RADICAL
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INTERACTING ARTS

INTERNATIONAL ISSUE
2006

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THIS ISSUE OF INTERACTING ARTS
IS DEDICATED TO EXPLORING
THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN
LIVE ROLE-PLAYING AND
POLITICAL RADICALISM

WE HAVE MADE INTERVIEWS
WITH SOME OF THE MOST
INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE IN
THE NORDIC LIVE ROLE-PLAYING
COMMUNITY

THEY ARE ORGANISERS,
THEORISTS AND EDITORS
WHO ALL HAVE SOMETHING
IN COMMON:
THEY WANT CHANGE

THIS IS A COLLAGE OF VOICES
A MULTITUDE OF OPINIONS
BUT IT IS ALSO A DIRECTION

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AND FEMINISM WE WILL
PRACTICE ROLE-PLAYING
TO FIGHT CAPITALISM,
PATRIARCHY AND REALITY

WE WANT THE MOST
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FROM THIS MOMENT,
DESPAIR ENDS AND
TACTICS BEGIN

A changed approach to moral concepts and view on society could lead to a sudden transformation of the role-playing hobby into a militant political movement.

Örnstedt & Sjöstedt, *De övergivnas armé*

In 1997 a book was published that caused moral panic in Sweden. It claimed that role-playing was a dangerous hobby – that it could change the identity of young people, turning them into political dissidents.

They were right.

LET'S SMASH THIS WORLD INTO PIECES TO BUILD A THOUSAND NEW ONES

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE FRAGMENTED THOUGHTS?

MAGNUS ALM is the editor of swedish gaming magazine *Sverox* and a frequent writer of free-form scenarios.

ERLEND EIDSEM HANSEN is film producer, activist, writer, and organiser of live role-plays. Organiser of *AmerikA* and initiator of *Knutepunkt.*

MARTIN ERICSSON is a game researcher, writer and organiser of live role-plays. Being one of the minds behind scenarios like *Carolus Rex*, *Knappnålshuvudet*, *Hamlet*.

EIRIK FATLAND is a theorist (*Dogme´99, Fateplay*) and writer of live role-plays including *Kybergenesis, Europa, inside : outside, PanoptiCorp*

TOVA GERGE is a writer, theorist and playwright. Formerly co-editor of swedish magazine *Fëa Livia.*

HANNE GRASMO is writer, theater director, sociologist and sexologist. She organised *AmerikA*.

HOLGER JAKOBSSON is the writer behind scenarios like *Det sista kapitlet (Last Chapter)* and *Futuredrome*.

MIKE POHJOLA is a writer and organiser of live role-plays. He wrote the *Maniphesto of the Turku School* and co-wrote *inside : outside*.

JOHAN SÖDERBERG is a writer, theorist and, illustrator active in Gothenburg. One of the minds behind the zine *Alter Ego*.

I'm digging where I am standing. The exploitation of our culture, language and humanity pales in comparison to the suffering of people in the periphery. It all connects, however, and I believe I best help there and then by pushing for liberation at the spot. –JS

To reclaim our culture, our right to breathe without a respirator. –EF

NEXT UP: Explore the concept of a seamless city-larping campaign combining escapist thrills and chills with activism and engagement. –ME

WHY DO LIVE ROLE-PLAYING?

I think that the way I've been working with live role-playing has made me strong and radical in an individualistic way. /// The generous norweigan scene has made me believe in my capacity to change the world. That I have to make a difference and that it's my responsibility. Many people want to make a difference but are tied to social democratic family constructions of some kind. –EEH

13 years ago I was a feature reporter who was supposed to join a larp (middle age fantasy...) for one day. I never got back home. Stayed for three nights. My approach to larp soon moved from "having fun" to "challenge and change people". –HG

I'm all for direct action and all that, but I've always been explicitly anthropocentric and hedonistic. The reason I dropped out of center-stage activism is closely tied to my morals; the scene was becoming increasingly ruled by fear, anger and disgust. From my perspective it felt as if all the fun and love went out of it and I went full-time into LARPdom. –ME
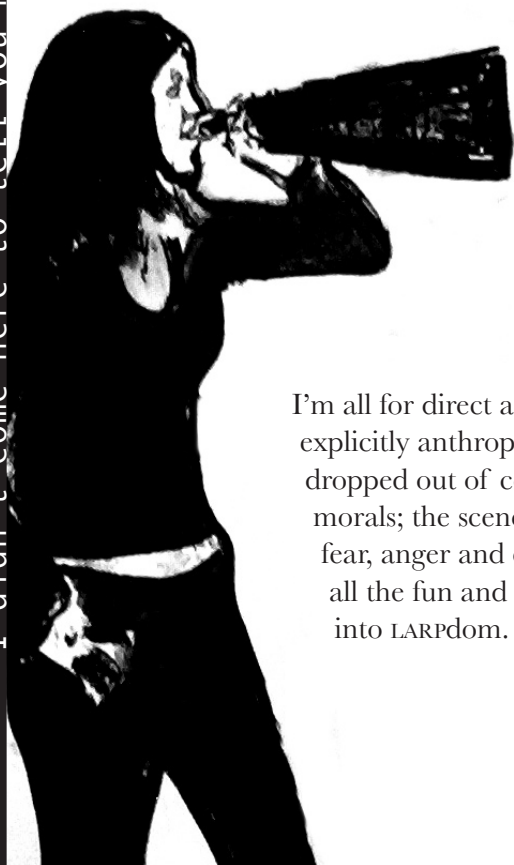
THINKING RADICAL

My first conscious memory [of radical thinking] is of organizing an escape attempt from kindergarten. Not because it was an unpleasent place (it wasn't) but because there were walls around it and to keep people locked up behind walls was simply wrong. I was four years old, and I guess you can say that's where it started. –EF

Liberty (incl. gender-freedom, cultural freedom, and erotic freedom), Peace, Anti-capitalism. –HG

I'm a third generation revolutionary. My grandfather gave up professional gambling and boxing to fight alongside the communists at the sawmill and my parents were central figures in Umeå's Trotskyism party. My first party-engagements were with the Marxist/Leninist "Offensiv" faction of the social democratic party, from there I slipped into the Trotskyite SAP's youth division. As time went by and I did my own reading more and more black crept over the flag until I was stomping away to Rage Against The Machine with the intellectual KAOS anarchists in Uppsala somewhere around 93. Since then I define myself as a left-hand path anarchist with increasing amounts of Thelemic and American hippie-radical influence. I'm still a sporadic member of the SAC. –ME

Investigate and spread anarcho-escapist ethos. Combine escapism and social action. –ME

I went to a school with a lot of upper class students. My home wasn't really poor or anything, but the people I met everyday in school where truly snobbish and looked down on poor people, this frustrated me and some of my friends. Of course we chose to not blend in to the crowd, and we were considered the freaks of the school. Especially since we were roleplayers. I remember my first protest against anything at all, which in a sense was political. Me and a friend wrote a satiric column in every edition of the school-magazine under the pseudonym "Mr X" –MA

"Radicalism came from many directions; new friends, a rising conflict level in society, and engagement in campaigns against neo-liberal globalisation. Then engagement fed into life at large, and into live roleplaying, and then back." –JS

ROLE-PLAYING IN A POLITICAL CONTEXT

Most of my 'work' with (live) role-playing has been as an editor of long-time pdf-fanzine *Alter Ego*. The fanzine was apolitical at first but successively opinion found its way into the material. Four years back we took the step of becoming outspokenly radical, and by then we had built up a regular readership and credibility. I would like to think that AE has played a part (and continuously does) as an organ for radicalising the movement, and making it to think of itself as a resistance identity in a larger, political setting. –JS

As a LARP organizer I have focused on making LARPs dealing with important questions such as: *Sosial femokratiet* – an utopia describing a close future society where the women have won the gender struggle. As if we took the political programe of the Social Left Party (where I'm a member) and put it to life. But we use the LARP world as a tool for questioning "is this really the world we want?" –HG

During the turn of the millenium I think the Seattle incidents was starting to enter my work. –EEH

From day one I've tried to integrate radical ideas in plots and world-construction. You can be pretty sure to find at least one or more reflections on the "woman of the future" in my old games; a character with the moral and intellectual maturity to live as she will and not harm others. Often you'll discover anarchist utopias or perfect communism somewhere in the worlds, just to prove that it can be done. But ever since I left the Uppsala-scene my games have morphed into dark reflections of the spectacle we live in. Funhouse fantasy mirrors to show the mechanisms of oppression to people blinded by comfort, if you want. *Törnedop* (vampire-game) was about social elitism, *Mineva* (never performed Sci-Fi) about capitalism, *Carolus Rex* (retro Sci-Fi) about nationalism and militarism. *Hamlet* was a very Marxist tale about the necessary pain of revolution. Some people have picked up on the radical vibes (especially after *Hamlet*, which was sort of in-your-face), some have not. *Knappnålshuvudet* (angelological realism) was a departure from this expository methodology; here a number of solutions were presented, rather than monolithic problems. This is the way I'm going now. I think I've talked enough about the need for change. Time to get cracking. –ME

When it comes to content, of course the LARPs I've authored have been influenced by my political perspectives. That's more or less unavoidable, and I find it dishonest to hide behind a banner of "neutrality" as so many larpwrights do. There is no such thing as a politically "neutral" LARP; ideology, values, perspectives sneak in no matter if you want them to or not. So the best way to deal with it is to dive in head-first and make LARPs about the stuff you really care about, whether it be anarchism or orc tribes. Just don't pretend it doesn't have values or that it isn't personal. Authoring LARPs, any LARP, is a fairly personal way of expression.

However, there is a difference between a work being influenced by your political position and making an outright propaganda work. Many of the LARPs I've worked on have been seen as propaganda pieces, and usually wrongly so. I suffer no delusions here, the political impact of these LARPs was neglible and was never expected to be anything but negligible.

Kybergenesis – a LARP version of Orwells *1984* – was born out of mine and (producer) Jan Erik Dyve's fascination for the pompous, hierarchical and extravagant. We made sure the society would be as unpleasant as possible since we didn't want the event to appear pro-fascist. Instead, it has been interpreted as an anti-fascist crusade. But the impulse to organize was artistic, not political.

Or take *Europa*, a fictious asylum reception centre for refugees from a fictitious Nordic war. It's paralells to Western European treatment of refugees was obvious, but it was never a "love refugees" propaganda piece. The LARP was born out of the frustration I accumulated while working as a conscientious objector at NOAS – a watchdog NGO that gives legal advice to asylum seekers, where the tide of problems seemed unstobbable. So Europa was a way for me to vent my frustration, feeling better by making others feel as bad as I had. And it was a way to analyze what I had actually experienced.

I don't see these LARPs as political propaganda, or as activism, or as politics at all. Rather they were a kind of discussion, or a dinner party. The chefs (organizers) set the table, served the meals, and suggested a topic of conversation. The guests (players) then discussed this, and obviously a number of other topics, for the duration of the party (LARP). –EF
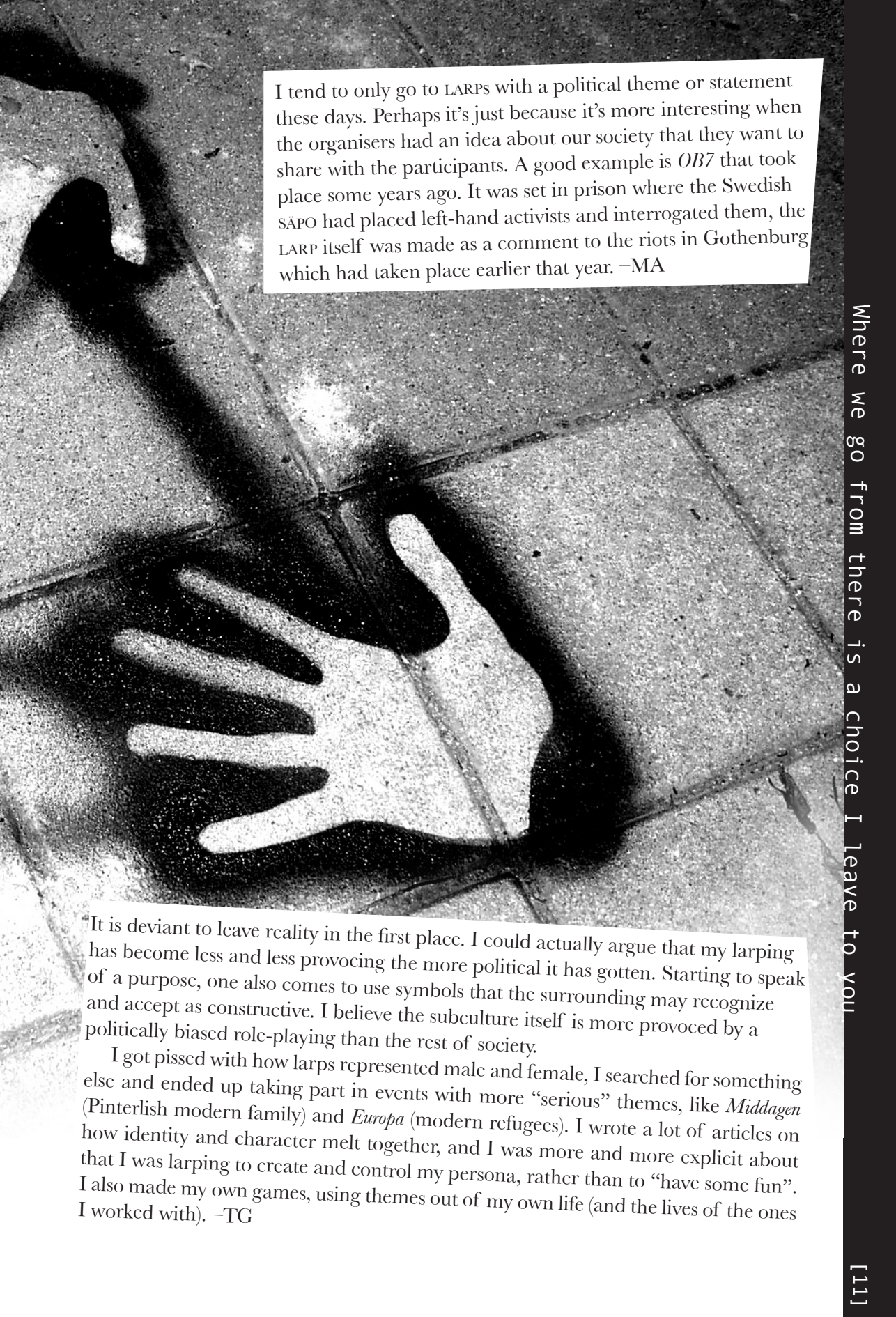
ROLE-PLAYING IN A POLITICAL CONTEXT

We made a huge garbage dung/installation/living homes for 50 LARP-ers at one of the biggest squares in the middle of Oslo. Including Real Life Company running a restaurant where guests could enjoy their drinks while watching the poor people living at the dung. Also ordinary by-passers (off live) could join Real Life Company in a guided tour (social tourism...) at the Dung *AmerikA*. The cermonial temple was made of TV monitors. The castle of refrigirators –HG

The content of everything i've done in this context has, of course, been influenced by my ethical and political viewpoints. *Futuredrome* was in a very obvious, almost cartoonish, way crowley-style anarchism. I belive that a lot of the young participants left the game with a feeling that things could be changed and that pure imagination and will of the individual could be powerful tools for this.

In *Virtual Galileo* a collaboration between Stockholm Science festival, The Storylab and Interactive Institute we tried to tell the almost true tale of Galileo Gallilei's struggle for freedom for his ideas. His prison warders wasn't the catholic church as in reality but "The Brand" an archetypic Gibson-like Mega-corp. In *Hamlet Inifrån* the depraved masters of an imploding society continued to spread poison among themselves in an underground shelter while revolutionaries roamed the streets of their cities. *OB7* was about the treatment of left hand thinkers during the early 70´s.

But all this seems more radical than it really is. My main focus has always been the creation of emotions, of any kind, rather than the sharing of radical ideas. –HJ

I tend to only go to LARPs with a political theme or statement these days. Perhaps it's just because it's more interesting when the organisers had an idea about our society that they want to share with the participants. A good example is *OB7* that took place some years ago. It was set in prison where the Swedish SÄPO had placed left-hand activists and interrogated them, the LARP itself was made as a comment to the riots in Gothenburg which had taken place earlier that year. –MA

It is deviant to leave reality in the first place. I could actually argue that my larping has become less and less provocing the more political it has gotten. Starting to speak of a purpose, one also comes to use symbols that the surrounding may recognize and accept as constructive. I believe the subculture itself is more provoced by a politically biased role-playing than the rest of society.

I got pissed with how larps represented male and female, I searched for something else and ended up taking part in events with more "serious" themes, like *Middagen* (Pinterlish modern family) and *Europa* (modern refugees). I wrote a lot of articles on how identity and character melt together, and I was more and more explicit about that I was larping to create and control my persona, rather than to "have some fun". I also made my own games, using themes out of my own life (and the lives of the ones I worked with). –TG

LIVE ROLE-PLAYING AND POLITICAL STRUGGLE

The biggest LARP I've ever been to was called GBG 2001. I'm not sure I used roleplaying <u>techniques</u> to survive the events of that demonstration but LARP <u>experience</u> sure came in handy when applied to filtering rumors, sniffing out and avoiding trouble, recognizing mass suggestion etc. I think organizing a demonstration, or even a small protest action, is very similar to organizing a LARP – you are basically building a focused framework for a wealth of individual expressions – and I think LARP organizers would do very well as demonstration organizers.

> That's one of the biggest lessons I've learned from live role-playing and regular role-playing. We need to communicate in order to understand each other, and understanding each other is the key to evolve. –MA

I don't think of the politically flavored LARPs I've authored as being part of a political struggle, except indirectly – the way all artistic expressions contribute to the flux and flow of human culture. I believe LARPs can not, and should not, be used as political tools. LARPs are cultural tools, cultural events, and they are at their best both artistically and in terms of the experience to be gained from them when they stay away from the much more limiting power-play of politics.

AmerikA, of-course, was part a political tool and part a LARP but it's political influence was negligible and it's artistic qualities were questionable. Still – as an installation, as a show-case of scenography and redecoration of dreary downtown Oslo – it was great. –EEH

More or less all of the scenarios I've been organizing, writing for and/or participating in lately, have a lot to do with this economy we are in. "We" - the world as a whole, but more specifically this subculture, producing humming voices of a scenario going on next-door neighbour to reality. "We" speak of a certain emptiness, "we" search for a certain fullness, "we" go to forbidden places. "We" crack each other up. "We" project our histories upon the walls, upon each other. "We" are (the) breaking out/caving in. Still "we" remain *within*. A very frustrating insight, pointing towards the same emptiness mentioned above. And so the snake bites its tail. Can "anyone" step outside its circle? –TG

The practice (struggle) of live role-playing has been indispensable for my understanding of contemporary theories on resistance against the mode of 'real subsumption' into which capitalism now spins, – i.e. its bid to colonise culture. –JS

'GAMES' REFERS TO MODELS, SIMULATIONS AND GAMES WHICH HAVE TACTICAL AND STRATEGIC APPLICATIONS.

First, let me extend the issue to include the whole gamer-scene. Any intellectual player worth his salt will sooner or later realize that the world we perceive as real is nothing but a bunch of rule-systems dictated by history and power. They are not written to maximize the joy of the game or give everyone cool characters to play; it's designed to funnel resources into the hands of a select number of players in the western world. Put simply; it should be quite obvious that game of reality sucks. So, what's the impulse when games suck? Two options; modify the rules or go play something else. Both roads are radical. Both roads lead to the future. That's the optimist in me speaking by the way.

I think some of this thinking is starting to affect the gamer scene in general and the LARP-scene in particular. I have a gut feeling there is a sense of knowing out there among the LARP-kids, of being privy to a secret that the mundanes have missed out on. We know that reality really is up for grabs. So far no-one has really got up on the soap-box and started preaching, perhaps afraid of being shot to pieces by the inevitable reaction. I have indications that lead me to believe that this is about to change.

On a more graspable level we are in big trouble. The Swedish LARP-scene remains divided along lines of "highbrow" and "lowbrow" games with both sides more or less loathing each other for no good reason other than different taste in drama and costume. I wished for this state of affairs sometime around 1996, not realizing that the result would be a rapid decrease in the number of interesting projects per year and what feels like the beginning of the death-march of the LARP-scene. Eight years back you could gather three hundred people for a LARP-seminar but now it seems we are mostly preaching to the converted. A handful small and outstanding games a year cater to the same group of roughly 500 people while the rest of the scene, numbering in the thousands, is still living in 94-style bofferland. Or maybe they're amazing and we just didn't bother looking. But where the fan-base fails the big players are stepping in. LARP is considered cool and promising in research-circles, state administration and boardrooms alike. There's more money in the business now than ever before, mostly in low-threshold games aimed at the general public.

ANALYSIS: Hot-shot organisers should make bigger and better games that celebrate our heritage (read: are genre-based) while incorporating our radical findings from recent years. If we want to change the world we need to reach more than 200 cozy impro-radicals in Stockholm. –ME

I'm not sure. I'm not sure here, where we are, is real at all. This feels like a game to me. And you, you begin to feel like a character...

[13]

THE CONTEMPORARY LIVE ROLE-PLAYING SCENE IN THE NORTH

The LARP-scene seems to be narrowing and getting more conservative. seems to me that for me the radical place to be is sweden all of a sudden. –EEH

I am happy that there are some people using the LARP medium to express deeper political, philosophical and ethical issues. Artists and activists who want larps to change us & the system. BUT there are far to few of those.

And I get really pissed of all the voices that are raised against larp as a political tool. The majority of larpers today thinks it's immoral to have a (political) message in a LARP, and especially if you do not say it in advance. Off course we can have hidden agendas in our LARPs! In fact, there are a lot of extreme conservative attitudes in the "normal" fantasy/historical LARPs. Why not fight this back! –JS

Honestly; I think it sucks. It has a lot of potential to explode into a new (counter-)cultural movement, but today is the same as when I began LARPing in 1994 - it's still just a potential. And that's a disappointment.

Note that I'm not really worried about the huge mainstream of fantasy LARPs with young participants. This is good – LARP is good, culture is good. The problem is that movement is at a standstill, as a movement it's not really developing. I think what many see as our greatest success is our greatest failure – the formation of a Nordic avant-garde LARP scene and an evolving body of theory to accompany it. The problem is that these tend to suck people and energy out of the general LARP movement without giving much in return.

The core of the problem is ambition, and ambition's brother – specialization. For a brief while in the 90s, you could put an undigested but original idea into an article and have people read and discuss it, or you could gather a bunch of friends for a weekend LARP and still see the clever security rule you invented or the strange genre blend you played in spread around the movement.

But today, an idea needs to be digested four times, accompanied by a set of clear definitions, backed up by some unrelated university degree, and printed in the Knute-book. And it's almost impossible to organise a noteworthy LARP these days without the attention of an elite cadre of players, some very experienced producers and LARP-wrights, and a bucket-load of sponsorships and/or public funding. This makes LARPs like *Hamlet* or *1942* pretty useless in a wider perspective – they're great LARPs, sure, even works of genius – but they are also pointers towards a road almost nobody can walk. Which means they don't do anything to develop the form or the subculture.

In an ideal world – players would return home from these events inspired to implement new ideas and techniques into the kind of small, easily organized LARP which keeps the movement alive. In practice they return home and ask "how can we do some-

thing bigger, better, more original?". Which most of them can't, lacking the experience and network and resources of the fanatical avant-garde. I fear we're headed towards a two-level LARP world, with a growing cleft between the avant-garde and the 'mainstream', where the most enthusiastically creative talent of the LARP scene either join the avant-garde or get freaked out by it.

I wish avantgardists would focus on making something reproducible by others, developing ideas and methods that could be picked up by teenage newbies and turned into great experiences. Instead we have a situation where the avantgarde is inspired by a desire to out-size or out-create previous LARPs, while the rest of the LARP movement is at a stand-still.

To mention a counter-example roughly as old as the LARP movement, the Internet is still the most promising place to be for cultural radicals. The way the internet is devolving power, questioning structures. The pioneer spirit has survived – though not un-changed – from the dotcom era when it looked like the Net would become a commercial pond. Now, I think it's pretty obvious that the Net is by and for people, and corporations are just riding piggyback on a movement and technology they don't understand. The achieve-ments of the Open Source movement (and derivatives, like Creative Commons) are just astounding and perfectly Kosher anarchism. And I think the best is yet to come. –EF

"It is a very exciting moment to partake in live role-playing and be part of shaping its future. Like most collective, sub-culturally based art-forms (rave, hacking); the movement has come up against a choice: to conform and feed back into the Spectacle – or to resist. I guess it will do both. Parts of it will be absorbed into the culture industry (game shows and tourist parks) and into art institutions. It promises to save some of us from more alienated forms of wage labour, but only a minority can escape in this way, since the rest of the movement will have to support the 'professionals' with our purchases. There are no morals here; no-one can be condemned for not wanting to sacrifice her only life in the factory-machine. But the individual escape route is illusory – even the lucky minority will find out that the authenticity and emancipative spirit of our community (which was their reason for holding on to live role-playing full-time in the first place) dissolves when it becomes a commodity. Relations of economic dependencies and hier-archy will inevitably infiltrate and gradually reconstruct live roleplaying into a market like any other. The only way you can save live role-playing for yourselves is by saving it for everyone. Backs to the wall, we have to fight this one politically." –JS

I think we've travelled the road together, but we're now seeing the divergence of different paths. Some want to do larps for profit, others have artistic ambi-tions, or political. Yet others just want to have fun, or develop the medium for its own sake. I think it will be really interesting to see where we will be in a few years' time, especially if all the different people will continue exchanging ideas in events like Knutpunkt. –MP

First of all, I have a problem with separating the scene from the social context. People in this subculture have, no matter how constructed, very strong emotional experiences in common. These experiences have in many cases been made to make an explicitly political impact, which makes the whole group sensitive (in it's most physical meaning) to ideological twists and turns. I see a parallell to the drug liberal sixties and seventies as I imagine them - we are a bunch of people that, though with some more pessimism than our parents, believe every change possible. On the other hand there is also a lot of mumbo jumbo going on; the stronger stepping on the weaker in the name of ideological virtues, people using the subculture as a hide-out for dreams that should be lived, the game as justification of really dirty human interaction, a certain secterism. –TG

SOCIETY AND THE WORLD

I think it's time to begin using the word "fascism" again, and acknowledge that it is a more real threat today than at any time since the end of WWII. I don't mean neo-nazism or the delusions of Hitler, but the less extreme (and more ellectible) forms of Mussolini or Franco. Traditionally, fascism was the orderly marriage of one-party government, military and corporations combined with nationalism and a skepticism towards free thought. That's a nasty combination, of course, but it doesn't automatically mean anti-semitism, concentration camps or genocide. Which means that, even though we have learned some lessons from the 20th century, fascism is still a threat.

First of all, we are seeing traditional fascists - who don't pretend not to be fascists - on the march again. Mussolini's heirs are in Berlusconi's coalition government, their foot soldiers are all over the police and carabinieri (as many G8 protesters learned the hard way). Turkey's MHP, the "gray wolves" who were allied with Hitler and Mussolini back when they were around, were in the previous government and they might get to be in the next one. The core politicians and activists of France's "Front National", though nominally right-wing populists, all have backgrounds from openly fascist movements going back to Vichy and before. The only way to find out if they really have become more moderate is to put them in government and see what they do.

Secondly, we are seeing the growth of political movements that resemble fascism. I'm not thinking of right-wing populists like Norway's Progress Party or Hollands (now defunct) Pim Fortuyjn List, but rather of ideologically solid non-populist parties like the Danish Peoples Party. Back when we were writing the 'alternative history' of the LARP 'Europa' we invented the concept nationalist-slash-social democratic parties as a way to make a Nordic war seem more plausible. And it was quite scary to see, a few months after I moved to Denmark, that precisely such a party became Denmark's second-largest.

Thirdly, we have all the 'anti-terrorism' legislation passed after 9/11 in most Western states (not just the U.S.) and the political influence of corporations is so strong that even 'the Economist' is warning against it in it's editorials. The fear of terrorism has made islamophobia, and by extension – xenophobia, legitimate. There has been a sudden explosion of criticism of Islam and the Islamic world. The liberal intellectuals who should have taken a stand against Islamic fundamentalism and oppression of women decades ago, didn't under the false belief that it would harm muslim immigrants. And now these intellectuals are made into scapegoats, and society grows more anti-intellectual – more sceptical of free thought. Combined, these influences are nudging our societies many steps towards fascism.

And finally we have countries that are essentially fascist though they sail under different flags. Many of these are in the Middle East, these days a region ripe with extremism. And then we have China, the world's most populous state and it's fastest-growing economy. China as of the early 21st century has all the hallmarks of fascism - a vibrant nationalism, one-party rule closely alligned with military and corporate interests, a police state severely limiting freedom of speech and thought – but not of labour or capital. Thank God the Chinese, by history and culture, aren't particularly expansionist.

Put it all together, and balance it by thinking of the growing social movements, and I think we run a risk of returning to a situation like the German 20's. We could see, once again, communists and fascists – probably under different names – openly fighting in the streets, and risk demagogues harnessing people's fear of extremism into establishing extremist states. It's not a certain scenario, but it's not entirely unlikely either – even in the cushioned reality of the Scandinavians. It is a situation we should be prepared for, by closely examining our own values and especially our methods, looking for that elusive "third way" out of conflict spirals and into utopia. –EF

I see global capitalism and its project of anti-Enlightenment as the single biggest threat to civilization on Earth. Many of the smaller problems, the invasion of Iraq, the spread of religious fundamentalism, the growing economic divide within the "western" world... they're all direct results of that one big foe behind it all. And so are reality-TV and Britney Spears, for that matter. –MP

The west dominates the rest of the world. People are generally fearful and they scare each other. New terror balances, new wars and old wars. –TG
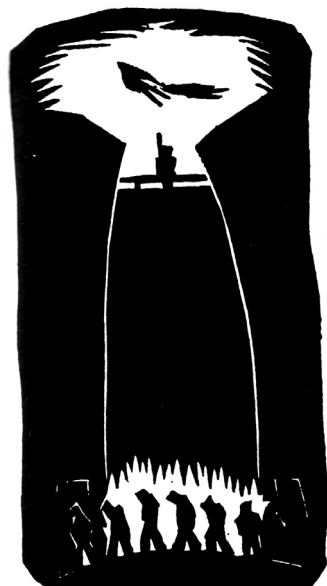
"- the world or our larps will never be perfect. no need to pretend they are." –EEH

Most of the globe has given in to US-style capitalism, at least on a national level. Suddenly it feels as if there are no options, as if The Market was really God and we were fools to ever try to chain it. To make a blunt comparison we're stepping out of an antiquity of political ideologies and into a dark age of absolute monocultural rule. How long before the renaissance is really up to us. Now, more than ever is the time to try out some options. –ME

The modern world must learn what it already knows, become what it already is, by means of a great work of exorcism, by conscious practice. One can escape from the commonplace only by manhandling it, mastering it, steeping it in dreams, giving it over to the sovereign pleasure of subjectivity.
Vaneigem

GLOBALISATION COUNTER-CULTURE AND ACTIVISM

i am a part of the movement,
but believe that it is strongly infected by
reformist, communist and conformist control-freaks –
that the anarchistic freedom and creative potential it had a few years
ago had to hide in other parts of society for example:
LARPing, music-festivalmaking and globetrotting. –EEH

Protest groups are important to break hegemony and to put questions in the minds of others. However, the thrust for social change comes from movements rarely acknowledged as political, like the live role-playing community. Unsuspectingly, in their volunteer labour for 'auto-valorisation', they are building a new 'architecture of conviviality' that has the potential of replacing the current structures (which are always only operable under hierarchy). Autonomous temporary zones can only be built unsuspectingly, as its conviviality lies exactly in it being built for its own sake, not for economic gain and not in ideological sacrifice. –JS

It's a mixed bag, isn't it? I understand and empathize with the kids charging the picket-lines but don't know if it will do much good in the end. If you are going to use force it should be done decisively and with very clear objectives. The military actions of the Zapatists in Chiapas serve as a shining example of modern revolutionary practice. A stone here and there will only turn the masses against you. Getting naked, painted and linking up a daisy-chain would be way more fun and efficient. The intellectual brigades of anti-globalization are doing a pretty good job, even though strict regionalism bothers the hell out of me. The biggest problem with the whole movement is that is feels…boring as hell. But that's where we come in. –ME

I really do believe in globalization. I just don't think it should be driven by mega corporations, but by people and their elected governments. If globalization could result in a global standard for a minimum wage and social security, for example, it would mean an end to slavery and exploitation of the third world. –MP

I'm not quite sure, I like when people express their opinions. I don't like when people hit a cop over the head yelling fascist, just because the cop is standing in their way. I don't support the idea of fighting cops in the streets during mass riots. I don't think it's achieving anything, but I really support the idea of many people getting together and working out new and odd ways of showing their opinions, thoughts and disrespect for some of the aspects of society. I'm pro pacifism, but then again I've never had a cause which I felt a need to physically fight for. Of course, times change, and people change, but I hope to never raise a fist at another human being. I've never had to, and I never want to. –MA

The current counter-movement was based on simplifying apparently complex issues – "globalization", neoliberal economics etc and relating these to local struggles. The world, post 9/11, is one where counter-movements need to complexify apparently simple issues - the 'good' vs 'evil' of the War on Terror or Israel-Palestine, for example. This is not what the movement was structured to do. Either we just close our eyes and hope the troubles are gone when we open them again, or we need a different kind of movement. The globalization movement was (and is) actively building alternatives, but the anti-war movement is simply anti-. You don't get very far by being anti.

But there's a lot of energy out there, probably reorganizing and realigning itself as we speak. I think it's only a question of time until the movements re-emerge in a stronger and yet un-forseen form.

When it comes to activism, I have become terribly dissapointed. Back in the summer of 2001 I was at the founding meetings of *Attac*, *Indymedia* and *Adbusters* Norway. Only Adbusters has turned out to be a pleasent organisation to work in, with the right combination of fun and efficiency to its methods. *Attac* Norway is yet another bastion for good old Labour Marxists and legalistic socialist do-gooders. *Indymedia* does essentially nothing, except uncritically publishing conspiracy-theory drivel.

Too often underground activist scenes resemble the grafitti scene; teams of activists doing stuff to win cred in the eyes of their peers without much attention to what they are fighting for or how to reach these goals. A bit of playful vandalism is great, but when it becomes a goal in itself it becomes uninteresting, if not outright stupid. –EF

HAVE YOU COMMITTED CRIME WITH POLITICAL OR ARTISTIC INTENTIONS?

i am currently sentenced to 24 days in prison due to political violence. previously i have been launching several symbolic terrorist acts in public places in Oslo. i believe strongly in breaking the law in a creative way, but think pure demolition and nihilism is a weakness of the more interesting parts of the movement. i believe more in breaking social laws and consensus structures of the dominant group of individuals than the juristic laws of a nation. –EEH

Yes. Long time ago. House occupation a.s.o.
Last years, only minor things, like "sitting down actions". –HG

Yes. I find my shoplifting (clearly overrepresented in my history of crime) problematic, though. It's a part of the same collector's spirit as everything else. How to live in this economy and feed on it's advantadges without using anyone, without getting completely anti-social, simply without being unhappy? I don't know exactly.

Then I like it better to visit restricted areas, or snogging in public spaces, or painting on the concrete and what ever more I might have done knowing or not knowing wether it was legal. –TG

As a kid, I was involved in hacking – not as a technological adept (which I certainly wasn't), but for the sheer thrill of it, the feeling of opening doors to these vast worlds of bits and bytes. I guess that counts as "artistic intention" – why shouldn't it? And as an activist, of course, there have been incidents but since I got away clean I'm not going to say anything more about that. I don't agree with the idea, popular amongst environmentalists and other such protest movements, that the highest form of political protest is to surrender your body to the State prison system. If you do something illegal but morally correct, the morally correct way to handle it is to ignore the immoral system that claims jurisdiction over your actions. –EF

No, not yet. But I'm starting a project that is in some sort of grey zone. I don't think I will be committing crime, but if the project demands it, perhaps I will. I never saw the law as my guideline to what's wrong or not, I think my sense of decency and my upbringing will let me know what's right or wrong. And if that doesn't correspond well with the law, well then, I guess I'll have to break the law. –MA

When even graffiti is illegal, everybody interesting has broken the law at some point. –MP

WHAT CAN ROLE-PLAYERS LEARN FROM RADICALS?

Alpha and omega for role-players must be to defend the community and the shared creativity it fosters for its own sake. In doing so, we need to become conscious of the political and economical forces that are threatening our 'free zone'. Radicals have some of the analytical tools to help us but they have to be adopted and set in context. Politics must come second to pleasure and creativity, otherwise means and ends crumble into ideology, - and yet politics has to be there. Tricky. –JS

A lot of roleplayers live in the (quite common) delusion that whatever they do they can't make a difference. Radicals know that battles can be, and have been, won. –EF

To reach out for others. To solve real problems instead of imaginary.
To live cheap.
To get real! –TG

That imagination can change the world, not only a living room or forest glade. –ME

To stop being so fucking cynical and superficial. –MP

ROLE-PLAYER OR RADICAL?

LARP is an outstanding way to produce strong emotions and even insights. But most times learning a lesson once is not enough if the goal is to change deep emotional and behavioral patterns. A good LARP could give you important and breathtaking experiences but then you're on your own again. Parts of the radical movement seem to be more about creating networks and to give continous feedback about how to handle situations in everyday life. –HJ

THOUGHTS ON ESCAPISM

escapism is a word used by politically oriented people to critizise
the selfchosen exile from a fucked up society
that certain people apply in their life in order to survive.
massproduction of entertainment is something different,
it is to be compared to monotonous masturbation until bleeding.
–EEH

Émile Zola (I think it was him, but it doesn't really matter) asked his
students what the historically most important output from mining was.
They guessed on iron, coal, gold, and some other precious metals. To
Zola, the most important result coming out of the mine was the miner.
In the dark pitholes humanity got in touch for the first time with a
completely man-made and dead environment (which has then become
the blue-print of our contemporary society). Live role-playing is the
same thing. The most significant result of a live role-playing event is
not on location or in any dubious output, but in the minds, relations,
and aspirations in-between role-players. –JS

At best it's a powerful manifestation of the human capacity for reality-creation. At worst it's a powerful part of the sleep-inducing machinery of the spectacle. As typical escapist badness I see the docusoap-cult, star-gossip, parliamentary debates and glossy lifestyle magazines selling material happiness and a pre-packaged lifestyle – the stuff of endless empty daydreams. Typical escapist goodness is the intrinsically intellectual Sci-Fi and horror scene, dramatic online gaming, and roleplaying in all its forms. I sincerely believe the escapist impulse (read; geek-culture) will be the cradle of the next worthwhile revolutionary movement. The trick will be to place magic on the streets, where it actually matters, instead of keeping it contained in books, DVDs and hobby-rooms. And remember – it's no longer escapism when you really believe in it. –ME

I dislike it. But I have been doing it a lot. Maybe that's why. Escapism is sweeping the dust under the carpet. Escapism is what occurs when unhappy people are too unhappy to notice they are. It's in the very word. I like evasion-ism or stay-and-take-it-ism or burn-it-all-ism or make-it-change-ism better. Escaping is only good for resting and re-turning. -TG

'Escapism' is one of those bullshit-words, it's exclusively derogatory and is used only by establishment folks when they encounter a work they don't have the imagination to comprehend. To accuse LARP, or science fiction or cinema for that matter of 'escapism' is to deny culture, to deny our human impulse to play, explore, create. Underlying accusations of escapism is always the assumption that roleplaying (or fiction, or whatever) is something unnecessary, something trivial. But culture is not trivial. At Maslows pyramid culture should be placed above food and drink and sex, since culture is where we learn to obtain and enjoy these things. –EF
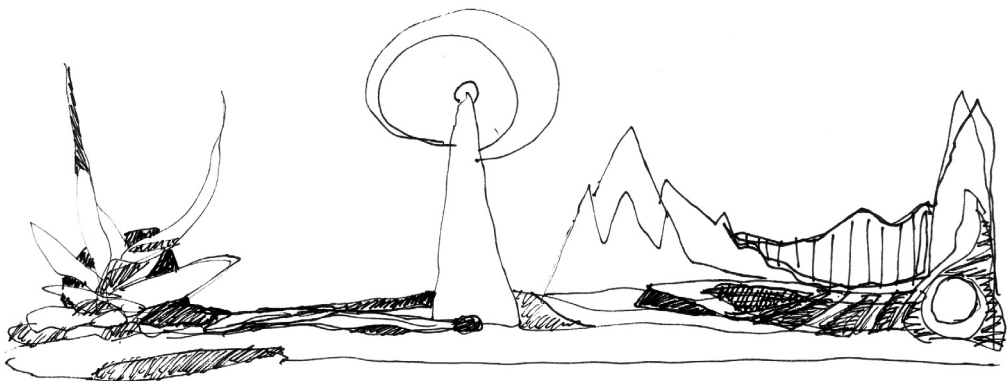
Stop escaping the world of today, start working for the world of tomorrow. –MP

IS ROLE-PLAY IN CONSENSUS REALITY DESIRABLE?

Yes, it's a way to fight the consensus reality. –MP

Yup. Public spaces must be reclaimed and redefined to serve as the stage for our dream-plays. Let's show the world just how malleable it is – turn reality ON! –ME

Role-playing in consensus reality could teach people that they really are allowed to play. Perhaps thats enough for strange and beautiful things to happen.

The space, the terrain vauge, between fiction and reality is very interesting to visit. The last night of *Futuredrome*, when the story had come to a premature and in many ways dissapointing end everything became more exciting then during the game. When few real world and no fictional boundaries restrained the participants, they where using fictional elements to act out personal and collective fantasies in very creative ways. I would like to explore that further in the future. –HJ

I wish we could found a subculture based on the idea that you can choose who to be, every day. Change costume, change name, change life story, and use your chosen personality as a medium when meeting other members of the subculture. It would be a step beyond roleplaying, a conscious fuckup of imposed identities, completely unmarketable (since it would be without any static aesthetics) and probably quite fun.

Such a subculture would get the critics of LARP & role-playing, people like Örnstedt & Sjöstedt and condescending academics, in a frenzy. Their stance – I suspect – is based on a fear that you don't actually have to be whom society tells to be. Role-playing proves that identity is fluid, a social construct which can be reprogrammed at will. And to conservative types this is very, very, very scary. –EF

Group rituals on the tops of skyscrapers to stop the malefic entities currently possessing the Israeli government, bizarre co/competitive duels involving implanted digital devices and Tai-Chi postures, tribes of Dai-Bakemono or Bysings camping in cocoons hanging from Österbron and a steadfast refusal to admit that these things are not real in the face of a flabbergasted police force and media crackdown. It pushes our agenda fast and hard – sets us up for the war of the worlds quite quickly. –ME

To this end, we need to invent new games — games that can take place in the conquered spaces of this world, in the shopping malls and restaurants and classrooms, that will break down their prescribed meanings so that we can give them new meanings in accordance with our own dreams and desires. We need games that will bring us together, out of the confinement and isolation of our private homes, and into public spaces where we can benefit from each other's company and creativity.

WHAT CAN RADICALS LEARN FROM ROLE-PLAYERS?

People reared on bourgeoisie media have such a different library of truths and observations that a radical opinion is bound to be deflected. To reach them, radicals have to ask the majority to switch paradigm, to take a 'leap of faith' and disowning what seems rational for them at the moment. Thus radicals have to sidestep rationality and appeal to the 'irrational', like the belonging to a new group of peers and a new identity. This is the significance of music-based identities and subcultures for left, radical movements, and I believe live roleplaying has an important task to fullfil here. –JS

LARP can teach radicals that social structure is fluid, that power is constructed rather than taken, that solutions found on the spot are often better than the ones thought out by Planners. Especially, I think radicals could benefit from the non-verbal side of LARP – the ability to 'listen' to others in a group and come to a decision based on feeling without a single argument being exchanged. The good kind of collectivism, the one where people build collectives for strength but retain individual freedoms, is alive and well in the LARP scene even though most LARPers don't seem terribly conscious about it. –EF

That reality is malleable and many perspectives can be equally valid at any given time. Most radicals are as stuck up and self-righteous as the defendants of monoculture. To quote my friend Coffe; "It's a widespread misunderstanding that anyone actually knows where the cupboard should stand". –ME

The roleplay techique number one is social interaction. I do believe that my physical awareness (opposing to theoretical) of how the social role can be altered by will has some importance for that part of my social interaction that includes political struggle. I am behind enemy's lines, enemy's eyes. I might very well be the very enemy. Maybe this awareness is a product of playing solemnly with personas. –TG

How to quickly redefine your identity and surroundings, and those of others. –MP

UTOPIAN VISIONS

Yes. I want to gather a bunch of friends, and build a boat that can sail around the world as a miniature utopia. Or perhaps construct a liberal village in the borderland between Norway and Sweden and proclaim it an independent country. The ends <u>are</u> the means; we should build our utopias here and now in our own lives. The best way to lead is by example, and if we don't live our utopias now we might never get to experience them. If we can't make it work on a small scale, how the hell can we expect it to work on a large scale? I think Che Guevara is the most pathetic figure in 20th century history - all his life fighting for an abstract ideal he never had time to enjoy himself, an ideal which when realized turned out to be crap. The Zapatistas (yes, I know I'm supposed to like them) are the first true revolutionary heroes of the 21st century, busily creating their ambigious utopia while fighting those who would stop them. –EF

An angelic society that is acctually rather brittle, and also harsch. In my none-where, everyone has the possibility to take the uttermost responsibiliy for her or his actions. When this fails, the follow-up is massive. In my non-where, people are really wise.

They saw a lot, but there were no wars, so it's hard to tell what they saw. They saw the full potential of human cruelty and they chose not to go there.

They are nice and emotional people and they live from renewable energy under a future sun. They know space and they know time. They don't use money, they have what they need. There's not exactly private property, only art. –TG
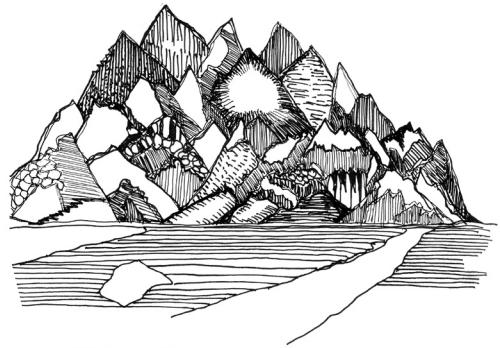
It appears to me that the market has run amok and is accelerating into self-destruction, fast. In the meantime, we have to work on a non-hierarchical architecture that can supersede the present structure. If revolution doesn't happen in our lifetime, we better enjoy making those free zones and strive to live in them the best we can. –JS

When mankind matures from power-gamers into responsible players the world will become our dreamtime. Imagine a hub – say a large city in each country, where medical and educational needs are catered for at the highest possible tech-level. Here the citizens of the dreaming come to rest from their constant life-adventures and to serve in the common needs of the community. From here a thousand gates open to as many pocket-realms of reality as we can imagine, all dramatic spaces of conflict or simply differently flavored utopias. All these spaces combine gripping stories with actual production and scientific/esoteric progress. In one realm a university complex of scientists fight a loosing battle against alien invaders and must find a way to colonize the solar system, in another a thousand bronze-age farmers till the fields of a tyrannical overlord (even though their life is pretty nice, in a cozy-larp kind of way) plotting rebellion and reform, a third is a paradise garden where plant research and free love is the order of the day. From horizon to horizon stretches a pattern of interconnected and constantly changing worlds providing everyone with the opportunity to live and die as whomever they choose. Inner and outer realities are reconciled as we explore the infinite realms of the impossible. Who knows, maybe we'll even find a sliver of Truth? –ME

Well, of course I have. I don't believe in utopias, but they're important cause they make us remember what were supposed to struggle for. That's what important. –MA

My utopian visions are changing from a green-socialistic society, towards a kind of post-modern anarchistic-like society. –HG

COLLECTIVE REALITIES: THOUGHTS ON POLITICS, ONTOLOGY AND ROLE-PLAYING

I have perceived a small but important change in the use of language among the people I usually play with. Earlier, we spoke in terms of fiction and reality. Today, we speak of realties. We have changed a dualistic discourse for a pluralistic. This change has brought sweeping consequences. As a political activist I am faced with a frightening choice, one which I aim to share with you. Are we going to change our lives within a collectively constructed reality, or within the consensus reality?

In this essay I am discussing the subculture that has been created surrounding live role-playing and how this medium can be used as a political method. To help me I have the blood-thirst of the Indians of the American northwest, which peaked many hundred years ago. Later I'll talk about the Zapatista, who have declared war upon the Mexican authorities – and laid down their arms – a struggle that has been ongoing the last ten years.

ROLE-PLAY AND REALITY

Politics is about how power is exercised and distributed. I am not advocating that everyone should have the exact same amount of resources all the time, but that a greater dynamic should be in force. The economic oppression that exists in society today is relatively marginal; what's worse is that during every waking moment our senses are fed with stimuli that we have neither power over nor insight into. In the western world, the powers over the means of stimuli are more important than the power over the means of production.

Live role-playing has taught me that a reality can be constructed. We can have power over our own experiences. The prerequisite for this is that we, as a collective, have "signed" a common agreement. The reality we live in daily has demanded the same type of contract; it is full of conventions on how social interaction is supposed to work.

By taking a step back, into another reality, not only does this forced upon contract become visible but it also shows that a different one can be created. This is the most important message of the roleplaying medium.

CONSENSUS REALITY

I'm naming the reality we experience in our daily lives the consensus reality. Within, we have a common way of looking at the world. Everyone doesn't view everything the exact same way, but there exists a large number of "common denominators". We all know that mythical creatures don't exist for real. Because they are – that's right – mythical! And even if some nutcase really believes in mythical creatures, he or she is relating it to established myth and in this way the consensus reality is affirmed yet again.

Working politically in the consensus reality sometimes feels hopeless. Everything is already constructed. From the fibres of our clothing to the vast, urban landscapes that constantly surround us. We didn't vote for social-democrat politics – we were born into a social-democrat society. Art is supposed to remain within its limits, music on stages and the architecture must not be touched unless you have top grades and want to spend five more years in a classroom. Here are seven parties in a row all humming to the same tune. It feels like the social contracts have already been written for life.

I'm not going to get more cynical than this. My ambition is to talk about tactics. After all, consensus reality is one of the arenas we can use.

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ROLES AND POWER

Role-playing teaches us something that we can put to great use in political and social settings, namely that power is a relationship, a figment where everyone needs to stick to his or her role. It is impossible to act high status if those surrounding you will not lower their status. You cannot act low status either if the other participants refuse to accept it. It works the same way in consensus reality.

AN EXAMPLE: If we refuse to answer the subway patrolman's questions about why we didn't pay the fare but rather calmly get up and wait for the next stop and get off, the patrolman cannot exercise his power over us. We need to affirm the power if it is to be kept. A guard doesn't exist until you lay your eyes on him or her. You can just pass by. Social methods of change and avoidance of repression are solid up to the point where the power opts to use brute force in order to restrict your actions.

COLLECTIVE REALITIES

During a live role-play we construct a new reality together. As children of a post-modern paradigm we have been taught that "everyone experiences the world in a different way" and that "no way of looking at the world is less valuable than any other". Ergo, if we create a reality, it has the same value as the "real" reality. The only difference is that we have the power over our collectively created reality. We can disappear – live beyond sheepish politicians, invasive corporations, a troubled past, a fat-assed patriarchy and a state monopoly of violence. Together we write new social protocols, find an aesthetic, develop a rhythm of life and allow our bodies to become tools for new, interesting ways to interact.

No matter what problems you put at the top of your agenda, one thing is certain: you and your friends have a greater chance of reducing them together, in a closed space, than succeeding to save the entire world in some sort of never-ending crusade.

TO PUT IT SIMPLY: imagine that your play never ends. What if we could form a bubble and slowly sail away with our common dreams as propellant.

IN DEFENCE OF SECTERISM

Doesn't this sound like the practises of a sect? Yes. But there is a great difference – and it is again about power. Most sects not only form and agree on a common view of the world, they also push the power they have created upwards. Not only in the hierarchic social structures that

compose the organisation, but also to something as abstract as a "god". In this the sect looses its liberating potential.

Perhaps we role-players also move power upwards, to an undefined narrative. Who has the power over what is hard to establish. When does the story stop being a tool and starts feeling like a constraint? Every tool apparently limits its user. Our characters limit our freedom of action. An analysis of power needs to be ever present.

Secterism, in the meaning that one bottles up in a collective for a long time, is a method to be considered. As long as one strives to create democratic structures, of course. The world view that we are forced to accept in consensus reality is as frightening as the world view of the Christian (or whatever) sects.

Secterism is often looked upon as a method of limiting the freedom of movement of the individual. But it can also create new spaces to act in when reality feels to constricting. I'm not trying to say that we should stop each other from breaking with the realities that we have created, that would be as crazy as stopping people from travelling and living in whatever nation state they please.

The economic structure of most sects is despicable. When the majority works their asses off to give their collected resources to a few, something is amiss. This structure is easily recognisable from many aspects of the world – if one bottles up one should take the time to look for a non-hierarchical economic model.

SUB-CULTURAL POTLATCH

The subculture we are a part of surrounds live role-playing in one form or other. It possesses a reversed economical problem that reminds strongly of the wild workings of the Indian Tlingith-tribe. The French philosopher and surrealist Georges Bataille analysed the phenomenon of potlatch in the late forties. In his book *La part maudite* (1949) he writes about the different economics of various Indian tribes. Potlatch means that the one who can give the greatest gift and not expect something back has the greater power. Wasting was seen as a sign that one had the gods on one's side. The gift was the most important form of potlatch, but not the only one. Giving becomes a form of insult because it forces an answer. It was also possible to secure status by a spectacular destruction of assets. Human sacrifice could be gifts in elaborate sacrificial ceremonies that often took the form of a party. The

GEORGES BATAILLE

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Indians adopted different characters with special functions. In this way, live role-playing reminds of potlatch and the religious sacrifice. Among the potlatch cultures, the loss should be as large as possible for the deed to have real meaning. Taking injury gave honour and glory. It works the same way in the live role-playing community, but fortunately not as much blood is spilled.

A desperate expression of the will to make a sacrifice is what we call "hardcore". It is often about a waste of assets. Buying the cloth for the expensive costume, spending hundreds of man-hours to make armour or to carve a harp. Almost as often the aim is to push and risk one's physical boundaries in and out of character; eating poorly, cutting oneself, jumping into ice cold water or in some other manner proving oneself ready to sacrifice everything for the game.

Organisers give the participant a lot of fantastic things; ideas, aesthetics, characters and logistics. The participant has no way to repay this other than praising the game afterwards. The organiser's social status is raised to the skies by the participants, they have no other way of expressing their gratitude. This is probably one of the reasons organisers can't receive pay for their work – it would mean a breach with our economic structure. When it happens it is considered dirty, the sacrifice of the organiser is not as potent. There are always rumours of how many thousand crowns this or that organiser are in debt after a game; it is apparently important to us to recognize each other's losses.

In this sacrificial economy we can also find one of the reasons behind the fact that a white middle and upper class is over-represented among live roleplayers. We have rich parents, a long education and resources to waste.

I don't think organisers or participants spend time live roleplaying in order to gain status in a subculture. I see it rather as an unfortunate consequence of what we're doing. This is the problem with the type of gift-economy that is used in our subculture. It creates a type of rivalry and debt. If we want to change this we need to build new structures where organisers and participants share the responsibility, the pleasure and not the least the sacrifice that our unproductive games require.

We must also be prepared to become productive. Firstly to sustain ourselves in a closed system. Food, warmth, shelter. Every reality that wants to be autonomous must function as a self-sustaining unit.

BACK TO REALITY

What many in the consensus reality agree upon is that everything is going down the drain. Our civilization is completely unsustainable. It is just a question of time, yes, that is what people say. Can we really leave

this sinking ship and all its passengers? Float away in a shaky raft on our own adventures`... is this really ok? I guess not. On the other hand, who are we to say what is good or bad for the World with a capital 'W'? There should be no more utopian dreams of "perfect" societies. It usually ends so poorly.

Do we have a responsibility for holding a door open to a newly created reality? What if one could, just like Alice in Wonderland, fall down a rabbit hole in reality and end up in a new world! A reality should at least be open for communication with the outside world. The problem is that our bubbles, if we really decide to create them, will be fragile. A pinprick from consensus reality can be enough to break everything down. It is easy, as an outsider, to break down an agreement if you do not know about it. We also know that our worlds require great trust for everyone involved.

MIDDLE GROUND

Of course it must be possible to find tools for interaction between collective realities and consensus reality. Why not be satisfied with temporary zones? Perhaps this is what we should do, and what we, in a way, are doing. That means we can pause a while, rethink, and start fresh. Another path is to make collective re-interpretations of consensus reality in order to break free from its constraints. If we yet again glance across the Atlantic, but remain in the present, we have something to learn from the Indians that have the Mayans as their ancestors.

SUBCOMMANDANTE MARCOS

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TAKING A LITTLE HELP FROM THE ZAPATISTA

Ten years ago there was a revolt in the southernmost state of Mexico, Chiapas. During the first two weeks of the struggle it was an armed one, but since then the rebels have laid down their arms and work as a social movement under the name of "Zapatism".

The name of the movement comes from Emilio Zapata, who fought for the farmers during the Mexican revolution in the early 20th century. It is built on two simple premises: conflict and the creation of consensus. They where organised along a system of direct democracy in village councils. When they are forced to elect representatives they must "control obeyingly" – this means that they are not, like the Swedish politicians, elected like people who can wave to and fro, but rather as representatives of their village. They can be resigned without warning and can never have a post more than two years. Their highest deciding entity is called Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee.

The important thing is that one achieves consensus within the village or commune. The Zapatista have formed autonomous communes which are economically independent from the government. Thanks to this independence it is possible for them to have an ongoing conflict with the Mexican right-wing conservative government and neo-liberal trade organisations such as NAFTA. In the Chiapas, worker communes form the basis of all corporations, instead of capitalist ownership. By building alternative structures the Zapatista have managed to undermine the power structures. Subcomandante Marcos, one of the spokespeople of the Zapatista, puts it this way:

We came here only to say we are here. We are a reflection and a cry and we will always be there. We can be with or without a face, armed or without fire. But we are Zapatistas as we will always be.

What the Indians of the Chiapas are missing, but something that we have in live role-plays, is the ability to create all-encompassing aesthetics. It can make our communes stick together

even better. It is possible for the Zapatista, from their collectively created zones, to have a conflict with national politics and structure of society. In the same way, we could use the bubbles of live role-plays as starting points to gather energy for conflicts with consensus reality. The pulsating dynamic which exists in closing – opening – closing is powerful and beckoning.

A WEB OF REALITIES

The echo goes on, a reflected image of the possible and forgotten: the possibility and necessity of speaking and listening; not an echo that fades away, or a force that decreases after reaching its apogee. An echo that turns itself into many voices, into a network of voices…
    – Subcommandante Marcos

There is nothing to stop us from forming many alternative bubbles which can cooperate within federative structures. They can communicate and trade in some fitting manner. Perhaps through potlatch, after all. Imagine being a vagabond of realities – what if a biking trip between Stockholm and the suburb Södertälje could offer as diverse cultural shifts as between Wall Street and Mecca? Imagine a network of people and groups with a common approach – the creation of new worlds.

THE QUESTION OF INSURANCE

I'm planning on remaining in consensus reality a while. But among me and my friends spreads an idea of creating a group collecting and saveing small resources – an insurance. Some time, if life here becomes unbearable, we will be able to use them in a collective action…

… to leave this world.

GW

POLITICALLY CONSCIOUSNESS-EXPANDING LIVE ROLE-PLAYING ACTIONIST LIVE ROLE-PLAYING: MACHINERY OF PROPAGATION AND LABORATORY OF LIBERATION

From the legendary Orwell-like live role-play *Kybergenesis*, there is told an anecdote about a young man changing his mind. Before experiencing this totalitarien structure, he had been advocating a republican system dominated by the president and a strong central power. Not a very democratic attitude, seen from our anarchistic standpoint. But after the game he had learned to appreciate the value of democratic principles.

In this case, the whole event was conducted by wrights wanting to tell a story with a certain morality. Thus, this live role-play worked as a centrally commanded apparatus of anarchist propaganda. In other less centralized live role-plays, there may be room enough for people and groups to unfold a variety of different stories. Personally, I have participated in stories that gave me some hints of the terrifying power of the building of unformal interpersonal networks, an anarchist mode of domination.

How do these consciousness-expanding mechanisms of live role-playing work?
It may be useful to develop a practically applicable political-aesthetical theory
on this subject.

"Live-action roleplaying is not literature. It is not theatre. It is imaginary, but working in the way of ordinary social interaction" (*Dogme 99*). When done artistically, live role-playing is participatory peformance-art. The impact by the game on the actor may be considerable. The actor is actually taking an active part in the story. As Owesen-Lein Borge will show in a forthcoming article, it is difficult to keep the outside, objectivist, observant, distanced, not-personally-engaged attitude towards the character, as both actor and audience do in ordinary theatre. The participants in live role-plays experience active involvement in the situation, bodily identification with the character, and thus a deep engagement in the story being told.

Our ways of thinking are socially and practically learned. They do not exist only in the individual mind. If we, dear reader, did not have

some patterns of understanding in common, my writing would have no meaning to you. But ways of thinking are not the same everywhere and all the time. They are different in different surroundings: There are cultures of the nation-states, cultures of the social classes, international mass-culture, local subcultures, transurban subcultures.

Our ways of thinking are culturally given patterns of behaviour, but at the same time, these intersubjective patterns are in a constant flux. Sometimes the traditional way of learning and doing will be kept for a long time, for example in the Norwegian valley Setesdal, where impulses from outside were very few until the turn of last century (1900). But at other times and places "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned." (Marx & Engels). This is the post-modernist mode of the artistic avant-garde and the anti-authoritarian political left.

In structuralist philosophy and social science the spoken word, the written word and the play of the game is called *parole*, while the grammatical rules, the ways of thinking and the rules of the game are called *langue*. The dynamic interplay of impro-based arts like Jazzjam and role-playing, makes us realize, in body and mind, that the rules of a game may be changed through the play of the game.

Philosophical Foundation: The Battle About Reality

Realize the Potentials!

"Realize" is a world playing on a twofold meaning. One edge is psychological: Discover the potentials! The other edge is practical: Make the dream come true!

"Reality" doesn't come ready-made! Reality is the continuous realization of potentials!

"Realist" is not the person following the Rules of a taken-for-granted World Order. The realist is playing a game of realizing potentials. She is participating a little bit in the continuous re-casting of the World Order.

This is what Marie-Curie did. This is what Mao did. This is what Dali did. This is what Nora did, when slamming the door as she left her dull

doll-house. All these people were central actors in
games that re-cast the World Order, by realizing unknown potentials.

> *"Reality is what you think it is."*
> *"Our thought is a product of the dominating mode of production."*

On one edge, a magic formula, on the other edge, a materialist slogan.
They do not agree, but both of them are true! Reality is two-folded, as
two aspects folded into each other. Our ways of thinking are not a kind
of superstructure build upon an objective, unquestionable material re-
ality. Our ways of thinking are a question of how to percieve reality. A
mode of thinking is itself a Means of Production, and thus it is a funda-
mental part of a Mode of Production. Therefore it should be elevated
to its legitimate place in the Basic Structures.

Inside these structures we find the dominant, the hegemonic, the
orthodox, the unjust and suppressing World Order, but we also find the
means of production, the weapons, for the continuous recasting of the
World Order, the battle about reality, the revolutionary potentials.

Historical Foundation: Avant-Garde and Revolution

Modernism is the principle of change: Art is always seeking an avant-
garde. Capitalism is always seeking growth of profit. Technology is al-
ways seeking innovation. The political left is always seeking liberation.

But at the same time: Communism is in pursuit of the Millenium.
Nazism persecuted as a final solution. As World War I was the war to
end all war (sic), both communism and nazism claim to represent the
final stage in the dynamics of modernism. This was also the dream of
Gerhardsen, the founder of Norwegian Social Democracy, and his Party
Secretary Haakon Lie. This is the spirit of totalitarianism and social re-
alism, e.g. the apparant fullfillment of a just World Order, the apparant
entropy of potentials, a virtual "reality" without sur-realism!

Modernity in a constant flux, always fucking itself, giving birth to new
modernities (e.g. endless dialectics), this is the "post-modern" aspect of
modernity. This is the tradition of the continuous revolution, always
creating multiplicity, always realizing potentials.

In the continuous revolution, the artistic avant-garde and the anti-
authoritarian political left have a common cause, and should therefore
make an alliance! The search of the political left for liberation, is good
material for the work of the artistic avant-garde. The search of the
avant-garde, for expanding and altering our ways of thinking, is a use-
ful weapon in the political battle. Our ways of thinking are the means

of producing reality. Realizing potentials is not only to alter the insti-
tutionalized practices and materialized structures. It is also to alter the
ways of thinking, it is to alter the means of production, and the politics
of the true left is the production of liberty. At the ideological level, this
is a battle about reality.

Present Social Democratic Regimes of the Scandinavian states, are
machineries specialized in the production of capital growth. The states
produce optimal conditions for the production of technological innova-
tions, which are the means of production of profit. The dynamic of
capital growth is intense, at the expence of spiritual growth. The social
democratic machines are specializing and disciplinating spiritual growth,
making it a servant of capitalism: creativity of advertizing, creativity of
engineering, and always the demand of cost-efficientness and profits in
the culture-industries. This may have been a problem only for art, if
social democracy had not left their former socialist and liberal program.
The social democratic machine has simply been reprogrammed into a
machine of profit. Therefore, it is also a political problem.

The political left needs to declare a propaganda war, to spread the
datavirus of liberation in the minds of labourers at all levels, all corners,
in the machineries of society. The continuous revolution of the artistic
avant-garde and the political left, need to make a post-modern, sur-real-
ist colloberation against the totalizing Capitalist Macine that produce
Profit at the cost of Just and Heterogenity, the machine named, in the
terms of its own new-speak, "Social Democracy".

HELGE HIRAM (helgehj@student.sv.uio.no)
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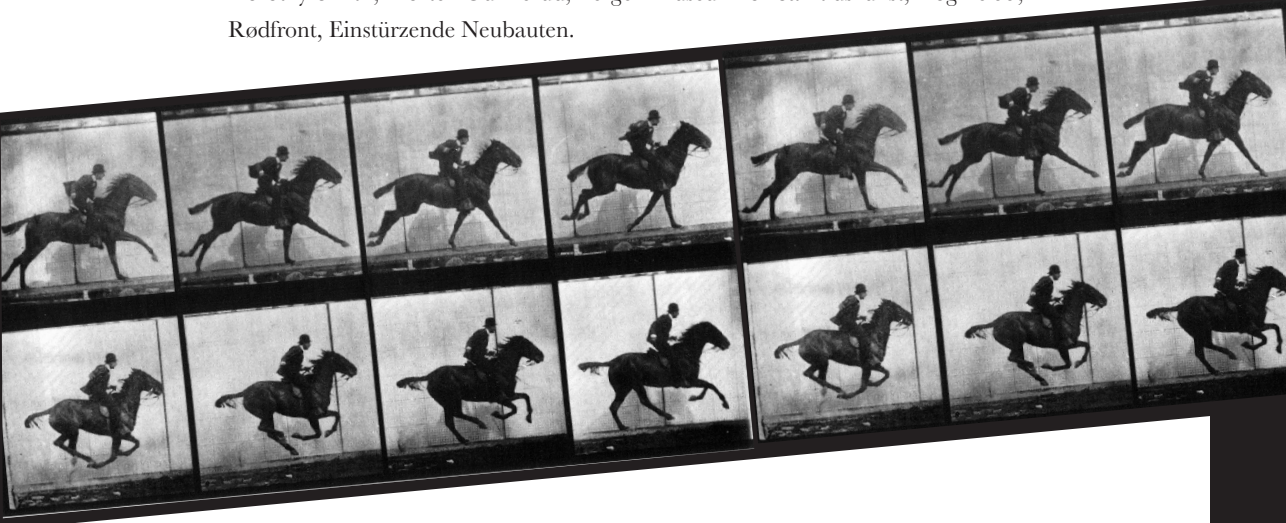
OUR FICTION
WILL BE REAL

INTERACTING ARTS is one or all of the following: a group of cross-disci-plinary artists, media critics, an activist network, a conspiracy, a brand, a think-tank and a magazine which is circulated both on the web and in print. We aim to inspire and activate people into becoming our fel-low creators of fully experienced lives. A refusal of existential poverty through affirmation of creativity, co-operation, solidarity, play and our blistering desire for freedom. In this issue we present a bunch of cut-up-style interviews with people from the radical parts of the live role-playing scene in the north together with two articles on the same subject.

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