

# Interaction: The Key Element of Larp

This article is a description of larp. In the article I try to describe the different levels of larp, and the role of interaction in a larp. The article starts with a general introduction to how I see larp, and then go on to introduce the model of interaction. This article is an edit of an article previously published online (Gade, 2002).

## Introduction and definitions

I see larp as a media, i.e. a

medium for communications. However, in a larp the participants are not passive receptors of communication, but also transmit and create communication with other participants. Hence, larp is an interactive medium.

As we all know, a larp starts with the participants taking roles upon themselves, so that they function and act as an independent personality, which does not correspond with their personality outside the larp.

In a larp it is important to distinguish the participant (outside the larp), the character (the idea for the role) and the role (the participants' physical manifestation of the character). Where the role is diegetic, the character and the participant are both non-diegetic (Andreasen, 2003). The role is a result of the meeting of the participant and the character. Two different participants playing the same character wouldn't result in two identical roles.

## The Author

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He has been larping since 1996, and has organised five larps in different genres since 1998. Also, he is the editor of the Danish LARP portal [www.liveforum.dk](http://www.liveforum.dk). This year he is an organiser of Knudepunkt.

An essential part of being a role is interacting with the immediate surroundings. The role will like or dislike other characters and have certain desires, and in correspondence with these, the roles will interact with each other and with their immediate physical (e.g. a staircase or a gun) and social surroundings (e.g. the social structure of the larp).

However, a role does not only interact with the immediate surroundings. The role also interacts with parts of the larp that are not represented at the scenario, which we can call the world of the larp.

Both the surroundings and the world of the larp are diegetic, the difference being the representation at the larp. However, the roles also interact with game mechanics (such as rules) and other non-diegetic objects. However, this type of interaction is not necessary at a larp, since non-diegetic objects can (theoretically) be excluded completely from a larp.

I define a larp as: An interactive medium where one or more participants take on roles. The roles interact with each other, and with the surroundings and the world of the larp. In this interaction many

improvised stories are created and told.

### **Let's go deeper:**

#### **The elements of a larp**

More often than not, the world of the larp is different from ours. Typically the organisers of the larp describe the world, and you can see descriptions of for example culture, norms, history, and geography. The world of the larp is a simulation of a world, often our own with some modifications (e.g. in a different time or place).

If the world is very different from our normal world, the roles can often perform actions that the participants can't normally do (such as magic). These actions are represented by non-diegetic objects, such as game mechanics. Game mechanics are the rules and concepts that allow the simulation of actions that are allowed in the fictional larp world, but impossible or unwanted in the "real" world. It is not the role that interacts with the game mechanics, but the participant, in what Andreasen calls an Orwellian Double Think (Andreasen, 2003).

The world is the general idea of where the roles interact. The roles can interact with the world, but it is usually only on a psychological

level, for instance interacting with the metaphysics of the world. This interaction is usually seen as the role interpreting the world and acting in accordance with this (for instance if the world is our world of 1350 most people would refuse the notion of “a round earth”). Also, the role is shaped by the world. The writer of the character would describe a character that makes sense in the world.

If interaction should go beyond the psychological level, the role should interact with its surroundings. The surroundings are anything that is present in the larp, be it physical or social. That includes other roles, i.e. for role A, role B is a part of the surroundings and vice versa.

The difference between the world and the surroundings is the representation at the larp. Where the world is only represented as an idea or a concept, the surroundings have a direct impact on the roles.

The surroundings for one role consist of:

- The physical reality of the larp (e.g. a town or a room)
- The social structures
- The other roles
- The situation (or ‘background’/ ‘plot’/‘history’)

At a larp you can typically divide the surroundings in two:

- The description of the surroundings (typically made by the storyteller (Hutchison, 2003)).
- The actual physical surroundings (typically made by the practical organisers and FX group (Hutchison, 2003)).

### **Interaction!**

Action and progress in a larp happens when interaction happens, otherwise you have a complete standstill. We can separate the following distinct forms of interaction:

- World interaction (World interacting with world)
- Macro interaction (World interacting with surroundings)
- Meso interaction (Surroundings interacting with surroundings)
- Philosophical interaction (World interacting with role)
- Practical interaction (Role interacting with surroundings, and as a part of this: role interacting with other roles)
- Non-diegetic interaction (Participants interacting with non-diegetic objects)

World interaction would usually

be caused by the organisers, and is not necessarily experienced by the roles. World interaction is anything happening to the world, but not happening to the surroundings, such as a war in a distant country.

Both organisers and roles can cause macro interaction. In the above example, the war in the distant country could have meaning to the surroundings, e.g. by reducing the imports from this country. But interaction can happen the other way around as well. In a larp set in Sarajevo 1914, the murder of a prince could have big importance for the world.

Meso interaction has two different meanings. In one, it has much in common with world interaction, being something set off by organisers. But for the individual role, two other roles engaging in practical interaction can also be seen as meso interaction.

Philosophical interaction is an important part of being a role. As the name says it is of a philosophical nature, for example if the role defines itself in relation to major institutions in the world, such as metaphysics.

Practical interaction is probably the

most important form of interaction at a larp. Whereas the other forms of interaction are not necessarily in use, practical interaction is used at all larps. This type of interaction can be divided into three different kinds of interaction:

- Personal practical interaction, where the role interacts with other roles, typically in a conversation (or in some physical manner, such as fighting)
- Physical practical interaction, where the role interacts with the physical surroundings, such as opening a door or reading a letter.
- Social practical interaction, where the role interacts with the social surroundings, such as the institutions of society, but not with the actual roles. For instance this could be a role kneeling for the king, because she (from interacting with the social surroundings) knows that if she does not do this, it will be lack of respect for the king.

Non-diegetic interaction is a much discussed phenomenon, at least in Danish larp. A number of people (especially those seeking the adrenalin factor (Gade, 2000)) believe that rules and other game

mechanics are an essential part of larp. Other people believe that non-diegetic objects at a larp harm the interaction. This normative discussion is essentially a question of what kind of larper you are: gamist, dramatist or immersionist (Bøckman, 2002).

To sum up, a larp has the following elements:

### **Literature**

Andreasen, C. (2003): The Diegetic Rooms. Published in this anthology.

Bøckman, P. (2002): The Three Way Model. Published online: <http://www.laiv.org/laiv/skatt.nsf/173a001ad4327805802567b300327268/a2e8276e2eba5f66c1256b9d0045bac1?OpenDocument> but is also available in this anthology.

Gade, M. (2000): Factors of larp. Oslo, Published in Knutpunkt 2001.

Gade, M. (2002): Grundlæggende interaktionsteori for levende rollespil. Can be accessed through [www.hjernevask.dk](http://www.hjernevask.dk).

Hutchison, R. (2003): Institutional development of larp in Oslo. Published in this anthology.

	<b>Diegetic?</b>	<b>Interacts with</b>	<b>Created by</b>
<b>Non-diegetic objects</b>	No	Participants	Organisers - sometimes also by participants
<b>World</b>	Yes	Surroundings, role(s), world	Organisers/storytellers (sometimes also the roles)
<b>Surroundings</b>	Yes	Surroundings, role(s), world	Organisers/storytellers and practical organisers (sometimes also the roles)
<b>Role(s)</b>	Yes	Surroundings, other role(s), world	Storytellers or participants
<b>Participant(s)</b>	No	Non-diegetic objects	n/a