

Larp as a Way to Enlightenment

As an introduction I want to discuss a phenomenon that I have called Post-Larp Charisma, PLC. Immediately after a larp most of us feel certain euphoria

The Author

Elge Larsson is 58 years young and lives in Stockholm, Sweden. He is some kind of academic scholar with wide interests in most forms of humanistic studies. A translator by profession and larper by interest, he divides his life between books and larping, which he's been doing since 1994. He regards larping with an analytic mind, trying to convince everybody that larping is the noblest of arts. He is very serious-minded and writes long articles where he compares larp to all kinds of religious experiences, gives deep lectures where he proposes ways of looking at larp that really stretches the concept to extreme degrees. He thinks reality sucks, and that it could be made better by conscientious larpers dedicated to improve the world.

in the aftermath where we meet old friends IRL, get new friends, exchange stories and telephone numbers, and fantasize about still wilder larps.

Sooner or later, though, the euphoria fades off, and we might succumb to the Post-Larp Depression, PLD. This is often a purely biochemical reaction, caused by lack of sleep and food. But I'm beginning to suspect that PLD also can be caused by a too fast return to the normal world, a point I will return to later.

But if you're lucky you find at your return to your usual life that you have been struck with Post-Larp Charisma! Some, or hopefully, many of you may have been surprised by a definite change in the world. Our dreams come true, beautiful strangers smile at us, we get the best table at the restaurant without any hassle, and suddenly we dare to propose to the king or queen of our heart, if he or she doesn't do it first. This is PLC.

What kind of phenomenon is this, how does it come about and what can we do to activate it when we are not larping? Most of us just larp a few times a year.

I say that PLC is a result of being divine for a certain length of time. When I say

divine, I mean it in a very literal sense. What you actually do when you're larping is that you create new reality. Creating reality is not the same as playing God; it is the same as being God.

I don't mean creating new reality in the trivial sense that you create things out of nothing, like magic, I'm not that mad. What I'm talking about is that the reality we live in is a social construction that we all together create for us. If this construction decides your actions it is real, regardless if it's true or not. The world was flat when you didn't dare to sail too far for fear of falling off the surface.

When you have been divine for a couple of days it's rather inevitable that you radiate a certain glory at your return to civilization. This is the reason for PLC; you have been living in an environment where you've been almost constantly creative (depending on how actively you've been larping), in the deepest sense of the word.

One reason for Post-Larp Depression may then be that you try to normalize yourself too fast and leave the divine state for an existence where you are not a creating artist.

How to be divine

So, what are the prerequisites for being creative in this divine way? We can study a related phenomenon, namely the magical moment when the role comes alive in your own flesh and blood, when the larp reality becomes the one and only reality. There may be some who think this is not something

to strive for, that it may cause split personality, that it is antisocial or escapist, but I'm not writing for those people.

In the religious world there is a long tradition of experiencing "for real" what others regard as illusionary self-deception. Since time immemorial shamans, and mystics of all creeds, have done their best to meet God or Buddha face to face – is there something we can learn of their methods?

In the psychology of religion there is a roletaking theory that tries to explain how the religious experience actually comes about. According to this view a role contains also the context, the coplayers. E.g. the role of Little Red Ridinghood also activates the Wolf's role. Roles are thus patterns for our acting and perception, a frame of reference that makes the world comprehensible. A man with a hammer sees a world full of nails.

Now, the religious traditions consist



mainly of roles, where the coplayers may be gods or saints, avatars or devas. When you take a role from this rich tradition, you may activate the coplayer “God”, your world changes and the religious belief turns into reality.

What are the mystics doing to get this experience? These are the rules:

1. You are well read, that is you have the tradition at your fingertips. (Cf. the larper who has learned his world history.)
2. You are focused, that is your life is devoid of mundane disturbances. (Cf. the larper who is surrounded by likes, all dressed the same way, all talking about the same things – like in a monastery.)
3. You are often exhausted by fasting, very early and late praying etc. (Cf. the larper who often forgets, doesn't care or know how to cook in the middle of the forest, and only sleeps when no orcs are about.)
4. Response. This is the real crux of the matter. When a believer goes into the religious role where you have a “dialogue with God”, it's precisely this feeling of a response that makes the experience so convincing. The larper really has a big advantage here, since she is surrounded by real people who react to her actions. Real people of flesh and blood goes into a dialogue with the role and thus makes it come true in the flesh and blood of the larper.

This is the same process that creates

my personality when I'm a newly born baby. My identity, my self, is created by the responses I get from mom and dad. By their reactions I learn that I am a sweet little thing or a damned spoiled brat. In the same way the role is created as a real person in my body.

The true dialogue

So what's the difference between the responses I get when larping and otherwise? How does it actually come about that dialogue creates new reality? What is the nature of it? Can new reality be created by any old dialogue? By Jove, we are in a dialogue almost constantly, what's the bloody difference?

The reason that we don't get the same kick out of getting our usual ego confirmed is that it just consists of our routine concepts and beliefs. Our everyday dialogue consists of a constant exchange of confirmations: “This is my picture of reality and thank you for supporting it.” That's nice but not very exciting.

What make a true dialogue creative are three things: it's 1) exploring, 2) egoless and 3) trustful.

Exploring

The true dialogue is not a discussion where you try to convince each other, it is not about winning a debate. In this context we can think of Dogma's taboo against “gamism”, where you try to “win” the larp. The dialogue is rather a joint groping through a jungle of outer and inner facts and feelings, where the main objective is to discover what

you don't know and from that point work together towards new insights. True dialogue is more like scientific research, art or lovemaking.

When we fall in love, when we create art or do research we leave our fixation with the things we think we know and go exploring into unknown land.

Egolessness

Egolessness means that we renounce

in my heaviest medieval larp costume and ask for some cheese, it will take a long time before my words reach through to them, since the subtext, my appearance, is blocking their ears.

Our ego consists mostly of defences. Our upbringing has made us believe that the world consists of different kind of threats and so we develop a personality to defend against them.

We define ourselves by the things we



all the habitual constructions that make up our identity. We should search for what the zen masters call "beginners mind".

It's like this: When we present ourselves to the world we are functioning on two levels. We have an agenda, an objective. At the same time there is a subtext where we choose a certain way to implement this agenda in order to convey a certain impression of ourselves. If we are too concentrated on the ego, the subtext, then no one will hear what we are trying to say. If I go to the store

are not: not boy/girl, not Norwegian/Swedish, not homo/hetero.

Egolessness means renouncing these definitions and enter into a relation where I get the possibility to be created anew, just as when I was a newborn baby.

Trust

The egolessness of true dialogue thus means letting go of this subtext as far as possible. I don't know anything, I don't care for how you see me, and I let go of my defences and trust us to jointly create something new. This is

what's going on when we fall in love and of course it takes a tremendously big amount of trust in the world.

To create this trust you must have an environment where you are accepted almost no matter what. That's why people go to all kinds of retreats and new age-courses, and that's the essential point in a therapeutic setting: I get unconditional confirmation, I find what I should have been given as a baby – appreciation just for being there, not for performing in any way. These are the three critical factors that create new reality. I hope it's clear how these factors apply to larping.

1) Exploring is simple. We never know what is going to happen in a larp. We jump into the stream of events, react to them and create new events for other to react upon.

2) Egolessness. This is actually the heart of larping: you leave yourself by going into another character. We renounce our personal striving for coolness - gamism, dramatism - and

let the role do the steering.

3) Trust. For a larp to function there must be a high level of acceptance from all players. If I all the time question the actions of my co-players, i.e. not returning the ball, then nothing will happen. If I don't buy into the story from the teenager with the three-hand sword about all the orcs he will fight, then I actually kill the game (together with his confidence and enthusiasm). I also hope that you see that this is the natural state of healthy children. Thus, if you don't be like children, the kingdom of heaven will not open for you. (That's why off-gaming is such a crime: you close the doors to heaven.)

Conclusion

By way of bringing this to a conclusion I will tell a very short tale: "In the Tree of Life there are two birds. One is eating of the fruits, the other is watching". End of story.

This simple allegory from the Upanishads, maybe the oldest existing



texts, gives a description of the relation of the ego to itself. There is a mental position from which you can watch the actions of the ego. Now who is the one who is watching the ego? If the word weren't so filled with religious overtones I would say it's the soul, but now I just call it my true self. From that position we can see that our neuroses and hang-ups are not our true identity, we can see that our beliefs, attitudes, and thinking patterns are nothing but accidental disguises that has been forced upon us by our psychohistory. Of course, it's still not easy to get rid of them, but it is only from that position that it can be made.

Most kinds of therapy consist of talking about your own behaviour, which only can be done from a position outside of the behaviour itself. E.g. in classical psychoanalysis you use about seven years just to recount everything that goes on in your mind. That means that once or twice a week you go into the ego-watching mode.

This is also the message from almost all religious traditions: you must lose yourself to find yourself. As long as you identify with the ego you will always be prisoner of your psychohistory. Larping shows us a way out of that prison.

Thus we return to the question of PLC. Is it possible to maintain that state between the larps? What I have tried to show here is the factors that support PLC – what now remains is only (only?) to activate true dialogue as far as possible in our everyday life. Can we do that, we can do anything – and then the only limits are the ones made by our imagination. Our larping is thus rehearsal for a truer way of living.

Please note – this is important! – that you need both parts; the true dialogue and your true self. By entering a dialogue from the ego-watching mode, you are in the unique position where you can free yourself from the constraints of upbringing. Isn't that what life is all about?