

History as a Cultural Playground

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There is growing belief within the discipline of cultural studies that heritage no longer relates to our historical past, but attempts to recreate a mythological past. We are witnessing a progressive process in which the Land of the Past is changing into the Land of the Different, a world which may well be charged with moral messages; an arena designed to create random continuity and cultural identities, a past designed to provide experiences and identities. A past intended to convince through its credibility rather than its genuineness, to be experienced rather than understood.

In order to discuss what happens in this "muddled past", in the transition between history and heritage, this article focus on the specific praxis that makes the Lands of the Past materialise. Detailed, first-hand descriptions and interpretations of how school children encounter, perceive, and invest two Norwegian historical parks with significance, play with traditions, consume and practice heritage, and make the past happen. To establish further knowledge regarding the cultural processes associated with modernity's relationship with the past, comparative analysis of the traditional museums is also taken into the discussions.

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The Land of the Past Extends Its Frontiers

In the autumn of 1995, the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation transmitted a documentary from the Bronze Age Settlement (Bronse-plassen), one of the new historical theme parks in Norway. People's curiosity was raised by the opening sequence and they let their channel hopping fingers rest: first focusing on the rustling leaves at the top of an oak tree, the camera then glides slowly down the trunk, until it finds a creature with a little peaked hat made of tawny leather and edged with white fur. His long beard is in a plait that curls over his white woolly jumper and down his grey woolly coat. The man is clearly concentrating, standing with closed eyes and hands touching the trunk. After a couple of seconds he turns round, looks straight into the camera, and says:

"This is how it all started, ten years ago. I suddenly discovered that there is a force within the trees. I believe that all living things have a force within, and that we, people, are able to experience this force if we're willing to open up and tune in to the frequency of everything that surrounds us. Trees are exciting, they take in whatever you might tell them. And you can use the force actively as well. So I would recommend that people go out and find their own tree."

In the woodland surrounding their own home, Helge Grønli and his wife, Eli Solgård, have built a bronze age settlement, complete with longhouse, maze, hunters trail, sacrificial site, burial mound, herb garden and tree-trunk boats. Their programme offers everything from story-telling round the bonfire for families on a Sunday outing to longhouse and tent accommodation for holiday breaks, corporate schemes for alter-

native business excursions, and a Viking market which gathers Vikings from all over Europe for courses in marshall arts and traditional crafts. In addition to all this, the Bronze Age Settlement offers customised courses for primary school classes who want to learn about the Bronze Age in a different way. The hosts themselves dress up in wool and leather, appropriately for the times, and change their names to Gorm and Urd as they enter the past. This time-change takes place as you pass under the elk skull, which adorns the gate that takes you through to the Bronze Age Settlement. This is a journey in time which offers not only an experience of the past, but which serves as an important comment on the present as well. This is how it is phrased in their leaflet:

“The Bronze Age Settlement is an attempt to show that our forefathers lived in a close and direct relationship with nature. Their everyday life had a totality, which we have lost. On the threshold of a new millennium we are about to kill Mother Nature, she who gives life to us all. The Bronze Age Settlement raises the question of which people are the primitive ones.”

There is growing belief within the discipline of cultural studies that heritage no longer relates to our historical past, but attempts to recreate a mythological past. We are witnessing a progressive process in which the Land of the Past is changing into the Land of the Different, a world which may well be charged with moral messages; an arena designed to create random continuity and cultural identities, a past designed to provide experiences and identities, a past intended to convince through its credibility rather than its genuineness, to be experienced rather than understood. This process has been described as a shift from *general history* to *individual heritage* by geographer David Lowenthal (1986), from a *genealogic* to an *organic* perception of history by social anthropologist Odd Are Berkaak (1992), and from *history* to *memory* by social anthropologist George Marcus (1992).

The fact that museums, curators and other representatives of antiquity-protecting authorities no longer hold the indisputable right to interpret and present the past, “muddles up the

landscape of times past”, says historian Svante Beckman (1993). Approximately ten years ago Beckman forewarned that once the spontaneous heritage enthusiasts, amateurs, prophets and directors start building “Lands of Yesteryear” for the voracious experience market, the antiquarian professors will be left holding their authentic, representative, high-quality baby. Was he right?

There is a deep conflict of interests between the new flourish of popular demand for past-time experiences and the institutions that are set to administer our traditions. While the specialists are delighted to see a healthy increase in the general interest in history, they are clearly concerned with the apparent shortfall of expertise. The long, extensive series of strict and scientific requirements that govern the selection, storage and exhibition of artefacts, is allowed to give way to the ideal that history should be made to come alive in a straightforward way. This disneyfication of the past obviously challenges the authorised definitions and the existing perceptions held at museums and within other value hierarchies.

There is reason to assume that the existence of these historical theme parks will have a major if somewhat unpredictable impact on our cultural heritage and on people’s cultural identity. But rather than joining the general choir of ideological voices in a heavy-handed intellectual condemnation, and rather than considering this rush to the Land of the Past as compensation for the disorientation that people experience in modern society, I will seek to understand this change by focusing on *what happens* rather than what the change *represents*. “Things have always spoken, but people have not always paid the same attention. Today we listen”, says ethnologist Jonas Frykman (this volume), wondering whether this is why the past and our cultural heritage have escaped from the prisons that museums and historians have put them in. How does the past take place in historical theme parks, and how does it acquire its materiality? Who are listening, apart from the children? Is anyone being forced to listen? What are the consequences of such shifts in our understanding of and approaches to history, for individuals, and for heavy traditional institutions such as

the education authorities and the museum council?

Even if this analysis is based on particular, specific parks and museums in Norway, there is no reason to believe that the Lands of the Past flourish in a national context only. The same trend can be found throughout Europe, with Terra Mitica in Spain as the most monumental and innovative example. What might be the historical theme parks' significance and impact in terms of how we come to understand European history and identity?

Fieldwork and Phenomenology

There is every reason to take the Bronze Age Settlement seriously. The same applies for the Viking Farm, which is another Norwegian historical theme park. The Viking Farm is a far cry from a small site built up round someone's home; it is owned by NorgesParken, a limited company which also runs one of the largest amusement parks in the country: Tusenfryd. The Viking Farm used to be a whole Viking Land with an entire Viking Age community, including an earl's court, storage house, burial mound, shipbuilding yard, tar mill, law-court, smithy, pier where Viking ships were moored, market, sacrificial site, silver smithy etc. But the Viking Age is also brought to life by means of modern high-tech equipment: "3–4 times an hour you can experience a hazardous voyage with Leiv Eiriksson at the helm, facing severe attacks from other ships and mythology. This is a highly realistic performance, created by means of modern technology and special effects", the leaflet promises. Animals have now replaced some of the Vikings, and some of the market square has been turned into a farmyard, to make the place commercially viable. But even if family tourism introduced a need for renewal after a couple of years of Vikings, the education service at the Viking Farm is as robust as ever.

One of the most interesting aspects of these historical theme parks is precisely their impact on schools. Despite the fact that they impose even heavier burdens on tight school budgets, an ever-increasing number of primary schools opt away the traditional museum visits for the benefit of day trips or overnight excursions to

the more entertainment-oriented historical theme parks. We have even found that these new past-times-experiences inspire changes in the curriculum. For example, the offer of a 24-hour excursion to Viking Land triggered a change in the way history was taught to 4th form pupils at a primary school outside Oslo. Replacing their previous approach of teaching a little about a number of historical eras, they now opt to concentrate their efforts on a single historical era throughout the school year. And rather than learning about Vikings in history class only, the children are now exposed to the Viking Age in a variety of ways through subjects such as music, Norwegian, home economics, and physical education. The idea is clearly that if you receive varied and thorough input about one period of history, this will have significant transitional value once you need to acquire knowledge and understanding about other periods.

In order to find out what happens in the "muddled past", I believe we need to look into specifics. We know a good deal about the structural processes that go on in the transition between history and heritage, but have less knowledge about the specific praxis that makes the Lands of the Past materialise. Detailed, first-hand descriptions and interpretations of how children encounter, perceive, and invest these places with significance, play with traditions, and consume and practice heritage, provide an opportunity for us to establish further knowledge regarding the cultural processes associated with modernity's relationship with the past – i.e. a phenomenological approach. This is how anthropologist Michael Jackson expresses it:

"Phenomenology is the scientific study of experience. It is an attempt to describe human consciousness in its lived immediacy, before it is subject to theoretical elaboration or conceptual systematizing ... Rather than examine the epistemological status of beliefs it is more important to explore their existential uses and consequences. Our emphasis is thus shifted from what beliefs "mean" *intrinsically* to what they are made to mean, and what they accomplish for those who invoke and use them" (Jackson, 1996:2–6).

It follows from this understanding that fieldwork is essential, or as anthropologist Keith H. Basso (1996:84) expresses it: “Everything, or almost everything, hinges on the particular, and because it does, ethnography is essential”.

This is why I chose to join two primary school classes on their respective excursions to the Bronze Age Settlement and Viking Land. I met up with the pupils at school, before the day of the excursion, and then joined one of them for a daytrip to the Bronze Age Settlement and the other on an overnight excursion to Viking Land. Following these past-time-experiences I returned to the respective schools as I wanted to listen to the children’s discussions and reflections concerning the excursions, and to take part in the movements, social conventions and rhythms they used for preparing, undertaking and rounding off their journey back to “the Land of the Past” – in line with the practical mimetic research ideal of “thinking with one’s feet” (Jackson, 1996:28f.). “By using one’s body in the same way as others in the same environment, one finds oneself informed by an understanding

which may then be interpreted according to one’s own custom, or bent, yet which remains grounded in a field of practical activity and thereby remains consonant with the experience of those among whom one has lived”, as expressed by Michael Jackson (1996:340f.).

However, my fieldwork did not confine itself to the 10–11-year-olds whose journey back in time I was allowed to join. While it is essential to find out what happens in the Lands of the Past, it is (almost) equally important to investigate why the museums fail to trigger as much action, and so I decided to follow the trail which is now becoming disused: I paid a visit to the museums which have lost out on visits from primary schools.

The Boring Museum and the Enjoyable Theme Park

Text displays and guided tours make up the usual exhibition format at the traditional historical museum, and this is probably the format most of us remember from our own

This is part of the Bronze Age exhibition that has lost at least one of its visiting school classes. The pupils are now travelling to the Bronze Age Settlement instead, as a supplement to their history classes!

school visits. At indoor museums you walk from one display case to the next while the guide interprets the significance of the carefully selected objects; or rather the *fragments* of original objects, which is most often the case when we are dealing with a past as distant as the Bronze Age. A knowledgeable guide tells you what you are looking at, where it comes from, what is typical of the times etc. "This is where you learn to think", as ethnologist Billy Ehn (1986) says in his book *Museendet*.

The outdoor museum variety offers a similar format. You walk from module to module; first the stave church, then the Setesdal farmyard, or first the urban setting, then the rural setting. You receive general information while standing in farmyards or courtyards, and more specific information as you get seated round the fireplace or the long table indoors. Once the questions and answers session starts, an indoor setting is preferable. For most of us are probably familiar with the situation in which the five people closest to the guide are conducting a lively discussion while the fifteen visitors trailing behind struggle to hear anything at all – gradually giving up as they start to lose their concentration and get talking amongst themselves.

There are clear expectations regarding the length of the guided walk. "Three quarters of an hour is considered the maximum for a guided tour", says the manager of Oslo Folk Museum's education department, because "people are generally able to take in only three different things in the course of a single 45-minute lesson. And I always wonder what three things will stick with people after the tour".

Museums are undoubtedly perceived as boring. "Some times it seems as if they come to life only when they pass a mirror", one of the Folk Museum guides sighed. Hopefully, things are not quite as bad as that, but the attitude is sufficiently well established for the Oslo Museum Council to dedicate the first page of their leaflet "Class visits to museums 1996" to this problem:

"Use the museum! Museums are **NOT** dusty collections of boring objects neatly placed in line upon line in gloomy, cold halls. Museums are full of **colours, questions, experiences, tasks, activities and news**".

There is a clear difference when you compare this experience with the school excursions to

the Land of the Past – in terms of hours spent as well the degree of involvement. “Great fun, really exciting and informative. And exhausting, but we didn’t notice that until we got home” the pupils summarized the excursion to the Vikingland. Some of the children had slept for 24 hours after their return.

Throughout the time we were enacting Vikings, the children’s degree of involvement was also very different from what you would normally expect from a 45-minute guided tour. The Vikings were divided into four different groups; two of them would be cooking, one would be sentinels, while the last group was assigned the task of carrying and stacking wood. Because some of the tasks were considered to be more enjoyable than others, and to make sure that the pupils would gain a varied range of experiences, a changeover system was introduced. In the end, everyone would have had a go at everything. But this is not what happened. The wood-stackers were so keen to find the most effective system for transporting the wood from the untidy heap at the centre of the yard to the neat pile adjacent to the storehouse, that they succeeded in doing just that. At the time of the first group changeover, there was not a single log left to move, and for a moment there was hectic activity in order to find a set of replacement tasks!

The same tendency – involvement, curiosity and keenness – was evident in the children who visited the Bronze Age Settlement. As we walked the round from the dance maze to the burial ground, the beaver lodge, the wishing tree, the sacrificial site, the ancient oak tree and the clearing water, I soon found that there was no point in trying to get to the front of the crowd. The children were rushing from one module to the next, and you had to be careful not to be run off the path. When the tasks for making vegetable soup were being distributed, the children were fighting for chores such as picking stinging nettles, peeling carrots, cutting onion and fetching water. Were they all highly experienced kitchen assistants, or would some of their parents have been equally surprised to see how easily they were recruited for kitchen service? Why is it so much more fun to be peeling carrots in the Bronze Age, or to be stacking wood in the Viking Age?

Why does a whole school day at the Bronze Age Settlement, or 24 hours in Viking Land, feel as if it’s not enough? And why do they want to repeat the experience as soon as possible? In his work jotter, one of the pupils ended his report from the Bronze Age Settlement in a similar fashion to the class summary from the trip to Viking Land: “it was time to leave, and although we didn’t really want to go, we had to, and we left after having spent a wonderful day in the Bronze Age.”

Making the Past Come Alive

There are probably a number of reasons why traditional museums and historical theme parks generate different levels of involvement and perseverance. One of them is their degree of accessibility. There is no doubt that museum visitors who have already acquired a degree of expertise, or people who enjoy surreal museum ambles, can pick up a world of knowledge, associations and appreciation from a Bronze Age pot in a display case, accompanied by this text: “Grave find from the Roman Era (0–400 A.C.) from Risholt, estate no. 11, site no. 3, Øyestad. Upper part of bronze pot, found in a grave mound in 1845, filled with ash. Gifted by Tellef Jonsen Risholt”. However, for all of those who have neither a special eye nor special expertise, like a bunch of 10-year-olds, it would be considerably easier to understand the past if they were allowed to use the pot the way we think it may have been used. The very act of reconstruction gives a completely different dimension to the experience for all those who have yet to be initiated. The past is thus made much more accessible; it feels as if it is readily at hand and alive.

Understanding the past on the basis of tiny bits of flint and shards of pottery displayed side by side according to registration number and geographic location, is obviously far more difficult than if you make the pottery yourself after having dug out the clay from the soil and mixed it with the correct amounts of sand and water. It takes a completely different level of attention to understand what life was like with an open fireplace in the centre of your house if you are not actually experiencing the burning

The past becomes much more accessible if you are allowed to take part in the reconstruction process.

eyes yourself, which soon teaches you how to move with care not to aggravate the smoke development. And similarly, you need to be far more concentrated in order to grasp what life was like in the Viking Age by looking at a Viking garment on a hanger rather than by wearing the outfit yourself for 24 hours.

The museums are aware of the problem. “We have been too arrogant, because we’ve never needed to change our ways. We have simply assumed that people would come”. This was the response from the Head of Education at the University Museum of Antiquities when she was told about the class that opted them away in favour of Viking Land. For their Viking exhibition, the Museum of Antiquities has introduced interpretive panels of different length and format. There are brief texts that give a general idea as to how to approach the object, such as “everyone was not the same” next to the royal costume on display, or “some believed in other gods” next to the presentation of different religious communities. Other display cases are accompanied by poetic elaborations, and all of them offer additional in-depth information – up

to as many as four A4 sheets. Obviously, a personal guide is also available. Nevertheless, even if the public are given a number of options, they are primarily asked to take in information through their usual senses: their eyes and ears.

In order to alleviate the interpretive problems, the Folk Museum follows strict rules when employing their guides. Ethnologists are preferred; they know the difference between grindstones and whetstones, between staves and logs, between ridging ploughs and normal ploughs, between southern and northern building traditions.

However, one may ask whether this focus on textuality and verbal communication is what is required for the past to become more accessible. Is it not rather the case that the theme parks’ anchorage in action-based communication of historical knowledge is what makes the past come alive in their Lands of the Past, and so enjoyable that even peeling carrots is fun. At least for as long as you are in the past.

True, many traditional museums have attempted to bring history to life in a number of ways. At the Folk Museum, the fireplaces are

Folk costume at the Folk Museum.

tended by griddle cake makers, at the general store you can buy sugar candy and other Past Times sweets, and on the benches round the courtyards, girls dressed in historically correct attire are sitting knitting while they answer questions, let people feel the material of their costumes and study the seams. However, it all seems rather tame compared with the magnificent re-enactments found in the historical theme parks.

While the children at the Bronze Age Settlement were welcomed by Gorm and Urd, the buildings and environments in Viking Land are equally appropriate for the times, yet far more crowded with craftsmen, singers, actors, children, earls, slaves, Vikings, ticket inspectors and guides. People are shown how swords were made in the smithy, how woodcarvers used to shape their wood, they listen to stories about the lives of earls and slaves, farmers and warriors, feel the taste of real Viking fare, see and take part in Viking games and learn how to carve runes in stone. The communication of information relies on frequent performances of rehearsed plays, mixed with improvised

interaction with the school children. For while the ethnologists at the Folk Museum are there to ensure historical accuracy and correct detail, Viking Land is dominated by actors, drama teachers, directors and musicians. Their job instruction is to play with the children, sing and dance to create the atmosphere of the times among the public. Every now and again their exuberant energy seems almost provoking – how can they bear being this funny, lively, playful all day?

In the course of the 24 hours that the children from Oslo spent in Viking Land, they never listened to a single summary or talk about the Viking era. When I asked the Vikingwoman Gudfrid why she never gathered the class around her to give them a few general points about the period, she responded by returning the question:

“Do you think I should?” Gudfrid felt it was important for the children to access the Viking Age through that which is non-verbal and non-narrative; they were experiencing and doing – while she was there, prepared to explain, answer questions, sing songs, tell stories, assist, initiate. The pupils would also walk round with their

Orm Viking in Viking Land.

workbooks and have their questions answered by talking to the various Vikings they encountered.

The visit to the Bronze Age Settlement was different in this respect, as action was not the be-all and end-all, even if there were lots to do here as well. The alternative school day started with a gathering in the dim, smoky, rather cold longhouse, where Gorm gave a talk about the Bronze Age. On the ensuing walk round the site, to the maze, the sacrificial site, the burial mound, etc., everyone was given a joint introduction to each module, before the children were allowed to have a go themselves, climbing, listening or touching. Nevertheless, a tour of the Bronze Age Settlement is completely different from what we are used to at museums, because the information is communicated in another voice, with a different motivation. Helge Grønli sees his role as a Bronze Age intermediary almost in contrast to all things strict and scientific.

“We have worked in close partnership with the archaeological museum in Stavanger, and if

they’re not good enough... Well. What I’m doing is to put some meat on the bare bones, and that’s what the museums dislike. They dislike the fact that I’m bringing the past to life for the public. But what the hell should I be doing then? Just sit there like a mummy and tell them that “this and that and then the other”? You see, when I tell them that the walls are made from clay, sand and cowpats, I also tell them the story of the bloke who helped us make the wall and who swallowed some of this mix and thought he was going to die. I suppose I’m that commercial that I know you need to crack a joke every five minutes or so to make your audiences choke with laughter. And then you’ll be able to take them with you all the way.”

Of course, to Helge Grønli strict historical accuracy is not the most important point; his primary objective is to make people become involved. He is an idealist, and “slightly demented”, as he puts it himself, which is undoubtedly a prerequisite if you make your own home into a public access Bronze Age settlement which

receives an increasing number of people every day, and if you are to cope with showing round school children all day, entertain corporate visitors in the evening, organise weekend trips, and constantly be prepared to talk to curious people who really only want to check out what this visitor attraction is about. What is his job description? What drives him? Why is he telling stories?

“I’ve got a message, and the Bronze Age settlement has a religious foundation. An animistic foundation, and that’s important. That’s what I want to convey. And for that I don’t mind a little historical prostitution. That’s all right by me. ‘Cause people need things to be edible, and they’re great suckers for chocolate topping. And the museums don’t like that. But people do. And that’s what I’m concerned with. I’ve never had a positive potter in the workshop, but then that’s not who I’m selling to.”

The two theme parks may have adopted slightly different communication practices, yet they both seek to make the past come alive by appealing to all senses. The encounter with the past is not achieved through eyesight and hearing only; verbal interaction is important too, talking and touching, testing, tasting and smelling, and not least: *doing* is imperative. For the visitors themselves are the most important travel agents on their journey back to the past.

Becoming a Citizen of the Past!

“Gorm, is it all right if I change my name?” An 11-year-old comes running up to us from behind, and I look with interest to the man in front of me.

“Of course you can”, Gorm answers. “What would you like to be called?”

“I’d like to be called Sol rather than Gaupe, and Line would like to change her name as well. From Binna to Vår. Is that all right, for her as well?” the girl asks excitedly.

“Of course she’s allowed as well”, chuckles Gorm in his good-natured way.

In the Land of the Past, the children themselves are key resources in the process of making the past come alive, and at the Bronze Age

Settlement, the name-change ritual is an important part of entering into the Bronze Age. Inside the maze, a ritual reminiscent of an initiation ceremony was performed with great formality. Gorm gave the instructions:

“This is like a picture of the earth; when you enter these corridors, you enter the earth as if you’re entering a cave. When you get to the centre, you may even get to meet Mother Nature herself. That’s when anything may happen. But you’re going to use this maze to change your names into a real Bronze Age name. And then you’ll need to remember that name for the rest of the day. To get to the centre, you’ll need to walk 300 yards. And you’ll need to move with care; make sure you don’t kick any of the stones. For the galiator lives under one of the stones, and he’s a tiny green creature with sharp teeth that will bite your toes if you kick any of the stones. OK? Walk as if you were ballet dancers all the way. And then, when you get to the centre, and this is important, you’ll need to remember the

When you get to the centre, you might meet Mother Nature. That’s when anything might happen.

name you've been given, and then you'll have to shout that name out as loud as you can to make sure you can hear an echo from both sides. Listen to what I'm doing; then I hit that stone and shout: GOOORRRM. Did you hear that? And then you skip over the stone."

Gorm squatted down by the maze entrance and the children whispered their favoured name into his ear. The first Bronze Age people chose names like Raffiki, Timon, Pumba and Baloo – Walt Disney appears to be a source of inspiration in most contexts. The children who were unable to think up a proper Bronze Age name themselves, were assisted by Gorm: Falk, Binna, Gaupe, Ørn, Bjørn and similar names with an old-fashioned Norse ring to them. It would probably be too much to expect a 3 000 year-old man to be entirely up-to-date in terms of name trends. And this is why the girls requested a name-change; after a good 30 minutes they had found something better themselves. Names they were comfortable with, and which they were happy to live with for the remainder of their day in the Bronze Age.

They were also given garments that were appropriate for the times, made from hemp, sacking, wool or leather. In Viking Land, daytrip Vikings are dressed in simple sacking, whereas 24-hour Vikings are given coloured shirts and grand robes to protect against the night chill; and of course, everyone who suffers from allergy are given garments in a non-allergenic material. The hemp rope to be tied round your waist is the device that makes sure your knife is always easily accessible. Once you are inside the park you can complement the outfit by making additional accessories yourself, such as headgear made from carded wool and hand-dyed yarn.

You learn to speak a different language as well: in the past you never say "hi", but "greetings", a mate becomes a companion, the earth is female and is called Mother Nature, to bury is to inearth; you never ask "What are you up to?" but "What is your errand", and when you part, you say "walk in peace" rather than "bye". In Viking Land, the children found it particularly easy to integrate the new language in their vocabulary. This may have something to do with the fact that they had recently been rehearsing

a specially commissioned Viking play at school. The play is written by Torild Svarstad Haugland, who has published a number of historical novels from the Viking Age, particularly aimed at teenagers. The play forms part of the educational material prepared by Viking Land. Of course, the school children's delight peaked when they were given the opportunity to stage their play in the Viking Land amphitheatre, yet they benefited from being acquainted with the characters, language and plot of the play throughout their 24 hours in the Viking Age as they experienced encounters of a more random nature.

Last, but not least, you work your way into the past: you pick stinging nestles, peel carrots and rip cabbage to make vegetable soup; you grind your cereal with a stone to make flour for bread; you light a fire to cook the soup or bake the bread – under constant supervision; you carry and stack wood so that there's fuel for the fire; and you take your turn as a sentinel, to avoid being surprised by robbers or anyone else with a hostile attitude.

It is through these tasks that the children gain experiences that make them become more and more of a Viking, or Bronze Age man, as the hours pass. By sitting round the fire making bark bread or pancakes, they get sooty, dirty and red-eyed and their throats get sore. By eating pancakes with honey the way they used to do before knives and forks were introduced, their hands get so sticky that everything they touch gets stuck. The butter for the pancakes or bread becomes less yellow and blacker as the stir or dough is taking shape. Teeth are gnashing with grit from the home-ground flour. Brushing their teeth is out of the question, morning or night – as there were obviously no toothbrushes in the Land of the Really Old Days. But apples are good for cleaning out the grit between your teeth. Their bodies are tired after all the work and a night spent without springs in their mattresses. Their body odour becomes more distinct, their hair more knotty, and their nails accumulate black lines of dirt and grime after only a couple of hours in the past. Imagine how they must have smelt back then, when they had a bath perhaps only once a month. Or worse still, once a year. Imagine how hard they had to

work just to make a single meal. Imagine how frightened they must have felt at the very real prospect of being attacked by robbers. Imagine how worn their teeth must have been from eating all that grit with their food. Imagine.

Creative Imagination

“At the Bronze Age Settlement we were welcomed by Helge and his wife Eli. We followed Helge to a gate. When we entered, it said: *simboli-bambili bom-tom-rom-bom*, and suddenly we were in 1800 B.C., where Helge turned into Gorm and Eli turned into Urd.”

This is how one of the pupils described her journey back to the Bronze Age in her workbook after the trip. However, travelling back to the past does tend to take more than the waving of a magic wand. Even if substantial efforts are put into making the past come alive, the demands on the participants’ willpower and creative abilities are high. In many ways, historical theme parks are places where creative imagination is being cultivated; it is the magic of make-believe that drives the time back and makes things happen.

It’s all about dreaming with care rather than looking too closely, says philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1992:23). He is concerned with creative imagination rather than reproductive imagination, and thinks that the indistinct is at least as productive as the distinct. If anything becomes too clear and obvious, this will block the imagination, says Bachelard (2000:159).

He is concerned with the thoughts and dreams triggered by the objects rather than the objects *per se*. He has written appreciatively about artists of virtually no artistic merit, yet whose works have prompted dreams and thoughts in him. Similarly, dirty butter, logs, bonfires and pancakes with honey are completely uninteresting in terms of objects of the past – yet the grime, toil, smoke and stickiness nevertheless give rise to dreams and thoughts about life in another era.

Consequently, Bachelard’s reasoning about dreams relates to the way in which things material – the artefact, the place, the exhibit – can no longer be ascribed significance as an

object, but as a subject: how they work on us and how we discover new aspects of ourselves by dreaming about them. This explains how the focus that historical theme parks’ put on using rather than watching, on action rather than reflectivity, works as an effective introduction to a spirited dream about the past for the school children. For as Frykman (this volume) points out, presenting the impact of material customs on cultural heritage, is not about materiality in a historically materialistic sense. Rather, the material culture needs to be displayed as something more than relics and objective evidence in order to become part of a present-day dialogue with the past.

“For places to be able to answer questions about identity”, says Frykman – and we might add: to make the past happen – “they have to be equipped with a biography, a life story, a proposition which is constantly open to new interpretations and surprising insights. We thus see how something local is once again populated, filled with revived narratives and mysteries that suit our own times. It is not the history of the place we seek, but its ambience, its soul, and its ability to accumulate memories and dreams” (Frykman, this volume).

The way that things operate as subjects and are filled with mysteries that suit our own times is probably clearest seen at the Bronze Age Settlement, where nature is vested with powers and is able to talk to those who listen. Gorm points to two trees in particular. The Tree of Good Fortune is a wish-fulfilling birch. Visitors sit down on a small seat-like branch a metre up the trunk; they lean back, close their eyes, and make a wish. No-one needs to know what you have wished for, as that’s a private secret, ensures Gorm. However, certain restrictions apply. “You’re not allowed to wish that you’ll win the Lottery”, says Gorm, looking strict and serious at the children. The other tree is an oak, which will talk to you if you are tuned to its frequency. “I heard the tree rustling”, said one of the children convincingly when I joined their group. According to Gorm, 95% of the children will hear something if they are urged to listen to the trees.

In many ways, the lands of the past are founded on the magic of make-believe. Even if

At the Bronze Age Settlement the trees have special powers and talk to those who listen.

much effort is put into creating a setting which makes the past come alive as you pass through the time gates, the journey back in time clearly fails to take you all the way: “We’re using a modern lid for the pot, even if that’s not really right for the Bronze Age. That’s to make sure we won’t get too much ash in the soup. There’s no need to adopt all the Bronze Age practices”, admits Urd once the ingredients for the real Bronze Age vegetable soup are ready to go on the fire. “Eli, no, I mean Urd”, says Gorm, constantly slipping up, but pleading for understanding as it is clearly difficult to be moving back and forth three thousand years at the time.

For of course, it is impossible to experience the past as it used to be. We prefer to stay put in the present as we take in the past; we can but interpret, play, imagine, dream our way into history. However, we have a number of atmosphere-enhancing props that will make it easier for us to dip into the past.

The children are highly concerned with what fits in and what does not, what is right in relation to the fact that they are now in the Land of the Past – not based on a historical assessment, but based on what is credible in relation to the make-believe magic which is required for them

to act their part as a Viking or take on their new Bronze Age identity. Consequently, none of them have brought their watches, pocket money or chewing gum. And they are vigilant enforcers of time-appropriate-ness as well, albeit with a twinkle in the eye:

“I saw you, so there,” one of the boys exclaimed triumphantly as he climbed the stairs up to the horse-mounting platform. “You’re eating chocolate! You’re not allowed ’cause they didn’t have chocolate in the Viking Age. I saw you, you’ve got a chocolate wrapper in your hand as well”. The horse minder tries to deny the accusation, but he’s unsuccessful. For it is not particularly easy to speak with half a chocolate bar in your mouth, hurriedly shoved in as you realise you are about to be found out. “I won’t tell your boss if you give me some”, is the ultimatum he is given by the boy, who cunningly seizes his chance to exploit the situation.

Perhaps the creative imagination, the magic of make-believe, actually helps develop the eye? It triggers thoughts about what is seen to be correct, albeit on the basis of what is felt to be authentic rather than historical correctness. And their curiosity is raised. The toilets in Viking Land are a good example of the difference between authenticity and correctness. Of course, there

were no toilets in the Viking Age, so historically speaking they should not be there at all. When for obvious reasons the toilets are nevertheless a must in a present-day Viking village, they have been built the way you would imagine toilets would look like if they had in fact existed back then, in apparently old and uneven timbers, with a turf roof, and crude outlines of a Viking man and woman on the two doors. And when the children are seated there, on the incorrect toilet seats, they are encouraged to think for themselves. There is a poster on the bathroom wall, designed by one of the park's sponsors:

"What did the Vikings do? They had no water closets, no two-ply toilet paper, and no cream soap. Did they use moss? Or a sprig of spruce? Perhaps wet new snow worked well? We're only asking."

The posters, framed in 10-centimetre grey strips of leather, are signed "SABA-Mölnlycke, suppliers of sanitary products to Viking Land". And undoubtedly, their message makes you think as you sit there, enjoying the luxury of SABA-Mölnlycke's soft, high-quality toilet paper. Imagine how cold it would be if you had to use snow. Or a prickly sprig of spruce. Moss sounds best, but it would probably get itchy afterwards, and on and on.

However, not even the magic of make-believe is surrounded by "authenticitarian" considerations. In certain contexts, the children appeared not to care the least about obvious credibility flaws. In the morning, as we were having our breakfast after a long Viking night, the quiet was shattered, the bird song and the children's voices interrupted, by an outrageously inappropriate intrusion in our past-time bliss: a tractor came driving up the gravel track, with a load of firewood in its grab. What an incredible double-blunder, I thought. First, the tractor is obviously not part of the Viking Age, and second, four of these children had been working their guts out the day before to make the yard tidy by transforming the heap of wood at the centre into a neat pile at the side. And now this highly modern tractor is bringing more logs, all of which are deposited in a heap at the middle of the yard. As the tractor made not only one trip,

but three and four as the morning passed, I started getting really annoyed. Was it really impossible to get some peace and quiet during breakfast? The children responded differently. At first they seemed not even to notice. But suddenly some clever souls realised they could make use of the empty grab on the return trip, to get a ride on the tractor. And thus the morning's entertainment was secured, even for yesterday's wood-stackers who seemed not to be the least bothered that their work had been obliterated in a single tractor trip.

When the past happens in a historical theme park, the happening reaches beyond history. Children who travel to the make-believe land of times past, all bring one glaringly inappropriate object: a camera. This is a happening of sufficient note to be worth photographing, and which deserves a space in the album. This is something they want to show their friends, and which earns them attention. Also, it is an experience that will take its place among other childhood memories, to be included in the autobiographical production.

What about the Museums and the Magic of Authenticity?

It is easy to criticise the historical theme parks for their unorthodox accounts of history and lack of antiquarian accuracy. Of course there were no toilets in the Viking Age, and it is clearly annoyingly easy for anyone with expert historical knowledge to spot incorrect building solutions. It is even more appropriate to ask scientifically founded questions about talking trees, or wish-fulfilling trees, particularly when they reject material wishes such as lottery wins. Helge Grønli has in fact received death threats based on his preaching of what some consider being idolatry. Nevertheless, most of the criticism is directed against commercialisation and popularisation. Many feel that the imagination is given too loose a rein in historical theme parks.

"What's so sad about Viking Land", said one of the researchers at the Folk Museum, "is that it's so superficial, the exhibits become worthless, it's all hip-hop." "Fun and games and amusement parkish", is the immediate negative characteri-

A historically correct souvenir from the past? This authentic rose-painted T-shirt is for sale at the Folk Museum in Oslo.

sation given by the Head of Education at the Folk Museum when I ask her to describe Viking Land. The Head of Education at the University Museum of Antiquities gives a fuller, but quite similar assessment:

“All the staff at the museum of antiquities visited Viking Land last week. Some of them think it’s really ghastly, deplorable, but personally I don’t think we should reject it all. The educational programme seemed very good; that part about *doing* things. The education staff appeared to be genuinely concerned with this, they’re not just thinking about earning money. That’s probably the management’s line, rather. More ale and fewer stories, that’s my impression. But I fail to understand why they’re not more thorough and correct in terms of their buildings, as that would have given them much greater legitimacy.”

Or in the words of the Museum Director at Vest-Agder Regional Museum speaking about the Bronze Age Settlement: “What we have here are originals, while they’ve only got replicas. Yes, they’re not even replicas. They’re assumptions, replicated assumptions”.

Admittedly, Bachelard wishes to focus on artefacts as subjects rather than as objects because he finds the dreams generated by the artefacts to be of interest rather than the artefacts per se. Does this mean that the artefacts, as objects, are completely uninteresting? Such as the original artefacts on display in museums? The artefacts that *are* the past? The Museum Director points out that:

“The fact that we have, say, the Oseberg ship, and are able to say that this ship looked precisely like this more than 2 000 years ago – it’s the original – then that’s different from making a replica of it. Making a replica of the actual Oseberg ship, which would look similar to this, that’s another experience than looking at the original object knowing that this is in fact the original.

Do you think that’s the case for everyone?

I don’t know. I think it applies to an awful lot of people, at any rate. Otherwise people would never travel to where they can see the actual originals. Otherwise they might as well have travelled to see the replica. Which is never as interesting. I do believe that for an awful lot of people it really means something to be looking at original objects. That’s what I imagine, anyway. If that were not the case, there would be no point at all in the whole museum idea in terms of the public. Not in terms of research, you’d need them for research whatever. If original objects have no effect on people, I’d have to say that museums like this would be rather pointless.”

Of course artefacts have a value as objects, and the original, dating from the past, has a special value relative to the copies. “The difference in value between the original and the copy can only be understood in this way: that the hand of the Master has touched the former but not the latter. This certainty gives a sense that the Master is virtually present in his work, as a part

of our past”, says media expert Anders Johansen (1996:124f.), referring to what Walter Benjamin called the aura of the original artefact. This reflects the ability of old original items to feign the elimination of time and history. Whatever its aesthetical qualities, the work is suddenly considered to have no value at all once it becomes clear that it is not genuine.

But even if the originals *are* the past, and have their own aura, they do not necessarily make the past come alive, at least not if the artefacts are left to speak for themselves, as is often the case in Norwegian museums. Certainly, the originals convey information, provide experiences and make the past come alive for those with sufficient knowledge to retrieve the aura of originality, even from shards of pottery on neat display – but there are few 10 and 11-year-olds among them. For pre-teenagers, three quarters of an hour is the upper limit for a visit to a historical past, and their first aura-experience comes when they pass a mirror!

We may wonder why it is that while original artefacts represent the museums’ greatest pulling power, they can also be considered their greatest drawback as well, particularly in relation to children. For even if the museum educationalists are skillful, you can sense that they are working against the odds in face of the awkwardness caused by original items: “don’t touch the things on the tables, they’re so old they’ll disintegrate”; “you can’t have anything to drink in here”; “no, you can’t go down to the basement, up to the attic, in the cowshed, in the barn, sorry”. During the tours of the Folk Museum this was the constantly repeated refrain. And of course you have to be careful; original artefacts are valuable objects.

This is why they are placed in display cases, or behind a rope. And how much magic is left when the children are barred from touching the tankard, or from entering the house, because it is cordoned off at the door. In the more visitor-friendly variety, the artefacts are allowed to remain on display, although they are secured by various means, such as filling pots with steel pellets to make sure any attempt to remove it will be easily heard. However, how much of an atmosphere is it possible to soak up by being inside a blackhouse, how much past are you

able to dream when you have to concentrate on not ruining or touching anything that you’re not allowed to touch?

The overall objective for most museums is to be faithful to their authentic artefacts. However, the authentic artefacts are no longer in their authentic setting, or are no longer used for their intended purpose, and so their authenticity is diminished. The curatorial dilemma that museums are regularly faced with is well exemplified by the story of this tour of the Folk Museum during which a group of nursery school children were meant to be given an experience of “an old-fashioned cowshed”.

In order to get into the cowshed, the children needed assistance, and any adults would need to be supple. For the door was tiny, and half-way up the wall. “How do you think the cows got in,” the guide asked the children, but had to answer her own question in the end: “The level of the ground outside used to be much higher, so that the door was in fact at ground level, like normal doors. And the cows were smaller, too”. The remainder of the tour was a continuous explanation of what things were really like in this authentic cowshed when it was actually being used for its intended purpose.

When the children wondered why there were no pens in the shed, they were told that: “Well, there used to be pens. The reason why there’s none now, is that the old ones are ruined. And it would be a bit daft to make new ones, which wouldn’t really fit in and might not be quite right”. At the centre of the cowshed floor a huge, strange-looking wooden structure was looming. The children obviously wondered what it might be. “Well, that thing really shouldn’t be here. So it’s a secret. Just pretend it’s invisible,” was the guide’s answer.

It is quite difficult to be faithful to the original in new contexts. It *is* difficult to stop the past. It is actually impossible. Because the original artefacts from the Really-Old-Days are as old as they are, there is obviously not that much left of them, as is the case, for instance, for shards of pottery from the Bronze Age. They are quite inaccessible to most people. To ensure that the exhibited artefacts are comprehensible and meaningful representatives of a past, the originals are often augmented, even at the museums.

Should we be better at stating that these are replicas?

Director at VestAgder Regional Museum admits that not everything is as it should be, not even in their antiquity exhibition:

“For example, from prehistoric times we have virtually nothing wooden. You know. And then we put wooden shafts on original arrowheads or knives or whatever, in order to illustrate what they may have looked like. And we’re doing that as well. And it’s obviously debatable to what degree we should be better at saying that these are replicas, and that these are attempts to show what it may have looked like, instead of simply exhibiting it. There’s clearly a whole lot of this thing going on, here as well as at a lot of other museums, so we’re far from consistent. This is an awfully difficult issue, and there are no easy answers. It would be difficult to sit down and document every little tiny object for the public; that would simply make it boring.”

It is easy to reject or disapprove of the museums’ criticism of the historical theme parks, or to direct the very same arguments back to the traditional conveyers of history. “It’s a bit like

opening the door of a toilet that’s taken. You surprise the museums with their pants down”, says Billy Ehn (1986) about discovering underhand practices. In some ways you could say that it is worse for museums to sail under false colours by exhibiting replicas as originals without saying so, because their prime claim to fame is precisely the fact that they are in possession of the historical originals. For as Anders Johansen pointed out: whatever the aesthetic quality, the object or work is suddenly considered to have no value at all once it becomes clear that it is not genuine.

An Era with No Sense of History?

It appears that everyone agrees about one thing, whether they come from the commercially or religiously based lands of the past, or from the traditional museums with a more antiquarian profile: we live in an era with no sense of history. The Bronze Age Settlement constantly presents examples of our lacking sense of history: people have forgotten about love and care, we no longer know our natural environment and consequent-

ly we no longer know how to manage the earth's resources, we fail to exploit our own potentials. The reason why we must fight not to lose our sense of history is that the past provides the answer to the problem. Helge explains:

"The way ahead goes back. There is no way we can continue the current trend. The only thing that'll happen then is that we'll get to the top of a cliff and make a nosedive, pulling with us every other living creature. We're not allowed to do that. If we do that, we will have elevated ourselves not only to god, but to the devil as well. We need to go back to the past, and we need to use the best of what we've had through the times. We mustn't loose our sense of history. If we loose our sense of history, we'll loose the chance to hang on to the good things only, cause then we'll have to go through it all again, good *and* bad. And to me, it often seems as if we're only hanging on to all the worst features."

The Head of Education at the University Museum of Antiquities in Oslo also talks about loosing the sense of history, but in very different terms: "It's not that the children don't learn enough about history and the past. Sometimes they know so much it's quite impressive. But at one point, as they're growing up, it all becomes uninteresting. And today's adults are so void of knowledge that we can but admit to having failed in our task. We have failed."

The paradox is obvious: while there is a deep conviction that we are loosing our sense of history, there is unsurpassed interest in the past! It is clearly because people are in fact interested in the past that the present-day Viking Lands and Bronze Age villages keep cropping up. Should this not indicate that we are anything but loosing our sense of history? "An era with no sense of history" can probably take on two different meanings: that we don't care about history, or that we go about it in the wrong way. Could we perhaps compare museum-style history accounts with an exam: they require a type of knowledge that needs to be revised and learnt by heart for the sake of a day's performance, only to be forgotten once the exam is over? And this is perhaps why we are warranted in saying that both the knowledge and the

interest disappear with age? Perhaps the intensely personal and physically anchored past-times-experiences from Viking Land and the Bronze Age Settlement make history take a deeper hold? On the other hand, is it at all possible to point to these tree-trunk-embracing men, talking trees, or chocolate-munching actor Vikings and call it history?

When people begin to imagine that it is possible to make direct contact with the past through the place, the land, and things, it can give them a dangerous certainty about their own excellence. Things are so palpable, they do not argue, and they can therefore be used as evidence that we really have something genuine of our own, in contrast to the complexity of the surrounding world, says Frykman (this volume), pointing to a key element in relation to all perception of history.

To school teachers this is so obvious that they will never even consider taking their pupils to a historical theme park for a history lesson without supplementing the park experience with further input. On the contrary, we have already seen how the trip to Viking Land has been contextualised through a series of different subjects in class. The preparations leading up to the trip to the Bronze Age Settlement, and all the class-work afterwards, show precisely the same: "Tomorrow we'll try to live as much as possible as they did in the Bronze Age. And so we have to leave our watches, radios and sweets behind at home", says the teacher to his class the day before the big day. "Do we have to take off our ear-rings as well?" wonders one of the girls. "Well, what do you think? Did they wear ear-rings in the Bronze Age?" asks the teacher in return. Following a quick discussion, they decide that they should be able to bring their ear-rings only if they were made from flint or bronze.

When the pupils' accounts of their trip are read aloud in class after their return from the Bronze Age, it is clear that they all tend to emphasise the talking and wish-fulfilling trees, the clearing water and the maze that can be used for naming ceremonies. However, the teacher turns this into an opportunity to problematise the relationship between the present and the past: "Some things we know for certain about the past; for example, we know that there were

mazes for they have found some in their excavations. But then there are lots of things we can only fantasise about. Like what the mazes were used for. These things about the trees and water are also good examples of things we need to imagine and that we'll never know for certain."

Rather than being presented simplistic historical knowledge through experiencing and dreaming their way back in time, we might find that the perception of history they are in the process of developing, is in fact quite sophisticated, in that problematisation and contextualisation are considered natural and essential parts of all historical information. In this respect, we might say that the historical theme parks' louder and perhaps even speculative depiction of a historical era has introduced a vital input for understanding the past. For problematisation and contextualisation are just as essential to our encounters with traditional museums and their antiquarian correctness.

At What Age do You Become a European?

Was Svante Beckman right when he forewarned 10 years ago that the antiquarian professors would be left holding the authentic, representative and high-quality baby? Yes and no.

They find it difficult to compete with the historical theme parks in terms of making the past come alive. Not only does their academic background complicate the animation process; publicly funded museums have access to a much smaller purse than the privately run historical theme parks, which tend to be backed by multinational sponsors. However, there is no need to be left holding the baby for this reason. There are many who would take no pleasure at all in dressing up and enacting Vikings or Bronze Age men, cutting up vegetables or stacking wood, or embracing talking trees. Many would probably consider these activities to be totally unrelated to the past. They would however find it exciting and informative to visit a traditional museum and walk from one display cage to the next, from one original artefact to the next, while letting themselves be surprised and entertained, or while reflecting on the museum's layout of the past. These are people who would

love to attend seminars organised by the museum, and who take great joy in and feel reassured by the fact that our past is preserved by sound, reliable institutions whose job it is to record, document, restore, exhibit and research the original artefacts of history. In fact, the museums have every opportunity to specialise in the areas where they already excel.

However, this group of people will hardly be inundated with pre-teenage children. And it is with respect to these pre-teenagers that I believe Svante Beckman's predictions were right. Perhaps the children will come to the museums as they grow older, but while they are still in their pre-teens I do believe that they will spend an increasing amount of time on the playgrounds of historical theme parks. And if this is correct, what does it imply?

Theme parks like Viking Land and the Bronze Age Settlement are often considered to be some of the most important sources of de-localisation of cultural phenomena (as are airports, hotel chains, television, and similar modern installations). In the words of cultural researcher Alexander Wilson (1992): "It's at once every place and no place; it is on the land but not of it." Yet this may be the very reason why they also have this incredible ability to provide substance and life to imaginary worlds, to people and cultural identities.

For example, if we look at Benedict Anderson's (1983) familiar concept of the imagined community of a national identity, we could easily say that theme parks like Viking Land and the Bronze Age Settlement are very much linked to the narrative and feelings of a national community. Ethnologist Orvar Löfgren (1993) discusses how the magic charge of the national territory arises from different forms of symbolic earthing of national themes. "Much the same way as maps change colours to simplify and clarify the nations, the emergence of national landscapes and scenarios means that the nation is taking *place*; these arenas have a wide variety of changing moods, memories and myths assigned to them, thus generating a cultural condensation of the national", says Löfgren (1993:90). These locations become sacred places, places of pilgrimage, which is what the museums have traditionally been. In many ways, the Folk

Museum in Oslo displays and performs national identity; it is a Norway in miniature. In my opinion, this is what the historical theme parks are in the process of becoming.

It is interesting to reflect on the age perspective in relation to the feeling of belonging and citizenship. According to Orvar Löfgren (2000), the kindergartens' virtually insatiable need for cultural props and their use of material culture constituted the principal contributing factor to the homogenisation of customs in the various Nordic countries. The kindergartens filled rituals and festival celebrations with new vigour and colonised worlds that sidelined traditions and the peasant community. "The rituals of childhood help define citizenship, or the sense of belonging to a system", says Frykman (1999), maintaining that "the solution to the problem of how to reach the citizen, appears to go via the land of childhood".

At what age does a person become a citizen of Europe? How old do you need to be to become a European? Construction européenne is clearly aimed at the traditional channels, where national belonging is based on a set of narratives about a perceived community, whether you believe in the significance of the printed word, like Anderson (1983), or in education, like Gellner (1983). However, these modes of expression are rarely important to the smallest children, so is this perhaps a community which appeals to those approaching the end of their teenage years? Anna Burstedt (this volume) refers to a different line of thought in relation to the belonging of identities as she discusses the slow food movement. She points to the ways in which food on a plate represents the embodiment and anchorage of a place, and she sees this as an example of the new regionalism which is thus in line with EU's device *In Uno Plures* – Unity in diversity. However, the slow food tables are certainly not crowded with children. They want fast food. Is Europe considered to be important and significant, something of which one wants to be a part, only after the playful years of childhood have past? Is it too boring for kids to be European citizens? Will EU have to change their way of thinking if they wish to unite the European cultures, and start going via the

playgrounds of childhood to recruit citizens among the very youngest Europeans?

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