Roleplaying Game Studies: A Handbook

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ABSTRACT
The study of roleplaying games has remained a small and somewhat separate tradition within game studies writ large. Yet roleplaying games arguably defined and influenced many design elements of today’s digital games, and constitute a formational experience for many influential digital game designers. This makes roleplaying games (and their theory) interesting from a media historical perspective alone (King & Borland 2003, Gilsdorf 2009, Peterson 2012). More importantly, the peculiarities of non-digital roleplaying games as a socially shared effort of imagination, performance, storytelling, simulation, and gaming have generated insights that have much to offer to the wider field of game studies. The particular theoretical sensibilities and concepts borne from the study of roleplaying games have, for instance, drawn attention to:

- different “aesthetic agendas” afforded by game mechanics and jointly produced by players, e.g. in the “Threefold Model” and “Forge Theory” (Kim 2008, Mason 2004);
- the necessary framing work performed by players to produce and navigate various levels of meaning in game play, as well as to the (re)production and negotiation of relations and boundaries between “in-game” and “real life” events, e.g. in Fine’s “frame levels” (Fine 1983);
- the design challenges inherent in emergent, collaborative storytelling, and fictional transmedia worlds (Klastrup & Tosca 2004);
- the imaginative, pretend-play, embodied, performative, and theatrical dimension of game play, including processes of identification, analyses of the relation of player, character, and avatar, and their enmeshment in questions of identity (e.g. in the books accompanying the annual Nordic LARP convention Knudepunkt starting with Alfsvåg, Storrø & Hansen 2001);
- the differing affordances of various media within one game genre (pen and paper, live action, computer, massively multiplayer online) (Hitchens & Drachen 2008).

Unfortunately, most publications in the field of roleplaying game studies remain scattered, offering no easy access to central concepts, theories, and traditions for...
interested scholars (Drachen 2008). At DiGRA 2013, we will convene RPG scholars in a workshop to outline a handbook of RPG Studies. The idea for such a handbook and workshop emerged from a discussion on the mailing list of DiGRA’s Role-Playing special interest group (SIG), where it was met with enthusiastic support and endorsement.

Prior to the workshop, we will solicit suggestions for topics, authors, and structures of the book from the Role-Playing SIG’s mailing list and an open online questionnaire. We will put out a separate open call for participation, in which participants will be asked to submit brief conceptual position papers together with a potential table of contents. Submissions will be juried, with a maximum of 20 participants to ensure efficient work on site. We will collate and distribute the result of the submissions and open questionnaire ahead of the workshop. During the workshop, we will mix open debate with playful prioritization exercises to identify essential contents for the handbook. We will also use cardsorting exercises to explore possible chapter organisations. Finally, we will collate author shortlists, publication venues, sources of financial support, and next steps.

**Keywords**

roleplaying games, roleplaying game theory, live action role playing, pen-and-paper roleplaying, computer roleplaying, massively multiplayer online roleplaying

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


