



Miscellanea

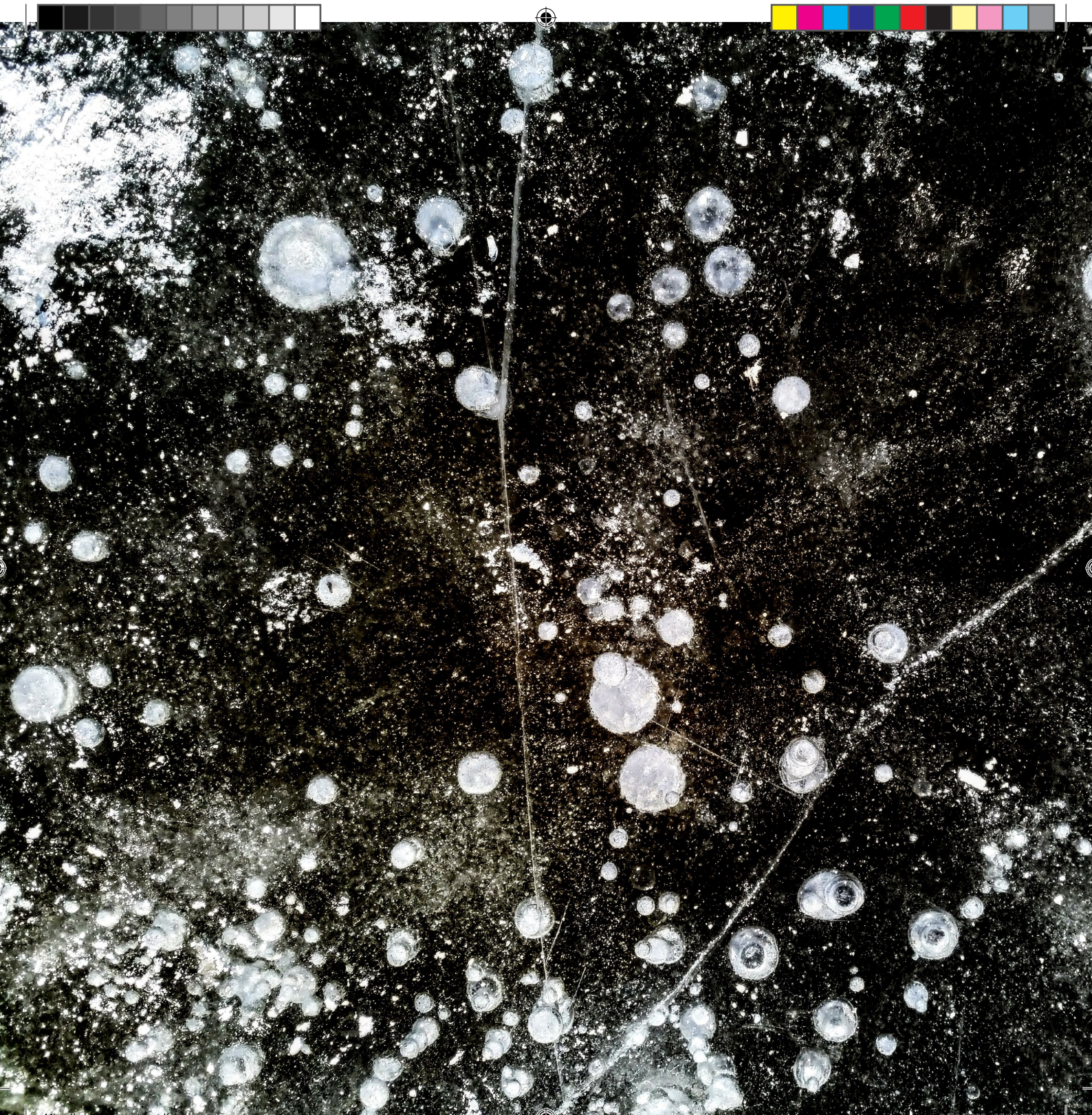
A cabinet of curiosities

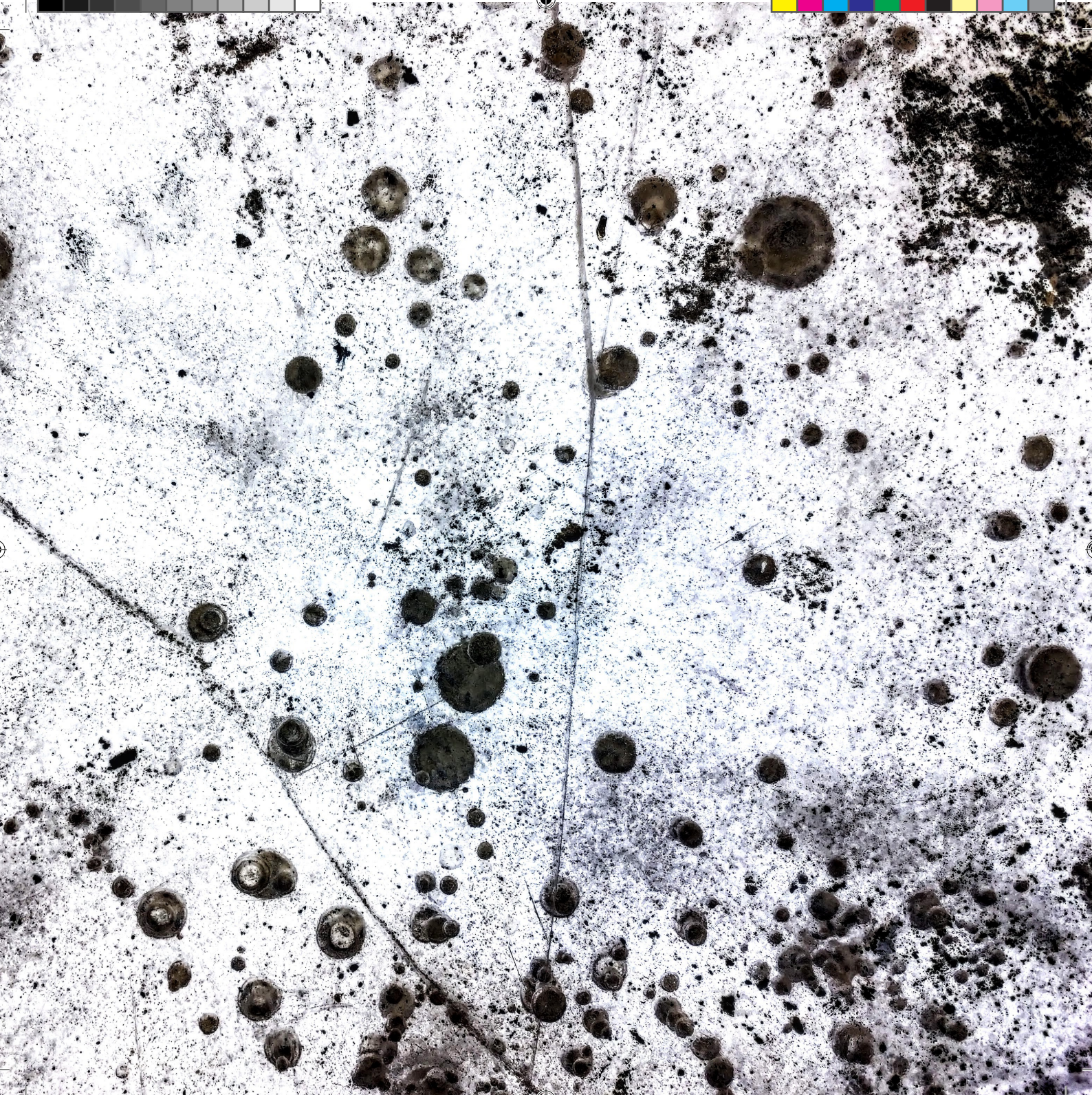
Edited by Tim Flohr Sorensen

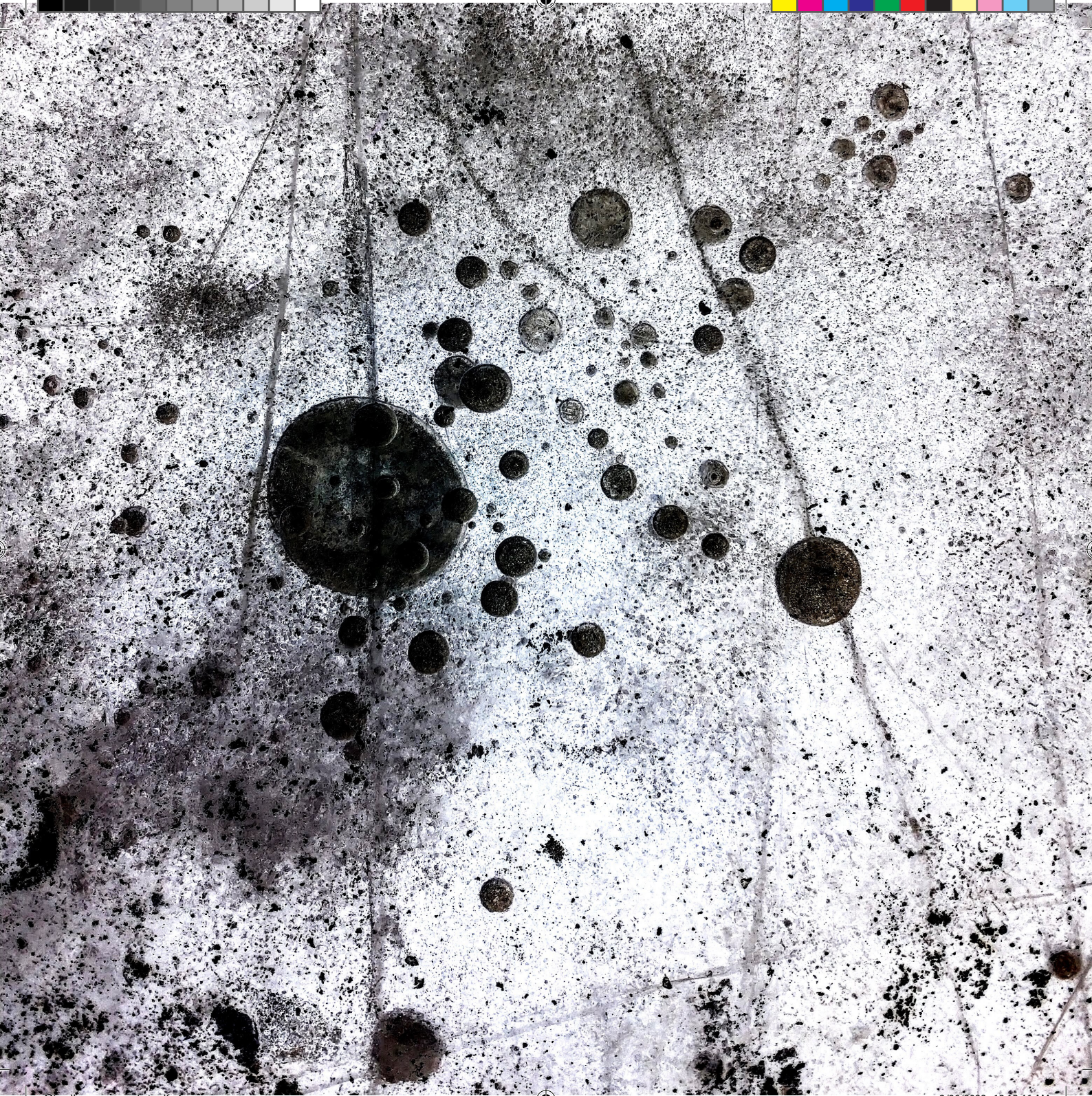


*The Hub for Speculative Fabulations
upon Incidental Observations*











Miscellanea

A cabinet of curiosities

Edited by
Tim Flohr Sørensen

on behalf of

The Hub for Speculative Fabulations upon Incidental Observations

Copenhagen

MMXXIII

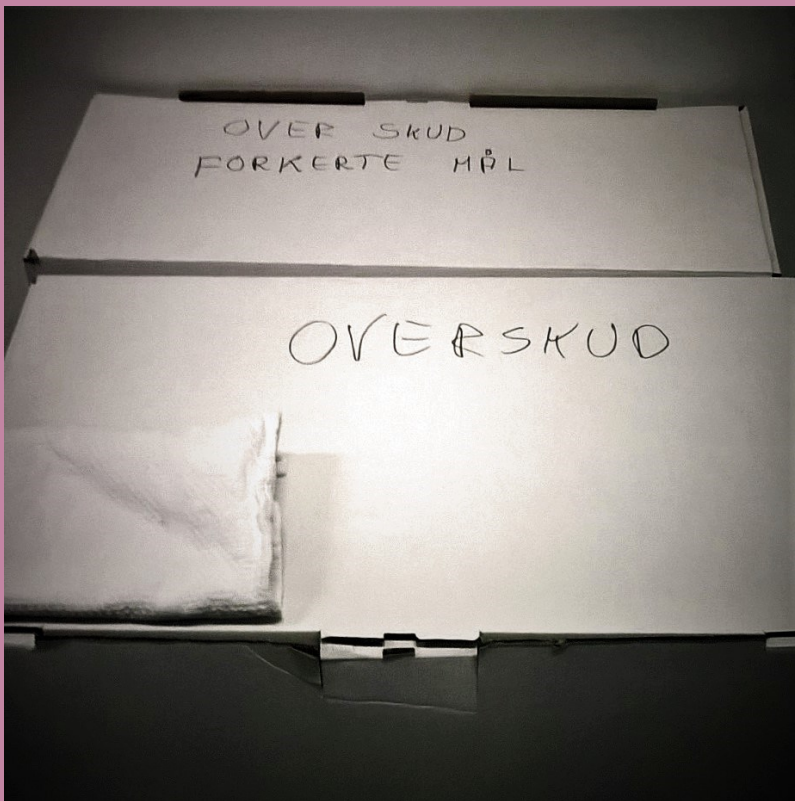


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Tim Flohr Sørensen

Conventionally, an academic anthology begins with an introduction, laying down the idea behind the contents of the volume, and introducing each of the chapters and their mutual connectivity. This is not how this volume begins. Instead, I invite readers to lose themselves on the following pages, exploring the essays without knowing in advance what they are about. Should readers find it useful or necessary, I refer to the afterword, where I—in the traditional tedious fashion—spell out what is at stake in this anthology.

This prologue is only meant to clarify that *Miscellanea* consists of words and images produced by a collective of people coming together under the moniker *The Hub for Speculative Fabulations upon Incidental Fabulations*. This is neither a 'project' nor a 'learned society', but simply a loose gathering of colleagues, agreeing to write texts and create images as a playful engagement with observations and modes of expression rarely welcomed within contemporary academia and its almost exclusive idealisation of impact-oriented, solution-driven research responding to 'real-world' problems with clearly communicated analytical points. The authors of the essays are anthropologists, archaeologists, artists, curators, and journalists. Also, they are active or former painters, janitors, beekeepers, odd-job persons, essayists, housekeepers, drifters, poets, cleaners, explorers, garbage collectors, stamp collectors, and much more. Some of the contributors composed the essays in their spare time as a relief from the constraints of their ordinary, territorializing work. For others, it was not an alternative to the chores of their everyday jobs, but in full alignment with what they do for a living. For others in turn, it was a mixture, and for yet others it may have been something of a completely different order.



I should also mention that this anthology was completed against all odds. To cut a long story short, at least according to my somewhat hazy recollection of the events, the manuscript disappeared for a long time, rendering the publication of *Miscellanea* impossible. After the contributors submitted their images and words, I began compiling and editing the material, but kept getting obstructed by administrative obligations at my workplace.

To make matters worse, at one point, the management at my university told me to move office, and in this process, I lost the manuscript for *Miscellanea*. I had placed the half-edited material in a couple of cardboard boxes, but they were nowhere to be found after the move. I had to assume the manuscript had disappeared for good, and I felt so bad about this sloppy and irresponsible blunder that I never dared admitting to the contributors that I had lost the cardboard boxes with their essays.

Then, not too long ago, a couple of janitors came by my office, having discovered my boxes in the basement. In fact, they said they found the boxes a while back, but they were not sure what to do with them, because the boxes were labelled in rather confusing and unhelpful ways. The thing is I had reused old boxes, when packing the manuscripts. One box was marked *Overskud*, which in the local language means either “Surplus”, “Profit”, “Leftover” or “Excess”. The other box was labelled *Over skud / Forkerte mål*. Literally, this means “Over shoot / Wrong measures”, but the space between “over” and “shoot” was probably a mistake, and hence it should be read “overskud” as in the first case (this

goes to show what difference an interstice can make). The janitors said it would have been much more convenient for them with a note indicating whether this was “small combustible waste” or “scientific notes of vital importance, do not discard”. Afraid to throw out scholarly notes that might lead to the next earthshattering discovery, they left the boxes in the lost-and-found corner of their office, waiting for the owner to reclaim them. That never happened, but eventually, they had to open the boxes, because some auto-ethnographic remains inside began developing a rather curious odour. Opening the boxes, the janitors found my name amongst the material, and were able to return the lot to me. Hence, I guess, this has to be considered the janitors’ prologue as much as mine.

The janitors related many fascinating—and alarming—anecdotes about the peculiar things they encounter in their daily routines over the years, such as messy and weird miscellanea in cardboard boxes. They also mentioned coming across a box of marshmallows in the archaeology department’s storage room in a remote and dark corner of the university. The janitors said they did not even dare opening the box, because they could tell from its date mark that the contents expired almost half a century ago. “Even for archaeologists, this is a bizarre collectible”, one of them remarked. That is true, I guess.

Maybe readers will react to this book with similar easiness, not knowing whether it is advisable to unbox *Miscellanea*. I will leave it to the reader to decide whether this prologue is an invitation or a warning.







”

If physics proposes: “You have a brother and he likes cheese,” then metaphysics replies: “If you have a brother, he likes cheese.” But ‘Pataphysics says: “You don’t have a brother and he likes cheese”.

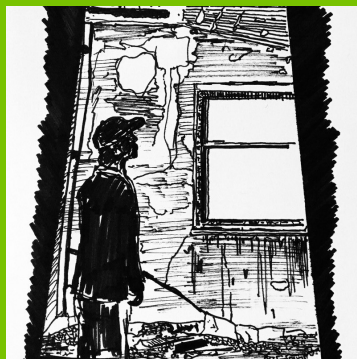
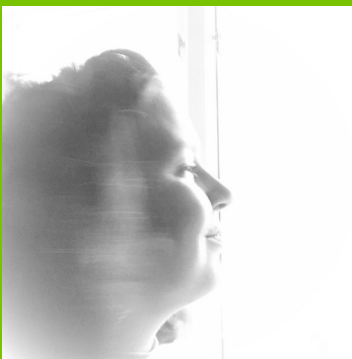
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Georges Perec quoted in Hugill, Andrew. 2015. *Pataphysics: A useless guide*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.



1 PELICAN A speculative exploit

13



Frida Amalie Bruno Weitling

Michael Alexander Ulfstjerne

Scraps of plastic, electronic debris, and the rain-streaking on select locations of the four-story building's large envelope attest to outdated surveillance technology. Cracks in the concrete has caused endemic penetration of water and moisture into the structure. Inside, the employment of steel and aluminum parts indicate non-domestic usage although a large grey, decomposing wall-to-wall carpet may suggest otherwise. Ventilation shafts bear signs of rapid oxidation, including the disfiguring and staining of other adjacent surfaces.

The sheer size (6500m²) of the construction and its location in South Harbor (*Sydhavnen*) in what used to be a central urban district in the city with high real estate prices suggest corporate or elite ownership, presumably used as a vault for storage of valuables. At several places, a green pelican is depicted in varying sizes, uniform, iconic, and in profile. A coat of arms, perhaps? A brand?



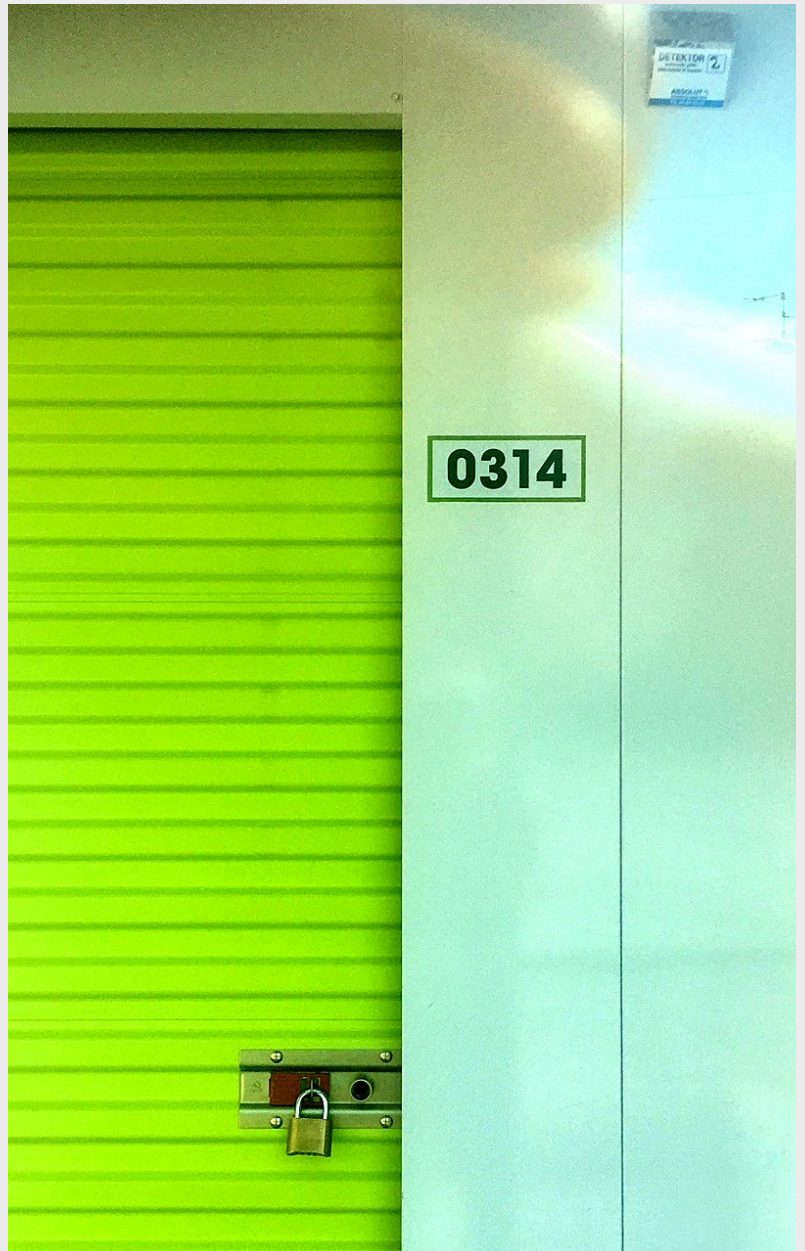


Residues of electronic and heating infrastructures predate smarter building design, indicating construction somewhere between 12.000-12.025 HE [2000-2025, *Gregorian Calendar*]. Inside, uniform steel blinds and doors in a series of set typologies resonate in a similar shade of pelican green. An excess of seemingly cheap materials counters the hypothesis of elite ownership. This was cheap, do doubt, and hardly built to last.

What was in there? I picture myself standing in the street facing concrete walls not yet marked by the ravages of time. From time to time people drop by with sets of keys in their hands, unloading furniture or closed boxes from trailers and cars. Looking through the polished window with the sounds of traffic in the background. Inside, long aisles with grey carpets and green steel blinds and doors appear. A man takes a quick look over his shoulder when leaving while carefully locking one of doors behind him. What's hiding in there? Is it trash or treasure? Is it just ordinary things that had run out of space? Things kept as a reminder of who the key-carrier once was? Or objects not meant to see the light of day?

...

From a cursory inventory of its contents there seem to be few of the heirlooms, riches, or museal objects that was generally valued in the recent past. The building's conspicuous lack of glass windows could also indicate a sort of warehouse or stock. At every level of the building, cylinder brass locks and numbered tags mark the entrance to lockers and rooms in diverse sizes.



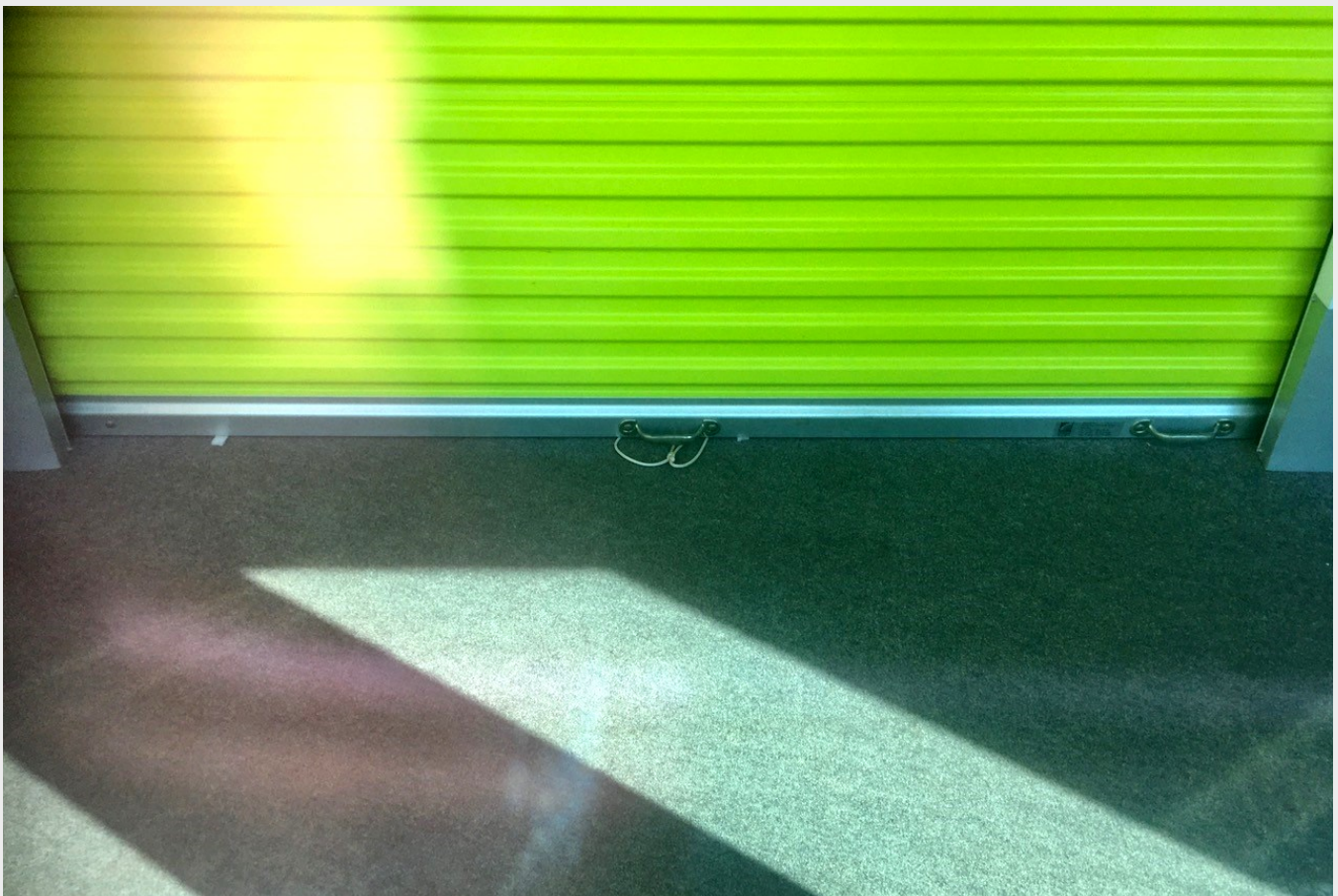


Room: 0314 – 9m³

Sealed plastic containers with manicure and eyeliner products (before non-binary standards). Two green ring-binders neatly compile orders and delivery details: Order # 205-7246499-0904334: Item: Roniki Nail Supplies/ Passionate Samba Series Nail Polish/Guangdong China. Delivery DHL.

Order # 008-724879-0902004: Item: Custom Logo Natural Black Waterproof Magnetic Liquid Eyeliner/Zhenhai/ Zhejiang China. Package Box. Delivery DHL.

A grey duffel bag, green stockings, and four small canisters of oleoresin capsicum spray (popularly, pepper spray).





Room: 0110 – 40m³

The room is located in an adjacent building structure. Inoperative heating and ventilation systems and remnants of CCTV surveillance. Storage room divided into two lots.

#1 Bits and pieces of rotten cardboard boxes, bubble-wrap, shoes, worn clothes, Digital Versatile Discs (DVD) by the hundreds, an inflatable canoe, paddles, Compacts Discs (mainly Death Metal, Trash Metal, and Tina Turner), furniture (dating from different time periods, all showing signs of usage).

#2 Unassembled parts of a motorbike (no gasoline or battery), suitcases with handwritten papers, hunting gear (no ammunition), books, photographs (on paper made for Inkjet or early laser technology). On the most part, photographs portray what seem to be families or couples.



Room 4012 – 0,75 m³ (the smallest typology vault)

The bulk of the vault's content consists of erotic magazines and DVDs, all but two items are targeted heterosexual males in the time of binary: 'Classic Rapport' (15); 'Barely Legal, Hustler Magazine' (4); 'Pige Special' (18; Manshots (2). Erotic DVD's: Sin city (4), pussy power (3), MoFos (1), and Naughty America (6).

On a worn leather photo album covered with several heart-shaped stickers, capital letters read:
"Thailand 2003 → Kasper& Lone".

A moldering carton box (35.5 x 30 x 25.5 cm) containing diverse contents: a blockbuster membership card; reminders for overdue payments (DONG electricity, Copenhagen's main library, dentist); broken reading glasses; keys, a deck of cards.



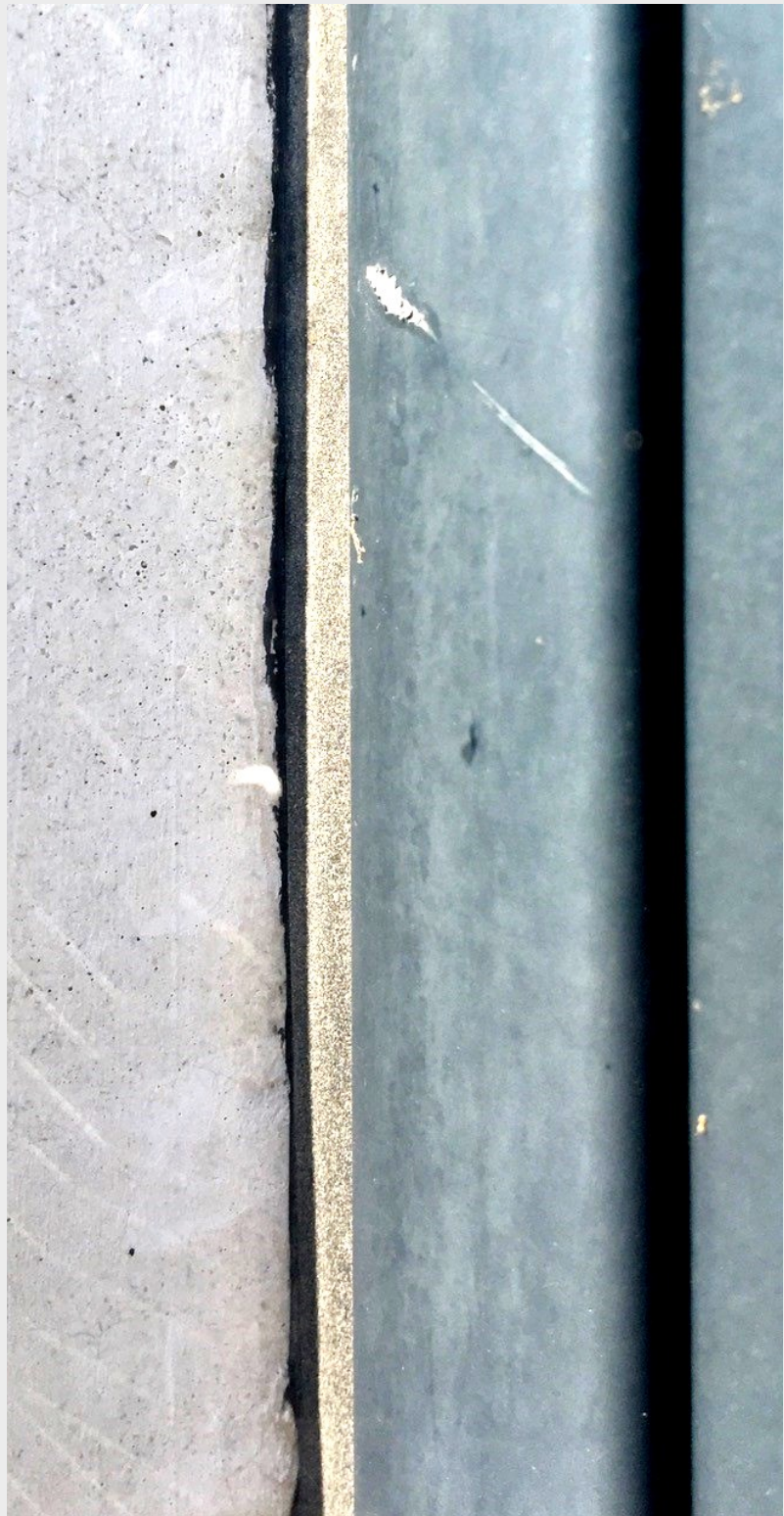
Notes from the archive

“I assure you, there’s no Chihuahua hidden in here. I’m almost certain that we’d notice if someone barked.”

Jonathan has his main post at the ground floor. A panel of CCTV footage to his right run a stable, but quiet scene of people coming and going. Most arrive in cars or smaller vans. With boxes, bags or other items. There’s free coffee at the service desk. *“We want people to feel welcome”*. Due to COVID19 measures, Jonathan is there by himself as only two customers and one employee are allowed inside at the same time. Hand sanitizer and small liquorish samples form a neat line at the desk. Containers of all sorts can be purchased: foldable cardboard boxes, plastic sleeves for clothes or quilts, large spools of bubble wrap. Containers for containers. Containers for everything.

“It can get a bit lonely with the new regulations, but really, I just talk with the people who come around. You know, make sure they feel ok, feel at home. This is the best place I’ve ever worked. There’s really no doubt about that. And I’ve been around.”

With a background in sales and marketing, Jonathan has only praise for Pelican Self Storage. Both as a business venture, but also as a friendly work site. Jonathan assures me that they really care for peoples’ things. They even offer their own insurance option, and in most cases, that’s what people go with: *“not once have we had a fire, and there’s not much worth reporting at all. [...] Every customer gets his or her own personal lock with set of three keys, and then, if they don’t need storage any longer, they can just bring the lock.”* After a brief pause, Jonathan adds: *“You know what I call this place? a homely Fort Knox! That’s what I call it, a homely Fort Knox”*.



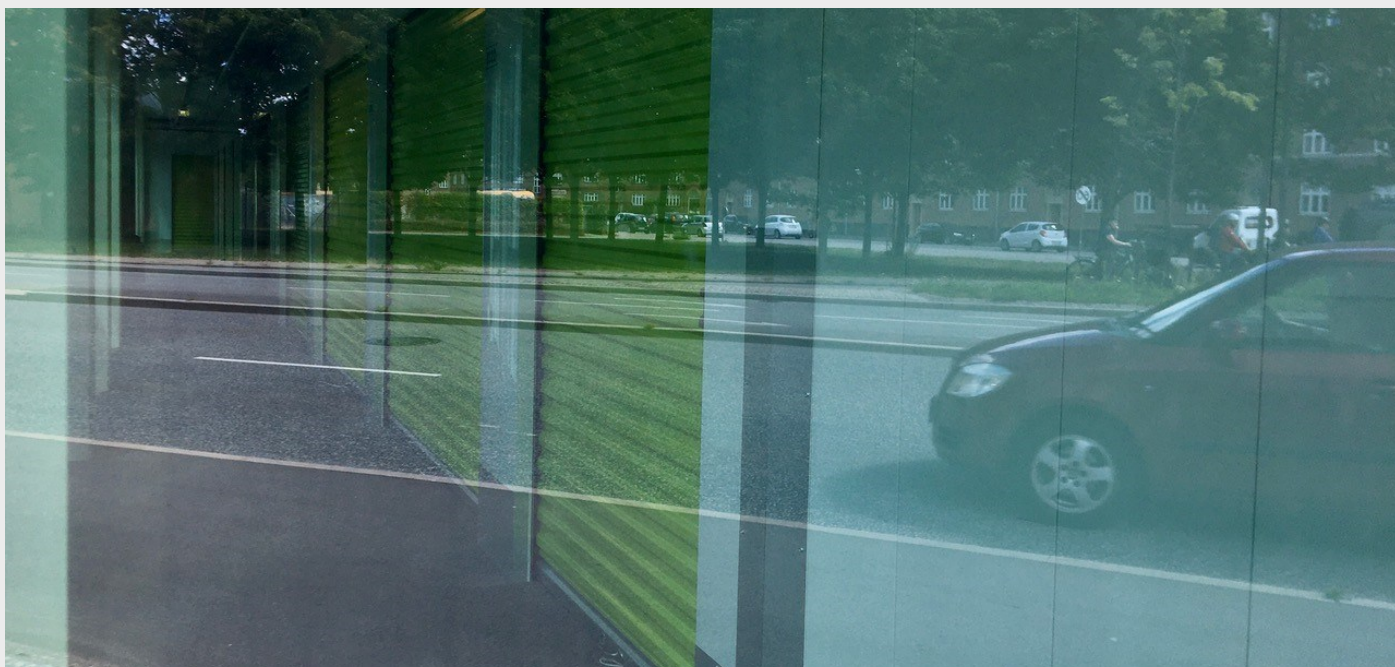


The Fort Knox part makes sense. Few windows, CCTV, insurance issues, the impregnable concrete structure. But homely?

We accompany Jonathan for a roundtrip inside the Pelican. Jonathan greets everyone we pass on our way, sometimes with a joke, always with a smile. We enter a spacious lift and ascend into the structure's different, yet similar floors.

Disembarking the lift on the third floor, another maze unfolds, dotted with green steel blinds, and leading into another batch of locker rooms and vaults. The Chihuahua remark has spawned a deep curiosity about the common and uncommon things that people stock. Who uses it? For what purpose? And why on earth the wall-to-wall carpet?





“Well, there are things that we don’t allow. Like explosives, gas bottles, inflammable stuff. We can’t really have that for safety reasons. You wouldn’t want everything to burn down, would you? [pause] But for the most part, people can store pretty much whatever they want. We safeguard the privacy of peoples’ things.”

The Pelican keeps no record over its inventory. Things just come and go. And they do come and go. Most spaces in the building are let out, and new storage facilities—both the Pelican branch, but also its many other territorial rivals—take over ever more space in the larger cities.

We go woozy from moving through the windowless maze. Jonathan turns towards us: *“You know, this should really be like a home, like walking into your own closet or attic. An extension of the house. And, I do think it’s pretty cozy. That’s also one reason why we put carpets everywhere”*.

The blinds exacerbate the urge to know what lies behind. Jonathan reveals little but his own excitement: *“There’s really no limits to what people can store. Sometimes it sweeps me of my feet. The things people store!”*





Alien, clutterholic, drug courier, or Jesus?

They used to feed on fish. Now, apparently, they hoard stuff. Or rather, they stuff themselves with our hoards and make a profit.

“Need more space at home?”

“Get a heated walk-in closet!”

“Store the memories in a safe place”

*“Make space for what you use at the moment.
Store the rest for later”.*

Pelican Self-Storage’s webpage presents myriad of solutions to the all-too familiar challenge of fitting all our stuff into the scarce floorspace in larger urban areas, devising helpful, yet costly, ways to place and care for all the things that have “*great sentimental value*” but are “*tricky to fit into our homes*”: Alex’ boxes of old CDs; late grandmother Karen’s estate; extra space for you winter clothing in the summer season; hunting gear; a motor bike; the stock of people buying

in bulk; divorced couples’ stuff; married couples’ stuff, collections of bachelor-life porn, and things of a more shifty nature. The Pelican abides.

In zoology, pelicans refer to a genus of large water birds (*Pelecanidae*), characterized by a lengthy beak and a capacious and highly flexible throat pouch used for catching prey (mainly fish, before miscellaneous things). Although a few wild birds have been spotted by ardent ornithologists in the very north-western part of Denmark (Skagen), this is rare, and the birds had most likely drifted off track before heading back south.

Besides the Pelican’s natural capacity for hoarding, in some regions, the *Pelecanidae* has come to be associated with drug trafficking, starring as the brand-bird of ‘Pelican Delivers, Inc.’, a Cannabis delivery service operating in several states in the US. Allegedly, ‘Pelican Delivers’ swiftly identifies customers’ age and address, making it both quick and easy to purchase and receive cannabis from your local retail store. Patent #10,255,578.





Indeed, before its domestication as commercial hoarder or cannabis delivery bird, the pelican was an animal imbued with a long history of religious and folkloric meanings. In Medieval Europe, the bird was an important symbol of devotional sacrifice as mother pelican was believed to wound her breast with the beak and feed her offspring with her own blood, if food was scarce. In a somewhat more daring version of this, the pelican would kill its own offspring only to resurrect them with her own blood. Several scholars even contend that the well-known tale of the stork delivering babies is most likely a species inaccuracy as it was the pelican – and not the stork – that symbolized maternal care for the young. But there's more. The bird also found its way into the Catholic faith where it came to symbolize nothing less than the Passion of Christ of whom *one drop of blood could save the world* (according to a hymn by St Thomas Aquinas).





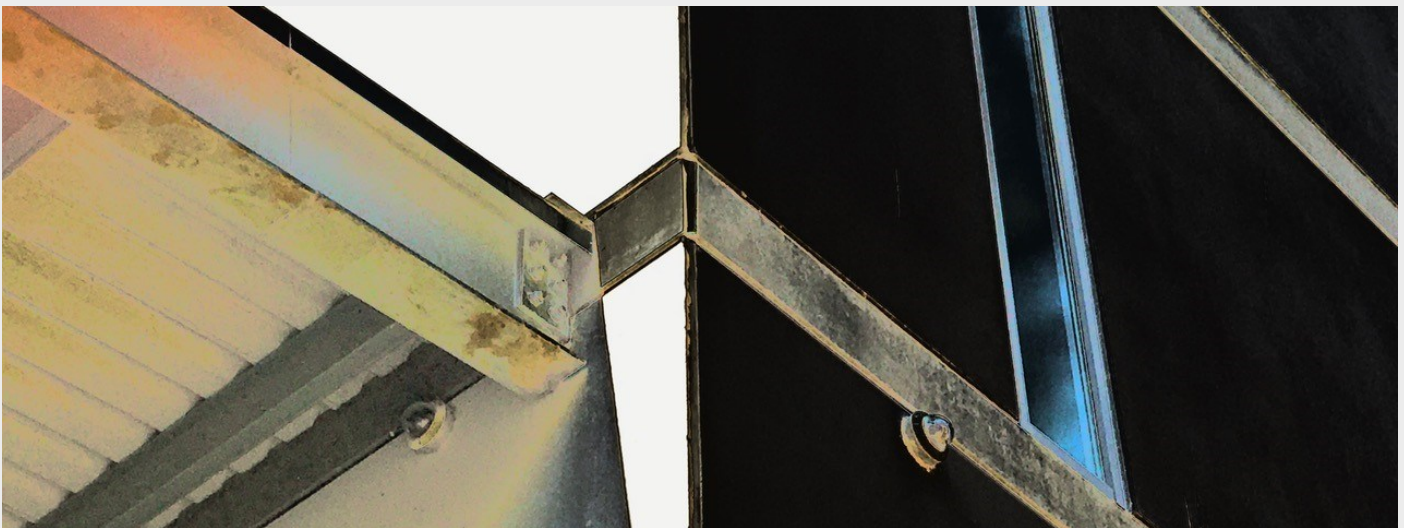
Confessions of clutter

But how, you might wonder, does the alien bird-*cum*-hoarder relate to sacrificial practices?

One place to start is Georges Bataille's theory of expenditure (*depense*), a theory of the need for loss, the things one can never really balance, reciprocate, or get over. In his work on the "accursed share" (1992) Bataille compels us to rethink economy in terms of excess, rather than scarcity. Flipping common economic sense on its head, Bataille states: "... it is not necessity but its contrary, "luxury", that presents living matter and mankind with their fundamental problems."

In crucial ways, hoarding counters expenditure as it deliberately avoids loss. Yet upon closer juxtaposition, excess expenditure often precedes the Pelican's hoards. Moreover, the high rates of storage seem to suggest that there is a toll to pay for the storage of *things that are tricky to fit in our homes*.

Tricky, however, does not only relate issues of spatial scarcity, but more importantly issues of public morality. In other words, hoarding things is unseemly. To be sure, you need only consult the 2013 edition of the American Psychiatric Association's 5th edition of its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. For it was here that "hoarding disorder" first attained the certainty of becoming a wholly legitimate pathology (Herring 2013: 1). "Hoarding disorder" has its more fashionable allies: the rapidly expanding vanguard of microhome living styles; Professional Organizers, who in a healer or shaman-like fashion excise things from their owners and the other way around (Kilroy-Marac 2016: 440). And not to mention the decluttering heroes propagating scores of self-help books as 'The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up' (Kondo 2014); 'Declutter: how to organize your life, maximize your productivity and enjoy and clutterfree life' (Edwards 2016), and 'The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning' (Magnusson 2018). In perfect harmony, the gospel of minimalist design and Professional Organizers (POs) relegate hoarding to the unseemly and irrational, for less is more. Surely.





While not exactly in vogue, hoards, nevertheless, are pretty much everywhere we look. They make up a universal trend that few, if any, cultures are exempted from (Peebles 2020). In the US, hoarding has evolved from being a small-scale community concern over orderliness to manifest itself as a national spectacle. Not only has it fueled the fastest growing section of the commercial real estate business over the last half decade, but it has also emerged as a cherished televised topic for the entertainment industry (Lepselter 2011).

In his reflections on 'hoarding and the spirit of possessions', Sasha Newell conceives of material possessions less as a one-way street and more as an active negotiation between people and things, and sometimes, Newell observes, it is the thing that possesses us (2014:168). Staying clear of pathologizing hoarding as a psychological deviance, Newell interrogates the underlying dynamics of 'storage behavior' observable in the general US population. The stored hoards, he argues, play an active part in sustaining our social worlds and thus do not only belong to us, but with us (Newell 2014: 209). In this light, the seemingly trivial concept of self-storage becomes more ambiguous, indicating both the activity of storing things yourself (STY) but could also mean the storage of selves, or even potential ones.

Does the Pelican embody a Noah's Ark of things treasured by commoners in the face of minimalist reign? Is it a reformatory remedy for clutterholics? Just maybe it's Bataille's science of filth that most readily can help us pursue the Pelican into its darker sacrificial nature. Contrary to the home organizers' tidying chant, the Pelican materializes a devotion to the irrational, to things that spill over. The sacred filth [*holy shit*] comes with a toll in the shape of regular rites of monthly payments. And here, more means more. The larger the pile, the fatter and exuberant the toll. Where does it all end? Perhaps all we're left with is Jonathan's rhetorical question: *You wouldn't want everything to burn down, would you?*



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”

a parting of the ways between pataphysics and surrealism, for while both embrace Chance as a productive principle, pataphysical chance is neither irrational nor subconscious. There are laws that lie behind pataphysical chance, but they are the laws of pataphysics: contradictions, exceptions, and so on.

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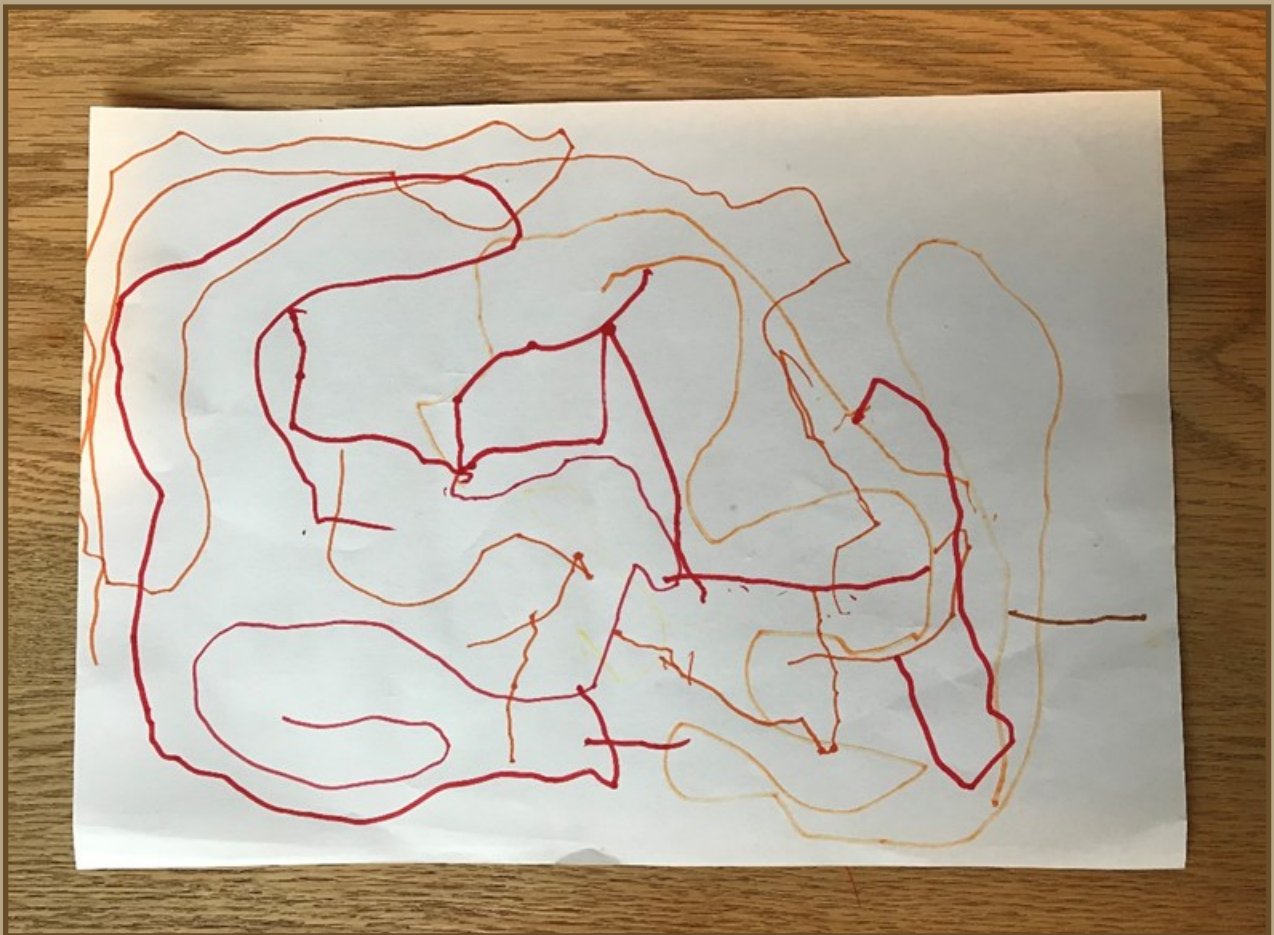
Hugill, Andrew. 2015. *Pataphysics: A useless guide*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.





Nina Holm Vohnsen

Take the female detective-series I love to watch. The detective leaves work after a whole day of driven, energetic detecting. Next thing you know they're in the pool doing laps, after which they drink a chilled glass of white, following which they just *have* to go back to work. Alternatively, they leave work only after everybody else have left and the lights are out, then go to a bar where they still have the energy to pick up some random guy. Fast forward, they wake up hung-over in a mouldy bed, take one look at their miserable face in the mirror before heading straight back to excellent detecting. You don't catch them staring into empty space wondering that the hell the point is. They don't get side-tracked into unproductively reading news on the internet, suddenly finding themselves absorbed in an alleged feud between Kate and Meghan, after which they are too unfocused to work and go home and would have loved to spend the rest of the day on the couch. Had they not been blessed with kids disabling any such indulgence. The female detectives work obsessively as if they cannot help it. I would love to be that *driven*.



But I'm not that driven and never have been. I have met people who get up in the morning to write a couple of hours before their kids get up. Or they go for a run. Such things are utterly beyond me. I desperately need the sleep, plus if I set the alarm everyone will wake up. Because of this and my need to collapse on the couch most nights, I have come to see myself as lazy. Does this mean I will never really do anything important? It is not that I am especially unproductive. It is just that if left to my own devices, I will

oscillate between short spurts of intense action followed by longer periods inclined to do nothing at all. Of course, between kids and work, that is not really an option, but what I'm saying is, I'd do it if I could. But what does it actually mean to be lazy? Who gets to decide? I mean; who should I even ask to find out? Is lazy something one is or something one does? Is it productive? And if yes, of what?

Chaos? Mess? Calm?





You can only delay so much gratification

My first inclination is to call up some colleague from the Department of Psychology but I realize no one is in their office due to corona-lockdown. Instead, I opt for the 'light' version of googling 'the function of laziness'. This manoeuvre sends me towards an online article in Psychology Today called *The Psychology of Laziness* by Neel Burton, psychiatrist, and philosopher, which should do it. In the article, Burton defines a lazy person as someone who "is able to carry out some activity that he ought to carry out, but is disinclined to do so because of the effort involved" (Burton 2014).

Ouch.

I know I ought to have looked up the research in the relevant databases, I chose Google, a shortcut. Instant gratification trumped effort. Guilty.

According to the article, which has already proven useful, laziness of the kind defined above, is theorized as a lack of ability in a person to disregard instant gratification in the pursuit of long-term goals (Burton 2014). What I read between the lines is the old marshmallow-test all over again, according to which a child's ability to not eat a marshmallow placed in front of them on the promise of getting another one a couple of painful minutes later becomes pregnant with said child's future success in life.





From this perspective, laziness is fundamentally all about the ability to delay gratification and is heavily laden with moral in the genre where abstinence is better than indulgence.

I talked recently to a colleague about my lack of patience with academia. She went on to lecture me, kindly and totally within acceptable limits, on the value of delayed gratification. For a moment there, I accepted that I was bad at it, but then I remembered: *HEY!* I have two kids aged eight and three; I have been delaying gratification in certain key areas of my life for nine years now. I would love to a) wake up in the morning when I felt like I was done sleeping and not have to immediately serve my people, or b) come home from work when I wanted to, throw myself on the couch with a good book and not give a toss about dinner. I have noticed that in periods where I have to do a lot of things, I don't derive any particularly satisfaction from such as preparing classes until late at night, correcting student exam papers, or attending zoom meetings, I get more prone to do other stuff that satisfy me on the very short term. I guess I am only able to delay *so* much gratification. After all, one cannot be expected to postpone gratification in all aspects of life, can one? In any case, laziness of this sort would be a response to delaying too much gratification in other aspects of life.



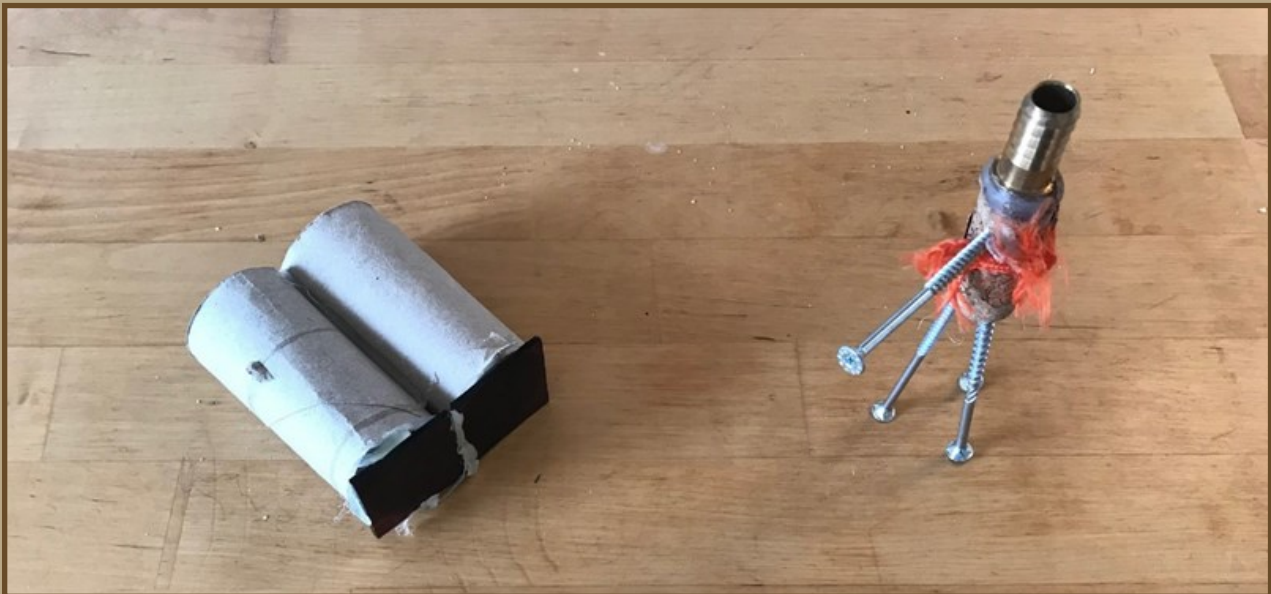


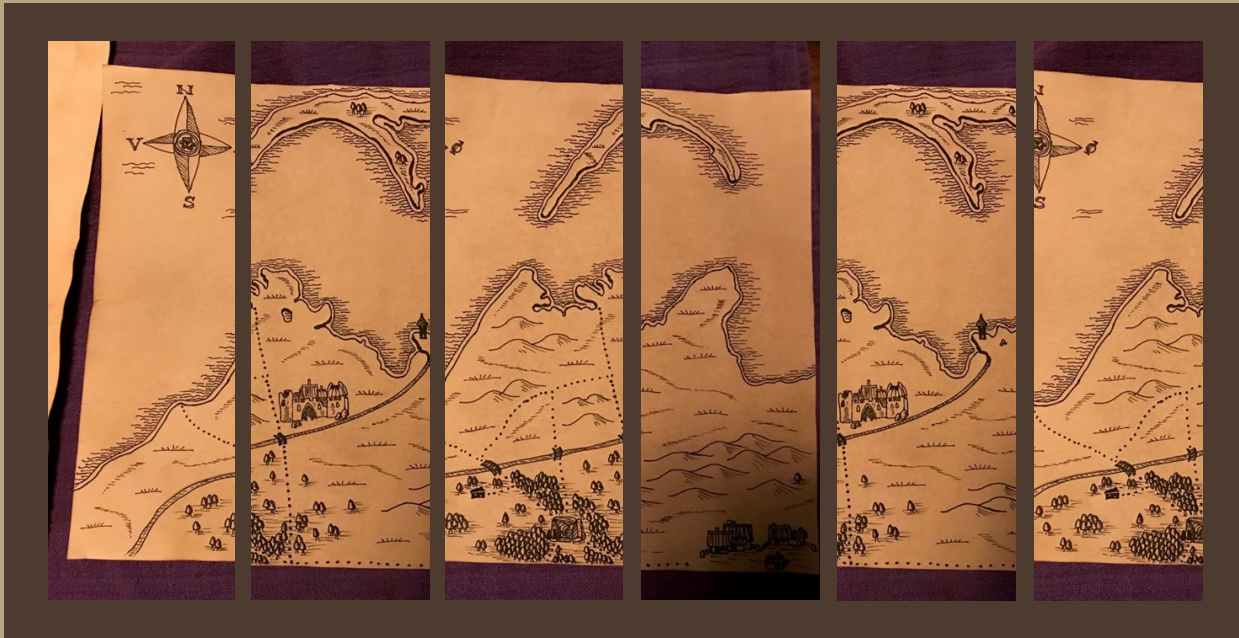
One reason or another

This echoes a later theory of laziness presented further down in the article by Burton. We learn here that *“many people are not intrinsically lazy, but are lazy because they have not found what they want to do, or because, for one reason or another, they are not doing it”* (Burton 2014). Here then, laziness is not the result of some deficiency in a person predictable since early childhood but might be caused by the circumstance that *for one reason or another, people are not doing what they want*. I like this better. It raises a question rather than offer an explanation.

Many an early afternoon, I plan to work after I have put the kids to bed, but once I get there I am totally drained of all creative focus. I find there are so many things preventing me from doing what I feel I could do, if only I could get my act together. Kids is the over-arching number one reason. But it is not the only reason, and sometimes I wonder if it they are just a very convenient excuse: A lot of people with kids does so much more than me.

Here’s the thing: I’ve lately come to think of myself as an absorber. Of people, of books, of tensions, of bits of pieces of trivia, of problems and ideas. It is such a physical release for me when I finally get around to get some of it out – through writing or drawing or making some physical object. But mostly, because I never seem to get to the part where I create, it just builds up until all I seem able to do is check my email or the news – which off course just adds to the initial problem. It can get to a point where it feels quite claustrophobic or even further to a point where I lose any sense of self and I feel dissolved into pure information. Whatever it is, it is not a healthy state of mind or body.





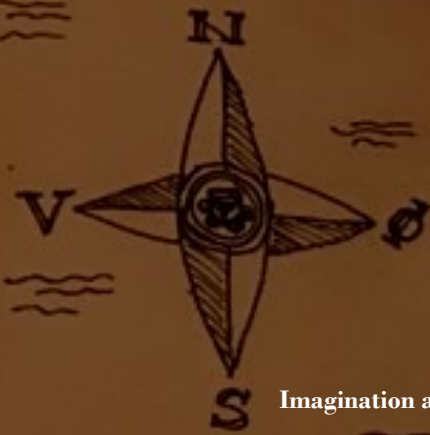
What usually happens at this point is I begin to randomly complain about the mess our home has yet again become. And this is where Nick usually asks me to go shopping for the evening meal which immediately brings me to a point of white-hot fury because how can he not, after all these years, know that the WORST thing to ask me is to go shopping. I hate shopping. But I think mainly he just wants me out of the house thinking it would be good for me and the annoying part is he is most often right. Not that it solves the fundamental problem, but it does at least offer a break from soaking up information during which I can recuperate some sense of proportion.

Shopping for the evening meal does not in my book count as *doing*. It is a repetitive task like washing the clothes or hoovering or picking up stuff from the floor. It is not something, which will ever occasion you to stop and marvel or just think 'I did that'.

And mostly, these tasks or the work-related pendants – are what comes between me and what I consider 'real' or 'worthy' *doing*. Because of their ever present-ness, I can't just do them once and for all. They are always there, tempting me away from what I feel is my real purpose. Punishing me immediately if I don't tend to their need for constant attention: No food in the fridge; no clean knickers; rice under my sock, the table sticky with honey, and then there's the egg mush fused to plates and cutlery and no amount of dishwashing will get it off, you'll need to scratch it off with a nail.

Suddenly, I am struck by the thought that while the rest of my household is immersed in perpetual 'doing' resulting in manifestations of their thoughts and shit loads of mess, I have resorted to the role of enabler, mitigator, and annihilator of collateral damage. How did it come to this? How do I turn the tides?





Imagination and doing

Based on my own experience, I immediately have to distinguish between two modes of imagining. If I imagine something I desire, I tend to imagine in very broad brushstrokes, whereas in the opposite case, I imagine in great detail and quite possibly a great deal closer to truth. For instance: Nick and I drive by a dilapidated farm in the middle of nowhere. The thing is; the more run down and disorderly the place is, the more it touches some deep, warm place in Nick and he immediately starts to imagine how happy we would be if we lived in such a place.

Meanwhile, what I imagine is the smell of mouldy wallpaper. In my mind's eye, I can see the missing paint everywhere. I know the feeling of walking on the dirty, impossible-to-hoover-due-to-cracked-linoleum-covering-the-raw-concrete floors. Most likely, the washing will never get really dry leaving the bedlinen with a permanently musty smell. I know for a fact how much we will argue about stupid things that needs fixing. We will need to drive the kids everywhere because there is no public transport and their friends will live many kilometres away and we will never have any food in the fridge because we are last-minute-at-least-once-a-day shoppers and out here there is nothing. I really know how to kill his moment, so I try to keep my mouth shut.





On the other hand, I have a tendency to be suddenly overcome with travel plans. Wouldn't it be great if we all went to Scotland and lived in a small village, possibly by the Sea, for four months? I can just picture the family unity and outdoorsy life we would lead and how my research would thrive, and the kids would have an adventure. Nick: No so much. He has already foreseen how he will get grumpy not really having a lot to do and how his daughter who currently sports a tremendously high-pitched English accent will be bullied at school because the Scots and the English have unsettled business not helped by Brexit. Plus, if you're a man in the UK and you look at another man in one of multiple wrong ways you are likely to get beaten up. So we don't go and we don't buy the run down farm and we certainly save ourselves a lot of grievance, but fact remains: there is a lot of stuff that we don't do.

Maybe the trick is to never stop and think at all. It is certainly a tried and tested path to success when it comes to swallowing big pills and getting one's body into the cold Sea in early summer. In fact, to go back to the beginning, there is an almost immediate reward in not thinking about things but just doing them. Maybe it is not the instant gratification part that constitutes the problematic part of lazy, maybe

it is the thinking part. To go back to the beginning of Burton's article, if 'lazy' is a person who "is able to carry out some activity that he ought to carry out, but is disinclined to do so because of the effort involved" then 'lazy' is a rational outcome of assessing a given task and the work involved in carrying it out and reaching the conclusion that it is not worth it. From this perspective laziness might easily be confused with due diligence and cost-benefit calculations.

I only mention this because when you read about very creative and productive people what strikes me most is that they do not seem to have any inclination towards that detailed imagining of future hardship. The antidote to lazy then is just ploughing ahead with no thought for consequences or the bill to pay further down the road. It is emptying your LEGO box in the middle of the floor not caring that you will have to pick it up again. It is starting an immense building project not caring if you have the time or money to conclude it. It is getting out all the PlayDoe five minutes before bedtime. It is in fact dispensing with the long-term perspective in the pursuit of immediately going about manifesting your thoughts.

Literature

Burton, Neel. 2014. The Psychology of Laziness. *Psychology Today*. 25 October 2014. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hidden-and-seek/201410/the-psychology-laziness>, accessed January 27 2021.







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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.



Marko Marila



Mikael Nordström

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 in 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 antici-

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





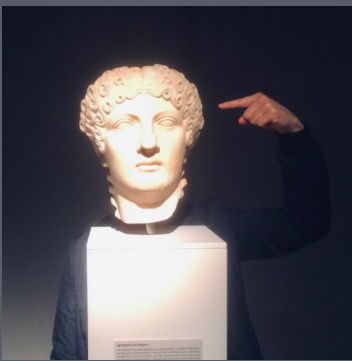


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It is essential to pataphysics that the basis of empirical physics, the repeatable experiment which produces an outcome that may be generalized into a law or axiom, is challenged by the science of the particular. Each experimental occurrence is, in pataphysical terms, a unique event that follows its own singular laws.

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Hugill, Andrew. 2015. *Pataphysics: A useless guide*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.



Anna S. Beck

Christine Finn



I think permanence would be an appropriate word for describing my experiences with the phenomenon of home. I have lived in the same place for more than ten years now and in total I have only lived in five places in my life. This includes my childhood home—a house with a long family history. It was built by my great-great-grandfather in the 19th century and since then it has been inhabited by the family. My parents still live there but recently they have started talking about whether I or one of my siblings should take over in the future. As such, stability and endurance can be said to have permeated my experience of feeling ‘at home’ already from the beginning.

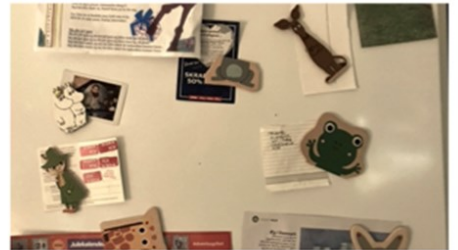
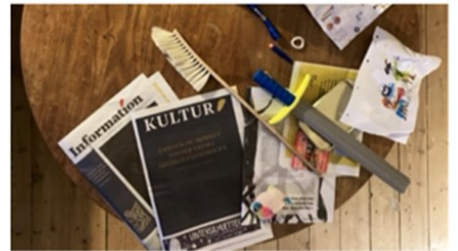
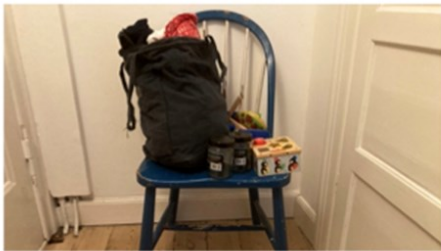
I don't have a place to call home just now. For more than five years I have explored being home-less. Not as a conceit, but a financial reality after the financial crash of 2008 and the ramifications of that. So, I dwell in various places - in hostels, art and writer residencies, friends' homes, strangers' homes; I cat-sit and house-sit and Feb 2020 I start a month-long dog-sit. After the dog-sit ends I have no idea where I go next. I am pursuing so many hopes of funding and leads to home, so I am pretty preoccupied by this. I never imagined to be home-less at 60, and it is painful... more, I think, because in the UK at least, it reduces my life to a dismal failure—property is such an obsession here. Actually, it is hard to get into a dialogue about home just now as I am very anxious about where I go to next. Keeping the Jacquetta Hawkes bio on track is a priority here, and I am working alone, and have very limited time in any settled place. Perhaps that is a sufficient response in itself?


However, my experience is also that permanence is not simply a natural consequence of staying in a place for a long time. Rather, for me, it must be created actively through the engagement with the place in ways that create a sense (or illusion if you want) of permanence and endurance independent of the actual time spent in a place. To illustrate what I mean with an extreme example: When I am staying overnight away from my normal home—e.g., at a hotel, at friends or on vacation—I have noticed that I have a habit—almost an obsession—of unpacking my bags. Even if I am just staying for a short period, it seems essential to unload, to organize things on the shelves, on the table, in the bathroom. From a logical perspective, it is an irrational act as I will soon be out of there again. Unpacking only leaves more work to do when actually leaving. However, with the things still in the bag, I would be aware that I am ‘on the road’ whereas unpacking gives me an illusion of staying for an undesignated amount of time—tricking myself to settle and ‘feel at home’.

But in terms of how I create a home every time I arrive at a new place, it revolves less around what I carry now, than what I bring... what I wear, which I then place beside me as I go to sleep. I have this ring I bought in Hawaii when over there in 2008, covering the Presidential election which Obama won. I was with his team in Hawaii watching it unfold so the ring for me signifies ‘hope’. The wooden ring with its shell spiral—typically Pacific—suddenly cracked a few weeks ago when I was

doing a recording at the BBC. I went to take it off, so I didn’t ‘knock’ during recording, and it suddenly went ‘crack’. Not broken entirely, it did that in a supermarket in Leicestershire, essential shopping during Covid 19-lockdown. As a practice... I make an array using whatever natural is to hand... flowers, shells, stones... an arrangement is satisfying and says ‘home’.

A similar, but maybe more subtle way, that for me give my home a particular sense of endurance, I find in the material traces left by the daily routines and practices—a homeless screw, some old paper notes and shopping lists, unread reading material, small stones, toys, unidentified objects, reusable stuff and utensils, souvenirs and the like that gather in unused surfaces and corners when allowed; in other words, in the ‘sediments’ of everyday life. It is the number of keys for long-forgotten doors gathered in my key box, it is the monthly magazines and newsletters that I hope to read at some point in the magazine rack at the bath room, it is the tons of saved rubber bands and other fittings in the top kitchen drawer, it is the random assemblage of things temporarily resting at the table, it is the things going to the charity shop collected around the chair by the door, it is the chaotic combination of mementos, writing utensils and important papers in the basket at my desk, it is the layers of outerwear not fit for the current season and the selection of notes, photos and recipes displayed on the fridge.



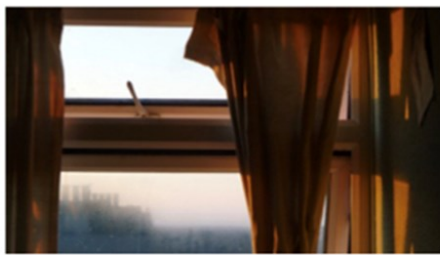
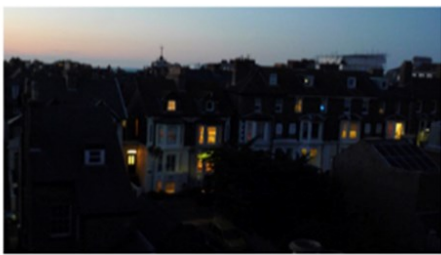


I left the UK for Paris in the summer, and am still here, in my second Paris home in less than three months. The photos give you views from my lockdown spaces. Fleckney, Leicestershire—where I was Feb-April, dog-sitting for friends on holiday when the pandemic hit the UK. I stayed on when they quarantined on return. I was also Covid fighting, which really kicked in, when I had no place to stay home in the UK. Finally, I found a house-sit in North London. Not many photos taken there, as I really lost the plot and was quite low for three months. In mid-July, I had to move on and so to the Kent coast at Deal. This time the loan of a friend's empty attic flat, five floors up overlooking Deal Castle and the Channel. It had views from the back which I had never seen, and from which I would not have identified Deal as my old hometown. I was too tired to walk beside the sea, but it was good to know it was so close.

What tie these things together is that they all represent a clear intention. It is things that has been perceived as useful, maybe not right now but in some unnamed

future, things that are found too interesting or fun to be thrown out and things that are going somewhere else and has to be dealt with later. They have been kept because there has been an intention of getting back to them at some point. They are things with a potential, with a plan, with a future—independent of whether anything will actually happen with them or not. Therefore, it would be a mistake to think of these kinds of assemblages simply as 'mess'.

And then, by luck, a place to stay in Paris. My first *chambre-de-bonne* in the 6th arrondissement, six storeys up, with the pigeons, and no elevator, so that was daily motivation. No room to swing a cat, but creative freedom, and the start of recovery. And now on the 7th floor in the 15^{eme}, another *chambre-de-bonne* with elevator part way. Here I have been experiencing strict 'confinement' since the end of October 2021. It is due to end early December. As with the first Paris lockdown, we are only allowed to go out an hour a day, within a one km limit, and with signed attestation of purpose for leaving home—an irony given my Deal project was based on deliberations around leaving home.



Instead, the assemblages should be perceived as fundamental—and maybe even unavoidable—elements of a home as they add a specific temporality to it that point both back and forth in time. Most of the objects have a history related to the lives of the inhabitants which serves to give the dwelling a feeling of continuity and duration. In the same way, the ‘everyday clutter’ could also be seen as adding a temporality that is oriented toward the future due to the accumulated potential and unreleased intentions they represent. Their presence implies that the place will endure into the future and obligates me to come back and engage with them. The indirect reminder of the past combined with the assurance of a future has a direct effect on the experience of the home. Even though, the actual assemblage will change and never stay the same for a very long time, the effect of the assemblage—or ‘sedimentation’—is to present the dwelling as a permanent and more or less eternal place—as a home.

Up till this weekend, I had been finding confinement OK, thankful for wifi, and my first Netflix subscription, and while I'm not a great fan of video meet-ups, curious about technology to socialise. Today, I realised how much I miss conversation, and my usual explorations on buses, and getting lost on pedestrian meanderings. The limited area means I am properly exploring my quartier, but I can feel unexpected limits. Still the weather is beau-

tiful just now—so hot I can sun bake my lunch!—and today it felt miserable to have to stay indoors. My one km gets me to the Seine at least. With the piscines closed, I don't feel that healthy, so grateful to have the seven-flight stair option. I am still not over Covid, so I sleep with the window wide open.

That been said I am aware that ‘cluttering’ can grow out of hand and create the opposite feeling—a feeling of not being at home—if it is not maintained and kept under control. I am also aware that my clutter will probably only be meaningful to me, whereas it will be without meaning to any other person and vice versa. It is a very personal thing—and can in that sense easily be perceived as ‘matter-out-of-place’ if the context is not known. Maybe that is the reason why in mainstream Western culture, clutter is mostly perceived as a problem that needs to be ‘diminished’, ‘fought’ and ‘conquered’. And an endless number of courses, home pages, tv-shows, glossy magazines, home consultants—with Marie Kondo as probably the most well-known example—promote the benefits of ‘de-cluttering’ your home. But what if we are, in this very process, removing something elemental to the feeling of home?

I sleep with the window wide open, and wake to the sound of starlings; I am content.





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Nothing, it seems, is so fascinating as the thing
that does not fit.

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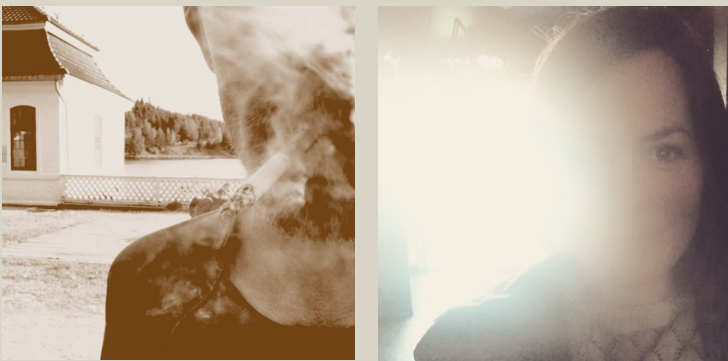
Hugill, Andrew. 2015. *Pataphysics: A useless guide*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.





5 IN THE OVERLAY A dialogue on dead cats

55



Martin Demant Fredriksen

Þóra Pétursdóttir

I came across something very random today in Croatia. Dear God...what is it? Do you really want to know? Do I...I'm really not sure. I have been thinking about it all day and am kind of sad that I eventually asked what it was. Is it a cat....? It IS a cat! Discovered under the floor of one of the houses under reconstruction I'm following, and now put on display by the workers. Interesting.

I came across something very random today in Croatia.

They're planning to bury it again once the house is finished. That is quite beautiful, actually... Interesting also since house sacrifices in relation to house construction (or rebuilding) is quite common all the way back to the Bronze Age at least. And since cats are common mythological beings. Yes, and I think they are actually a little bit scared of it (although there are many, many, many cats everywhere). Mostly alive? Yes. I would be scared too. I also didn't like it at first. Now I really do. And I hope they will finish the house soon so I can be at the funeral.

They're planning to bury it again once the house is finished.





I have a fantastic photograph from a cat's funeral in Iceland, early 20th century. That would be great. We could write a fabulation called "Dead Cats and How to Bury Them". As promised: a photograph from a cat's funeral (Akureyri, Iceland). It's only fitting on a Sunday. Oh my, that is a wonderful photo! I know! The grief... heartbreaking. I think we should do random observations on dead cats and burials... Yes – as a contribution to Tim's assembly. Exactly. Okay. Let's think about it and come up with a (random and insignificant) strategy. I see cats everywhere now.

I have a fantastic photograph from a cat's funeral in Iceland.

One of the things I like about the two images is that there is a sense of grief or pain in the expressions of both. And that they are both somehow excavated, the photo from Iceland from an archive I assume, and the Croatian cat from beneath floorboards. And they are both now related to burial – the Croatian cat was re-buried in the yard in front of the house. I suggested to the owner of the house that we could make a small ceremony out of it, as she had become quite close to the little mummy. But she outright refused that because she was afraid that her neighbors would think she was either crazy or a witch, and she was slightly embarrassed about having it, and of wanting to re-bury it, so it was done in secret. So she was both mournful and a little ashamed at the same time, which makes me wonder why the women in the photo are covering their faces. Are they crying, or ashamed of being photographed at a cat-funeral?





I came across something very random today in Croatia.

They're planning to bury it again once the house is finished.

I have a fantastic photograph from a cat's funeral in Iceland.

I love the overlay of the two cat figures. Could we work further with the “overlay” concept? Combining a map from the location in Croatia and Akureyri ... and a text on cats from Croatia and Iceland in original language. That's a great idea! I'll see if I can dig out a map from the village in Croatia. And the mixing of language would also be great, but I think my Croatian might be a bit too shaky for that (we could do English/Icelandic though). Or we could write an original text in English and then google translate it to Icelandic and Croatian.... And then make an overlay out of the two. How would we focus this one?

I love the overlay of the two cat figures.





Something on the art of mixing... or on “correlation”. I think playing around with the notion of “The Overlay” could be interesting, as a form of cover or a particular kind of surface. Also given that in both cases something is hidden (a face/the mummy). Correlated surfaces—as opposed to thinking of the surface and what is beneath it or behind it as separate, whether materially or temporally. (Or correlated layers, not surfaces).

Something on the art of mixing... or on “correlation”.

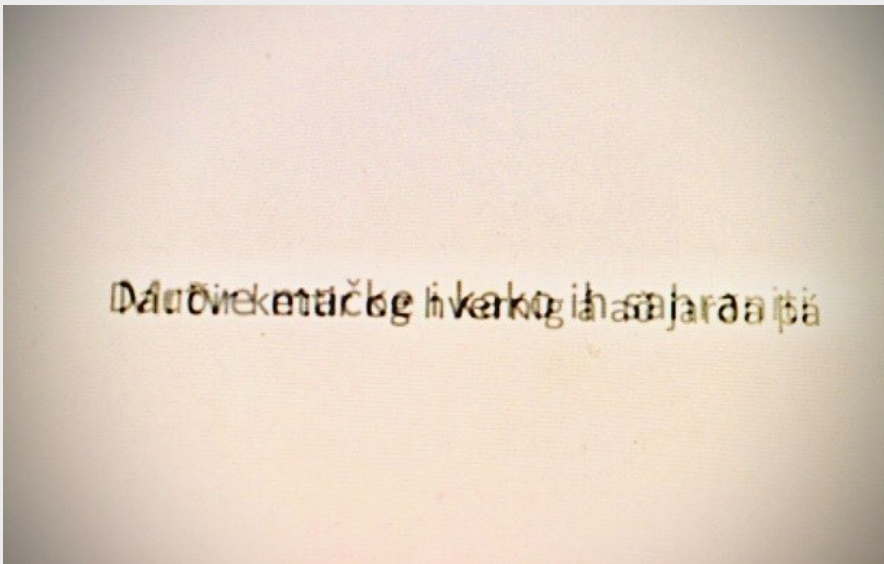
Croatian and Icelandic looks quite ok when overlaid. What does it say? *Dead Cats and How to Bury Them.*

We could think about strata/stratigraphy ...because when overlaid it becomes impossible to tell which one is “on top”... and thus also chronologically later. *It all becomes like one atmosphere.* There is also something interesting in “grounding” the notion of atmosphere, as something that is not just in the air, but also in the “soil”—layers of earth. *Exactly what I was thinking.* I have been reading a book on earthworms. And their universe and atmosphere is fully below ground ... or “in” ground rather.

Dead Cats and How to Bury Them.

It all becomes like one atmosphere.

Exactly what I was thinking.







”

We are all fetishists snared by the object.

”

Spoerri, Daniel. 1970. *The Mythological Travels of a Modern Sir John Mandeville: Being an Account of the Magic, Meatballs, and Other Monkey Business Peculiar to the Sojourn of Daniel Spoerri Upon the Isle of Symi, Together with Divers Speculations Thereon*. New York: Something Else Press. Translated by Emmett Williams.



Jeff Benjamin



Tim Flohr Sørensen

May

I adjusted the lamp on the desk to a position, which allowed the shadows to reveal an unusual sculptural depth.

Wondering for a while whether I had seen these figures before, or whether I had failed to notice them, I quite lost track of what business I had at the desk. I meant to do something, —but what? Knowing that memory can be recalled by repeating movement, I turned off the light, got up, left the study, and then returned to the desk, switching on the light. Yet when I sat down, the shadows had disappeared. There was just light. Flat, illuminating light. I turned the light off, and then back on. No use. I looked around in the room and realized that all shadows had disappeared.

I felt the nauseating plunge from heights. A visual indifference consuming all contours surrounded me. What would happen if I turned off all lights?

Separation from form, disintegration.



All these objects embedded in the walls, I faintly see their shapes in the blue dawn. Who placed them in the plastered walls? An axe, a radio, a belt, a cup, a plate. Everyday objects. Why are they there? A bottle, a peg, a small wheel from a chair. I am taken away from the task at hand, which is a reconstruction, a reconstitution of something once living. Tomes of ancient potions and remedies are scattered across the floor, and I stumble over them to find the glass vial in which I have placed a coiled line of words. Somehow these words offer direction. This work must be done quietly, of course, not a sound, not a sound, barely a breath. The floorboards squeak!

I fall asleep, my consciousness pours out into the dust.

At first, I had a firm sense of purpose, but each word creates a new diversion, a redirection and a diffusion. I have developed too much empathy. Through a practice of careful placement, I have somehow found a method to distinguish one thing from another. Why bother? Much to my surprise, I discover that there are already lines drawn in pencil on the floor, so I can make some sort of use of these arbitrary partitions.

I hear a small animal scurrying in the wall, then up to the ceiling. This is comforting.





Partitions. Arbitrary. Some sort. Following the pencil strokes on the floor brings back the shadows. The pencil strokes themselves cast no shadow, but the gaps between the floorboards are deep fault lines, dividing one board from the next. They squeak, and for good reason. Every time I put my weight on the boards, a black, dry filling between boards is displaced, pushed out from the space between the boards, it then cracks, and crumbles. This is how gaps are made, and shadows thrive in the deep. Pencil strokes are companions of shadows, not out of some ancient kinship or a common ancestry in the primordial soup. They are companions as a result of empathy, just like gaps and shadows bring out the best in one another. And silence. Be quiet. Not a sound, not a sound. Barely a breath. No movement. But the floorboards squeak!





June

I am released, suddenly, from my frozen state. I awake with one word on my lips: "And..." A conjunction, a connection, a continuation. What was I saying before this... anything? And to whom was I speaking... anyone? Swaying towers of books guide me to a delicate dancing ray of light on the far wall, reflected from a puddle of water.

I turn to see the doorway. It opens to the sun and the buoyant smells and sounds of a lakeside morning. I walk to the threshold and stand. Looking down at my bare feet, I see the sand of the beach sweeping past strands of grass in the wind. Small ants doing their chores, carrying things. I would love to help them but for this wounded shoulder. It should heal soon enough, as long as I keep it wrapped tightly to my body. Too much interiority. One can incur harm by staying inside with the blunt walls, the unfeeling floors, the looming stacks of books, and the sharp pointed implements of language. My eyes are not hurt by the light, but neither are they necessary: I am not looking for anything visible.





A distant figure wanders the shore, and I can hear her singing while she draws in the wet sand with her toes. Small tadpoles in warm vernal pools glisten and writhe, making the lines of the shore dance as the sun reflects and twinkles in the water and on their vibrating backs. My distance from the bunker increases—my tether is cut—and I fall to my knees on the pebbly shore. I can hear her gently sing:

*A window in my room
A window in my room
I'll hold your hand
Upon the strand
A window in my room*

Something strange takes control of my face and contorts it. A smile? I think of the people I have known in my life who have lived through years of loneliness. They have forgotten how to smile or laugh. When they are, by chance, given a reason to smile, their visage sometimes appears like a frown or grimace. Is that how my face appears now? I begin to laugh, or cry, it's hard to tell which. A moment of quiet envelops the lake as a great blue heron swoops across the shore. Then I hear her whisper: "Mother, did he say the word 'care'?" But there is no one else around, she is talking to herself, or the mother inside her. I immediately relax, feeling a sudden camaraderie. "We are equally delusional", I think to myself. With the side of my face pressed against the cool pebbles of the shore, I watch as she slowly walks away, her song trading places with the gentle lapping waves.

I turn my head the opposite direction and press the other side of my face against the cool stones, they shift and yield as I clench the muscles of my jaw. I hear them grinding as I look back at the bunker, and I wonder: will I ever return to that place? Then, I close my eyes and rest. I become consumed by a memory:

A loud "BOOM!" A hot summer day in Connecticut. We are orphans, cut loose from guidance or purpose. We are on our bicycles and ride through the country heat toward the sound, or where we imagine it came from. We have playing cards attached to the frames of our bicycles, and they flap against the spokes, making a fair imitation of sputtering motorcycles.

We come upon a crowd that has already gathered at the scene of a car crash. A large powerful green car has struck a telephone pole head-on, and the transformer at the top of the pole has fallen and crushed the hood and roof of the car. A woman is leaning back in the driver's seat, looking out of the window with a slight smile on her face. I move back and forth but her eyes do not follow me, they stare blankly into space. A man brusquely tells us to move away, "The electrical lines are still alive", he says.



The last days of July

I look up. I stand up. I turn my head towards the bunker. Walls shake, tremble as if it were the tremor of an earthquake. Everything moves, everything is set in motion, succumbing to ageing, repeated blows, and gravity. A stove is disjointed from its chimney. A mirror splinters on the squeaking floorboards. Wallpaper cracks, revealing layers and layers of wallpaper. Then more wallpaper. Electrical lines, still alive, hang from the ceiling, sockets sparkle, briefly. Sunlight illuminates a wall, the shadow of the window bars vibrates like heat haze in the desert, briefly. Plaster and dust spill from the ceiling, walls give way. Tumble. When the ceiling caves in, rumbling, crunching, and snapping, splashing down in a pile of debris, the floorboards squeak. A greyish white cloud whirls up, hiding for a few minutes:

1. 23,591 fragments of plaster (ranging from the size of dust particles to foot-long pieces)
2. one radio
3. 12 wasps, dried out, and a butterfly, also dried out
4. one peg
5. two silver spoons with dedications (commemorating, respectively, a christening in 1923 and a christening in 1930)
6. nine metres of electrical wire (two metres cloth covered; seven metres plastic coated)
7. one vinyl record (a copy of the sonnet *Incidental Music* (opus 79b, 1939) by Sergei Prokofiev, a rare piece, allegedly printed in four copies only. One is owned by the Library of Congress, yet mistakenly registered as *Things in Themselves* (opus 45, 1928). The remaining three copies were thought to be owned by the London Institute of 'Pataphysics, but it now appears that the Institute cannot be in possession of more than two copies. It is widely disputed whether *Incidental Music* was composed by Sergei Prokofiev, even if the sonnet was ever written, let alone recorded)

8. three earthenware mugs (of which one is intact)
9. one belt
10. one small wheel from a chair
11. one bottle
12. one stainless steel buttering knife
13. one desk, maple, torn into 14 pieces
14. one map (heavily damaged by water and rodents' gnawing; motif unclear)
15. one porcelain plate (in nine pieces of which two were never retrieved)
16. a plastic comb, orange
17. three flint axes (Neolithic, one pointed-butt axe (fragment) and two thin-butt axes)
18. one crochet triangle shawl, light and dark brown linen
19. one office chair, beech (seemingly intact)
20. one cardboard tube (containing the original poster for Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, originally displayed at UFA-Palast am Zoo in Berlin for the premiere in January 1927, signed by Fritz Lang and Alfred Abel)
21. two candleholders, brass, with burnt candles
22. one illuminated globe, broken into six pieces (most of the northern hemisphere was pulverized at the impact of a roof beam)
23. four roof beams
24. one axe
25. one desk lamp (Christian Dell, model 6751, brass)
26. three large and one small cardboard storage boxes (flattened or squashed, contents displaced)
27. four napkins with an arabesque floral motif, paper
28. 23 floorboards, pine, third grade quality with a plethora of whorls and grains (one of them looking precisely like a miniature map of the course of River Mississippi from Lake Winnibigogish, Minnesota, to Memphis, Tennessee)

and, in the midst of the rubble, a framed photograph. It descended with the cardboard boxes from the attic, as the ceiling collapsed. When the dust settles and I loom over the pile of debris, I see smiles and laughter, brighter years, electrifying days, even. Do you remember? You were singing the same song over and over again. A gentle song, a song of longing—a longing for intimacy and a view to the distance.



Distance. Distance. Heat haze and distance. For you, all horizons are too close. With this photograph, I do recall the distance. A juxtaposition. Amidst the rubble, a fault line—my tether is cut—and I fall to my knees on the squeaking floorboards. I can hear her gently sing:

*A window in my room
A window in my room
I'll kiss your face
If you will place
A window in my room*

I want to finish my sentence, but I hesitate, lingering in the connection. “And...”

September: The Solution Precedes the Problem

The days have turned from hedgehog to mink. An abrupt change, but barely discernible because I was lost in a stand of foxglove, pondering its age. Now I stand on the shore, holding the Prokofiev album in my hands, musing on the incidental. The staff have all left the island. I am alone with my thoughts and clumsy motions; holding the album up to the sky, tilting it on edge. If only, there were a record player. Nevertheless, the album is grounding.





November

It stands to reason that they'll become
facile with words if they
insist on spending so much
time with them.

Days in December

At the beginning, I had difficulty sleeping, so I used that as an opportunity to go out and witness the earliest moments of the dawn. One morning, while sipping a coffee in my favorite parking lot, a distant memory of a family of foxes playing in the sunlight next to a church. The fox kits jumped up and down and played with each other, their own tails and their shadows that were cast by the rising sun on the bright white painted siding of the church. I returned later in the summer to photograph them.





For Tom 10 May/62
from Bingle + Dong
for no particular reason
other than affection -

(a wandering chef)


Tim Flohr Sørensen

curiosity (n.)

late 14c., "careful attention to detail" (a sense now obsolete); also "skilled workmanship;" also "desire to know or learn, inquisitiveness" (in Middle English usually in bad senses: "prying; idle or vain interest in worldly affairs; sophistry; fastidiousness"); from Old French *curiosete* "curiosity, avidity, choosiness" (Modern French *curiosité*), from Latin *curiositatem* (nominative *curiositas*) "desire of knowledge, inquisitiveness," from *curiosus* "careful, diligent; inquiring eagerly, meddling," akin to *cura* "care" (see *cure* (n.)). Neutral or good sense "desire to see or learn what is strange or unknown" is from early 17c.

Out of context

During the autumn of 2019, archaeologists from a museum in Denmark excavated a piece of land prior to construction work. The excavation would prove to produce settlement traces ranging from the Early Bronze Age to the Medieval, which is, in itself, not a remarkable or unexpected outcome of archaeological fieldwork in Denmark. The greatest curiosity of the area was the unearthing of 262 golf balls, many of them decorated with markings and smileys. The occurrence of numerous golf balls would make sense if they were found on a discontinued golf course, or if they were located near an existing one. However, this was not the case, and the archaeologists sought other explanations. Someone suggested foxes could be responsible for the amassing of the golf balls, as they are known to occasionally carry them back to their dens, confusing the golf balls with eggs. Others ruled out this explanation as the nearest golf course was simply too far away to be within the territory of a fox. In addition, given the quantity of golf balls, it would have been the daftest of foxes hitherto known. The most plausible explanation for the occurrence of golf balls at the site of the excavation, the archaeologists suggested, was that ‘some dude’ living nearby had been throwing a party with friends, driving golf balls from his garden across a neighbouring agricultural field for no particular reason other than amusement. Later, the archaeologists would donate the golf balls to a second-hand charity shop. (Jepsen 2019).



Yet is it even interesting where those 262 golf balls came from? Why is the sheer presence of golf balls on the site of an archaeological excavation far from a golf course not reason enough for pausing to ponder? Does the presence of something completely unmotivated and unexpected not deserve to be cherished in its own right, inviting us to dwell for a wee bit longer with this strange occurrence, acquainting ourselves with the unknown—in its quality *as unknown*—instead of rushing to explain it retrospectively through logical causation (see also Martínez *et al.* 2021; Sørensen 2021)? In this perspective, there is no such thing as ‘out of context’; a thing without anterior relations creates new contexts.

Accordingly, perhaps, we ought to think of this archaeological engagement as a work of land art: an agricultural field with meticulously incised excavation trenches yielding a distribution of linear structures of postholes and golf balls with smiling faces drawn on them. A rather rare and wonderful thing, is it not? Think about it.

Lost horizons

In the 17th century, New England clergyman Increase Mather worked on a project to publish a natural history with the title *Discourse on Miscellaneous Observations, Considered Rare and Wonderful* (Daston 1998). At the time, classifications that would later become so deeply embedded in Modernity’s conception of the world

that they seem unquestionable had not solidified. This pertains not only to the division of nature and culture, but also with regards to with the separation of facts and superstition, science and religion, art and academia. In the 17th century, distinctions that may appear so ‘natural’ in Modernity were less obvious. Thus, in the face of bizarre observations, unexplainable occurrences, strange events, and monstrous anomalies, responses revolved simultaneously around curiosity and anxiety. This led Increase Mather to pursuing the ‘rare and wonderful’ in miscellaneous observations, also evidenced in rarity collections and cabinets of curiosity of the time (Daston 1998; see also Daston and Park 2001).

One may also point to the 16th-17th century literary genre known as *miscellany* (Corbellini, Murano and Signore 2018; Eckhardt *et al.* 2014, Vine 2019). Miscellany are collections of diverse and unrelated texts and images, pertaining to philosophical ruminations, step-by-step fly-tying instructions, theological discourse, empirical observations of plants and animals, travelogues, poems, descriptions of art exhibitions, culinary recipes, short stories and advertisements for anything from ointments to hunting equipment. In the same era, yet in a slightly more stringent fashion, Jacob Spon (1685) published *Miscellanea eruditae antiquitatis* as a very early attempt at advancing the study of ancient relics out of antiquarianism. The volume retains much of the messiness and honest rawness of archaeological traces, which

has later been denied by systematic and analytical science-based scholarship. It is important to remember that what is frequently today seen as naïve and un-academic fetishist traction towards things was in fact no less empirical than present-day ‘evidence-based’ research. Yet, what we might learn from the naivety of these varying degrees of unsystematic studies is their enthusiasm for the things that are not justified in advance; the aimless curiosity of their embrace of the strange, just because encountering unknown things is exciting and luring (see also Pétursdóttir 2014).

What is there left to wonder in the everyday of our contemporary world, we might ask. What space is there today for encountering the bizarre, strange, and unexplainable, except in ‘explanations’ that are themselves bizarre and monstrous, e.g., conspiracy theories, anti-feminism, and racism? Are we even capable of cultivating any sensitivity to the strange and wondrous in unexceptional, un-extraordinary everyday encounters with the mundane and trifling? Perhaps, the attempts at explaining unmotivated golf balls in an excavation is a token of such inability, i.e., having to figure things out instead of dwelling with their strangeness.

Yet at the same time, it may also be quite telling that the seemingly only ‘good explanation’ for the presence of 262 decorated golf balls far from a golf course was an imaginary engagement: *maybe* a fox was responsible, or *maybe* a party of cheerful buddies was responsi-

ble. Instead of turning to strategic disinterest, such as deeming the golf balls ‘irrelevant’ or ‘unimportant’ to the excavation, the archaeologists invited speculation and fragmentary reasoning as a mode of engaging with the occurrence of something strange and unexpected.

In most cases, however, the desire to attend to and even describe ‘rare and wonderful’ occurrences seems to have been tamed, or naturalised, with Modernity’s advance of natural science and epistemologies depending on falsification and mutually exclusive classification. In this process, rarities became a particular class of things, an anomalous category of uneasy deviants, separated from the common, typically as abnormal exceptions, digressions, and errors in the natural system (Daston 1998; Greenblatt 1991; Mordhorst 2005). Effectively, this meant that the extraordinary became parcelled out from the ordinary. Hence, the singular or unique had to be understood as being the antithesis to the norm, or as out of joint with the logics governing natural laws.

The present collection of essays explores encounters with everyday oddities as well as exceptional things that are quite common in mundane environments. They do so without the need to rehabilitate the element of superstition from the 17th century as a method to explain the strange. Instead, they reclaim *speculation* as a mode of engaging chance observations. While cherishing the incidental as a possibility for getting stuck and for slowing down, the essays also explore the unanticipated as an invitation

for *leading on*. In other words, surprise and wonder can invoke distraction, pointing in directions unanticipated and unplanned for. This is an argument in favour of releasing fieldwork, material encounters, and lines of reasoning from the constraints of looking for something more or less specific. This attitude is about stepping back from having to make deductions something anticipated in advance, revitalising instead the ability to set out on a path with no predefined destination, and to see the strange in the trivial and insignificant.

Following Kathleen Stewart (2008), it implies that relaxed modes of attending—being strategically open to things—may offer confusion, doubt and redirections, and, accordingly, stimulate the appreciation of unexpected observations. Such experiences, the essays suggest, may lead to new discoveries in or through things otherwise utterly trivial and self-evident. Through hesitation and delay, they may allow us to learn something different about the world, realising something new about sensing the world, or discovering something new about ourselves and our relations to, with and in the world.

Yet in addition to idyllic visions of surprise discoveries and epiphanies, it must be acknowledged that confusion, doubt and distractions may indeed also lead ‘nowhere’. Dead ends, and redundant annotations of exhaustingly obvious or self-effacing things, may be the destination. That is indeed the risk. Or, perhaps rather, the promise. Either way, the stakes are undeniable high. Yet, the authors of the essays in this collection did not take on the task of go-

ing nowhere as a heroic gesture of daring and courageous exploits. The ambition was simply to lower the guard, relax, and remain open to the superfluous, unwarranted, and erratic. Thus, they seek alternatives to epistemological and methodical safety measures devised to hinder failure and error which, allegedly, threaten to lead to the accursed nowhere. — But why even aspire to go in the direction of nowhere? ‘Nowhere’, you might argue, is merely a balmy elsewhere, located beyond criticism and critique; a blissful and irresponsible state of uselessness and indifference, or a Sangri-La of epistemology.

Search, and you shall seek

The essays in *Miscellanea* challenge this prejudice against heading nowhere, demonstrating it is not the easiest decision to aim towards nowhere. Rather, going nowhere travels a road filled with searching, friction, and doubt. And besides, most of the time, finding this bloody ‘Nowhere’ is very difficult as most road signs and atlases point to ‘Somewhere’ and not in the direction of lost horizons. At best, we may find ourselves facing the signposting of a ‘dead end’, but such a sign seems most of the time to be a warning and not an invitation. Yet, there ought to be a town sign, saying

Welcome to Dead End
Population: 10. Twinned with Failure
Enjoy your stay

Only in rare cases are we offered field guides to getting lost, like Rebecca Solnit's travelogue from *terra incognita* (Solnit 2006: 14). "You get lost out of a desire to be lost. But in the place called lost strange things are found", she says (Solnit 2006: 20), contending that when we are lost, "the world has become larger than our knowledge of it" (Solnit 2006: 22).

One of the strategies employed by the creators of the essays in *Miscellanea* is a careful, minute and tenacious attention to detail, perhaps out of a desire to get lost. As such, the contributions are explicitly empiricist in their care for material observations as they all subscribe to the premise behind the experiment leading to these essays: to offer a speculative fabulation on incidental observations.


Hence, Amalie Weitling and Michael Ulfstjerne describe the encounter with things and people in a self-storage facility, and reflect on pelicans and hoarders, and things that come and go without any clear charting of exactly what comes and goes. Such a space—whether in the pelican's beak or in the bowels of a self-storage monster—seems to constitute an involuntary home for things that do not fit in the home proper, lingering for an unknown stretch of time, and for unknown purposes, perhaps, eventually, only to be forgotten. Forgetting could be another way of releasing things from the donkey work of being useful, you might say.

Nina Vohnsen speculates on laziness, ruminating how the already existing mess at home—with rice under her socks and a table

sticky with honey—deters her from sharing her partner's ability to see the potentials and pleasure in refurbishing a dilapidated and worn-down old farm in a project to build a new home. Vohnsen does not pursue laziness as a deliverance from being active. Rather she prescribes a strategy that remains in the affirmative of laziness; accept being lazy and try to avoid thinking too much about the situations you cannot be bothered. *The antidote to lazy is just ploughing ahead with no thought for consequences or the bill to pay further down the road.* Planning is double work. Change is quicker than planning. Forget the future. If you do not forget the future, you will start complaining, and then Nick will tell you to go shopping for groceries.

The home is also the centre of attention in the essay by Anna S. Beck and Christine Finn, contemplating their relationships with permanence and transience of homes, and how senses of belonging become entangled with experiences of mess and losing one's plot in meandering realisations of not having arrived at the place you had expected, or being stuck in places all too familiar. The essay characterises the home inside out; it is about the home seen next to the Pacific Ocean, the Channel, and the Seine. *I was too tired to walk beside the sea, but it was good to know it was so close.* Waking to the sounds of starlings can be enmeshed in such scenarios.

Marko Marila and Mikael Nordström task themselves with playing a game of chess with an ensemble of unconventional chess piec-



es, toying—in the literal sense of the term—with rules and memory in the cold facts of the Finnish winter. The players, including Suvi Tuominen, who has the role of Marila’s and Nordström’s opponent, bring their own chess pieces. These consist of everyday objects with personal or historical significance. This stimulates “purposeless joy”, perhaps like driving golf balls across an agricultural field in the company of good friends in a slightly drunken state at a garden party. A “pure play”.

Martin Demant Frederiksen and Þóra Pétursdóttir share a play with overlays and the compositing of encounters with burials of dead cats in respectively Croatia and Iceland. They interweave slightly displaced yet curiously agreeable images and words, altogether creating a strangely elegant mess and mesh of impressions and languages. This essay is perhaps the most truncated of all the contributions to the collection, and equally the one going most visibly around in circles. The essay does not move very far, and almost seems to be grinding to a halt even before it gets going. Or, perhaps, it is an essay that gets lost in its own tracks, bothering to remain committed the unbending path of distraction.

Finally, Jeff Benjamin and Tim Flohr Sorensen relate a memory of a tumbling home, squeaking floorboards, and fox kits playing in the rays of the rising sun. Also in this essay, the home, and the act of playing, play a role in incidental fabulations on speculative observations. These meander through stringently inconse-

quential, empiricist accounts of factually present things that seem to stir up unrelated recollections, forgotten secrets, and reveries at will.

All of these essays share an interest in dwelling long enough on random and purposeless observations for them to become a thing in their own right. Perhaps, some of the details, things, textures and sentiments expressed in the essays would never have materialised as a publication without the shared commitment amongst the authors to creating speculative fabulations on incidental observations.

The laws governing ordinary exceptions

In her description of a passage in Robert Hooke’s *Micrographia* from 1668, Lorraine Daston emphasises how Hooke depicts a blue fly under the microscope: “the commonplace is estranged by means of minute inspection and at the same time transformed into a thing of beauty, worthy of a still life” (Daston 1998: 32). Like the essays in *Miscellanea*, this way of getting lost in detail is not a starry-eyed attention to the outstanding, exceptional and unique, but more so a way of approaching quite ordinary things and observations with a sensibility to aspects of mundane encounters that usually pass by unnoticed (also Pereg 1997 [1973]).

Daston further refers to 17th century botanist Nehemiah Grew, who—unsuccessfully—tried to have included in the inventory of the Royal Society Repository not only things considered strange and rare, but also “the known

and the common” (Daston 1998: 30). What is interesting here is the relationship between the ordinary and the strange, or their difference, or how these differences come about. In principle, the difference between familiar and unexpected experiences would be displaced by repeated and careful attention to objects: i.e. if a surprising object is encountered multiple times, it should cease being surprising, you would think. We would quite simply get used to it, maybe even bored with it; like when Georges Perec tasked himself with “exhausting a place in Paris”, describing everything he notices in the street, sitting at an outdoor café. After spending days, noting people passing by, city lights changing, and buses coming through the street, he wonders whether anything is really moving anywhere from day to day:


Many things have not changed, have apparently not budged (the letters, the symbols, the fountains, the plaza, the benches, the church, etc.); I myself am sitting at the same table. Buses pass by. I’ve lost all interest in them (2010 [1975]: 29).

Perec’s point, and as essays in *Miscellanea* also show, it is by making careful observations of mundane contexts, attending to the wealth of useless details, that curiosity may in fact be prolonged.

The question of what qualifies as useless is of course an important and challenging issue,

yet in the politics of everyday life—within and outside academia—it is typically addressed in wildly Manichaeic ways. Most of the time, uselessness is circumscribed by its opposite, meaning that ‘useless’ must be the things, people and places that fail to assume purpose or cease to sustain it. However, this definition is purely binary and antithetical, passive-aggressively phrased in the negative; it equals saying that the colour black is the opposite of white, as if the colour black does not exist independent of white. Thus, uselessness becomes defined by way of abstract generalisation. Instead, as this collection of essays suggest, working towards specific phenomena characterised by insignificance and indeterminacy, context, and lack of context, constitutes a different and more affirmative measure of uselessness.

Some essays in this collection, or aspects of the essays, might be likened to the artistic and philosophical assemblage of ideas known as ‘pataphysics, developing from French writer Alfred Jarry from the 1890s onwards. It is difficult to define or characterize ‘pataphysics, but it shares some affinities with Dadaism, surrealism, Situationism and related movements at the turn of the century. Jarry himself defined ‘pataphysics as “the science of the particular”, examining “the laws governing exceptions” (Jarry 1996: 21), i.e., epiphenomena or accidental side-effects. ‘Pataphysics, for Jarry, stands in contrast to “the common opinion that the only science is that of the general” (Jarry 1996: 21). The ‘general’, such as causal explana-



tion, Jarry contends, are “true only in the majority of cases” and are “codified only for convenience” (Jarry 1996: 22). Despite the teasingly sarcastic tone, the 262 golf balls emerging unexpectedly out of context does prove Jarry’s point. The instinctive response was to try to reconstruct the causal trajectories leading to their arrival in the place, where the archaeologists encountered them. Yet why presume their past trajectories were of primary—or exclusive—importance? And why focus on the bulk of golf balls, and not on the individual item?

According to biographer of ‘pataphysics, Andrew Hugill, ‘pataphysics “is subjective, privileging the particular above the general, the imaginary above the real, the exceptional above the ordinary, the contradictory above the axiomatic” (Hugill 2015: 2). Jarry exemplifies this with the figure of a watch:

Why should anyone claim that the shape of a watch is round—a manifestly false proposition—since it appears in profile as a narrow rectangular construction, elliptic on three sides; and why the devil should one only have noticed its shape at the moment of looking at the time? – Perhaps under the pretext of utility (Jarry 1996: 22).

Jarry held ‘pataphysics to be “the science of imaginary solutions” (Jarry 1996: 22) and proposed a reasoning seeing the contradictory and the particular as the source of this imaginary. It

is “a poetic theory of contradictory undecidability, continually inverting a dyadic hierarchy, while momentarily subverting its mutual exclusion – neither cancelling nor surpassing the dialectic” (Bök 2002: 33). Importantly, this does not imply a wholesale denial of the real, nor of the serious. Contradictions and particularities are, indeed, part of the real, but in ‘pataphysics, these are approached without reduction: ‘pataphysics does not seek to explain contradictions and particularities through analysis, nor by referring observations to the systematic, the orderly, the typical, or the general.

Thereby, ‘pataphysics may be seen as highlighting a paradox or tension in the epistemologies at the heart of the discipline of archaeology, which is fundamentally divided in terms of its attitude to exceptions, the unique and the particular. In some cases, archaeologists approach such occurrences as anomalies, suspended from systematic analysis and from serious representations of past realities. Things known as ‘outliers’ and the ‘extraordinary’ are rarely granted explanatory power, and become excluded, because they are anomalies, a-typical and incomparable. In other cases, however, archaeologists seem to cherish exceptional phenomena as ‘treasures’ or ‘outstanding finds’ that represent something of particular value, or a sovereign type in the vast ocean of repeated forms. In such cases, anomalies are held in high esteem, perceived as yielding information about otherwise invisible aspects of the past.

So, in archaeology, exceptional occur-

rences can either be appreciated as windows into unique aspects of the past or as hiccups that cannot be taken seriously. However, ‘pataphysics does not seek to do one thing *or* the other, since causal explanation and the creation of general laws are not the goal. Rather, the aim is to be able to take contradictions and exceptions seriously in their own right: “One of the fundamentals of ‘Pataphysics is that of Equivalence, which may explain to you this obstinacy we have with regard to what is serious and what is not; for us there is no distinction” (Boris Vian cited in Hugill 2015: 5).

Failure and its futures


The contributors to *Miscellanea* were not asked to refer or subscribe to ‘pataphysics when creating their essays; some of them might not have heard about this rather obscure scientific orientation before, nor may they necessarily see their essays as being in harmony with ‘pataphysics. The reason for bringing together the essays with reference to ‘pataphysics in this afterword is that few other epistemologies, except certain feminist orientations, seem to welcome incoherence and the erratic with the same unswerving open-minded curiosity as ‘pataphysics.

Undoubtedly, the essays in *Miscellanea* must, at least to some, verge on the unserious, or at least remain in the realm of the academically frivolous. There is no denying that the usefulness of attending to the kinds of things, contexts, and un-contexts that the authors ex-

plore, is—in bourgeois terms—limited or even absent. They do not concern themselves with retracing the origins of things or their value, nor do they make purposeful generalisations or offer solutions to pressing problems. Some of the essays refer to (or at least seem to refer to) ‘real’ objects and places, while other are imaginary (or at least seem to be imaginary). Such libertarian attitudes to reality does not sit very well with current requirements to academic work, expected to be applicable, socially relevant, and solution-oriented with a clear analytical point. The essays do not reflect serious academic work, you might say. Yet, why distinguish between the serious and the unserious, and not instead venture on to *explore*; like a leap of curiosity that *plays* with the vectors of the possible without filtering away in advance that which is assumed to be useless or unrepresentative in all its particularity?

As noted in the dictionary entry quoted above, ‘curiosity’ shares a genealogy with ‘caring’, which may be an observation particularly worthwhile in the current academic atmosphere, where curiosity seems to have been made redundant by ‘relevance’. So, while curiosity killed the proverbial cat, ‘relevance’ has, in turn, culled curiosity.

Perhaps tellingly, Increase Mather’s 17th century pursuit of ‘rare and wonderful’ miscellaneous observations never materialised as a publication. In the early 21st century academic world, ending up unpublished is the hallmark of failure. *Miscellanea* is the result of a process that threatened to qualify to such failure.



In the course of 2019, the author of this afterword asked the contributors to join a loosely formed collective of academics under the moniker *The Hub for Speculative Fabulations upon Incidental Observations*. This was to be a space for engaging in epistemological and aesthetic exchanges on—precisely—incidental observations and their potentials for engendering ‘speculative fabulations’. Obviously, Donna Haraway (2016) is the scholar coining this expression, highlighting a particular appreciation of ways of encountering and storying the world, “promiscuously plucking out fibres in clotted and dense events and practices” (Haraway 2016: 3).

Yet in fact, the expression ‘speculative fabulations’ has a different source of origin in the context of *The Hub for Speculative Fabulations upon Incidental Observations*. Between 2003 and 2006, the author of this afterword received numerous rejections on applications for funding for a PhD project. In one of the rejection letters, the assessment committee stated that the proposed project “seemed merely to lead to speculative fabulations upon incidental observations”. Apparently, the assessment committee did not consider this a positive feature. By contrast, *The Hub for Speculative Fabulations upon Incidental Observations* stipulates that academic observations must include—and are sometimes *only* possible on the basis of—incidental things and encounters. Getting in touch with, even noticing, such incidental oc-

currences is made possible through speculative fabulations, because the openness towards the unexpected is a speculative attitude—i.e., an empirical curiosity along the vectors of the possible. Although the expression ‘speculative fabulations’ does not directly, or exclusively, refer to Donna Haraway’s homonymous term, much of the actual inspiration for how to make speculative fabulations relates to her work, and that of other feminist scholars.

It’s a long way to Nowhere

The first activity in *The Hub for Speculative Fabulations upon Incidental Observations* was to produce text and images that were to care for and play with incidental observations through speculative fabulations. The essays are the outcome of a two-step procedure. First, in August 2019, participants committed to work in pairs, crafting a speculative fabulation upon incidental observations. Partnerships were composed by drawing names from a hat (a hard hat, actually) instead of pairing authors that could be assumed in advance to work well together. The experiment was in part about seeing what would happen when writing partners were coupled at random, potentially creating unforeseen synergies, while acknowledging the potential for similarly unanticipated obstacles or irreconcilable differences.

This way of establishing collaboration was an implicit critique of many large-scale,


interdisciplinary, and otherwise respectable research projects, where ‘collaboration’ typically turns out to be a question of accumulating individual parts under the guise of strategic commonality. As such, the widely acclaimed ‘synergy’ of research projects usually revolves around sensible and rational juxtapositions of separate limbs into a coherent but also somewhat embellished mannequin. The collaboration staged for the sake of this writing experiment, on the other hand, may have more in common with a Frankensteinian monster; that is, as an “in/appropriated Other” (*sensu* Haraway 1992), composed of an equal measure of whimsy and partly decomposed fragmentary parts being connected into yet unknown states of becoming and dissolution. This was an attempt at allowing collaboration to remain accidental and disobedient for a little while longer than usual, experimenting with the erratic formation of ideas, practices, communication, text and images as a mess and a mesh, since it was quite unpredictable how—or even if—collaborators were able to work together.

The authors agreed to contribute with essays consisting in narratives based on fragmentary observations of incidental encounters whether with people or other entities in the world. They contributed under the condition that they hesitated, slowed down their writing process and committed to patience, doubt, and distraction. Then, in May 2020, the partnerships were to submit their speculative fabulations of 3000 words and five images. Initially, the intention was to publish the presumably unfinished essays online, while the authors were given the opportunity to continue amending

the text and images as they saw fit until the final version of the essay was due in February 2022. In the meantime, authors were free to amend, rework, delete and replace their speculative fabulation, questioning themselves, dithering and rewriting their texts. This was not a request that had the objective of leading to improved, flawless contributions, but simply to allow texts to be open to metamorphoses for as long as possible, sustaining processes rather than producing results.

This first phase of the experiment was characterised by numerous delays and a growing uncertainty whether anything would ever materialise in a condition worth sharing, even online where anything seems to be publishable these days. Some contributors were struggling to find time to write their essays, and some were facing personal challenges—as in any other collective project, of course. Moreover, the first deadline coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, for a while postponing the submission of contributions indefinitely. Then, some contributors bailed out, or simply seemed to disappear, while new partners joined the experiment, so the final deadline was postponed, accommodating the unforeseen changes. In effect, contributions never made it on to the online platform.

The second phase of the experiment—planned to commence in February 2022, yet first postponed, then cancelled—was to pass on the manuscripts to new authors who would complete the respective essays. This part of the writing experiment was conceived as a form of ‘archaeo-writing’, mimicking the archaeological formation process, where some elements of past realities endure in seemingly intact form, while



others are transformed, decay or swell, while yet others disappear without a trace. Importantly, in the hands of archaeologists, traces of past realities always become reconfigured, or disfigured, and archaeologists should therefore be considered contributors to formation processes rather than their mere outside witnesses. The idea was to distribute the first edition of the essays to new partners in the writing experiment. The new authors would then rematerialize the initial images and work, allowing for interventions with new sentiments, sensibilities, and speculative fabulation.

Although the planned phase of ‘archaeo-writing’ did not materialise, the long period of utopian hibernation of the experiment, between late 2020 and the end of 2022, is nevertheless comparable to the state of the archaeological trace. It rests for an indefinite period of time, until encountered by human or non-human agents excavating it, gnawing at it or seeping through it. Archaeological traces, hence, should not be perceived as *either* still *or* vibrant; rather, they can be both, sometimes even at the same time, as some weird form of mutually-exclusive-yet-nevertheless-concurring metabolism.

Without blaming COVID-19 for all dead ends in the world after 2019, the pandemic did indeed bring the experiment to a state of hibernation, or to a dead end. It is surely evidence that ‘shit happens’, and, less kindly, a token of bad project management. Yet, it also marks an organic process with a minimum degree of control and discipline, in addition to a protracted and fruitful online exchange between participants leading exactly nowhere; that is, to here.

Perhaps there are also more structural and political reasons for why the experiment was grinding to a halt; the fact that academic careers rarely leave much time for an exercise of the sort represented here; *and* the fact that academic publications are typically expected to follow a very uniform configuration, leaving little or no space for unfinishedness and erratism. Therefore, it is also in this quality—as an incomplete and open-ended rogue object—*Miscellanea* is published, or, rather, passed on.

An invitation to the reader

Undoubtedly, some readers will have been trained to consider speculative fabulations and incidental observations deserving of nothing but sheer rejection, being useless, unserious, or ridiculous. Regardless how cute such hysterical rejections can be, it might nevertheless be worthwhile welcoming speculations, fabulations and the incidental, in part because such qualities remain intertwined with those trajectories and institutions of academia that are conventionally held in higher esteem. For instance, in the perspective of ‘pataphysics, the traditional museum can be seen in the very quality of the incidental and speculative. Accordingly, for Hugill, museum visitors are often responsible themselves for engendering imaginary accounts of the meaning and background to the artefacts they encounter, or conversely because the curators’ explanations of objects in museum exhibitions “can often seem strange or downright ridiculous” (Hugill 2015: 30). He further stipulates:

Part of the pleasure in attending museums lies in the secretive perception: that the objective truthfulness of what we are told is beside the point. The glass cases, the explanatory plaques, the interactive installations, the illustrated catalogs, even the public lectures by experts, serve to provide us with enough fragmentary evidence to piece together in our minds the lives and activities of those long gone. These are inevitably mysterious (Hugill 2015: 30).

In this perspective, knowledge implies a ‘mysterious’ component, at least when knowledge refers to *empirical encounters* rather than *rational reasoning*. The encounters with things in the archaeological excavation, in the ethnographic fieldwork, in the artist’s studio, in the museum exhibition, in biographies of people, things, and unthings will contain some degree of unknown, or something strange. Responding to such unfamiliar encounters in the familiar poses an epistemological dilemma: how does one remain truthful to something strange without dispelling its strangeness? Perhaps, part of the answer is to embrace Ursula Le Guin’s avowal: “It is a strange realism, but it is a strange reality” (Le Guin 1986: 170).

So, this collection of essays is perhaps best understood as a tiny cabinet of curiosities, resting inside a mislaid box in the lost-and-found corner of the janitor’s office, waiting to be encountered and engaged with anew. This brings us to the only possible conclusion, which is at the same time an imaginary solution: the reader is hereby invited to approach the essays in *Miscellanea* as leftovers from past activities, or a form of enduring, erratic traces, welcoming new encounters with essays already couched in delays, deferral, uncertainty, indecision, and change of mind. If taking up the invitation, future authors should all commit to the role of being archaeologists of the text; not by recovering, sorting, analysing, or interpreting the ‘original’ text retrospectively, but by carrying on its traces in the process of capricious emergence and dissolution; simultaneously leading anywhere and nowhere.

You are now leaving Dead End
Thank you for visiting, we hope to see you again
Please drive carefully

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”

In pataphysics, mutually exclusive opposites
can and do exist.

”

Hugill, Andrew. 2015. *Pataphysics: A useless guide*. Cambridge,
MA: MIT Press.





”

Nicht awl est Pataphysicus and (praps) Pataphysicus est part of wholeshebang; but it est overanabove everyfink and glides ovum the speshulness of events and boils dahn to spifflicatum inter impossibleness the veezuns, the parrerdoxes and the facks, z'more vous spik bout her, the more uttah boolshytte it be.

”

Afro Somenzari quoted in Brotchie, Alistair, Stanley Chapman, Thieri Foule, and Kevin Jackson, 2003. *Pataphysics: Definitions and citations*. London: Atlas Press.



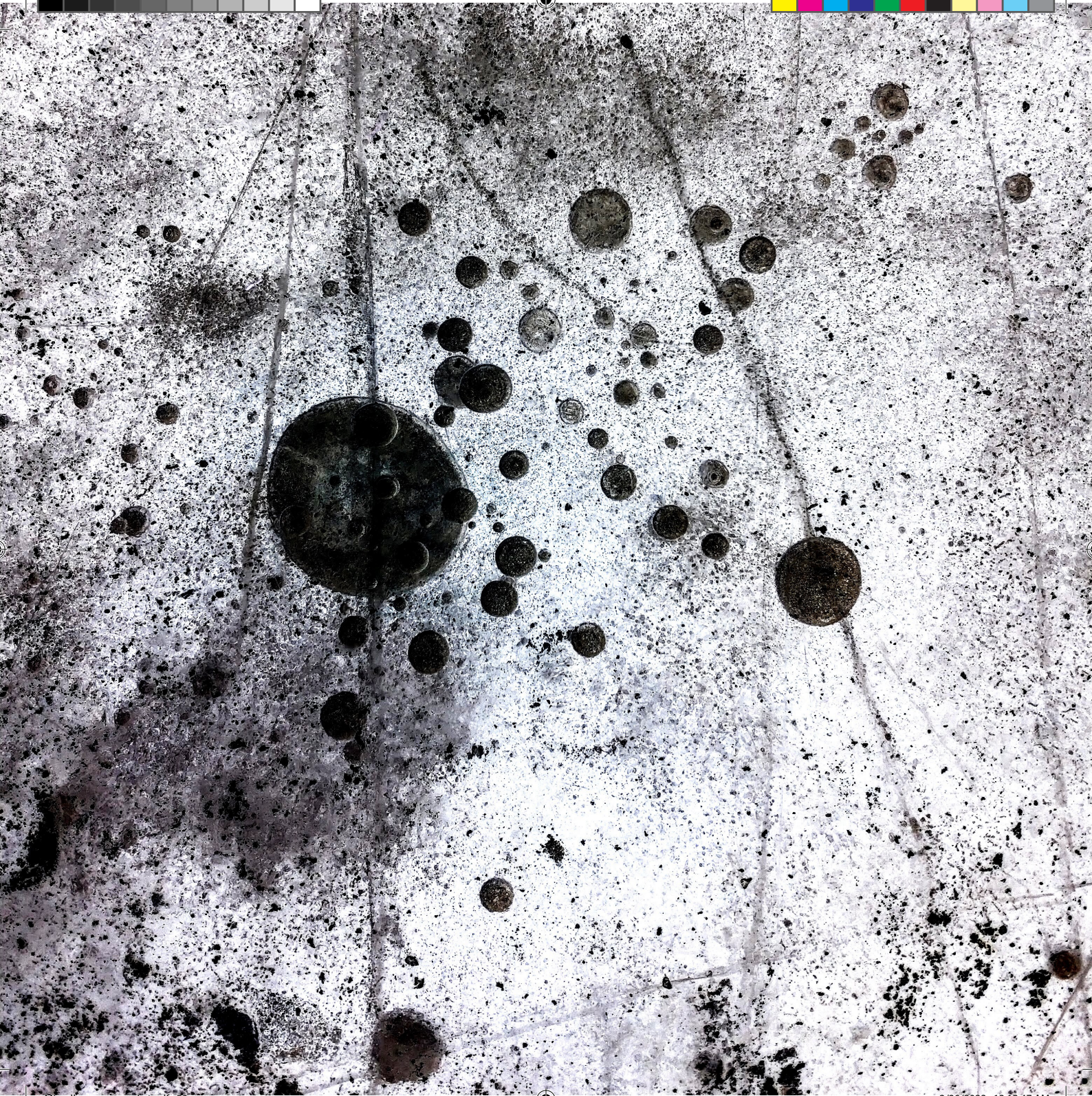
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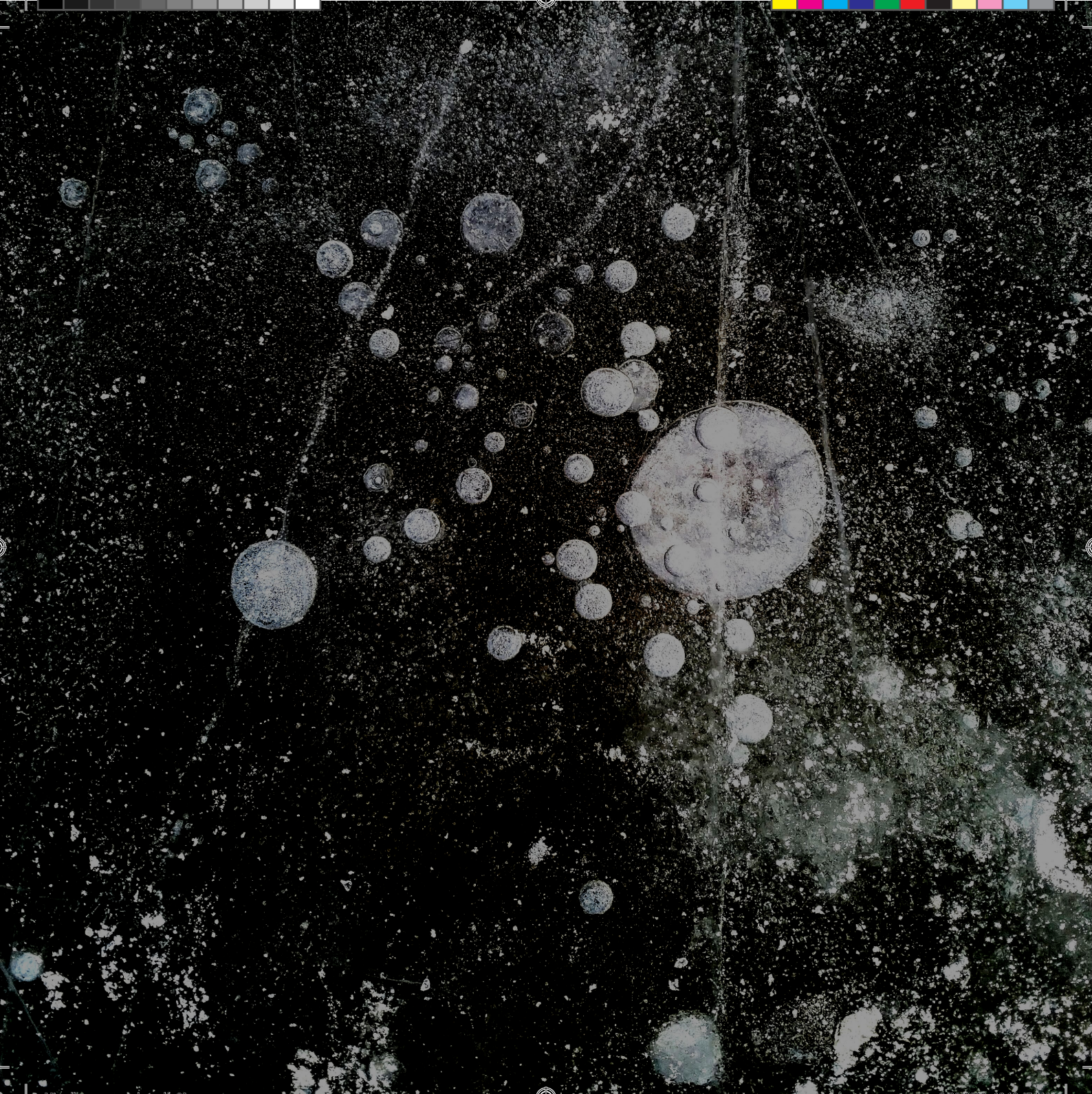


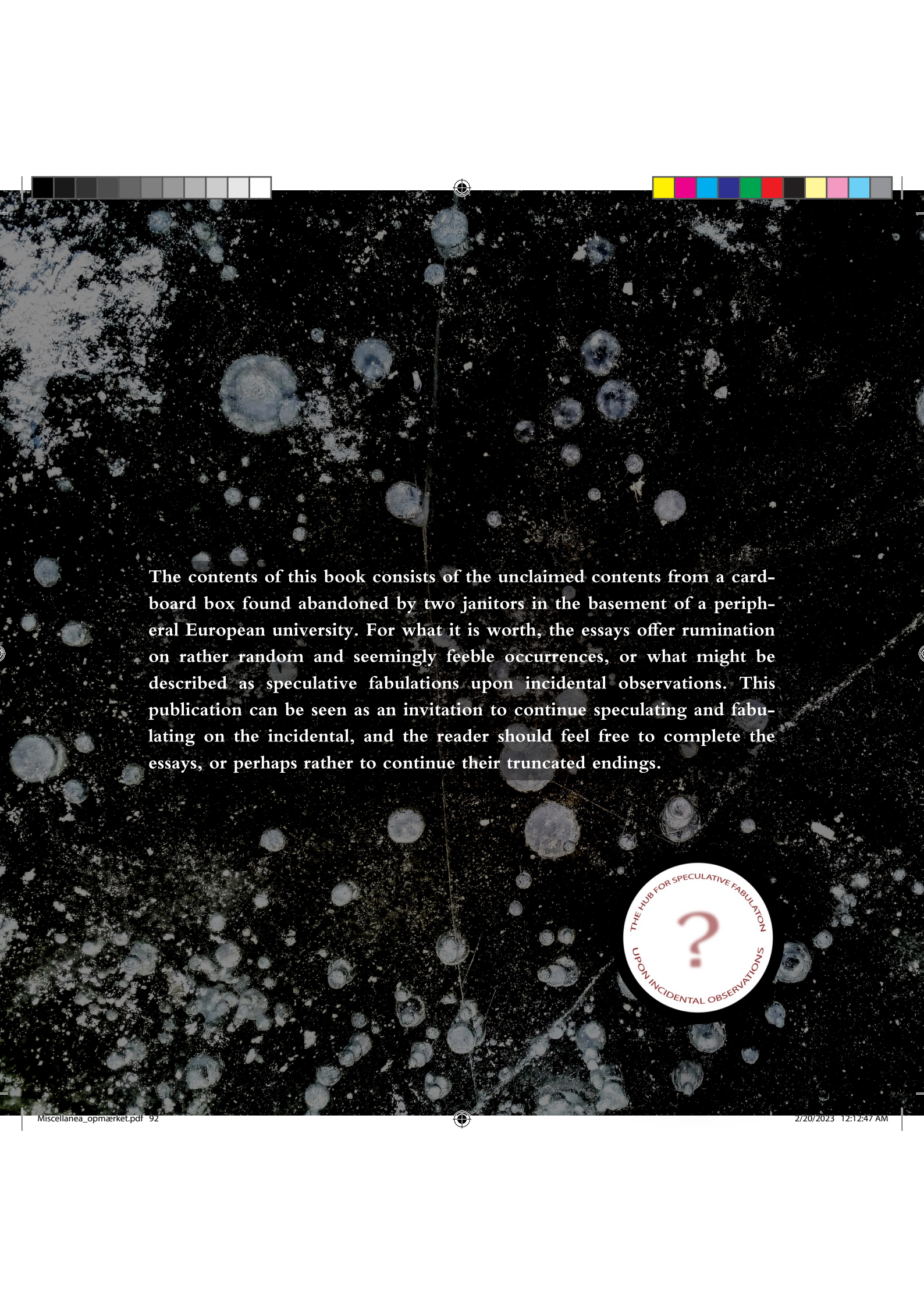
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The contents of this book consists of the unclaimed contents from a cardboard box found abandoned by two janitors in the basement of a peripheral European university. For what it is worth, the essays offer rumination on rather random and seemingly feeble occurrences, or what might be described as speculative fabulations upon incidental observations. This publication can be seen as an invitation to continue speculating and fabricating on the incidental, and the reader should feel free to complete the essays, or perhaps rather to continue their truncated endings.

