

# Muovikuppi (The Plastic Cup)

a larp by Juhana Pettersson

Duration: 45 min workshop + 45-60 min game

Participants: 20

The Plastic Cup is a larp about material possessions, about having stuff. The characters are dividing an inheritance while the players express themselves through destroying coffee cups.

The game is designed to be as easy to organize as possible, and has been made for maximum replayability. I grant the right to anybody to run the game as they like, as long as its on a non-profit basis. I request that if you run the game, email me ([jlj@iki.fi](mailto:jlj@iki.fi)) about it and send me pictures afterwards.

This PDF file contains all the information necessary to run the Plastic Cup, from organizer directions to the characters and all the material to be distributed to the players.



Photo by Staffan Jonsson



# Muovikuppi (The Plastic Cup) - Artist Statement

Many of the items the characters divide among themselves in the Plastic Cup are based on an inheritance I had. I got an antique, preserved blowfish, an African spear, a helmet from the 17th century and a Samoan tapestry. My brother got the zebra skin, the saw of a sawfish and the grandfather clock.

These are items you can't throw away, items you can't sell, but also items that you can't really use for anything. After I carried all this stuff home, my apartment looked like a museum.

All of the characters in the Plastic Cup have been written according to their relationship to stuff. There's a rich family, a poor family, a character who loves stuff, a character who hates it. All of this is meant as a framework to explore the sentimental and practical issues related to owning things, in the context of dramatic waste and destruction created when everybody expresses themselves through breaking coffee cups.

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In a traditional fantasy entertainment larp, the principal bit of designed, stylized interaction consists of padded swords used for fighting. All other interaction occurs in a realist style. I've had an ongoing project to explore new and more versatile ways to create stylized interaction since 2004 and the larp Luminescence I created together with Mike Pohjola. Luminescence used flour, offered to the players to be used as they saw fit.

The Plastic Cup is another attempt at this: this time, the stylization consists of the destruction of coffee cups. The players are told to express themselves by throwing coffee cups on the ground.

While the fantasy games with their padded swords still cling to the remnants of simulation, the tools of Luminescence and the Plastic Cup are willfully abstract. They don't symbolize anything. Instead, the meaning they have is imparted by the players whenever they use the flour or the coffee cups to express something. A padded sword is a tool for hitting people, but the coffee cup can be used for anything.

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A central problem of art larp has been to engage the participants into the game. The Plastic Cup attempts to achieve this by asking the players to do something exhilarating and fun that they can't do in their daily lives, in this case destruction. After the first couple of coffee cups break on the ground, the participants loosen up, jolted out of the wariness created by the abstraction of the game.

Larp differs from passive media in the sense that it is not enough for the participants to suspend their disbelief for the game to work. They have to feel comfortable expressing themselves in the game, and the energy released by the destruction goes a long way to achieving this.

# Muovikuppi (The Plastic Cup) - Producing the Game

The Plastic Cup is simple to produce. The game can be done with a budget of 100-250 euros, depending on what you can get for free and what you have to pay for.

## What you need

200 coffee cups. The cheapest I could find where the Syntes cups from Ikea, 50 cents apiece.

Cleaning equipment: brooms, shovels and plastic sacks to collect the waste from the coffee cups after the game.

A car for transporting the coffee cups and the waste.

A color printer for printing all the game material for the players.

(Optional) Water or soda the players can drink during the game.

(Optional) Safety goggles for the players. Ceramic shards are less dangerous than broken glass, but I opted to give the players eye protection anyway.

## Location

The best location for the game is a parking lot. Breaking 200 coffee cups on the ground damages ordinary floors, so finding an indoor location is problematic. The parking lot should be empty, because cars may be damaged by the pieces of ceramic flying about. It's also a good idea to cordon it off and for the organizers to stick around during the game to explain things to passerby or the authorities, should problems arise.

Ideally the game is organized with the permission of the administrator of the parking lot, but doing the game without permission in an out of the way location is not impossible, since it's quick to set up and clean up afterwards.

## Running the game

From the organizers perspective, the game has the following phases:

1. Setting up the game. This means cordoning off the location and placing the coffee cups so they're available to the players.
2. Briefing the players and distributing the game materials.
3. The game. It's good to have a clear starting and ending signal everybody knows. The game ends after the coffee cups run out, but you shouldn't wait for the last stragglers to destroy the ones they have in their hands. Experience has shown that the players become very conservative with the cups when there's only a few left, so cut the game after the game seems to be on the verge of stalling.
4. After-game discussion. Debrief the players, destroy the remaining coffee cups.
5. Cleaning up.



# Muovikuppi (The Plastic Cup) - Briefing the Players (part 1 of 2)

## Distributing the materials

This PDF file contains the following materials to be printed and distributed to the players:

20 characters. Each player gets a character.

List of Items. Each player gets a copy of the list, so you need to print 20 of these.

Item number sheets. This file contains 15 pages with numbers from 1 to 15. These represent the items in the list of items. Whoever has the sheet with the number, has the item. At the beginning of the game, the Count has all the item sheets, and at the end of the game, they should be distributed among the participants.

## Briefing

Explain the following things to the players before distributing the characters:

The coffee cups - The participants and characters are to express themselves by destroying coffee cups. There are enough of them, so there's no need for self-restraint, although breaking them for no purpose is not encouraged. The coffee cups should be thrown straight down to the ground, away from other players.

The normality rule - The Plastic Cup has no off-game per se. Instead, all of the strange elements such as conducting the dividing of the inheritance on a parking lot or breaking coffee cups is to be considered as normal by the characters. They see nothing unusual about this, and have no need to talk about it. To the characters, the parking lot and the coffee cup destruction are utterly unremarkable. The purpose of this rule is to move the focus of the game away from the coffee cups: the participants are supposed to break the cups, not talk about them.

It's advisable to explain everything about the game, including the reasoning behind the design choices and the end of game criteria, to the participants in a transparent manner.

## Distributing the characters

There's 20 characters, divided into families. Most of the families are self-evident. The Neurotic couple have brought along their yoga instructor. The parents of the Money-Obsessed family are Terry and Pierre, the rest are their children. The Romantic yet Estranged are a three-person polyamorous group, where only Andrea has a stake in the inheritance. The Poor family consists of mother Molly, his boyfriend Pablo, and two kids.

There's a number of characters with unisex names. These are provided to give the game some flexibility in terms of the balance between male and female participants.

The first character to distribute is that of the Count. Since the Count is the one who has arranged this whole event and has to make a speech at the beginning of the game, it's good to have a player you can trust in this role. If that is not possible, try to get someone who seems comfortable with being in the spotlight but doesn't appear competitive.

## Muovikuppi (The Plastic Cup) - Briefing the Players (part 2 of 2)

Distribute the characters as groups, paying attention to the general composition of the people. I generally try to break groups of friends into different in-game families and make sure that all the shy participants don't get grouped into one family.

After everybody has a character and the list of items, ask the players to talk amongst their family's participants, so that they all know each other. Talk to the Count's player and explain what's required of him. Go around and answer any questions the participants might have.

After it seems that everybody knows their family unit, have one person from each family introduce their family to the rest of the participants and say a few words on what they're about.

After any last-minute questions you're ready to start the game.

### **Starting the game**

Arrange the participants in a semi-circle, with the Count in the middle-facing the others. The preliminaries are already over, and the Count is just starting to give his welcoming speech. Instruct the participants that the game starts when the Count starts talking.



## List of items

### Item #1

A preserved blowfish - Brought to Europe in 1833 by a sea captain ancestor.

### Item #2

A framed sketch by Jean Cocteau - Made by Cocteau and given to an ancestor in a bar in the harbor of Marseilles.

### Item #3

A collection of fossilized trilobites - Collected by the deceased, who believed that all civilized families have a natural history collection. Contains 17 specimens of various sizes.

### Item #4

A steel grenadier's helmet from 1633 - Stolen by an ancestor from a museum in Stockholm.

### Item #5

A first edition copy of the F.L. Green novel Odd Man Out, from 1947 - Bought by the deceased in a bookstore in Bangkok.

### Item #6

An ivory tusk - Exchanged by an ancestor to a tattered shirt in 1812 in what is now Senegal.

### Item #7

A Russian church ledger from 1877 featuring a woodcut of a worm-infested skull - Given to the deceased as a gift on her travels in Russia.

### Item #8

An Egyptian figurine depicting the deity Sobek - Stolen by the deceased from a museum in Cairo.

### Item #9

The skin of a zebra - Purchased by the deceased in an interior decoration shop in Copenhagen in 1967.

### Item #10

An armor made of gold originally made in 1433 in Constantinople - Given to an ancestor as a gift by a suitor in 1922.

### Item #11

A collection of women's magazines from the 1950s to the present day - Stored by the deceased in a shed on her backyard.

### Item #12

The saw of a sawfish - Originally from a specimen caught by an ancestor in 1799 in the Caribbean Sea.

### Item #13

A Samoan tapestry made from palm leaves - Acquired by the deceased from a Norwegian sea captain in the fishing harbor of San Francisco in 1959.

### Item #14

A collection of the sketches of Picasso - Found by the deceased in a dumpster in Paris in 1998.

### Item #15

A collection of Egyptian pornographic scrolls - Given to the deceased by the Shah of Persia in 1971 in Teheran.



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Be unreasonable.

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### Olga

Mother

A high-strung woman in her early forties, Olga is proud of her barely upper class lifestyle. Her values are based on tact, good taste and being better than most other people. She likes to think of herself as a cultivated woman of class, but her temper always lets her down: when she gets angry, insulted, flustered, happy or sad she forgets herself and lets go. After she calms down she pretends it didn't happen. Olga has all the crazy ideas of someone who doesn't have to work for a living.

### What's happening

You are a part of a huge extended family spread in many parts of the world. Not all of you know each other, and now a greataunt has died, leaving a large inheritance. You don't really know exactly how you're relate to the deceased. There is no money, but instead all kinds of strange objects, enough to fill a museum, and a binder with notes detailing the history behind every single piece. Some of the things are valuable, others worthless, all unusual.

### Practical

Express your emotions by shattering coffee mugs on the ground. Make sure you'll have reason to shatter a mug before the game has run for twenty minutes. There's plenty of mugs, so don't be shy. When throwing a mug into the ground, make sure you don't hit anybody, and always throw straight towards the ground.





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### Flavio

Father, the Count, middle-aged

The scion of a family in long decline, you work as a highly-paid graphic consultant to various companies led by people who respect your name. You're vaguely disgusted by the fact that you have to work, and like to pretend you don't. You hate conflict and beastliness of any kind, and tend to lash out like a sissy when it occurs. Every family heirloom holds deep significance for you, personally.

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### Alexandra

Daughter, in her twenties

Happy naivete can be supremely aggressive if you feel entitled to have everything your way. You have a clear idea of how things are in the world you live in: everybody loves you, and wants you to be happy. All people are basically good and all problems can be solved if everybody's nice to each other and does exactly as you say. If somebody somehow fails to conform to your high expectations, you let them hear it until they correct their inexplicably bizarre behavior.

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### Elizabeth

Daughter, in her twenties

You don't really give a damn about material stuff, as long as nobody in your family is getting what they want. Your mother made sure you knew the value of suitably chic shoes and exquisite sushi, which is why you wear loafers and eat at Burger King. Your joys include nasty repartee, depriving others of their material pleasures and watching greed fail. You don't know what you want for yourself, and hide it by projecting everything outside.

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### Brad

Son, in his twenties

You're vaguely ashamed of your family, but you love all the stuff that comes with it, all the history, the stories of people who seem much more respectable and accomplished than your mother and father. Everything your parents do is indicative of their degeneration, which is something you like to point out in their company. Ideally, they would be dead, so you could create the noble familial fantasy you want to have without interference from actual, real people. You could decorate your home with the materials of the past and pretend that your family was always great.

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### Isabel

A middle-aged childless housewife

Your husband never throws anything away. You have been married for twenty years, and your garage has a collection of cardboard boxes, because "you might need them one day". You have come to hate stuff. You declared the living room a white zone, and every time an object is brought in, you throw it into the trash compactor to be destroyed.

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### James

A middle-aged childless working husband

You never, ever throw anything away, because it might be useful someday. You hate seeing things discarded. You have a great deal of tension in your marriage, because your wife is a person who throws things away. You work in the plumbing business, and you like to say that construction is a profession that teaches you the value of things. You are a generous person, because you like to see other people find use for things too.

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### Wendy

A thirtysomething yoga instructor

The person who knows what's best for everybody is you. You become annoyed when people don't take your advice, and you know that everybody will fail in some way if you're not there to help them. You start with yoga, but you know that to be of help you have to extend your advice into all areas of the lives of your charges. If there's one thing you can't stand, it's ingratitude.

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### Terry

A middle-aged line producer at a movie company

You have 322 067,44 euros in debt, and it would be very nice to get rid of some of that. You see whatever you can get out of this inheritance as assets to be sold to help you with your other financial commitments. You are aggressively non-sentimental, and it's clear to you that your financial problems are immensely more important than the financial problems of other people.

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### Pierre

A middle-aged househusband

Why is the running of the household always on your shoulders? Why don't you have any money? You're supposed to be in the upper income bracket, yet when you wish to redecorate, there is no money for it. You're very financially oriented, and proud of the fact that what you're doing is keeping your family on the rails. You'll never live in the street, because you plan ahead, do wise investments, and never let anyone walk over you.

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### Dieter

A teenage anarchist, son

You have caused the family tremendous financial setbacks because your parents have had to pay for the fines and legal expenses incurred by your graffiti hobby. It gives you perverse pleasure to lay waste to your parents' finances. You don't appreciate beautiful things, but you do have a girlfriend, and it would be nice to have something to give her as a gift, for romance is something you do understand.

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### Sydney

Bright young thing

You study law and your one aim in life is to be more successful than your parents, make more money, be more famous and make sure they know it. You have a good job, a good marriage, good children (two, another one on the way) and a desire to acquire. You like to think of yourself as a ruthless person, but in secret the one thing that gets in the way of having more is the fact that you're quite sentimental.

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### Helen

The princess daughter

You are the youngest child, the most loved. You are, of course, the center of attention in all things, and when something strikes your fancy, you must have it. You have everything you're ever wanted, and there's no reason to stop now. You have a weakness for people who grossly ignore your desires, and always end up helping them in any way you can.

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### Andrea

A rootless hippie

You moved into a squat after leaving your grandparents place because they went senile. You have no idea of your own parents, but don't bear them any ill will. You are a kind but persistent person, and you like to pursue things which strike your fancy. Calm things make you happy. You are here because of a letter from a solicitor you received; you don't know any of these people. You live in a three-person polyamorous arrangement with your partners, both of whom came along with you.

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### Leslie

The angry protester

You just know that you're going to get fucked. You're a poor person belonging to an ethnic minority, and if there's one thing that's always true for people like you, is that what you should have you'll never get. You're always on the lookout for things you or your loved ones should have and for people who try to shaft you. You live in a three-person polyamorous arrangement with your partners, one of whom is about to get an inheritance.

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### Nikita

The NGO worker

You live in a three-person polyamorous arrangement with your partners, one of whom is about to get an inheritance. You don't mind this one bit. You're the only person in your relationship with an actual job, with an actual income, and it would be nice if someone else made a financial contribution to your household for a change. You deeply despise rich people and like to talk to them about this.

### What's happening

You are a part of a huge extended family spread in many parts of the world. Not all of you know each other, and now a greataunt has died, leaving a large inheritance. You don't really know exactly how you're relate to the deceased. There is no money, but instead all kinds of strange objects, enough to fill a museum, and a binder with notes detailing the history behind every single piece. Some of the things are valuable, others worthless, all unusual.

### Practical

Express your emotions by shattering coffee mugs on the ground. Make sure you'll have reason to shatter a mug before the game has run for twenty minutes. There's plenty of mugs, so don't be shy. When throwing a mug into the ground, make sure you don't hit anybody, and always throw straight towards the ground.



Ceramic shatters but plastic endures. You are not someone who breaks. You may scratch, bend, and have a meltdown, but you never break.

Be unreasonable.

## Muovikuppi (The Plastic Cup)

A larp by Juhana Pettersson

### Molly

Drunk mother

You used to be a teacher of Spanish, but you got kicked out of your job because you mistook a student for your boyfriend in a state of drunken confusion. You change your mind constantly, but argue your opinions very forcefully for the little time you have them. You follow the opinions of others easily, but get carried away in repeating what you heard. You like to say that you're the best mother anyone is ever going to have, but it's probably not true.

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### Pablo

Young boyfriend

You're fifteen years younger than your girlfriend, almost as young as her children, but it doesn't bother you because she has a nice flat, which she owns. You like to flirt and fuck whoever is available, and you see money and material things as the fuel you use to buy pleasure. You like to say nice things to people, so you can have what you want.

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### Jamie

Ambitious student

Your mother has a shit life, and you're going to avoid it. You're going to work, get something valuable out of this inheritance and hustle to make sure you can get out, study, marry well and never look back. You react to adversity and setbacks with self-destructive moves, so you don't always get what you want. It is your belief that you can do an infinite amount of work hustle an infinite amount of people and never get caught in a lie, but its probably not true.

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### Jürgen

Happy delinquent son

You love your mother and like to steal nice things for her. You have no ambition, but you like it when people are happy. You are non-confrontational, but like to make sure unpleasant people don't get what they want. You get along with men badly, with women very well. You subsist on very little, and can never say no, when someone asks you to do something, or to give them something, or to get them something.

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