The Process Model of Role-Playing

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Abstract— **This paper presents the Process Model of Role-Playing. The model provides concepts to describe and analyze role-playing sessions, to describe role-playing preferences, as well as to plan and convey visions of future role-playing sessions and campaigns. The core idea of the work presented here is to look at role-playing as a set of interacting processes, distinct aspects of the act of role-playing that go on over a period of time. On top of this, a model is built that identifies the various processes, as well as the end results of role-playing, the individual methods used, and the interactions of all these components.**

Index Terms— **process models, role-playing, role-playing styles, models of role-playing, role-playing analysis**

I. Introduction

The Process Model of role-playing is a set of concepts and tools to describe, analyze and discuss the act of role-playing. The design goals of the model were as follows:

1) to identify distinct elements and components inside the act of role-playing and create a vocabulary of such concepts, and
2) to describe how these components interact to make or break a game.

The model can be used for the following:

1) to describe and analyze singular or typical gaming sessions from the viewpoint of an individual or a whole group,
2) to plan and communicate visions of future sessions and campaigns, and
3) to describe play preferences of an individual or a whole group.

The core modeling concepts utilized are those of process and process interaction. These concepts were chosen because they provide a very natural methodology for modeling and abstracting such complex time-varied phenomena as role-playing. The concepts are also well defined and widely in use in a number of fields, including social, cognitive and computer sciences.

This article is divided into two parts, plus appendices. The first part gives a full understanding of the base model, introducing the main descriptive framework of the model. It contains the core of the article, and it is intended that after reading it, one can apply the model in all its uses.

The second part of the article advances on the first, introducing normative restrictions to the model in the interest of rigidness and the creation of a common vocabulary. This is attempted by categorizing the instances of the various model component types as exhaustively as possible. With the vocabulary at hand, further analysis of the interactions of the various components is undertaken. The second part closes with a discussion of weaknesses and ambiguities in the model and other areas of future work.

Appendix I gathers the terms used in the model in a glossary. In appendix II, the model is put to the test of describing different gaming cultures around the world. Finally, in appendix III, the model is compared to other models of role-playing, primarily focusing on how the concepts of the model relate to the concepts of the other models compared.

The terms used for the concepts of the model have been selected to be as fitting as possible. Some of the terms selected are however already being used with varying meanings in the general role-playing community. The reader is advised to see the definitions given here as normative with regards to the model, and read no more into the terms in relation to the model than is given in the term descriptions. In the text of the article, capitalized words refer to Process Model definitions, lower case words to common language concepts.

Part 1: The Descriptive Framework of the Process Model and Applications

In this part, first a general outline of how role-playing is perceived through the model is given. A general description of the descriptive framework of the model follows, after which the individual components of the model are explained. Finally, in chapter III, the model is put to use, first in analyzing and planning sessions, then in describing preferences and plans.

II. The Descriptive Framework of the Process Model

A. The Definition of Role-Playing as Seen From the Viewpoint of the Process Model

To understand the basis of the Process Model, it is useful to offer a description of how the act of role-playing looks from the viewpoint of the model. To accomplish this, the act of role-playing must first be defined, along with a few formalizations.

For the purpose of the model, role-playing is defined as any act in which an imaginary reality is concurrently created, added to and observed, in such a manner that these component acts feed each other. This definition of role-playing is left intentionally as open as possible, including for example improvisational theater, children's play, collaborative story-telling and imagining alone. It is not all-inclusive, however. The requirement that the creation and observation feed into each other rules out for example computer role-playing games (when they are not used as an aide in imagining) and listening to or reading a story (though not improvising one).

The facts, expectations and hopes about the imagined reality being explored, as experienced by an individual, define a conceptual space referred to as the Imagined Space. When role-playing in a group, the Imagined Spaces of the individual participants overlap to create a Shared Imagined Space (SIS) with regards to which the majority of interaction pertaining to the game is enacted.

The environment in which this interaction is enacted is the Shared Space of Imagining (SSoI), a concept that includes the Shared Imagined Space, but also all the other facts, expectations and intentions concerning the act of role-playing, like unspoken or spoken social contracts pertaining to how the game is played.

The term Shared Imagined Space originates from discussions at the Forge[1]. The concept of an individual's own Imagined Space is not used there however, and neither is the concept of a Shared Space of Imagining, though a highly similar term in Forge-speak is the Social Contract. For the current definitions of these terms, see the Forge Provisional Glossary[1].

In some texts, particularly in the Nordic tradition of role-playing theory, the term Diegesis is used, but there is debate on if it should be defined the same as Imagined Space[2] or the same as Shared Imagined Space[3]. The term definitions given here are an attempt to better distinguish the concepts from each other.

A description of how the model sees the actual act of role-playing can now be given. The Process Model of Role-Playing sees role-playing first and foremost as a process, something that happens and goes on in a time-frame. Inside this process, multiple concurrent but distinct subprocesses can be seen. Each of these subprocesses revolves around a certain element, creating and consuming it, be it player competition or the exploration of a theme. The qualities manifested in a role-playing session by these various processes are hopefully enjoyable, benefiting the participants in some way. If they do not, they can be considered losses.

The needs of the various processes in terms of techniques and decision-making considerations vary, sometimes coinciding, sometimes being at odds with each other. Processes benefit from methods

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[1] http://www.indie-rpgs.com/

and other processes that support them, leading to a more optimal gain of benefit, while conflicting processes and methods lead to the poor running of the affected processes, diminishing the benefits gained thereof. The driving idea behind the research presented here is that by understanding and intelligently selecting the processes and methods used, and controlling the circumstances that affect them, wanted benefits can be maximized and unwanted losses minimized.

B. Overview of the component types recognized in the Process Model of Role-Playing

The Process Model of role-playing forms around four main types of components and their interactions. The main component types are Circumstances, Methods, Processes and Results. The relationships of these component types are visualized in figure 1.
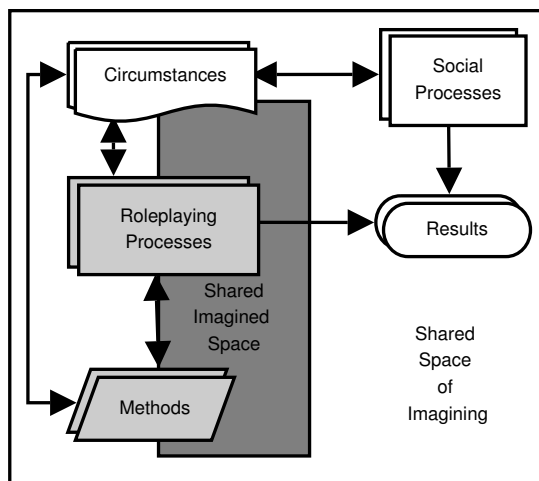

Fig. 1. A flowchart showing the relationships of the components of the model

A Result is what comes out of the role-playing session, what the people engaging in role-playing get out of it. Wanted Results are called Benefits, while unwanted Results are termed Losses.

Feeding to the Results are a number of Processes, both Social and Role-Playing. Processes describe what actually happens inside a role-playing session. The Role-Playing Processes describe what qualities are being created or explored in the role-playing session and how, while the Social Processes are general forms of social contact that happen to coincide with role-playing, but are not actually tied to it. Both types of Processes describe what the means that lead to the different Results are.

While the Processes are the means to the Results, they are in turn constrained and guided by Circumstances and Methods. Circumstances are any states of affairs that affect how the role-playing group enacts the various processes. Methods on the other hand are the agreed-upon means and rules by which the actions pertaining to the role-playing session are undertaken. The influence is not one-way however. The Processes can affect the Circumstances, while the Methods actually used are usually chosen from an available set depending on the needs of the Processes. Finally, an intentional alteration of Circumstances is a Method, while the choice of Methods can be limited by the prevalent Circumstances.

In the following, the four component types are discussed in more detail, in turn describing the Results, Processes, Circumstances and Methods.

C. Results

The term Result in the Process Model describes the final wanted or unwanted outcomes of the interaction of the various Role-Playing Processes. They are further subdivided into Benefits and Losses.

Benefits describe the reasons we role-play, what we gain from participating in the role-playing process. Sample Benefits are for example positive emotional experiences arising from the game, gaining new knowledge from the material explored in the game or getting to know your co-players better through playing with them.

Losses, on the other hand, are harmful Results, created when a role-playing session goes awry. They can be for example boredom arising from an unsuccessful session, the worsening of social relations or unpleasant emotions arising from role-playing.

A suggested normative categorization and further examples of role-playing Results are given in chapter IV-A.

D. Processes

The Processes are the core of the model. They describe what actually happens in a role-playing session by identifying various distinct aspects of the role-playing process that are responsible for producing the results of play.

The characteristics of Processes are as follows

- A Process produces some measurable quality in a role-playing session
- The amount such a quality is present or is realized depends on how play is conducted, ie. affected by how decisions are made by the players or by how the players choose to experience the Shared Imagined Space or, in most cases, by both.
- The qualities produced can be mapped to the various Results.
- The Processes are distinct entities in and of themselves. If a role-playing session is permeated by a single Process, that Process can even be seen as the primary act, role-playing merely being the means.

The Processes are further subdivided into Role-Playing Processes and Social Processes. Social Processes are general social interactions that could as easily coexist with other activities, and are therefore not given much thought here. Sample role-playing processes are for example exploring the personality of a character, competition among the players using the experience system and number of monsters killed as a measure of competence, or exploring a moral dilemma by playing the various sides of it.

A suggested normative categorization and further examples of Processes are given in chapter IV-B.

E. Methods

While Processes tell us what happens in a role-playing session, Methods tell us how it happens. They are any singular techniques, rules or contracts that are used or referred to in connection with a game. A method can be anything from playing in a certain game-world to hitting a random player in the head with a mallet occasionally to keeping your eyes shut the entire session.

The relationship between Methods and Processes is twofold. Firstly, Methods are chosen from those available in accordance with the needs of the various Processes. Secondly and conversely, the Methods used constrain and guide the game so as to promote certain Processes, while hindering others. In doing so, they also affect what Benefits the Processes produce.

The most important method choice in role-playing is discussed below. A few others are given as examples in chapter V.

1) Authority over the Shared Imaginary Space: The single most important choices shaping a role-playing session are the Methods used to distribute authority over the Shared Imagined Space. Usually this authority is subdivided into authority over the inner world of player characters and their actions, authority over the actions of other entities of the SIS and finally authority over resolution of events.

In traditional tabletop role-playing games, usually players have absolute control over their character's inner world and their choices of actions, while the gamemaster has similar control over all other aspects of the imaginary reality. Authority over the effects and resolution of stated actions seems often overtly to reside in the rules system, likened to the laws of physics of the imaginary world, but usually actually resides with the gamemaster with his godlike ability to ignore or bend the rules when he wants.

In games of co-operative story-telling without a gamemaster, the final authority over all matters usually rests within the game system, tasked with resolving any conflicts that arise between the storytellers. Usually the drive for social consensus is given a chance before resorting to the system, or is actually facilitated by the system.

In live-action role-playing, particularly of the Nordic tradition, authority is mostly trusted to the likening of the actual laws of nature to the laws of nature of the Shared Imagined Space and the strong drive for silent social consensus, with authority resting on specific rules for necessary mapping discrepancies like injury, death and technology.

F. Circumstances

Circumstances are any parameters that affect the game. They differ from Methods in that Methods are chosen and agreed-upon means of interacting with the SIS, while Circumstances exists in and of themselves. Example Circumstances are for example the mood of the players, the amount of outside disturbance in the place where the game is played and the social relationships between the players. An important Circumstance that exists in almost all games is the gaming history, particularly the facts already established pertaining to the SIS.

Circumstances interact with Methods however, where a Method is used to change a Circumstance. So, while the number of players should be considered a Circumstance, changing the number of players dynamically in response to some in-game situation is a Method.

III. USING THE PROCESS MODEL

A. Using the Process Model for Analyzing and Planning Sessions

The main use of the process model is in analyzing how the different components support or hinder each other. For this purpose, because the components of the model are distinct and complete entities in themselves, the interactions between them can be modeled as a simple support/hinder dichotomy.

Also, in this context, the choosing of Methods according to Process requirements as well as the restrictions Circumstances place on the available Methods lose significance. The resulting simplified flow is visualized in figure 2. Methods and Circumstances support or hinder Processes, while Processes affect each other and the realization of Results. Of the two remaining feedback loops, the one directly between two Processes is the more important, and thankfully usually both easy to recognize and analyze. The more complex interaction, in which a Process affects another indirectly through affecting Circumstances, fortunately proved in our six months of testing the model to be infrequent and/or inconsequential, and can thus often be ignored.

A flowchart depicting the support/hinder relations of components of a sample session can be seen in figure 3. Such a flowchart is of necessity a conglomerate description, because the relationships between the components change over time inside a session. In cases where this is problematic, multiple flowcharts from different points of time or different viewpoints can be crafted.

In the example, Meaning, a positive emotional connect, has been generated through the Exploration of a Theme. There was also some Competition among the players, but no-one actually enjoyed that
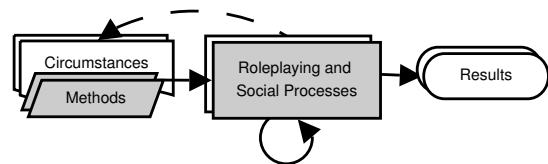

Fig. 2. A flowchart showing the support/hinder relationships of the components of the model

enough to gain any benefit from it. In contrast, the existence of Competition was seen to pollute the Exploration of Theme with incompatible priorities.

The Method of Distributing Power over the Shared Imaginary Space to All Players and the Method of Encouraging Discussion of Potential Future Plot Twists were seen to help in Exploration of the Theme, while certain aspects of the rules were seen to be the forces fostering the air of Competition among the players. The Circumstance of Player Tiredness was seen to hinder both of the Processes - but conversely, by keeping the players on their toes and thus reducing Player Tiredness, the Process of Competition actually ended up also indirectly benefiting the Exploration of Theme.

This same simple formalization of interactions can also be used to plan future sessions, trying to predict what the interactions of the various components will be and selecting a blend that supports the most wanted components best. Perfect support between the Processes is extremely hard to obtain and perhaps not even advantageous — humans are extremely good at adapting, and cross-Process interference can be easily forgiven if the Processes still provide a good enough yield of Benefits.

B. Using the Process Model for Stating Preferences and Describing Future Sessions or Campaigns

When using the concepts of the Process Model for stating play preferences or describing visions of future sessions or campaigns, one should always start with the Benefits desired. After that, other layers of components can be added on, if desired.

The simplest form of stating a preference or vision is only stating the Benefits a person is interested in. For example: "I'm interested in gaining Meaning and Entertainment from role-playing", or "I'm thinking my next campaign will be pure Meaning".

To this, Process restrictions can be added: "I'm interested in gaining Meaning and Entertainment from role-playing, and want to do it by Immersion and/or Exploring the Social Surroundings of My Character" or "I'm thinking my next campaign will be pure Meaning, through the Exploration of Moral Social Dilemmas".

Finally, if necessary, Method restrictions can be added: "I'm interested in gaining Meaning and Entertainment from role-playing, and want to do it by Immersion and/or Exploring the Social Surroundings of My Character by Pure in-SIS Causality Simulation" or "I'm thinking my next campaign will be pure Meaning, through the Exploration of Moral Social Dilemmas, with Much Scene Framing Power Given to the Players".

In this way, the preferences stated never lose sight of what actually is important. all role-playing that is enjoyable must lead to a Benefit, and that Benefit must come through a Process. A plain statement like "I want to play a game with Pure in-SIS Causality Simulation" guarantees an enjoyable game only in the rare circumstance that actually all Processes and Benefits are equally palatable to the one giving the statement.
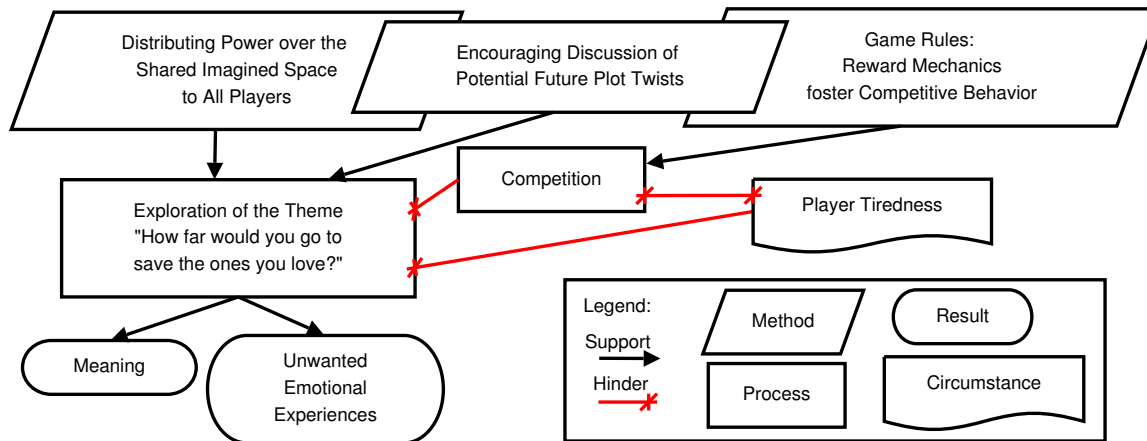
Fig. 3.   A flowchart showing the support/hinder relations of components of a sample session

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PART 2: NORMATIVE CATEGORIZATIONS OF THE COMPONENTS AND ANALYSIS

In this second part, the two component types of Results and Processes are given suggested normative categorizations. The reason for creating such categorizations is simple: with a common vocabulary exhaustively partitioning the concept space, speech between different users of the model is made much easier. This also gives us clear-cut targets for interaction analysis between the components. This fact is taken advantage of in chapter V. The numbers of both Circumstances and Methods are nearly infinite, and thus, no definitive lists of them can be given.

IV. NORMATIVE CATEGORIZATIONS OF THE COMPONENTS

A. Results

The categorization of Results in the normative version of the Process Model is based on identifying general types of enjoyment and discomfort arising from Role-Playing Processes. Benefits created by other Processes are only skimmed.

The Benefits recognized in the current version of the model are as follows:

Entertainment Enjoyment of fun, being together and passing the time.

Learning Gaining new knowledge or understanding, affirming or questioning old knowledge, spiritual growth and reflection.

Meaning Enjoyment of an emotional experience, resonance with established thought constructs

Aesthetic Appreciation Artistic appreciation, enjoyment of beauty and form.

Social Benefits Positive changes in the social sphere arising from role-playing, for example the strengthening of social bonds, or getting to know the other players better.

Physical Benefits Positive changes in the physical sphere; increased fitness, improved body language, physical pleasure.

The Losses mirror the Benefits, being:

Boredom Frustration caused by lack of enjoyment. Usually caused by a failure to gain any Benefits.

False Knowledge Misinformation, incorrect or misleading understanding.

Unwanted Emotional Experiences Unwanted negative emotions, overly intensive experiences.

Aesthetic Failure Failure of form, frustration caused by unengaging aesthetic aspirations.

Social Dysfunction Negative effects on the social sphere, the worsening of relations.

Physical Hindrances Negative effects in the physical sphere; catching a cold, spraining an ankle, suffering a hangover.

In the following, the various Benefits and Losses are explained further:

1) Entertainment: The most common Benefit gained from role-playing is Entertainment. Being together with friends, having a good time, twisting the game into something funny. These all belong under the heading of Entertainment. Entertainment is the lighter side of role-playing, the passing the time aspect of it.

2) Learning: The Benefit of Learning applies equally well to the study of ancient Greece through a role-playing game as it does to learning how to deal with emotional situations through the game, encompassing equally the acquisition of factual knowledge as well as experience, self-knowledge and understanding. Sometimes the understanding gained through gaming can be faulty however, leading to the Loss of False Knowledge.

3) Meaning: Meaning is defined as an emotional connect with the game content, be it fear, suspense or a remembrance of past love, as long as it is wanted. The flip-side of Meaning are Unpleasant, Unwanted Emotional Experiences. Meaning is usually approached via empathy or sympathy for, or immersion with the characters, but can also be obtained through any other means, for example when suspense is being created by competition among the players.

4) Aesthetic Appreciation: Aesthetic Appreciation is the enjoyment of form and beauty in itself, the satisfaction one gets from a perfectly composed scene in the game or from the simple joy of applying a well-designed rule system. Aesthetic Failure is the result when these aspirations fail, when a rule mechanic leads to frustration or when the person framing the scene just fails miserably in conveying anything to the other participants.

5) Social Benefits: The Results of play are Social Benefits when the play-experience changes something in the social space of the participants for the better. Usually, this happens because of Social Processes, but can also be caused by Processes of Roleplaying. This can be for example by transference of inter-character social cohesion to the actual participants, or when exploring the game content tells the participants more about each other. Social Dysfunction appears when the Processes produce negative social results like distrust or hatred.

6) Physical Benefits: Physical Results are normally encountered only in live-action role-playing games, and even there they are most often unintended, being a side-effect of the Method of Equating Physical Space with the Shared Imagined Space. Thus, they are at best at the very edges of Role-Playing Processes, but are mentioned here for completeness. They include for example a full stomach from an in-game meal or increased fitness from spending time outside. The opposite of Physical Benefits are Physical Hindrances.

B. Processes

The major normative Role-Playing Processes discerned are first listed here, then explained below:

Competition The pursuit of victory

Tension Maintenance and enjoyment of tension

Challenge The besting of challenge and the overcoming of adversity

Exploration of an Entity of the Shared Imagined Space
Exploring the many-fold interactions a single entity has with others.

Exploration of a Concept through the Shared Imagined Space
Exploring a concept through its expressions in the Shared Imagined Space, and bringing forth such expressions to be explored.

Immersion Equating the self with an entity of the Shared Imagined Space, feeling and acting as that entity

1) Competition: Competition is the name given for the pursuit of victory in some form, in the classical sports race sense of the word, where there can be only one who is the fastest. It is the aspiration to be the first, the best, the highest in whatever actual measure used. The existence of this measure is key.

Thus, also in the context of a role-playing game, this Process requires some form of measuring competence, be it experience points, character levels or simply giving implicit social appreciation to whoever solves a puzzle first. An important element in Competition is Tactics. Tactics is the subprocess of both optimizing resources for maximum potential and also the actual act of pondering situational choices in relation to their expected benefits. A pure implementation of a game supporting Competition, also from the gamemasters point of view can be found in Rune[1], by Robin D. Laws.

2) Tension: While it may look like most traditional tabletop games and role-playing games with a strong element of such in them revolve around Competition, in truth most games are designed and most people seem to play in a way which keeps Tension as high as possible. This is the style of play where, in order to keep the winner uncertain for as long as possible, people give slack to those who have fallen behind and use other means to keep the playing field relatively equal.

The enjoyment gained from Tension actually comes from two sources. In addition to the actual enjoyment of the sensation of tension, Tension can also be seen as a chained series of miniature Competitions. As such, enjoyment is also gained from the small moments when one notices that one is ahead and gives slack, thereby acknowledging a small victory for himself.

Like Competition, Tension requires at least some form of measuring competence, and also employs a great deal of Tactics. A good example of a game designed to support this style of play is the 3.5 edition of D&D[2].

3) Challenge: Challenge, the overcoming of adversity and the besting of challenges, is a Process closely associated with Tension. In contrast to Tension, however, the enjoyment gained from Challenge does not come from besting other players. It is enough to simply overcome the challenges put before you. This is evident for example in many forms of live-action role-playing, where the pursuit of character goals is seen as important, even though there is usually very little comparison going on between players.

The challenges put before players in the Process of Challenge need to be fair, ie. not so easy as to not really be challenging at all and not so hard as to halt progress. In role-playing games, this balancing or "fair challenge" inherent in all of Competition, Tension and Challenge is most often seen as the responsibility of the gamemaster, who in traditional role-playing games is given way too much power to actually Compete with the players. Thus, mostly, the gaming systems suitable for Challenge are the same as for Tension.

4) Exploration of an Entity of the Shared Imagined Space: Exploration of an Entity of the Shared Imagined Space is a process of observation. It means taking an entity, and exploring the interactions of that entity with its surroundings. The entity need not be a character, it can be a medieval village or the love of two individuals. What is important is that it is a distinct, whole entity and that its interaction with other elements is the focus of the exploration. In Exploration of an Entity, the entity will also discussed as an indivisible whole, so that for example when studying how a medieval village deals with the outside influences of church and state, or the rise of internal tensions, the individual villagers comprising the village are in at best a secondary role, the village being thought of as an active entity itself.

5) Exploration of a Concept through the Shared Imagined Space: The flip-side of the Exploration of an Entity is the Exploration of a Concept through the Shared Imagined Space. The two forms differ in focus. In the Exploration of a Concept, the focus is on a concept, which is then explored possibly through numerous expressions in the Shared Imagined Space. Again, the subject of the exploration can vary wildly, from exploring the sides of a moral dilemma through investigating the concept of psionic abilities to the study of social dynamics of clan life.

These two last explorative processes are interesting also in that in them, the two sides of interacting with the Shared Imagined Space are more clearly separate. After the subject matter is injected into the Shared Imagined Space, it must somehow be experienced. Most often this takes the form of Empathy, an emotional connection with an element of the SIS. This experiencing the SIS is actually the part of exploration that brings on the Results - but it cannot stand on its own as a Process, as it always needs that some subject matter be brought in to the SIS to observe. Only in this combination is it whole.

6) Immersion: Immersion is the process of becoming another entity, thinking, feeling and acting as that entity. It is a process going beyond mere Empathy, the general method of relating to and experiencing the Shared Imagined Space. To Immerse is to be, to feel inside. It has few counterparts in other medias, method acting perhaps coming close, while for example feeling with the characters in a book or a film is Empathy, feeling from the outside. While Immersion is generally possible with only one target, Empathy can be felt for other players characters as well as for other entities in the SIS.

A fitting description and discussion of Immersion was given recently by Mike Pohjola, who defined it is as:

> Immersion is the player assuming the identity of the character by pretending to believe her identity only consists of the diegetic [Imagined Space] roles [3]

The article by Pohjola also contains a chapter on Inter-Immersion, describing what would in terms of the Process Model be multiple Processes of Immersion supporting each other, with some references also to supporting Methods.

V. ANALYSIS OF TYPICAL COMPONENT INTERACTIONS IN THE MODEL

While it is useful to remember that none of the support/hinder relationships between the components of the model discussed in chapter III-A are absolute, there are many common patterns that usually hold. This section tries to analyze some of them, starting with the Processes of the normative version of the model and then moving on to a few sample Methods.

7) Process: Competition: Usually, Competition co-exists poorly with the other Processes. The grounds for decision-making required in Competition are very rarely in sync with the decision-making grounds of other Processes. With Tension, Competition can coexist for as long as other factors like the game rules can keep Tension alive. When this is the case, the decision-making priorities between the two are the same. It is only when balance is broken that problems arise, but then they may be as severe as with all the other Processes. With respect to Challenge, the situation is much the same.

8) Process: Tension: Tension shares much of the same interactions as Competition. It can rarely truly coexist with most of the other Processes. But because the imperative to do well is not as strong as in Competition, it may be easier to blend with the others. For example, in a murder mystery game, Tension (and even Competition) could exist alongside the Exploration of detective work or even Immersion, with the various characters racing to find the murderer first. Tension and Challenge are mutually compatible.

9) Process: Challenge: Challenge, existing primarily on an individual level, rarely affects the running of other processes. Tension and Competition are especially congruent. Immersion however, can be adversely affected, if challenge is actively sought from the one Immersing. To an extent, the same goes for the Exploration of an Entity and the Exploration of a Concept.

10) Process: Immersion: Immersion is a companion of the Exploration of an Entity. The two can share the exact space for a long time, so that the other players get Exploration and the one Immersing into the entity gets Immersion.

Those Competing will not be bothered by Immersionists much — except if they perceive a total lack of challenge, but anyone valuing Tension may be spoiled by having to keep dragging the Immersionists along to keep it going. Challenge is also usually unaffected, as long as the one Immersing does not inadvertently ruin the challenge.

11) Process: Exploration of an Entity of the SIS: As previously stated, Exploration of an Entity goes well with Immersion, if the entity being explored is the same that the immersionists are trying to immerse into. But if true Immersion is attained, at least for that player, it completely replaces the Exploration.

As for the other processes, they are not very much constrained by the Exploration of an Entity, unless they touch on that Entity directly and profusely.

12) Process: Exploration of a Concept through the SIS: Exploration of a Concept doesn't often do really well with the Exploration of an Entity. They approach exploration from too different vantage points, with the Explorers of a Concept wanting to inject that concept into all interactions, while the Explorers of an Entity would just like to see that entity interact with a multitude of different elements. With the other Processes, the situation is similar.

13) Method: Consequence Rules: Consequence Rules are a rule Method that describes the consequences of a characters actions in relation to a meter. In turn, the value of this meter measures some important aspect of the character, and also affects how he can function in the game-world. Examples of such mechanics are the humanity mechanic in Sorcerer[4] and all the attributes of characters in My Life With Master[5].

These methods are directly built for a subclass of the Exploration of a Concept, the exploration of the consequences of one's actions. In relation to the other processes, these rules are usually reasonably isolated. However, Immersion can suffer from any forced behavior resulting from the Consequence Rules.

14) Methods: Use of Only In-Character Knowledge, In-SIS Causality and Realism: Use of Only IC Knowledge, In-SIS Causality and Realism are all Methods drawing a border between the Shared Imagined Space and the Shared Space of Imagining. They all deal with insulating the SIS from outside influences to various degrees and in various ways.

The Method of using only In-Character Knowledge versus also including Out-of-Character Knowledge does this by limiting the bases of decisions. This Method certainly supports the Process of Immersion.

The requirement for In-SIS Causality on the other hand forces adherence to an In-SIS simulation of event causes and effects. This supports those Processes that benefit from an ability to conclusively and believably rationalize events from a purely in-SIS perspective. Immersion again certainly qualifies, but also some forms of Exploration of an Entity would probably benefit.

Finally, Realism, or perhaps better termed believability with respect to genre conventions, is a looser restriction, only requiring that any change to the SIS can be rationalized as believable after the fact. Usually, this is sufficient for maintaining Empathy in Exploration, but the mere act of applying outside rationale to decisions can be enough to break Immersion.

The Processes of Competition and Tension both suffer from all these Methods.

VI. DISCUSSION AND FUTURE WORK

The concept of a Process, while intuitively very simple, is actually quite complex, with many adjoining concepts. Thus, while the authors of this paper are certain that the central concept of a Process is a worthy one, there may be other tied concepts, subconcepts and concept relations still hidden beneath the conglomerate Process.

The major normative Processes are also perhaps not as intuitive as possible. They seem to partition the types of extant role-playing processes quite well, however. Still, the descriptive part of the model works just as well with more free-form components.

If one goes far enough, many of the normative Processes can be seen as the Exploration of a Concept through the SIS, for example Immersion being the Exploration of Immersion through role-playing, and so on. Further thought is needed to clear the matter.

A big field for future work will be to further analyze the common interactions between the various Methods, Processes and Results — and in breaking those defaults by applying new, innovative methods.

Jonathan Walton's post on the Forge that later grew into an article on rpg.net[6] about values in role-playing prompted us to re-evaluate and rephrase some of our normative Result categorizations.

Thanks must also go to all those whose discussions about role-playing theory we have listened to, both at the Nordic conventions and at the Forge, and all the role-playing theories that have come before. Special thanks to the people of the IRC channel #ropeteoria, with whom many an enlightening conversation has been had.

Finally, thanks to Ryan Rohde Hansen, Olli Kantola, Markus Montola and Eero Tuovinen, who all provided valuable peer commentary on the article before the final submission.

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APPENDIX I
GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN THE PROCESS MODEL

A. Descriptive Framework

Imagined Space A conceptual space defined by the facts, expectations and hopes about the imagined reality explored, as perceived by an individual.

Shared Imagined Space The intersection of the Imagined Spaces of the participants of role-playing.

Shared Space of Imagining All the facts, contracts, expectations and intentions concerning the act of role-playing. Includes the SIS.

Result A final wanted or unwanted outcome of role-playing.

Benefit A wanted outcome of role-playing. A distinct form of enjoyment.

Loss An unwanted outcome of role-playing. A distinct form of discomfort.

Process A distinct operational part of play, that can be associated with a distinct, measurable quality.

Social Process A process operating in the sphere of general social interactions

Role-Playing Process A process particular to the act of role-playing, especially operating through the Shared Imagined Space.

Method A singular technique, rule or contract that is used or referred to in connection with the game. A constraint on or guide to how the game is played.

Circumstance A parameter that affects the functioning of the various Processes.

B. Normative Vocabulary

1) Benefits:

Entertainment Enjoyment of fun, being together and passing the time.

Learning Gaining new knowledge or understanding, affirming or questioning old knowledge, spiritual growth and reflection.

Meaning Enjoyment of an emotional experience, resonance with established thought constructs

Aesthetic Appreciation Artistic appreciation, enjoyment of beauty and form.

Social Benefits Positive changes in the social sphere arising from role-playing, the strengthening of social bonds, getting to know the other players better.

Physical Benefits Positive changes in the physical sphere; increased fitness, improved body language, physical pleasure.

2) Losses:

Boredom Frustration caused by lack of enjoyment. Usually caused by a failure to gain any Benefits.

False Knowledge Misinformation, incorrect or misleading understanding.

Unwanted Emotional Experiences Unwanted negative emotions, overly intensive experiences.

Aesthetic Failure Failure of form, frustration caused by unengaging aesthetic aspirations.

Social Dysfunction Negative effects in the social sphere, the worsening of relations.

Physical Hindrances Negative effects in the physical sphere; catching a cold, spraining an ankle, suffering a hangover.

3) Processes:

Competition The pursuit of victory

Tension Maintenance and enjoyment of tension

Challenge The besting of challenge and the overcoming of adversity

Exploration of an Entity of the Shared Imagined Space Exploring the many-fold interactions a single entity has with others.

Exploration of a Concept through the Shared Imagined Space Exploring a concept through its expressions in the Shared Imagined Space, and bringing forth such expressions to be explored.

Immersion Equating the self with an entity of the Shared Imagined Space, feeling and acting as that entity

4) Other:

Empathy a form of experiencing the Shared Imagined Space. An emotional response to or resonance with something in the SIS.

APPENDIX II
DESCRIPTIONS OF VARIOUS ROLE-PLAYING SUBCULTURES USING THE PROCESS MODEL

In this chapter, an attempt is made at describing various schools of role-playing around the world using Process Model terminology. This is done primarily in an effort to demonstrate the expressiveness of the model, and its usefulness in formulating styles clearly and firmly. We recognize that such characterizations of gaming cultures both intimately familiar and distant are very likely to cause severe arguments about the rightness of the characterizations. Thus, we posit these descriptions as propositions to be developed, and ask for some leeway in the interest of proving the actual points.

A. The Nordic Live-Action Role-Playing Community

Centered around yearly international conferences, the Nordic live-action role-playing community is also an active producer of theories concerning role-playing. While live-action role-playing forms in the various countries do differ quite much, through such conference publications as As Larp Grows Up[1] and Beyond Role and Play[2] and such larps as Mellan Himmel och Hav[3], [4], a very clear message is seen. Larp and role-playing are seen as a media like any other, and at its best, a media for art and/or questioning.

This, translated to the Process Model, means that the Nordic larp community puts a clear focus on Meaning as the sought-after Benefit

of role-playing. The publications also speak of a willingness to try and experiment with a wide variety of Methods and play styles in the pursuit of this goal, though there is a general wariness of introducing many actual resolution rule mechanics. This wariness in turn can be traced to a strong desire for Maintaining Believability, in the Process Model and probably also in the Nordic community seen itself as a Method for maintaining Immersion, a Process often seen as very desirable. In addition to the de facto base Process of Immersion, most highly acclaimed larps such as the already mentioned Mellan Himmel och Hav have also introduced the element of Exploring a Concept through the SIS into larping.

B. The Turku School of Larping

The Turku School of Larping[5], [6] is a Finnish manifesto, nowadays mostly historic but still describing a distinct style of live action play. It also beautifully distills one facet of the more general Nordic larping mode. Art, ie. Meaning is up front stated to be the highest goal sought after in role-playing. It is posited that the potential for this Meaning has been carefully crafted into the starting setting of a game by its writer, and the players task is to bring this Meaning to the fore and experience it as deeply as possible. It is then strongly and directly posited that the Process of Immersion be the single best means of experiencing Meaning, due to the strong and direct nature of the experiences gained in that state. Methods like Use of Only In-Character Knowledge and Strict Adherence to In-SIS Causality and Considerations are proscribed in turn as the means to support Immersion.

C. The Old School of Tabletop Role-Playing

The traditional Finnish way of playing tabletop role-playing games is based on the Benefit of Entertainment, with a sideline of Meaning. Actual play in turn usually consists of multiple simultaneously running processes, with individual players taking interest and operating according to only one of them. Some Methods are very entrenched. Use of Only In-Character Knowledge, In-SIS Causality and Realism are all standard, with final authority over the SIS resting firmly in the hands of the gamemaster. While these Methods are primarily Immersion and Entity Exploration supportive, one should not assume these Processes to dominate. While they may be more prevalent, the whole range of Processes is encountered, with for example Competition and Tension being supported by the prevalent Method of Character Balance.

D. The Vampire Live-Action Gaming Community

The Vampire live-action gaming community, with its Mind's Eye Theatre -rule-set[7] has never had the aversion for rules its Nordic counterpart triumphs in. The Method of Using Resolution Rules in these games, added to the socially adversarial nature of the setting, often leads to strong Processes of Competition and Tension, the means of choice for Entertainment. On the other hand, the basic premise of humanity inherent in the setting is clearly a Concept to be Explored, resulting mostly in Meaning. The two Processes usually both exist in a given game, but the players who engage in each try to remain separate from each other as much as possible. According to interviews[8], the forthcoming new edition of Mind's Eye Theatre rules acknowledges this disparity, allowing gamemasters to select between a simple (neutral, unobtrusive) and a complex (Competition- and Tension-supportive) resolution system.

E. The Forge Narrativist Tabletop Community

The Forge's narrativist community is self-providing in the sense that they play many games designed for themselves, by themselves. Examples of such are Sorcerer[9], My Life with Master[10], Dust Devils[11] and Dogs in the Vineyard[12]. In the Forge lingo, narrativism is defined as putting the *characters* in situations of choice whose consequences are meaningful to the *player*. This alludes to a strong desire for the Benefit of Meaning, but in actuality it seems that easy going Entertainment is at least as important.

Immersion is not usually a popular Process among the narrativists, and neither are Competition, Challenge or Tension. Exploration of an Entity appears, but the Exploration of a Concept seems to be the Process of choice.

Methods used in the narrativist games are often wildly avant-garde, with a clear de-emphasis on In-SIS Causality and Use of Only In-Character Knowledge. In contrast, a Method known as Observing a Director Stance towards the SIS is often employed, and Authority over the SIS is frequently Distributed. While these Method choices are common, the Methods truly best supporting narrativism seem to be Consequence Rules, found in almost all the successful narrativist games.

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APPENDIX III
COMPARISON OF THE PROCESS MODEL WITH OTHER MODELS OF ROLE-PLAYING

In this chapter, an attempt is made to compare the Process Model with the various other models of role-playing created before. The chapter is mostly intended for people familiar with the respective models, not as a full review of them, so previous knowledge of the other models discussed is assumed. The focus of the comparison is on relating the models to the Process Model by analyzing design purposes and use expectancies, and by mapping concepts between the models. Additionally, some thoughts are given on what the Process

Model might have to give the other models. The models discussed here are the Threefold Model[1], the Three-Way Model[2], GNS[3], the GENder Model[4], Glen Blacow's and Robin Laws' player type classification[5], The Big Model[6], and Channel Theory[7].

A. The Threefold Model and the Three-Way Model

The Threefold Model tries to describe gaming styles through goals. These are not the same as the sought after Results of the Process Model however, but correspond more with the Processes, the actual form of enjoyment gained from pursuing these goals not being given much thought. The Threefold Model describes three styles of play, Dramatism, Gamism and Simulationism. The short definitions of these, taken from [1] are as follows:

> **dramatist** is the style which values how well the in-game action creates a satisfying story-line. Different kinds of stories may be viewed as satisfying, depending on individual tastes, varying from fanciful pulp action to believable character drama. It is the end result of the story which is important.

With this definition, the Threefold is quite vague on what actually causes enjoyment for Dramatists, it only proscribes that that something be found in the Story. The mapping of Dramatism in the Threefold thus depends on what actually makes the story satisfying. Most likely it will be Exploration of a Concept or Exploration of an Entity.

> **gamist** is the style which values setting up a fair challenge for the players (as opposed to the PCs). The challenges may be tactical combat, intellectual mysteries, politics, or anything else. The players will try to solve the problems they are presented with, and in turn the GM will make these challenges solvable if they act intelligently within the contract.

This definition of threefold Gamist can be seen to map to either or both of Tension and Challenge in the Process Model.

> **simulationist** is the style which values resolving in-game events based solely on game-world considerations, without allowing any meta-game concerns to affect the decision. Thus, a fully simulationist GM will not fudge results to save PCs or to save her plot, or even change facts unknown to the players. Such a GM may use meta-game considerations to decide meta-game issues like who is playing which character, whether to play out a conversation word for word, and so forth, but she will resolve actual in-game events based on what would "really" happen.

Simulation, in the scope of the Process Model, is not really a Process, but a Method. The Process most likely involved in Threefold Simulationist play will be Exploration of an Entity of the SIS, but with the added methodological constraint of Strict In-Game Cause-and-Effect.

In the Three-Way Model[2], Simulationism is replaced with Immersionism, defined as follows:

> **Immersionist** is the style which values living the roles life, felling what the role would feel. Immersionists insist on resolving in-game events based solely on game-world considerations. Thus, a fully immersionist player will not fudge rules to save its role's neck or the plot, or even change details of background story irrelevant in the setting to suite the play. An immersionist organizer will try to make the plots and setting such that they are believable to the players.

While this definition skirts the Process of Immersion, it mixes it with other elements. The notions of realism and in-game causality are again Methods in the Process Model. The definition also does not make a clear difference between outside Empathy and Immersion.

As the Threefold model strives to describe common major styles of play, it could be beneficial to it to study the various playing styles that can be formalized using the Process Model (see chapter III-B), and see if any of the possible combinations of Benefits, Processes and Methods should rank a classification of their own. Careful thought should at least be given to the inclusion of Immersion in the basic model, as well as to the omission of Competition in its entirety.

B. GNS

The GNS model is an evolution from the Threefold, and a precursor to the Big Model, developed by Ron Edwards at The Forge. It strove to find important goals and decision-making considerations in role-playing that were distinct from and incompatible with each other. The model posited that coherent, successful play could exist only when just one of these goals was being realized.

GNS defines the elements of Gamism, Narrativism and Simulationism as follows in [3]:

> **Gamism** is expressed by competition among participants (the real people); it includes victory and loss conditions for characters, both short-term and long-term, that reflect on the people's actual play strategies. The listed elements provide an arena for the competition.

The GNS definition of Gamism maps neatly and completely to the Process of Competition.

> **Simulationism** is expressed by enhancing one or more of the listed elements in Set 1 (Character, System, Setting, Situation, Color) above; in other words, Simulationism heightens and focuses Exploration as the priority of play. The players may be greatly concerned with the internal logic and experiential consistency of that Exploration.

The Simulationism of the GNS model maps directly to the Exploration of an Entity of the Shared Imagined Space.

> **Narrativism** is expressed by the creation, via role-playing, of a story with a recognizable theme. The characters are formal protagonists in the classic Lit 101 sense, and the players are often considered co-authors. The listed elements provide the material for narrative conflict (again, in the specialized sense of literary analysis).

While this definition of Narrativism is still a bit vague, later definitions have equalized it with Exploring a Premise, which in the Process Model is a form of Exploring a Concept through the SIS.

Thus, the definitions of the GNS seem to map quite neatly to the Processes of the Process Model. As the GNS model has evolved into the Big Model, what the Process Model could have to give it is discussed there.

C. GENder

The GENder model[4] was created to counter some of the ideas expressed in the GNS model, positing that a single game can *support* multiple playing styles simultaneously. The Process Model recognizes this claim as valid, though not incompatible with the claim of the GNS model that *coherent* play requires that only one creative agenda be adhered to. In terms of the Process Model, it can be seen that multiple co-existing Processes often interfere with each other due to differing support methods and decision-making considerations, but as the Processes also independently generate Benefits, they can continue

to co-exist without breaking the game as long as the interference is not severe enough — especially since human beings are so able at adapting to non-optimal situations.

As for the playing styles of the GENder model, no definitive definitions of them exist. From the discussions and related definitions the following may however be gleamed: Gamist in GENder seems to mean the overcoming of obstacles, whatever they may be. This definition puts it into close contact with at least Challenge, Competition and Tension, mostly hovering between them. Explorative play on the other hand points directly at Exploration of Entities of the SIS. Finally, Narrative seems to share the definition of Threefold Dramatism.

D. Glen Blacow's and Robin Laws' player type classification

In his book of game mastering advice[5], Robin Laws describes a player type classification that is a modified version of an original[8] by Glen Blacow. In it, the following seven types of players are recognized:

The Power Gamer seeks to make his character ever better. This equates with the subprocess of Tactical Optimization, a part of either Competition or Tension, but as it is described in the text without bounds, it equates more with Competition.

The Butt-Kicker simply wants combat, and to excel in it. In terms of the Process Model, this can be simply described as Challenge operating jointly with the Exploration of the Concept of Violence.

The Tactician wants to overcome adversity and tactical challenges. This behavior can be part of the Processes of Competition, Tension and Challenge, but in its purest form is an instance of the last.

The Specialist, always playing and exploring a certain distinct type of character, could at first glance seem to be Exploring an Entity, but what is happening is probably actually better described as Exploration of whatever Concept the character type represents.

The Method Actor, who strongly identifies with his or her character, can, in terms of the Process Model, either be engaged in Immersion or the Exploration of the Entity he or she is playing.

The Storyteller, on the other hand, is harder to describe in terms of the Process Model. Being equal to the dramatist of the threefold model, it too lacks a clear cause for the enjoyment, only the medium through which it is gained is mentioned. Thus, the same considerations apply.

The Casual Gamer, finally, is described as a person who is playing without special interests, mostly joining in to enjoy the social aspects of the game. In terms of the Process Model, he may enjoy any of the Role-Playing Processes to an extent (though probably none of them very much), but is probably gaining something significant from at least one of the Social Processes co-occurring with gaming.

Coloring all these definitions is the core premise of the book that:

> Role-playing games are entertainment; your goal as GM is to make your games as entertaining as possible for all the participants.

Taking this into account, it can be seen how many of the classifications also tie into an implied end Benefit of Entertainment.

E. The Big Model

As stated above, The Big Model[6] is the current from of the model of role-playing developed at The Forge. It has its roots in GNS, but those aspects are only a small part of the current model.

On the top tier of The Big Model stands the Social Contract, defined as follows in the Glossary of The Forge[9]:

> **Social Contract** All interactions and relationships among the role-playing group, including emotional connections, logistic arrangements, and expectations. All role-playing is a subset of the Social Contract.

While the wording and intent in the Process Model is quite different, the concept of Shared Space of Imagining defined here certainly does have lots of points of contact with the Social Contract of the Big Model, both concepts being the containers of everything else.

The Big Model then defines a layer containing three Creative Agendas, Step On Up, The Right to Dream and Story Now, defined as follows:

> **Step On Up** Social assessment of personal strategy and guts among the participants in the face of risk. One of the three currently-recognized Creative Agendas. As a top priority of role-playing, the defining feature of Gamist play.

Step On Up is a driving force behind Competition and Tension. In the Process Model, it is best equated with seeking the specific Social Benefit of an acknowledgment of guts and accomplishment.

> **Right to Dream, the** Commitment to the imagined events of play, specifically their in-game causes and pre-established thematic processes. One of the three currently-recognized Creative Agendas. As a top priority for role-playing, the defining feature of Simulationist play.

The Right to Dream maps directly to the Method of in-game causality, and is in close proximity with other Methods, like the use of out-of-character knowledge. It also has a close relationship with the Process of Exploring an Entity of the Shared Imagined Space.

> **Story Now** Commitment to Addressing (producing, heightening, and resolving) Premise through play itself. The epiphenomenal outcome for the Transcript from such play is almost always a story. One of the three currently-recognized Creative Agendas. As a top priority of role-playing, the defining feature of Narrativist play.

In terms of the Process Model, this Creative Agenda can simply be likened to the Process of Exploring a Premise, a form of Exploring a Concept Through the Shared Imagined Space.

At the bottom tier of the model are Techniques and Ephemera, described as follows:

> **Techniques** Specific procedures of play which, when employed together, are sufficient to introduce fictional characters, places, or events into the Shared Imagined Space. Many different Techniques may be used, in different games, to establish the same sorts of events. A given Technique is composed of a group of Ephemera which are employed together. Taken in their entirety for a given instance of role-playing, Techniques comprise System.

> **Ephemera** Moment-to-moment or sentence-to-sentence actions and statements during play. Combinations of Ephemera often construct Techniques. Changes in Stance represent one example of an Ephemeral aspect of play.

In the Process Model, these are both compacted into the definition of Methods, which then occupies the exact same space as in The Big Model in relation to the SIS.

The Big Model and the Process Model are complementary models that can be used to look at instances of role-playing from two quite different viewpoints, thus possibly fostering a greater understanding together than could be gained from the viewpoint of only one model. As for the part of The Big Model that continues to study coherent and incoherent playing goals and decision-making considerations, it could perhaps use the Process Model as a tool in further analyzing

and formulating the various coherent and incompatible styles, as well as to probe for possible new additions.

F. Channel Theory

Channel Theory[7], built upon the foundations of a solid critique[10] of the Threefold and GNS, shares much with the Process Model, but also differs from it fundamentally.

Both models leave behind the single planar partitioning of a space that the older models exhibit. Both try to isolate distinct concepts from the whole of role-playing that could be measured independently. The basis of classifying these axles are completely different however. Channel Theory tries to create a thorough description of a gaming style, through partitioning the axles, or Channels, into priority groups. Unfortunately, the model stops at this, without describing any relations or interactions between the various channels. Due to this, the applicability of the Channel Theory model is extremely limited. It can only be used to describe, not analyze. The model would do well to analyze the different interactions between its component axles.

In general most of the top Element Channels of the Channel Theory model correspond with either Social or Role-Playing Processes in the Process Model.

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He hopes for games in general to have intelligence-boggling qualities, but in rpgs he is mostly in search for Meaning, Entertainment, rich experiences outside the scope of his normal way of life, Immersion and flashes of Social Role-playing.

Originating from the free-spirited side of the world, his other interests include guitar, yoga, lively art and jokes of irresistible quality.

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As a whole, the group has recently been exploring innovative tabletop gaming systems and methods. Via one-shot experiments and analysis, the group seeks to better understand and push the limits of what roleplaying can be.

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Eetu has been roleplaying since the 80's and larping since 1996. He has organized ca. 25 larps. He is a storyteller, a shaman and the boasting champion of the Finnish Glorantha Association.

From roleplaying he usually seeks Meaning and Entertainment. These he gains through Empathizing with Entities along with Exploring Concepts. When possible, he also Immerses.