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Larp as a Potential Space for Non-formal Queer Cultural Heritage

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LGBTQIA+ History and Heritage

- Typically excluded or misrepresented by mainstream socio-historical studies and heritage records (Stain 2022)
- Often recorded, disseminated and communicated in different sites and mediums (Stryker 2008, Burns 2018).
- Found in non-formal and informal sites, with methods reflecting the concealed nature of the subject.
- It is only recently being recorded in:
 - Oral history archives e.g., *British Library Sounds Archive*
 - Community created stories, articles and ephemera e.g., Hall-Carpenter Archives, Queer Britain Museum.

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LGBTQIA+ History and Heritage

- Other archives recognise the importance of performance spaces for the creation and communication of LGBTQIA+ history.
 - E.g., The Bishopsgate *Transfabulous* and *Wotever* Archives
- E.g., Drag performance which communicates queer experience and culture (Volcano & Halberstam 1999, Senelick 2000, Parslow 2019).
- The venues themselves are also queer history. E.g., *The Stonewall Inn* in New York and *The Royal Vauxhall Tavern* in London.

Self-portrait Photo by AbsolutQueer Photography, Permission to Show Granted by the Artist



LGBTQIA+ History and Heritage

- There is currently an alarming socio-political movement in a number of countries that may lead to a significant reduction of formal recording and education on LGBTQIA+ issues, by governmental and legal decree (ECREA 2018, HRW 2018, Phillips 2022)
- Games, and perhaps particularly larp, might potentially provide an opportunity to explore, express and embody queer subjectivities in safer non-formal and informal environments (Baird 2021 & forthcoming).

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Edu-larp, History and Heritage

- I have suggested that larp might achieve this through the function of:
 - Alibi of play (see Deterding 2018)
 - The form of a safer container of play (see Bowman & Hugaas 2021)
 - Bleed, and perhaps particularly emancipatory bleed (see Kemper 2017 and 2020)
- I contend that a game which models queer spaces might also provide the opportunity for the communication of, and education on, queer heritage.

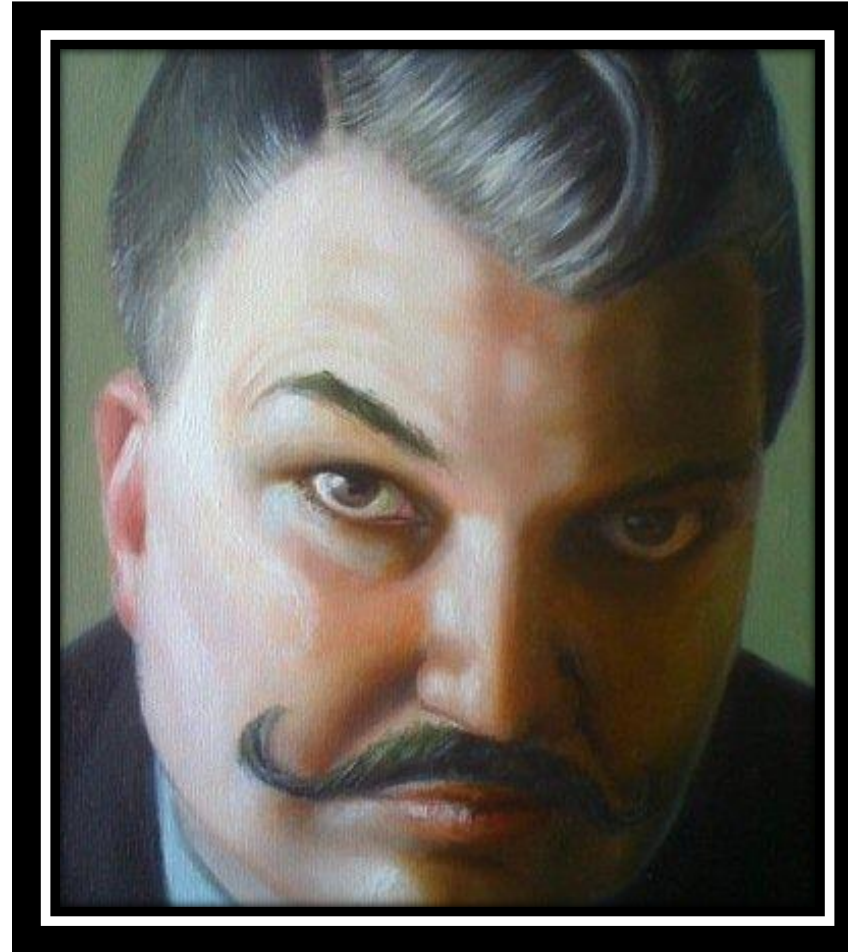
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LGBTQIA+ History and Heritage

- With a focus on experiential- and situated-learning, edu-larp has the potential to simulate scenarios which are similar real-world experience (Henriksen 2004).
- Larps, representing specific historical moments, or heritage, can allow for a contextualised learning environment thereof, and facilitates the modelling of complex social processes therein (Henrikson 2004).

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Edu-larp, History and Heritage

- There is a limited number of larps which specifically highlight LGBTQIA+ queer heritage.
- *Just a Little Lovin's* (2011) fictionalised social and performance space reflects and represents the importance such venues served to queer communities at the time.
- JaLL (2011) utilises the co-created space of the larp and activities which function in- and out- of game, to debrief, educate and discuss issues raised. (Bowman 2015).

Artwork by the author



Edu-larp, History and Heritage

Potential pitfalls in attempting to simulate an actual historical time-period and also attempting to provide an opportunity to enact marginalised experience and heritage:

- We cannot presume a literal history/heritage can be conveyed nor a simplistic sense of empathy conveyed (see Leonard, Janjetovic & Usman 2021)
- Larp, like any social-cultural activity, has the potential, perhaps even the predilection, to reproduce problematic societal norms (Cazeneuve 2018)

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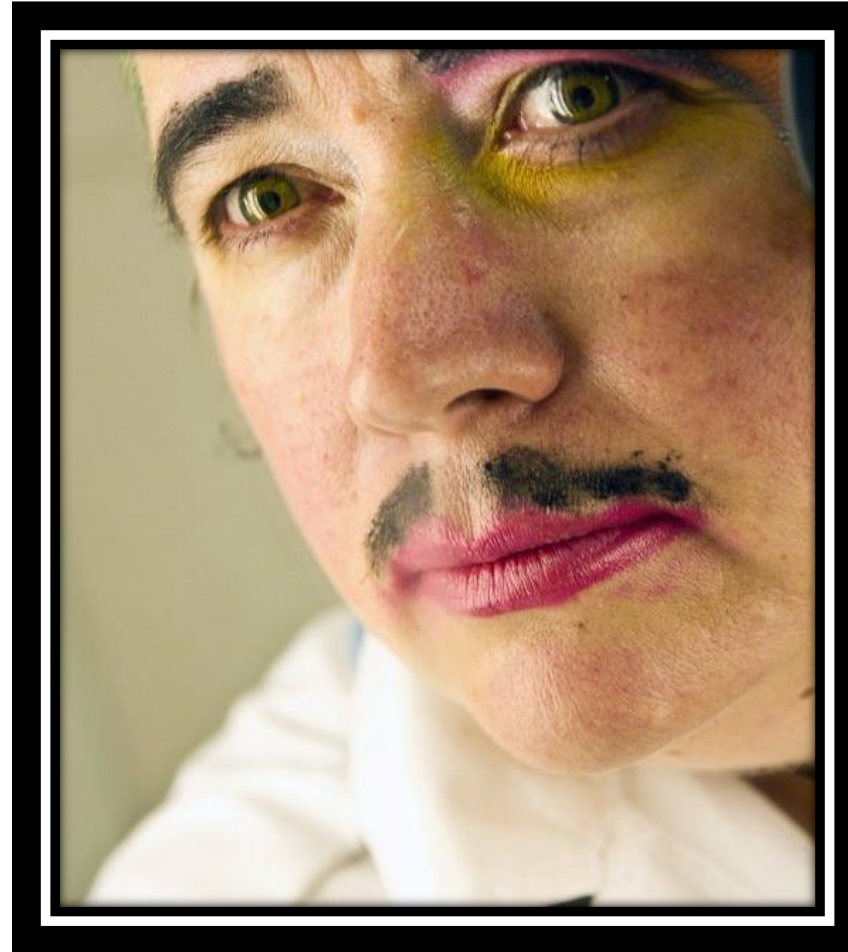


Edu-larp, History and Heritage

Through intentional design and play, Leonard, Janjetovic and Usman (2021) argue for the potential positive outcomes of playing marginalised characters:

- Greater empathy and less stereotypical understandings through an increased overlap between the self and others.
- A wider understanding of structural inequalities.

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Queer Social/Performance Heritage in Larp

By engaging in the co-creative nature of these environments, through the similarly co-creative medium of larp, we might:

- Endeavour to facilitate greater understanding of the function of these spaces.
- Educate on, and demonstrate, why they have been so critical to our communities.
- Allow people to explore them in ways they might not be able to otherwise.
- Record our histories, heritage and experiences.

Artwork by the author



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Thank You for Listening.

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