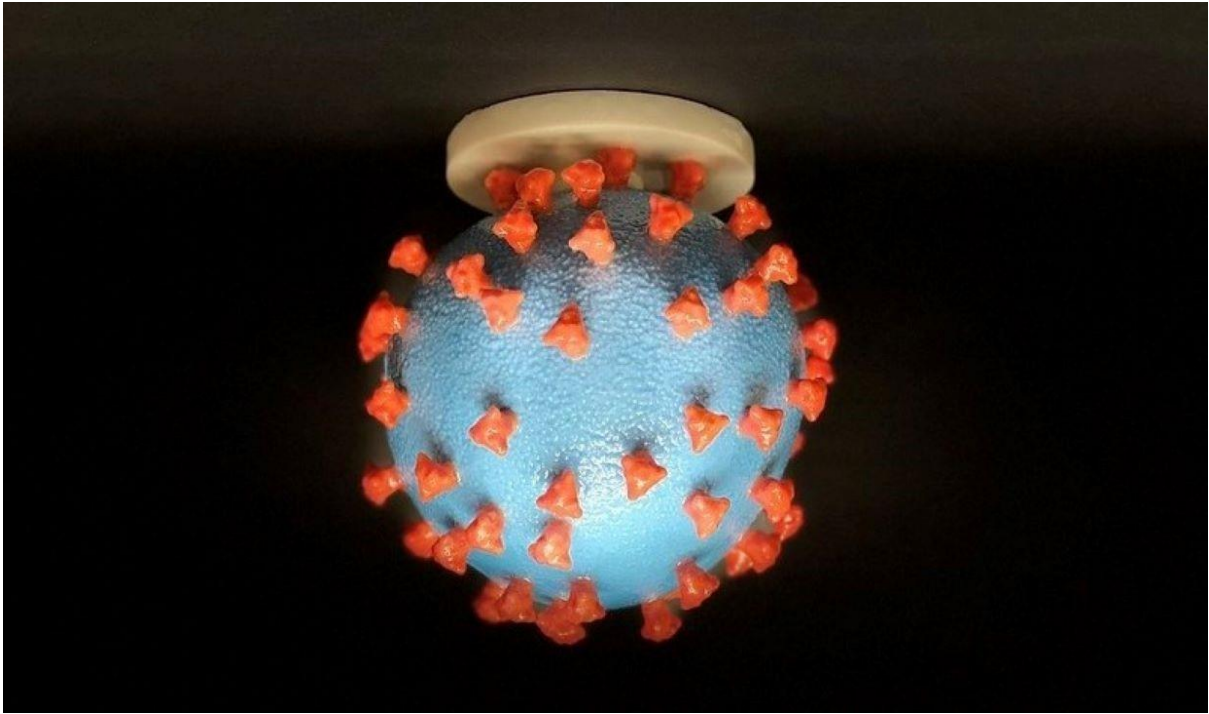


SPILLOVER

A non-verbal climate larp exploring bat habitat degradation, colonial power and pandemics
By Alex Brown



Welcome to Spillover. It is a non-verbal climate larp which explores the story of human pandemics, through colonialism, deforestation and bat habitat degradation. You will be guiding the players through a workshop on the themes, structure, techniques, character creation, and safety. You will then facilitate the larp with minimal intervention and narrative, as well as operating sound and lighting. The soundtrack is very straightforward, the lighting can be straightforward or slightly more advanced, depending on equipment available and your experience.

You will facilitate a debrief at the end so players can gently come out of the experience and their characters, and discuss how it felt to play.

The larp is written for 6-20+ players in a large open space without furniture. It is scalable to larger numbers of up to around 40, although this requires a very large space because of the player movement involved, as well as the appropriate number of props.

Props:

To be prepared before the larp:

- Approximately 5 reused/salvaged cardboard boxes per player to be scattered around the space (make sure they are clean and dry). It can be less but requires an absolute minimum of 3 per player.
- Toilet rolls hung from ceiling or rigging in one area of the space (see example photo)
- Scene Changes document should be printed and taped to floor close to the play

To be set aside and introduced during the workshop or larp:

- Tape (ideally paper packing tape)
- Scarves or small pieces of fabric that can be used as blindfolds, ideally black (for half the number of players)
- Blankets or large pieces of fabric that can be used as bat 'wings' no smaller than 1.20m x 1m, ideally black (for half the number of players)

Lighting:

Lighting can be scaled depending on equipment available and/or your experience with lighting design.

As a minimum, white or yellow lights should be flashed off/on to change scenes as this is an important cue for players which is described in the workshop. Scene 5 should be dimly lit.

If you have access to a lighting rig, a clear lighting signal for scene change should be agreed which would ideally be a slow white strobe, although flashing white lights on and off as described above will suffice.

The bat starting play space can be lit green from Scene 1A and the human starting play space can be a colour mix from Scene 2A. If it is available, there is an option to match the lighting design with the minimalism of the soundtrack by flashing colours with increasing pace across Scenes 2-4, for example; Scene 2 changes every 4 beats, Scene 3 changes every 2 beats, Scene 4 changes every beat. You can also reduce the coverage of the green light throughout play, as the bat habitat shrinks in size.

Scene 5 should be dimly lit without flashes, low blue light for the whole space (no green) is suggested for this scene.

Sound:

Philip Glass' **full** original soundtrack to Koyaanisqatsi, beginning with Organic (skip title track), end with Prophecies. You should play sound at a medium-loud volume to fill the space, but not too loud so players cannot hear each other. Some tracks, such as The Grid Introduction and Microchip, are quieter, I would recommend manually adjusting the volume for quieter sections.

Here is a Spotify playlist of the full original soundtrack, begin with Track 2:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0mhSQSYjD9ayizUYb4N9di?si=63872c238c6f4807>

Text should be read aloud during the workshop, anything in italics and brackets is an instruction to the GM. I would recommend reading it in advance to make sure the design document is understood or at least can be interpreted in a way that feels authentic to you as a GM.

The larp plays on the competition over resources, materials and territory for the human characters, the bat characters are much more cooperative in play style. The competitive element is one of the mechanics around the themes of colonialism and capitalist growth, which I hope comes through in the play.

During play:

There is a fairly minimal intervention for the GM during play; you are responsible for overseeing safety, especially for blindfolded players who are moving too quickly or in any immediate danger of harm. The scene changes are signalled by the lights, which is rehearsed. The music continues as the players are swapping between characters and takes between 30-45 seconds. I would recommend 15-20 seconds **before** the end of each track to give the lighting signal for the scene changes as it takes a few seconds for players to respond.

The tone of the larp is moderate, there are some very serious and existential themes in the play, yet to play it is fun and entertaining. Embrace any dissonance between these two points, in mismatching them there comes an opportunity for players being more open to learning and experiencing heavier topics.

Potential spoiler alert for players(!):

The play style is mostly transparent, and players should understand that the bat habitat will decrease in size over time as the human dwellings increase in size. There is one design choice that I will leave up to the GM, regarding Scene 5. Players could know about the reduction in bat numbers in advance or not, if you are to leave this as an in-game surprise then you should only reveal this piece of information in the narration before Scene 5, rather than in the workshop.

Enjoy the larp!



An example of the starting set-up, photo taken at Blackbox CPH 2023.

WORKSHOP

(Thank everyone for coming, introduce yourself and this is Spillover. Go straight into warm ups.)

Warm ups

We will start with a game, to decide the teams we are going to play a giant game of Rock, Paper, Scissors. Everyone knows how to play? We will choose our weapon *on 3*
*(demonstrate 1,2, *3*).*

Ready? 1,2, *3*

(Organise players in to 3 teams based on shape chosen, an uneven mix is fine, as long at least 1 on each team)

Tower race

In this game we will race to build the highest stack of boxes. All players in the team must start behind the line *(show start line at one end of the room, or touching the wall)*, and take turns to take one box and place it at the other end, then come back to tag the next person in. Players must only place one box in the stack at a time, even if they fall. Only one player is allowed in front of the line at a time. *(Set 2 minute timer and count down at the end)*

Retracing steps

I invite you to make 2 laps of the room, moving how you like in an interesting route and end the 2 laps where you started.

Now we will make another 2 laps, attempting to repeat the route and any movements exactly as you did the first time and ending in the same place.

Now try to repeat once more, for the 3rd and last time, changing one small but significant detail and notice how the difference feels.

(Ask players to take a seat in a circle)

To begin, we will go around the circle and say our player name and pronouns, and any expectations of the larp.

Introduction

This is Spillover. The title comes from the process of zoonotic spillover, disease carrying organisms called pathogens transferring from wild animals to humans. In the larp, we play out the story which creates the conditions for a pandemic through colonial extractivism, deforestation and habitat degradation, through a dual lens of bat and human characters. This is a non-verbal larp, which uses sound, touch and how you interact with your environment, as forms of communication. It is a fun way of exploring and reflecting on these heavy topics.

The larp covers a long period of time, finishing somewhere close to present day. Through this, you will experience a collective depiction of all events leading up to human pandemics. Although an epidemic is not played out in the larp, by playing this story I hope we can deepen our understanding of the process of zoonotic spillover, and how humanity has ended up with the present day vulnerability to epidemics.

Characters

Everyone plays a bat character and a human character, alternating between the 2 characters throughout the larp.

Bat characters

Bat characters live in the bat habitat, represented by the paper. They tend to live in groups in close proximity, feeding, building a home, finding a partner, sleeping. These are your main activities as a bat. It is usually safe for you in your habitat with the other bats.

Here is how you play as bats:

- The bats are blindfolded (*with a scarf or fabric*)
- You wear a blanket to represent wings
- You communicate through an 'E' sound, there are no instructions as to what different variations of this sound represent, it can be developed in the play.
- You communicate through touch, a long touch means safe, a short repeating touch means unsafe.
- You collect small pieces of paper during the larp which can represent building a nest or collecting food

Human characters

Human characters are mostly an abstraction of nation, a country, rather than individuals but it's entirely up to players how they internalise their characters throughout play. You can choose:

- Individual characters
- To represent an industry or period in history
- Abstractly representing a nation

The last option is the default but you can mix between scenes, you can choose this in advance or can see how it develops during play.

Here is how you play as humans:

- Humans build boxes to make a territory, these boxes can represent whatever you like
- You can use paper from the bat habitat, to decorate your habitat, trade with other characters, or use it for something else
- Humans communicate through all vowel sounds and gestures
- Humans represent a country

Now stand in 2 groups according to your teams from the tower building game, the largest team on one side, the 2 smallest teams on the other side. (*ie. Rock and Scissors merge to form one group, Paper is the second group. Even the teams so they are of equal numbers and name the teams Group A and Group B.*)

Please select a country that you wish to represent as your human character. Discuss with the others, so that within your group there is a mix of countries from the Global North and Global South (*richer and poorer countries*) and switch if necessary. Please form a hierarchy line for your human characters based on your country. This should be based on global colonial power dynamics, line up with the most powerful at one end (*make sure teams are*

coordinated by pointing where the most powerful stand) and least powerful at the other. It could be debated for a long time but please don't overthink this, it should be done quite quickly.

Take a moment to notice where you are in relation to the other players in your group. The bats are at the bottom of this hierarchy. The intention of this is to translate your status as a country into your play, those at the top end of this hierarchy may behave differently towards other characters to those at the bottom. That also goes for your relationship to bat habitats as a resource, where you stand in the line might have an influence on how respectful you are to the bats.

The person you are standing across from is called your opposite number. Whilst you play your bat character, they play a human character and vice versa. As a bat, you hand over your scarf and blanket between scenes. You will start from where your opposite number finished the previous scene. *(If there are an odd number of players, one player will have 2 opposite numbers, ideally the mismatch is at the top of the hierarchy)*

Interaction

Bat characters and human characters interact within their groups however, **opposite character groups don't see each other during the play**. You don't directly interact, only through the environment. As a human character, you avoid bats, if they are directly coming directly towards you or your habitat, you should move out of the way. As a bat character, you should stick mostly to the bat habitat and collecting paper for food or nests. Bats avoid human territories though if you struggle to find a safe habitat, this is the point at which you might go closer to human territories, and conditions are ripe for zoonotic spillover.

Vowel sounds

I would like to practise communication, first of all with the vowel sounds.

(Conduct/gesture to players using different hand symbols for short/long/loud quiet. This is most appropriate using vowel sounds which are specific to the local language, the bat sound should be the closest to the English long 'ee' sound.)

Repeat after me:

A a a a aaaaaahhhhhh

(short) Eh eh eh eh eeeeeehhhhhh

(short) O o o o oooooohhhhhh

(long) Oo Oo Oo Oo ooooohhhhh

Ee ee ee ee ee eeeeeeeeeeeee

Human characters can use all of these sounds and any other vowel sounds to communicate, bat characters can only use the last one.

We will practise a human conversation now only using all the vowel sounds.

Form a pair with your opposite number. I want you to imagine a scenario where person A has a very delicious cake and does not want to share it. Person B really wants to have some. Communicating only through vowel sounds and gestures can person A convince

person B? Don't be afraid to repeat the same sounds and feel free to experiment with different volumes/rhythms/timbres.

We will add music to replicate the larp. (*Play track 'Resource' at low-ish volume*) (1 minute)
Swap over now so that it is Player B with the cake and Player A is trying to get some. (1 minute)

Scenes

Scenes are quite short, representing long periods of time from decades to millennia, it's up to players what your internal sense of time passing is, it won't be proscribed. We begin a long long time ago and we will end somewhere close to the present day, right before a pandemic.

There are 5 scenes in total, which are divided into 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B and so on. The scenes change with an agreed signal of flashing white light (or yellow). When the lights flash for the end of the scene, please stop what you are doing and swap places with your opposite number. **The human characters lead the switching as their sight isn't restricted by the blindfold.**

(Check if anyone has sensitivity to flashing lights and if a slow strobe is ok. Otherwise you can manually turn lights off and on. Demonstrate the signal for the scene changes.)

There are different instructions for the human characters for different scenes.

Scene 1 bats only

Scene 2 humans stay in their territories, only within arms reach

Scene 3 humans can visit other territories

Scene 4 & 5 can move anywhere

This should be easy to remember, from the first time you play human characters, you go from stationary in Scene 2, then moving between territories in Scene 3, and then moving anywhere in Scene 4 & 5. The scene structure is written on the paper at the sides (*point to Scene Structure*), if you are ever unsure then there is somewhere to check.

Pace of the larp

The pace of the larp is a slow beginning and steadily increasing to the end of scene 4. The musical pace and mood of scene 5 is more slow and solemn, but you can choose however you wish to respond to this, you can continue at a fast pace or slow with the music. The music and lighting will guide you throughout. The reason to say this is that if there's no bat habitat left by Scene 2 then we've peaked too soon, so pace your play accordingly.

Consent and safety

Please look after each other. Even though this larp relies on power dynamics and exploitation, there isn't much physical contact for the human players, so please ask for consent 'off game' if you wish to escalate a situation physically.

For the bat characters, you will be blindfolded and other human character movements will grow over time. Humans should always avoid the bats, even if one is walking directly into

your territory. To play blindfolded requires a level of trust and it's up to the human characters to pay attention to where bat characters are at all times. Bat characters will explore the space slowly to find paper for their food or nests.

Even though I'm trying to minimise this risk, if someone falls or there is an injury, we will cut the scene by shouting 'Cut'. Everyone at this point stops what they are doing, we will check on the person, and then continue where we left off. If it looks like the person dived/rolled on the floor intentionally, it's fine to ask 'Are you ok?' it's not a definite 'yes' then we cut the game. If anyone needs a breather at any point, or desperately needs the toilet, this is fine, you can catch up and won't break the game.

Practise switchover

We're going to practise the first switchover which happens in scene 2. Group A will start as bats, while Group B will start as humans. We will play for just a couple of minutes. As your human character you will be building with the boxes in your territory, as you design the space you should think about what the boxes represent, for example, houses, industries, cities, or something else.

As a bat character you will stay in your habitat, try to practise; finding paper, making the 'ee' sound to know where the other bats are, and the touch communication- long touch for safe, short sharp touches for unsafe.

When the humans see the white flashing light to signal a scene change, the humans initiate the switch by tapping their opposite number gently on the shoulder and then taking their blanket and scarf. Please try and switch as quickly as you can.

(Play Scene 2, 1-1.5 minutes before switching)

We will take a short break before we play. Are there any questions?

(Players go for short break, suggested 10-15 minutes)

Scene structure recap

One final time we will go through the scene structure.

Group A will always begin as bats

1A group A as bats, group B observe

1B group B as bats, group A observe

Scene 2 Humans only in their own territories are allowed to move within arms length

Group A begins as bats, Group B begins as humans, then switch *(you can say this once and then shorten it in subsequent repetitions)*

Scene 3 Humans can visit other territories

Group A begins as bats, Group B begins as humans, then switch

Scene 4 Humans can move anywhere they like

Group A begins as bats, Group B begins as humans, then switch

Scene 5 Humans can move anywhere they like

There are no groups in Scene 5, just 2 bats, the rest of the players will play humans. (see note in introduction about this information, which can be kept from the players and revealed in-play, if desired, this should be decided before play.)

Starting positions

With your opposite number, please choose a human character starting point together. This will be your starting territory for at least scenes 2 and 3.

Are there any questions before we start?

If you are in group A, please get ready as bat. Group B should stay at the side. The larp will begin with the music.

The larp

(Play music to begin)

(Scene structure is below. There is only 1 time for the GM to provide instructions, at the beginning of Scene 5. The GM should be paying close attention to the bat characters and physical safety throughout and be ready to intervene with 'cut' if there is an imminent risk of physical safety. The GM delivers tape to the 2 most powerful characters at the beginning of Scene 3A and 3B. Scene changes are triggered by lighting around 15 seconds before end of track - see GM guide)

Scene 1A Organic

Group A are bats, group B observe from the sides

Scene 1B Clouds

Group B are bats, group A observe from the sides

Scene 2A Resource

Group A are bats, group B are humans

Scene 2B Vessels

Group B are bats, group A are humans

Scene 3A Pruitt Igoe *(At beginning of scene deliver a roll of tape each to the 2 most powerful characters)*

Group A are bats, group B are humans

Scene 3B Coda, SloMo, Grid Intro *(At beginning of scene deliver 1 roll of tape each to the 2 most powerful characters)*

Group B are bats, group A are humans

Scene 4A The Grid 0.00 - 8.44

Group A are bats, group B are humans

Scene 4B The Grid 8.44 - end

Group B are bats, group A are humans

Scene 5 Microchip, Prophecies

(All human apart from 2 bats as instructed)

(At the beginning of Scene 5 whilst Microchip plays, intervene to remove all but 2 blankets and blindfolds.)

All players will play a human character for the final scene, apart from 2 bats, can I have 2 volunteers for this? Raise your hands. *(Select 2 if there are more volunteers and remove remainder of blankets and blindfolds)*

(Scene 5 is very slow. You can cut it slightly short by fading out before the end of the track but not before 8.22. Although with a larger group of 10+ I would encourage you to play until the end. At end of Scene 5 sound and lights fade - hold silence and darkness for a few seconds, then gently bring the lights back up and state the larp is over as below)

That is the end of the larp, take your time in gathering yourself in a circle in the middle.

Debrief

First, we will do a round of how people are feeling, anyone can start.

Secondly, we will open up to any further comments, if anyone wants to add anything about their experience, they are welcome to do so.

(Finish the debrief when it feels appropriate and thank players for playing Spillover)

SPILOVER SCENE CHANGES

Group A will always begin as bats

1A group A as bats, group B observe

1B group B as bats, group A observe

Scene 2 Humans only in their own territories
(within arms length)

Bat A / Human B, switch

Scene 3 Humans can visit other territories

Bat A / Human B, switch

Scene 4 Humans can move anywhere

Bat A / Human B, switch

Scene 5 Humans can move anywhere

No groups