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The Internet found its way into Finnish printed literature somewhat slowly during the mid to late 2000s. The first examples of utilising the poetic possibilities offered by an unforeseen abundance of linguistic material, accessible to almost everyone in a Nordic welfare state, were few and far between. Experimental poetry books, such as *Varjofinlandia* (*Shadowfinlandia*, 2005) by Karri Kokko, *Lyhyellä matkalla ohuesti jäätyneen meren yli* (*On a Short Trip Across a Thinly Frozen Sea*, 2006) by Janne Nummela and *Täytetyn eläimen lämpö* (*The Warmth of the Taxidermic Animal*, 2008) by Tytti Heikkinen led the way, but at the same time the majority of poets seemed to rely solely on more traditional literary devices as the basis of their expression.

In 2010, Mikael Brygger's first Finnish poetry book *Valikoima asteroideja* (*A Selection of Asteroids*) was released as the final publication in a series titled *poEsa*, which focused on different forms of poetic experimentation. Coincidentally, in book reviews Brygger's Finnish debut was approached almost exclusively from the point of view of its experimental features: the use of unconventional textual forms and typographic devices; various poetic "games" demanding the reader's active intervention; and the lack of more traditional, "original" and versified expression (Gylen 2010; Laihinen 2011; Liuhto 2010; Mattila 2010). The apparent overtones of analytical confusion and even a biased attitude that defined some of the reviews become more comprehensible when one considers the temporal exceptionality of Brygger's oeuvre. Focusing on numbers of publications only, the most recent wave of poetic experimentation in Finnish literature began slowly in 2007, reaching its quantitative peak around 2012–2013. One of the crucial events that made poetic experimentation more "acceptable" in the eyes of the Finnish literary public was the rewarding of poet Henriikka Tavi's vigorously experimental debut poetry collection *Esim. Esa* (*E.g. Esa*, 2007) with the Helsingin Sanomat Literature Prize in November 2007. One could argue that this recompensing functioned as an institutional gesture towards poets and publishers alike: "this is now allowed: go and experiment". Nevertheless, in 2010 a poetry collection that one might label in one way or another as experimental was still an anomaly and, as such, somewhat difficult for a literary critic to put into perspective.

In general, the fuel for experimentation in Brygger's poems is founded in the historically changing nature of uses of (printed) language. The texts of the book approach language as a visually perceived reservoir of spatiotemporally specific material practices. From this reservoir Brygger picks and chooses a seemingly arbitrary set of examples – playful language games, geometric

assemblages of letters and all sorts of textual excerpts gathered from various historical and contemporary sources. The poems operate by triggering different kinds of textual surface effects, rather than by encouraging the reader to dig deeper by means of textual analysis aimed at interpreting the hidden meanings of the text. There appears to be nothing “inside” or “behind” Brygger’s poetic expression: everything is already on display.

One of the best, if also one of the most confusing, examples of this surface-oriented expression can be found near the end of the book. The final, longer text in the book is an uninterrupted nine-and-a-half page stream of consistently capitalised letters, organised in groups of mainly four or five characters. In other words, the pages are filled from top to bottom with mostly unfathomable assemblages of capital letters, with no pacing or subdivisions whatsoever.

EXCERPT: PAGE FIVE OF THE POEM

The word count of the text is more than three thousand. It probably goes without saying that reading the whole text from beginning to end is a frustrating experience: an ordeal of a kind. The only hint of organisation, a trace of a human intervention among the flow of letters, arises from the roughly alphabetical order of the “words”; or, more precisely, the first characters of the words. But even this order is disturbed at regular intervals. Short sequences of out-of-place instances breaking the alphabetical continuity appear on every page of the poem – as if the code-like stream of text is trying to override the human influence by emphasising pure chance among the seemingly logical alphabetical order. Indeed, the text even opens with such a displaced sequence. The first line of the poem consists of the sequence “FLWS FCTY SRCE FUBC TCHC TDSC SSRX JOBS EGHT SHLM”. From the second line onwards, the text advances with character strings beginning with the letter ‘A’, before switching to strings beginning with the letter ‘B’ from the fourth-lowest line of the poem’s first page.

On one level the whole text appears to be inhuman, regardless of the approximate alphabetical order traversing the pages. The unfathomable strings of characters seem to have no communicative function whatsoever. The reader of Brygger’s text is drawn into a stream of material mess, a series or a continuum that makes no apparent sense. Although someone or something has arranged the character strings around a principle that we as readers can recognise as alphabetical order, no reasonable purpose for this organisational principle is to be found within the text. Considering that the organisation is restricted to the first characters of the strings, the principle appears to be a somewhat weak guideline for the reading process. Thus, the first characters conjure up a sense of

discipline that is maintained all the way through the text. At the same time, both the relative alphabetical disarray of the remaining letters and the recurrent manifestation of out-of-place sequences undermine the organising effect of the alphabetical order. In any case, since there is neither apparent semantic content nor a potential interpretable meaning hidden under the material stream of letters, the principle of alphabetical order remains the sole point of entrance for a reader who wishes to come to terms with the poem.

Then again, when one ventures outside the material boundaries of the poem itself, an interpretive key of sorts can be found within the papery folds of the book object. Namely, the table of contents of the collection, situated on the page to the left of the book's centrefold and titled "VÄLITILA" ("LIMBO" in English), suggests that the textual material found between pages 72 and 81 is to be read under the title "NASDAQ 30.5.2010". Two issues relating to the denominating power of this suggested title arise. Firstly, the pages ranging from 72 to 81 do not exist as numbered pages in the book. While some pages of Brygger's oeuvre have in fact been numbered, the pages from 72 to 81 are among those that have been left unnumbered. In other words, the table of contents seems to indicate something that has no correspondence in the book's material structure. A reader searching for pages 72 to 81 by referring to the page numbering won't find what he or she is looking for. Secondly, the stream of character strings that has been listed in the table of contents under the title "NASDAQ 30.5.2010" has no title whatsoever attached to it within the material boundaries of the text itself. In other words, the table of contents seems to denominate in a peculiar way something that is not what it is said to be, and also places this something in a location that in effect is not "there" – at least, not as a signified correspondence between the table of contents and the pages this table denominates.

These contradictions between the index and the indexed are of utmost importance when considering how Brygger's text functions as avant-garde poetry. To put it briefly, the text deals with questions of (in-)signification and displacement. The impressions of namelessness and placelessness caused by these contradictions emphasise the poem's autonomous operation as a text in relation to both the internal order of the collection and the order of names in general. The whole comprises linguistic units but at the same time is not language *per se*. Brygger's poem seems to have no communicative function for a reader of poetry – that is, if the reader does not happen to be familiar with the conventions of stock exchange processes. For even if the suggested title of the poem fails to denominate and determine the functions and operations of the text itself – because the text as a material entity is left without a title – it certainly provides the reader with a clue to where the code-like stream of character strings is drawn from.

By “drawn from” I mean specific spatiotemporal coordinates, for the title “NASDAQ 30.5.2010” connects Brygger’s poem with a particular location and date (One Liberty Plaza, 165 Broadway, New York, NY 10006 on 30 May 2010). Although the text does not seem to have a hidden content or meaning under its mostly incomprehensible surface, it quite literally establishes a material connection with the world outside the book object. Thus, the reality of Brygger’s poem is not one of transcendent images and ideas or interpretable meanings; on the contrary, it is one of immanent, material events and textual surface effects that connect the text as a material object with the material world. In his famous analysis of the two *Alice* books by Lewis Carroll, philosopher Gilles Deleuze emphasised the role of such surface effects. Deleuze tracked the analytical “return to the surface” all the way back to the philosophy of the Stoics; instead of ideas or states-of-affairs the focus is on *events*, which are always only effects on a surface. (Deleuze 1990/2015, 8.)

It is worth noting that the question of (textual) surface effects connects with a wider philosophical framework of Deleuze; namely, that of receding from the tradition of interpretation and meanings as generally accepted goals of (literary) analysis. For instance, in *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue that the question of meaning should be replaced with the question of function; instead of asking what something means we should ask how it works (Deleuze & Guattari 1983/2000, 109). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, a follow-up of *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari go even further by defining “significance and interpretosis” as the “two diseases of the earth or the skin, in other words, humankind’s fundamental neurosis” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987/2005, 114). Although outrageously provocative, Deleuze and Guattari’s arguments raise the question of reading avant-garde texts such as that of Brygger’s: if there seems to be nothing behind, above, below or beyond a given poetic text, why make an *interpretative* issue out of it in the first place? For in the case of Brygger’s poem there certainly is and happens something *right there*, on the immediate surface of the text itself.

And so it appears that the spatiotemporal connections Brygger’s poem establishes reveal that its textual material consists entirely of *ticker symbols*: abbreviations used on a particular stock market to identify particular tradable stocks. A few moments spent with a search engine seem to verify that the autonomous character strings of Brygger’s text are not, in fact, random or arbitrary in any way. Each string of letters included in the poem refers to a stock of a particular company listed on the NASDAQ stock market on 30 May 2010. At the time of writing this article (30 August 2018), NASDAQ had 3394 companies listed on its market place (NASDAQ Company List, 7.9.2018). This number appears to be in the same ballpark as the approximate number of individual letter

strings in Brygger's poem (some 9.5 pages, 29 lines per page and approximately 11 letter strings per line equals 3030 letter strings in total). By listing the ticker symbols and making the reader go through them all, Brygger's poem develops first and foremost a sense of scale, the proportions of which are usually hidden under general stock indexes. Reading through all three thousand character strings is a mundane and even an overwhelming task, but at the same time it offers a sensory, experiential and affective glimpse of some of the inhuman forces influencing our everyday lives in a fundamental way.

From this point of view Brygger's poem appears to operate in terms of what Félix Guattari has conceptualised as *a-signifying semiotics*. According to Guattari, social relations and processes of subjectivation in contemporary societies are compiled of both signifying semiological elements and a-signifying semiological dimensions, such as elements related to information technology and its machinic sign systems. (Guattari 1992/2010, 26.) For example, philosopher Levi Bryant has applied Guattari's conceptualisation to consider the role that computers and algorithms have in our lives (Bryant 2011). Brygger's poem can therefore be approached as a text that makes visible a particular a-signifying process of subjectivation: a process that – in addition to its a-signifying and thus more or less incomprehensible quality – operates in the well-shielded virtual fortresses of telecommunications networks and so is somewhat hidden from the eyes of those (i.e. almost all of us) on whose processes of subjectivation it has most effect. However, Brygger's text makes no claim on the justification of these processes themselves; there is no defence or judgement of the financial system to be read in the stream of letter strings. "NASDAQ 30.5.2010" merely *shows* the components of a particular, spatiotemporally explicit process and connects it – within the thematical and material limits of Brygger's collection – with the historical development of sign systems and different uses of language(s).

Finnish literary scholar Kaisa Kurikka has used the term *experimental realism* when writing about a Finnish experimental novel *Aperitiff, avoin kaupunki (Aperitiff, Open City)*, written by Kari Aronpuro in 1965. Kurikka reads Aronpuro's textual collage as a means of *showing* the world instead of narrating, picturing, depicting or representing it. Experimental writing can hence break the barrier between literature and reality and thus be considered *as* reality. (Kurikka 2018, 152.) The notion of experimental realism connects Brygger's poem with the tradition of Finnish experimental writing. "NASDAQ 30.5.2010" shows the world to the reader by materialising elements of the virtual realm on the pages of a poetry book.

When one's focus is turned back from the table of contents and the title of the poem towards the

repetitious stream of individual letter strings, one more contradiction within the spatiotemporal relations of Brygger's text arises. For whereas NASDAQ, Inc., a holding company running the stock market, has its physical headquarters in New York, the NASDAQ stock market differs from other stock markets in that it does not have a real trading floor filled with brokers. The trading with stocks of NASDAQ-listed companies takes place exclusively online; the NASDAQ market is located on "a telecommunications network" where the trading happens "through an elaborate system of companies electronically connected to one another". (The Investopedia Staff, 28.4.2017.) In other words, the letter strings of the text seem to escape the signifying power of the poem's title due to the fact that the two belong to different spatiotemporal realms. While the title of the poem determines a set of spatiotemporal coordinates of the material world, the text itself belongs and/or participates in a virtual realm of online trades, never setting foot outside the telecommunications network that constitutes it. On the other hand, what Brygger's poem effectually does is to materialise these virtual identifiers of stocks on the pages of a poetry book. The flow of capital is frozen, reorganised and placed under a totally different time frame: that of the process of reading a nine-and-a-half-page long poem.

The process of materialising virtual entities as corporeal words on the pages of a book has a two-fold function in Brygger's text. On the one hand, it transforms the virtual flow of the ticker symbols into a tangible form, thus expressing that stock markets have real material effects in the real material world. The reader of Brygger's poem can see and touch the materialised ticker symbols and therefore sense them in an unprecedented way. In turn, the process of reading the poem puts the tickers in motion and absorbs the reader into the flowing state of semantically unintelligible symbols. A semantically grounded interpretation of Brygger's text may be ineffectual, but the poem can most certainly be *experienced* in a unique way. On the other hand, the process of materialising virtual symbols in a tangible textual form emphasises the functioning of poetic language – no matter how unintelligible – as a material entity. Brygger's poem and the book containing it are to be considered as corporeal, immanent objects (taking part) in the world, rather than as mediums transmitting transcendent content that depicts or represents the world. The materiality of language in Brygger's poem deals with words as corporeal, sensible and tangible entities that connect with one another. Approaching entities (such as words) first and foremost as material, bodily things that are autonomous in relation to one another can be apprehended – for instance – in terms of Spinozian ethics. The philosophy of the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza is built upon the metaphysical notion that all of nature consists of a single substance that has an infinity of attributes; all creatures are merely modes of these attributes or modifications of this substance. According to Gilles Deleuze, Spinoza thus offered philosophers a new model, which was that of the body. The body

surpasses the knowledge we have of it. (Deleuze 1988, 17–18.) When applied to the realm of language and poetry, this kind of a conceptualisation radically transforms the way in which words are conceived: our knowledge of words – that is, significations and meanings attached to the bodies of autonomous, material words – can never catch up with the operations of bodily words.

In addition to the notion of experimental realism, Brygger’s poem can also be understood in terms of more contemporary phenomena of literary experimentation. The textual material of “NASDAQ 30.5.2010”, being derived solely from a source other than the writer’s imagination, urges one to read the poem as an instance of what is called *found poetry*. Andrew Epstein has defined found poetry as a form of expression rejecting the notions of originality and creativity and thus blurring the relationship between artistic inspiration and appropriation. Epstein traces the belief in the creative potential of found materials in poetry all the way back to modernist invention, but notes also that recent social and technological transformations have shifted the focus towards a crisis of originality and authorship. The use and sampling of found materials serves a purpose of paying close attention to the nature of everyday life. In other words, found poetry acquires a sort of documentary function instead of emphasising, for instance, the aesthetic features of experience and perception. Appropriation as a form of poetic expression can thus be viewed as an attack on the tradition of voice-centred lyrical poetry. (Epstein 2012/2015, 310–315.)

However, the notion of appropriation by no means concludes, let alone overcodes, the material processes of reading Brygger’s poem. Rather, it merely sets the scene for the text to start working properly in terms of its literary functions. For even if the ticker symbols make no reasonable, interpretable sense for a reader with no intricate knowledge of stock market procedures, this doesn’t mean the character strings make *no sense at all*. There is in fact a sort of sense by chance pattern to be found within the seemingly monotonous stream of mostly unfathomable symbols. Out of the approximately three thousand stock symbols constituting the text, some two hundred can be recognised as actual words. These words, however, seem to operate according to a mechanism of *chance*, meaning that the words seem to have absolutely nothing to do with the operations and functions of NASDAQ-listed companies, their stocks or the ticker symbols symbolising these stocks. Neither are these words semantically interconnected in any coherent, meaningful way within the poem. Rather, they appear as arbitrary and even chaotic at times, pointing the text – and also the reader trying to make some sense of the text – in different and often contradictory directions. At the same time these signifying instances function as textural, rhythmically emphatic components that frequently interrupt the a-signifying stream of alphabetically sorted stock symbols. The sensation of chance is further strengthened by the quantifiable fact according to which the roughly two hundred

signifying strings of letters are divided very unevenly among the nine and a half pages of the poem. For instance, on the first page of the poem there are fewer than ten strings that can be read as signifying words, whereas on the fifth page of the whole (reprinted earlier in this article) contains more than thirty signifying strings of letters.

The signifying strings appear as points of discontinuity and transformation among the repetitious stream of ticker symbols. The a-signifying flow of capital, actualised in the sensory and experiential impulses of the poem's reading process, is disrupted and ramified by the chaotic, incoherent and coincidental functioning of the signification process. Familiar elements such as "MAIL", "WOOD", "JAZZ", "LAWS" and "ISIS" intrude by means of the mechanism of signification into the code-like continuity of the tickers. The sole common denominator capable of connecting all the different signifying elements is also found on the fifth page of the poem, halfway through the whole text: "LIFE". Signifying letter strings, however arbitrary, incompatible and unevenly divided, function not only as textural components distributing rhythmic impetus within the text but also as a whiff of life among the inorganic, codified flow of insignificant abbreviations.

Randomised signification, the (in)frequency of which is controlled solely by the loose alphabetical order of the character strings, has two operational effects in Brygger's poem.

The first is an expressive one: by applying a random signifying function among a list of ticker symbols, the poem expresses that stock markets are in no way an autonomous subject affecting only some virtual telecommunications sphere, but rather they are thoroughly entangled with the ordinary lives of millions and millions of people. What is interesting is that Brygger's poem expresses this using only material offered by the source from which the text is appropriated; to the best of my knowledge – based on doing random searches on the Internet with individual character strings contained in the text – no text has been added. The only addition is the poetic framing of the ticker list, effectuated by the materialisation of virtual material on the pages of a poetry book. In other words, the ordinary lives of ordinary people are an inherent quality in a list of stock symbols, rather than a literary function executed by a poet.

The second (and, in terms of literary functions and devices, a more interesting) operative effect of randomised signification in Brygger's poem is a *deterritorialising* one. In their collaborative writing, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari define deterritorialisation – among other things – as creative potential appearing in a given assemblage. In the case of Brygger's poem, this assemblage would be the material(ised) list of some three thousand individual ticker symbols arranged as an alphabetical list and printed on the pages of a poetry book. According to Deleuze and Guattari,

deterritorialisation occurs when components constituting a given assemblage connect via different processes with new elements and components, thus transgressing the corporeal boundaries of the assemblage and creating something new, something that has not previously existed as such. Deterritorialisation is relative movement traversing forms of content and expression. From this it follows that in given cases semiotic components can be more deterritorialised than material components, or vice versa. (Deleuze & Guattari 1987/2005, 87.) In Brygger's poem the signifying strings of characters deterritorialise the list of ticker symbols by giving divergent signifying values to denominators pointing in the first place to particular stocks of particular NASDAQ-listed companies. The two hundred or so character strings that gain a signifying value during the process of reading the poem no longer designate publicly traded shares, but cause discontinuities in the flow of symbols and hence destabilise the seemingly closed sign system of tickers.

Finally, this deterritorialising function also sheds new light upon the previously addressed contradictory relation between the table of contents of the collection and Brygger's poem. In a way, this relation establishes and outlines the rules according to which the whole functions as a poetic text. Just as the title of the poem fails to denominate the text, the character strings gaining a signifying value fail to denominate the stocks that they are supposed to represent in the form of virtual symbols. In "NASDAQ 30.5.2010" the foundness of poetic material functions both as a way of paying attention to a particular a-signifying process that defines the way our lives are controlled and as a catalyst that produces chaotic change in the very base of this process.

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