

# Tiny Research 01: Notes On Immersion

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Sloppily Larping and Squatting to Combine Multiple Layers of Meaning



Metallica band members James Hetfield and Kirk Hammett being filmed in their studio together with group therapist Phil Towle. Photo by Annamaria DiSanto (2004)

## Squatting

The act of squatting can be seen as a way of approaching a world foreign to oneself by temporarily taking ownership of this given world and/or participating in it without taking fully becoming a part of it.

Squatting as an immersion strategy is relevant in the context CAR TUNING FOR ARCHITECTS, since what we as architects do when we investigate car tuning, is essentially to squat a subculture.

Let us now briefly look at how squatting was widely explored by performance artist and dramaturge Lena Bondesen in her MFA graduation piece at The Danish School of Performing Arts *Something Else Matters* (2021).

In the project a group of performers (the monster squad) met up to reenact scenes from the Metallica documentary *Some Kind of Monster* (2004). The reenactments would generally take place in public spaces, but without any planned or forced interaction with the public. The reenactments were partially filmed, to correspond with the documentary, in which Metallica is also being followed by a camera. The performers each held the role of one of the bandmembers and developed and explored their assigned bandmember in multiple larp (live action role play) reenactments of scenes from the documentary over the course of more than a year. During this time the group of performers slowly began to develop their own group-dynamic and started relating the characters to themselves. Elements from the performer's personal lives and from external sources of inspiration would be included in the LARP. This pulling of multiple layers of meaning into the project was referred to as hijacking.

Performance philosopher and dramaturge Jonas Schnor would include this project in his Ph.D. thesis *Microdramaturgy. Between Practice and Event: A Performance Philosophy* (2022) where he develops the term 'sloppy immersion', to define the porous relationship between performer, character and the original bandmembers of Metallica from the documentary. In the following section I have selected excerpts from Schnor's work, that I find central to understanding how Squatting, larping and sloppy immersion, were consciously and subconsciously used by Bondesen and the other bandmembers.

## Excerpts from Schnor's thesis

### The practice of squatting

"Let me begin by approaching the practice of squatting on philosophical terms. As the name suggests, squatting is an approach to character-work, manuscript, and sources, which operates just like a group of people inhabiting an abandoned

building, making it their living place for a while but without claiming (formal) ownership. Squatting is an anarchic principle, in its original sense as well as performance practice. As a performance practice, squatting is an approach to character, which may very well – like traditional acting approaches – involve interpretation, emotional investment, attention to biographical, situational, and personal detail, but where the emphasis is on squatting the reality of that person and making it your own. It is the practice of inhabiting a reality without formalized ownership, of operationalizing something without the need for correct referencing or perfect correspondence. In fact, non- correspondence is integral to the practice, as the character is enacted without necessarily disguising one's own personal idiosyncratic behavior, look, clothing etc. Furthermore, foreign elements not belonging to the character can be deliberately added, expanding or displacing the character in another direction. Like the squatted building, the 'inhabitation' does not need to correspond or adhere to its 'place of origin.' This approach to reenactment is not done without respect for the person one is squatting, but the respect is enacted through a creative and displacing gesture, of making the person crystallise as themselves – but otherwise." 235

#### Entanglement of the larp and the private

"Everybody knows we are not Metallica; everybody knows that we know we are not Metallica; but does everybody know where the larp self begins and the private self ends? How much, at what times, and to which degrees, is it the larp-personas or the performers doing things? How much of the relational dynamic and energy stems from Metallica and how much from The Monster Squat? In this, through squatting we engendered an affective environment, in which it became deliberately difficult to tell the meta-layers apart." 242

#### Sloppy immersion

"In fact, they [the monster squat] prefer it to be porous, this is their practice, the apparently lazy, incomplete role-playing. What I just described is part of the fiction of the performance; the sloppiness is a deliberate choice." 261

"As an affect, sloppy immersion is the felt sense of multiple layers of reality co-existing simultaneously. For the audience, the Metallica-layer (squatting-in-action), the larp-layer (the fiction of these people squatting), the performer layer (these artists presenting this work) are all there at the same time. In addition, the acting style in squatting can vary between being very much in character, only subtly or momentarily in character, to being somewhat 'yourself' or even something/someone" 261

"What this means is that when 'real-life' reality is allowed to intra-act with the fictional levels, the fictional levels are also allowed to intermingle with 'real-life'

reality. Immersion leaves the confines of an absolute parallel universe. Because it makes the boundaries between realities indiscernible, immersion as an affect expands; the artwork spreads its fictional ecology outwards as it allows the outside to leak into it. This is sloppy immersion: a felt sense of immersion due to the porosity between worlds.” 262

## Squatting for Architects

How can all of this then be used by the architect? First off this is a friendly reminder on how being an architect is always somehow a larp. Through our education we learn mannerisms, language, and taste, that altogether create the architectural persona, a role we can then play in the theater that is architecture. But this is not squatting, since becoming an architect isn't temporary but a complete becoming. Nonetheless this becoming- architect, is still very much a larp, just a very serious one. Due to this seriousness, I would like to suggest that the architect really should remember to take breaks from the architectural being and squat some other characters from time to time. Go on vacation from the architectural larp and become an actor, a salesperson, a citizen or a car tuner. But keep the larp sloppy so the immersion stays porous. In the end we still want to learn – even when on vacation (stressful I know).

Comments and questions: [tinylittleresearch@gmail.com](mailto:tinylittleresearch@gmail.com)

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