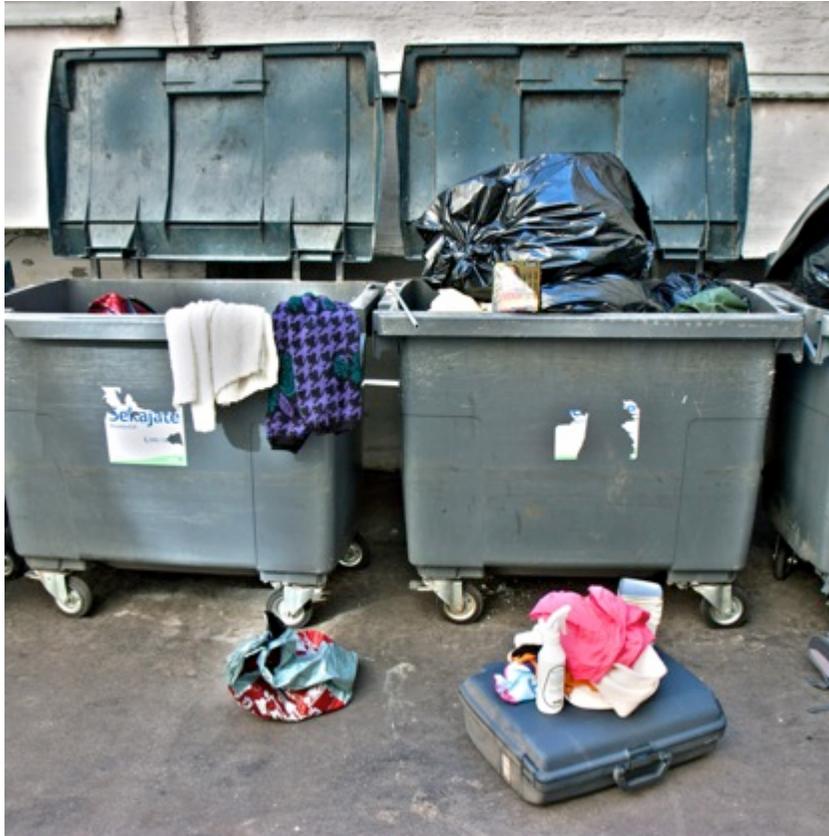


Timo P Vartiainen

TRASH IS LUXURY!

Dumpster Diver's Diary

Home Garbology 2014



Dumpster Diver's Diary tells stories about 40 hours spent waste picking at containers situated in the southern districts and the Kallio district of Helsinki. Forty hours is the average number of weekly working hours in Finland. Even this short time was enough to make me realise that waste picking is hard work!

I picked trash using a stick with a hook at its end; with it, I could lift treasures from the bottom of a general waste container. I also carried a backpack and bags. Every now and then I rode my bicycle.

I had decided to focus on general waste, picking things that had been thrown away though in good condition and still usable. During the time I went waste picking, these objects were heading first for a dump and then, later in the spring, for an incinerator in Vantaa, the neighbouring municipality. Naturally, I also kept some things which were not so fresh but which interested me; these included a nostalgic old herbarium and a wooden tool box. I also took all the mobile phones and laptops no matter what their condition, as hazardous waste had a place in my exhibition collection of things.

The yield of my trash expeditions was 209 kilos of selected "rubbish" (an inhabitant of Helsinki produces in average 305 kilos of general waste in a year); the amount consisted of approximately 800 objects. Most of the objects, primarily clothes, were like new!

At the end of the Diary, there is a list of the objects and rough estimates on the potential of the things reclaimed. Let us all try to come up with new ideas about what to use "trash" for!

The main purpose of my rubbish walks was to build a collage of objects in the exhibition **Home Garbology**. The collection of things would tell about the city that had created the pile of rubbish – about Helsinki. And that's what the things I found indeed do!

– The paper used for the Diary has been reclaimed from a general waste container –

April 30th, waiting for May Day.

One and half hours of waste picking today.

I go waste picking in Torkkelinmäki where horse chestnuts are about to burst into leaf – this feels like a celebration! I notice that most of the containers have just been emptied. I only find a good Marimekko towel with blue-and-white stripes and, close to my home, a red men's cotton shirt. Around noon I set out to ride my bike to my studio through the wealthier district Kruunuhaka and its "rubbish heaven". At first, the containers provide almost nothing. I reach a familiar dustbin in a sympathetic inner court; I've often found nice things here. A few ordinary plastic bags filled with things from someone's home: a men's suit with no signs of wear and tear, a Marttiini knife that looks like new in its leather sheath, fine textiles such as pillow covers, a big, black leather suitcase (with signs of use but unbroken), and tableware. A neat laptop and a good keyboard, a notebook. Hangers again; I take the most solid, wooden ones. A few plates of which the big, flat one is made by Arabia. Artist's equipment: a wooden artist's paint box, a few oil paintings and drawings, piles of oil colours (25 tubes x 20 ml, Goya and Van Dyck), brushes, unused oil pastels, etc.

By the dustbin, I meet a woman who complains affectedly – or maybe fearfully (how should you relate to a dumpster diver?) – about how much we throw away. There's also a man in his forties who stands a few metres away from the dustbin, buzzing at the door; he waits for an answer for a long time but never even glances at the dustbin. I say to the guy: "Hey, look at this great Marttiini knife and leather sheath!" That's when he turns his head, and I also show him a light Jack London -type pinstriped jacket: Would you be interested in this? The man comes closer and decides right away to try the jacket on. When he's got it on, I goad him on saying "It looks good, the sleeves are exactly the right length!" He says: "Yeah, I'll take it, and if I don't use it, I can at least drop it into one of UFF's containers." "Yes, do take it!" The man leaves, wishing me a peaceful May Day celebration. I've got such a pile of things that I can't ride my bike, so I leave it in a bike stand in the inner court of a block, and return home by tram.

I'm now halfway through my waste picking, and wonder how much stuff I'll end up with. I had estimated that I'd get a few cardboard boxes full of things in 40 hours, but I realise I'll have more than 30 boxes!

May 3rd in Torkkelinmäki and its neighbourhood: waste picking for an hour and 20 minutes.

The beautiful evening yielded me a living house plant (jade plant) with a clod of dirt that I place on my windowsill, a shirt for a young man, an elegant black handbag, pieces of jewellery that look like trinkets, a heavy white ceramic bowl (from the Stockmann's, like new), a pair of cool amber sunglasses, [harmaa siisti Ikean kompostiämpäri](#), [silmälasit koteloineen](#), [vanha kauhuvideo](#), [kaks punoskoria \(Ikea?\)](#), [muumi-peltirasia](#). Vaatteita näkyi, nyt yllättäen muutama reikiintynyt – yleensä löytämäni vaatteet ovat olleet ehjiä. Roskiin jäi punoskori ja jättimäinen kasan erilaisia vanhoja videoita mm. "UKK:n hautajaiset". Kaunis käsinleivottu ruisreikäleipä josta leikattu pieni siivu herättää ajatuksia. Lapsuudessani, kun leipä tipahti lattialle, laatokankarjalainen isoäitini nosti nopeasti leivän ylös ja pisti sen hetkeksi päänsä yläpuolelle.

4. toukokuuta. Teen kierroksen Töölössä, noin 1,5 tuntia menee.

Seikkailen pitkin Töölöä – tällä kertaa paras roskis löytyy Apollon taiteilijakodin takapihalta jossa tunnistan rakkaat kollegani punaisena pölyvästä väripigmentistä. Pehmoleluja (iso keltainen, siisti nalle jolla on punainen nuttu), käsin dreijattu keramiikka-astia (matkamuisto), kiva huivi, italialainen vati ym. Otan vain ehjät tavarat. Paras saalis tänään on kuitenkin iso määrä naisten ja miesten vaatteita kahdesta muusta paikasta. Naisten vaatteet ovat hyvälaatuisia ja kauniita (villaa, silkkiä), miesten taas urheilullisia: Niken uudenveroiset housut talvilenkkeilyyn - - -