Tango for two

Fields notes from a larp experiment

Even Tømte & Tor Kjetil Edland

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"We enter this world alone. We leave it pretty much the same way. And in-between, a dance we call life. Problem is it takes two to Tango. So we look for signs; something to help us to find our perfect partners. A smile, a wave. But we have to be careful; because while some signs can be misinterpreted, others can be missed completely....Some dances you sit out. Others you change partners. The important thing is...you never stop dancing." --Chuck Fishman, *Early Edition*

►The basics: Me and myself

Tango **for two** is a one-evening larp experiment. Two players will act different parts of one character's personality. Either you play the conscious self, or the underlying desires of the person. The two of them work in tandem, each one of them being the dominant part in different phases of the game. Tango for Two is about cooperation and musicality, about compromise and conflict, and about taking and giving away – or losing – control.

We created this game because we wanted to try out new role-playing techniques. The game can also be viewed as an exercise in awareness of your fellow players. Here are our field notes. They should enable you to try it out on your own, if you wish.

Id and **ego** are both parts of the personality of a human being. ego is the **conscious self**, while id is the **underlying desires and wants** of the person. Normally the ego is in control. You talk, discuss, flirt, party and work, but the real life concerns are never far away. When the music changes, the desires rise to the surface. For a short while, they seize control, with the conscious self as a helpless spectator – until they let go and the self regains control once again.

The terms id and ego were popularized by Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis. Those in the know will propably notice some disrepancies between our and Freud's use of the terms. No worries. This larp takes a relaxed approach both to current and former psychological theory.

In Freud's model, the mind consists of three parts: id, ego and superego. In this larp 'superego' does not have a player of its own. Rather, superego is formed in the meeting between id and ego and is the result of their interaction.

►The method: This is how you play

In Tango for Two, each character is played by two players - one assuming the role of the id, the other as ego. Together they form an **individual** (which, ironically, means *indivisible*).

The ego player represent the actual actions of the individual. What she does is what the individual does, and what the other characters can see. The id player's actions represent thoughts and desires. He can also influence the ego player in certain ways:

- whisper suggestions, exclamations or emotions in her ear
- lead her movements
- hold her back
- circle around people, food, or other things you want the individual's thoughts to fluctuate around
- talk to her
- place your hands on her shoulders and speak one sentence out loud. This represents suppressed feelings bubbling up to the surface. This is heard by the *players*, who can choose to incorporate it in the play. The *characters* can choose to notice the feelings represented by the words, but will not hear the actual words being spoken.

The two parts of the individual take turns being in the leading position in different parts of the larp. There will always be a **leading** and a **passive** player in an individual.

The leading player posesses a special privilege: he decides what the individual will do! The passive player is not helpless, however, but can affect the player in control in certain ways.

There are no strict rules defining precisely how id and ego will interact. Use your imagination and do whatever feels right! However, the leading player always has the final control. When ego is leading, id can only make suggestions at best. When id is leding, however, the ego player *has to* obey the id player's commands.

At the start of the game, ego is in control. The control will pass back and forth between the players several times in the course of the larp. Such changes will be signalled with a change in music and lights.

The game should last about two to three hours. Abour halfway through the game, you might have a break. The players can use this opportunity to discuss and make adjustments to the game with their co-player, and give each other feedback about what works and what does not.

At the side of the table, the psychologist and the CEO are having a casual but somewhat restrained conversation about work-related issues. At the same time, their ids are rolling about on the floor, nibbling at each other's ears.

Obviously, we chose tango as the music to represent the id taking control. We also lit red lamps when the tango was playing.

This playing style might feel awkward at first. It might be a good idea to warm up with some drama exercises to
heighten the awareness of one's fellow players, such as these:
. Walk around the room with closed eyes. Try to avoid bumping into each other. If you do, lean lightly against the other player before continuing.
. Lead your partner around the room, always touching each other at one point (finger against finger, elbow against
elbow etc.) Start with one leading the other, then switch roles, before letting leadership flow back and forth. Try to act as one.
. Create a scene to try out the id/ego-interaction. Make all the mistakes you can think of before starting the actual game.

►Characters creation: Plug and play

The players will form pairs and be given characters either as id or as superego of an individual. The two players forming an individual should have certain distinctive characteristics symbolizing their unity, e.g. a similiar piece of clothing. The organizers will give the id players make-up to identify their status.

The players sit down together and generate the individual they will play. This is done by drawing notes from a hat and using the keywords on the notes as a starting point for their imagination.

1) First, each pair of players are randomly **assigned a character concept**. For costuming purposes, you might want to do this in advance.

2) Then, each pair **draws a dysfunction** out of the following:

- Angst
- Low self-esteem
- Selv-obsessed
- Sex fixated
- Confrontative
- Manic
- Jelaous
- Narcissistic
- Social ineptitude
- Lack of empathy

3) and then **draws an id/ego relation** out of the following:

- Supportive
- Dismissive
- Cool
- Warm
- War
- Complementary
- Two of a kind
- Intuitive
- Absorbing

4) Sit down for a few minutes and **discuss with your partners** how you will interpret this in the game.

5) Write your character's name on a note and drop it in a hat. All players **draw one name** from the hat and **combine it with one of the following relations**. If you draw your own name, draw again:

- Love
- Hate
- Compete
- Abuse
- Envy
- Admire
- Protect
- Teach
- Gossip

We used dark face paint to form raccoon-style markings around the eyes of the id players, like the masks of the beagle boys. You might consider giving them white paint on the rest of the face, making them appear more ghostly.

- Despise
- Like
- Entertain
- Irritate
- Dismiss
- Embarrass
- Flirt

6) Discuss openly with all the players the interpretation of this relationship.

7) The id players repeat step 5, but keep it to themselves. This is a **subconscious relation** which is unknown to the ego (but will probably emerge during the game).

Obviously, the faciliators can affect the tone of the game by changing the text on the notes (or even omitting or replacing the dysfunctions with something else).

►The scenario: A party of opposites

Tango for two is mainly about method. This is the scenario we made as a background for the game. It is not vital that you follow this scenario strictly. Ideally, the methods in Tango for two should be playable with a number of different scenarios.

The party: The Labourlove foundation has recieved a large sum of money for a big campaign about harassment in the workplace. The public relations company id+superego has been hired to develop the campagin in cooperation with Labourlove. The newly formed team has just had its first meeting and is gathered for a night of teambuilding and socializing.

Labourlove foundation: An indepentent foundation committed to stopping harassment in the workplace and promoting a diverse and inclusive workplace. The Confederation of Trade Unions, the Confederation of Employers, the Ministry of labour and social inclusion, and the Work Research Institute is represented on the board of directors, and Her Royal Highness princess Mette-Marit is the patron of the foundation. Labourlove is soon to launch a country-wide campaign against harassment. The time has come for a powerful push for inclusion!

id+ego: This is where dreams come true - both for the customer and for those who work there. The employees at id+superego are young, creative and ambitious players in the top league of the PR industry. As long as the contract lasts, and hopefullt even a bit longer.

Character concepts: Distribute these randomly among the players. If there are not enough players for all the characters, make sure the teambuilding coach, the CEO and and the project leader is present.

- CEO (id+ego)
- Communications expert (id+ego)
- Art director (id+ego)
- Project leader (Labourlove)
- Psychologist (Labourlove)
- Office drone (Labourlove)
- Teambuilding coach (independent)
- Celebrity serving as the public fase for the campaign (independent)
- Journalist (independent)

When the game starts, the characters are at the end of a long day of teambuilding. They have worked hard all day. The first scene of the larp is the final teambuilding exercise. Now it is time for a more informal gathering. There should be music, perhaps some snacks and drinks. The party lasts through the entire game.

> The dramatic momentum was somewhat different in the two games we facilitated. In the first one, we were at the party from the beginning to the end. In the second, the action became a bit stale, so the players decided to jump one month ahead in time for the second part of the game. The half-time break was shown to be handy.

► Wrapping it up: Go play

This is our creation. Use it to whatever purpose suits you best. Keep what you like, change what you don't, and have fun! This text and the game concepts contained within it are yours to use and abuse, but we would like to be identified as authors of this work.

If you decide to try out this or similiar concepts of your own, we would love to hear of your experiences. Please contact us at **even.tomte** or **torkjetil,** both **@gmail.com**.