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Popular Participation

Why do People Participate in Amateur Theatre?

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ABSTRACT
There are about sixty amateur theatre companies in Iceland. Hundreds of people every year participate in various theatrical activities, from staging large and intricate productions to smaller and more intimate readings and programs, attending workshops and seminars, writing plays both short and "full-length", meeting in groups not only to rehearse but to practice and develop theatrical crafts. None get paid. Some are even ready to part with fairly large sums for aforementioned workshops and seminars. All of them put in untold work hours and a lot of effort – after they get done with their day jobs. These are not "professionals". Mostly, they don't want to be. They have no interest in pursuing a theatrical career for a living. They just want to make theatre.
In my article I explore what it is that people experience when participating in amateur theatre. The paper will mainly be based on a number of in depth interviews I conducted in 2009 and 2010 with people from the Selfoss Amateur Theatre Company, as well as my own experience of being a member of the same company for the last 25 years. Using analytical tools such as thematic analysis and Richard Schechner's performance process as a time-space sequence I explore how making theatre creates communities and worlds and gives the participants freedom to let loose and play, if only for a time.

KEYWORDS
Amateur theatre; Icelandic theatre; Community theatre; Local culture; Victor Turner; Communitas.

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On a cold night in September, some twenty-six years ago, I stepped, for the first time, into a fire-truck-red, but somewhat dilapidated building: *Litla leikhúsið okkar við Sigtún* (Our Little Theatre by the river) in Selfoss.[1] I was sixteen years old and barely knew anyone present, but that autumn, I participated in my first full amateur theatre production, a cabaret put together out of scenes of children's plays well-known in Iceland. With me on this adventure was a large group of people of all ages, some considerably younger than I was, some much older. Some had done this many times before and others, like me, were doing it for the first time. This was the 39th production of *Leikfélag Selfoss* (Selfoss Amateur Theatre Group) in its thirty-two years (having been established in 1958) and today, with nearly sixty years of unbroken activity, it has staged over eighty 'full-length'[2] productions, some with up to forty participants, in addition to numerous smaller ones. This is by no means a unique situation in Iceland. In

[1] Selfoss is a small town, now with about six thousand inhabitants, in the south of Iceland about 60 km from Reykjavík. *Leikfélag Selfoss* usually has around 150-200 members, of whom about 30-50 are active at any given time.

[2] A "full-length" production is typically at least 80 minutes, not counting intermission. *Leikfélag Selfoss* usually stages one or two full-length productions a year; one that is considered the "main" one, which usually starts in January and ends in March/April, and often a smaller one in the autumn.

fact, one might claim that every backwater and remote village in the country has an amateur theatre group (or a swimming pool – usually both).

Despite how pervasive and common this phenomenon is, there has not been much scholarly interest in it in Iceland or elsewhere. In writing about the history of British theatre, Claire Cochrane states that "[a]mateur theatre constitutes a largely unexplored narrative."[3] This situation is little better in Iceland despite the efforts of scholars such as Sveinn Einarsson[4] and Bjarni Guðmarsson,[5] especially when it comes to contemporary amateur theatre and/or ethnographic studies. Furthermore, Sveinn's discussion is focused more on Icelandic amateur theatre up to about the mid-twentieth century and as a precursor to professional theatre in Iceland.

I was curious about what those people who spend such a lot of their time and energy in amateur theatre productions had to say about their involvement with their amateur theatre group. I therefore conducted in-depth interviews with seven long term members of *Leikfélag Selfoss* in 2009 and 2010 as part of my BA thesis at the Department of Folkloristics and Ethnology at the University of Iceland.[6]

In my original analysis of the interviews for the BA thesis, I recognized a variety of themes. The four key ones were: The history of the group; the effect on and connections to people outside it, both those close to the participants as well as the community as a whole; the theatre as a different world from the ordinary one with somewhat different rules; the love of theatre and pure joy of doing it. Admittedly there is much scope for further work with this material, which I hope to be able to do in the future. In this article, however, I will be using mostly the third theme, focusing on what people participating in amateur theatre

[3] Cochrane 2001, 223.

[4] See Sveinn Einarsson 1991, 1996, 2007 and 2016 on the origins of theatre in Iceland.

[5] See Bjarni Guðmarsson 2008.

[6] Gerður Halldóra Sigurðardóttir 2010. There was a seventh interview I made use of in the thesis, but it was very short and the interviewee was never actually a member of *Leikfélag Selfoss* after its founding in 1958. He had been a participant in staging plays in Selfoss more than a decade earlier, but remembered little from it.

productions had to say about their work and experiences as participants in their *leikfélag*; how they experience the theatre as a different world and what that entails for the participants, as I feel that is, in many ways, the point of departure and what makes everything else possible.

METHODOLOGY

My research methods are two-pronged, both stemming from qualitative social science research methods. On the one hand, there are the in-depth interviews, which are then analysed using thematic analysis, which is a careful and detailed analysis of a body of source material (in this case, the interview transcripts) to identify patterns or themes.[7] On the other hand, there is my own long-term experience of working with *Leikfélag Selfoss*, which would fall under the heading of autoethnography, which is the practice of using personal experience to examine cultural experience, intentionally highlighting the relationship between the two.[8] In this study, I am both participant and researcher; I position and ground myself firmly as a researcher within my subject matter, since I am by no means an outsider. Each person I interviewed had been personally known to me for years and much of what they talk about is very familiar to me as, since September 1990, *Leikfélag Selfoss* has been a part of my life, sometimes a very large part. I have been both on stage and behind the scenes as well as being part of the management. I have done almost everything that needs to be done for a production from costumes and lighting to making coffee. In general, there are very few things in the operations of an amateur theatre that I have not tried my hand at or am unfamiliar with, up to and including taking care of paying the bills, doing the books, and being part of running the company. This intimate involvement is naturally bound to colour my perception, analysis, and interpretation a great deal, although, of course, an outsider would have his or her perspective coloured by exactly that of being an outsider.

The effect my involvement has had is firstly that my desire to conduct this research springs directly from my experience as a member of *Leikfélag Selfoss*; a

[7] Berg 2009, 338-9.
[8] Jones, Adams and Ellis 2013, 22.

longing to put that experience in a wider context, to connect it with the experience of others within the group. Secondly, as a member of the group, I presumably had greater access to its members to interview. Therefore, when I approached them, it was as a long term member of their own community, someone they knew and trusted. My choices as to whom to approach were also made from a position of knowing who were long-term members, something of their history and stories in the group as well as who would be likely to respond positively and be willing to participate (no one I asked refused to talk to me). Thirdly, the interviews themselves took place in a long established atmosphere of mutual trust, familiarity, and camaraderie, not so much because I was necessarily all that intimate with all of the participants personally, but because of the shared background, the knowing that when describing a particular experience or incident a participant could say something like “It's like that, you know?”, and be fairly confident that yes, even if I hadn’t known the particulars, I would understand the context and possibly or even likely empathize with him or her, thus making it more likely that they would be open about their own experiences. Fourthly, the themes I recognized in my analysis cannot help but be influenced by my own experience. Although of course I did, in my analysis, focus on what my participants were *saying*, and not only on what would correspond to my own experience, there was nevertheless that jolt of recognition, almost a sense of triumph, when there was a match between the two. In fact, in addition to there being a general feeling of sameness between the participants’ responses, this feeling also matched my own experience. That said, I want to make clear that although it may at times be somewhat difficult for me to separate the researcher from the participant, the interviews are nevertheless the main body of my sources, with my own experiences being on the one hand, a ground and a springboard for me from which to conduct this research, and on the other, playing a supporting role to add to or emphasize what is said in the interviews.

The six in-depth interviews used in this article were conducted with seven long-term members of *Leikfélag Selfoss* in 2009 and 2010. Each interview was about an hour to an hour and a half long; amounting to a total of about eight

hours of material. The participants were five women and two men, ranging in age at the time of the interviews from 50 to 72, and they had been members of the theatre company from twelve to fifty-two years. Four of the participants, the two men and two of the women, are still actively engaged in productions in various capacities, the other three women continue to support the company in more passive roles, such as paying annual membership fees and attending the performances as audience. One of the men and one of the women are a married couple and were interviewed together. One of the men is a retired teacher and principal of a small rural elementary school, but was retired at the time of the interview. The second is a carpenter. All of the women worked outside of the home, or held unskilled or low-skilled jobs,[9] mostly in various office positions. All but one of the women were retired at the time of the interview. All participants except one of the men have children. The interviews were partly unstructured, which means that I started out asking the participants to talk about their work and experiences with *Leikfélag Selfoss* and tried to influence or direct them as little as I could along the way.

When quoting the interviews below, I do not differentiate between the participants (except of course in the references). Although there are, of course, differences in the details of the individual responses and what was emphasized, there is a remarkable homogeneity in perspective across all the interviews when it comes to the themes I recognized. Furthermore, it is not an aim of this study to look for differences between variables such as gender, age, or education, only to gain understanding of peoples' experiences of working within an amateur theatre group and what it could be that keeps them returning. All quotes from the interviews are my own translations from Icelandic.

SETTING THE STAGE: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

According to information from *Bandalag íslenskra leikfélaga* (The Icelandic Amateur Theatre Association) there are now 52 amateur theatre groups all over

[9] From 1946 to 1974, and therefore for all of the participants, all of whom reached the age of 16 during that time, the schooling required by law in Iceland lasted eight years, from 8 years of age to 16 years of age.

the country, which in the last year alone staged sixty-seven productions of various kinds with hundreds of people taking part.[10] Very few of these people get any kind of payment for their involvement, at least not in monetary terms. Usually, only the director gets paid, and occasionally one or two other professionals hired to design lighting and/or scenery and costumes. Everyone else, from the actors to the person who makes sure there is always plenty of coffee and toilet paper, volunteer their time and efforts. And not only for a year or two; some people have been doing this for decades, despite the fact that theatre productions demand a lot of work and commitment.

What the participants talk about pertains for the most part to what Richard Schechner calls proto-performance, which is the first part of his "performance process as a time-space sequence", containing training, workshop, and rehearsal; the second part is the performance event itself with warm-up, public performance, events/contexts sustaining the public performance and cool-down, and the last part he calls aftermath, with critical responses, archiving and memories.[11] In the case of *Leikfélag Selfoss,* proto-performance is largely the rehearsal period; for the people whose voices are heard here 'training' and 'workshop' for the most part took place in the context of rehearsing for particular productions and not as stand-alone features. Also, when people speak of their involvement with the theatre, they are talking about 'full-length' productions (see below). The interviews themselves of course fall under the last category of aftermath, memories and archiving; applying to a collection of productions, as it were, rather than a specific one.

In *Leikfélag Selfoss,* the rehearsal period for a "full-length" production is typically around six or seven weeks. During that time rehearsals usually take place four out of five weeknights plus both days on the weekend. Usually, at the start of the rehearsal period not everyone has to show up for every rehearsal, but for the last two to three weeks, everyone has to be present. This is just the actors; in addition, there are of course the people doing the lighting, sets, costumes,

[10] Guðfinna Gunnarsdóttir et al. 2016.
[11] Schechner 2006, 225.

make-up, and everything that has to happen behind the scenes, and not all of it can take place during rehearsals, especially the work on the stage itself. These people have to attend at least some rehearsals, if they are not also acting, which is not uncommon. Most people also need to be at their paying job during the day so most of the behind-the-scenes work happens during the night after rehearsals are over. In fact, the behind-the-scenes people tend to be rather sleep-deprived on opening night:

> Those who are in this, they of course remember rehearsing until maybe eleven, twelve o'clock in the evening and then you start working on the scenery. I have sometimes been coming home around four or five in the morning, the last week [before the premiere] when the pressure is the most.[12]

This is obviously a lot of work in addition to day jobs, not to mention for those who have families, which often just have to cope while a member more or less disappears into the theatre:

> You just sort of live there [in the theatre] and everything else just has to give way and this of course means that those close to you have to be very patient, but I think most people understand.[13]

My own personal experience is that the families of participants are usually incredibly patient and supportive, but it can still be a lot of strain on a family when one, or even more members decide to disappear for a few weeks.[14]

A JOURNEY TO A DIFFERENT WORLD: THEATRE AS A LIMINAL SPACE

In light of both the work involved and the strain it can put on people's nearest and dearest, one has to wonder what it is that draws people to repeatedly engage in theatrical activity with their *leikfélag*. Admittedly, there can be no simple and easy answer to this. However, I believe that at least part of the answer is to be found in one of the themes identified in the interviews; namely the partici-

[12] Eyjólfur Pálmarsson and Svanhildur Karlsdóttir 30.11.2009. See also Gerður Halldóra Sigurðardóttir 2010, 72.

[13] Guðrún Ester Halldórsdóttir 14.2.2010. See also Gerður Halldóra Sigurðardóttir 2010, 52.

[14] It would be interesting to do further research with family members of those who take part in amateur theatre.

pants' sense of the theatre and their theatrical activities as separate from their everyday lives, almost otherworldly:

> You get such a break from daily life. We are all of us struggling with something, sometimes everything is all right and sometimes everything is not all right and then it is just wonderful to be able to go down there, to your group and focus on attuning to a completely different world [...] Be able to immerse yourself into something that tears you from your daily life, become someone else, have another life for a little while. Is it not a bit like meditation? Is that not exactly what meditation is, getting away and resting your mind? I think that is what happens there [in the theatre].[15]

Furthermore, participating in a theatre production can be seen as not only attuning to another place but essentially *creating*, and journeying to a world separate from your ordinary one:

> Every production you participate in is an adventure in itself. It is just like going on a journey, not dissimilar from going to another country except you do not know where you will end up next.[16]

The process, the production, and even the place itself where this happens can take on an otherworldly aspect, a liminal quality. The concept of liminality originated with Arnold van Gennep's idea of 'limen', a threshold or a sort of 'no-man's-land', and 'liminal rites' like those transitory rituals that take you from one state of being, dump you in this "no-state" of being for a while, and where one emerges from in a new a state of being,[17] such as in the case of baptisms, weddings, and funerals. Van Gennep used this concept exclusively in connection with rituals, but anthropologist Victor Turner picked up the idea of liminality and developed it further, connecting it with various activities and conditions in all societies.[18] Liminality is a complex and multifaceted idea which has been used in a variety of ways but it always conveys some sense of being 'in-between', 'outside-of' or 'somewhere else' and is thus rather defined by what, or where, it is *not* than what or where it *is*. What, or where, liminality is *not*, is what Mircea Eliade calls "the formless expanse surrounding […] a sacred space, […] spaces

[15] Guðrún Ester Halldórsdóttir 14.2.2010. See also Gerður Halldóra Sigurðardóttir 2010, 59.
[16] Sigurgeir Hilmar Friðþjófsson 24.1.2010. See also Gerður Halldóra Sigurðardóttir 2010, 61.
[17] van Gennep 1960, 11.
[18] Turner 1982, 33.

that are […] without structure or consistency, amorphous."[19] The theatre can be seen as such a sacred, liminal space, a "strong, significant space"[20] in Eliade's words, because of its ability to enclose both its participants and its audience, separate them from the outside world and transport them to a different world, different reality, if only for a while and perhaps not quite in the same way for those two groups. Erika Fischer-Lichte specifically connects liminality and performance for the audience, stating that: "all genres of performance open up the possibility for liminal experience"[21], but for the audience this experience is usually limited to the time it takes to watch a performance. For those who participate in a production, making theatre, experiencing liminality in a theatrical setting is an ongoing, or perhaps rather repeated process for the duration of the production, a condition they step into day after day for weeks to create a new world into which they then invite an audience for an evening.

Dwelling in a liminal space, especially if it is repeatedly for prolonged periods of time, does not leave one unaltered. It is a space/time very different from our ordinary, daily lives, which can be both hectic and draining; an endless cycle of working, eating and sleeping, and trying to catch some moments of meaning and fulfilment as well as quality moments with spouses, children, extended family, and friends. There often seems little, or no alternative or escape from this humdrum life. For some, perhaps, it is not really necessary, they do not need or require much more from their lives. For some other people though, the 'break from daily life' mentioned in the quote above, the separation from our ordinary world and attuning ourselves to a different one is a blessed relief, even if it is only a temporary one.

IN THE ZONE: PLAYING, PERSONAL GROWTH, AND COMMUNITAS

What often happens in this liminal zone, and what many of the people I interviewed, as well as others[22] in *Leikfélag Selfoss* talk about, is not only the break

[19] Eliade, 1957, 20.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Fischer-Lichte 2008, 199.
[22] Casual conversations with various people in *Leikfélag Selfoss*.

and relief mentioned above, but also a revitalization and an opportunity for personal growth and interpersonal connections that do not happen just anywhere. Partly, this is caused by being able to leave behind many of the social obligations and personas taken on in our communities.

In our everyday lives, we usually play multiple "established social roles" as sociologist Erving Goffman calls them.[23] We are daughters or sons, siblings, parents, we play the parts our jobs require, we are friends and co-workers; to name but a few. However, when entering the liminal space of the theatre and theatre group, one can shed at least some of that, as one participant states:

> I always feel, when I am in [my] theatre, I somehow become so much just me. I also feel that you can play, at all ages you can play, because I think we are all such children inside, but it is just, people hide it away so much, because everyone has these masks and they somehow cannot allow themselves to play.[24]

In this sacred space, we co-create with our fellow theatre-makers, one can let everything else drop away and just focus on oneself, on finding out things about oneself, try out and play with new roles, new characters, or just simply play.

Play-theorist Johan Huizinga considered play to be not only interwoven with and inseparable from culture but "one of the main basis of civilization."[25] However, in our Western cultural setting, with its somewhat pervasive protestant work-ethic[26] and what Huizinga terms "grotesque over-estimation of the economic factor […] conditioned by our worship of technological progress, which was itself the fruit of rationalism and utilitarianism,"[27] play does not have a particularly high status. In fact, Richard Schechner claims there is a deepseated bias against play: "From Plato to the Puritans, the playful has been considered frivolous, unimportant, and even sinful."[28] A lot of effort has been put into rationalizing play, controlling it and, in general, putting it in its place,[29] which is

[23] Goffman 1959, 17.
[24] Sigríður Karlsdóttir 26.7.2009. See also Gerður Halldóra Sigurðardóttir 2010, 62-3.
[25] Huizinga 1955, 5.
[26] See Weber 2005.
[27] Huizinga 1955, 192.
[28] Schechner 2006, 112.
[29] Schechner 2006, 89.

usually somewhere on the fringes of society. Life is serious business and we are not supposed to allow ourselves to play at it, play in it, or even play at all. Despite all efforts, though, playing persists, and not only with our children, where it is allowed and even acknowledged to have its uses. Play cannot be controlled or hemmed in, but sometimes it helps to have a special place to let loose and in the liminal space and time of the theatre:

> You can rid yourself of the constraints you are under every day just because society expects it of you and of course you want to fit in and behave correctly [...] Don't you think it is enjoyable for people who perhaps sit in an office all day [...] and can then go and throw it all away and allow themselves to act like... well I do not want to make it sound like people act like they are crazy, but that they can just... throw of their masks... that is just freedom.[30]

This sense of freedom is not incidental to a liminal or liminoid space-time, but an intrinsic part of it, according to Turner, who claimed that in such circumstances there is a certain breakdown of societies' norms, which he called "anti-structure," where

> the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses, enacting a multiplicity of social roles, and being acutely conscious of membership in some corporate group[31]

takes place. Being able to burst free, as it were, of the social statuses and roles, to let loose a bit and play in the safe space the liminality of the theatre offers is, for some, what participating is all about, but for others there is also an element of intense personal growth and emotional work that can be both freeing and terrifying and certainly cannot take place just anywhere:

> You work so much with your feelings, you perhaps open yourself up, deep down into the corners of your soul, and you just cannot do that in front of just anybody, I mean you cannot do that unless others are in the same place as you, and I think that is also what connects people, it opens so much up.[32]

To be able to do this without some serious repercussions, the time and space it takes place in needs to be understood by everyone as special, as safe. For

[30] Sigríður Karlsdóttir 26.7.2009.
[31] Turner 1982, 44.
[32] Sigríður Karlsdóttir 26.7.2009. See also Gerður Halldóra Sigurðardóttir 2010, 77.

those who participate in *Leikfélag Selfoss*' activities, the group is such a safe space.

In the anti-structural liminal space-time the theatre can become, especially during the rehearsal period, the connections and relations between the people participating are somewhat different than in everyday life; in Victor Turner's words: "[S]ocial relations may be discontinued, former rights and obligations are suspended […and…] people 'play' with the elements of the familiar and de-familiarize them."[33] Part of that is no doubt the closeness that can form between people working together for hours, night after night, for several weeks, which sometimes can be rather intense as can be seen above. The feeling of 'togetherness' that can connect people under these circumstances is of course not at all exclusive to this particular setting. In fact, it is common enough that Turner termed it "communitas" and associated it specifically with the anti-structural non-ordinary state, when the ordinary structure of society falls away, as mentioned above.[34]

In such an anti-structural state, status is inverted or done away with completely, as are social roles, and people get 'caught up in the moment', feeling at one with each other. Once mostly belonging to, or at least believed to belong to, the realm of religion and religious or spiritual experiences, in our largely secular world, communitas has started to make its way into other areas, as Erin K. Sharpe notes in her study on river rafting: "Once solely the domain of ritual, communitas has begun to enter the realm of leisure. There is a growing collection of studies that document communitas in contemporary leisure settings that exhibit similar anti-structural qualities to their ritual counterpart."[35] Although communitas and anti-structure have been, and certainly are, a part of religious and spiritual experiences, I believe its role in more secular circumstances in the past may have been underestimated. Edith Turner, the late Victor Turners wife and co-collaborator in his anthropological work, seems to indicate as much

[33] Turner 1982, 27.
[34] Turner 1982, 47-9.
[35] Sharpe 2005, 256.

when she states that "[c]ommunitas is togetherness itself. ... In communitas there is a loss of ego. ... In the group, all are in unity, seamless unity."[36] I do not doubt that in the increasingly secularized world we live in, these phenomena are, to a greater extent, found in the secular. In some instances, such unity is found in circumstances that to some extent imitate, and/or are in some way or other related to the sacred, which the theatre can certainly be said to be in various ways. During a production, this feeling of togetherness is indeed what usually happens:

> When you were down in that little rat hole[37], then everyone was just like one person and there was no problem, you just were there and had to accept it and you are among people you are acting with. It would not work if people were not good to each other, and every person patient with the others, it has to be like that, or it would not work with all these people.[38]

Status in the outside world is to some extent ignored, and people do make an effort to do away with some markers, such as age, education and religion, and soften the boundaries between people they usually maintain:

> It does not really matter how old people are, or from where they hail in society: Everything is wiped clean, age difference, work, politics, religion, none of it exists when you are in the theatre.[39]

Of course, throwing a bunch of people together into a sometimes intense and somewhat frenetic activity that stretches on for weeks is bound to test someone's patience every once in a while, especially in a production with a lot of people participating and crammed into a rather small space. Personalities can and do clash. I remember, from a production I participated in, that once the guy controlling the lights got annoyed about something and walked out of the building ten minutes before the performance was supposed to start. Fortunately, he did come back in time, but those ten minutes, when we didn't know whether he

[36] Turner 2013, 3-4.

[37] The cellar in the theatre, which is basically our green room; at that particular time there were over forty people crammed in there.

[38] Elín Arnoldsdóttir 16.3.2009. See also Gerður Halldóra Sigurðardóttir 2010, 82.

[39] Sigríður Karlsdóttir 26.7.2009. See also Gerður Halldóra Sigurðardóttir 2010, 74.

would, with a full house, were a bit hair-raising. Such stories are amazingly rare, though. Once people get started, they tend to stay the distance: Those who cannot rather quickly weed themselves out when they realize the sheer amount of work involved and the commitment needed to make something like this work. Still, it is also possible to overdo it:

> Many have had enough, that is the trouble with it, even if it is so much fun participating in all of this. If people drive themselves into the ground, there comes a point where they just can't take any more, so they say, 'I'm not in.' Then they just maybe stay away for ever.[40]

Those who stay do make an effort to get along:

> At least it has perhaps taught one forbearance, to accept people as they are and that each person is allowed to be like he is. You have no licence to try and change that, no authority from anyone to do that... Not everyone is pulling on the same oar and that does not matter, but they are still part of the crew maybe. Groups of maybe very different people have to be attuned but somehow it always flows together into one and then you can just somehow... I do not know if you get the hang of it somehow but anyway, just... if there is someone, I do not know how to say this so it does not sound bad, someone that you do not like as much as someone else or something... then you just ignore it, because in the end, we are all aiming for the same goal, a good show.[41]

In a group of people that is, for all intents and purposes, open to everyone who wants to join, there are of course bound to be people who do not see completely eye to eye or like each other very much. However, considering the sometimes intense atmosphere, there are surprisingly few clashes between people; sentiments like "the company was so precious"[42] is much more common, indicating that "the gift of liminality," as Edith Turner calls communitas,[43] is a large part of the reason people come back to create amateur theatre again and again.

[40] Eyjólfur Pálmarsson and Svanhildur Karlsdóttir 30.12.2009. See also Gerður Halldóra Sigurðardóttir 2010, 53.

[41] Sigríður Karlsdóttir 26.7.2009. See also Gerður Halldóra Sigurðardóttir 2010, 82.

[42] Guðrún Ester Halldórsdóttir 14.2.2010. See also Gerður Halldóra Sigurðardóttir 2010, 98.

[43] Turner 2013, 4.

CONCLUSION

In the previous pages, I have attempted to explore how people participating in amateur theatre productions experience the theatre and their theatrical activities as something different and separate from their everyday lives, and how that again impacts their experience in making theatre. In this exploration, I used interviews with seven long term members of *Leikfélag Selfoss* as well as my own experiences of working within the company. In the liminal space-time of the theatre, we have the freedom to lay aside our ordinary, daily selves and become someone different for a while. We can put down the masks we usually carry around and play, open up, and connect to other people in ways not readily available in the outside world. This may possibly seem like a 'too good to be true' scenario, despite the story of the lights-guy, which is, to be fair, not the only possible such example. The fact is, however, that throughout the interviews, the participants consistently portrayed a very positive attitude towards their time with *Leikfélag Selfoss*. Despite some of them having stories of difficulties connected to that time, both concerning the group and their families, none of them displayed any regret about the time and effort they put into their theatre activities.

Amateur theatre people often pride themselves on being *amateurs* – the ones who love. We speak jokingly of ourselves as having the 'theatre-bug', of being addicted to making theatre. There is no doubt that those who 'catch the bug' invest a lot of time and effort in satisfying their so-called addiction, sometimes putting a considerable strain on their relationships with families and friends. For some, this strain eventually becomes too much, and they leave, never to return. However, unlike real addictions, there is always the understanding that each production has a limited time-span. Those who partake in it may indulge in their world-creating for a while, but it does have an expiration date, and then they will be back with those in the outside, everyday world. Well, until next time, anyway.

Although I have, in this article, focused on aspects of making amateur theatre that could be considered mostly positive, this is not because I am un-

aware of any negative ones, or that I am disinclined to bring attention to those negative aspects, although I have also tried to make clear that I am someone with a deep interest in and love of amateur theatre, or my long-time association with *Leikfélag Selfoss* and that this is bound to colour my perspective. Alas, I am all too aware of how much there is yet to research when it comes to amateur theatre. However, I believe the liminality of theatre, the loosening of social norms and roles, and the communitas that happens within it are, in a way, the basis for everything else that takes place, whether it be positive or negative and, therefore, a good place to start researching amateur theatre.

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