

Foreword to the Manifesto of the Turku School

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”
- George Santayana, “Life of Reason, Reason in Common Sense”

The Turku Manifesto was first published in Solmukohta, roughly three years from now. It was published online a year later. This 3rd Edition is pretty much the same as that second, online one, but to be clear and pretentious, we call it third.

The Turku School made its first appearance in late 20th century on the mailing list of Finnish Live-Action Role Players’ Association where the school emphasized the meaning of eläytyminen and simulation over dramatism and gamism.

In Chapter VI (shamelessly plagiarized from the Communist Manifesto, by the way) we call out for a Turkuist revolution: “Turku School supports any and all revolutionary role-players’ movement directed against the current gamist and dramatist circumstances.” A fancy way to say we want you to focus on character eläytyminen and society simulation.

Since its first appearance in the Finnish scene some five years ago, the Turku School has achieved pretty much all it

set out to achieve. This does not mean all role players consider themselves Turkuists, but that the ideas are pretty much accepted, or at least considered before discarding. Role-playing is seen as art, the importance of eläytyminen is understood. Sure, there’s work to be done, but the Revolution is on its way. And not all the thanks go to the Turku School, but for all the role-playing manifestoes and dogmas out there.

We haven’t been alone in our struggles. There have been those that stood behind us and our ideals from the very start, and there have been those that joined us after heated discussions. (Just those heated discussions that the provocative style is there to create.) And yet again there are those who’ve managed to combine our ideas with gamism and dramatism.

The truth is, that with all this going on, the original four-way divide is fast losing significance, at least among the avant-garde of role-playing. The most interesting dramatist concepts have evolved just as much as those of the eläytyjists and simulationists. So much so that they’re all transcending into something much bigger.

What the next step is, it’s hard to say yet. Perhaps we’ll focus on making the

role-playing media popular again, now that we can roughly agree on what that media is. And that it is a media. Or perhaps role-playing will continue evolving for a long time.

Clouded is the future. Still, it seems clear the “Age of Manifestoes” (1999-2002) helped make it happen. Here’s one of the makers of that era, perhaps for the last time in print: The Turku Manifesto.

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Terminology:

a game: a role-playing session, not a game in the sense of somebody trying to win.

the game master: the organizer and/or writer of the game, in table-top games also the players’ medium for interaction with the game world.

to eläytyä: (verb) to immerse yourself into a character, to think, experience and feel through the character.

eläytyminen: (noun) character immersion, see to eläytyä.

GM: the Game Master.

Larp: Live-Action Role-Playing game. A RPG where most action is acted out, not described.

to larp: to play in a larp

RPG: Role-Playing Game.

Table-top: A RPG where most action is described, not acted out.

Turku: a city in South-Western Finland.

The Manifesto of the Turku School

The criticized and feared, acclaimed and admired Turku School is here to tell the world what role-playing is, how and why it should be done, and why everybody else is wrong. The Turku School has been named after the home town of its chief provocateurs, but living in Turku is no guarantee of quality - living somewhere else doesn't mean that you can't understand and support the Manifesto.

I - RPGs and role-playing

Role-playing is immersion ("eläytyminen") to an outside consciousness ("a character") and interacting with its surroundings.

Most traditional mediums are either active (the part of the creator; writing, singing, acting etc.) or passive (the part of the audience; reading, listening, watching). Role-playing, however, is a truly interactive medium - and the best and most useful of such media - because there the creative side and the receptive side are no longer separate. The experience of role-playing is born through contributing. No one can predict the events of a session beforehand, or recreate them afterwards. Also,

most of the expression takes part inside the participants' heads (in the process of eläytyminen), which make role-playing games (RPGs) a very subjective form of art.

Interactivity and subjectivity are typical to RPGs, but everything else can vary greatly, depending on the game. In some games all action is described verbally and the events happen in the players' imagination, while in others the goal is to visualize everything as concretely as possible.

In some games the players focus on the story and the action, in others the purpose is to simulate the world in as much detail as possible.

There is an infinite number of ways to role-play, but one of the most popular is to divide them between live-action role-playing games ("larps") and traditional or table-top RPGs. Although it is impossible to draw an exact line, a typical larp is a game where you try to do everything as concretely as possible, and do your best to avoid any means that are not part of the game world ("non-diegetic means" or "off-game"). In a typical table-top game the game master ("GM") is the players' medium for interacting with the game world, and most things are

only described, and take place only in the players' imagination.

Another way of dividing the different ways of gaming is to group them into gamist, dramatist, simulationist and eläytyjst styles. The gamist players ("munchkins") try to somehow win the game by making their character as powerful as possible - in a way turning the role-playing into strategy-gaming. The dramatist people have no true grasp for the meaning of interaction, as they think the purpose of the game is for the game masters to tell a story using the players as actors - but with no audience to tell the story to! The simulationists try to create a working society or even a world which is simulated through role-playing. The eläytyjst set the goal to becoming the characters, to experiencing everything through the character.

While the division between the mediums of larp and table-top games does not provide any difference in quality, the second division certainly does - not all of the above styles are as well thought-out as others. As is obvious to most role-players, the dramatist and the gamist styles are inferior to the simulationist and eläytyjst styles. For the sake of objectivity, they will, however, all be here introduced.

II - The styles: Good and Bad

Strategy games are often fun and educational. They can be a measure of your intellect, strategic thinking and ability to stretch resources to their very limit. It's fun to try to win the

war at chess. It's fun to rule a nation in Civilization. It's fun to command an army unit in Necromunda. Wouldn't it be fun to try to win with just one person whose actions you could guide? No! Not unless that person is a robot with exact orders and no personality. Real people don't aim to win at the "game of life"; in fact, there is no such game! Real people aim to enjoy their life or further their personal goals, but they also have all sorts of doubts and weaknesses, which come into way of their wanting to do what they want to do: "I was going to run for the parliament, because I want to make the world a better place, but I ran into some old friends and went out for a beer, instead." That is why the gamist style does not work. Stories are fun and interesting, they can have a huge impact on mankind. Movies are often entertaining, and a good book can really make you think. And if you want to tell your own stories, nobody's keeping you from writing a short story, or a novel, or a drama, or a movie. Nobody's keeping you from composing a song, or directing a play, or choreographing a dance. But note that in those cases you are the auteur, the creator. And when your work is finished the audience will get to see it. RPGs don't work that way. If you want to tell a story (as the dramatists do), you must have the players as the audience, the auteurs, or both. If the players are the audience, you'd somehow have to stop them from interfering with the story - and thus they would become passive,

and you'd have a form of theatre or story-telling. If the players are the auteurs, you can't tell a story. If they are both, as they effectively always are in RPGs, then the story is told by players, not the game master. And then there are an infinite number of little stories, all inside the heads of the players. You will have no way to know what will happen beforehand, and no way to re-create it afterwards. (This same observation can also be found in the very definition of role-playing.)

It is said that man is a social animal. This is true, for most people define themselves at least partly through social ties (job, school, hobby, nationality, social class, religion etc.). As all existing societies are imperfect and flawed, this poses a problem: people do not know themselves - they have defined their image of themselves at some early developmental stage, and can't see how it could be anything else. It would be so much better if they could try to live in a different world, or a different society, for a while, and then try to see themselves in a new light after that experience. Well, they can! Through the simulationist way of role-playing - which is, or can be, social philosophy and behavioral psychology put to practice. It can have many positive effects on players, and it's also one of the two styles the Turku School promotes.

Apart from societies, what most dictates a person's behavior, is his personality (which is in part a product of the society). It's easy to think you know yourself when you live a very

sheltered life and never have any reason to leave your room - or, heaven forbid, question your own way of thinking. To find out your true self - or to check if this is really what you want to be - you need to have an outside view on yourself, or an inside view on somebody else. Living the life of another personality, another character, is just the trick to accomplish this. Another name for that is the *eläytyjisti* style of larping, and it is the other style of larping the Turku School promotes. You, the reader, have probably already made your mind about what styles are acceptable and what are not. Now, read on, as we further elaborate the ideals of the Turku School.

III - Role-playing as art

Art can be broadly defined to be use of a medium with precision and individuality (which is creativity combined with personality). Thus it is possible to create art, as well as pointless entertainment, with RPGs.

When creating a game it is important to know what you want to say with the game, and how it differs from other games. If you're having hard time finding the answer, you should think again if you really should organize the game at all. If you want to tell a story, don't attempt to tell it as a role-playing game (and definitely not as a larp); think about other easily accessible mediums, like short stories instead.

Art is a very delicate thing, and certainly not all role-playing games should be classified as such. Not all even want to be! Most art today is

story-telling in one form or another. But often the art is not in the story itself, but the way it is told. And although RPGs have no actual plot, the way that the many personal experiences are taken, is, in a way, up to the GM. In effect, although the content can not be predetermined, the form can be. And as the form affects the content (in the same way that the content would in active mediums also affect the form), this gives the GM a way of guiding the experience of the players. That is the GM's art.

Eläytyjst role-playing is the best currently existing method for creating experiences and emotions, and allow you to see things from a truly personal point of view. Although this, like television, is often used as a substitute for life or to allow some people to have any feelings at all, it can be much more. It can give great, subjective insight into difficult topics - and allow you to see things from different points of view. In this sense, role-playing can be called an art.

On the other hand, simulationist role-playing is the best currently existing method to simulate the actions of a small society in diverse situations. This can be, for instance, used as a tool for experimenting with different social models. I myself intend to create a working Utopia and then test it with larps and fix it where it didn't work. In this sense, role-playing can be called a (method of) science.

IV - The cause

These days, role-playing games of all

kinds are organized and played for the most obscure reasons. Many people want to sacrifice the GM's workload on the unholy altar of social relations, playing only when it coincides with meeting friends. In the same sense, some people write their games for just the same reasons, without ever asking themselves why they're doing it.

Good reasons to express yourself are telling a story (or in the case of role-playing games, creating an interesting starting point and setting for possible stories), delivering a message and developing the medium you want to express yourself with. In this sense, RPGs are as good a way to express yourself as any other medium.



Telling stories has always been important for mankind. When you have an idea for a great story, you should think about which medium would best support it - e.g. a story of the development of an anthill from creation to destruction might not work as a larp, but rather as a work of prose, a computer game or as an animated film (The above chapter

was written before the movie Antz --ed.). If the story has a few obvious main characters, but you only know the beginning (if the middle and the end are, as of yet, open) then it might work as a table-top RPG. If the story's middle and end are open, but you know it's about a small society of people and the time-period it encompasses would be relatively short and twist-packed, then you might even use larp as its medium. Notice, however, that the last two methods are not strictly about telling stories via RPG, but rather giving the world and the beginning of a story to the players and seeing what comes out. It is NOT POSSIBLE to tell pre-determined stories through RPG. In delivering a message you should remember the same thing as with story-telling. The difference is, this time the starting point should be your message, not the idea for the story. Delivering messages through RPGs takes some skill, but when successful - thanks to the subjectivity of RPGs - gives more empiric and precise insight than any other medium. There has been relatively few experiments in this field, but larps are extremely well suited at least for criticizing the society, and table-top games for commenting on the behavior and psychology of the individual. Developing a medium is never unnecessary - often even the worst failed attempts can teach a lot about the inner structure of the medium. Often it's not advisable to start by thinking what kind of a game you want to organize, but in these cases

you must go there. When you have a wish to organize something weird - like a larp where causality doesn't work, or a table-top game where the players will try to communicate telepathically with each others - you should think about what type of a game this experiment would benefit most, and create the situation and the world around the experiment. (All the better, of course, if some particular situation or message requires this approach, but it is not condemnable to do it for honest curiosity, either.)

V - The absolute rule of the game master

The role-playing game is the game masters creation, to which he lets the players enter. The game world is the game master's, the scenario is the game master's, the characters (being a part of the game world) are the game master's. The players' part is to get inside their character's head in the situation where the game begins and by eläytyminen try to simulate its actions.

The object of the player should be to obey the game master's every wish concerning the style of play.

This does not mean that the game master should tell the players what their characters should do. When it comes to the things that have to do with the game, the game master has the ultimate ruling power. Not the enjoyability of the gaming session, not cell phones, not hunger, not anything. Sometimes it might be fun to do something that is not in strict

accordance with the character, but - unless the GM has specifically asked you to do so - THAT IS FORBIDDEN. The player's position in an RPG session is further elaborated in the following Player's Vow of Chastity.

VI - The relationships between the Turkuists and the opposing schools

After what has been said above, it is obvious what the relationship between the Turku School and any other schools and ways of thinking is - that is, the relationship between the Turkuists, the gamists and the dramatists.

The Turku School struggles for the immediate and long-term goals of the eläytyjist and simulationist role-players, but presently it also stands for the future of all role-playing. In Norway the dramatists are trying to re-invent theatre, but there the word of the Turku School still brings hope to the oppressed simulationists. In the United States the gamists are trying to de-evolve role-playing back into moving little pieces of plastic on a board, but even in that world of darkness the Turku School sheds light to the eläytyjist movement.

The members and friends of the Turku School are spreading the radical views of the Manifesto all around the world - lately including Stockholm, New Jersey, Helsinki, Istanbul, Vienna, Oslo and Paris. In London the local gaming store refused to sell the Manifesto because it didn't have any pictures.

Yet, despite its international

achievements, even in its native Turku the school is struggling against the short-sighted, the conservative, and above all, the gamist and dramatist schools.

The Turku School now has its eyes mostly set on the Nordic countries, because they live the dawn of role-playing revolution. Compared to the Nordic countries of the early and late 1990s, this revolution is characterized by the more advanced role-playing community and especially the ever-increasing number of newbies.

Thus the role-playing revolution of Northern Europe can only be a prelude to the Turkuist revolution.

To put it shortly, the Turku School supports any and all revolutionary role-players' movement directed against the current gamist and dramatist circumstances.

In all these movements the Turkuists put the question of character eläytyminen and society simulation above all others.

The Turku School thinks it despicable to hide one's views and intentions. Turkuists openly admit that their goals can only be achieved by taking down by force the current system of role-playing. Let the gamist and dramatist classes shiver before the Turkuist revolution. The simulationists and the eläytyjists have nothing to lose but their chains. But they have the whole world to win.

TURKUIST ROLE-PLAYERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!

The Larper's Vow of Chastity

Turku 1999

As a live-action role-player I hereby vow to submit to the following rules, included in the Vow of Chastity published in the Manifesto of the Turku School.

1. When playing a character and immersing myself in it, my foremost goal shall be to simulate what happens inside the character's head, and how it affects his behavior. Hollow pretence I leave for the actors.

2. I shall use no non-diegetic (out-of-game world) methods (such as background music or unrelated off-game comments) while playing, if there is any other way to play



the situation. (E.g. unless the game material specifically says otherwise, when the character hits, I hit.)

If I think I see something like this in a

game, I will assume them to be diegetic methods, and that my character experiences them exactly as I do, unless the game master has instructed me otherwise. (It remains the game master's duty, however, to make sure I know what level of physical and mental safety and suspension of disbelief is in use in the game.)

3. I shall learn and understand the character's person by building the self image, personality, world view and other things that make it an individual from the subconscious outwards (i.e. not via manners or such). I expect others to do the same.

4. When attempting to look and act like the character, I shall avoid stage acting. I am aware that I and my character might have different ways of speech, manners or other outward features, without them forcing me, the player, to over-act or otherwise call for undue attention.

5. I shall immerse myself in the game with the assumption that if a character or other game element seems out of place in the world or in the game - such as comical, over-acted or badly played - it is still a part of the world,

not a stupid idea the player had.

6. If forced to improvise or add to my character during the game, my first and foremost goal shall be to do this by thinking about the big picture I have of the character and the game world, not trying to add surface dramatics or theatre methods. While playing, I will focus on immersing myself in my own character, not trying to improve the gaming experience of other players. I will try to be true to my character without trying to spot a story-line which I should act out. I accept the fact that as a player my part is to see only a small part of the whole.

7. I shall assume that the game master has told me everything I need to know about the game world, and what he wants his players to know about larping. I shall not attempt to use any general larping conventions in any one game, but the exact conditions given to me by the game master: if for example the off-game sign has been defined to be something, I will not substitute anything for it.

8. When attending a game, I shall not consider it to be a member of any particular genre or see its events as larp-plots that have a certain solution. Unless the game master tells me otherwise, I shall see each game as a unique work of art, which should be treated accordingly.

9. I shall not let any non-critical

factors from outside the game (such as entertaining the other players, advancing the plot, guiding the newbies, off-gaming etc.) affect my playing in any way. During the game these things do not exist for me.

10. As a player I shall strive not to gain fame or glory, but to act out the character as well as possible according to the guidance given to me by the game master. Even if this means I have to spend the entire game alone in a closet without anyone ever finding out.

Furthermore, as a role-player I vow to refrain from any personal style of gaming! I do not try to play, but to mold myself after the game master's wishes. I do not try to create myself a perfect gaming session or give others short-lived pleasure, because I consider the game as a whole to be much more important than any single player's experience of the game. My greatest goal shall be to fulfill the game master's vision, forcing myself to immerse in the character as truthfully and realistically as possible. I swear to do this in all ways possible to myself, regardless of any concepts of good taste and the convenience of other players.