a Norwegian pop star famous around 2000-2001, while Aurax is an antiseptic drug.*

Many of the players I talked to saw the consequence of implicit upkeying as equal to explicit upkeying. However, some players did not seem unanimously negative. Two other experienced players, noted to me instead that the acceptance of such remarks was a question of elegance:

*Christine: 'Yeah, let's take an example. We had a laiv that was set in the Bronze Age. Then there was a woman who was supposed to say 'Come, here all my small lumps of gold!' No, it wasn't that. She was supposed to say 'Oh, you just stand there and talk and talk, you great goldmedal!' It's a well-known expression, in Norwegian. But then she said: "You just stand there and talk and talk, you great... Bronzemedal!" It was so funny, it was supposed to be a bronze-age laiv.*

*Geir: Isn't that a break?*

*Christine: Yeah, but you don't off for that reason. It's a break, which shouldn't happen, but people are tired, and then it's okay.*

*Rupert: 'You get too little food, water and sleep on laiv. (...) But there are those who manage to play elegantly within the boundary (...) And then there are those who do not manage to do that. Bad metahumour always happens.'*

Instead of condemning the event as a break, the two players here instead catch it as humorous: The implicit reference is to "goldmedal", which is the familiar wording of the expression. It is impossible to be in the Bronze Age and talk about gold. They played on the ambivalence in this. She notes that when many players were tired of being in-frame, the elegant upkeying is accepted – perhaps everyone finds it a little relaxing in light of the tight frame that surrounds them. This extract is interesting, because it indicates that the differences between the playframe

and 'real life' are not as clean cut as the players sometimes rhetorically present it. Furthermore, it shows that they take a joy in 'playing' with the frame boundaries in interaction. This is a curious phenomenon, and it is often done in both art and popular culture today.

An example, are the popular music by the rap artist Eminem.<sup>1</sup> The artistic identity he has created and enacts in his performances, are that of a hard social critic of American middle class values, sometimes also sexist. Box 10-1 presents an example from his lyrics. In the first verse, he plays his role. On the final line, however, he notes "I'm just playin America, you know I love you", referring to the performance frame of his earlier remark. Yet these remarks sounded very serious, Like meta-humour of the laiv players, his off-frame comment plays ironically on him being in a performance frame. Both are at the same time highlighting taken for granted boundaries in the performance frame.

Furthermore, by using meta-humour, the players are at the same time displaying a distance to their performance as characters in the playframe. Interestingly, Christine are open towards meta-humour when she note that 'but people are tired, and then its okay'. In the section below, I shall discuss how the display of role distance may also work as a metacommunicative technique to sustain the keying.

#### **Repair work to upkeying**

I consider three different ways that the players may do repair work in relation to upkeying.

First, the players take action to prevent upkeying from happening in the first place, especially when it is caused by external interference. For example, in order to reduce the likelihood of outsiders entering play and external stimuli, players

#### **Box 10-1. Lyrics from rap artist Eminem**

*(...) I am the derringer aimed at little Erica to attack her character  
The ringleader of this circus of worthless pawns  
Sent to lead the march right up to the steps of Congress  
and piss on the lawns of the White House  
To burn the {flag} and replace it with a Parental Advisory sticker  
To spit liquor in the faces of this democracy of hypocrisy  
Fuck you Ms. Cheney! Fuck you Tipper Gore!  
Fuck you with the free-est speech  
This Divided States of Embarassment will allow me to have  
Fuck you! (...)*

*I'm just playin America, you know I love you (...)*

Extract of the lyrics the song White America, from the record 'The Eminem Show' (2002)

usually take care in selecting a relatively desolate place for play if possible. A player who had taken part in several public plays set in contemporary times explained to me that he tried to notify the police in advance when running the risk of being subjected to a keying error. Special risk can be due to, for example, the use of replicas of modern weaponry. But this could be difficult. Apparently, the police in Oslo did not have any routines in notifying its constables about the special events taking place in public.

A second technique seen is to go off-frame and communicate in order to sort things out, such as seen in the example of the passers by and of Hans. Hans' use of cut, has similarities to how a prompter in theatre, who may communicate off-frame in order to help to correct an actor on stage if he upkeys by forgetting his lines.

Thirdly, one of the most common ways to counter upkeying in-frame is to ignore it and continue to suspend disbelief. I have discussed this ability in chapter 6, as well as several places throughout the text. Players also noted that it was important not to try to integrate an inconsis-

<sup>1</sup> Based on analysis by Hiorth (2003)

tency into the playframe. One way this could happen was to call a plane a flying dragon, for example. Accordingly, this would serve to draw more attention to it, and make a framebreak more likely. When suspending disbelief, players were usually easily able to maintain the frame when dealing with external interference (type 1 and 2). I want to connect this with how Goffman suggests that frames may in general be more resistant to external interference from the frame, than from interference originating from a participant in-frame:

*'In a fascinating account of his own research career, the psychologist Paul Ekman (1987) recounts an episode from the time when he was involved in joint research with Goffman, at the university of California, San Francisco. The study consisted of asking two students from opposing political persuasions to discuss their differences while the debate was filmed: 'As this interaction proceeded (...) he (Goffman) was taken by with the fact that serious people were willing to engage in such a conversation in a laboratory setting, and decided to test how much interference they would tolerate. Dressed in his casual style, he posed (quite credibly) as a janitor. He walked into their room, saying he had to remove some of the furniture. He removed one piece of furniture after another while they continued their argument, until finally he took away the chairs in which they were sitting. They continued their argument standing up! For Erving, the videotape demonstrated that someone who was not a player - Erving - could not really interfere with the scripted interaction.' (Bouisac, 2000:115)*

## Downkeying

Downkeying is the opposite of upkeying in the sense that too much involvement in the play-

frame causes it to break. In chapter 5, I presented the possibility of downkeying as a main challenge in the laiv keying, as it implied that the players had to use a variety of metacommunicative techniques in order to distinguish between someone being properly in-frame and someone that was downkeying. In this chapter, I will extend upon the topic by reviewing an additional example of downkeying and discuss how downkeying is related to role distance.

Eric note how in one play, he played the son of a tribal chieftain. While preparing for the play, he had not thought to have a relationship to a woman:

*Eric: 'I was told that the organisers would maybe put something more in my role. A few hours before the play was about to begin, she walked to me, and asked: "Can't you play my lover? I lack a lover, and the organisers suggested you, and..." Well, yes, she was cute, probably fun to play her lover. It didn't happen so much on this laiv, so okay!  
It became quite intense. (...) Because, she decided everything. I was to take part in some tests of leadership, and I was to be a hunter a little, and hunt reindeers and that kind of role. But she decided then. It was crazy, on one of those days. One of the organisers loved erotic rituals - with lots of drums, lots of people, half-naked people, and so on. Whereupon she then grabs her child, gives it to her husband, and walks to me. She drags me into this circle of dancing, sweating people - it all becomes very intense. We flirt a little, she touches me a lot, I touch her, and... It happened by itself. I did not think so much about it then, that now, we are out of the role. I just thought that, "so what - let's go for the ride!". And, inside that longhouse, it was a lot of smoke, fire, and leather, and people lying next to each other. You heard that people were*



*demonstratively lying thrusting and moaning in the corners. It was totally impossible to decide if someone did it for real, or in play, or...*

*Eric also noted that he developed a brief relationship to the woman after the play.*

The example relate downkeying to physical feelings. In the example above, Eric notes that he engaged in romantic and sexual behaviour. I have earlier pointed out that the players regard physical feelings, such as that created by the surrounding material environment as a part of the keyed frame (see chapter 7). Thus, keep in mind that there are several situations where physical feelings in themselves do not lead to downkeying. This may point to how lack of role distance (Goffman, 1961) between oneself as a player and the character one is in the play, appear related to this examples of downkeying. Recall that in the example of the keying error in the Swedish play considered in chapter 5, it was also the *absence of communicative cues that would distinguish the actions of the female player in-frame as distant and different from her 'real' behaviour as a person that made her co-players regard her as downkeying.* Eric's depiction of his situation appears to imply that when he followed *his own* sexual desires when acting *in character*, he went 'out of the role'. (line 25 - 26). It seems here that role distance is very important important in order to avoid a framebreak. Role distance is essentially a communicative achievement -it depend on the players being able to perceive clearly that there are two distinct frames that they relate to. It can be fruitful to compare this to the position of Medical Doctor's gynecological examination, as studied by Emerson (1970). She noted how male doctors faced a challenge similar to downkeying when maintaining the medical examination frame. Touching the private parts of female patients, always carried a risk that the examination behav-

our could be defined as pertaining to sexual behaviour of 'everyday life'. While the laiv players need to maintain the playframe, the medical doctors need to sustain the medical examination frame. To do so, Emerson argues that the medical doctors need to maintain a role distance to their performance of the role as medical doctor. They use metacommunicative techniques similar to those the laiv players to do this - they ironically act overly dramatic in the role as a medical doctor, they do brief smalltalk with he patients concerning 'off-frame' personal issues, and they joke about the situation of medical examination. Emerson here use the term 'countertheme' to refer to themes of 'everyday life' as opposed to the medical frame:

*Sustaining the reality of gynecological examination, does not mean sustaining the medical definition. What is to be sustained is a shifting balance between medical definition and counterthemes. Too much emphasis on the medical definition alone would undermine the reality, as would a flamboyant manifestation of the counterthemes apart from the medical definition. (...) the doctor must convey an optimal combination of impersonality and hints of intimacy that simultaneously avoid the insult of sexual familiarity and the insult of unacknowledged identity. (Emerson, 1970:80,85)*

One can say that both the doctors and the laiv players appear to be balancing on a communicative tightrope - too little role distance to their performance of the framed roles and they risk up and they risk downkeying, too much distance and they risk being regarded as doing the upkeying discussed above. By using meta-humour, off-frame communication, or distinct metacommunication the laiv players may succeed in communicating role distance and then at the same time

### Box 10-2 A framebreak in the Swedish laiv play 'The Roas of a Thousand Roses'

*'The second time a larp was stopped full time, was 'The Road of a Thousand Roses'. Rikon, more or less modeled on Nazi Germany, strove to spread its faith all over the world, but at this point they were driven back by the Empire of Darien and its allies. A group of Rikon soldiers were under siege in a fort. The idea of the organisers, very clearly stated, was to present war as the horror it is, not as a funny game. In the second night (out of three), a feigned attack was planned. The outside forces were to attack and try to take the fort, but they were meant to retreat before the weapons of the defenders. Unfortunately, the defenders were not very alert, maybe because too many of the officers knew the attack was only meant to be a fake. After all, there was one more day and night to go. So the attackers never got a good reason to retreat, and playing their roles to the full they jumped the walls, broke the doors and started slaughtering. I was killed right at the beginning, and spent the fight lying still in the rain, with my leg at a funny angle and a mosquito on my upper lip, listening to what was going on around me, considering the fact that I would have to spend the next half of the Larp in the off camp, and thoroughly enjoying the feeling of reality. And then comes the order to stop it all! Frustration! This time there were no physical injuries to account for the break. The reason was that one side had practically been wiped out, so again, what was there left to play? For the conquerors, yes, but not for the defeated=dead. Everybody was not as content as I to miss the second part of the larp for reality.' (Fahlgren, 2001:33-34)*

### Box 10-3 The bankruptcy of The Last National Bank

*'The Last National Bank is a flourishing institution. A large part of its resources is liquid without being watered. Cartwright Millingwille has ample reason to be proud of the banking institution over which he presides. Until Black Wednesday. As he enters the bank, he notices that business is unusually brisk. A little odd, that, since the men at the A.M.O.K. steel plant and the K.O.M. A mattress factory are not paid until Saturday. (...) The low discreet hum of bank business has given way to a strange and annoying stridency of many voices. A situation has been defined as real. (...) He knew that, despite the comparative liquidity of the bank's assets, a rumor of insolvency once believed by enough depositors, would result in the insolvency of the bank. And by the close of the Black Wednesday – and Blacker Thursday – when the long lines of anxious depositors, each frantically seeking to salvage his own, grew to longer lines of even more anxious depositors, it turned out that he was right. The stable financial structure of the bank had depended upon one set of definitions of the situation: belief in the validity of the interlocking system of economic promises men live by.' Merton (1968:476)*

acknowledge the existence of the laiv playframe as a distinct frame with separate rules and boundaries apart from its contrasting opposite, the frame of 'everyday life'.

### Internal paradox

The final type of framebreak is what I, for want of existing concepts, have called internal paradox. This refers to those instances of play where the action in-frame develops in such a way that there is an unrecoverable paradox that necessitates a halt in the keying. I begin by presenting an example depicting a break of this kind. Afterwards, I consider three aspects that appear important in understanding what leads up to this break. The aim of discussing this example is to underline the variety of contingencies that affect the in-frame action and the difficulties faced by organisers.

In chapter 9, I considered the way the players made and shaped the in-frame action. I showed that a basic premise of laiv play was the presence of improvisation during play. This creates an ever present risk that the storyline in play does not develop as planned. Keep in mind that when the playframe breaks due to an internal paradox, it does not involve interference of any kind from outside. In the sources, I encountered several stories of plays that had failed due to a frame break due to unforeseen events in-frame. An example presented in box 10-2 on the next page is a description of a Swedish laiv play: In order to avoid an internal paradox in that case, the players and organisers rely on the range of means to influence the playframe that was discussed in chapter 9. However, when a break does occur, then the players have limited means of doing repair work. In this example, organisers intervened by a 'deus ex machina': They used their power to persuade the players to start over again

and completely redefined the event that had happened in-frame as a 'wishful dream' (for the attackers) and as a 'nightmare' for the defenders. Many, especially the attackers, felt this to be a bad solution and the rest of the laiv was not so good.

However, I shall look more closely into the process leading up to the framebreak. While the precise top-down techniques being used in the example above are not described in detail, it is likely that the organisers have utilised a variety of top-down techniques during play in order to try to make the players act the way they wanted. The author also notes that many of them appear to have known in advance the intended storyline, perhaps as a part of the preparation. In order to understand the process that leads up to the internal paradox, I will compare it to an example from Merton (1968:476), presented in box 11-3.

There are some interesting parallels of the bankruptcy of The Last National Bank, and the breaking of the frame in 'The Road of a Thousand Roses'.

First, in both cases, there is an unintended change from an old frame to a new disruptive frame. In the 'The Road of a Thousand Roses' it was from a playable playframe where the two groups in play were at a roughly equal combat strength, to a non-playable situation where too many players, whose characters had been killed, had nothing to do. The Last National Bank goes from a frame where it is regarded as liquid and a solid place to keep one's savings, to a frame where the bank is regarded as lacking liquidity.

Second, in both cases the change is unintended and occurs as a result of the collective actions of many individuals. The bankruptcy of the Last National bank is brought on by customers who each, in isolation, judge the withdrawal of money from the bank as to their best interest

given a rumour of insolvency. However, the bankruptcy – the new frame – occurs precisely as a result of the customers' actions at a collective level. In the case of the laiv players, the change was brought on by each of the besieged fighting too sloppily, and each of the attacking players fighting too hard. Together, the aggregated result of the individual players actions was that the attackers swept away the besieged much earlier than what each player would have intended. Furthermore, in both cases the final frame was an unintended consequence of actions that had other motives.

Third, beliefs play an important part in the process of both examples. In the case of the Last National Bank, the decision of the customers to withdraw all their savings was brought on by them hearing a rumour of about the insolvency of the bank. Furthermore, the customers did not know what possible consequences their action could have at a collective level. This is why Merton portrays it as an example of a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is the rumour – or prophecy – of the lack of liquidity that causes the bank to be in the state of affairs prophesied. Each of the laiv players in 'The Road of a Thousand Roses' did probably also not know what the consequences their actions would have on the central narrative when acting in-frame, the situation being far too chaotic for that. The author suggests that a likely reason that many of the besieged players knew that they were supposed to throw back the first attack, which gave them less reason to fight ferociously (line 8-9). It may be likely that the players had acted differently, if they had not known about the following state of affairs that the organisers intended. In their case, this was not a self-fulfilling prophecy. Rather, it was a suicidal prophecy: 'which so alters human behaviour from what would have been its course had the

prophecy not been made, that it fails to be borne out.'(ibid:475)

## Final Remarks

In previous chapters, I have shown that the keying may be fragile, that it may sometimes break. In this chapter, the instability of the playframe during play is clearly underlined. The keying is subjected to a constant range of threats from the outset, and it must continuously be maintained by the players. This is achieved through the use of a variety of techniques to avoid framebreaks and conduct repair work in the context of action. Furthermore, these techniques are conventionalised. It is the players' knowledge of a shared repertoire of pre-existing conventions, such as the 'cut' rule, that enables the maintenance of the playframe. The use of many of these techniques is based on co-operation. Upkeying was countered by collective use of suspension of disbelief. Downkeying is in itself a phenomenon which affects single players. However, the way of dealing with it is a complex collective task. I showed in chapter 5 how the possibility of downkeying. It is also clear whether or not an internal paradox occurred, were entirely due to the collective actions of the players as a group.

In earlier chapters, I have underlined the capability of the players to adapt their keying to the context of action. Yet, this chapter shows that there are limitations to this. One way to regard the different framebreaks is to see them as precisely due to tensions between the requirements of the general keying conventions contra what happens in the context of performance. For example, the reason that upkeying could be caused when outsiders passed by is related to the way general keying conventions prohibits audience as well as outside interference. Other keys which

regard outsiders differently in the keying do not face this possibility of framebreak. Similarly, one sees how intentional upkeying of players are due to the difficulty of maintaining the tight discipline required by the laiv key during play. Downkeying is connected to the difficulty of maintaining the high emotional involvement prescribed by the key while at the same time maintaining sufficient role distance in the context of action.

While framebreaks in many ways may be regarded as a negative phenomenon, one must also consider whether it is important feature of laiv play. When the frame is in a constant risk of being broken, it may very well make the players more focused and involved during play. Framebreaks can by itself be an emotional event, therefore it makes a real stake for maintaining the frame. Consider how many radio hosts prefer to record their shows live, as they feel sharper and less likely to make mistakes that lead to framebreaks in this way. Or, how a theatre audience – especially improv, where action is much less predetermined – may become more involved due to the presence of real action. There are always risks of something happening that may have emotional consequences, right in front of them.

Each of the chapters has by now looked at a separate part of how the laiv players make and maintain frames. In the next chapter, I will review the main findings of this text as a whole.



# 11.

# Making and maintaining frames

## Introduction

I set out in the beginning with the research question of how the laiv players make and maintain the plaframe. By now, I have surveyed this topic from a range of different angles. In this final chapter, I shall sum up and discuss important themes throughout the text. In the beginning, I made an emphasis on looking on how the framing process involved the use of both pre-existing structures, and action in context. In the first section of this chapter, I shall discuss five different ways how this is shown in the text. First, I consider how the players have been portrayed as capable to adapt to the demands of the context of performance by suspending disbelief. Second, I consider how the use of pre existing conventions, are intertwined with the context of performance. Third, I consider how some actions in the context of performance are in part structured by pre-existing structures, while at the same time affecting the pre-existing structure for future action. Fourth, I look on how all actions always relate to a pre-existing material environment

with given possibilities and limitations. Fifth, I consider how framebreaks throws light on the sometime sconflcting relationship between the given keying conventions, and the demands of the context of performance.

In a second and final section, I discuss how the laiv players activity closely relates to the paradigm of viewing social reality as socially constructed, which is widespread in contemporary social research.

## The relationship between pre-existing structures and action in the context of performance

In this section, I argue that the process of making and maintaining frames in laiv has been shown to be the result of a framing process involving both pre-existing structures and action in context. These two aspects are closely intertwined, yet sometimes also conflicting.

Previous chapters have shown how the process of making and maintain the laiv playframe

involves the use of several pre-existing structures in the way it was defined on page 24 - including given conventions, the given material world, and structures of the framing created more specific in advance of play. It has been shown that the creation of these structures is not a passive process, the players themselves also exert considerable influence by actively shaping and creating them. Despite the use of these pre-existing structures the process remains far from pre-determined. A lot of the framing action is not pre-determined, but originates creatively in the context of performance. The players have a range of techniques during interaction that modifies, or builds on, the pre-existing structures. This text has shown how the maintenance of the keying is entirely dependent on the players actively using a range of metacommunicative techniques during play. I have also shown how the performance of in-frame motifs were usually not pre-determined but heavily dependent on the players' action in the context of performance. The final performance, involves both pre-existing structures and the context of performance. Next, I shall sum up five points that show more clearly how this closely intertwined, yet sometimes conflicting relationship, is shown throughout the text.

1. First, there are two ways that the players' ability to adapt to the context of performance are particularly evident.

One way is the way the players are able to pragmatically ignore inconsistencies in the playframe, thus increasing their ability to maintain the playframe. In chapter 6, I argued that the ability to disregard inconsistencies made it possible for the players to take a lot of information of the playframe for granted, reducing their need for metacommunication. In chapter 7 and 8, one saw how the players appeared as able to disregard inconsistencies of the visual similarity

between the material objects and surroundings, and to some extent the players, to what they portrayed in the keyed playframe. Thus, when it is not practical for the players to follow the general keying convention of visual similarity, the players adapt their general conventions to the context of performance by nevertheless continuing to suspend disbelief. An exception to this was shown in the case of the casting conventions in chapter 8, where the players were influenced by the external norms in our culture to deny certain transformations.

A second way the adapting is evident, are in the way the players are able to flexibly use off-frame metacommunication while remaining involved. In relation to this, it may be fruitful to compare the laiv play to fantasy role playing games, as studied by Fine (1983). FRP are similar to laiv in the sense that players play characters in a make-believe playframe. However, FRP play is essentially a game of verbal narrative. The players - usually between two to six, playing around a table - doesn't do actions in-frame, they participate in a shared narrative through making a conversation about it. The players may speak directly in-frame as their in-frame character with a distinct voice, or they may speak about the narrative in descriptive terms similar to the perspective of a literary author writing in third person form. Fine describes how the players exert a high ability of shifting from speaking as their character in the conversational narrative, to commenting the narrative as players, and to speaking about completely off-frame issues such as the snacks or potato chips. The verbal narrative consists of continuous shifting between the different frames, and numerous temporary off-frame breaks. The shifts are done with metacommunicative ease. However, despite all the frame shifting the players do not have great difficulty in maintaining



maintaining a high involvement in the shared make-believe narrative. The laiv players exert a similar ability to engage in off-frame communication signs or remarks, or make smaller off-frame conversations during play and make humorous meta-remarks. When the players take an off-frame break by using 'cut', they nevertheless usually can enter the playframe again by going back in-again. Much of these off-frame activities are tied to the management of the performative context. The players are not only capable of of adapt to and ignoring such off-frame metacommunication *around them*, but *their own use of it* as well. The requirement to stay in-frame and the need 'immersion' in a character, are set aside because of specific needs in relation to the context of keying, or to organising a specific narrative.

2. Second, conventions are itself a pre-existing structure, yet at the same time its usage is very flexible depending on the context. To a large extent, the use of conventions in laiv play does not occur in a deterministic fashion. How the context of play is perceived, is not logically given but dependent on the interpretation. Only a very limited number of the conventions – such as the basic keying conventions – bind the players to act in a specific ways independent on how the particular context is interpreted. Instead, most of the conventions are tied to players' own interpretation of what works best in the context of performance. For example, in chapter 5 one saw that when a player encounter another player that may possibly be downkeying, they could use 'break', or 'cut' to stop play, or they could study the action and body idiom, or they could use explicit off-frame talk during play. All techniques would be based on available conventions, but what the player choose to do are uncertain and up to him or her. In chapter 9, I showed how the players relied on using a variety of standardised

conventions in relation to in-frame motifs, despite that this conflicted with a given ambition of 'original' and 'natural' play. Yet, players of two characters, who either prepare or improvise a relation and motif to play in play, are not pre-determined to choose specific standards. They can select from the variety conventions regarding relation and motif depending on how they interpret the needs of the context.

Following both Becker (1983) these conventions are social structures that work as a system of resources that *enables action*. This system does impose *limitations* on the available actions, but it does not *determine* action.

3. Third, this text reflect Giddens' (1984:374) remark about the 'duality of structure'. By this, he argue that social structures in general 'are both the medium and outcome of the conduct it organises'. This is demonstrated specifically some places in laiv play where there is continuous causal feedback between the structured action in the context of performance and the pre-existing structures that continuously shapes further action. In chapter 5 and 7, I argued that keyed action itself was a strong keying signal. Thus, the presence of keyed action would continuously contribute to reproduce the keying. A second way it was demonstrated, were in relation to the development of the in-frame performance. In chapter 9, I noted how the players use of improvisational emergence as a technique of shaping the playframe. I pointed to how this improvisation was had to be in line with the pre-existing structures in the form of frame complexity. At the same time, improvisational emergence also created more frame complexity when by elaborating the given frame-complexity. This contributed to increasing the frame complexity, which formed a pre-existing structure for later action.

4. Fourth, I want to underline how the pre-existing material world was constantly intertwined with action in the context of performance. The play of the laiv players always took place in a physical environment, with certain given physical objects. When acting in the context of performance, the physical environment also gave the players possibilities of using aspects such as physical region and costumes as metacommunicative tools in framing. At the same time, the players always had to do so within the limitations of the physical environment. Yet, like the pre-existing structures of conventions, the given physical environment did usually not *pre-determine* the actions of the player. The given physical environment is selected and shaped by the players before play, but they are in turn limited by given standardised material and resources.

5. Fifth, looking at framebreaks, gives more information about how given keying conventions are carefully adapted to demands of the context of performance. The convention of 'immersionism' emphasise that players should be highly involved in their character during play. Yet chapter 10 showed how the players were usually capable of adapting to inconsistencies in the playframe. I noted how downkeying could occur if the players used techniques that made the physical emotions *too real*. I argued that the players actually depend on having a role distance to their performance of the in-frame character. In the same way, the high discipline of the laiv keying are aimed towards the aim of making the playframe appear as 'for real', yet it may also lead players to loose involvement and intentionally upkey. The metacommunicative techniques that

the players use carefully balance on the edge in to breaking the frame - too much involvement, and they may downkey; too little and they risk being regarded as upkeying.

## Constructing social realities

Having reviewed the main findings of the text, I now want to end by making some reflections concerning the topic of framing at a larger level. Namely, how the process of defining a situation of laiv play provides a demonstration of how a social reality is 'constructed'. This text follows the basic premise of paradigm that Berger & Luckman (1966) outlined in their insightful book 'The Social Construction of Reality'. This approach stress that are that social institutions, actions, and ways of organising society is not something that is naturally given, but primarily created by the use cultural and historical contingent language and knowledge. In the later decades, the perspective of social constructionism has been used in analysing how many different topics.<sup>1</sup> Authors such as Giddens (1979, 1984) and Barnes (1995) stress that in order to understand the existence of social institutions and organisation at a macro level, one have to understand how these are continuously produced and reproduced by persons acting in specific local settings at a micro level. This connects directly to the topic of this text. The laiv playframes are essentially small temporarily constructed societies. that the laiv players make. This text has shown how this is done on a micro level. The activities of the laiv players may work as laboratories that provide vivid demonstrations of social constructionism in practice. One may draw a line here the prison experiment conducted by Zimbardo and others

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<sup>1</sup> Such as gender and homosexuality (Nissen, 2001), natural science, (Latour and Woolgar, 1979; Knorr-Cetina, 1981), acts of crime (Hulsman, 1985), youth deviance and moral panics (Cohen, 1972) and so on. Hacking (1999:chapter 1) lists presents a more complete list.

(Haney, Banks & Zimbardo, 1973, Zimbardo et. al 1973, also see Web site, URL: '<http://www.prisonexp.org/>'). Zimbardo gathered a group of 40 subjects, and gave them random assigned roles as either prisoners or guardians at a mock-up prison built in a psychological laboratory building. His initial (in retrospect naïve) hypothesis was that authoritarian behaviour were a product of internal psychological traits. Yet he found that the subjects behaviour was much more tied to the way the situation was temporarily defined as a prison situation. The subjects enacted the roles as guardians or inmates within the temporarily constructed social system, relying heavily on their knowledge of conventions and stereotypes pertaining to prison situations. Both the laiv players activities and the Zimbardo's study demonstrates the validity of social constructionism. They show that it is possible to construct small semi-autonomous societies with a different hierarchy, social roles, and cultural setting. As a consequence, one should not take the manifestation of these aspects in everyday life as granted, natural, facts. Through looking at laiv play, one may more easily realise the ways in which everyday society is socially constructed as well. Some laiv players explicitly share this reflexivity, and I hope the reader may do so as well.



# 12.

## Appendix I - Six specific analytical techniques

The broader analytical approaches were discussed in chapter 4. However, in this appendix I shall sum up 6 practical approaches used in relation to the data in more detail.

### 1. Using software

I assisted my analysis with using the computer program NUDIST to 'code' the data. The program enabled me to note text according to keywords. Text with similar keywords could then be viewed and printed out together. This could then be further analysed for shared points, or further coded.<sup>1</sup>

### 2. Content analysis.

One technique was to look on the content of what was written or said in the textual sources. The players told me much about their own experiences, and about conventions of play. One pre-supposition to this approach, are that there is a relation between the content of the data, and the activities of the actors out in the 'real world'. While this is to some extent a reasonable pre-supposition (Hammersley&Atkinson, 1996), it was not necessarily the best approach. There are two reasons for this:

First, the players' own descriptions and discussions could have high normative ideological content. For example, the meaning of the play-

ers term 'immersionism' emphasise on spontaneous improvisation when playing the character. Consider the following extract from an organiser:

*'It is when you roleplay on autopilot that LARPs get interesting and you can start talking of "immersionism": 'Those periods that you are not consciously thinking about yourself as a different entity than the character, were you believe in the illusion.'*  
(Fatland, 2001:17)

In one way, it is a description of how play feels when 'LARPs get interesting' (line 1). However, it also carries a strong normative connotation intended by the author, of how laiv should be played, and how laiv should feel like. This is an interesting point in itself. It further leads to questions about the influence and use of normative ideologies in play, as well as noting the influence of debates for creating normative ideals. Nevertheless, a social researcher interested in understanding action must avoid assuming that factual behaviour blindly reflects normative ideals.

Secondly, I have already described how some of the sources presume a high amount of taken for granted knowledge that is of importance to

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<sup>1</sup> Described in Coffey&Atkinson, 1996:chapter 2.

the activity. This would not be evident with content analysis.

### **3. Contrasting perspectives.**

A way to see implicit knowledge more clear, were to compare data from frames that presume different degrees of insider knowledge. This can give different accounts of reality, which may be of analytical interest.

### **4. Analysing frame breaks and disagreement.**

Looking on norm breaks is a common approach in sociology. One of its most famous uses was by Garfinkel (1967) set of 'breaching experiments', where he instructed some of his students to break the basic convention of reciprocal trust of underlying everyday interaction. By looking at how the interaction then proceeded, he was able to get better insight into how reciprocal trust was important in everyday interaction. The methodological approach of Glaser&Strauss (1968) emphasise paying particular attention to 'deviant cases' in research – in other words, events that differs from the main tendency – in order to reveal what the general mechanisms are that they do not follow. On their hand, the laiv players are usually able to maintain the play-frame. However, from time to time the frame of play breaks, and the players go off-frame and act as themselves again. By understanding what makes such situations happen, one may at the same time gain insight into how they avoid this and manage to maintain the frame. Debates and disagreements between players were also illuminating. People who argue must present what they disagree about and this and may in the process explicitly refer to knowledge that is usually taken for granted.

### **5. Looking at the material world.**

I paid attention to how framing involved the material world. When playing, the players used a

place, money, people, objects and so on. I looked at the symbolic meaning attached, as well as the influence of the physical world on action. Just before the keying of the play began on Amaranth I was able to take a set of photographs of the players and the surroundings. While these have average technical quality, I have used them throughout the text as illustrations of analytical points. This have been particularly useful in relation to highlighting the importance of the material objects and surroundings, as photographs can render this much more concrete than text.

### **6. Using theory and comparisons.**

First, theory is a good tool to for me to maintain a distance to the field under study. This helps to create a novel perspective on the activity, and avoid replicating the players' perspective. Second, using theory provided me with a range of abstract 'sensitizing concepts' (Blumer, 1954) to suggest new relations and mechanisms within the data. Third, theory offers a framework for comparing the phenomena under study with other phenomena that on the surface appear different.

# 13.

## Appendix II - A note on ethics

I shall first note some relevant ethical principles that are taken from official guidelines (NESH, 2001), then consider how I relate to these.

An important principle is that 'people who are the objects of research shall not be submitted to any extra risk of injury or other significant strain' (ibid: §7). There is also a need to protect privacy of subjects (ibid: §12). Studied subjects can feel that certain acts belong to their private sphere, and would discomfort if these were made public. Accepting the subjects' self-respect is essential in research (ibid: §6, §12). Research that are conducted within the subjects' private sphere, and require their active cooperation, demand the informed consent. Observation that is taking place in a public context, usually do not require the need for informed consent (§ 8). However, it is necessary to inform the research subjects of the nature of the research conducted (§9), as well an obligation to report the research results back to the subjects (ibid:§10).

These guidelines leave considerable responsibility for judgements by me as a researcher. The talk and observation I did with players, depended on their co-operation and was to some extent outside of a public context. It thus required informed consent. When informing the players whom I met about my research I said of 'writing a Master thesis at the University' about laiv. The players whom I spoke to about this

didn't seem to mind it. However there were some problems with this approach. I did meet many players casually, taking part in conversations and listening to their debates about laiv. Many of these players only saw me briefly, and did probably not know about my intentions as a researcher of their practice. (Researchers who are obvious different from the subjects they study do not have this problem. But my appearance and age is similar to the average laiv player). It would have been awkward to declare my research intentions in all such informal exchanges. Generally, I only did it with players that I had longer conversations with, and on occasions when I took the opportunity to present myself to larger groups of player.

Like many other discussion sites on the World Wide Web, texts written and published on laiv.org is ambivalent in whether it can be regarded as private or public. Many have a remarkable private form. They reveal personal confessions about events inside or outside of play. But there is no registering required in order to read or write texts at the website. I therefore regard this as a public context. I have not individually informed nor asked permission for using such texts. I made a note on the web discussion forum, stating that I had read their forum and would quote some texts. If anyone wanted to read my findings, they could contact me. But not

many of the readers were likely to read this notice, since it was hidden in one of the discussion threads. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that my research would be felt as harmful or an invasion of privacy by the players. The topic of this text, mostly involves issues that is of a relaxed and non-controversial character.

There is a conflict between the need for protecting the privacy of the sources (§ 12), and the need to respect the work of others by citing the publications (§27). In the beginning of my interviews, I declared that whatever the subjects said would remain anonymous. Afterwards, some players objected to this. I have therefore disclosed their real name on their own request. This is complicated in relation to the Internet text. Some of these are more extensive, and had more the character of an article. My general approach has still been to make the author anonymous. I have made some exceptions, citing the author in some instances.



# Appendix III - V

## Handouts

The following pages contains three different handouts from the material that the laiv players themselves uses in the preparation process. This is the 'Europa - instructors handbook', the '2nd tour - inside/outside' playters booklet, and the character sheeth from my character in the play 'Amaranth'.

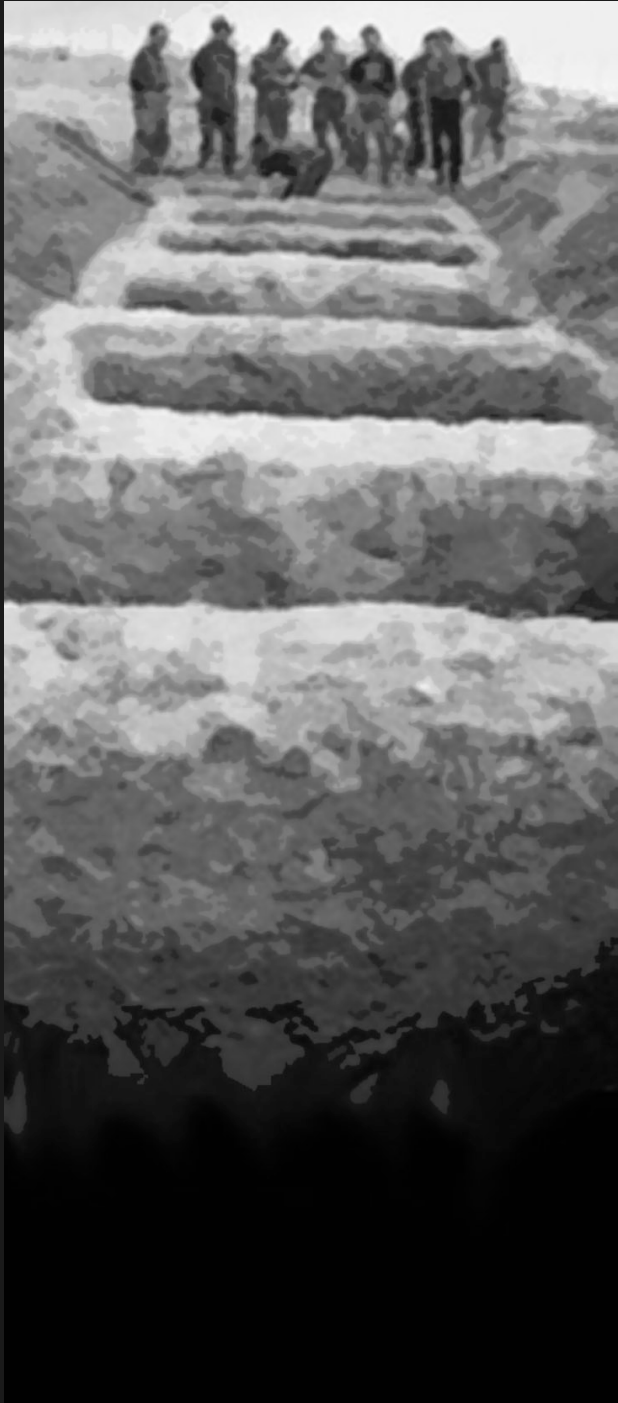
# 14. Appendix III 'Europa' - Instructor's handbook

On the following pages, the instructor's handbook booklet from the play 'Europa' is presented. This play was organised in the winter of 2001. The topic of this play, was to problematise conflicts of ethnicity and nationalism, and the situation of being a refugee. This play included players outside of Scandinavia, the material is therefore in English. However most of the players were from the Nordic countries.

The players played in a fictional setting, where the Nordic countries had been engaged in ethnic wars similar to those that plagued former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. The players played refugees, who arrived in a refugee camp set up in an Eastern-European country. They were divided into groups according to the country where the players lived (Swedish played Swedes, Norwegians played Norwegians, and so on). The players were instructed to put an emphasis on acting nationalistic and racist towards each other. Some players also played officials who had the work to interrogate the refugees and process their case, deciding if they could stay or not. This was a relatively demanding and emotionally intense play. This handbook provides details on the setting, on how to build up characters, and instructions regarding how to perform the characters. It was written to be used by co-instructors, who were assigned to prepare players. 'Europa' was a play

following the 'dogma' style, which differs from the regular conventions of play on some accounts - a discussion of this is also included. This booklet is a very good. Taken together, this is an excellent summary of techniques of playing as the laiv players explicitly know them.

The copyright of this text, belongs to the group Weltschmerz, who organised the play. Thanks to Eirik Fatland for giving permission to reproduce it. More information about Weltschmerz is available on-line, at url: '<http://weltschmerz.laiv.org>'. More information about the 'Europa' play, including a 'Players Sourcebook' that describe the setting in detail, are available at url: '<http://weltschmerz.laiv.org/europa/>'. The text also includes an article by Mr. Omar Harbie, who describes his experiences as an asylum seeker in Norway. I was unable to find out details of his current whereabouts, and could therefore not contact him about permissions to reproduce the article. Yet I think the content has high importance for the public, so I nevertheless choose to reproduce it in the current context.



## Instructor's handbook

### Terms (in this context)

<b>Instructor</b>	a player with the task of aiding other players in developing a character for Europa.
<b>Dogma 99</b>	"a programme for the liberation of LARP". Controversial LARP manifesto. Europa is a dogma LARP. see: <a href="http://fate.laiv.org/dogme99/">http://fate.laiv.org/dogme99/</a>
<b>diegesis</b>	the "world" of the fiction's characters - what they hold to be true.
<b>non-diegetic</b>	something which is not true for the characters, but still part of the fiction.
<b>introvert style</b>	an attitude of players: I convince myself I am the character, and then roleplaying follows from this illusion.
<b>ekstravert style</b>	an attitude of players: I use my body to emulate the character, and my illusion follows from this interaction. Most LARPer use a blend of these styles - but the categories are usefull as an analytical tool.
<b>low-key roleplaying</b>	a non-dramatic style of roleplaying: encouraging the use of subtle signs and avoiding exaggeration, caricature and stereotypes. The preferred style for Europa. Compatible with both introvert and ekstravert LARPing, but probably easier to achieve through the introvert style.



# Preface

In this handbook, you'll find 20 pages of text that are mostly about alternatives to using text. The self-contradiction of this has been pointed out to us.

Only four of these pages, however, are important - the section called "Working with players". As for the rest - these articles are there to describe the ideas behind those four pages, and to give some general background info about the concept and topics involved.

An emphasis is on the role of the instructor as a communicator of the LARPs concept. We have tried to describe the concept as best we can - but we also hope you'll take the time to ask us the questions that aren't answered here. Communication is not a one-way process.

A couple of texts are available in Norwegian only. These are inspirational material we didn't have time to translate. An English synopsis is included.

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# A vision of Europa



## **Abstract**

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### **Nation states and human machines**

Europa aims at demonstrating and discussing the problems of two typically European notions : the notion of the nation-state and the trust in the "human machine" as seen in the legal systems and bureaucracies. The choice of setting - an asylum reception centre filled with refugees from a nationalist Nordic war - reflects these problems from both angles.

In the background: nationalism as a result, extension or perversion of the belief in the nation-state and brutal militarism as possible through the "human machine", the obedience of soldiers to their superiors and populations to their governments.

In the setting: the asylum reception centre is an institution to contain the "unwelcome guests" who don't fit into the nation state. The legal treatment of asylum seekers, though making sense from a bureaucratic point of view, becomes absurd when one attempts to eliminate human compassion and understanding from the process.

### **Playing styles**

Exploring these problems through roleplaying is no easy task. A certain degree of selective realism is used for this. "Low-key" roleplaying emphasizes the realistic over the dramatic. The reception centre is based in detail upon the structures of real, Nordic reception

centres. The legal system used by the Orsinian bureaucrats in denying as many asylum applications as possible - is identical with the legal system used by real, European bureaucrats.

Bridging the gap between reality and LARP - we use abstraction and emotional realism. Abstraction : the bureaucrats are a Department of Justice in miniature. Emotional realism : our sounds and scenography do not belong in a real asylum reception centre, but do belong in the experience of a real asylum seeker.

But most importantly - we are dependent on the instructors and players to get this to work. The themes (nation-state and human machine) should be reflected in the characters. Players should be familiar with them, and be able to gain inspiration for roleplaying from them.

### **Reflection - not propaganda**

A "message" is not to be sneaked into the background. Though we (obviously) are critical to the way asylum seekers are treated in Europe - it's far easier being critical than suggesting solutions. A solution might simply be to not accept asylum seekers. A solution might be to accept the nation state and human machine as the "least of evils". The purpose of the LARP is to get players to reflect over the questions it raises - not to function as indoctrination.

Experimentation with the LARP medium is secondary to the themes and fiction. Because our fiction is unusual, our methods should be suited to the fiction and traditional methods of LARPmaking are not. This forces us to experiment with new ones.

## **The Nation-State**

One people - one state. Used as we are to this notion, it has of course not always been so. The nation-state is a recent, mostly European, invention. Some argue that its nature is illusory, an "imagined community" enforced by a state in need of the support and cooperation of the

people. Others describe nation states as more positive entities - the idea of a nation can only be questioned in the abstract, and even if illusory - there is a fundamental benefit for the people of a state sharing a strong, common identity. Neither your opinion, nor our opinion about the nation state is relevant for Europa.

What is relevant is to ask questions, demonstrate problems. The European paranoia of immigration clearly comes from the nation state - one nation, one state - and so you have "aliens", those who don't belong. At Europa, an aim is for the players to feel alien, to be the unwelcome intruders of another nation-state (Orsinia).

Nationalism is an ideology, or political tendency, that really couldn't exist without the nation state concept, and which draws its symbolism and legitimacy from those of the nation. The characters, all influenced by nationalism, will be the aliens and intruders for one another. The "subjective history" (a text on the history of the Troubles and before - written differently for each country) will make an attempt at using symbols and history we recognize, and warp them - or just shift emphasis - in order to show "My Country" as heroes, and the others as villains. An important motive enters here - the Martyr Complex.

### **The Martyr Complex**

Central to some forms of nationalism is the myth or reality of martyrdom. Whenever your people have been oppressed or slain because of their identity - it justifies any retaliation. Serb nationalists have legitimized Serb atrocities during the wars with the atrocities committed against the Serbs in the past. Israeli and Palestinian nationalism both display this martyr complex - the Israelis: everybody fucked with us, so we have a right to retaliate and secure ourselves a safe haven. The Palestinians: the Israelis fucked with us so bad, we have a right to retaliate and secure ourselves a safe haven.

While the Israelis and Palestinians do have their martyrs in living memory, the

\* Norwegian and Swedish media told remarkably different versions of this story.

nationalist myth of martyrism also tends to search further back into history. If you look long enough into your "nations" history - there's always a period where you were oppressed, as well as that golden age.

It is an extremely powerful motive, especially when it's mixed with the history of living memory. Hitler came to power in part by portraying poverty-struck Germany as a martyr of the unjust Versailles treaty. The civil war in Turkish Kurdistan has been fuelled by the martyr complex on both sides - the mothers of slain Turkish soldiers or slain PKK guerrillas have shown an extreme unwillingness to forgive, halting attempts at peace and reconciliation.

Introducing this motive to Europa; the subjective history will show every nation as a martyr in its own eyes. We didn't start the war - it was the nasty Swedish Imperialists/Norwegian Fascists/Greedy Danes/Arrogant Finns! Sure, we killed civilians in Oslo/Iceland/Jämtland/Skåne/Turku - but remember what the other side did before!

The same martyr complex should be reflected in the characters. All characters should start the LARP with memories of atrocities committed by the other sides. Many characters may feel as victims of foreign aggression and brutality.

### **Encouraging racism**

Racism should be encouraged in the characters, as an extrapolation of the xenophobia and ethnocentrism we all try to suppress. A Swedish player is mildly skeptical to playing with Danish LARPer? Good, encourage a character who really hates Danes. A Norwegian player feels the Telia/Telenor fiasco was all Sweden's fault - or vice-versa?\* Good, make the character a nationalist with a strong hatred for the other country. Exploit every prejudice you come across for what it is worth - the consequences of prejudice should demonstrate themselves during the LARP. We also want characters who make it easier for the other nations to play racist. Characters that are blatantly unpleasant people, and extremely proud of their nationality.

Using this method, we're dependent upon a good derolling and some solid multinational partying after the LARP. We don't want players to bring prejudice home with them. Not that that's very likely, though.

We want the players to hate each other - to spit on each other, to swear and tell stories of what a tremendously brutal, egoist and arrogant people the Norwegians / Swedes / Danes / Finns / Skånes / Lapps / Finland-Swedes are. Political correctness and super-tolerance are of course not acceptable.

### **The Human Machine**

The "Human Machine" is a term we invented for Europa. It designates the attitudes commonly found in bureaucracies and military systems.

To quote Max Weber:

"From a purely technical point of view, a bureaucracy is capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency, and is in this sense formally the most rational known means of exercising authority over human beings. It is superior to any other form in precision, in stability, in the stringency of its discipline, and in its reliability. It thus makes possible a particularly high degree of calculability of results for the heads of the organization and for those acting in relation to it. It is finally superior both in intensive efficiency and in the scope of its operations and is formally capable of application to all kinds of administrative tasks.

"No machinery in the world functions so precisely as this apparatus of men and, moreover, so cheaply. . . . Rational calculation . . . reduces every worker to a cog in this bureaucratic machine and, seeing himself in this light, he will merely ask how to transform himself into a somewhat bigger cog. . . . The passion for bureaucratization drives us to despair"

"When fully developed, bureaucracy



stands . . . under the principle of sine ira ac studio (without scorn and bias). Its specific nature which is welcomed by capitalism develops the more perfectly the more bureaucracy is 'dehumanized,' the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational and emotional elements which escape calculation. This is the specific nature of bureaucracy and it is appraised as its special virtue"

"The decisive reason for the advance of bureaucratic organization has always been its purely technical superiority over any other kind of organization. The fully developed bureaucratic mechanism compares with other organizations exactly as does the machine with the nonmechanical modes of organization"

"The apparatus (bureaucracy), with its peculiar impersonal character. . . is easily made to work for anybody who knows how to gain control over it. A rationally ordered system of officials continues to function smoothly after the enemy has occupied the area: he merely needs to change the top officials"

Many of the same things can be said of the military. The "human machine" is any human organization that strives for impersonal perfection, to remove individual emotion and understanding from the decision-making process - preferring instead rules and procedure, strict hierarchies. The legal and democratic institutions we are so proud of - perhaps with good reason - are "human machines". To look at the darker side: this mentality is what makes the modern military possible. It is what made the holocaust possible -

*I'm just following orders. The rules say I put the name of all Gypsies and Jews in my area on this list - and it isn't my responsibility to know what that leads too.*

While the holocaust was made possible by the human machine - it was made desirable by nationalism. There has been no clearer demonstration of the problems of Europe than the holocaust. Our working hypothesis is that the same forces and mechanisms are at work in the asylum reception centres.

The LARP Europa is a medium to discuss this.

# The textbase and character development.

This article, written by Eirik back in January, outlines our philosophy of text and character work.

The Dogme 99 slogan, "LARP is Action - not literature!" should be taken literally, and we should strive to limit the textbase of the LARP to a necessary minimum. Admitting, though, that we are dependent upon a concise textbase. The traditional "character writer" becomes, instead, a "role instructor" - whose main task is to aid the player in character interpretation. The role instructor may use a variety of techniques in her job, and for "Europa" - we should use the opportunity to experiment.

## The textbase

Almost every LARP has a form script - what I will call here the "textbase". The textbase may be defined as all texts read by players before a LARP, upon which they base their character interpretation. Included in the textbase are the traditional character descriptions, group descriptions, info booklets ("kompendium", "utskick") and any other documents produced by larpwrights to be read by players before the LARP.

Of course, players base their interpretation upon more than the textbase - the visual and verbal communications from the larpwrights play an important part, as do rumours and talk between the players. Still, the textbase is held to be the most important tool of the larpwright. If you examine the attitudes

of contemporary LARPer you will soon discover that the prevailing paradigm is similar to that of institutional theatres - the drama as an interpretation of text, unscripted drama being inconceivable for the majority.

I will not here question if this is correct or incorrect. "Europa" will have players corners of the Nordic countries. To be pragmatic, the only sure way to reach all of them - is through the traditional medium of text. We should be aware of the importance of the textbase, and though we will supplement it in many ways - the textbase should be concentrated, well thought-through and serve as a "safety net" that ensures all players act in the same illusion.

## Pre-LARP and In-LARP fictions

The totality of ideas held by the player about the nature of the particular LARP and her character constitute the LARP's fiction. The pre-LARP fiction is the LARP fiction as understood before the event. The in-LARP fiction is the LARP fiction as understood during and after the event.

The most important function of the textbase is to establish a common pre-LARP fiction before the event. While interpretations of character may and should vary, the interpretations of the whole should be as similar as possible. Playing a Norwegian during Europa is not the same as playing a Finn. Both the Norwegian and the Finn should however have a common understanding of the purpose of the LARP, the ways to interact, the moods that are to dominate, the ways to resolve conflict dramatically and such

simple rules as "No off-game!" and "this is a fiction!".

From this initial consensus, the LARP can and will develop beyond the plans of the larpwrights. This is to be desired. The purpose of establishing consensual pre-LARP fiction is simply to provide guidelines that ensure the in-LARP fiction remains a conceptual whole. The worst thing that can happen is fragmentation; players adopting incompatible playing styles.

Common as this fragmentation is in "garden variety"LARPs - it should be avoided at all costs for Europa. We are dealing with some pretty serious issues, through a pretty unusual event - and this will only work if our vision is enforced through the pre-LARP fiction. Mainstream LARP aims at providing the largest amount of fun for the most players. Europa aims at provoking thought.

### **Minimising the textbase**

It is my opinion that an error of many LARPwrights has been to over-estimate the need for a long and detailed textbase. The in-LARP fiction is created by lots of improvisation over a few facts. When the textbase contains more facts than the player is able to, or desires to, memorise - different players will remember different facts. Thus, we have the fragmentation problem again.

Another side of the over-extensive textbase is that it gives the player the idea that the LARP is based upon a whole lot of "truths" - known by the LARPwrights. This leads to uncertainty, a reluctance to act out lest you're doing "something wrong".

At least one fantasy troupe I know of have adopted this attitude - leaving almost no parts of the in-LARP fiction to improvisation - but being busy off-game answering the players' questions about the LARP world. Needless to say, that's not how we're going to spend our time during Europa. The pre-LARP fiction should be established by the larpwrights, but after gamestart - it should be left entirely to the players to define the in-LARP fiction.

An over-extensive textbase should be avoided. That means - no more than 1

page of character description, no more than 30 pages of relevant information on the whole and no more than 5 pages pertaining to each group. The character description should be factual, not prose, and aim at giving a "skeleton" for the player to flesh out.

### **Interpretations of the textbase**

The LARP "old school" holds that the written character description is the basis of the character interpretation. This is a truth with modifications; experience has showed us that players almost without exception alter, forget, or add to their written descriptions in their interpretations. Other factors form their idea of character. The long character descriptions used by the more professional Norwegian LARPs have generally served as inspiration, not as basis, for the character interpretation.

As stated previously - while the interpretations of the whole should be as similar as possible, character interpretations should vary. Players interpret the textbase to answer at least three questions:

1. what is the LARP about?
2. what is my group about?
3. what is my character about?

Of these, an answer to the first question should come first, and an answer to the last one come last. As one interpretation influences the others, it is important that the player has a clear idea of how to fit in with the other players before coming to any conclusions about the character.

A player who has decided on a character early on, may (involuntarily) interpret the entire LARP to fit with her



chosen character. It is for this reason we have seen even mature LARPerS insisting on such silly ideas as playing wizards on historical LARPs or orcs at greek-mythology events.. the character concept has come before the understanding of the LARP, and as excitement over the character concept dominates - the players eyes will be clouded to what is actually written in the textbase, especially as it requires interpretation.

If the understanding of the pre-LARP fiction comes first, suitable ideas of character will develop from it. The most obvious way to ensure this, is to begin by presenting the LARPs vision, then asking players to come up with ideas for their character. The problem here, is that character ideas may have been formed even before the LARP was planned. "oooh, finally a LARP where I can get a chance to play.. [insert cliché here]".

I can think of only two solutions to this problem; the less preferable one is to invite only the "best" LARPerS, and then start wondering which criteria to sort by... The better solution is to make the interpretation process a guided one. Thus, we should dispense of the "character writer" - as stated before, the writing job should be a minimal one - and introduce the instructor.

### **Guided interpretation**

Having stressed the importance of a short, concise textbase and guided interpretation we come now to the other



methods that may be used in the process of character interpretation.

As said before, we are dependent upon the textbase as our only secure tool of communication. The fact that this is the only method we can depend upon, does not mean it is the only method we should use. Rather, the textbase should work as a "safety net" for the communication of the pre-LARP fiction and character. Apart from this safety net, we should concentrate our efforts on experimenting with techniques other than text - in guiding players through the interpretation process.

The job of the instructor will be writing the character skeleton, and then assist the player in developing this skeleton into a full human being. The instructor should, in this process, make sure the final character fits in with the pre-LARP fiction totality.

As this is a lot of work, we are dependent upon having instructors other than the Europa larpwrights - especially since our players are spread out all over the Nordic countries. Following "Knappnålshuvudets" example of having playing instructors, who create 5-10 characters each, seems like the best solution for Europa.

Here are the five methods I suggest instructors use for Europa;

#### **1. The written description - the "character skeleton".**

This should be written in a clear and factual way, contain only that information necessary for the LARP to work, and not exceed one page. The character skeleton might say something about the characters ethnicity, relations to other characters (family, comrades), reason for flight and work experience/education.

#### **2. Dialogue between instructor/ writer and player**

The instructor should spend time talking to each individual player, listening to their ideas and expectations, and coordinate these with the LARP vision and those



of other players. The character may be developed through questions asked by the instructor.

### **3. Inspirational material**

This may be text, but also photography, painting, music, film or any other medium. The instructor finds material appropriate for the LARP and character, such as real refugee stories, photography, poetry etc. If text is used, it should be marked as "Inspirational material" to separate it from the hard facts of the textbase.

### **4. Mini-larps**

It is not unknown for LARP groups to prepare for a LARP with short "mini-LARPs", testing characters and establishing group play. This is a tool that can be used by us to establish not only group play and develop characters - but also communicate some of the vision behind "Europa".

For instance, a mini-larp may take place in a container during the characters' smuggling through Europe. Or characters who have been in the army, may be played a scene where they are given (real) guns and instructed by an officer to execute "traitors" or members of a rival ethnic group. The execution is carried out in-game, and aims at establishing a picture of the brutality the characters are escaping from.

"The application for asylum", held immediately before "Europa" itself, also serves as such a mini-larp.

### **5. Meditative/suggestive techniques**

The idea is to experiment with introspective techniques of character immersion, mostly to explore an opposite of the (extrovert) drama exercises currently in vogue.

For instance, a player may be asked to meditate over a specific situation in the characters life - to visualise it in detail, reflect on any emotions that arise, and find ways to recall the atmosphere of the meditation at will. Such meditations may be guided by an instructor, played by audio or video, or be self-guided. Players can be asked to find experiences from their own life similar to those of the character, relive the scene for their inner eye, and then substitute the particulars of their own memory for particulars of the characters experience - while retaining the emotion. The ideal is to give the player a spectre of base emotions to call up, perhaps even to fabricate "false memories" with the feel of real ones.

Stanislavski's exercises for actors, as well as textbooks on meditation, hypnosis and self-hypnosis, may serve as sources of inspiration here. These techniques will also be explored during Europa.

# Working with players

## Larp is action, not literature!

There - we said it again. This slogan says a lot about what we want the character development for Europa to be like. The instructor as an advisor rather than a writer. The most important task of the instructor is to **communicate the Europa concept**.

Communication is not a one-way process, and for this reason you should be prepared to spend a lot of your time talking - with players, other instructors and organisers.

Working this close with other people may lead to your obtaining sensitive information about them. Remember discretion. Don't abuse the trust players may place in you.

## 1. The interview

The first step of working with a player is the interview. We've made a standard interview form to use here. You should add follow-up questions to get as clear a picture as possible of what the player wants, how you can reach that goal together. You should consider what the player says carefully, looking for any problems that may arise later. This applies as much to friends as to people you've never met before - we all have our weaknesses.

### remember

- talk with the player about psychological safety and the safety codes.

- if the player informs you of any special concerns that need to be taken at the LARP - because of claustrofobia, veganism, whatever - please inform the organisers.
- at this point, you should also consider warning players that may be making a mistake; Playing yourself (not a character) in the fiction, for instance, is not necessarily a good idea, and should be justified. Not that we won't allow it - we just want the player to make an informed, well-thought-through decision.

### dangers/pitfalls

- the player may try to steer or manipulate you into giving him/her a specific character. This may be OK, but you should try to find out *why* - what are the player's real motives for wanting this character?
- there is also a risk you might do the same - manipulating or steering the player into accepting an idea of yours.

## 2. Character sketches.

Together with the player you should come up with several character ideas. Good starting points are stereotypes (the bank manager, the student, the housewife, the politician..) or people the player knows (the neighbour, boss, teacher, friend..). Toy with these concepts, brainstorm a bit about them, test them out in short roleplaying sessions.

What is a good Europa character? Pretty much anyone alive in the Nordic countries today, with the influence of

living through a poor, strongly nationalist, war-torn decade added - and a reason to flee. At the website, you'll find a sketch of the wars and a list of typical refugees. These are also good starting points, at least when adapting a reality-based character to the fiction of Europa.

*"OK, so we'll try the character of a bitter old woman with an outdated degree in computer science. What does she think when Finland bombs Stockholm? What is her attitude to her Danish neighbour? Is she proud when her son joins a paramilitary group?"*

After discussing some concepts, you choose one. In some cases, you want to end the first meeting here - without choosing a character yet, giving both you and the player some time to think. In other situations, the ideal character may have been obvious from the beginning.

#### **remember**

- Characters should be realistic.
- Both you and the player should feel comfortable with the character

- Most refugees are "ordinary" people. Some may have been persecuted by the government for political actions and views, but this does not mean that they're freedom fighters or persecuted writers with a Nobel Prize in literature.

#### **dangers/pitfalls**

- "the double agent". Playing a role who pretends to be a different role (say - an opportunist pretending to be a refugee) - a common idea, but usually really difficult to roleplay well.
- "the clown". A caricature isn't a character. At least not at Europa.
- "the hyperactive". A character so demanding to play, the player will be exhausted in short time. Europa is four days.
- "the nice guy". We don't want neutral, nice, tolerant characters who can turn the hatred of Europa into a nice, social democratic Disneyland.

### **3. Connecting characters**

If the player wants to play in a group (usually - "groups" will be couples), this is when you create it. You may team some

#### **excerpt from Infoletter #1:**

- Characters should be reality-based. We want people who could be real - not caricatures.
- No character should be super-tolerant.. every character, even left-wing political dissidents, have a sympathy for their country and a disdain for the others. Every character has been influenced by nationalist propaganda and ideology.
- As many players are leftish, liberal, intellectual folks - there is a risk that there will be too many leftish, liberal, intellectual characters. Please consider other alternatives, though we won't be saying no to players who insist that a leftish, liberal, intellectual character is the one they really, really want to play.
- We don't want any characters based on being violent.
- Military service : All healthy young men, and quite a lot of women, were conscripted to the army before the wars began. Did your character go? Was he/she a draft dodger or pacifist? Was he/she forced to go anyway? Characters who have been involved in the War have most probably experienced extreme acts of brutality - also towards the civilian population. War leaves a certain mark on a human, and this experience will be part of your character.

**Note by GTB: Original shows photography of starving refugees in refugee camp.  
Removed from reproduction in the appendix due to lack of publishing rights.**

of your players together, co-operate with another instructor on forming a group, or post a message to the europa-developers list. Typical groups may be families, friends, or colleagues. Maybe just a couple of people who co-incidentally fled together.

#### **remember**

- teaming experienced with less experienced players is often a good idea. The experienced player may explain things to the inexperienced, whereas inexperienced players - uncorrupted by LARP convention - often contribute a dynamic unpredictability to the LARP.
- we want a majority of characters to arrive alone.

#### **dangers/pitfalls**

- connecting players that won't interact well. You can test this by setting up a microlarp and observe their roleplaying.

## **4. Training the player**

Based on a skeleton of the character - you may now start training the player in playing the character. There are several ways to do this. Not all are easy to put into text, and we therefore suggest you use the methods you feel the most comfortable with. The aim of this training is to give the player a "vocabulary" of emotions, memories, expressions and body language. We prefer that you do this first, and then - if at all necessary - give thought to the details of the history a character with these emotions, memories, expressions and body language would have.

During these exercises the character may change substantially. That's not a problem, unless the "new character" is unplayable.

Actually - the major purpose of this training is to give the player enough confidence to roleplay. Secondary purposes are to make players focus on roleplaying and to communicate more of the Europa concept. If the players become better roleplayers along the



way, that's excellent, but not always achievable.

A character interpretation can be seen as an interplay between inner and outer factors. The inner factors mostly amount to self-suggestion - players immersing themselves in the fiction of the character the same way they would immerse in a book or a movie. "Introvert training" aims at deepening this immersion, as well as guiding the player in developing this fiction. The outer factors consist of scenography and interaction. Both aid in immersion, making the LARP fiction more convincing. Scenography is Someone Else's Problem, whereas the "extravert training" and microlarps/prologues aim at training the player in Europa-style interaction.

### Introvert training

Bring the player to a relaxed, meditative state. This can for instance be done by playing the opening part of the Europa promovideo ("you will listen carefully to my voice as I guide you still deeper into Europa...").

Here are some suggestions for what to do next:

- "seeing through the eyes of your character - visualise your hometown, burning, describe what you're seeing."
- Ask the player to call up the memory of when something bad (accident, death) happened to someone he/she knew. Get the player to describe the memory with as much detail as possible, reliving the situation. Then replace the details, one by one, with details from the characters world until this becomes the memory of a friend of the characters. Hopefully, the player will then be able to call up the same emotion for his characters friend as.
- "seeing through the eyes of your character - imagine you're sitting in a chair, watching a black TV-screen. You have heard that a war has began. When I have counted to the number 10, you will turn on the television and

describe to me which images you see on the screen"

NB! This is experimental. It might not work at all. It might work too well. Take care, and make sure you have the player's consensus.

### Other, slightly introvert, methods that can be used:

- Get the player to say something. Anything. Then ask him/her to rephrase the sentence and say it the way the character would.
- Ask the player, relaxed and with closed eyes, to imagine a situation from the Troubles. Preferably a situation involving a conversation. Roleplay this situation, using voice and imagination only.

### Ekstravert training

Drama exercises are almost always a good way to prepare for a LARP. If you don't know how to lead any drama exercises - chances are, you know someone who does.

**Grotowski-style** exercise and **physical theatre** have been used for LARP preparations several times before, generally with good results. Using this style for Europa, though, one should remember the focus on low-key roleplaying.

**Method Acting** (Stanislavskij school) is antithetical to LARP, disapproving of improvisation, and in general shouldn't be used. Some exercises on the introvert side, however, may come in handy.

If using **Keith Johnstone** ("Impro") - status exercises are often valuable, and should be practiced by all LARPer worth their salt, but many of his theatre sports exercises lead to the kind of exaggerated play we don't want at Europa.

A good way to test or train a player in low-key roleplaying would be to ask him to act out a situation with as much dramatic exaggeration as possible. Then play the same scene again - but a little less exaggerated. Then again - but more normal. Then again, but a "level" less intense, less dramatic, than normal. Redo

this exercise in different scenarios until the player is able to;

- a) conjure up inner emotion (anger, fear) through physical motion - without having to resort to exaggeration.
- b) communicate an intent or emotion without using words or exaggeration but through the more subtle signs of body language and tone of voice.

The player may also act out scenes from the everyday life of his role. Ex: writing a letter to a newspaper, writing an article, studying, looking for information about certain issues, and so forth.

Encourage the player to practice, alone, in front of a mirror.

### **Microlarping/prologues**

Gather some of "your" players for a microlarp, preferably together with another instructor and his/her players. The roles don't need to be complete at this stage, in some cases it could actually be better if they're not. Microlarps may take place months or even years before the characters fled to Orsinia - establishing memories. They may also be used to test the character in situations that will be encountered at Europa - such as a police interview or a phone to the bureaucrat.

## **5. Developing background**

We believe the importance of background story is generally over-estimated by LARPerS. What we hope to achieve by the above methods - is to define a character by other criteria than a logical, detailed, background. After taking players through the aforementioned four steps - you've probably found out if this works or not.

Even if it does work in general - there are still those players who will insist that a detailed background is essential for their LARP experience. You can write the background, or they can - and get your mark of approval.

**Important:** If introducing background story that will affect other players (ex. introducing a new political party) - send an email to the europa-developers list.

### **Using fates**

If you're not familiar with the fateplay method - take a look at [http://fate.laiv.org/in\\_fate.htm](http://fate.laiv.org/in_fate.htm).

If you and the player agree that a fate sounds like a good idea, create one. Otherwise - don't. But make fates open-ended, triggering situations early in the LARP - not closing them. Use them to create situations that will add to the players interaction and experience - not stories.

There is no reason to create a fate that will take the character where it would go anyway. The purpose of fates at Europa is to break up the predictability created by LARP convention.

An alternative to using fates is to set up a list of suggestions for things the player can do.

# Implications of Dogma 99

Europa is a dogma LARP. Though instructors are not required to take the Dogma 99 Vow of Chastity - Dogma 99 ideology will still influence your work, or the organisers will be shot by an angry mob of players accusing them of not keeping their promises.

Here's a list of how this will influence your work, as well as answers to some common questions.

## 1. It is forbidden to create action by writing it into the past history of a character or the event.

Contrary to popular belief - this does not prohibit long and detailed background stories. It prohibits writing background with the purpose of creating action at the LARP. Static conflicts (like "Norwegians hate Swedes") are a specified exception.

## 2. There shall be no "main plot".

There isn't one.

## 3. No character shall only be a supporting part.

Avoid creating groups where the existence of one character is justified by it supporting another character.

## 4. All secrecy is forbidden.

Any participant who so desires shall in advance be shown all documents that pertain to the event.

That includes character sketches and this handbook. This does not give players the right, however, to request sensitive information about other players.

## 5. After the event has begun, the playwrights are not allowed to influence it.

After Europa has begun, you are a normal player. So are the organisers.

## 6. Superficial action is forbidden.

Avoid creating characters that are bound to be violent during Europa.

## 7.LARPs inspired by tabletop role-playing games are not accepted.

Avoid character concepts like half-elven fighter-mages or Cthulhu cultists... :-)

## 8. No object shall be used to represent another object.

This does not prohibit the use of non-diegetic or non-realistic elements. It prohibits the use of a non-realistic object to be used as a replacement for a realistic one.

Some would say this interpretation is balancing on the edge of Dogma 99. We don't think so, though it may be discussed. Our use of non-diegetic elements is definitely not in conflict with the purpose behind vow #8.

## 9. Game mechanics are forbidden.

There aren't any game mechanics at Europa. Safety rules are not game mechanics according to Dogma 99's definition of "game mechanics".

## 10. The playwrights shall be held accountable for the whole of their work.

If you don't like what we do - criticize it.

**Dogma 99**

A programme for the liberation of LARP

# Post-traumatisk Stressyndrom

**English synopsis:** this is a short description of post-traumatic stress syndrome: definition, symptoms, causes and effect.

Post-traumatisk stressyndrom er en ikke uvanlig lidelse for personer som har blitt utsatt for særlig sterke opplevelser, og kan føre til betydelige hukommelsesproblemer på grunn av fortregning av hendelser og opplevelser.

## Blant årsaker til post-traumatisk stressyndrom finner vi:

- At man har blitt utsatt for alvorlige trusler mot sitt liv eller mot sin fysiske trygghet.
- At barn, ektemake eller andre nære slektninger eller venner er blitt utsatt for alvorlige trusler eller skade.
- At man har opplevd en plutselig ødeleggelse av sitt hjem, eller av nærsamfunnet.
- At man ser en annen person som nylig er blitt - eller idet han/hun blir - alvorlig skadet eller drept som et resultat av en ulykke eller fysisk vold.

## Personen vil gjenoppleve den traumatiske hendelsen gjennom

- Gjentatte og påtrengende erindringer om hendelsen.
- Gjentatte vonde drømmer om hendelsen.
- At man plutselig oppfører seg eller føler det som om den traumatiske hendelsen gjentas (kan inkludere hallusinasjoner, flashbacks).
- Intenst psykologisk stress på grunn av hendelser som symboliserer et aspekt ved den traumatiske hendelsen, for eksempel ved årsdager for når hendelsen fant sted.

## Videre vil personen forsøke å unngå alle stimuli som han/hun forbinder med den traumatiske opplevelsen:

- Forsøk på å unngå tanker eller følelser som man forbinder med traumet.
- Forsøk på å unngå aktiviteter eller situasjoner som kan påkalle minner om traumet.
- Manglende evne til å huske vesentlige sider ved traumet (psykisk amnesi).
- Markant forminsket interesse for viktige aktiviteter (for små barn: tap av nylig ervervede evner, så som å bruke toalettet eller språkevner; for voksne: manglende interesse for hygiene, rengjøring, matlaging, o.l.).
- Følelse av dissosiering eller fremmedgjøring i forhold til andre mennesker.
- Svekket følelsesliv, for eksempel manglende evne til å føle kjærlighet.
- Opplevelse av en avkortet fremtid, for eksempel at man ikke forventer å ha en karriere, gifte seg, få barn, eller leve et langt liv.

## Følgende symptomer på øket sensitivitet vil kunne opptre:

- Vanskeligheter med å sovne, eller med å holde seg våken.
- Irritabilitet, utbrudd av sinne.
- Konsentrasjonsvansker.
- Ekstrem sensitivitet/årvåkenhet, vaktksomhet (hypervigilance).
- Engstelig, skvettent reaksjonsmønster.
- Fysiologiske reaksjoner på hendelser som symboliserer eller ligner på den traumatiske hendelsen, for eksempel en kvinne som begynner å svette intenst straks hun kommer inn i en heis, fordi hun en gang har blitt voldtatt i en heis.

Kilde: American Psychiatric Association

## Others on the List Were Not as Lucky

*Dr. Vjosa Dobruna traveled to Washington DC in April to testify before the U.S. Senate on her experience being forced from her home in Pristina.*

My name is Dr. Vjosa Dobruna. As a pediatrician and human rights activist, I founded and direct the Center for Protection of Women and Children, a community clinic in Pristina, Kosovo. The Center works with war trauma victims, families in need and handicapped children. We also cooperate with international non-governmental and private voluntary organizations to monitor humanitarian and human rights violations.

Pristina, which until two weeks ago was a city of more than 200,000 inhabitants, now has a population of 15,000 to 20,000, mostly Serbs. I was among those forced to leave Pristina by Serbian security forces. Before forcing us out of town, Serbian security troops demanded money and beat us, both my sister and I. They beat my brother-in-law very badly, threatening his wife that they would kill him.

Even before I left Pristina, I had changed apartments every night for the previous six nights, ever since I was told by a friend that my name was on a list of targeted ethnic Albanians.

Others on the list were not as lucky. Human rights lawyer Bajram Kelmendi, along with his two sons, was abducted by Serbian security or paramilitary forces in front of his wife and grandchildren. Serbian police told the family to kiss him good-bye, they would not see him again. Bajram's body was found three days later, on the

road next to a gas station. He had been shot in the head repeatedly. His sons were killed with him.

After being ordered out of Pristina myself, I rode with my family to the border. I rode in the back of the car, covered by a sheet, so that police would not recognize me as a human rights activist. By the time we reached the long line of cars waiting to cross, we had seven adults and two children in the car. While in line, we were forced by Serbian police to keep the doors shut and windows closed for at least 24 hours; we waited in line for some 56 hours. As we waited, we saw many trains passing on the railway beside us, carrying thousands of refugees. We heard one man in the car behind us cry out, because he saw his elderly father in the crowded window of one passing train, headed for the Macedonian border. Hours later the trains would return empty.

When we finally reached the Blace border crossing at the border with Macedonia, the situation was inhuman. The flow of deportees into Blace seemed to be well-coordinated between the Serbian and Macedonian border guards. The deportees slept in the open, in an enormous muddy pit with little or no water or food for the first two days. There was no proper medical care, and international aid organizations were not permitted access to the camp by the Macedonian police. I personally was kept from providing immediate aid to a 17-day old infant suffering from severe dehydration. The baby died.

(Source *U.S. Committee for Refugees*)



# En asylsøkers beretning

**Dette er en beretning om hva jeg som asylsøker og min familie har gjennomgått i Norge. Vi forlot Irak pga. press og forfølgelse. Vi er palestinere, og i Irak ble vi ikke behandlet som likeverdige mennesker. Det var derfor vi kom til Norge.**

Vi følte lettelse og glede da vi kom til Norge sommeren 1998. Vi trodde at vi kunne leve i trygghet, og at lidelse og usikkerhet skulle være slutt. Dette trodde vi fordi Norge er kjent for å fremme demokrati, frihet og menneskerettigheter. Måten vi ble mottatt på, ga oss en optimistisk forventning om et liv i frihet og verdighet. Etter tre uker i transittmottak var vi til det første politiavhøret. Deretter ble vi plassert på et svært isolert sted, Landeskogen asylmottak i Bygland kommune. Vi syntes det var ok fordi vi var sju personer i familien, og vi regnet med at vi ikke skulle bli der så lenge. Vi leste UDIs informasjon om asylsøkeres rettigheter, og etter ca 2 uker fikk hvert familiemedlem sitt eget brev fra UDI, der de skrev at våre asylsøknader var mottatt, og at søknadene ville bli behandlet innen 3 måneder. Hvis de ikke kunne bli behandlet på den tiden, ville det likevel bli tatt en avgjørelse. Vi ble glade da vi fikk disse brevene.

## Nye avhør

Vi var de eneste palestinere fra Irak på dette mottaket. Som familiefar var det godt å vite at livet i mottaket ikke skulle vare så lenge, og snart skulle være bare et minne. Jeg deltok i alle aktiviteter på mottaket. Jeg satt i beboerrådet, og anstrengte meg for å løse problemene som oppstod for asylsøkerne. Tiden gikk, måned etter måned - og vi ble innkalt til nye avhør. Politiet viste stor oppfinnsomhet da de spurte etter informasjon. De spurte ikke etter papirer eller annen dokumentasjon. Min kone var syk, og hun aborterte etter et av disse avhørene. Situasjonen forandret seg til det verre, og det ble stadig vanskeligere å forklare barna hvorfor vi måtte vente så lenge. Mottaket var et gammelt sanatorium, bygd i 1912, og det var ikke særlig egnet for lang botid. Fra tid til annen ringte jeg advokaten jeg hadde fått oppnevnt. Jeg spurte hva vi kunne gjøre, og han svarte hver gang at det var bare å vente, vente, vente ...og at jeg måtte være tålmodig. Ledelsen på mottaket forstod meg, og de anbefalte meg å ringe til NOAS. Det gjorde jeg, og etter mange telefonsamtaler sa de at vi sannsynligvis ville bli innkalt til nye avhør. Og ganske riktig. Vi ble avhørt for fjerde gang, og vi ble behandlet som om vi var kriminelle. Min kone var syk, men de unnskyldte seg ikke engang overfor henne, og vi ble nektet å snakke med hverandre. Avhørene ble gjennomført på en tøff og uforståelig måte. Mange av spørsmålene hadde ingenting med asylsaken

vår å gjøre. Vi ble skremt, og vi var svært engstelige for vår og barnas fremtid da vi dro tilbake til mottaket. Ventetiden ble enda vanskeligere etter dette. Vi ble pessimistiske i forhold til hva som skulle komme til å skje.

## Katastrofe

Etter 14 måneder og 27 dager mottok min kone og jeg hvert sitt brev fra UDI, og det var avslag på søknadene. De skrev også at 15-måneders regelen ikke kunne komme til anvendelse fordi vi hadde gitt uriktige opplysninger til politiet, og dermed var vi unntatt fra denne regelen. Dette opplevde vi som en ren katastrofe. Vi kjente oss ikke igjen i beskrivelsen, for vi hadde forsøkt å gi riktig informasjon. Unntakene i 15-månedersregelen var ikke dekkende for oss. Vi forstod det absolutt ikke, og det var like uforståelig at det skulle ha tatt så lang tid å komme fram til et slikt vedtak. Vi følte oss nå fullstendig satt utenfor samfunnet. På dette avsidesliggende stedet var det ingen som interesserte seg for vår sak. Kommunen var ikke interessert i å høre om problemene, og verken helsepersonell eller sosialarbeidere ville involvere seg. Alle toet sine hender i forhold til våre problemer. Situasjonen for familien var kritisk, og for tredje gang sendte jeg en søknad om å få flytte til et annet mottak. Nå fulgte de tre verste ukene i vårt familieliv. Vi kunne ikke sove og vi klarte ikke å konsentrere oss om noe. Vi følte oss helt fortapt og det smittet over på barna som begynte å spørre hvorfor vi hadde kommet hit. De spurte om det ikke hadde vært bedre å bli i Bagdad. Der er det mange som er blitt arrestert og drept, og familier er blitt splittet. Der er det mange barn som har dødd av mangel på mat og medisiner. Jeg var ansvarlig for familien min, men det var ikke dette som hadde skremt meg til å flykte. Mitt ansvar var å bringe barna mine til et sted hvor de kunne leve i trygghet. Jeg var vant til å leve i et diktatur, og Saddam Hussein har sine metoder for å torturere folk. Jeg tok mitt ansvar for familien ved å flytte til et land som kunne gi oss trygghet i et samfunn hvor menneskene var likeverdige. Dette var ikke mulig i Irak. Bekymringen for barnas fremtid var den viktigste grunnen til at vi kom hit.

## Til Hove

I desember 1999 fikk vi flytte til Hove asylmottak i Arendal. Mottaket var overfylt da vi kom dit, og vi var 26 mennesker som bodde på ei brakke med felles kjøkken, ett dametoalett og ett herretoalett. Slik bodde vi en og en halv måned før vi kunne flytte til en av de vanlige blokkene. Denne bygningen er heller ikke beregnet på langtidsopphold. Utformingen av rommene er slik at familien er splittet. Barna må passere 5 dører for å komme på toalettet om natta, og

det hender de tisser på seg før de rekker frem. Etter en tid på Hove mottak ringte jeg til Bygland for å hilse på en kamerat som bodde der. Han spurte om jeg visste hva som hadde hendt der. Han fortalte at en felles venn av oss, somalieren Omar Fatah, var funnet død nede ved vannet. Han skulle begraves i Kristiansand. Begravelsen ble arrangert i samarbeid med ledelsen på mottaket, og jeg ble invitert til å delta. Det var underlig å tenke på at han var død. Så vidt jeg visste, hadde han fått oppholdstillatelse fem måneder tidligere. Han var verken gammel eller syk. Jeg spurte meg selv om det kunne være noen spesielle grunner til at han døde. Kunne det være noen sammenheng mellom livet i asylmottak og dette dødsfallet? Månedene gikk. Etter 20 måneder i Norge fikk min kone og jeg hvert vårt brev om at vi ikke kunne få oppholdstillatelse i Norge. Vi hadde ikke fremskaffet dokumentasjon på at våre opplysninger var korrekte. Dessuten var det min feil at det hadde tatt så lang tid å avgjøre saken. Men politiet bad aldri meg om noen dokumentasjon. Det var visst bare politimannens fantasi som gjorde avhøret til en kriminalsak og ikke en humanitær sak. Advokaten i saken arbeidet tydeligvis ikke som annet enn postbud. Han videresendte våre opplysninger til UDI, og sendte kopi til oss av svarene derfra. Nå var situasjonen vår ytterligere forverret. Ventetida føltes lengre og lengre, og livet ble mer og mer unormalt. Barna begynner også å reagere annerledes. De får ikke sove, og de sier ting som ikke er vanlig for barn. Blokka vi bor i er ikke noe hjem. Det blir vanskelig for barna å sortere ut hva som er hjemme. Alle har søvnproblemer. UDI gir råd for dette i sin informasjonsbrosjyre. De sier at asylsøkere må være aktive, drive sport eller "make love" slik at de blir trøtte og kan sove. Jeg stiller spørsmålet her: Er det slik at nordmenn gjør dette - driver sport og make love - for å få sove?

### Hvor er rettighetene?

Det stilles mange spørsmålstegn ved asylpolitikken i Norge. Gjennom mitt lange opphold i mottak har jeg gått på kurs og lært om norsk historie og hvorfor vi feirer 17. mai. Grunnloven av 1814 var inspirert av den franske revolusjon og har gjort Norge til et demokrati med frihet likhet og brorskap, og nordmenn har rettigheter og plikter. Nå spør jeg: Hvor er rettighetene for asylsøkere, spesielt i forhold til saksbehandlingen i UDI? Er det virkelig forsvarlig å plassere asylsøkere til et nedbrytende liv på avsidesliggende steder over lang tid? Slik jeg ser det, har det utviklet seg til å bli en langsom, og over tid en drepende prosess. Det er ikke bare kuler som dreper, men også den indre tomhet som oppstår når man fratar folk deres verdighet og håp. På asylmottak kan du se mange som ser ut som mennesker utenpå, men innvendig er håpet og livsgnisten sloknet. De har ingenting. Kan vi kalle dem levende mennesker? Hvis UDI er et viktig forvaltningsorgan i Norge, skulle det da ikke være en plikt å behandle asylsøknader på en måte som forplikter dem etter de FN-konvensjoner

og andre internasjonale avtaler de har undertegnet? Skal de kunne forskjellsbehandle asylsøkere på en urettferdig måte? Dette gjør at jeg begynner å stille meg tvilende til de andre styringsorganene i den norske staten.

Og hva med palestinske asylsøkere generelt? Siden april 1999 er det ingen av disse som har fått oppholdstillatelse, så vidt jeg vet, men de har fått negative og atter negative svar. Det er små grupper på 2-3 palestinere på hvert mottak, samtidig som det er store grupper av andre nasjonaliteter. Norge har avholdt møter med palestinere og israelere, og har fått internasjonal oppmerksomhet ved å engasjere seg i å finne en løsning på det vanskelige problemet. Norge vet at palestinerne ikke har noen stat hvor de kan leve i frihet og verdighet, og dette er grunnen til at Norge har engasjert seg for å bidra til opprettelsen av en palestinsk stat. Alle som er interessert i problematikken, kjenner til dette, men de som har papirene på skrivebordet i UDI, behandler noen asylsøknader i strid med det som er internasjonal forståelse. Det ser ut som de prøver å finne enhver unnskyldning for å kunne gi avslag. Hovedsaken for en palestinere som i løpet av de siste 52 år (siden 1948) er blitt født i en flyktningleir, er at vedkommende har bodd atskilt fra sitt folk og uten rettigheter. I den arabiske verden vet en aldri når en kan bli arrestert uten grunn, og en har ikke noe sted å søke beskyttelse. Jeg forstår ikke hvor palestinske flyktninger skal kunne få beskyttelse i denne verden! Vi venter nå på klagebehandlingen i Justisdepartementet, og ingen kan si oss hvor lang tid det vil ta å få et svar. Som familieoverhode er det nå mitt inderlige ønske at vi kan oppnå rettferdighet, og at denne uholdbare livssituasjonen snart må være over. Jeg ønsker at det må skje før det blir for sent.

Kilde: *Agderposten*, Omar Harbie

**English synopsis:** this article is written by Omar Harbie, a Palestinian asylum seeker from Iraq. He and his family were transferred from reception centre to reception centre in Norway for more than two years until they received a final, negative answer to their application.

Mr. Harbie describes this period, their encounters with police and bureaucrats, and the effects of these on the well-being of his family. Harbie concludes, as many asylum seekers do, that while he came to Norway in the belief that human rights were respected there - this apparently does not apply to refugees.



Europa



# Europa - interview form

Player:

Instructor:

Date:

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## 1- player and characters

1.1 what kind of characters has the player played before?

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1.2 does the player have a tendency to play a certain kind of character? Why?

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1.3 what does the player expect of Europa?

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1.4 does the player see this as a challenge?

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## 2 - players opinions

*The player is asked about his/her opinions on a number of issues. It should be pointed out that there are no right or wrong answers.*

2.1 Abstraction or realism?

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*Is an unreal slideshow on the wall of the asylum reception centre OK? How much of the non-diegetic can the player tolerate? Will it add to his/her LARP experience?*

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2.2 Introvert or ekstravert LARPing?

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*Key questions: Do you play for yourself (introvert) or others (ekstravert)? Does immersion come before action (introvert) or action lead to immersion (ekstravert)? Players may not necessarily fit into one category only.*

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**2.3 Relation to the nation-state.**

*The player's own national identity, emotions towards national symbols The national anthem? Flag? Identity? Ethnicity? How much does the player identify with his/her nationality?*

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**2.4 Relation to the human machine.**

*Attitude to authorities, military service etc. Obedient? Has he done military service? Does he/she work best at own initiative, or in a structured environment? Is he/she able to rebel against an unethical order?*

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**2.5 the player's original character ideas: (preferrably several)**

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**3 -The player has been warned/informed about:**

*This information is ideally given as questions and examples. When would you use a safety code? Do you know what HC LARPing is? Do you do it?*

**3.1 Hardcore LARPing**

*That it will happen at Europa. That you can avoid it by using the safety codes.*

**3.2 Possible police interrogations, police brutality**

*Is it OK? Anything we should know?*

**3.3 No offgaming in play**

*Everything is ingame.*

**3.4 Safety codes : the "Off-game Stop!" and "Off-game relax!" rules.**

*How to use these. Especially that the player may not ask others why nor speculate about why they choose to use safety rule - during or after the LARP. Also that they have the right and responsibility to use them. That in a situation where one is a victim, the victim is responsible for saying stop! whereas the other is responsible for making sure the victim has a chance to say stop.*

**3.5 The off-game room**

*That there is one. That you can go there for comfort. To talk about your experience.*

**3.6 Too little food and little sleep.**

*That it might happen.*



# 15. Appendix IV - '2nd tour' booklet from 'Inside/Outside'

I took part in 'inside outside'. The booklet presented in the following pages, give a brief introduction of the basic conventions of play to prospective players. This play lasted only for four hours, but was set up multiple times at different places. It is one of a few plays to have been set up in an art institution, being set up at one of the branches of the Norwegian National Museum of Art. The original format of this booklet was half the size of an A4 page, so it is shown here two by two pages.

The booklet is written by Eirik Fatland and Mike Pohjola. Illustrations page 3 by Rune Haugen. Photographies page 2 and 7 by Sakari Jântti. Copyright to each respectively. Thanks to all of them for permission to reproduce the material in this context.



## 2ND TOUR HANDBOOK

### Foreword to the 2nd tour

As Heraclit's parable goes; a man can never step into the same river twice. Different water will flow through the river and the man will have changed since his first bath. The same holds true for this 2<sup>nd</sup> tour of inside:outside.

It's called "indrama", and the "in-" is for "interaction" and "interactivity" both. Interaction is more than interactivity, you are not just navigating through the work of another. You are, in a way, co-creator of the work.

Interact, immerse. Feel the beat, be the role, think the thought, evaporate, dance. The only real inside:outside is the one in your mind. Neither my opinion nor anyone else's matters - the moment you begin; inside:outside is yours.

As with Heraclit's river - no two inside:outsides will ever be the same. And this second tour certainly dips into a different river. In the first edition of this foreword, I wrote:

"Inside:outside deals with issues such as conflicting worldviews and value relativism. That's something that's very clearly around us all the time. Think G8, EU, USA, NATO, Kyoto, Bonn, Belgium, Göteborg and George W. Bush."

Since then, we could add Genova, Septem-

ber 11th, Osama bin Laden, Porto Allegre & WEF to the list. The hideous new anti-"terrorism" laws being passed all around the Western world these days puts inside:outside into a new, and darker, context.

I thought I was writing a piece to bring Kafka into indrama, but our politicians have managed to bring Kafka into real life. Or what other word than "Kafkaesque" can be used to describe the interrogations of random arab-americans? Or the three Swedes who are denied the right to earn and transfer money, without right to appeal or due trial, for the simple reason that they "might have terrorist connections" according to a foreign government?

I'm inclined to end this foreword with the words "the stage is yours", but it's not. You've long since lost the stage to something huge and impersonal. Come inside. The stage is out there.

Emir Zweik

Strassbourg, February 16th, 2002



# Summary and introduction

## Beginnings

Your persona, your character, is a normal person in a strange situation, someone you might run into in the street of your home town. The character awakens to find herself imprisoned in a cell with people she's never met before. And then, things gets worse.

## Roleplaying at an indrama

Basically, you're expected to *be* the character from the beginning to the end. "Being in character" means to improvise and immerse - try to think like the character, speak like the character, act like the character. Don't remind the others that you're all just pretending. Indrama is about sharing an illusion. The only exceptions from this rule are covered in the chapter on "safety rules".

If you haven't participated in an indrama before, you might want to see Chapter 3 on roleplaying.

If you have participated in an indrama before (you might have called it "a LARP"),

you must forget everything you think you know about roleplaying, and then read Chapter 3 like a starving man would read a cookbook.

## The character

The character is your entry point into the indrama. Written characters are stereotypes. You have the opportunity to develop this character into someone with a name, age and complex personality - making choices depending on what you can handle and enjoy roleplaying. Character development will be handled during drama exercise before the event. Developing the character before this is an option - not a duty.

## Style

Despite the clichè characters, inside:outside is a realist event with some dark and/or existential themes. Roleplaying should be realist in style, not parodic. Asking questions about "who, what, why, how"?

## Simulation and safety

There are some simple rules for handling difficult situations, mostly the ones we've never thought of.

You are responsible for maintaining your own mental and physical well-being, and not endangering others. Violence will occur during inside:outside, and this violence shall always be pretended, never real.

If a crisis should occur or you feel it's becoming "too much" you can interrupt roleplaying. Saying "**brems**" means "calm down, this is a bit too much". The message should be followed, and roleplaying continue. Saying "**kutt!**" is an order to stop roleplaying entirely. Always respect the "Kutt!"-rule, and never question anyone's use of it. At any time, you may choose to leave inside:outside - simply walk out.

Remember: since you know your own limits the best, you are the only one who can assume responsibility for your own well-being. Never fear to use the safety rules.

3

# Roleplaying

## Be Your Character At All Times



Playing your character in an indrama is neither difficult nor easy. It's pretty much the same as the play you did as a child, with the world and characters preset and not changed arbitrarily during the event. At an indrama, players do not speak as themselves but as their characters, except when a safety rule is invoked. From an indrama there is no normal escape, and the illusion is meant to last for hours, sometimes days.

## Thinking like the character

The most important thing is for you to think like the character. Try to get in the character's mental state. Understand the character's worldview. Share the it's psyche. Do what your character would do. Feeling through the character is where the expression of indrama comes from.

This isn't theatre. You are not expected to perform. If your character would sleep during the entire game, you're welcome to do that. Your character is a real person.

However, you are expected to look and act like your character. Implementing those physical signs - different walking, mode of speaking, is one way to achieve immersion. You're welcome to do things like that, should you think it suits the character.

## Boring = good

Don't try to "save" the indrama. If somebody looks miserable or bored, this doesn't mean that you as a participant must "help" that participant to have fun. (Your character is, of course, welcome to help that character if it suits her.) Don't try to be dramatic or funny, unless your character is being dramatic or funny. Never stop roleplaying, especially not "half-way".

A particularly destructive moment is "meta-humour"; jokes that are funny to the players, but not the characters.

You can forget all of the above if you just remember the one basic rule:

Be Your Character At All Times.

# The Character

Before the game you will receive a written description of your character. It will paint a fuzzy picture of the characters life and focus on her views, opinions and nature. That's a skeleton for a character - you provide the flesh.

## Choosing a character

Experienced players often prefer to play characters that are unlike themselves, yet not so alien that they cannot in some way identify with the character. The difference between player and character helps you to consciously notice when you are in-character and when you are not; whereas a small bit of identification is necessary to be able to see the world from the characters point of view. For someone entirely unacquainted with religion, for instance, our character of "middle-class christian" may be hard to play or understand. Whereas if you were raised a Moslem, the character would be different enough yet similar enough to be played.

## The characters world

The setting of inside:outside is the modern world. Your characters might've seen recent movies, discuss recent political events etc. The country is the country the indrama is played in - or that's where your characters are from, anyway.

## The characters knowledge

Your character doesn't have to know everything you know - she might not be familiar with the tv show you follow, for example. On the other hand, the character might know something you don't know. If you have the time and inclination, it's a good idea to try to find out a few things - the library, Internet and well-informed friends are a good asset.

If you don't have the time to do research, you can just ask the people who run the game, if you feel there's something your character should know in advance. Maybe they know.

## 13 questions to build character..

1. Where are you from? The country is the same as your own country. What city? What part of the city? What street?
2. What's your name?
3. How old are you? When were you born?
4. What did you do yesterday?
5. What were you supposed to do today?
6. What hobbies do you have?
7. How are you not the typical stereotype of anything?
8. What were your parents/siblings/children like? What were their names?
9. Are you single? If not, is the other person like? What is his/her name?
10. What's your best friend like?
11. What's your sexual orientation? Any quirks?
12. How do you deal with those that have differing views from your own?
13. Is there something in the character that doesn't perhaps quite fit the picture?

5

# Rules & Safety

Avoid harm, feel safe enough to play, read these pages.

## Simulation of violence

Should an in-game violent situation occur, don't hit anyone so hard they get hurt for real. Improvise the fight. Stay clean of vulnerable regions - the head, genitals and womens breasts.

By the way; the concepts of rape and sexual harassment do **not exist** in inside:outside - your character will never come up with the idea of "raping" or sexually harassing another character.

## Don't touch the scenery!

Don't try to dismantle surveillance cameras or break out of the cell. In the courtroom; don't touch the walls. Whoever built the cell did a better job at making it indestructible than we are able to.

## Kutt! and Brems!

If in an emergency, shout "Kutt!". When the word "Kutt!" is used, all roleplaying stops. If you feel a situation is getting out of hand,

or getting too tough, but you don't want to interrupt the roleplaying - say "Brems!". If someone says "brems!" to you, you must "wind down" your roleplaying, be a bit less intense or hard. Under no circumstance shall you question or criticise a fellow player for using any of these rules. You know your own limits the best.

## Leaving or taking a break

If you feel something simply is too much, you may take a moment to relax out-of-character. If you can do this without anybody noticing (sitting alone in the corner, for example), good. If you want to leave inside:outside, or take an outside break, you can simply walk out. Or, if you're not in a hurry to get out - you can lift your hands in an X-sign in front of a surveillance camera. This sign will be demonstrated during the prebrief. Your character will be removed in-game, with the option of returning if you want to.



**Dealing with difficult emotions**

Indrama may be experienced as Kathartic (rinsing) and beautiful, or as stressful, even traumatic. The difference isn't in the situation - but in the way you react to it. Indrama is the most direct, personally involving art form there is. The most important thing to remember is that there is absolutely nothing wrong with feeling strong in-game emotions as if they were your own. The best way to avoid bad experiences is to surrender to the character. Ride the wave of emotion. Continue roleplaying. If you feel like crying, cry. If you feel like laughing, laugh. Express yourself!

**PLS**

Some people experience what has humorously been called the "Post Larp Syndrome" (PLS) after indrama events, though this happens rarely after short events like inside:outside. PLS may manifest as feeling of melancholy, recurring memories or any

other sign that the experience has "stuck". PLS is no different from looking back on intense situations in your real life; we have all experienced something similar. As before - the best way to deal with strong indrama-created emotions is to express yourself - and

to talk to someone about it. I:o organisers are not only available for talking about the event, we love to do so. PLS usually occurs no sooner than 24 hours after the event is over, and has never been known to occur more than a month afterwards.

## I N S I D E : O U T S I D E

**Created by:** Emir Zweik

**2nd tour staff:** Irene Tanke (producer), Rune Haugen (scenography), Fredrik Hossmann (sound), Erlend Eidsem (video), Mike Pohjola (instructor), Eirik Fatland (instructor), Arvid Falch, Cath Røsseland.

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[www.fatland.net/io/](http://www.fatland.net/io/)





# 16. Appendix V - Character description from Amaranth

Fabian 35), Roman slave. Your birthplace is unknown, but you have been slave in Judea (near Nasareth) by a Roman Governor-relative. You have seen Jesus in action at least once, and that made an irrevocable impression on you. Tell others about it!

You were sold to your present master five years back. How did you feel about being sold? As a personal slave for the Senator son Tarpeius, you enjoyed a certain status among the other slaves in Rome. Life as a houseslave could be pleasant. How did you respond when your young master decided to take you with him on a military campaign? Julius Tarpeius is commander of Legio XV, which has worked as the escort of the nobility family on this journey. How are your relationship with your master? Find five work duties that Fabian has. Your co-slave, Domotia, are five years older than you. Nevertheless, she has the mind of a young child. and get mixed up in troubles. You love her, even if she does thoughtless things from time to time. Is this what you can expect from women? Talk to her, and explain about how you once saved her.

The camp of the Legionaries are a place that are full of exciting information. Du are your master's regular companion when he talks with other members of the nobility. Make Julius aware of this- that you shall follow him, and that he takes your discretion for granted. Behind a perfect and submissive exterior, a sharp observer is hidden. Fabians rule for life is something like: 'No gaze is more thorough than that which is struck down'. You have exchanged information with the messenger-slave Baltasar recently. He has a good view over the secrets of the Nobility family. Is the relationship to him affected by bargaining and trade of information, or sharing of information to make as many pieces as possible fit the puzzle regarding what goes inside the heads of the masters? Fabian are half-heartedly worshipping the Roman gods, but has a feeling that something is missing. Something like the community he saw in Nasareth, maybe.

Domitia is part of the Isis-cult, and you have a strong attraction to this group. Sadly, only women are allowed. But you know that men may be accepted as Priests, and you are pushing Domitia for information about what she has experienced during the worshipping.

Contact

Julius Tarpeis ([name of player])

Baltasar ([name of player])

Domitia ([name of player])

(Original in Norwegian, translation by GTB. Written by the organisers of Amaranth)

# 17.

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Appendix V is written by the the three women who organised 'Amaranth'.

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# 18.

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