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The merit of pataphysics is that it has at least confirmed that there is no metaphysical justification for forcing everyone to believe in the same absurdity.

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Asger Jorn quoted in Brotchie, Alistair, Stanley Chapman, Thieri Foulc, and Kevin Jackson. 2003. *'Pataphysics: Definitions and citations*. London: Atlas Press.

3 MUSINGS ON PURE PLAY

Marko Marila

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Ian Bogost's *Play Anything* (2016) begins with a powerful scene. The author recounts a hurried walk through a busy mall with his daughter in his hand. Trying to move quickly through the crowd, he nevertheless feels resistance as his daughter is attempting to time her steps so as to stay within the boundaries of the square, white tiles lining the mall floor. Rather than urging his daughter to keep up, the author quickly realises the value in her impromptu game of "step on a crack". Instead of concentrating on the obstacles she faced in that situation—the speed set by an adult, the overwhelming crowd, the boredom—she used those limitations to her advantage and managed to turn a mundane situation into a joyous game.

Following from the realisation that children may have an innate ability to turn daunting situations into games, *Play Anything* becomes an exploration of the different philosophies that might help adults to do the same. Importantly, however, the book is not a self-help guide to mindfulness enlightenment. Those familiar with Bogost's earlier publications will remember his *Alien Phenomenology* (2012), a sort of speculative take on what it is like to be a thing, any thing, for that matter. *Play Anything*, then, is a follow-up to *Alien Phenomenology*, but it goes further into developing a kind of object-oriented ethics. Insofar as the anti-materialism of western postmodernism has led to somewhat of a suspicion of things and an ironist tendency to keep things at arm's length, Bogost contends that the ability to turn our interactions with things into instances of play will allow us to notice the complexity—and joyfulness—of everyday situations, and therefore develop a sense of speculative care for things.

What Bogost's proposed philosophy of play highlights is the interplay in everyday situations between limitations and creativity and how that tension affords gamification. When reading *Play Anything*, both of us found ourselves thinking of the game of chess. Much like adult life, chess is predicated on a very strict set of rules but becoming a master at chess requires much more than the simple ability to follow those rules mathematically. Especially when two top-level players meet, it is not enough for a win to be able to predict the other player's moves, but also to change one's own playing style creatively and intuitively according to the situation and personality of the opponent.

Another peculiarity of chess emerges from the interplay between its mathematical nature and the materialities of the game. With exceptional skills and memory, chess can be played totally blind, but as most players will need a physical chess set, its material traits become equally important. For instance, the physical appearance of chess pieces has evolved a lot during the centuries the game has existed. One dramatic alteration took place in the Middle Ages when the original military characters were replaced with those of the royal court. The modern look of the chess set, on the other hand, is result of a standardisation that took place in the 19th century when the game's popularity in Europe increased significantly. Today, many—including the *International Chess Federation*—consider the Staunton chess set the global norm.

The fact that chess is a war game has made it a fruitful source of inspiration for artworks of a highly political nature. Yoko Ono's *White Chess Set* (1966) replaces the black squares and black pieces with another set of whites, and in doing so makes away with the original position of opposition between two armies. Because all pieces are of the same colour, the players will at first try to memorise their moves, but when they soon forget which piece belongs to them, the war game turns into a form of friendly interaction where both players are on the same side. Another iteration of the *White Chess Set* was *Yoko Chess* (2015), a smart phone chess application designed by Ono that replaced the conventional pieces with dogs of different breed. 20 % of all proceeds from the application's sales went to animal rescue organisations in the area where the player was located.

Our experiment is far from being political, and instead we seek inspiration from the interplay in chess between the limitations set by the rules and the playfulness afforded by the instance of playing the game. We replaced the chess pieces with everyday objects that are somehow personally or historically important and familiar to the player. With our experimental performance, we did not wish to point at anything outside the confines of the game, but rather explore whether a game of chess with random everyday objects as pieces is possible in the first place and if any significant discoveries could be made when playing is such a fashion. We treated the rules of the game as simply a starting place or a template, and while successful playing will require basic understanding of the rules of the game, we anticipated that paying attention to and spending time with the objects themselves would be more important.

We did not want to play against each other, and instead invited as our guest opponent Finnish artist and archaeologist Suvi Tuominen. Luckily, she knew the rules of chess, and the only instructions we had to give her were to choose 16 objects of personal significance each of which would fit a square of 48x48 cm. The assignment of the standard chess values of the objects was done more or less randomly on sight at a giant outdoor chess board in Helsinki. A list of the objects chosen by us and by Suvi, as well as their respective chess designations, can be found on the next page.

Marko & Mikael

1 pepper grinder with black pepper (pawn)
1 Rubik's cube, sufficiently randomised (pawn)
1 quartz arrowhead replica (pawn)
1 pair of spurs (pawn)
1 Eppu Normaali *Hatullinen Paskaa – B-sides and Other Rarities 1977–1983* vinyl record (pawn)
1 enamel kettle (pawn)
1 half full bottle of Finnish Tenu gin (pawn)
1 Lewis chessmen knight replica in original box (pawn)

1 half full bottle of Winsor & Newton Galleria acrylic paint, permanent Alizarin crimson (queen's rook)
1 WHS trowel (queen's knight)
1 wooden chess set in standard starting position (queen's bishop)
1 guitar overdrive pedal (queen)
1 cheeseburger (king)
1 Corded Ware pot replica (king's bishop)
1 lit candle (king's knight)
1 pair of Red Wing model 1907 boots (king's rook)

Suvi

1 pair of space rocket novelty sunglasses (pawn)
1 boyu/floater (pawn)
1 copy of *Art and Postcapitalism* by Dave Beech (pawn)
1 lemon (pawn)
1 acupuncture ball (pawn)
1 notebook and a pencil (pawn)
1 time machine/plastic badge with an hourglass figure (pawn)
1 pack of cigarettes and a lighter (pawn)

1 half full bottle of Ocaldo Ready Mixed Paint, fluorescent pink (queen's rook)
1 Oum Kalthoum cassette tape (queen's knight)
1 synthetic bird's nest/tangled mess of cord and two styrofoam eggs (queen's bishop)
1 part of belly dance costume (queen)
1 pair of sneakers of unknown make (king)
1 human/Suvi herself (king's bishop)
1 painted toy horse (king's knight)
1 set of 3D printed objects, three battle axes and one Venus of Willendorf (king's rook)

We won the draw and played the first move, Eppu Normaali vinyl record to e4. This was also Bobby Fischer's go-to opening move. Suvi responded with time machine to b5, which left her time machine open for our Corded Ware pot (king's bishop). We decided not to take Suvi's time machine, as we felt that this would only compromise our aim to take control of the centre of the board. At this point we did, however, decide that only one of us (Marko) should play the moves, while the other (Mikael) could keep note of the moves. That way we would have a transcript of the game available afterwards, but also a mnemonic aid in case both players (Marko and Suvi) forget the value of the pieces during play. The opening moves were fairly easy to follow, and both sides could remember the values of their pieces. In the middle game there were a couple of occasions where we had to resort to Mikael's notation to refresh our memory. At this point we discussed whether being reminded of the play value of the objects could be seen as a form of cheating and if we should just create new rules as we go, but we quickly agreed that maintaining the original scheme could possibly lead to a more joyful endgame.

During the middle game something truly wonderful and unanticipated happened. All of the sudden, we found ourselves unbound by the rules and were instead able to enjoy the game as a form of material interaction with the individual objects. Moving the objects became a joyous moment and their qualities were felt in a very direct fashion. Each move was preceded with a sense of anticipation and, instead of thinking about the actual chess value of the object or the purpose of the move, we noticed that we were deciding on particular moves only because the idea of interacting with that object felt joyful. Touching the synthetic bird's nest (queen's bishop), for instance, generated in Marko a sense of childlike playfulness when he took it with his guitar pedal (queen). At the same time, we both felt that, at the spontaneously experienced instance of play, the original objective of the game, to checkmate the opponent's king, was not the purpose of our play. Each turn and each move became a moment of purposeless joy, however fleeting.

The instances of purposelessness reminded us of Charles Peirce's idea that, in the midst of all the purposefulness of the universe, there exist moments of pure play or musement:

> There is a certain agreeable occupation of mind which, from its having no distinctive name, I infer is not as commonly practiced as it deserves to be; for indulged in moderately—say through some five to six per cent of one's waking time, perhaps during a stroll—it is refreshing enough more than to repay the expenditure. Because it involves no purpose save that of casting aside all serious purpose, I have sometimes been half-inclined to call it reverie with some qualification; but for a frame of mind so antipodal to vacancy and dreaminess such a designation would be too excruciating a misfit. In fact, it is Pure Play. Now, Play, we all know, is a lively exercise of one's powers. Pure Play has no rules, except this very law of liberty. It bloweth where it listeth. It has no purpose, unless recreation. The particular occupation I mean—a petite *bouchée* with the Universes—may take either the form of aesthetic contemplation, or that of distant castle-building (whether in Spain or within one's own moral training), or that of considering some wonder in one of the Universes, or some connection between two of the three, with speculation concerning its cause. It is this last kind—I will call it "Musement" on the whole—that I particularly recommend. (CP 6.458)

Musement played a crucial role in Peirce's philosophy of discovery, and he argued that sometimes new ideas are born in instances of pure play. In other words, pure play, regardless of having no ulterior motive other than itself, can be heuristically invaluable. It is precisely because in musement the muser's mind is empty of any predetermined purpose that she can notice new things, new anomalies, new problems, and new questions. This is why pure play can be an unhindered moment of creative speculation that leads to important new insights in the long run (Cooke 2018).

Our play of musement lasted for a very short time, seconds rather than 5–6 % of our waking time that day, but it came like a flash, and it was impossible to miss it. In those instances, both players noticed the joy of purposelessness and the vibrancy of potentiality nested in the moment of pure play. We can't say that we made any concrete discoveries about our chess objects, but the sensation of pure play alone points towards something with inherent speculative potentiality that should be explored further. One possible course of action could be to slow the game down significantly. Our whole experiment was over in an hour and prolonging the game could possibly afford longer plays of musement and therefore also actual new insights about the objects involved in the play. Such a game would be, however, better played in the summer, as during our experiment our bodies were quickly reminded of the cold facts of the Finnish winter.

Game transcript (recorded by Mikael Nordström)

1. e2-e4 b7-b5
2. d2-d4 Ng8-h6
3. Bc1-f4 Bc8-a6
4. Nb1-c3 e7-e6
5. Ng1-f3 Nb8-c6
6. Qd1-d2 Ra8-b8
7. 0-0-0 Bf8-d6
8. Bf4xd6 g7-g5
9. Nf3xg5 c7xd6
10. Bf1-d3 b5-b4
11. Nc3-a4 Ba6xd3
12. Qd2xd3 f7-f5
13. d4-d5 b4-b3
14. a2xb3 Rb8xb3
15. c2xb3 Qd8-b8
16. d5xe6 d7xe6
17. Ng5xe6 Nh6-g4
18. h2-h3 Ng4xf2
19. Qd3xd6 Nf2xd1
20. Qd6xb8+ Ke8-e7
21. Qb8xh8 Ke7xe6
22. Kc1xd1 f5xe4
23. Na4-c5+ Ke6-d5
24. Nc5xe4 Kd5xe4
25. Rh1-e1+ Ke4-d3
26. Qh8-c3#