

Fall Term Print Theme– **LARP**

‘Role-playing games are also a tool for exposing...’ (Stenros 2008)

<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/103/292645/ask-before-you-bite/>

<https://elephant.art/sunday-read-excellences-perfections/>

The proposed print theme is ‘LARP’–

FIRST– Acronym standing for Live-Action Role-Play. An activity popularised in the 80s, inspired by the fantasy worlds of ‘dungeons and dragons’ etc.; ‘A character-driven type of gameplay conducted in the physical world’; participants physically portray characters in a physical setting [c.f. Historical Reenactment, Tabletop Role-Playing.] LARPing has since only grown in popularity and diversified– a larp might have a realistic-historical (e.g. medieval), futuristic, or fantasy setting. LARP is the game, also a verb; one ‘LARPs’, is a ‘LARPer’.

SECOND– The term has taken on a popular slang meaning, used predominantly in online spaces [esp. twitter and forums]. It is in this sense we first encountered the word. To LARP is to ‘fake or pretend’; to ‘pose’ as something you are not. In a sentence: ‘Patti Smith was an opportunistic clout-chaser LARPing as artistic wallflower’... or, ‘e-girls love to larp as trad-cath’. The term accuses artifice or falsity in what the ‘player’ is ‘enacting’.

This proposed theme offers a diverse set of associations for the curious critic, writer, and 21st century subject to engage with. It implicitly echoes the call of ERA’s Fall 2021 print edition, GET REAL. It is proposed at a moment of nascent ‘fine-arts’ and critical interest in LARP. We pretend, perform, play, LARP; the possible applications of this lens are MANIFOLD.

LARP casts a game-ified and performance-based lens on our culture. This print issue might take a deep, eclectic, and good-humoured dive into a topic to which the reader may already have some kind of established response, but likely knows little about; they are the UNINITIATED. This brief outlines some possible avenues for exploration and provides evidence for Larp as an emergent critical interest.

1. LARP as subculture

‘LARP’ evokes notions of subculture and identity; hot-button issue for fashion and culture media in recent years. Part of our fascination with LARP is seeing it as a TRUE SUBCULTURE– perhaps one of the last. Like other ‘nerd’ cultures there is an essential barrier to entry; LARP even more than the rest has resisted being ‘made cool’, corporatized, sexed-up, appropriated for cultural gain.

The larper tells you, LARP is a lifestyle. Larp already, will never, reach the mainstream.

2. Values, Initiation

LARP the hobby has extensive conventions, traditions, etiquette; each game with its own rules. ERA takes the theme with respect and sensitivity– LARP and LARPer are not a source of humour. If you want to learn more about the world of LARP you can speak to our own Samuel Davey-Newton, ERA treasurer, voter UK LARPer of the year in 2019.

3. LARPspace vs IRLspace

LARPing offers an imaginative mode for personal expression; a larp is a setting and activity once or twice-removed from the player's reality. As a subculture it acts as an enclave, facilitating relations, fostering communities with high proportions of neurodivergence and alternative thinking.

4. Online

The anonymity of the internet lets the modern subject masquerade as any identity they please- there needs be no greater motive than 'for the lolz', or 'for the aesthetic'. LARPing is thus related to trolling, but is essentially different. One might LARP as a troll, thus creating a double-walled identity.

5. The Forum, The Town Hall

The term has gained a complex set of meanings on a 'reactionary' side of twitter, anonymous forums, and other hyper-online spaces; related to or used interchangeably with 'PSY-OP' [c.f. 'crisis actor'].

"To call some- thing a LARP on 4chan typically means to designate it as a trollish in-joke, where all content exists in a suspended state between the "real thing" and its mocking parody."

5. The Deep Vernacular Web

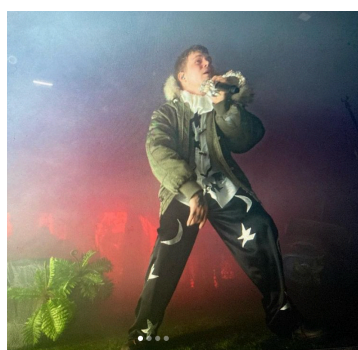
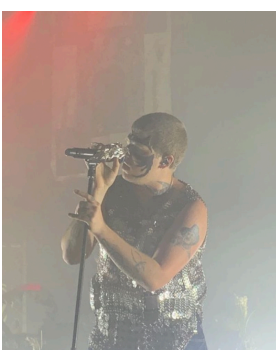
"The deep vernacular web is characterized by anonymous or pseudonymous subcultures that largely see themselves as standing in opposition to the dominant culture of the surface web. Identified to an extent with the anonymous 4chan image board – which hosts one million posts per day, three quarters of which are made by visitors from English-speaking countries – these subcultures tend to imagine themselves as a faceless mass. In direct contrast to the individualized culture of the selfies associated with social media, we might thus characterize the deep vernacular web as a mask culture in which individual identity is effaced by the totemic deployment of memes."

4. Counterpolitics

LARP has no shortage of political associations; modern slang use has a far-right affiliation; though in hobby spaces, 'medieval', 'viking', especially war-time historical larps have picked up troubling affiliations.

5. '(Neo-)Medievalism'(??.?)

'LARP' easily maps onto the curious resurgence of neo-medieval aesthetics in recent years, a youth, street-style and music movement centred on London or across Europe (no serious hold in the U.S.A.). The aesthetics associated with artists as Yung Lean or Bladee ('Exeter Castle' 'Warlord'); the 'plasticky' medievalism of Guttering raves, student art shows with titles evoking castles, 'yeomanry' paganism etc. When did 'medieval vibes' become so hot, so everywhere?



unpredictable, but also around the players embodying them, who possess their own unique drives and aims’

12. Nordic Larp

Nordic Larp is a tradition of larp game design that emerged in the Nordic countries... below curator Ben Vickers suggests re- modelling collaborative art on this style of play... comparison to Relational Aesthetic art reveals the boundaries between Larp and Art to be more blurred than presupposed.

C.f. Brody Condon ‘To Prove Her Zeal’ video installation documenting a five-day LARP. “Ground Zero Larp held in Finland (1998), in which the participants ‘experienced’ a fabricated nuclear missile crisis based on the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Stenros used the term ‘positive negative experience’ when discussing Ground Zero, the premise of which centres around the theory that through constructed traumatic experience the participant can learn valuable life lessons. This sentiment is similar to the recent TV experiment Apocalypse (2012) by Derren Brown, in which Brown led the unsuspecting Steven to believe that the world was going to end as a result of a meteor shower. Although ethically Ground Zero and Apocalypse exist on different planes, both ask whether an individual can gain meaningful experience through a fictive constructed scenario. They also pose questions on the long term effects of intentionally inflicted trauma on an individual, willing or not.”

13. Discourse

Cf. Spike Online, PARTICIPATE DON’T DOMINATE: AN INTERVIEW WITH CURATOR AND ACTIVIST BEN VICKERS

VICKERS: That is why I am particularly drawn to things like live-action role-playing, especially the Nordic LARP scene and Jeepform stuff. When that scene comes together, they create something at the highest level of human-to-human experience that I wish art could maintain.*

SCRIMGEOUR: So your ideal art would be collaborative, network-based?

VICKERS: Like I said, it’s in my most extreme moments, because it is fascistic to say that all art has to be collaborative and participative and there are no spectators.

SCRIMGEOUR: But the model would be coproduction?

VICKERS: An intuitive guttural understanding of that, yes ... my preference would be to have that as a lens by which you understand that to be art’s primary experience, because at the moment the lens through which most people look at art is the idea of production and then outcome, rather than collaboration and experience.

SCRIMGEOUR: That is a beautiful dream; a network-based way of making a flat hierarchy between production and consumption, and ...

VICKERS: ... and commentary, as you’d also end up with things like fan fiction, where people extend the history of Beuys. I don’t want art history to feel like a graveyard when you walk through it, I want it to be possible to recreate for yourself the energy that was there in the present. ”

14. Specific section prompts

As this brief gets pretentious, self-referential, deep-vernacular– these are just initial ideas; the writer should take the term as stimulus, as literally or creatively as liked. At its most basic, almost anything concerning ‘artifice’, role-play, performativity, even ‘IRL’ vs the online, or ‘live

action' (TV, cinema, live music) vs. animated, rendered etc. Chatbots, Auto-fiction, Lying, Lying online; "XYZ in the digital age".

Read: e-flux journal, e-flux journal, 'Ask Before you Bite' by Eva Wilk, on LARP as critical lens and Eroticism.

ART–

- ★ Performance art generally– Marina Abramovic retrospective at the RA
- ★ Ann Imhof?
- ★ Amalia Ulman, *Excellences and Perfections*
- ★ Nordic Larp
- ★ Gaming– Hans Ulrich Obrist's 'Worldbuilding'.
- ★ Art in the digital age.
- ★ Webcam Performance.
- ★ 'The pleasure of Artifice (is it cake?)'
- ★ 'Trans-cultural role-play.'

LOOK–

- ★ A call-out for non-written responses to the print theme or specific section prompts.
- ★ We are interested in featuring lots of art by young artists– installation photos, digital art, anything we can print on a page. Please submit if you see a connection, however vague, between your work and 'LARP'.

MUSIC–

- ★ 'Nostalgia'; Mark Fisher is good on this kind of thing.
- ★ Post-Punk LARP, Pop-star LARP
- ★ World-building through Rave (Guttering),
- ★ Neo-pagan aesthetics.
- ★ Remix culture; imitation, sampling as LARP.
- ★ 'Post-internet' culture, sensory overload, layers of noise and meaning.
- ★ Live performance as LARP, Persona.
- ★ Artists e.g. Lana Del Rey where world-building figures hugely.
- ★ *Cloud rap esp. Yung Lean*, for medieval aesthetics as well as cloud-rap as the best example of something truly ultra-contemporary (email Rebecca.lally.21@ucl.ac.uk for some nonsensical but brilliant digital-critical essays on this).
- ★ Kedr Livansky as a really good example of the kind of modern, Larpy aesthetic we have been talking about, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZG-AvMqidE>

READ–

- ★ Autofiction.
- ★ Language as coding.
- ★ The artifice inherent to the medium.
- ★ Reactionary cultural-historical or personal-emotional backswings.
- ★ Gender as performance (Cixous).
- ★ Code-switching, assimilation.
- ★ Surveillance (Foucault).
- ★ Fantasy fiction, self-insert fanfiction

LITERATURE–

- ★ Sci-fi, fantasy, speculative-fiction.
- ★ ‘Beat LARP’, Poet-larp,
- ★ Medieval literature!!!
- ★ Choose your own adventure...
- ★ Authors LARP. To live is to LARP. LARP as your favourite author...
- ★ Self-insert Fanfiction.
- ★ Question of (no) audience– writing for others vs. self.
- ★ Writing as participatory, collective.
- ★ Improvisatory writing (beat).
- ★ Subculture writing (Kathy Acker, Cookie Mueller).

THEATRE–

- ★ Could write about almost anything.
- ★ Physical sets, setting, improv, live action, costume.

FILM–

- ★ Nostalgia-porn in modern cinema.
- ★ Historical aesthetics in non-period pieces (Marie Antoinette).
- ★ POV, immersive, interactive. Films based on video games.
- ★ Amateur acting: in Larry Clark’s ‘Kids’, Teens LARP as themselves. The Idol.

THOUGHTS–

- ★ Performing online, ‘Posing’, Anna Delvey and Caroline Calloway
- ★ Subculture aesthetics, Gate-keeping, Tribalism
- ★ The Trouble with ‘Authenticity’ or ‘The True Self’
- ★ Subculture, fashion, identity, youth. In-group out-group dynamic
- ★ ‘Scenes’, Persona, Celebrity, ‘It girls’

THEATRE

- ★ Improv (Improvisation)

Prompts:

Lore	Posting	Ritual	Community
Cringe	Trolling	Symbology	Improvisation
“Poser”	Psy-opping	Signalling	Social codes
Subculture	POV ASMR	Deep-vernacular	Main Character
Initiation	Gaming	Cyper-speech	NPC
Gate-keeping	Artifice	Mythologies	Persona
World-building	Alienation	Simulacrum	Y/N
Performative	Outsider-art	Nerdcore	Participation
Fantasy space	Art-world-LARP	Weirdcore	Fan-Fiction
Faking	Cosplay	Corecore	Alternate reality

“Reading list”

★ ‘Larp’ and art articles:

<https://www.frieze.com/article/more-game-0>

<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/103/292645/ask-before-you-bite/>

<https://www.spikeartmagazine.com/?q=articles/participate-dont-dominate-interview-curator-and-activist-ben-vickers>

<https://gnpeelmagazine.weebly.com/sounds-like-a-larp--or-is-it-an-art-by-zara-worth.html>

<https://nordiclarp.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/the-making-of-nordic-larp.pdf>

<https://isismagazine.org.uk/2023/05/art-yeah-whats-it-about-the-features-team-has-a-larp/>

★ ‘Larp’ art:

<https://futuregallery.org/jaakko-pallasvuo-off-game/>

<https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/378691/blend-bleed/>

<https://www.e-flux.com/criticism/237505/momentum-8-tunnel-vision>

<https://www.spikeartmagazine.com/?q=articles/cabaret-economique-swiss-institute-new-york>

★ Hans Ulrich Obrist Gaming and Digital Art Exhibit:

<https://jsfoundation.art/exhibitions/worldbuilding/>

<https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/461832/worldbuilding/>

<https://www.dazeddigital.com/art-photography/article/56316/1/hans-ulrich-obrist-interview-worldbuilding-gaming-art-digital-age-exhibition>

<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/artists/hans-ulrich-obrist-worldbuilding-julia-stoschek-collection-1234630698/>

★ ‘Medieval’ in pop culture:

<https://www.dazeddigital.com/art-photography/article/55888/1/odious-rot-magazine-combining-medieval-weaponry-and-craft-revival>

<https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/54678/1/how-medieval-fashion-took-over-the-runway-and-our-instagram-feeds>

<https://i-d.vice.com/en/article/dy788j/rei-kawakubo-frames-medieval-jesters-as-the-original-punks>

*The soundtrack of eerie slasher-flick scores, from *Suspria* to *Halloween*, set the tone for a brooding darkness and a creepy assertion of forced smiles, bright colours and a deranged sense of fun amid the suspenseful fear lingering in the air.*

<https://i-d.vice.com/en/article/v7gbqj/bardcore-youtube-music-trend-medieval-covers>

<https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/49595/1/bardcore-is-the-medieval-music-trend-taking-over-youtube-lady-gaga-radiohead>

★ POV roleplay:

<https://i-d.vice.com/en/article/gy7v9w/girlfriend-roleplay-youtube-guus-voorham>

★ “Poser”:

<https://www.spikeartmagazine.com/?q=articles/everyone-not-artist>

★ The internet, the term ‘Larp’ online:

<https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783839446706-003/html?lang=en>

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/20563051231157300>

★ Misc:

<https://spikeartmagazine.com/?q=articles/mark-leckey-o-magic-power-of-bleakness>

<https://www.spikeartmagazine.com/?q=articles/discourse-music-hyperpop-comfort-noise-2023>

<https://www.spikeartmagazine.com/?q=articles/downward-spiral-text-image>

<https://www.spikeartmagazine.com/?q=articles/people-interview-marina-otero-impulstanz-2023>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXNGFb2p90k>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKd5QMeXqWs>

<https://www.tiktok.com/@0ak13y777/video/7183860577935166726>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iX1a3JngmpI>

★ Artists:

Amalia Ulman– Excellences and Perfections

<https://artreview.com/september-2015-feature-amalia-ulman/>

<https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/30013/the-future-of-memory/>

<https://www.dazeddigital.com/art-photography/article/39375/1/amalia-ulman-2014-instagram-hoax-predicted-the-way-we-use-social-media>

Wolfgang Staehle (1950)– “co-founded the New York-based virtual artist community The Thing, a bulletin board system of messaging and file-sharing that hosted an S&M roleplay run by artist Julia Scher and exhibited one of the first artworks sold online, Peter Halley’s digital print *Superdream Mutation* (1993). . .”

★ Philosophy

Baudrillard– Simulacra and Simulacrums

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3qf7zjqmJA>