

## Broadcast Culture Meets Role-Playing Culture

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*Abstract: The production Sanningen om Marika is a rare example of a production that combines traditional broadcast culture with the participative culture fostered primarily within the larp community in the Nordic countries. Swedish television collaborated with The Company P to produce this alternate reality multiplatform media production. The result was a spectacular and controversial production offering online and live action role-playing experiences in parallel with traditional TV drama. This article focuses on the differences between the production cultures of two companies, and how it affected the experience they produced together.*

On October 29th, 2007, one of the major tabloid newspapers in Sweden, *Expressen*<sup>1</sup>, topped its first page with the heading “*Sanningen om Marika – Irresponsible by SVT.*” In the article, the TV reviewer Britta Svensson dealt judgement on the first airing of *Sanningen om Marika* – a drama series and a faked real-time debate sent in Swedish broadcast television the evening before. Criticising in particular the claim that Swedish Security Service (Säpo) covers up the fact that a lot of people disappear in Sweden, she forcibly expressed the opinion that “*it is completely irresponsible by Swedish Television to blur the border between fiction and reality*”. But *Sanningen om Marika* was not only a television series, it was also a reality game that lasted over a month, played both on the net and in the real world. A month later one of the participants wrote, in reviewing the experience: “*A wonderful experience on the borderline between fiction and reality. I see an underlying message that is true, but written in through the fiction to create a context and a complete picture. A creative way to tell a story, to get through with a message.*”

*Sanningen om Marika*<sup>2</sup> was one of very few experiments to marry traditional broadcast culture with the participation culture fostered in the Nordic countries, primarily within the larp community. The production was made in collaboration between Sveriges television (SVT) and the Company P, which also produced the *Prosopopeia* larps - *Prosopopeia Bardo 1: Där vi föll* and *Prosopopeia Bardo 2: Momentum* (Montola & Stenros 2006; Jonsson, Montola et al 2006; Jonsson, Montola et al 2007; Stenros, Montola et al 2007). The cultural differences could not have been larger – SVT being the oldest and most prestigious television media in Sweden with a reputation of objective reporting and civic education, and P a very young, small, and quite anarchistic company relying partially on volunteers in their productions. The result was a spectacular and controversial production that offered larp experiences in parallel with traditional TV viewing.

With the support of both SVT and P, we have had the opportunity to study this production closely. Through participatory studies, interviews with the participants as well as the organisers, and an online survey, we are in the process of creating a picture of how this production came about, what its goals were, and how this came through in the final result and the participants’ experiences. In this article we peek behind the curtain, focusing on the meeting between SVT and P and the

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<sup>1</sup> News item published by *Expressen* (2007): “Sanningen om Marika – Oansvarigt?” [www.expressen.se/noje/tvsajten/1.902787/sanningen-om-marika-oansvarig](http://www.expressen.se/noje/tvsajten/1.902787/sanningen-om-marika-oansvarig) (Accessed on 22nd of January 2008)

<sup>2</sup> The *Sanningen om Marika* (2007) production had two teams, one working at The Company P and the other at the SVT. The Company P: Martin Ericsson (creative director), Andie Nordgren (producer, technical lead), Christopher Sandberg (executive producer), Adriana Skarped (lead actor, designer), Martin Brodén (run-time actor), Åke Lindén (avatar actor), Elge Larsson (artist, writer, actor), Emil Boss (assistant actor), Alexander Graff (lead art design), Victoria Henriksson (lead artist), Anders Muammar (scenography), Ludvig Moritz (comic art), Karim Muammar and Jesper Berglund (design, writing), Staffan Jonsson (technical lead), Johan Persson (mobile tech lead developer), Jonas Henriksson (developer), Andreas Dahlström (technical advisor). Kindergarten, strike team Stockholm: Tom Olsson Liljehom, Ki Henriksson, Johan Nilsson, Joakim Sandström, and Torbjörn Öberg Strike team Göteborg: Petter Karlsson, Marcus Brissman and Jon Back. Moderators: Tomb Svalborg, Herman Ferner, SVT: Jonas Sjöqvist, Sasha Becker, Mirja Thurestedt, Lennart Jäkel, Niklas Fransson and Moa Millgård (actors), Anders Weidemann (screenplay), Martin Schmidt (director), Niclas Karpenty (filming), Kurt Bergren (filming), Per Norberg (filming), Peter Bergström and Christian Gyllensten (sound), John Carlsson (debate host), Eva Rados (web editor in chief), Martin Brundin, Marcus Puren and Marianne Lindekrantz (editing), Krister Lindell (scenography), Tobias Marberger (music), Christina Åberg (graphics), Hans G Andersson (web producer), Magnus Johansson (web), Sanna Verner-Carlsson (press), Jenny Rådelöv Harrysson (script continuity), Sussi Johnsson (image producer), Richard Jarnhed (director), Susanna Boonyai, Richard Jarnhed and Helena Stjärnström (script editors), Pär Brundin (casting), Daniel Lägersten (project manager), Christian Wikander (publisher). Swedish Institute for Computer Science / Interactive Institute: Jonas Söderberg (actor), Daniel Sundström and Henrik Berggren (developers). Eng. “The Truth About Marika”.

differences in the production cultures of the two companies. Other factors, which are not addressed here, but which probably also affected the interaction are the prototypical technology used, the width of the targeted audience, and the quality of the drama series. We are still in the process of evaluating the participant experience, and that work will be reported at a later stage. As researchers not involved in the actual production, our ambition is to provide an outsider's view.

## **Background**

*Sanningen om Marika* drew primarily on the experiences from *alternate reality games*. According to Jane McGonigal, an ARG is

an interactive drama played out in online and real spaces, taking place over several weeks or months, in which dozens, hundreds or thousands of players come together online, form collaborative social networks, and work together to solve a mystery or problem [...] that would be absolutely impossible to solve alone. (McGonigal 2004).

An ARG uses techniques such as fake websites, phone calls from game characters, and staged events in the real world to create a fictive game story that looks and feels very much like reality, and invites the participants to take active part in the story, causing them to feel more capable, confident, expressive, engaged and connected in their real lives (McGonigal 2004; McGonigal 2006; IGDA ARG SIG 2006). By using real-world historic facts, rumours, and events within the game story an ARG can become an immensely rich experience even with limited resources – at least compared to computer games where every single part of the world needs to be modelled or historical larps where costumes have to be sewn and castles built.

ARGs have often been used as advertisement campaigns. Examples include the archetypical ARG *The Beast*<sup>3</sup> used to market the movie *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* (2001) and the more recent *The Art of the Heist*<sup>4</sup> used to market a new Audio A3 model.

The main inspiration for SVT (Lägersten 2007) in the case of *Sanningen om Marika* was the television show *ReGenesis*, a Canadian television production that was combined with an ARG. This production centred on the scientists of a fictional biotechnical scientific organisation. The game was primarily an online clue hunt, in which the fictional characters sometimes contacted the players through email and phone, but players were also sent on missions in the real world. Originally broadcasted in Canada, it has since also been produced for European and American television audiences.

The main inspiration for P was their two previous pervasive larp productions, *Prosopopeia Bardo 1: Där vi föll* and *Prosopopeia Bardo 2: Momentum*. They were staged in Stockholm as part of the IPerG<sup>5</sup> project. In contrast to *ReGenesis*, these games were primarily staged in the real world and required intense involvement by the participants. The participants took on roles as ghosts that re-entered the world of the living through possessing the participants. This model of role-taking

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<sup>3</sup> Also known as *The A.I. Web Game*. The game was a promotion for *A.I.* The film was Stanley Kubrick's unfinished project, and was directed by Steven Spielberg for DreamWorks.

<sup>4</sup> *The Art of the Heist* was an advertising campaign for Audi which merged adverts with online gaming elements, in which people had to actively search for content across several media formats to piece together clues regarding a fictional robbery. [www.mckinney-silver.com/A3\\_H3ist](http://www.mckinney-silver.com/A3_H3ist)

<sup>5</sup> Integrated Project on Pervasive Gaming. [www.pervasive-gaming.org](http://www.pervasive-gaming.org)

required participants to role-play on multiple levels; they had to both role-play versions of themselves that believed that it was possible to be possessed, as well as the ghost.

A common strand between these two productions was that both had a serious theme and a certain ideological and political depth. *ReGenesis* often addressed social, political and ethical topics related to the science at hand. In *Momentum*, the central theme dealt with the meaning of activism in a conformist society and its motivations and cost. The ghost characters of the participants were all dead revolutionaries; their motivations and goals varied, but they all shared a strong desire for change. Consequently, the narrative and the gameplay were in both cases complex and multi-faceted, demanding much from the spectators and participants alike.

But apart from this, the differences were vast. Where *ReGenesis* was largely based on fictional content fabricated by the game designers and sought out by the participants, the *Prosopopeia* productions relied to a very large extent on real-world history and events. Where *ReGenesis* was largely played online, the *Prosopopeia* larps were primarily physical real-world events. Where *ReGenesis* primarily relied on the puppet masters staging the game for the participants, the *Prosopopeia* games were an interactive role-play experience where both game masters and participants took part, and both could influence the development of the storyline. Finally, where *ReGenesis* was a massive game tailored to support millions of participants, the *Prosopopeia* games had only 12 and 30 participants, respectively.

### ***Sanningen om Marika***

*Sanningen om Marika* could be described as a trans-medial production – a production spanning several media types. The creators called it a “*participation drama*” (SVT, 2007a), indicating the intent to get the audience to actively participate in the storyline. In many ways it was a unique attempt at pervasive entertainment, encouraging the participants to imagine and *immerse into the fiction as if it was reality* rather than just engage in a game.

The game showed its kinship with both *ReGenesis* and *Prosopopeia*. As in *ReGenesis*, a televised drama series provided the hub for the storyline, explaining the background and developing the fictional world of the story. As in the *Prosopopeia* productions, the participants were encouraged to “*pretend that it was real*”; offering a role-play experience in which you played a subset of yourself with a slightly different view of reality. To make it possible to at the same time watch *Sanningen om Marika* as a TV viewer and participate in an intense role-play experience, the game offered multiple layers of participation with gradually intensifying immersion and influence over the storyline. The *Conspirare* website ([www.conspirare.se](http://www.conspirare.se)) offered the hub for participation. It consisted of a forum, a chat, and a blog. The third core component of the production was a debate program aired weekly directly after the drama series. This program, which was recorded a day before it was aired, served as a means to connect the fictional drama series (recorded a year in advance) to the ongoing game.

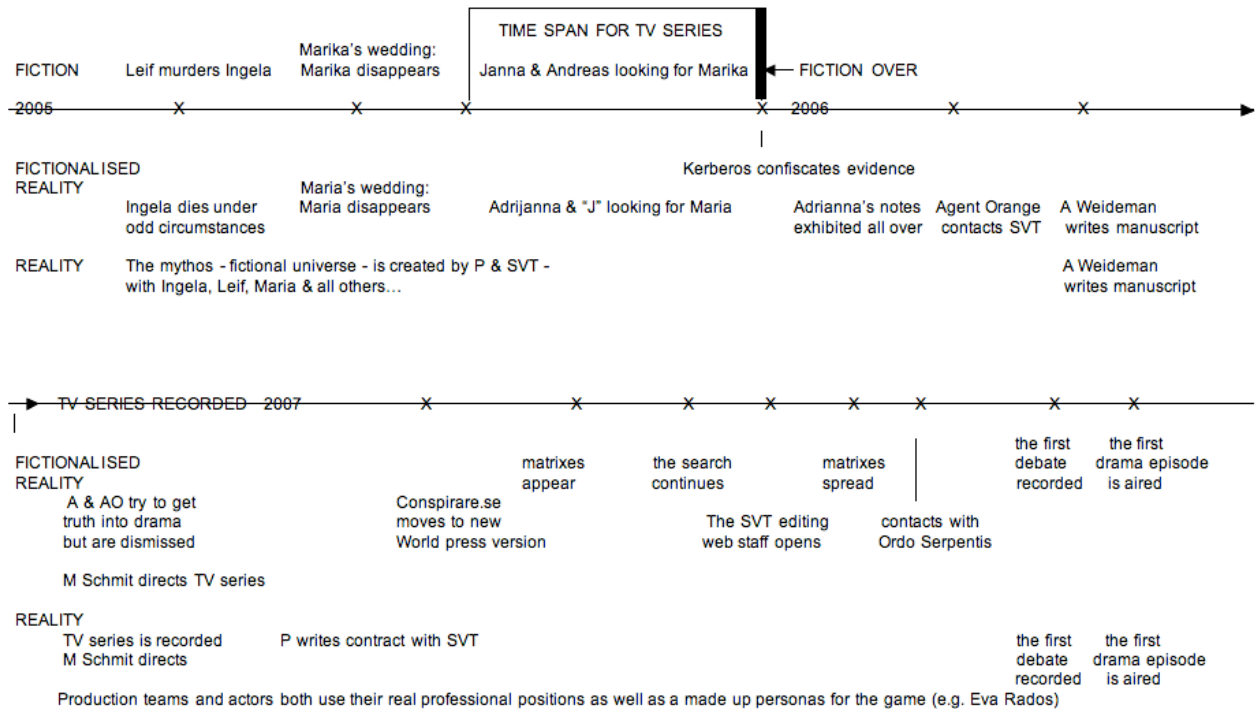
The real world participation in the game was primarily organised through a separate website for a fictional secret society named Ordo Serpentis. The participants were encouraged to enlist in the society, which would send them on different missions and tasks in order to rise in rank within the society. The game also contained on-line puzzles and scheduled events in the real world as well as in an on-line virtual world.

In the line of *ReGenesis* and the *Prosopopeia* productions, *Sanningen om Marika* took on a serious theme. In this production, the focus was on people who disappear and the potential explanations why. A theme throughout the television series – and the game – was the possibility that people

actually may choose to disappear, to live a secret life outside a society that they have begun to experience as oppressive.

## Fictional universe

The diegetic fictional universe in *Sanningen om Marika* consisted of two back stories – a fictional drama and a fictionalised reality – with several sub-stories and fictional conflicts (see figure 1).



**Figure 1. Timeline.** Timeline for fiction and fictionalised reality presented at conspirare.se in October 2007. Translations and reality timeline added by the author.

The drama series was an outspoken fiction, a five-episode television series. The fictionalised reality was communicated as reality – in the beginning only by Adrijanna, Agent Orange and Anty, but as part of the unfolding story, SVT became convinced that Maria had existed and disappeared so towards the end of the series SVT also communicated this as reality. Both of these back stories were part of the diegesis and in fact fictional. Apart from the fictional disappearance of Maria, the fictionalised reality used the real background of the production, such as including the recording of the drama series and the true names of the directors and several other central characters.

The fictionalised reality centred on 'Maria', an allegedly real person who had disappeared. Her childhood friend Adrijanna started to look for her, suspecting that she had disappeared voluntarily, but with help from an underground organisation that Adrijanna mistrusted. As part of her search, she created a website and put up posters with a photo of her friend, trying to recruit help. Her efforts were spotted by the SVT production team, who were in the process of planning a drama series around missing people. They contacted Adrijanna to learn more about her story, and to use some of it as inspiration for their production.

When the drama series had been filmed, Adrijanna got to see the result and became very upset. SVT clearly believed that she had made the story up, but they had still used very much of it in the TV series (even the names were only slightly changed). Adrijanna started to tour Sweden, telling people

that the planned TV series actually was based on Maria's disappearance. SVT denied this, claiming that Adrijanna was making it all up and that Maria had never existed.

This conflict formed the background for the game – the participants were recruited by Adrijanna to help her in her search and to prove SVT wrong. The first participants were recruited during the summer of 2007. They signed up at [conspirare.se](http://conspirare.se), and became the Conspirare crew; participants of an ARG who sought out, as well as placed, clues on the Internet and in the real world. One week before the TV series started, the crew uncovered the Ordo Serpentis website and decided to infiltrate the secret society.

When the TV show was aired, SVT had started to become unsure about the “truth” – was Adrijanna really making it all up, or was there a grain of truth in her story? To address the controversy, they publicly announced that the TV series would be accompanied by a debate program, in which this issue would be discussed. The debate was created to tie the TV drama and the real time game events together and was very authentically staged. Some actors were recruited to “play themselves” in their official roles (as a psychologist, dentist and even as a police spokesperson, for example). Starting from the first airing of the drama series and debate, SVT started to investigate the case on their own and reporting their own findings, as well as those done by the Conspirare crew in the debate. Eventually, the participants, Adrijanna and SVT managed to uncover the “truth”.

In addition to this main storyline, the story had several subplots, such as the story of Maria's dead mother who had been mentally ill, and her friend Mr. E from her younger days. One subplot that became very important was the Kerberos surveillance company that opposed Adrijanna's and the Conspirare crew's investigations, and the semi-public welfare organisation Cityinitiativet in Gothenburg. Both were exposed as having committed serious crimes as part of the debate programs. This subplot was very realistic and included faked company websites and logotypes, and representatives from both companies were interviewed in the debate program. Again, it should be stressed that all of this content was fictional; neither Kerberos nor Cityinitiativet were genuine.

### ***Modes of Participation***

*Sanningen om Marika* offered multiple modes of participation. The SVT versus Adrijanna conflict was staged by parallel web sites and chats that communicated the different views of the “truth”. On [conspirare.se](http://conspirare.se), the participants were expected to stay within the fiction, to “pretend that it was real” and to discuss the game's storyline and mysteries. By contrast, the SVT chat offered a certain degree of off-game discussion, even though the site as such was kept entirely within the fictional context.

Game activities in the real world were organised in two different ways. Conspirare was used to invite to and organise larger events (such as the final demonstration outside the TV building in Gothenburg). Some events were also staged in the online virtual world *Entropia Universe*.

Ordo Serpentis focused on self-organised play in smaller groups. When participants signed up to become part of this secret society, they were asked to form cells and carry out missions together. This part was also technology-supported; the participants were encouraged to download a mobile phone application, which enabled them to read two-dimensional bar codes, “matrixes”, with their camera. In return, the participants would get a mission to perform and document. The documentation (video and photos) were uploaded to Flickr or YouTube and announced on [conspirare.se](http://conspirare.se). Parts were also re-used in the Conspirare blog. Participants could also submit their documentation to SVT, which put it on their web site and selected some of it to show in the debate program. The plot and storylines were held open to a certain extent, so that participants could initiate and influence the story through online role-play and larping.

A final component of the production consisted of a puzzle-solving quest. In the drama series, an SVT character had put in hidden “subliminal messages” that were not visible to the eye, and then they made a special tool available that allowed the participants to watch the entire TV series, step by step, and find these messages. These were puzzles that, when solved, gave a password for yet another site where a subplot could be explored. The purpose of this part of the production was to invite and offer television viewers an easier form of participation through online puzzle-solving, in addition to the physical play offered by Ordo Serpentis and the role-play offered at *conspirare.se*.

### **Production Cultures of Participation Drama**

The project was initiated by SVT, who contracted The Company P as experts in participatory culture. SVT aimed to create a novel format that took off in a television drama that invited “*the audience [...] to step in to the fiction and take part in it in new ways*” (Lägersten 2007) by exploiting the prospects of interweaving pervasive game components.

But P had an outspoken goal to create a *reality game* where the reality outside the game started to effect and intervene with the game. P also had ideological and political goals to develop methods that would assist in the participants’ personal development processes and enable them to question today’s society.

The differences were acknowledged by both parties and created a strong motivation to understand each other’s cultures and languages. They were the focus for many meetings, especially in the beginning of the production process. The target groups ranged from television viewers to experienced role-players aged 17 to 40 years.

### **Two Cultures – Two Methods**

SVT is the oldest Swedish television company with a history reaching back to the 1950’s, when television were a novelty. During recent years, the organisation has undergone major changes. Today, a part of its public service remit is to guarantee a broad range of programs and services via television, Internet and other forms of publication (SVT 2007b). Programs can be watched on the Internet, and the usage of new media (games, chats, program web sites) has increased. The *Sanningen om Marika* team part of the Gothenburg division, one of the seven program production departments throughout Sweden that serve both the regional audience and the national scene. SVT recently moved into a large glass building with modern working areas, located in the old harbour of Gothenburg, on the west coast of Sweden.

During the production, SVT was responsible for the drama series, studio debates, trailers and other marketing activities. SVT also ran a web editorial staff linked to a program webpage. In many respects, the production was uncontroversial and followed ordinary production processes. However, in some respects it was very unusual and unique. Professionals from different departments worked tightly together, and high-level managers took part in the on-the-fly decisions usually carried out at lower levels (Engblom 2007; Lägersten 2007; Wikander 2007).

By comparison, the Company P is a small, newly founded pervasive entertainment company, staffed by professionals experienced in organising larps and other similar productions<sup>6</sup>. P comprised a small flexible organisation employing less than twenty people with overlapping design and production teams. P’s three-room office is situated in a back street in central Stockholm, with black walls and white chalked wooden flooring. The first thing that you notice is a big brown leather

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<sup>6</sup> [www.thecompanyp.com](http://www.thecompanyp.com).

suitcase filled with handwritten pieces of papers, small watercolour paintings, ripped out pages from old books and other interesting pieces of props like electric cords, dice, dolls, feathers used during the *Prosopopeia* larps.

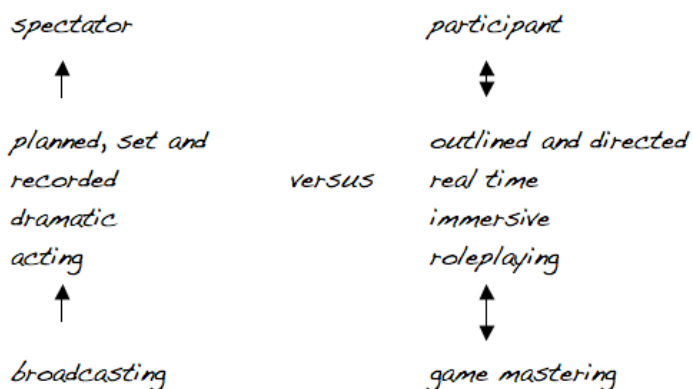
P was in charge of the game design and game mastering, managed interactive actors and forum editorial staff, as well as produced the real life installations and online puzzles. P also produced props, sounds and choreography and subliminal images for key scenes of the drama series, and edited the script for both the series and debates. In a joint research venture with the Swedish Institute of Computer Science and The Interactive Institute, the Company P developed the technology platform that enabled participation on all available media (web sites, forum, chat, mobile application, game) and the orchestration the larp. Two groups of participants also served as volunteer game masters, one in Stockholm and one in Gothenburg.

The teams thus differed not only in their physical environment and size, but also in societal context and history. As discussed previously, they also had quite different goals for the production.

The two teams cooperated primarily through weekly phone meetings. Due to the geographical distance between the teams, only a few physical meetings were held. The original aim was to move together during the intense phase of the production (when the TV series was aired), but this could not be realised for economical reasons. An online web portal was used in the early phase of the project, but technical problems made it less useful in the end. As all team members could not participate in all meetings, information was sometimes lost or did not reach all people involved (Rados 2007).

### Two Production Cultures – Two Views of the Audience

The processes of broadcasting and role-playing are quite different. Figure 2 illustrates the differences in the main work processes. A broadcasted show is a one-way communicative activity, and differs a great deal from the multi-directional activity of role-playing. Broadcast ingrains a view of the audience as *spectators*. The television viewer is limited in influence and interaction with the storyline. The program is seen as a performance, with a set narrative and plot. A director uses a written manuscript to direct and stage employed actors to implement the show. The performance is recorded and broadcasted to an audience. The result is a controlled, one-directional and easily broadcasted product.



**Figure 2: Broadcast and role-playing production.**

On the other hand, in role-playing culture the individuals taking part are seen as *participants* and co-creators. Role-playing games, like other forms of interactive narrative, represent a fundamental



blurring of the distinction between producer and consumer, creator and audience, and storyteller and viewer. Within the rules, the participants may improvise freely; their choices shape the direction and outcome of the games (Rilstone 2000).

The role-playing producer stages the scene, crafts the rules, and plans the core narratives, plots and characters. The producer is prepared for anything; participants often respond in surprising ways that can interfere with plans for later scenes, causing a demand for narratives, plots or characters to be changed, developed and carried out in unforeseen directions. This enables the creation of a planned but open-ended, interactive and multi-directional experience, played out online in chats, forums and in the physical world by larping in streets, parks, and forests.

These differences made cooperation complicated, as there was not a full agreement on what the production was – a recorded performance with Swedish television’s quality requirements, or an open role-playing game, in which immersion in the game and a good player experience were the most important things.

### **Case Example: The Debates**

The televised debates staged after each show are a very good example of the conflicts between the two production cultures. Early on, the companies had agreed on the goals of the debate. The intent was to exhibit and contextualise the game for television viewers and to give the game participants the chance to appear on national television. However, when it was time to start producing the debate SVT recruited a director internally, who had other ideas for the debate. From P’s point of view, this had a negative impact on the participatory elements of the game.

He would not bring in participants into the studio, and selected only a few video clips and photos from the participants. He had an explicit goal to produce “good television”, which demanded a degree of quality he didn’t feel the participant material had. Still, the original idea of creating a real-time debate was retained, and his re-planning of the debate made it a highly realistic side story to the television drama. He used his role-playing experience and game mastered the actors separately, which strongly contributed to create a convincing fictionalised reality. This was a masterful move, and made the debate one of the most novel parts in the production, but it also lessened its relevance as a connection between the game and the TV show.

P worked very actively to include participants, following the design of the game but also partly to cover up for the debate’s low ambitions on participation. They quickly published participant material on Conspirare: video clips, pictures, and photos that the participants themselves made available through YouTube, Flickr and other well known media applications. This made participation quick, relevant and easily accessible, though with very varied quality.

### ***Interaction with the Audience***

The term *user generated content* is widely used throughout Swedish Television due to an internal policy that has for several years pushed for “interactivity”. The term implies a view of the audience as users and consumers, and as a source of material, such as pictures, text and audio. An active selection, editing and transformation process of this source material enables the TV broadcaster to maintain full control over the overall quality and plot narrative as it is broadcast back to the audience.

By contrast, P aimed to foster *participatory culture*<sup>7</sup>. Although the game part of *Sanningen om Marika* had a clear producer, the participants were expected to co-create the game and storyline together with the game designers. The main mechanism worked to create a joint role-playing experience in which both the participants and organisers took part, and in which the roles were by no means were fixed – as the participants got more involved in the game, they also gradually took on more and more of an organisers’ role. The differences in attitudes between SVT and P showed up even in the details such as the wordings in blogs and the selection of tools.

## The Blogs

Both companies used text and video blogs to encourage the audience to interact. However, a deeper examination shows large differences in *how* these blogs were used. At the SVT site, the audience was asked to interact by sending in material to certain addresses. An example of the encouragements at the SVT site:

### EDITORIAL DIRECTOR RADOS

I am the editorial director on this site and actively searching for the truth about what happened to Maria Klingbohm. The editorial staff investigates this in cooperation with *Conspirare*, and my blog will keep you updated. By sending e-mail to [marika@svt.se](mailto:marika@svt.se) or putting your own material in the “inbox” you will give us access to your records and information that could help us in our search.<sup>8</sup>

At [conspirare.se](http://conspirare.se), participants could follow and actively participate in online discussions in real time chats and a web forum, try to solve clues and mysteries together, as well as plan and prepare larp events. They were encouraged in a much more concrete way to go to the chat and keep a log, come to the headquarters of the television channel, read matrixes using the mobile phone, pray, and create rituals:

How can I help? Tomorrow we are reaching the end of our journey. You can help us whether you are a Conspirite or a rookie:

- 1) Go to the chat and stay in touch.
- 2) Come to the television building at 7 PM, Pump Street, Gothenburg and show everybody that WE are The Others.
- 3) If already a member, read Matrixes using Urim<sup>9</sup> to strengthen our anti system.
- 4) Think about, pray for, or create a ritual for The Others that we do not take seriously and dismiss in the name of “normality”.

The end is close. The future starts now.

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<sup>7</sup> Here, we use this term in vaguely the same meaning as Interacting Arts does in Haggren, Kristoffer, Larsson, Elge & al forthcoming and less as defined by Jenkins 2006a & 2006b).

<sup>8</sup> All excerpts translated from Swedish to English by the authors.

<sup>9</sup> The mobile phone application.

## The Chats

The chat applications exhibit a similar pattern. What SVT called a “chat” at the SVT site was, in fact, an FAQ. No dates or times were shown and it was not possible to chat live. Instead, you had to send in your question and it would (possibly) appear later together with an answer. The SVT production management reflected on this during the production, but the application could not be changed at that stage. Examples:

Question: You do not know if Ingela Klingbohm is alive or not?

Answer: As far as we know she has not existed.

Question: But then she is a character in your telly series? (I mean, it IS “based on a true story”)[...]

Answer: The drama is not based on a true story. It is based on notes the authors found in town. If Adrijanna says it is the truth then that is up to her.

The chat application at *conspirare.se* was a freeware chat system designed to display who was online in real time. Participants could choose to use their game characters like, “mattlo”, “Tomb” or “markzpot”, choose a different character, or lurk. The application showed the dates and times of contributions, allowed private conversations between participants while chatting, and so forth. It was an immediate and easy-to-use real-time chat. Participants could easily include URLs and photos in their comments, which appeared in less than a second on the screen. This chat required instant moderation and hence P spent approximately 20 hours a day game mastering it.

## Consequences

During the initial phase of the project, the *Sanningen om Marika* production was met with a certain degree of internal scepticism at SVT. The complex game design and narrative puzzled the upper management. The production also planned to encourage its audience to get involved in activities outside the control of SVT, threatening its policies and regulations. The production team had the challenging task of convincing the decision-making bodies at SVT that the show should, could and would be aired and openly marketed. This also served as a “common enemy” that united the two teams.

The management-level attitude at SVT radically changed after an internal workshop six weeks prior to the premiere of the series. At this workshop, an international expert reviewed the planned production and complimented its uniqueness. However, some damage had already been done. The production’s marketing was late, small and muddled.

The joy of this success soon faded, as the underlying conflict in interests between the SVT and P teams surfaced. The most obvious consequence of it was the reshaping of the debates discussed above. After a few weeks on the air, the production fractured, which became visible on the websites. Very different stories were being told, and references between the two sites became sparse. Around the halfway point of the series the two teams had a follow-up meeting and identified the problem, resulting in better integration between the sites during the last few weeks. During the final week of the production, SVT also sent a team to film game action and aired these as part of the debate.

These differences in approach had a large impact. Interaction and contributions from participants were low on anything that looked a part of SVT and high at *conspirare.se*. SVT’s expectations had been high, and there was considerable disappointment at the apparent lack of participant films and

photos, as well as the low activity at the SVT chat and discussion forum. Conspirare.se experienced the exact opposite – the forum grew quickly and constant discussions took place.

Still, not all of the activities coordinated by P were successful. Ordo Serpentis did not gather as many participants as hoped, even though it was constructed to scale. The threshold for participating in Ordo Serpentis was high. The story behind the game was complex, the participants were required to self-organise into groups, the missions were advanced, and on top of this, at least one participant in each group had to download and install a special mobile phone application that would only run on certain types of phones. In addition, the high level of interactive game mastering done at the real-time chat on conspirare.se required the game masters' undivided attention. As a result, the participants at Ordo Serpentis got little reward for the completion of their missions. The effect was that the participants of Ordo Serpentis were mostly the same as the crew that formed the core of Conspirare participants. The game failed to scale above the 100 to 300 players that could be effectively game mastered by more direct means.

## **Conclusions**

*Sanningen om Marika* can be considered a success in many ways. It managed to create a win-win situation for the dedicated participants, for Swedish Television, and for the Company P. Our early analysis of the participants' experience speaks of a totally new and unexpected experience, irrespective of whether the participants were television viewers, experienced online role-players or live action role-players. Swedish Television expanded and challenged their traditional production methods, as well as experimented with traditional formats in new ways to create something novel. P managed to force their ideological and political demands to a great extent and to shake and challenge SVT's norms and rules to design a game that enabled immersive participation. Both had to take bold steps. P had to scale up their design, organisation, and work methods in order to create a large-scale production, and the Swedish Television had to challenge its own production framework as well as the mainstream audience.

The result was not the blockbuster they had hoped for, at least compared to *ReGenesis* which has been aired for several seasons and won prizes. Some of the explicit goals of P and SVT, in particular the goal of creating a very large group of active participants, were not met. There are many and complex reasons for this. In this paper, we have chosen to focus on the production methods, the friction between the two production teams and the effects these had on the result. Other factors that affected the result were the game design, the prototype technology used, and the quality of the drama series. We shall continue our analysis of the production by concentrating on the participant responses to the experience, which will shed more light on these factors.

When we presented this research to the production teams in December 2007, the response was immediate and frank. One of the team members expressed their own view of the production as follows:

A learning process does not start *after* a production like this; it is an ongoing process during the whole production. Of course we have learned a lot from our mistakes and we have already reflected and discussed a lot. The question of production methods was all the time the most difficult of the conditions to relate to. At least we will form only *one* team next time!

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