

Carole Collet, Rachel Wingfield and Mathias Gmachl at Luminous Green

A retreat, workshop and symposium on ecologically inspired and sustainable worlds
27 April - 05 May 2007 Belgium, organised by FOAM.

<http://www.luminousgreen.org>

There is nothing more rewarding than spending a week with like-minded creative people and this is what the Luminous Green project was all about. Maja Kuzmanovic and the Foam Team carefully engineered the coming together of a group of designers, scientists, grass roots activists, policy makers, economists, artists, educationalists, cooks and engineers. Debating on our future world and our ecologically inspired practices and beliefs was our focus for a week. Removed from our daily routine, we brainstormed, debated, argued, proposed and transposed ideas.

In the midst of the Ardennes, amongst deserted greenery and puzzled villagers, we questioned and challenged our respective roles in a world demanding ecological actions.

At "La Classe" we worked on transcending the limitations of our respective practices by exploring the potential of joining forces. The presence of an economist and a European policy maker gave us an invaluable perspective in terms of how leading businesses and European bureaucrats deal with the integration of environmental values in their corporate environments. And despite a fairly grey picture and increasing environmental damage, a positive attitude emerged fairly quickly: one that places design and creativity at the heart of the debate rather than as a last minute add on. The environmental debate is a complex one, and demands multifarious problem solving approaches. Too often, design is a problem maker but, once integrated, ecological values become part of the creative process and design is a powerful tool to reshape our ecologies.

The Luminous Green symposium held in the Groenhoven Estate, near Brussels presented world wide projects and actions that made a difference in the field. Jennifer Leonard, co-author with Bruce Mau of "Massive Change" decided to pick the brains of entire audience to come up with positive actions in the field of transportation, urbanism, education, energy use and food. The outcomes will be published and podcasted on <http://www.worldchanging.com>.

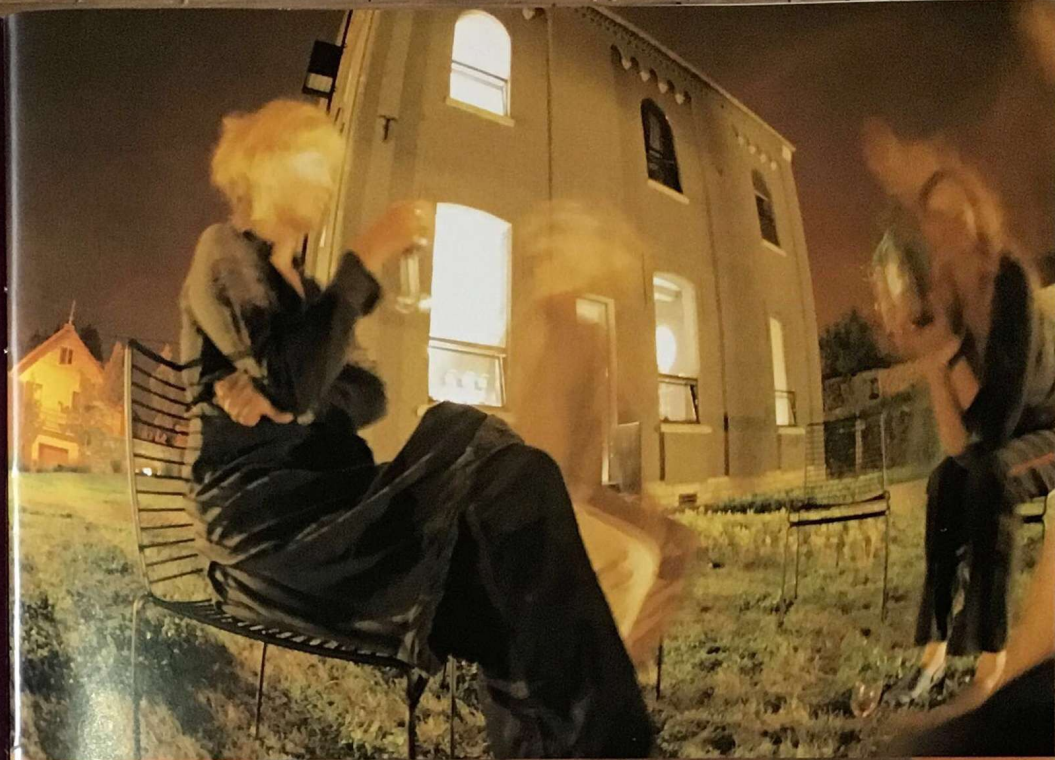
Vasu from the Barefoot College showed us how passion, commitment and self-belief can achieve the most amazing results. The Barefoot College started in the 70s. "The College addresses problems of drinking water, girl education, health & sanitation, rural unemployment, income generation, electricity and power, as well as social awareness and the conservation of ecological systems in rural communities. The College benefits the poorest of the poor who have no alternatives." (<http://www.barefootcollege.org>). Their solar programme was of particular interest for the luminous green symposium. As part of their education, children are trained to use solar powered systems to make lanterns and solar cookers. This enables the community to be self sufficient in terms of energy as well as producing solar powered craft artifacts sold worldwide.

Marko Peljhan from the Interpolator project ITASK, introduced the notion of art installation as a role model for good practice in the field of clean and self sustaining eco-systems. "I-TASC is a decentralized network of individuals and organisations working collaboratively in the fields of art, engineering, science and technology on the interdisciplinary development and tactical deployment of renewable energy, waste recycling systems, sustainable architecture and open-format, open-source media" (<http://www.interpolator.org>). The next project will take place in Antarctica, and will test out art, technology and engineering ideas in the most unwelcoming environment.

The conclusion of the symposium was that despite a gloomy environmental picture, more than ever there is a growing number of individuals and organisations prepared to make a difference with real effective actions, not just words. The symposium was a key step for most of us and initiated a fruitful and successful network of eco-creatives. Many future projects are now being discussed and the full report on the Luminous Green project will shortly be available on <http://www.foam.org>.

The creative workshop that followed the symposium was the real test: how best to put the theory into practice. In small groups we worked on testing ideas of self-sustaining systems. The work was showcased in the Open Lab on the 5th of May, when the public was invited to interrogate, challenge and engage with our "products".

Carole Collet
Course Director, MA Textile Futures, May 2007.



MA Textile Futures 2007

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