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# Kromosomer – an Experience in Shared Creative Work and Expression

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## Abstract

This article is a reflection on the Kromosomer project, a storytelling performance held in both physical and virtual worlds, which was implemented and disseminated through digital, virtual and social media. The aim of the whole project was to search for an expression that could combine physical experience with virtual world. The project was also looking at how to deal with social inclusion. The motto for this enterprise was the traditional Norwegian legend characters who represent “the other,” the “not-normal,” as a pretext to address the question of alterity. These legends’ characters were re-created as avatars in the metaverse, where they were also freely distributed in virtual installations as unfinished artifacts, open to mutation. In the Second Life virtual world, participants could pick up avatars and create their own stories through snapshots, machinima, etc. The physical performance later used these participants/producers’ interpretations and narratives of the avatars in stage design and in the storytelling performance itself. We describe and analyse the main work method used for this project — a shared creative process of collective and distributed creativity. The project encompasses different forms of expression therefore we will also focus on how metaphors constitute themselves as paramount to our way of working.



Figure 1: Heidi Dahlsveen performing at PopUp hub, Oslo, 2012

## 1. Introduction

Kromosomer, a project initiated by Heidi Dahlsveen (aka Mimesis Monday), was a traditional storytelling performance that interacted with digital, virtual, and social media during its adaptation and implementation process (<http://www.scoop.it/t/project-kromosomer>).<sup>1</sup> In its realization, two visual artists, a social entrepreneur, graphic designer and filmmaker, and a storyteller participated. The project had a ‘distributed’ dramaturgy, where different participants contributed equally, but creatively independent. The idea for the performance came out of Heidi Dahlsveen’s childhood; she grew up with a grandfather who used legends and storytelling as a way of dealing with everyday life problems. As an

<sup>1</sup> A compilation social media dissemination can be seen at the Scoop.it page of Project: Kromosomer  
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adult she understood that these stories were more than mere anecdotes. The stories she heard were both frightening and exciting. A legend can be described as a short traditional narrative that has been told as a true event. The Kromosomer project attempted to understand the disquieting nature of these stories (Sousa & Dahlsveen, 2012, p. 422).

The title "Kromosomer" refers to the assumption that the characters in Norwegian legends occur because someone looks 'different' from what was considered normal. They represent 'the other' which we define ourselves away from. Despite several of them having great similarities with ourselves, we cannot accept 'them' as a part of us. Nevertheless, a relationship to what is not ourselves, yet similar to us, is completely inevitable: without 'the other' there is no 'I', without 'the stranger' there is no familiar, without darkness there is no light.

Based on Norwegian legends, Second Life avatars were created as a basis for new stories. They were distributed free and with full permissions. Users could then copy, transform and share them, enabling an open and creative embodiment of these characters. The users were encouraged to take pictures and make machinimas, or to use the avatars in any other creative form. Some of those pictures were used on a blog (<http://mimesismonday.com/?cat=360>) where readers were invited to create new stories. These stories were then passed on, either via social media or verbally told in the performance.

These producers' interpretations were later assembled into a video that was projected on two walls during the physical performance. (When a user contributes into the project we decide to call them producers, according to Axel Burns' concept of produsage that we will address later on.) There were also installations with picture stories of the avatars created by producers. One of the stories in the performance was told simultaneously in the physical world and in Second Life's virtual environment. The storyteller (Heidi Dahlsveen) was then using one of the avatars created for the project. The project had a six-months-long process from reading legends and systematizing characters to ending up with five physical performances. These did not happen in a typical performance space but in an abandoned office landscape. The process was just as important as the performances, and artistic expressions were there all the way.

Two aspects of this project's development are of special relevance to us: the metaphorical way of working and the shared creative process. We call it a metaphorical way of working because in new connections and meetings, we seek to articulate and give meaning to issues that concern us (Ricoeur, 2004). Ricoeur states: "Metaphor holds two thoughts of different things together in simultaneous performance upon the stage of a word or a simple expression, whose meaning is the result of their interaction" (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 92). We shall, through different approaches, try to describe the artistic and creative collaborative process made possible by the Second Life platform.

In the face of the idea, another type of structure will occur that might stride against traditional practices. Aslaug Nyernes promotes a topological way of thinking that studies phenomena as they arise (Nyernes, 2002). The linear, hierarchical, and causal structure that ends in a conclusion will not always be able to accommodate artistic and creative projects. Because "*practice is not something that one just speaks about, practice is*"<sup>2</sup> (Nyernes, 2002, p. 34), the text is often perceived as being more descriptive than explanatory. Important factors such as the fact that participants in the project (and in this text, for that matter) come from different disciplines, different language areas and so on, will give this discourse a more *khiastisk* structure, on which different practices are mirrored.

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<sup>2</sup> Translated from: «praksis er ikkje noko enn berre talar om, praksis er».  
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The background material for the project was collected from oral tradition, more specifically Norwegian legends. These were published by Norsk Folkeminnelag in the period between 1921 and 1990, but the collection period extends further back. A legend is described as a short, often one episodic, oral narrative, closely related to the “folkbelief.”<sup>3</sup> Legends claim to be true. Mostly natural mythic legends formed the basis for this project, hence the encounter with the supernatural, the unseen, the other.<sup>4</sup>

Linda Dégh states that “legend contextualises and interprets belief” (Dégh, 1996, p. 34). Belief is the core of the legend, but science or knowledge are a necessary counterweight to it (Dégh, 1996). Legends are told spontaneously as people orient themselves within the given canonical community norms. The frame around the legend is the real life topology (Dégh, 1996), “everyday life” is there prior to the legend and it is there afterwards. “It is as if life stumbles along the way, discovers something and moves on” (Sousa & Dahlsveen, 2012, p. 423).

The extreme collision between two worlds distinguishes legend from other traditional stories, such as folktales.<sup>5</sup> Legend characters are not only strange creatures but also human-like beings, like ghosts or the huldra. The meeting with ‘the other’ in legends poses social and existential questions. In this meeting the ‘unnatural’ occurs, which in turn constitutes the premises for both the work with avatars and the dramaturgy (Sousa & Dahlsveen, 2012, p. 424). The meeting disturbs the identity and show us how fragile the concept norms are (Kristeva 1982). For Julia Kristeva the logic, the meaning, is broken down because we lose the distinction between subject and object, ‘I’ and ‘the others’, it becomes the abject. The abject is located outside the subject and object; it is something else. The meeting with a corpse is probably the clearest description of abject. Although similar to life, the corpse is “not life.”

Kristeva’s concept of the abject can relate to Mori’s concept of the “Uncanny Valley”. This ‘valley’ can be described as a sharp and sudden depression in a line chart describing growing familiarity caused by increased human likeness in a robot (Mori, 1970). One’s sense of familiarity grows as a robot’s human likeness increases, but this familiarity suddenly drops to negative levels, when this human likeness becomes uncanny, as Freud describes it — “that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar.” (Freud, 1919) At the bottom of this valley is the dead body, and even further down the animated dead corpse, the lowest peak in the chart. This seems to reinforce Kristeva’s argument. It appears that what is familiar but falls outside our explanatory models is more frightening than the fantastic.

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<sup>3</sup> The folklorist Linda Dégh claims that there is no such thing as «folkbelief», that a belief is a belief.

<sup>4</sup> We use the term «the other» referring to an origin legend about how non-humans, but similar to humans' was created. The story relates it to The Fall (Adam and Eve).

<sup>5</sup> Folk tales such as the fairy tale also portray the encounter with other worlds, but they exist naturally together. You can meet trolls and fairies, but it is not unnatural that you meet them.



**Figure 2: Datter Savnet, Heidi Dahlsveen aka Mimesis Monday, 2012.**

The killing of children and the experience of having children that are ‘not normal’ is addressed in legends like changeling<sup>6</sup> and *utburden*,<sup>7</sup> where one is taken to the edge of meaning. (Sousa & Dahlsveen, 2012, p. 424) We are more than disturbed, as Kristeva describes regarding her encounter with Auschwitz:

*“In the dark halls of the museum that is now what remains of Auschwitz, I see a heap of children's shoes, or something like that, something I have already seen elsewhere, under a Christmas tree, for instance, dolls I believe. The abjection of Nazi crime reaches its apex when death, which, in any case, kills me, interferes with what, in my living universe, is supposed to save me from death: childhood, science, among other things” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4).*

This disturbance is caused by the ambivalence of our comprehension, it is an encounter with something primitive that has not yet manifested itself symbolically, but legends are already a way of assimilation. By verbalising the meaninglessness, one gives it symbolic value. Once we submit to the symbols a new order arises, what Kristeva calls sublimation (Kristave 1982).

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<sup>6</sup> A Changeling is a child who has been replaced by a child from the fairy people. Legends arose because they had no other terms for children with conditions such as Down syndrome.

<sup>7</sup> *Utburden* - a child murdered and not buried. Legends speak of places that are haunted by the murdered child. It is always a man who discovers the crime and there is always a woman, the child's mother, who is the killer. The women are poor, single mothers, sentenced to death for their action. The child's father is never mentioned.

The meeting with ‘the other’ is represented in legends as a physical one, because the characters look different or even because of actual physical confrontation. “The sublimation associated with the legends somehow implies an embodiment of the uncanny” (Sousa & Dahlsveen, 2012, p. 425).

According to Walter Benjamin, storytelling gives us “*the ability to exchange experiences*” (Benjamin 2006, p. 362). Long before his time, Benjamin saw how information created poor conditions for the story. A story has as its basis sensory experiences and when a story is being told, these experiences are converted into the listener's experience:

*“Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it (Benjamin 2006, p. 365).”*

In that sense the legend can be seen as an attempt to articulate the experience of meeting others. If we establish a relation between meeting a character from legends and a meeting with avatars, can this provide a tool to extend the language that can handle the sense of meaninglessness?



**Figure 3: The Kromosomer avatars, Catarina Carneiro de Sousa aka CapCat Ragu, 2012.**



## 2. The Avatars

By using Second Life avatars, one can become “the other,” embodying the uncanny. The Kromosomer avatars resulted from a free interpretation of Norwegian folk legend characters through avatar design. Catarina Carneiro de Sousa (aka CapCat Ragu) and Sameiro Oliveira Martins (aka Meilo Minotaur) built these avatars commissioned by Heidi Dahlsveen (aka Mimesis Monday), who provided them with a brief description of the characters. This served as inspiration, but the artists were given total creative freedom for their reinterpretation. Three virtual installations were built to accommodate three groups of avatars.

The first installation and avatars were based on a legend of a grain spirit — the Surekallen. If a peasant was the last to crop the grain he had to accommodate the spirit through the winter, or in an extreme situation he had to sacrifice himself and become Surekallen, in order to ensure the spirit’s existence. A grain field was created in Second Life, as well as two figures — an old peasant and the Surekallen. The scene depicted the moment when the peasant, realizing he was the last to crop his grain, transfigures into Surekallen (see Figure 4). These figures were identical to the avatars distributed. They were mesh avatars, which means they were built outside Second Life using 3D computer graphics software for modelling and rigging. The possibility of uploading rigged mesh avatars was, at the time, a very recent feature in the Second Life platform that enabled the possibility of making the avatars and the virtual sculptures identical, thus allowing the user to embody the artwork itself.<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 4 Peasant becoming Surekallen, Catarina Carneiro de Sousa aka CapCat Ragu, 2012.**

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<sup>8</sup> We didn’t use exclusively mesh avatars, as we noticed that the fully mesh avatar inhibited the potential transformation by the producers, since rigged mesh avatars can’t be transformed inworld. For this reason we also distributed a ‘traditional avatar’ version of the Peasant. On subsequent avatar distributions we mixed mesh avatars with traditional ones and divided the meshes into parts so the potential for remixing and transformation could be increased.

In this way, the installation illustrated the whole concept of these avatars, the possibility of inhabiting alterity (Sousa & Dahlsveen, 2012, p. 426). Avatar manipulation in virtual worlds enables the experience of embodying ‘the other’. Nick Yee and N. Jeremy Bailenson highlight that “immersive virtual environments provide the unique opportunity to allow individuals to directly take the perspective of another” (Yee, Bailenson, & Ducheneaut, 2009, p. 147), and even suggest the possibility of embodied perspective-taking in virtual environments having an impact on the reduction of negative stereotyping (Yee, Bailenson, & Ducheneaut, 2009, p. 154).



**Figure 5: Little Attganger playing with her sister 1, Sameiro Oliveira Martins aka Meilo Minotaur, 2012.**

The second installation was about the Attganger, the Norwegian word for ghost, literally meaning “walking back.” It has a number of meanings, though: beyond being a dead person, it can be someone to whom a promise was broken and comes back to remind its offender of the betrayal. However, what inspired this group of avatars was a tale from a valley in Norway, called “Osterdalen:” the story of a child who returns after dying. The child plays with her sisters and brothers, and the family grows so accustomed to the dead child that they forget she really is dead. The installation consisted of a dream-like children’s room, resting on a cloud, where one could hear the continuous sound of a music box. On the walls one could see old photographs of a mother and her two little girls. The avatars given there were the mother, the two sisters and the Attganger.

The last installation, “Ocean Avatars,” gathered some of the characters from “vannvetter,”<sup>9</sup> where five avatars were given in the eggs of an enormous Sea Monster: Havfrue Melusina, Lindorm, Draugen and Kraken. Havfrue was a mermaid, half human and half fish. She was primarily seen at sunrise. Her face was beautiful and down her back she had long, wavy hair, which she would braid while sitting on a rock. Melusina was quite similar, but with a more tragic perspective. Only one folk legend from a part of Norway called Helgeland mentions her. Because every Saturday half of her turned into a fish, she was unloved and evicted from her home after giving birth to nine children. Lindorm was a large serpent that guarded a treasure and was able to take people down in the water to eat them. One way to get rid of it was by running seven times around a campfire while being chased by it and then lure it into the fire. Draugen was a drowned man who was never buried. He howled terribly at sea as a warning. His scream sounded like that of someone in distress. He could have an arm with a claw and often rolled himself up in a boat, and then made himself so heavy that he would sink the boat. The Kraken was a horror from the sea. If the fishing was good, one should beware because it could happen that the Kraken was around, one had to be ready to move the boat in a hurry.

The new owners of these avatars could copy, transfer, and modify them, because all avatars were distributed with full permissions, enabling a very creative approach to their embodiment. Although, as Jacquelyn Ford Morie remarks, in virtual environments “our experience is very much influenced by how we perceive our self, and yet, within most immersive environments, as they exist today, this choice is still made by the VE designer” (Morie, 2007, p. 130). Second Life avatars can be customized in a very dramatic way solely using the platform’s interface. One can also upload content such as textures, meshes, animations, and so on, making the residents (of Second Life) themselves the avatar designers, through their own designs or through what other residents share or sell (Sousa C. , 2012, p. 141).

This makes embodiment in Second Life an utterly creative experience, deeply connected to avatar design. But this was not always the case; late 1990s virtual reality theory had a different perspective about what virtual corporality could be. For instance, for Frank Biocca progressive embodiment was extremely dependent on the “tighter coupling of the body with the interface.” Biocca refers to a body in which shape and boundaries are to be defined by the interface and the perceptual illusions generated by the head-mounted display (Biocca, 1997). This form of sensory engagement didn’t become as ubiquitous as the researchers of the 1990s expected. Boellstorff notes that “this notion of immersion does not accurately characterize the dominant cultural logics at play in Second Life” and Celia Pearce suggests that the “self visible inside the world may actually enhance the sense of presence, as well as the sense of embodiment” (Pearce, 2009, p. 122).

Nevertheless, these views do not have to be seen as divergent. Both Biocca and Boellstorff address the question of social presence as paramount to the sense of immersion. Biocca distinguishes three different kinds of bodily presence in virtual environments: objective body, virtual body, and body schema.

*“The objective body is the physical, observable, and measurable body of the user. The virtual body is the representation of the user's body inside the virtual environment. The body schema is the user's mental or internal representation of his or her body” (Biocca, 1997).*

The phenomenal body is not stable; the use of media can radically alter it, even in what Biocca calls “non-immersive” environments like television. This modification of self-representation is also

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<sup>9</sup> Folklorist Ørnulf Hodne distinguishes between “landvetter” and “vannvetter”, a distinction that corresponds to whether the character lives on land or in water (1995).

supported by Nick Yee, N. Jeremy Bailenson Ducheneaut and Nicolas' findings on the way behaviour can change with avatar manipulation, not only in virtual worlds but also in subsequent physical interactions. The *Proteus Effect* implies that online changes to the phenomenal body can endure offline (Yee, Bailenson, & Ducheneaut, 2009, pp. 285-312).

These findings have highlighted the importance of avatar design in virtual worlds, as embodiment can have a very real impact in both self-perception and self-expression, as Pearce remarks: "If the avatar is framed as a form of personal expression, as performance medium, it is not hard to see the ways in which the components of the avatar kit dictate the forms of expression that occur" (Pearce, 2009, p. 111).



**Figure 6: Sea Serpent, Sameiro Oliveira Martins aka Meilo Minotaur, 2012.**

By being modifiable, the Kromosomer avatars promoted an active and creative participation not only in avatar design and expression but also in the embodiment of the story itself as a character (Sousa & Dahlsveen, 2012, p. 428).

However, in the virtual environment of Second Life this kind of experience is mostly conceptual and not exactly an experience of the flesh. One cannot deny, though, a perceptual and sensorial aspect to embodiment in desktop based virtual worlds, but they mostly continue to be experienced through our

organic body, not our avatar body (Sousa C. , 2012, p. 154). Although it is the organic body that has all the sensorial experiences, it is the avatar that moves inside the virtual world and interacts with objects and other avatars. It is as if there were two bodies, as Maeva Veerapen states, one organic, the other image. This raises new questions about the constitution of the phenomenal body. Three conceptions of the avatar are suggested by Veerapen: the avatar as prosthesis, as phantom limb and as equal. A prosthesis is an object that extends the potential of the phenomenal body. The user does not have direct and immediate access to the virtual world, the avatar acts as a prosthesis that extends the frontier of the user's body. Amputees can still have sensations in the phantom limb. The avatar never made part of the user's body, unlike the amputated limb, but can lead to feelings other than by direct stimulation (activating the memory, for example). The avatar as phantom limb adds an emotional dimension to the experience of the virtual world. The body of the avatar is not sensorial or perceptually able. Between them, the physical body and the body of the avatar meet all the qualities necessary to constitute a phenomenal body, which is why Veerapen conceives the avatar as an equal (Veerapen, 2011, pp. 81-100).

### 3. From the storytelling community to creative collaboration

The Kromosomer project was a shared creative process. There are two different ways in which one may address this concept of shared creativity — one is through *collective creation*, the other is through *distributed creativity* (Sousa C. , 2012, p. 143).

In *collective creation* all of the agents involved act as a single creative entity, requiring a high level of intimacy between co-creators. Meilo Minotaur and CapCat Ragu, mother and daughter in real life, built the avatars on an equal partnership basis, in which their own authorial mark was relinquished in favour of the group's authorship. Both artists often work and transform each other's builds, constantly exchanging things. This kind of creative process not only requires a high level of intimacy but also complete trust and openness (Sousa & Dahlsveen, 2012, p. 428).

Once the avatars were distributed, they would become the avatars of others. These new identities could be formed by taking the legends' characters literally or by transforming them altogether, as they are always "unfinished artifacts" (Eno, 1995), that can not only be used but also modified into a new creation (Sousa & Dahlsveen, 2012, p. 428). This relates to another concept fundamental to this project: *produsage*. This is a concept developed by Bruns to describe a new arising reality "emerging from the intersection of Web 2.0 user-generated content, and social media since the early years of the new millennium" (Bruns & Schmidt, 2011, p. 3), realizing that the conventional sense of production no longer applied to "massively distributed collaborations [...] constantly changing, permanently mutable bodies of work which are owned at once by everyone and no-one" and in which the participants easily shift users to producers and vice versa, originating a hybrid role in between (Bruns & Schmidt, 2011, p. 3). This author defines the concept of *distributed creativity* as "projects which harness the creativity of a large range of participants to build on and extend upon an existing pool of artistic material" (Bruns, 2010).

The aesthetical experience of this project in fact required the users to become producers. The distribution of avatars was just the beginning of a creative flux (Sousa & Dahlsveen, 2012, p. 429). The Kromosomer team made avatars and animations<sup>10</sup> that were distributed in Second Life, along with the description of the characters in Norwegian legends. We were producers of this content and gave it to users in a sharable and modifiable way. From there on, users created new content, such as virtual

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<sup>10</sup> Animations in Second Life control the way the avatar moves or poses.

photography<sup>11</sup>, machinima<sup>12</sup> or stories. They became producers and we became their users. We used that content to create new items as producers, integrating the users' input into the physical performance and into a booklet, published online, with stories, virtual photography made by producers and reflections on the process of the project (see Figure 9).

A story made by an avatar with the name Laurel Leavit was integrated into the performance. This avatar is a good example in several ways — she contributed stories and images and partook in the audience during the telling, where she took pictures of the performance in-world. On the blog she wrote:

*“It was a man walking on the beach who first saw the Kraken. He called the newspaper and reported the sighting of a many headed sea monster.*

*Later that week, when the moon was full, a fisherman noticed the chains. And Mr. Gustafson with his binoculars thought that one head looked like his third Cousin Carl who had been last at sea five years ago.*

*Reporters came from all around. Experts were called in. The best theory promoted was that the Kraken had become entangled in a shipwreck of a ship carrying prisoners in chains and wild fish had nibbled on the bodies.*

*But never in history had there been recorded a Kraken with such a lovely face. Children went down the sea to throw food out to her. Men wrote songs about her. Preachers preached about her.*

*But only the newspaper editor knew that it was made from old stage props and plastic sleds and carried carefully down to the sea one night, unsure whether it would sink or float” (Leavitt, 2012).*

Rebelo's concept of *distributed dramaturgy*, where each individual is responsible and contributes something specific to a production, can also be of use in this project, for its sense of how an idea of collective creation relates to a storytelling situation (Rebelo, 2009). As part of an oral tradition, Norwegian legends constitute a cultural storage available to anyone in the community. The items distributed and the materials used in this project were free of copyright, according to Norwegian law. Every aspect of the project, including process and performance, was transparent and free to share and use without any compensation. Most importantly, participants were free to interpret the material as they wished (Sousa & Dahlsveen, 2012, p. 429).

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<sup>11</sup> Virtual Photography consists of still images rendered from virtual worlds.

<sup>12</sup> Machinima consists of cinematics rendered from virtual worlds. They are usually short video clips, but a full feature film is also possible.



**Figure 7: Melusina, Catarina Carneiro de Sousa aka CapCat Ragú, 2012.**

The social network around storytelling situations in Slovakia was examined by Gabriela Kiliánová in the late 1990s. The storytelling situation was a natural part of everyday life and, according to Kiliánová, actually a necessary and natural part of the social organization. Kiliánová writes that the storytelling situation comes from a social need to be together, while pointing out that the “success of storytelling communities depended upon the presence of a verbally gifted individual, the narrator.” (Kiliánová, 2006, p. 245). Community and sharing of stories are there as a necessary socialization and dissemination of knowledge, but there is also an aesthetic presence: “Storytelling is, on the one hand, a form of entertainment, a performance during which the audience appreciates the artistic qualities of the narrators. Yet, on the other hand, it is also a means of transmitting information and knowledge.” (Kiliánová, 2006, p. 245)

The stories are part of the collective property in the oral storytelling tradition, as Parry and Lord confirm. Their research focused on former Yugoslavia’s bards in the early 1930’s (Lord, 2000). The bards’ audience knew and had a sense of ownership of what was being performed, and this affected the aesthetic on several levels, all the way down to the dramaturgy of the moment (Lord, 2000). One can relate this sense of ownership of the material to the produsage concept, as the term includes the

possibility of improving an existing content through collective and sustained expansion, resulting in “constantly changing, permanently, mutable bodies of work which are owned at once by everyone and no one” (Bruns & Schmidt, 2011, p. 3).

Continuous process and a floating hierarchical structure characterize produsage (Bruns & Schmidt, 2011). This implies that commercial market values cannot dominate, as Picone remarks: “Still, it is an amateur-driven, non-profit way of producing information.” (Picone, 2011, p. 101). In the Kromosomer project, roles were blurred: “We navigated between creation, procreation, and re-creation without prior agreement, as did all sorts of participants.” (Sousa & Dahlsveen, 2012, p. 430). We focused on a shared creative process and not consumption. There was no work schedule, only the absolutely unavoidable deadlines and performance times. Kairos were cultivated over chronos (Nyrmes, 2002).



**Figure 8: The Storytelling installations, Eupalinos Ugajin, 2012.**

**A remix of the Attganger avatar with artifacts of his own creation.**

If we go back to the storytelling situation, however, we can discover factors that extend beyond the term produsage as the collective highlights someone who has the talent and knowledge to level information up to an aesthetic experience to manage the community's knowledge (Lord, 2000). “The project’s initiative and input did not arise from an information need, but had an inherent power to create and the desire to seize the world with a rich multivocal language, to inspire aesthetic experiences.” (Sousa & Dahlsveen, 2012, p. 430).

This was a project sponsored by the Norwegian arts council. Artists were paid to create the framework that supported the shared creative process. These professionals worked with the same kind of commitment that they dedicate to any art project. “The paradox and the tension was that they gave up any ownership as soon as an artistic contribution was made.” (Sousa & Dahlsveen, 2012, p. 431).



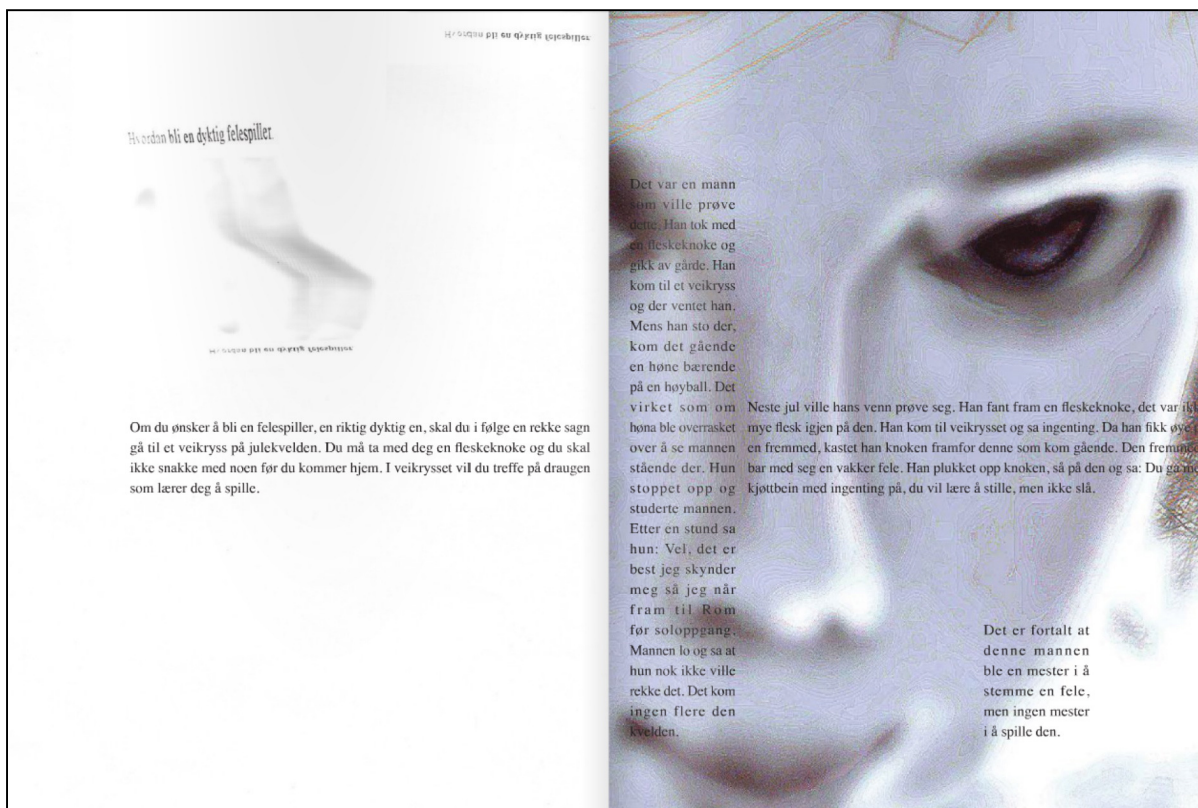


Figure 9: Kromosomer Magazine, screenshot of the booklet published on issuu: [http://issuu.com/thereseee/docs/kmmm\\_issuu](http://issuu.com/thereseee/docs/kmmm_issuu)

#### 4. Dramaturgy

A story is often understood as a structure that moves linearly and cognitively. This structure does not function in our process, as it operates on a different temporality. A traditional story does not need to be linear, as is demonstrated in Homer's Iliad. The story<sup>13</sup> begins not ‘where the history begins’, with the gods in a party on Olympus, where the chronology of the story starts. Instead, the Iliad begins with Achilles’ rage that first occurs far out in the chronology. Alber, et al. promote the “unnatural narratology,” one that breaks with the mimetic, that looks at the story as it moves beyond what is perceived as possible, in which the stories “may radically deconstruct the anthropomorphic narrator, the traditional human character, and the minds associated with them, or they move beyond real-world notions of time and space, thus taking us to the most remote territories of conceptual possibilities.” (Alber, Iversen, Nielsen, & Richardson, 2010, p. 114).

The project is synthetic; it moves outside time and space, yet it is not completely without a mimetic function. The legends, as mentioned earlier, are framed by everyday life. Mimesis can be understood as something that gives names to things. This means that the language in itself is a witness of truth (Nyrcnes, 2002). As an example, in our project, we linked avatars to descriptions of characters directly taken from the legends, as additional information. We could have gone further than we did, by

<sup>13</sup> According to narratology there is a difference between history and story. History is a chronology of events, while a story is structured by a plot.

specifying where and when the meeting with ‘the others’ took place, which legends often provide. In this way we gave a sense of truth to the experience of the avatars.

A dramaturgy can have four angles, according to Gladsø, et al. – text, time, space, and body (Gladsø, Gjervan, Hovik, & Skagen, 2005). In our project the body was the primary approach. Characters drawn from the legends formed the basis for the avatar, which in turn formed the basis for further creations like texts and images. Here space and time is revoked and the dramaturgical orientation point, the body, requires a different dramaturgy than the classical Aristotelian one.

Richard Schechner sketches three different approaches to a performance, three different traditions that affect the practitioner's work and the meeting with the audience, in our case participants (Schechner, 1981). Aristotelian dramaturgy rooted in ancient times is an aesthetic based on competition. In the traditional dramaturgy where it is built up in relation to ‘who is the best principle’ (who is the best poet, who is the best actor) the community has received a “judgmental” role: “Critics must and spectators often do, rank performances in relation to other performances, even separating out within a given performance the ‘good’ from the ‘bad’” (Schechner, 1981). The aesthetics need not be built up after that principle, according to Schechner. He mentions two other principles. One is the Japanese Noh theatre. Here the performance is a kind of meeting place: “So close and immediate is the relationship between the performers and the spectators that if the audience is noisy the costumes are changed at last minute.” (Schechner, 1981). The costumes are changed to appease the public. The audience must be familiar with the form and content to bring meaning out of what is happening, and the performer must constantly adapt to the audience level.

Schechner is also referring to Hinduism’s fifth Veda, or the principle of *rasa*. A performance can be composed by the image of sharing a meal. Each element is composed with the intention of creating participation of all parties. The performer stands out as one that ‘prepares’ and the listener is a participant: “A successful performance is one where both the levels of skill (preparers) and understanding (partakers) are high and equal. If the partaker expects more than the preparer can deliver, the performance is inadequate; if the preparer does more than the partaker can savour, the performance is wasted.” (Schechner, 1981).

*Rasa*, which in short can be translated to spices, is the vocabulary of a performance, which aims to facilitate a transformation (Schwartz, 2004). *Rasa* begins with an emotional personal experience (*bhava*) leading to a transformation and then the possibility to express this transformation: “*Rasa* is at once an inner and outer quality as the object of taste, the taste of the object, the capacity of the taster to taste that taste and enjoy it, the enjoyment, the tasting of the taste. The psychophysiological experience of tasting provided a basis for a theory of aesthetic experience...” (Schwartz, 2004, p. 9).

In *Kromosomer*, the principle of *rasa* is the closest to how we can define the dramaturgy of this project: through avatars, installations, and information, we arranged for the participants themselves to create a “meal” based on their own aesthetic. Participants were given a series of “pulses” (*bhava*) that led them to self-expression.

Figure 10 is a virtual photography made by Deborah Lombardo. By combining different elements and information from the project, she created a new story. The title of the image refers to information given, connected to the installation *Surekallen*, mentioned earlier. Yet one does not need this information to discover a story in the photo. Based on different elements, she created her own story.



Figure 10: Paid, Deborah Lombardo aka Harbor Galaxy, 2012. A mix of the Surekallen and the Attganger stories.

## 5. Metaphors

The metaphor is a stylistic figure of speech, mentioned by Aristotle in "Poetics." One can include it in two different disciplines: Poetry and Rhetoric. It serves two functions, one creative and the other ornamental: "The second seeks to persuade men by adorning discourse with pleasing ornaments, it is what emphasizes discourse in its own right. The first seeks to re-describe reality by the roundabout route of heuristic function." (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 291).

However the metaphor also seems to have deep roots in our consciousness, as I. A. Richards remarks. Our thoughts are always making comparisons, in a way one could say we always think two things at once and our thought creates an interaction between them, and that is the way a metaphor occurs (Ricoeur, 2004). The metaphor is not a way of replacing a thought or word with another; it is not a substitution. It entails an interaction between two concepts. This juxtaposition takes something from each one and creates a new concept. It becomes a whole and cannot be replaced or said in any other way.

The metaphor can be seen as a bridge between old and new knowledge, as one activates a number of specific connotations in this juxtaposition between the two concepts. It works as a filter that promotes specific properties (Hansen & Holmgaard, 1997). "The girl is a rose." This is a metaphor cliché. The comparison accentuates some properties in detriment of others, but it also evokes something latent in us (Sousa & Dahlsveen, 2012, pp. 431-432). When we see the concept – "The girl is a rose" – we do not think that she is red and has thorns (Hansen & Holmgaard, 1997).

“In this way metaphor confers an ‘insight’. Organizing a principal subject by applying a subsidiary subject to it constitutes, in effect, an irreducible intellectual operation, which informs and clarifies in a way that is beyond the scope of any paraphrase” (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 101).

This requires knowledge, ability and talent to generate new insights; one cannot expect that a metaphor should occur by itself by simply juxtaposing any "two concepts" (Sousa & Dahlsveen, 2012, p. 432).

According to Nyrces (2006), artistic research has to do with rhetoric, because it has more to do with space and landscape than a temporal process where we “organize our understanding of what is happening in time” (Nyrces 2006, p. 12). When we started this project we had no clear definition of where we would start or finish. We entered the project in a topological way, experiencing the landscape as it arose in front of us:

*“One does not stress fixed starting points or method or thesis; one stresses that research is a dynamic process, constantly moving around, getting to know a topology of the art. Finally, according to rhetoric, artistic research is best understood as not being pure emotion. Rather it is to be looked upon as analytical work embedded in fantasy and emotions” (Nyrces 2006, p. 21).*

The virtual world, however, is not completely imaginary, but is still “not fully based in solid physicality” either (Morie, 2007, p. 127). Simulation makes it possible to experience this abstract world, consisting of bits and ruled by conditional behaviors, experiencing it in a metaphorical way, making the metaphor a fundamental way to interact with the computer. Windows, folders and trash bins are metaphors fundamental to the design of digital interaction (Murray, 2012).

For Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors are based on bodily experience, considering that the ordinary conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical – the way we think, what we experience and what we do every day is, for these authors, a matter of metaphor. They claim that a significant part of our concepts are rooted in our physical and cultural experience and organized in terms of spatial metaphors: up/down, in/out, forward/backward. We say we “feel down” or “in love” or that we “look forward” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2002).

Much in the same way, when we drag items on our “desktop” we are merely providing commands to the computer.

*“As regards the avatar, these metaphors are further extended, enabling one to feel as if she can step into the computer and fully experience the virtual environment. In fact, this metaphorical dimension of the virtual body enables a poetic appropriation of this kind of corporality” (Sousa & Dahlsveen, 2012, p. 432).*

## 6. Conclusions

Legends try to assimilate and give symbolic value to the meaningless. They can be faced as sublimation. In their own way, they attempt to name the prenominal: the one that looks “different,” the not-normal, the other, the abject, something outside both subject and object, prior to the subconscious, something primitive not yet semiotized.

However, by using avatars in the metaverse, one can experience the embodiment of “the other.” This can be a process of actually inhabiting alterity, which may provide new tools to extend the language that can handle the feeling of meaninglessness.

Because they are unprecedentedly customizable, Second Life avatars enable residents to become the designers of their own avatars, making embodiment an aesthetical experience that is in fact a creative one. By distributing its avatars freely and making them modifiable, the Kromosomer project promoted a different kind of relation between artists and public. Instead of contemplation, we proposed a shared creative process, not only in the embodiment and design of the avatars, but also in the distributed creativity springing through the project as derivative work of the unfinished artifacts delivered. By creating new content, users become producers as well, thus making us all *producers*.

One can find in this process much in common with oral tradition, which can be defined as a cultural storage that is readily available to anyone within a given community, resulting in a distributed dramaturgy in the development of the story — each individual can always contribute something to the ongoing process. In the Kromosomer project, this could mean actually taking part in the story, as producers could literally go into another world. Just as in legends, this was an exceptional event framed by ordinary life.

Embodiment on this virtual world, however, has a metaphorical dimension, not only because of the ubiquity of metaphor in our computer interactions, but also because the metaphor arises from something basic in our consciousness – our thoughts making comparisons, not as substitution, but as the concurrence between two concepts, filtering specific connotations, producing particular insight and in this way fulfilling a poetic function.

*“Following from these general metaphorical attributes of the computational medium, it hardly needs to be re-asserted that the virtual bodies that reside within the metaverse too are metaphorical bodies and therefore a body of expression and language” (Sousa C. , 2012, p. 155).*

Thinking of avatars as body/language entities, open to experimentation and possibility by offering them copy-enabled, transferable, and most importantly transformable, creators and audience exchanged roles along the course of this project, thus becoming partners in a shared creative and poetic flux (Sousa & Dahlsveen, 2012, p. 434).

In the Kromosomer project we were free from time and space, we followed the strategy of thought, pursuing new creative meetings between such diverse concepts as folk legends and metaverse avatars, blurring the frontiers between professional artists and amateurs. By juxtaposing different disciplines and interpretations, we achieve a poetic function: “In service to the poetic function, metaphor is that strategy of discourse by which language divests itself of its function of direct description in order to reach the mythic level where its function of discovery is set free” (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 292).

This project opened us to an entirely new possibilities and ways of working within artistic production.

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