

Play to Love

Reading Victor Turner's "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual; An Essay in Comparative Symbology"

This text is a set of extended marginal notes attempting to draw conclusions and make observations regarding some of the core aspects of live-action role-playing from the perspective of performance studies in general and by looking at Victor Turner's (1920–1983) wild brand of cultural anthropology in particular. For many years, my mental picture of what role-playing is all about has been heavily influenced by models linking ritual behaviour, human creativity and social transformation, this is a first attempt to gather a few threads of these thoughts in writing. What I hope to gain by presenting the present musings on some interesting texts is to introduce a number of useful terms and models from performance studies that I find relevant to the study of live-action role-playing and stress the far-ranging implications of making the connections that I do.

Renowned anthropologist Victor Turner's body of work spans detailed statistical analysis of marriage patterns in the villages of northwestern Zambia and ambitious attempts to find the origins of the human activities of performance and play. Moving gradually away from traditional ethnography, his later work includes the physical re-enactment of ritual with student groups and studies of the ubiquitous performative structures of everyday western society. It is naturally these later projects that made me interested in reading his stuff. The main question Turner addresses in his study *From Ritual to Theatre; The Seriousness of Human Play* (Turner 1982) is how social action is related to aesthetics. He tries to explain the links between small- and large-scale social dramas (a divorce and Watergate) and aesthetic dramas found in ritual, theatre and literature. My reading will touch upon this core question, but it is not here that I find the most nutritious food for thought in relation to live action role-playing. It is exclusively the book's opening essay, *Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual; An Essay in Comparative Symbology* (ibid, 20–60), that is the subject of this paper. If the reader finds work of Turner and the other performance theorists referred to in this text interesting, I refer them back to the original works which hold a much broader and better developed scope of ideas than those referred to here.

A coherent theory of play would assert that play and ritual are complimentary, ethnologically based behaviours which in humans continue undiminished through life;

that play creates its own (permeable) boundaries and realms: multiple realities that are slippery porous, and full of creative lying and deceit; that play is dangerous and, because it is, players need to feel secure in order to begin playing; that the perils of playing are often masked or disguised by saying that play is “fun”, “voluntary,” a “leisure activity,” or “ephemeral” – when in fact the fun of playing, when there is fun, is in playing with fire, going in over one’s head, inverting accepted procedures and hierarchies; that play is performative, involving players, directors, spectators and commentators in a quadriliteral exchange that, because each kind of participant often has her or his own passionately pursued goals, is frequently at cross purposes. (Schechner 1993, 26–27)

Larp Theory and Performance Studies

During the last few years, larp theories have tried to define our nascent art form; the theories have attempted to create borders and definitions for what role-playing is – or in many cases, what good role-playing is. This quest for definition has thus far led to the birth of a number of strict and fairly unforgiving descriptive models, useful as tools for defining the uniqueness of role-playing in relation to other performative genres such as dance, sports, re-enactment, stage theatre and child’s play. It is tempting, but perhaps unfair, to see this struggle to find a unique and separate identity as a continuation of the role-playing community’s tendency to revel in its own marginalisation. The *Dogma 99* (Fatland & Wingård 1999) movement actively attempts to remove influence from non-larp forms, and the Turku school (Pohjola 2003) glorifies the one trait that is seen as uniquely ours – the holy grail of immersion. It may be argued that role-playing is not performance because it lacks a conventional audience, but so do the coming of age rites of the Ndembu, the events at Tiananmen Square and chicken-races on a dark Texas highway, all of which have been subjects of performance studies¹. New York based professor Richard Schechner, one of the giants of the field, goes as far as stating that “Everything and anything can be studied” as “a performance” (Schechner 2004).

Naturally the insights we gain from looking at larp from this angle are very different from applying something like feminist or Marxist theory, but that’s a given. The fact remains that the body of larp theory has so far been largely self-referential and dominated by grand gestures and provoking poses rather than a serious attempt to make use of and comment on the large body of existing performance theory concerning play and participation on and off stage.

The practices and writings of Victor Turner, Richard Schechner and Jerzy Grotowski are of particular relevance to the role-playing community. What this boils down to is that these guys wrote some seriously provocative stuff and extended their ideas of performance far beyond the bounds of stage theatre and into the realms of religious ritual, sacred acting, child’s play and participatory drama. Had Nordic-style live-action role-playing been around in New York in the sixties, it would have been the natural focus for their studies and would have been hailed as the key, the missing link,

¹ Essays on these subjects can be found in Schechner 1993.

in their quest to understand humanity's constant creation of performances. This is the greater picture in which role-playing theory is but the latest stroke of the brush, even if it has, to continue the metaphor, striking similarities to some of the very first charcoal sketches. There is a lot to learn from studying fields of performance outside the micro-culture of Nordic role-players and it's immediate sphere of reference.

In later years, a small number of games have consciously used some degree of understanding of performance theory as a part of the design process, the two most renowned being *Hamlet* and *Mellan himmel och hav*. The latter of these is a case of very special importance because of its effective use of methods drawn from religious performance, physical acting and writing based on solid ethnographical thinking. The game was not only something as rare as a genuine novel larp experience but also an extraordinary showcase of what can be gained from studying the roots and branches of human community, belief and performance. In games like this, role-play is getting closer and closer to something potent and primal.

The First Art?

Open almost any book on theatre history, and you'll find the romantic theory that the origins of theatrical performance lie in rituals. Most of the field still seems to support this stance, backed up by modern observations from history, anthropology and ethnography. Whether the blame for Greek tragedy is put on the ecstatic rites of Dionysus or sombre worship of dead chieftains² matters little. The gist is that it looks bloody likely that stage theatre arose from practices where no clear distinction can be made between performer and spectator; from processions, magic rites, feasts and initiations. One of the earliest written records of dramatic performance is a sketchy description by I-kher-nefert of his participation in the great passion play to the glory of dismembered Osiris at the cult-centre at Abydos somewhere around 1800BC. This guy was the chief treasurer of Khekure, the Pharaoh known to history as Senusret III. He did pretty much the kind of job a megalomaniac larp organiser would do with a few thousand slaves and unlimited resources, instead of a guy with a van and a loan from the local role-playing guild.

I acted as beloved son of Osiris-Khentyamentiu. I embellished his great barque of eternity; I made for it a shrine which displays the beauties of Khentyamentiu, in gold, silver, lapis-lazuli, bronze, sesnedjem-wood and cedar[?]. I fashioned the gods in his train. I made their shrines anew. I caused the temple priesthood to do their duties, I caused them to know the custom of every day, the festival of the Head-of-the-Year. (Breasted, Henry James 1907)

From the sound of I-Kher-Nefert's report he had a busy game at the absolute centre of the plot. On his stele is written:

I organised the going forth of Wepwawet when he proceeded to avenge his father; I drove away the rebels from the neshmet-barque; I overthrew the enemies of Osiris; I celebrated

² As claimed in Ridgeway 1915.

the great going forth. I followed the god at his going, and caused the ship to sail, Thoth steering the sailing. [...] I avenged Wennefer that day of the great fight; I overthrew all his enemies upon the sandbanks of Nedyt; I caused him to proceed into the great barque. It raised up his beauties, I making glad the people/tomb owners of the Eastern Desert, creating joy amongst the people/tomb owners of the Western Desert; they saw the beauties of the neshmet-barque when it touched land at Abydos, when it brought Osiris-Khentyamentiu to his palace; I followed the god to his house, I carried out his purification and extended his seat and solved the problems of his residence [...and amongst] his entourage. (ibid)

We have no real way of knowing exactly how pre-scripted these ritual plays were. Our scant sources hint that they were set up a bit like a mix between Hamlet and *Futuredrome*, with a scripted core cast at the centre of a violently ecstatic crowd. Herodotos, in his *Histories*³, tells us most of what we know about the game at Abydos, a weeklong affair re-enacting the battle between Osiris and Seth. The Pharaoh and a statue acted as the hero-god, and it is likely that it was not seen as pretence or art when he rode his gilded divine wagon through the streets followed by thousands of common citizens who took an active part in the action as the armies and feasting worshippers of the conflicting forces. The Greek historian reports with some horror the battles were being fought on the stairs to the temple.

The few then who have been left about the image, draw a wain with four wheels, which bears the shrine and the image that is within the shrine, and the other priests standing in the gateway try to prevent it from entering, and the men who are under a vow come to the assistance of the god and strike them, while the others defend themselves. Then there comes to be a hard fight with staves, and they break one another's heads, and I am of opinion that many even die of the wounds they receive; the Egyptians however told me that no one died. (Herodotos [2001])

The roots of the senseless boffer-war climax run deep indeed. The game must be considered quite hard core, not only for the heavy blunt-weapon fighting – the game ended with the Osiris-pharaoh slaying a live hippopotamus acting the part of Seth and a feast of hippo-cake and copious amounts of beer. The games at Abydos were not the first participatory dramas and they were not the last. Through the ages and across the globe we find similar spectacles of serious role-taking creating phenomena ranging from intimate initiatory rites to sprawling carnivals. A couple of examples that have continued into modern times would be the Waehma deerdance of the Yaqi Indians (Schechner 1993, 94–129) and the Ramlila of Ramnagar (ibid, 131–183).

The structural similarities between ritual drama and live action role-play are quite evident, even if one cannot claim an unbroken lineage of any sort – hardly a lipstick trace⁴ – connecting our art causally to these dawn times of drama. Still it seems clear that current larp-practices share more traits with dramatic ritual than with any

³ (Herodotos, [2001]) Found on *Project Gutenberg*, see reference below.

⁴ A term adopted from Greil Marcu's *Lipstick Traces, A Secret History of the 20th Century* (Harvard, Harvard University Press 1990), a work attempting to tracing the lineage of punk rock back to the situationist international, the Dadaists and beyond.

other form of human behaviour. Some of the models constructed to understand ritual and the emergence of performative art can be applicable to larps and help understand why they feel so important to players and, ultimately, why they are.

The Rites of Role-Playing

Like all tactical academics, Arnold Van Gennep went down in history by coining a phrase. The term *rites des passage* (rites of passage) is highly successful and used by academics and laymen worldwide if a bit too often. Although Van Gennep intended the term to be used for rituals accompanying both individual and larger scale social status changes as well as rites marking an agrarian society's progression through the seasons, it has come to be used almost exclusively in connection to "life crises rites" (Gennep 1909). In our industrialised western world we have pale reflections of rites des passage in our baptisms, student examinations, university initiation pranks, our marriages and burials, all rites concerned with an individuals journey from one social role to another.

Turner tries to revert to the earlier meaning in his essay; that all rites have the character of a "passage" between different conditions and asks himself what this means. My question is a bit different; I'm looking for traces of role-playing structures, similarities and hints to enrich our art. Gennep divides a rite of passage into three phases; *separation, transition and incorporation*. It is possible to follow Turner and Gennep and apply the stages of ritual on larps. In this process one finds numerous signs pointing towards the conclusion that there exists a fundamental similarity between larp and liminal rite.

Dead to the World

"The first phase of *separation*," Turner writes, "clearly demarcates sacred space and time." (Turner 1982, 24) This phase is well known and highly developed, at least in Swedish larp culture; it includes all the preparations players and organisers deem necessary to perform before they are ready to enter into a game. Most larp events are set in clearly defined spaces for a set period of time and while the game is active special rules apply within the game area. To the players, the game area is no longer a part of everyday reality, but it becomes a site hallowed to the game. Breach of this sanctity results in confusion and anger among the celebrants. To mark the space as a sacred ritual site the participants prepare buildings, paths, costumes, decorations and symbols in correspondence with symbolic world of the game. While physical separation must be considered a hallmark trait of live action role-playing, it is not the only (and perhaps not the most important) aspect of the separation-phase in a larp. Turner continues:

It includes symbolic behaviour – especially symbols of reversal and inversion of things, relationships and processes secular – which represent the detachment of the ritual

subjects (novices, candidates, neophytes or “initiands”) from their previous social statuses. (ibid, 24)

The very act of playing a character is the most important separation made by players from their everyday social position. It is a trait that role-playing shares with many other ritual systems but this form is unique in placing at the centre of the whole experience. By putting their societal roles aside (visible through the practice of costuming, physical acting etc.) and accepting new ones the participants make ready to cross into the main part of the role-playing rite, the *liminal* or transitional phase. These preparations can be compared with the ritual washing and donning of ritual robes found in many strands of western esotericism or the elaborate costuming and mask practices of West African Yoruba-culture.

Many players find great enjoyment in this first step of the journey between worlds. The manufacture of costume, character behaviour and props of all kinds are fuelled by anticipation and charged with the will to transform. If role-players are to follow the ritual model, making the players shed their former selves along with their entire socio-moral luggage before entering the game should be the primary goal. Currently there seems to be a lot of hesitation among players and organisers about going into games naked and head over heels, yet the game will touch deeper if one gives oneself up to it completely and enters the liminoid space as a humble initiate rather than a headstrong actor.

Lurking at the Threshold

During the intervening phase of transition, called by Gennep “marigin” or “limen” (meaning threshold in latin), the ritual subjects pass through a period and an area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo which has few (though these are sometimes the most crucial) of the attributes of either the preceding or subsequent profane social statuses or cultural states. (Ibid, 24)

Sounds a lot like a larp. It’s in liminality that Turner finds the roots to human culture and performance. This state of ritual between-ness that larpers know so well, of being “dead to the social world but alive to the asocial world” (Ibid, 27), is where elements of the culture performing the rite are mixed and mingled until it finally, after centuries, gives rise to myth, dance, play and epic. The initiates of a liminal rite are outsiders; they are compared with ghosts, gods and ancestors and often act out dramas involving these kinds of figures.

“[T]he liminal initiands are considered to be dark, invisible, like the sun or the moon in eclipse or the moon between phases[...]they are associated with such general oppositions as life and death, male and female, food and excrement, since they are at once dying from or dead to their former status and life,[...]” (Ibid, 26) This is our spiritual heritage, and looking at the themes of a typical game, role-players seem to have adopted it just fine. The duration of a larp is a very prolonged limens-like state. Role-players have a lot to learn from how the tribal pioneers transported and still transport

their players into the realms of human imagination. Turner's list of the defining elements found within liminality and their functions reads like a veritable checklist for larp organisers.

[...]ordeals, myths, maskings, mumming, the presentation of sacred icons to novices, secret languages, food and behavioural taboos, create a weird domain in the seclusion camp in which ordinary regularities of kinship, the residential setting, tribal law and custom are set aside, where the bizarre becomes the normal, and where through the loosening of connections between elements customarily bound together in certain combinations, their scrambling and recombining in monstrous, fantastic, unnatural shapes, the novices are induced to think, and think hard, about cultural experiences they had hitherto taken for granted. (Ibid, 42)

While role-players may feel pride and wonder in the connections between rite and role-play, they must still remember that the aim of a truly liminal rite is to ensure the stability and continuation of established norm patterns and to teach the initiates the mythological deep structure underlying those patterns. These are mandatory activities that must be performed by every member of society at preordained times during their life to make sure society stays the same for generation after generation. There is nothing revolutionary or romantic about limens-rites, as they are in function just tools of governmental oppression of an age before television, money and parliament. Yet, in the liminal phase of ritual, Turner (1982, 45) sees “[...] a kind of institutional capsule or pocket which contains the germ of future social developments, of societal change, in a way that the central tendencies can never quite succeed in being [...]”

The liminal phases of tribal society invert but do not usually subvert the *status quo*, the structural form, of society; reversal underlines to the members of a community that chaos is the alternative to cosmos, so they better stick to the cosmos, i.e., the traditional order of culture, though they can for a brief while have a whale of a good time being chaotic. (Ibid, 41)

This is the social function of the carnivals and feast-days found in the cyclic agrarian calendar of almost any culture as well as the initiation and growth-rites of tribal society. It is tempting to view role-playing games as this type of liminal events. Many role-players state that their reason for playing is to “blow off steam”, to take a deep breath of magical air before they plunge back under the ice floes of the mundane. From that kind of player perspective, the game has become something akin to a medieval May fest where the poorest peasants are elevated to the top of the societal ladder for a few days before going back to the grind. This use of role-playing seems limited and wasteful. Larps are not strictly liminal phenomena despite their uncanny resemblances to these first human zones of imagination. Turner introduces the concept of *Liminoid* forms. In this term he includes all arts and entertainments that have risen from ritual liminal practices, basically meaning all of them. In stark contrast to its origin, choice, personal expression and division from the social norm are seen as the hallmarks of the liminoid arts. (Ibid, 52–55) Larp must be seen as sharing the defining traits of ritual liminality,

but since it has been developed within a modern complex society it has all the freedom of expression of liminoid arts. So even if there is much to gain from treating larp like a limens-rite, to create powerful game-structures players should not be fooled into believing that the essence of live role-playing art is normative. In fact, Turner's writing implies the opposite.

Antistructure

The integration phase of Van Gennep's rites des passage model and its relation to live action role-playing is quite tricky. Role-players are notoriously bad at letting their liminoid experiences change them, or at least admitting to being changed by them. In a tribal society there is no going back to the state you were in before the separation phase; you were a girl – now you are a woman. You will be treated as transformed by everyone in your village and you are expected to conform to the new social code of conduct – a new character in the game of the real.

Larpers have the option to let themselves be affected deeply, to use games as personal rites of passage and change, as signposts on an ever-changing journey towards death; to grab traits from the characters, learn new attitudes and ways to form social bonds. But according to Turner, it is not as isolated human beings that we have access to the true payoff of liminoid exploration: rather, the benefit is to the social group bonded by the performance and, in the end, human culture as a whole. Per definition, the playful state of liminality creates a structure inverse to that of everyday reality: an antistructure as Turner calls it. Even while the liminal rites of passage strive to foster tribal citizens, they provide them with access to a field of play where the boundaries of normal behaviour and thinking are extended or even dissolved. The threshold stage, especially when prolonged into a “[...]tunnel’ where the liminal becomes the ‘cunicular’[...]” (Ibid, 41) becomes a repository for ground-breaking ideas and methods of organization. Turner quotes anthropologist Brian Sutton-Smith's definition of his own term.

The normative structure represents the working equilibrium, the “antistructure” represents the latent system of potential alternatives from which novelty will arise when contingencies in the normative system require it. We might more correctly call this second system the *protostructural* system (he says) because it is the precursor of innovative normative forms. It is the source of new culture. (Ibid, 28)

Comparing this with the Marxist “superstructure”, the lump of non-essential culture that is generated by the fundamental means of production and ownership, yields a heretically simple explanation. Where Marx sees all social change as coming from changes in the modes of production, Turner sees societal development as a continuous interplay between structure and “antistructure”; the child of liminality – the product of role-playing.

Antistructure, in fact, can generate and store a plurality of alternative models for living, from utopias to programs, which are capable of influencing the behaviour of those in mainstream social and political roles (whether authoritative or dependent, in control or rebelling against it) in the direction of radical change, just as much as they can serve as instruments of political control. (Ibid, 33)

For what is live action role-playing if not a constant construction of alternative structures of being alive as a humanoid creature? While inside a game, role-players relate to each other in manners completely different from their everyday state – and not just due to the obvious change of character enacted. Participants are required to leave the whole social role complex they consider to be their “selves” at the door and enter into alien mental and relational configurations, adopting cultures often opposed or vastly different to their own in terms of value-systems and structural composition. But far more important than in-game changes of social structure, that often are not that impressive, is that they are required to change their primary role to that of player and co-creator, a task that requires every ounce of concentration and skill they can muster. The ideal player must become a *Liminaut* – a free explorer of the threshold realm – and abandon all illusions of being an individual defined by the fetters of her mundane prison of self. The equation is as simple as it is potent: *to truly play one must be truly free*.

Communitas

I have used the term “anti-structure,” (sic) mainly with reference to tribal and agrarian societies, to describe both liminality and what I have called “communitas.” I mean by it not a structural reversal, a mirror imaging of “profane” workday socioeconomic structure, or a fantasy-rejection of structural “necessities,” but the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc. , from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses, enacting a multiplicity of social roles, and being acutely conscious of membership in some corporate group such as family, lineage, clan, nation, etc., or of affiliation with some pervasive social category such as class, caste, sex or age division. (Ibid, 44)

Here Turner approaches his most important, and from the role-playing point of view, his most stunning conclusion. Liminality ultimately requires its participants to meet each other on a being-level free from the ego-mongering and constant role-playing of society; be it the capitalist cycle of hard work and guilty leisure or the never-changing agrarian cycle of harvest and planting. Communitas is the experience of moving beyond and outside our prison-selves, of choosing to believe in a dream together, and in doing so suddenly seeing each other not as targets of transactions to benefit our own ambitions, but as a part of an *Essential We*, as parts of a communitas. Turner writes:

What then *is* communitas? Has it any base or is it a persistent fantasy of mankind, a sort of collective return to the womb? I have described this way by which persons see, understand, and act towards one another (in *The Ritual Process*) as essentially “an unmediated relationship between historical, idiosyncratic, concrete individuals.” (Ibid, 45)

This is the hard-caught experience that makes role-players return to the forests and cellars of larpdom year after year. Immersion is but one of the tools to reach it – it is the individual's way to approach this collective state of grace, but it is an empty sacrament without the company of other celebrants. Turner finds his word for immersion in “flow”, a term for a state of untroubled creative mind that comes from mastering an activity within a set framework (acting in character, for instance), coined by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi⁵.

“Flow denotes the holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement,” and is “a state in which action follows action according to an internal logic which seems to need no conscious intervention on our part...we experience it as a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which we feel in control of our actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment; between stimulus and response; or between past, present and future”. (Ibid, 55–56)

One of the key effects of “flow” states is a pleasurable sense of “loss of self”. This may hold the key to what character immersion really is in psychological terms, but it should be the subject for future explorations and should not distract us from the wonder of *communitas*.

Again, “flow” is experienced within an individual, whereas *communitas* at its inception is evidently between or among individuals – it is what all of us believe we share and its outputs emerge from dialogue, using both words and non-verbal means of communication, such as understanding smiles, jerks of the head, and so on. (Ibid, 58)

So where can we find *communitas* in the order of modern society? Where are the places where we may create “[...]an interval, however brief, of *margin* or *limen*, when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance.” (Ibid, 44)

Performance began as mandatory participation and live-action for the good of the community but it has turned into the highly personalised business of art and entertainment to be bought with money and leisure time. Turner views this shift from *Liminal* to *Liminoid* mainly as a process of liberation and diversification (Ibid, 52–55), but there is also a fundamental shift in the relationship between the role of audience. Turner does not focus his attention on this area specifically, but it is telling that he considers ritual liminality to be the primal and perhaps most effective way of creating *communitas*, while the *liminoid* diversions of modern times offer a wider range of choice.

In tribal societies and other pre-industrial social formations, liminality provides a propitious setting for the development of these direct, immediate, and total confrontations of human identities. In industrialised societies, it is within leisure, and sometimes aided by the projections of art that this way of experiencing one's fellows can be portrayed, grasped, and sometimes realised. (Ibid, 46)

⁵ Quoted extensively by Turner, reference to original work (Csikszentmihalyi 1974) found below.

Larp, as stated before, shares the traits of liminal and liminoid. Participation and co-creation are the bridge between the intensity of grand ritual drama and the freedom of modern art. Others have started down this path before, the “environmental theatre” of Richard Schechner and Grotowski’s “paratheatre” both explored ritual, participation and quested *communitas*. When he left the stage to pursue the project that later became known as *Holiday*, Jerzy Grotowski made this statement at a conference in New York;

Am I talking about a way of life, a kind of existence, rather than about theatre? Without a doubt. I think at this point we are faced with a choice...The quest for what is most essential in life. Different names have been invented for it; in the past these names usually had a religious sound. (Schechner, Wolford 1997, 232)

But this quest for a form where “the terms “spectator” and “actor” lose their divisive significance and both the action and the creation become a collective responsibility” (ibid, 232) was met with massive critique and lack of understanding from a theatre world that needed to see how the Polish directors’ methods could be applied to the stage (ibid, 5). The heritage of Grotowski lives on, but it is almost invisible in the shadow of the mainstream. Schechner gradually tempered and finally gave up his experiments in participatory theatre because he concluded it destroyed the aesthetic value of his work (Schechner 1973, 40–86). The fire of *communitas* in performing arts died down to a flickering ember. But it was only waiting, biding it’s time to flare up in the most unlikely of places.

Play to Love

Here we have a loving union of the structurally damned pronouncing judgment on normative structure and providing alternative models for structure. (Turner 1982, 51)

Who today can claim to be the initiated masters of the threshold realm, priestesses of the cunicular realms of phantasmagoria and poets of heart-to-heart? Who today can compare to the thousands of fanatical role-players as they wield the first art of man in ways never before dreamed of? We discovered it, almost as if by accident with our childhood friends, drawing labyrinths in pen and paper, conjuring it in our long-running table-top campaigns and in the furious invention of radical freeform, we feel it when the vision is strong and shared, when the village sleeps and breathes at night, as tears flow and the undiscovered country of the future is in our collective hands. We set our souls aflame with it when trembling fingers touch and the black eyes facing us do not reflect but truly see and feel. This is inter-immersion, this is Genesis, this is the fire of *communitas* and it is as old as mankind itself.

Liminality is both more creative and more destructive than the structural norm. In either case it raises basic problems for social structural man, invites him to speculation and criticism. But where it is socially positive it presents, directly or by implication, a model

of human society as a homogenous, unstructured *communitas*, whose boundaries are ideally coterminous with those of the human species. When even two people believe that they experience unity, all people are felt by those two, even if only for a flash, to be one. (Ibid, 47)

There we have it. Through the game of love and the love of the game, we have discovered that the structure that binds us is just another set of rules, as false and as real as the ones we create for pleasure. Performance theorists have stated this for a long time, but we active larpers have never been good at taking ourselves or the implications of our art seriously. Turner's model of *communitas* gives us a tool and a positive vision to strive for rather than the general sense of doing something that feels important.

Within our liminoid games, we are starting to discover ways of acting and being together that are ultimately more human and humane than the order that surrounds us. Play itself is becoming a valid ideology as a vision of constantly renewable co-creation of meaning is emerging. I can't help feeling something big is about to happen. I hear it whispered at conventions, see it embedded in the structures and stories of our games, hinted to on discussion-boards, and witness it confessed in the slow grey hours when one game has ended and another one has yet to begin.

Games

Futuredrome (2002) by Henrik Wallgren & Staffan Sörenson et al., Sweden.

Hamlet (2002) by Martin Ericsson, Anna Ericson, Christopher Sandberg and Martin Brodén et al., Interaktiva Uppsättningar, Sweden.

Mellan himmel och hav (2003) by Emma Wieslander and Katarina Björk et al., Ars Amandi, Sweden.

References

- Breasted, James Henry (1907): *Ancient Records of Egypt*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Herodotus: *Histories* volume II. Project Gutenberg, 2001. www.gutenberg.net (December 2003).
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (1974): *Flow, Studies of Enjoyment*. University of Chicago, PHS Grant Report.
- Fatland, Eirik & Wingård, Lars (1999): *Dogma 99. A Programme for the Liberation of LARP*. International version. In Gade, Morten, Thorup, Line & Sander, Mikkel (ed.) (2003): *As Larp Grows Up – Theory and Methods in Larp 20–29*. Knudepunkt 2003, Copenhagen. www.laivforum.dk/kp03_book
- Gennep, Arnold van (1909): *The Rites of Passage*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. Printed in 1960.

- Pohjola, Mike (1999): The Manifesto of the Turku School. In Gade, Morten, Thorup, Line & Sander, Mikkel (ed.) (2003): *As Larp Grows Up – Theory and Methods in Larp* 34–39. Knudepunkt 2003, Copenhagen. www.laivforum.dk/kp03_book
- Ridgeway, William (1915) *The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schechner, Richard (1973): *Environmental Theatre*. New York: Hawthorne books.
- Schechner, Richard (1993): *The Future of Ritual, Writings on culture and Performance*. London: Routledge.
- Schechner, Richard (1995): *Performance Studies Textbook*, 2nd draft, July 1995. www.nyu.edu/classes/bkg/schechner, (13.1.2004).
- Schechner, Richard and Wolford, Lisa (ed) (1997): *The Grotowski sourcebook*. London: Routledge.
- Turner, Victor (1982): *From Ritual to Theatre, The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: PAJ Publications.