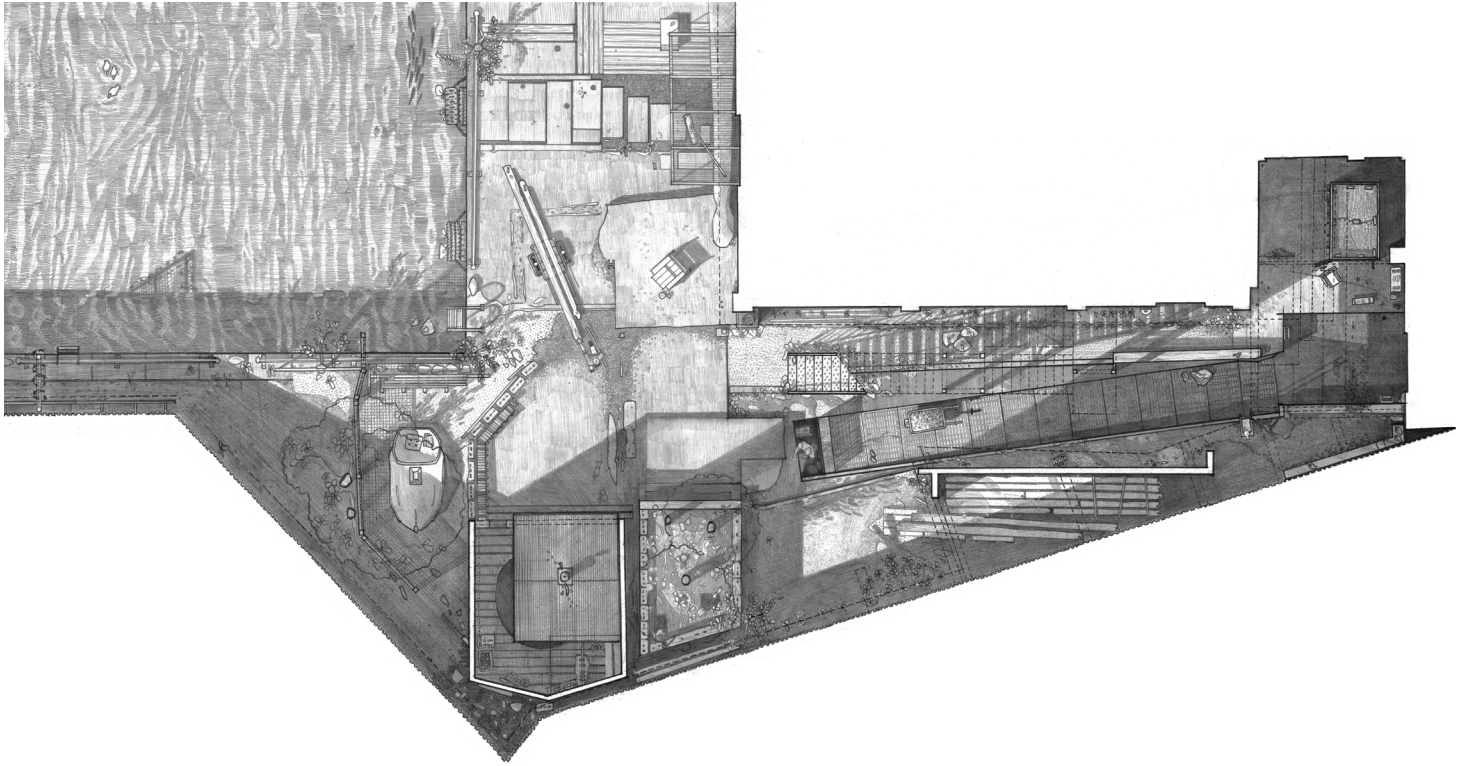


# SCREWS, FAECES, BRANCHES, NEEDLES, LEAVES AND CORPSES.



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60°24'34.7"N 5°19'18.8"E

100cm x 50cm

**SCREWS, FAECES,  
BRANCHES, NEEDLES,  
LEAVES AND CORPSES.**

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## WORDS OF WASTE

The traces and scars make this clear: they came here long before us and, most likely, they will remain long after. They are the natives; over time and through many generations, they have become indigenous to this dark corner. Their droppings tell us that; through waste we communicate: faeces, urine and corpses; waste is fundamental to our interactions, fundamental to our being here together. They do not defecate just anywhere and not just at any time; some places it is piled up high, some places there is nothing.

They have a maximum amount of around ten nests here at one time. Most of them are shrouded by darkness inside of the old steel machinery. Others have no choice but to nest in exposure; there is nowhere else to go; fragility is the rule.

We have come here for the same reasons; we are more alike than we are not.

## FAECES

From Latin, plural of *faex* 'dregs'. Dreg: from Old Norse *dregg* 'sediment'.

1. waste matter discharged from the intestines; excrement.
2. dregs; sediment.

## A WASTE OF WORDS

When you see a bird sitting motionlessly on a branch not making a single sound do you then think that that creature is sad, morose, angry, sleepy, dreamy and up to no good? No? Well then why do you grow suspicious of me? Am I not doing the same? I am not so different from that bird; I have found a branch that fits me and now I am just *being* and nothing more.

'And what if, instead of teaching them to speak, we were to learn to be silent ourselves? If we sided with the delinquents, with the madmen, with the schoolchildren, then justice, the education system, the asylum become grotesque; but if we side with the mute, then language becomes grotesque.'  
— Fernand Deligny, *Graine de crapule* (1945)

## IN THIS DARK CORNER

We never really know what to do; only by paying attention do we tie ourselves into these networks; we have nothing else to offer. No geniuses ever step foot in this space, no elaborate plans are devised, nothing otherworldly happens. Everything revolves around the smallest gestures, les moindres gestes: averting a gaze, walking past a nestling slowly and with your back turned, leaving behind some seeds, suppressing flinching, speaking softly, moving buckets. As much not doing as doing, as much absence as presence.

A few millimetres of sheet metal separates us from the neighbour. In many places it is damaged and the edges are sharp; a hole the size of a human head opens up into their hangar. On their side, they have long ago covered it with an advertising poster; when we stick our arm through and lift it we can look in. Using an angle grinder, we

enlarged the hole and inserted a window of forty by eighty centimetres painted bright red with only two of the six frames containing glass. The opening is still nearly entirely covered by the poster but now one-third of the window peeks out underneath. It does not take long before they notice.

We hear the sound of machines, vacuuming, the loading, cutting and unloading of wood, sirens; they sing along with the popular songs being played over and over again on the radio; conversations are inaudible. Days later the window is removed and the hole is covered with a black sheet of metal; it did not meet the precautionary standards in the event of fire. The only opening that connected us no longer exists; the black sheet stands out like a sore thumb and makes clear where the border is. We can't get any further: on the periphery of the dock there is a passage around the building that is blocked off

by two rows of metal fences and barbed wire; in the basement a door leads to the hangar but it never opens; the underground passage of the old steel machinery is closed off by a mountain of concrete fragments. But scattered along the sheet metal wall are tiny holes from former screws; we bring our faces as close as possible and close one eye; to look through feels like spying. Thousands of timber pieces are organized by section and stacked high on structures in the warehouse; it is enormous.

During the evening, when the radio and machines are shut off, we hear cooing coming from the hangar. A hole near the roof beams offers privileged access. The pigeons sneak in at the risk of losing a few feathers; they need just a few dozen square centimetres. The place is ideal; plenty of landing surfaces, covered by the hangar's roof and neither crows nor seagulls fit. Our neighbour does not know who we are but

allows us to walk around in the warehouse; we do not come here for timber. On the asphalt flooring traces of birds appear just like we expected; dropping, feathers, corpses and branches; it gives away their location: two pigeons are perched on a metal roof beam with the nests not far away; we can hear the squabs crying.

We know the other birds' nesting places must be nearby; seagulls are nesting on top of both our and our neighbour's roofs. From high up the staircase we see ten chicks spread out over the hangar's roof; on top of the silos, thirty metres higher, a seagull keeps watch. Their nests are much more exposed: right underneath the open sky and in immediate proximity to humans. The newborns are not nearly as skittish as the pigeon squabs. Before turning grey and white their feathers look just the same as the eggs: light-brownish with black spots.

We remove the barbed wire from the fence



so birds can land on its surface, covered by the crowns of the trees. Just behind the first fence waste has gathered in a corner. A second gate prevents the neighbour from accessing it, but the space is nevertheless on his property. On the ground there are, among numerous other things, screws, bones and syringes.

Where the silos and the hangar meet, a hidden niche, only accessible by climbing the concrete wall, shelters dust and spiders. Metal hits the wall with the force of the wind and the noise resonates in its volume. After observing the pigeons nesting in the old steel machinery for months we unscrew an iron panel and see for the first time, with the help of a flashlight, the volume of two-hundred cubic meters of silo, empty and uninhabited.

Many species inhabit the dividing line of the properties; they live together on top, under and on either side of the wall.

These limits are rigid yet malleable: a tree's branches and its roots push into the metal and deform it; sand spreads out on both sides; for years, trees along the dock have been taking root around metal rails, using them as support to hang over the waterfront's edge and grow towards the sun.

People imagined and planned as they wished, undertaking major interventions constructing dividing boundaries and emergency infrastructure by undertaking major interventions in the space. Where everything is abandoned, with a distinct architecture resulting from property and safety standards, constructions are inhabited differently than intended.

In this dark corner we find relief. It is not a space of isolation; it is close to everything and everyone; the edges have small pores. Through a hole we spy on the neighbours, one door only opens from within the

basement, the other leads to an auditorium, we hear what happens near the sauna and the waterfront and we can just see who comes running down the stairs; they almost never see us. We knew no one would come here; it is a despised place. Here we are protected, sheltered. We sit here with our backs to a dead-end and look out. It is our niche; here we can just be. There is silence here, the kind that has nothing to do with sound. We stare at the walls, the ground, our own legs, a bird, a splotch of paint, a shadow, a leaf, a feather, a glass, a cigarette without getting restless. Our bodies are at ease; we sense that we are not out of place, that we also belong. It is not personal; others have come here with the same needs. We communicate through these spaces; we speak, shout, listen, whisper, question, share, demand, gift and receive through architecture. And not a word needs to be said.

#### NICHE

From French, literally ‘recess’, from *nicher* ‘to nestle, nest, build a nest’, based on Latin *nidus* ‘nest’. In Sanskrit: *nidah* ‘resting place’.

1. shallow recess in a wall.
2. ecological: position of a species in an ecosystem.

#### PIGEON

From Old French *pignon* ‘young dove’, probably from Late Latin *pipionem* ‘squab, young chirping bird’ from *pipire* ‘to peep, chirp’, of imitative origin.

1. one of several birds of the family Columbidae, which consists of more than 300 species.

#### NOTHING, JUST WIND

When neither the murmuring of a crowd nor the quietness of a small room relieves one of distress there are not very many places to go. Those spaces where a simultaneous experience of both exposure and isolation is within grasp are near extinct. Spaces that acknowledge multitudes; that acknowledge

opposites and their interdependences. To feel both fragility and immortality, meaninglessness and belonging, loneliness and kinship in a single moment. A moment out of watchful eyes, devoid of norms, not accepted, not under control, not secure, can't be captured, can't be profited from and can't be turned useful: Near the river stands a steel structure with a synthetic covering and doors four meters tall. At the back is a small opening at hip-height. Its purpose is unknown. The edges were not straight; it was not cut by a machine and it must've not always been there. Someone might've gotten in and they might still be inside. You listen closely, make some noises to announce your presence and then listen again: nothing, just wind. You dart your flashlight around and are relieved: no one to be seen. Behind a large stack of rubber tires something lay shimmering on the floor: a singular earring and two needles. Others

have come here with stories very different than yours but you were both vulnerable, read that space in the same way and ended up behind the same stack of tires. Perhaps, if even for just a little while, it is no longer fear you experience but an intimate bond to whoever left that earring behind. A sharp noise comes from the way you got in and your flashlight is pointed there before your eyes are. But it was nothing, just wind.

#### ON VALENTINE'S DAY

We were in need of a hiding place. The day before Valentine's day we spent the entire day outside walking through the city. Late in the evening we returned with a pile of artefacts and four leaking trash bags. We wanted to keep them, at least for a while. Everything we carried with *Caretta*, a two-wheeled, handheld cart.

### What we brought:

- tools for Caretta
- trash bags
- working gloves
- backpack
- food
- water bottle
- rainwear
- notebook
- pencil
- camera
- torch
- knife
- rope
- tape

### What we didn't bring:

- phone
- watch
- map

The walk was without precise objectives and with little expectations. Few things guided us: we simply followed trash wherever it led us and collected it. We did not pick up everything; there were criteria that we changed throughout the day as we seemed fit: phones, watches and maps were strictly prohibited, we do not return home before dusk, we do not collect near trash cans, we only take a minimum of notes and pictures, no public transport, no transactions. With these limits we tried to ensure us being fully present in all we were doing; that we were not thinking of matters foreign to the situation, not trying to get ahead, not capturing every moment and not posing for pictures; we were no tourists. The places we passed through were far from special and what we collected was hardly surprising; cigarettes, snus, clothing, plastics and glass were most common. Certain places had much higher and more

diverse concentrations than others. Every single collected item was photographed and stored. For months after, it laid hidden in this shadowy dead-end.

WITH SHOVEL, RAKE AND BROOM

And none of it is ours. The critters that end up here together do not hold much power over the space or one another.

From a couple of nails on the exterior hang a shovel, rake, broom and foldable chair. At the front is a short stick for a single bird to perch on. It is rarely used; they prefer to be higher up. The small room had been standing idle in the basement before we took it apart and rebuilt it underneath the pigeon's nests. It was a drastic decision; anything that closes the distance between the nests and the ground below or interferes with common flight trajectories is reason for concern. It has around the same size as a toilet stall. One could easily sleep in

here; it fits one person lying down. There is a green door that can only be locked from the inside and a small window looking out onto a wall, both of them with white curtains. On the right side, after entering, is a light switch at shoulder-height for the lamp hanging from the ceiling; the light is a warm yellow. High up against the back wall are two shelves and a narrow table at hip-height. They all span the room's full width. One other shelf is right above the door, close to the ceiling. The walls are painted unevenly in a blood-like red. It is full of things: rulers, tape, books, paper, drawings, a camera, photographs, pencils, tea, cups, a spoon, a sleeping bag and mat, a hammock, a headlamp and many jars: jars with screws, feathers, pigeon faeces, bones, sowing needles, thread, rubbers. What it looks like is not much of a concern; the room is not an end in itself. We depend on it heavily; if it were not here we could not be here.

It is what allows us to be outside. All tools and equipment needed to be part of and contribute to the networks are here. When the situation outside becomes heavy for us to bear and there is nowhere else to go it is here that we find a final place of refuge.

#### THE FAECES METAMORPHOSE

It's all changing, it always has been. There come additions, things are rearranged, creatures welcome themselves, relationships are formed; every single speck of dust will have a new beginning. There is destruction, removal, paths are erased, words are left unspoken, the forest is burned, the nest is abandoned and there is blood on the floor. It's all decomposing; critters are buried in the soil and become part of the humus that sustains these trees. They come here to gather branches for their nests; new branches will grow and fall down to the ground. Another critter will gather them,

another nest will be made. So much of that nest comes from this tree, his roots, the soil he's in, the fungi and so much of this tree comes from that nest, the eggs, the bodies, the droppings. How much of the tree bark is pigeon flesh and how much of the pigeon flesh is tree bark? Very little; it is rare for a bird to pass on in this soil. The people don't have the habit of burying them; their corpses are often treated in other manners.

Burials have only started happening recently. The last time was during a day that we later marked as a day of remembrance for reasons unrelated to the burial. It was pure coincidence that it happened on the same day:

The removal of a green ladder signalled that our way of being of this world was transforming. It was a violent act; sparks flew everywhere when the metal was cut. The eight screws keeping the ladder going up to the nests in place were unscrewed;

they have no need for that ladder and neither do we. Their home is not a zoo and their eggs are not attractions; we are not caretakers or sightseers. We are one specie, one animal amongst others in this dark corner and we have to get along. We could be accused of ornithocentrism; many of our actions are in service of winged critters, often disregarding others, sometimes compromising their safety.

First time we slept here it was underneath around twenty pigeons. For the entire night they did not make a single sound; there was dead silence. Around four in the morning a single pigeon started cooing and it was unlike any other sound we ever heard them make. It was as if something was stuck in their throat and they were desperately trying to get it out; perhaps it was a morning call. We walked around the back to put away our sleeping bags. On the floor between the ladder that we had taken

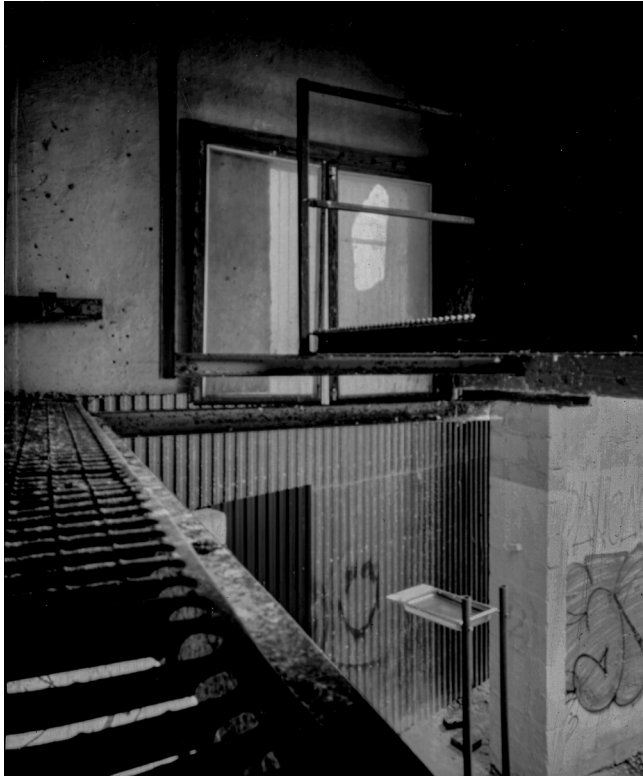
down just the day before and us, no more than fifty centimetres from where we laid, there was a pigeon. He could not be scared off; he made not a single movement. He remained how he was: dead silent. We dug a hole by the trees and buried him a few hours later. In the evening there was a quiz right next to his grave; people pee where we had found his corpse, behind the firewall and underneath the staircase. And the next morning that is where a girl gets consoled by her friend. One pigeon was gathering branches; they are selective with their pickings: this branch is too light, that one too heavy, another too brittle and another too firm; plastic zip ties are ideal. He was tugging at a root exactly where his friend lay now buried. Just a week later he ends up in the soil right beside him. The cause of death unknown, a vacant nesting place, a hooded crow finds its dinner, the intestines are left behind and blood turns brown.



Behind the water container is the firewall and the neighbour's wall. Left are the basement doors and right is the waterfront. Top right is the emergency staircase and in our backs is the dead-end. The nests are above.

exposure: 90min     $\varnothing$  pinhole:  $\approx 0,5\text{mm}$     focal length: 17cm    25,4cm x 20,3cm





Walkways near the nests look out and have trouble-free access to the water container. Empty eggshells are often pushed down; squabs have stumbled out of their nests and fallen to their deaths before.

exposure: 240min    ø pinhole: ≈0,5mm    focal length: 17cm    25,4cm x 20,3cm



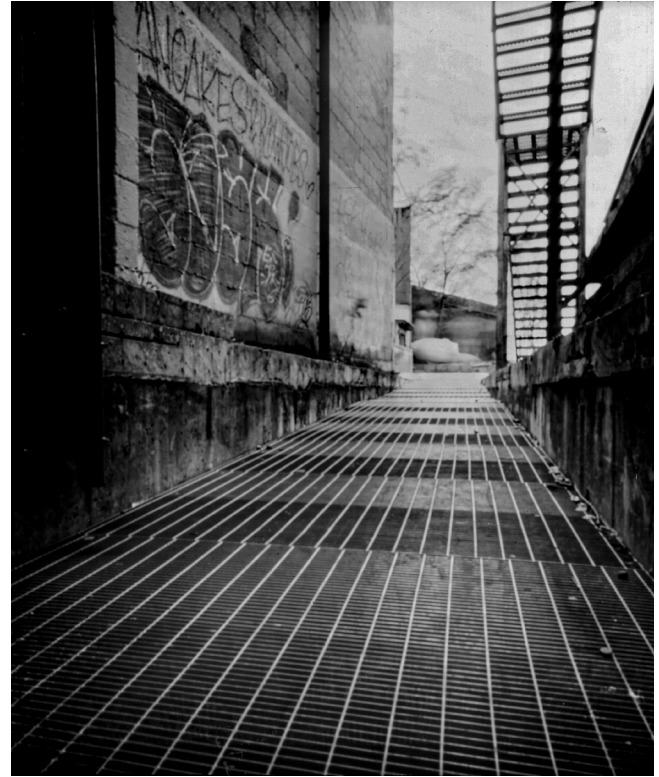
Before a bucket was placed below the rainpipe it would gather on the ground. The puddles they drunk from would drain away quickly. On the right a cable runs into the basement providing the little room with electricity.

exposure: 30min    ø pinhole: ≈0,5mm    focal length: 17cm    25,4cm x 20,3cm



Diffuse daylight reaches the area in front of the little room; inside the light bulb shows; everything else remains in the shadows for good. Two boxes allow storage; the smaller one was made to fit Caretta.

exposure: 45min     $\varnothing$  pinhole:  $\approx 0,5\text{mm}$     focal length: 17cm    25,4cm x 20,3cm



Along the entire length of the path leading to the basement are metal grills. It is near impossible to walk on them without making a sound; they reveal that someone is coming long before they get close.

exposure: 6min     $\varnothing$  pinhole:  $\approx 0,5\text{mm}$     focal length: 17cm    25,4cm x 20,3cm



A hole with a diameter of around fifty centimetres leads to the nests; the edge serves as a point of arrival and departure. The white dot to the right is the end of the wobbly rainpipe.

exposure: 9min     $\varnothing$  pinhole:  $\approx 0,5\text{mm}$     focal length: 17cm    25,4cm x 20,3cm



People, mostly party-goers, have started peeing in the sandy area between the firewall and the neighbour ever since the pile of wood was moved. Caretta has parked against the wall.

exposure: 45min     $\varnothing$  pinhole:  $\approx 0,5\text{mm}$     focal length: 17cm    25,4cm x 20,3cm



Corpses of deceased pigeons are buried in the soil of the trees straight ahead. Where the lowest branches spread out a birdhouse is just visible; it is unoccupied. In the wall on the left there are plenty of spyholes.

exposure: 50min     $\varnothing$  pinhole:  $\approx 0,5\text{mm}$     focal length: 17cm    25,4cm x 20,3cm



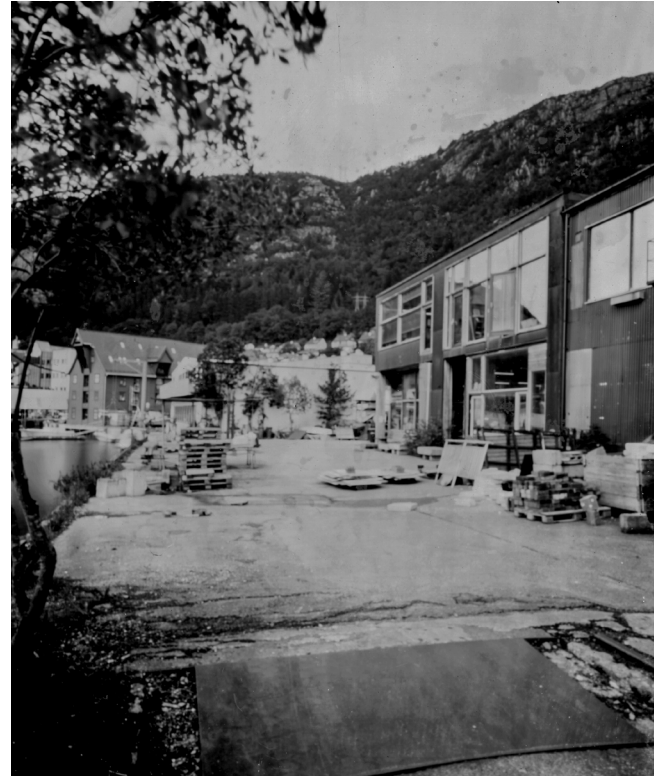
Looking down the dock from the base of the trees the mountains appear. To the left, by the tree on the waterfront's edge, is the stone oven.

exposure: 4min     $\varnothing$  pinhole:  $\approx 0,5\text{mm}$     focal length: 17cm    25,4cm x 20,3cm



Tides regularly accumulate things at the bottom of the ladder: advertisement flyers, bouys, hats, construction wood, trash bags. A red birdhouse hangs in the trees concealed by branches.

exposure: 3min     $\varnothing$  pinhole:  $\approx 0,5\text{mm}$     focal length: 17cm    25,4cm x 20,3cm



Our presence and influence fades away the further up the dock; there is much more traffic and eyes keeping watching here.

exposure: 4min     $\varnothing$  pinhole:  $\approx 0,5\text{mm}$     focal length: 17cm    25,4cm x 20,3cm



ø pinhole:  $\approx 0,5\text{mm}$

focal length: 66mm

12,8cm x 8,9cm

## ORNITHOCENTRISM

Derived from the Ancient Greek *órnis* 'bird'.

1. a belief in birds and their existence as the most important and central fact in the universe.

## IT ALL DRIPS DOWN

We put a large bucket six meters underneath a dripping rain pipe. It stands on an uneven surface; when the bucket fills and the water eventually flows over the edge it does so only on one side. There, underneath the water flowing out, we put the lid of a metal cooking pot. And so the rain goes from sky to roof to pipe to bucket to lid to bird. Only a tiny fraction of the rain pouring down actually reaches a pigeon; on average, a pigeon will drink around ten centilitres of water per day. Most of the water misses the lid and ends up on the ground. From there it then creeps along the floor and goes downward, passing by a metal roster, until it reaches a space below filled with heaps

of concrete left behind after construction works years before. Much of it is flooded. This space continues in a straight line for thirty meters and reaches a dead-end below our neighbour's. Along the entire length run the remains of steel machinery from the building's past activities that were presumably once part of the structures the pigeons are nesting in. It has long been abandoned now; the water has turned orange because of rust and on top of the machinery dirt has gathered out of which a plant has grown.

We used the water from that bucket to clean; often we fully emptied it. Their closest source of water had then dried up; it was unacceptable to continue in that way. In the kitchen we found a metal cooking tray able to hold five litres of water and we attached a metal plate functioning as a landing on one side. Two long poles were screwed into the concrete to elevate the tray two meters

and a half from the ground. For weeks they were suspicious of it. Only when the younger generation had shown that there is no danger in drinking from the container they all accepted it. They sometimes perch on there five at a time, both drinking and bathing. They seem to be comfortable up there; they do not flee with people standing right underneath.

The water gets dirty and turns greenish. We throw it out and clean the container with a brush that fits the width only just. We never have to look to know how much water is in there; it is easy to tell just by listening. After some light rain the water drips down with a steady rhythm close to our average walking pace. It takes around two hours for the container to be filled to the brim. The sound of drops on the metal is loud, sharp, harsh; the metal shouts. When it hits the water it is like a small puddle; the sound is much softer, it is gentle; the water whispers.

In between those two states there is a short time you hear both. When it hasn't rained for some hours the rhythm is slow and a small que forms at the drainage hole; for every two raindrops falling in there is one that exits and falls down to the ground. During heavy rain there is a continuous flow; the sound drowns out everything else. Wind makes the pipe wobble up, down and sideways; much of the water then hits the edges or misses the container entirely. Whenever a bird lands on or departs from the structure it shakes in a way similar to the pipe and the rhythm of the departing drips is temporarily sped up.

#### THEY LEAVE THEIR MARK

On the lower part of the firewall are two graffiti. They are painted by the same hand and both spell out SOSH!; one is painted in grey on a white base with red contours signed EASK, the other is painted white on



a grey base with red contours signed ASKE. The 'o' is a character wearing a hat and the dot of the exclamation mark is a smiley. They must have come here at night for one or maybe two hours. There are two other tags: VBSU and ESSR. Above two messages are written: EASK 4 EVER and PANCAKES & BLOWJOBS.

The southern façade is exposed to intense rains and winds. She's more than forty meters tall and has her feet in the water. A while ago some of the grey façade panels were blown off; the aluminium edges were no longer able to hold them. Most of them ended up down below on the dock, underneath the trees and the emergency staircase. The area is later closed off by a construction fence near the stone oven and the sauna is no longer accessible. A roof is built above the first fifteen steps of the staircase; the façade will be changed. A team of four builds scaffolding along the façade's

full height; the operation seems simple but is organized carefully. Countless panels are unscrewed, taken down and removed from the area. Weeks later the entire façade is gone; the glass wool insulation sees the light of day.

Soon two graffiti cover the insulation on the seventh floor. They did not wait for it to be covered again, the opportunity was too beautiful: a scaffolding erected against the tallest building around. They climbed the gate and went up through the new passage before painting MBK in chrome with a black outline, now visible from the entire neighbourhood. Before long they are covered by new panels: two pallets arrived a few days before; screw by screw, panel by panel, the façade is dressed in gleaming white. Around the seven emergency exits, the window on the fifth floor, the staircase's structure and the south-western edge more attention is required; the building needs to

be waterproof. The taggers return before the scaffolding is dismantled; two new graffiti are painted: vbsu on both the fifth and sixth floor. They make their way to the attic and roof and paint three more; always the same operating plan: thick, three-dimensional letters with outline accompanied by a (crew) tag. Solid white with black outline SAKE and SA on the ventilation, solid orange with white outline LENGE LEVE BOG painted with a roller on top of the building not so far from the much older CHILLOUT.

When the staircase was inaccessible to everyone else the taggers took their chances. They leave behind two empty spray cans, a few caps and more signatures: SQUASH, VBSU, FUCKERS, ESSR, ASKE, YESKAFE, IGIR, DARLIG, 4M and WC. The aluminium frames, crosspieces, guardrails, ladders and wooden boards making up the scaffolding are eventually taken down. The workers leave behind eight OSB plates at the

bottom of the staircase, the aluminium edges at the feet of the trees, a pallet with the remaining panels in front of the sauna and an innumerable amount of screws on the ground. We later moved those OSB plates; slugs were brutally dislodged from them before moving on to other boards and branches behind the trees.

#### GRAFFITI

From Italian, plural of *graffito* 'a scribbling', from Greek *graphein* 'to scratch, draw, write'.

1. markings, as initials, slogans, or drawings, written, spray-painted, or sketched on a sidewalk, wall of a building or public restroom, or the like.

## ON THE FLOOR OF THE DOCK

A mass of bodies, organized in an infinite number of networks, conceals the surface of the concrete. Some of these organisms go through radical changes: trees grow around the metal rail and their branches lean on the gate separating us from the neighbouring plot; trees more than ten metres high grow in one to three cubic metres of soil; fifty centimetres of sand and waste are enough for the plants to stabilize, their roots penetrating into the smallest gaps in the slab; slugs feed on and inhabit OSB boards; piles of faeces cover several square meters of impermeable concrete; lichen grow in each hollow containing a few grains of sand pushed by the wind and watered by the rain; in the water, molluscs attach themselves to the smooth legs of the metal ladder; flowers grow in the earth contained by car tires hanging from the dock; cod take refuge under the

cap of the foundations; pigeons lose down feathers which the sparrows collect for their nests; flies and midges decompose bodies and feed on the excrement; woodlice, ants and worms roam through layers of earth, wood and sand transformed, nourished and destroyed by rain. They are in constant activity and remain fragile. These exchange networks do more than communicate, they live together; an entire ecosystem adapted to this immense expanse of concrete.

A ladder going down to the sea, attached to the dock's metal rails by rope, gave access to a seat suspended above the water. The seat was held by metal poles connected to a concrete block acting as counterweight. The structure started swaying with the wind and the seating was washed away. We deconstructed that passage to make a new one. Two of the structure's poles we would later use. A tree has grown around the metal rail that we cut to make room. We

attach wooden steps to the structure of the new ladder and drill holes in the concrete to fasten it. It is the first time that we can sit on the edge of the dock with our feet dangling.

The waterfront was pushed back by the foundations of the dock; a fifteen metre high mass of concrete sinks into the rocks of the seabed and extends eighty metres. The slab's surface is irregular. Cuts and sawblade marks stand out on the smooth parts revealing steel reinforcements. Ten cubic meters of concrete was extracted to enable access to the silo basement. The exposed surfaces are sporadically covered with layers of tar, wooden planks, pebbles or sand and a mixture of metal parts, branches, plastic, roots, screws, faeces, cigarette butts, leaves and dust.

Numerous stacks of materials lay on the dock; some of them are only here in passing, others have been here for years. In between

the firewall and the neighbour lays an eight cubic metre stack of wood on the sand that, once assembled, forms a building over ten metres both in length and width. On top of a base of pallets five levels of wood were interspersed by thinner crosspieces. Only a part was covered by a roof seven meters higher, most of it was exposed to rain and wind. We moved the entire structure to the other side of the dock with Caretta. She allowed us to transport between three and ten pieces at a time; room by room and floor by floor we reassembled the pile seventy metres further under a green tarp protecting it from wind and rain. They are fragile; many break under their own weight; we would have preferred to crush the majority of wood to nourish the soil. A few of the strongest beams in the pile were used in a construction just days later.

## WHEN RAKING LEAVES

“Like I wrote in one of the previous mails: a very good sleeping bag and warm clothes that are allowed to get dirty and protect you against rain or snow. Work gloves are useful, boots too.”

Except for trees there was not much to see; every now and then a pile of wood lay by the side of the path. The sun had gone down and from midway up the mountain we could just see the closest town. The mountain was slowly eroding the path; it wanted to restore its former unbroken slope. Only by building up a mass of leaves, branches and stones on one side and thus slightly tilting the path against the forces slowly washing it away could we be sure that, at least until the next heavy rainfall, we will be able to walk here again; the paths are fragile and perishable. To bend down for every branch and stone that ends up one the ‘wrong’ side is common sense here.

Our timetables, alarm clocks and deadlines set to the hour, minute and second, do not fare very well here. The forest mocks our watch; we are almost ashamed to bring it. Here, time is not something that ticks and the weekend does not exist. How awful! Time is light, temperature, wind, rain, drought, fire, seasons, decades, centuries, generations. And whoever nestles in this forest better follows its schedule. It is like a journey to nowhere and with no end; it is wise then to keep a steady pace with small steps instead of hurrying.

The electricity pylons were planted here decades ago. The intensity of the power lines’ sound depends on the current running through. Some days the crackling drowns out every sound of the birds, insects, horses and humans and at other times they come close to whispering. But never are they quiet. Excavators and bulldozers made room for them and they did not use the paths the

mountain dictates and the ground-bound critters had been traversing for eternity: the paths along the valleys' depths, the thalweg, and the mountain's ridges.

The house that we came to, to rest and recover, was not an end in itself. It was a means that made it possible for us to be outside the entire day and it had to stay that way. There is no use in changing it so that it would provide more comfort. That would take away attention from what mattered on this part of the mountain. In winter stalactites hang from the rafters in the sleeping room and there is dead silence; in spring the morning chirping of birds is overwhelming. All meals are prepared on the wood-burning stove; breakfasts and dinners take place at the long and heavy wooden table. "Are you guys going to set an alarm or should I wake you up?"

We got to work as soon as there was enough daylight. Just outside, during the

night, a family of wild boars had dug up the earth in search of food. We started working on a slope with a dense carpet of trees. In fact, there were too many of them. At a forest's edge, *la lisière*, where two ecotypes merge, there is often a higher species diversity than in either of the individual ecotypes. The specific lighting condition, both shady and sunny, attracts plants, insects, birds and predators that aren't adapted to survive solely in the shadows of the forest canopy or in the exposure of the open field. Over the next few days we made a small clearing in the forest; we had sawn down trees, cut the logs into lengths of one meter, cleaved them in four, stripped them of moss and then stacked them. After drying for no less than one year they would then be suitable as firewood. We did not do this haphazardly; we worked very neatly and the placement of each stack was not at random. We knew that this was no trivial thing. "I only walk as

far as your furthest pile of firewood. When I do not see any more I turn back.”; people get a sense of comfort from seeing the piles. It assures them that they are not moving through terrain that is entirely unknown or unpredictable. It allows them to be outside. We noticed that where we had been cleaving the logs and had arranged two piles of firewood the terrain had become much flatter: there was a small plateau. It had become a distinct place and parts of the slope we had been walking on to get to the main path had slowly become a path in itself; we were creating architecture. And no, not “architecture in the broadest sense”. The opposite: architecture in its most narrow sense, in its most essential: simply making good places to be. And it does not matter whether that is done by pen, broom, knife, bucket, bottle or ruler. A building is only one of many instruments and it can be a very blunt one.

In this area we encounter countless species of tree, orchid, flower, mushroom, fungus, bird, mammal, reptile, insect; we identify what will feed us and what will poison us; under a pylon we find the skull of a chamois and the droppings of a lynx. In the woodlands around only a few species dominate. They are forest ruins; former timber plantations that were abandoned because they ceased to be economically viable.

We are far from the first to come to here and far from the last. Many have been here with reasons each to their own. About once yearly the court facilitates a boy under the age of eighteen to come here and stay for a couple of months. They carry with them the labels of ‘criminal’ and ‘troubled youth’. One of them was judged by psychiatrists to be mentally insane but after working together our verdict was not the same: with this boy absolutely nothing is wrong.

A little lower on the mountain there is a building that plays a very different role than the other. It was not far from collapsing and there have only been few repairs; it should remain abandoned. The abandoned house is here seen as an example of a space with a high degree of publicness. Public as the opposite of privatized space; the space nobody can own where there are no norms, where no one holds control over any other and where you find those that have nowhere else to go. It is where one goes to do drugs, where a teenager goes to smoke, where a gay man is pushed to meet like-minded people and where gypsies and homeless people seek shelter. A space of powerlessness, not of power. It is where you go when you want to do what you were told you ought not to do or when, for once, you don't want to be anything. Where you can be useless and just *exist*.

THALWEG

From German: *thal* 'valley' + *weg* 'road, path'.

1. path along the bottom of a valley.

#### IN THE BASEMENT

A couple keeps flying into the silo basement and their intentions are obvious. To nest there would be their demise; the doors do not open often and there is no other way out. Transforming the silos into an enormous columbarium does not require much imagination or energy. Each silo could house a colony of hundreds. Their requirements are few: the main concern is the egg rolling away. Niches sized approximately 45x30x30 with a flat surface and a small lip on the front are sufficient. They can't be cut into the concrete walls, there is not enough thickness; a separate structure is needed. Arrivals and departures fly through drilled holes with a diameter of no less than twenty centimetres. There should be plenty of



light coming through as a pigeon's vision is limited in total darkness. Landing would be made easier with countless wooden ledges, pegs and sticks both interior and exterior.

Two summers after a new relationship could be established. In the niches that have not gotten occupied by then there will be an opportunity to place funerary urns. They will not be fastened in place. They might remain untouched, one might nest alongside or, if empty spaces run out and more room is needed, get knocked down, shattering into pieces. That is not a tragic thing; it is simply the first step of a new phase for the ashes and it comes with a loud bang. Instead of being preserved and locked up for as long as possible the cycle continues; the ashes soon return to the soil. The urn is only temporary, death is only temporary. At the bottom of the silo is a concoction of smashed urns, faeces, corpses and ashes. It is not waste; it all gets harvested.

#### COLUMBARIUM

Based on the Latin *colomba*, which is based on the bird family of pigeons and doves (*columbidae*).

1. from Latin, literally 'pigeon-house', from *columba* 'pigeon'.
2. a chamber or wall with small niches for urns containing the ashes of the dead.

#### COLUMBARIAN

1. a dove-keeper, a pigeon-fancier.

#### GUANO

From Spanish: 'fertilizer, dung'; Latin American Spanish *huano* 'dung' from Quechua *wamu* 'dung for fuel, fertilizer'.

1. the accumulated excrement of seabirds or bats. High content of nitrogen, phosphate and potassium, all key nutrients essential for plant growth.

## ROSA GOT REVENGE

It has long been forgotten what she looked like, where she came from, what she did or what she sounded like. In fact, it is not quite sure if anyone ever knew much about her. All that is certain is that her name was Rosa.

The house she lived in must've been there for a long time; it's character was that of an old farm building. It stood about five meters from the edge of the street and had two windows looking out onto it; one large and one small. The white, thin curtains were closed most of the time. The house was hugged by trees from all sides, except for the one facing the street. There were enough of them to speak of a small forest. A wide path led to the backside of the house. Right there, by the entrance, was a clearing in that small forest where the sun could come through. The light would hit parts of a large pile of firewood and the ground

surrounding it, everything else would be left in the shadows.

On a warm day the smell of dirt, wood and leaves would be just as intense as in a larger forest. Rosa never really tried to influence this place much; it always seemed as if she let everything there make their own choices. The many birds and insects that lived there seemed to be the proof of that.

A couple of years after Rosa had passed away, due to unknown reasons, three young boys out of the grown ups' eyes did what they ought not to do: *It's abandoned anyway! The lady that lived here is dead now and ever since nothing has happened here and they've just let it rot!* Seconds later one of the tall windows got smashed into pieces. They threw dozens of stones and pieces of wood until there was not a single shard of glass still attached to the window frames. And even then, when the sound of glass breaking that they lived for then and there had come to a halt, they

continued throwing. It was as if they were trying to fill the entire house. They did not have any intention of entering even though that seemed like the obvious thing to do now they had an easy way in. Perhaps they were too shy, had too much fear of getting caught or perhaps they simply wanted to say what they thought of the fact that that place was no longer being cared for: *Damn you, you fools!* Feelings of guilt came over them: surely Rosa would be furious and in tears if she knew what they did? An angry shout from the neighbour sent them running away. A month later they saw that heavy wooden shutters were placed over the broken windows. They weren't quite sure what to think of them.

When one of them returned, years later, it became clear from afar that things had changed. Not a single trace of that place was left; not a single tree, not a single brick, not a single gutter. The smell of dirt was

gone and so were the birds. Thinking back their guilt fades away a little; perhaps Rosa, instead of scolding them, would've been right there alongside them, being the first to throw a stone, still furious and in tears: *Damn you, you fools!*

#### THE MUTANTS HATCHED

Most of them have left; without them it's lonely here. Heavy rains, snow, cold winds, intense heat, loud noises; we would both come to take shelter here. We do not have much trouble understanding one another. We would see, smell, breathe, touch and hear the same things: back and forth cooing, squabs crying for food, sparrows chirping, the neighbour's radio, footsteps in the sand, people running down the staircase and crows walking up, doors opening and closing, seagulls guarding their nests, the elevator, objects being dragged along the basement floor, wood being sawn,

holes being drilled, glass shattering, rain dripping down, the creaking of a wooden floor, someone crying, people peeing, screws, grains, rocks, zip-ties, branches, ropes, slugs and cigarettes on the floor. We observed one another for hours on end and sometimes we tried to get close.

They told us of their departure beforehand; when the days grew warmer and longer and the youngest ones had gotten competent in flying and scavenging their visits here became infrequent and short. We are newcomers; we do not know why or where they have gone, we do not know whether they will return or not. Perhaps they move with the changing seasons, perhaps we had gotten too close.

It might be wise for them not to return. The area will transform and a future here looks bleak for them. Soon our neighbour will move away and much will be demolished. In their place will come

residential buildings. The winged, egg-laying natives were not invited to the table when the initial plans were made. And even if they were it would not have helped much; their cooing would've been in vain. To ensure their disappearance a diligent bookkeeper will reserve a budget for stainless steel bird spikes. They fly high but are looked down upon. From inside the office their calls are not heard, their eggs are not seen.

They inhabit the borders and the area in between. When they permeate the edges it is not for long; they do not survive there, their bodies have not been adapted. The walls sheltering the nests from the elements and uninvited visitors will be torn down. There will come a small street and the planners are not fond of dark corners; the street lights will never turn off. Everything will be revealed and no longer will pigeons come here to nest. If that is indeed how things will proceed, then let us be clear

about who used to be here and how they lived their lives:

For years, a small colony of pigeons had been nesting in the ruins of a former factory. Their numbers varied throughout the years and seasons but, generally, they ranged between ten and twenty individuals. They had started inhabiting a space that others despised and abandoned long ago. They did not pay rent but had gradually acquired informal nesting rights here instead. If they were to suddenly find themselves far away from home in a distant part of the world they would not try to get a tan or take family pictures. Rather, they would do their very best to return to this one particular dark corner as quickly as possible. But they would never have to travel such gruelling distances; they are not racing pigeons; they live here permanently.

They would form lifelong pairs and mourn the loss of their closest ones; they

form strong bonds in the same way we do. A pair is able to lay eggs year-round but it would mostly be during spring and fall and almost always two eggs would be laid. Both parents would take turns guarding the nest, brooding over the eggs and feeding the squabs with crop milk and regurgitated food. Despite the near-permanent care, many of the young would not make it past the juvenile phase due to a lack of food, disease or predators. Although the area is shared mainly with seagulls, magpies, crows, sparrows and humans conflicts are rare. Some of the bigger birds are known to prey on the eggs and in desperate times the pigeons' corpses are also part of the menu.

The humans did not often consciously interact with the pigeon community. From the faeces on the floor they deduced that they lived in this corner but that was about all they knew. Without knowing, they had, to some extent, domesticated each other:

the birds knew that the closeness of humans meant that predators would keep a distance and that they would regularly have access to foods the humans discarded. In their turn, the humans knew that the presence of these birds and their droppings said something about this space. It meant that this space was not subject to absolute control, that many rules did not hold up very well here and that, contrary to the main narratives of their time, it was not a sin to be or do nothing, be useless and without purpose here.

Their being there together was about reciprocity; they slowly became something else together: the one more bird-like and the other more human-like. They were morphing into one another; it would no longer make any sense to refer to their offspring as either human or bird; there are too many similarities for them to be seen as distinct species. But these new

mutants would have no chances of survival here either. When the human-like pigeons flee so do the pigeon-like humans. Their habitats cease to overlap; soon they forget the intimate interdependency of their wellbeing.

#### MUTANT

From Latin, *mutantem* ‘changing’, present participle of *mutare* ‘to change’.

1. an animal or plant that is physically different from others of the same species because of a change in its genes.

#### SQUAB

Of uncertain origin; from Swedish *skvabb* ‘loose, fat flesh’.

1. a nestling pigeon, still unfledged.
2. the meat of such a bird, used as food.

#### COO (plural coos)

Of imitative origin.

1. the murmuring sound made by a dove or pigeon.
2. (by extension) an expression of pleasure

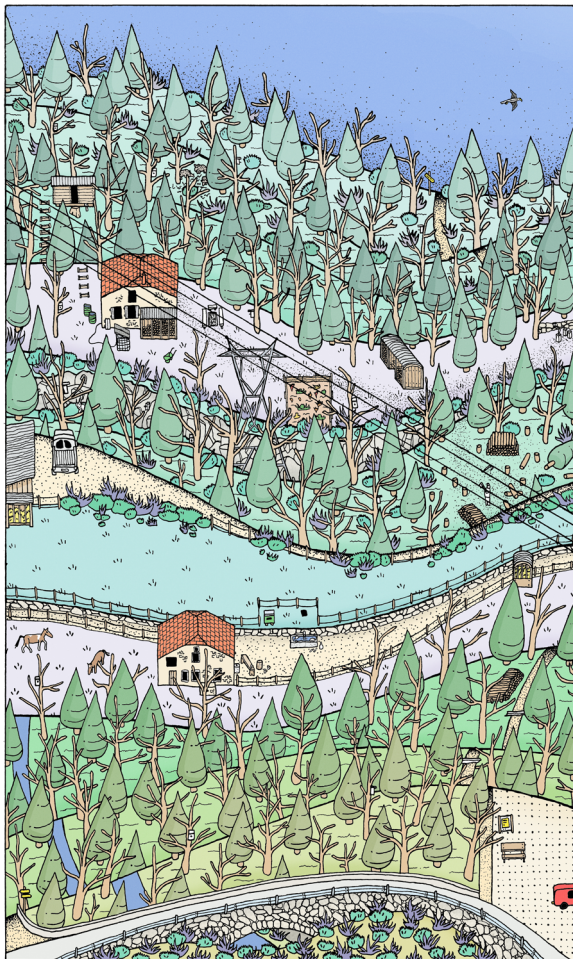
### *Afterword*

*Screws, faeces, branches, needles, leaves and corpses* was compiled at the end of June 2024. The story took place between then and December of the previous year. There is much more to learn from the lives that were and are still being lived there and although the relationships and networks there showed no signs of deterioration and, instead, seemed to grow stronger, our roles came to an abrupt end.

The building was inhabited by a school of architecture where we had certain obligations and, as part of those, our stay was limited in time. Rarely were those obligations a limiting factor; few times doubts were expressed over whether things were heading in an appropriate direction

but the vast majority of communication was guided by encouragement, trust and understanding even when there was “very little to show for”.

During some of the talks recordings that were made over those months were projected onto a wall; they can be found online under the same title. Both the book and the recordings are autonomous entities; they are like two individuals that have lively conversations when together but do not depend on each other and do just fine when separated.



When Raking Leaves

70cm x 50cm





WORDS OF WASTE, A WASTE OF WORDS.  
IN THIS DARK CORNER: NOTHING, JUST WIND.  
ON VALENTINE'S DAY,  
WITH SHOVEL, RAKE AND BROOM,  
THE FAECES METAMORPHOSE;  
IT ALL DRIPS DOWN; THEY LEAVE THEIR MARK  
ON THE FLOOR OF THE DOCK.  
WHEN RAKING LEAVES IN THE BASEMENT  
ROSA GOT REVENGE; THE MUTANTS HATCHED.



60°24'34.7"N 5°19'18.8"E

100cm x 80cm

The traces and scars make this clear: they came here long before us and, most likely, they will remain long after. They are the natives; over time and through many generations, they have become indigenous to this dark corner. Their droppings tell us that; through waste we communicate: faeces, urine and corpses; waste is fundamental to our interactions, fundamental to our being here together.

Most of the nests are shrouded by darkness inside of the old steel machinery. Others have no choice but to nest in exposure; there is nowhere else to go; fragility is the rule.

We have come here for the same reasons; we are more alike than we are not.

**SCREWS, FAECES,  
BRANCHES, NEEDLES,  
LEAVES AND CORPSES.**