

## **Kromosomer – an experience in shared creative work and expression**

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**Kromosomer is a storytelling performance that interacted with digital, virtual and social media, using characters from Norwegian legends as a motto to raise questions on alterity: the "other, the not normal, the one that looks "different", which we want to distance ourselves from. The object, something outside the subject and object, prior to the subconscious, something primitive that has not yet manifested itself symbolically.**

### **Introduction**

In the project and performance several artists participated in a "distributed" dramaturgy where contributed equally, but creatively independent. Avatars were created, based on characters from Norwegian legends; they formed the basis for new stories, mainly mediated through pictures which were used on a blog, where readers were challenged to create new stories. These stories were then passed on, either through social media or orally narrated in the performance. Participants were also instigated to record pictures and machinimas. Many of the participants/producers' interpretations were later used in the physical performance, some assembled into a video that was projected on the walls, others printed to form part of an installation.

### **Background**

The background material for the project was collected from traditional oral Norwegian legends (sagn). Folklorist Linda Dégh states that "legend contextualizes" and interprets belief (Dégh, 1996). Belief is the core of the legend, and not only that - the science (knowledge) is a necessary counterweight when the legend occurs. It is as if life stumbles along the way, discover something and moves on. In legends there is a clash between reason and faith.

The logic, the meaning is broken down because we lose distinction between subject and object, "I" and "the others". Object, as Julia Kristeva describes it, is prior to the subconscious, it is an encounter with something primitive that has not yet manifested itself symbolically (Kristeva, 1982). Legends are already a way of trying to assimilate and give symbolic value to the meaningless. Often the

legends portray the meeting with "the other" as a physical one, but by using avatars in the metaverse one can experience the embodiment of "the others", thus creating a process of actually inhabiting alterity, possibly providing new tools to extend the language that can handle the feeling of meaninglessness.

### **The avatars**

Jacquelyn Ford Morie notes that 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). Second Life avatars are unprecedentedly customizable, giving its residents the ability to design themselves, making embodiment not only an aesthetic experience but also a creative one.

Legends added a pretext for the exploration of a different kind of body. Through avatar manipulation in virtual environments, one can actually experience the embodiment of "the other". Yee and Bailenson, who studies this process of inhabiting alterity, argue that "immersive virtual environments provide the unique opportunity to allow individuals to directly take the perspective of another" (Yee et al., 2009), and even suggest the possibility of this embodied perspective taking having an impact on the reduction of negative stereotyping (Yee et al., 2009). With the free distribution of the Kromosomer modifiable avatars we aimed to promote residents' disposition to have an active and creative part in the process of their own avatars design, as well as in the embodiment of the story itself as a character.

### **Creative collaboration**

The free distribution of the Kromosomer modifiable avatars promoted a different kind of relation between artists and public, in this project, that might stride against traditional roles. Instead of expecting a solely contemplative audience to an artistic performance, we proposed a shared creative process. Once the avatars were distributed they became avatars of others, inhabited by different identities that could take them literally as the legends' avatars or radically transform them and use them

to perform entirely new stories. This process relates to Axel Bruns' concept of produsage, as a conventional sense of production no longer applies 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, 2010).

### **Metaphores**

We call our work process 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). A metaphor is not a substitute but an interaction between two concepts: in their juxtaposition, the metaphors creates something new.

The virtual body is then a metaphorical one and therefore a body of expression and language, open to experimentation and possibility. By offering the avatars copy enable, transferable, and most importantly, transformable, we became more than authors, creators or artists: we were partners in a shared creative flux.

### **Conclusions**

In this project we freed ourselves from space and time, working with what arises in creative meetings between concepts such as legends and metaverse, professional artists and amateurs, different disciplines, different

interpretations, ultimately achieving a poetic function. Kromosomer generated a completely different way of working within artistic production, one in which the frontiers between artist and public are blurred, thus revealing new parameters and consequently new possibilities.

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