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»Svalbard« and the end of Nordic exceptionalism  
in Ralf Andtbacka's *Wunderkammer* (2008)

The relations between space, place and literature are manifold, and need specific means when examined. Geocriticism, a branch within literary and spatial studies, offers methods to do that as it puts a special emphasis on the interaction between literature and the world. Taking its point of departure in recognizable, existing places referred to in fictional and non-fictional texts, it studies the oscillation between real and fictional places and argues that all places are simultaneously real and imagined.<sup>1</sup> Dan Ringgaard and Thomas A. DuBois put a similar perspective forward in the recently published *Nordic Literature* when they describe the interaction between literature and real Nordic places: »Literature plays a part in the production of place, and place is a part of literature. Literature redistributes place, takes it, transforms it, and returns it«. <sup>2</sup> The speciality of the connection of the ›virtual‹, internal forms of spatiality within a literary text and the various external spatial forms lies in the indirect referentiality of literature.<sup>3</sup> After all, authors have an advantage as »[...] they are not constrained to produce only a realistic portrayal of the world«, Robert T. Tally states.<sup>4</sup>

Taking my point of departure in the geocritical perspective concerning the relation between spatiality and reality, I will here study the representation of a specific Nordic place, Svalbard in *Wunderkammer* (2008) by Finland-Swedish poet Ralf Andtbacka. *Wunderkammer* is a humorous, abundant, and experimental collection of poetry, characterized by language materialism and postmodernism. It centres on collecting (of objects, concepts, words, languages, phenomena, sounds and letters, and so on), and writing about it, and the dominant milieus in which this activity takes place are the flea markets and the working room of the author in Vasa, a town in West-coast of Finland.

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1 TALLY: 2011, x–xi. For a critical overview on Bertrand Westphal's concept 'geocriticism' and a somewhat broader understanding of it, see TALLY: 2013, 112–114, 140–145.

2 RINGGAARD and DUBOIS: 2017, 21.

3 PRIETO: 2013, 2.

4 TALLY: 2013, 144.

The town of Vasa is however only a diminishingly small part of the spatiality put forward in Andtbacka's book. *Wunderkammer* is—literally—shot through with spaces and places of all kinds and on all levels. It includes an exhaustive variety and abundance of spatial forms, often described in a playful and self-reflexive manner. The collection of poetry includes poems referring to geographical places from all over the planet, and poems that refer to material, social, linguistic, cultural, and economic spaces as well as utopian and imaginary ones. Small tiny boxes and far away existing, real planets occur in it side by side. Furthermore, the objects and technological, historical developments depicted in it—for example cables that unite continents, and objects that move from one place to another—create connections between people and places far from each other.

Despite the fact that the book maps locations all over the globe, it seldom refers to Nordic places. Thus, the poem here chosen for study, »12 assemblage (Svalbard)« makes what first seems an interesting exception.<sup>5</sup> It is, however, an illustrative example of the complexity of postmodern spatiality. A further scrutiny shows that it activates several aspects of interest to geocriticism, and even (Nordic) exceptionalism, that is, the view according to which some people or countries—for example the Nordic countries—are entitled exceptional treatment,<sup>6</sup> or that the Nordic countries share common policies, which distinguish them from the rest of the world.<sup>7</sup> According to Anna Rastas, »the potentialities of the notion of exceptionalism lie in its utility for describing how particular interpretations of histories and ›our‹ (national or Nordic) involvements in specific developments are constructed and employed for strategic purposes: for ›selective amnesias‹ [...]«. <sup>8</sup> My questions are the following: Why does Svalbard occur in this collection of poetry that rarely takes up Nordic places? Which are the phenomena and attributes connected to Svalbard, and what is the meaning of it in relation to the rest of the poem and the world depicted in *Wunderkammer*? What kind of a place does referring to Svalbard produce here? Which are the strategic purposes it is used for? Finally, how does the poem relate to Nordic exceptionalism?

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5 I would like to express my gratitude to Lieven Ameel, a colleague of mine in spatial terms, whose ideas have greatly enriched my reading of »12 assemblage (Svalbard)«.

6 RASTAS: 2012, 89.

7 LOFTSDÓTTIR and JENSEN: 2012, 2.

8 RASTAS: 2012, 89.

There are several spatial forms of importance for Andtbacka's book. I will start by presenting the three central ones before I enter a discussion of the meaning and exceptionality of ›Svalbard‹. First, ›Wunderkammer‹, which announces that the book belongs to the art historical tradition of the cabinet of curiosities that evolved and flourished during the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries; second, the ›Narrow Room‹, a spatial metaphor used to depict Finland-Swedish minority literature; and third, postmodern spatiality, which according to Bertrand Westphal is characterized by polytopy, »a composition of different spatialities«, and isotropy, »systemic indeterminacy«. <sup>9</sup> These spatial forms—a tradition within art history, a minority literature metaphor, and the ›chronotope‹ of postmodernism—have their roots in different times, disciplines, and traditions. They are already as such complex representations of spatiality, and their simultaneous copresence and the intriguing way in which they unite in Andtbacka's poem, enhances the spatial density of the book even more. In my analysis, I will scrutinize these three spatial forms in terms of the categories essential to geocritical practice, namely spatiotemporality, transgressivity, and referentiality. Bertrand Westphal explains the classifications in the following way: spatiotemporality means that »no spatial analysis may avoid temporal terms«, transgressivity includes the idea that »no representation is stable«, and, finally, referentiality, which sums up the central idea of geocriticism according to which »any representation is linked with the referential world«. <sup>10</sup>

My analysis strives to offer a ›thick description‹ of space and place in »12 assemblage (Svalbard)«, and to show how ›Svalbard‹ in Andtbacka's account becomes a means to unite local Scandinavian history and global developments. Thus, it contributes to a way of making sense of the world and our place in it and to cognitive mapping, as Fredric Jameson describes it. <sup>11</sup> By taking its point of departure in the cabinet of curiosities, an art form created during the great journeys of exploration, the poem connects past, present and future, and offers a critical corrective to Nordic exceptionalism. Thus, my analysis will contribute to our understanding of spatiality after the Spatial Turn in the Nordic region.

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9 WESTPHAL: 2011a, 53, 236.

10 Idem: 2011b, xv; idem: 2011a, 6; TALLY: 2013, 141.

11 JAMESON: 1991, 51.

### Wunderkammer + the Narrow Room + postmodern pantopia

In Andtbacka's collection of poetry, the reader soon meets the three typical categories, central to a geocritical study, namely spatiotemporality, transgressivity, and referentiality. I will soon show how the three forms of spatiality, which I here study, are all characterized by spatiotemporality as they combine space and time in different ways. Transgressivity is visible above all in the way the spatial forms central for *Wunderkammer*, transgress the ›ordinary‹, natural boundaries and limits of places. And referentiality enters above all through the references to Svalbard in the poem analysed.

*Wunderkammer* has its name after cabinets of curiosities, also called Kunst- or Wunderkammer. Cabinets of curiosities were rooms or cabinets filled with objects that the collector had gathered according to a special logic, the principle of pertinence<sup>12</sup>. Having the form of rooms or closets, they were already as such an explicitly spatial form of art. This scientific and artistic form was born during the great journeys of exploration between 1400–1800, an age called by historians »the first global era«<sup>13</sup>. According to Horst Bredekamp, the cabinets of curiosities demonstrated a wish to understand »the earth in its horizontal, spatial entirety«, to research the complete globe.<sup>14</sup> The contemporaries perceived the collections as portrayals of their owner's knowledge of the world and as ways of making sense of a rapidly expanding environment. The existence of cabinets of curiosities illustrates the global circulation of knowledge, imaginary, objects, images, and ideas in the past and in the present. Already between the years 1400–1800, a wide range of goods circulated across continents and global markets, Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello remark.<sup>15</sup> This is also the case in *Wunderkammer*, as the objects depicted in it enlarge the ›narrated world‹ in a radical way. For example, the opening poem »Ask« (The box) includes various odd, foreign objects such as a green turtle made of onyx, a wooden carved dancer from Bali, German and Canadian toys, a Japanese monk in clay showing his prick, and an advertising dish made in Sweden.<sup>16</sup> Objects create connections to far away geo-

<sup>12</sup> INGVARSSON: 2015, 54–56.

<sup>13</sup> GERRITSEN AND RIELLO: 2015, III.

<sup>14</sup> BREDEKAMP: 1995, 36.

<sup>15</sup> GERRITSEN AND RIELLO: 2015, III.

<sup>16</sup> ANDTBACKA: 2008, 9.

graphical sites as they »float in« from everywhere in the world. Thus they give access to what Marc Brosseau calls »imaginative geographies«,<sup>17</sup> places far beyond the town of Vasa in the region of Ostrobothnia, where Andtbacka and his family live, and where the collecting and writing about it happen.

Ralf Andtbacka is an author who writes in Swedish in Finland. Ostrobothnia region is also the home of several other important Finland-Swedish authors, and one of the few still existing linguistic areas of the Swedish speaking population in Finland. The connection of the word ›Wunderkammer‹ (a room of curiosities and rarities) to that of the ›Narrow Room‹, a spatial metaphor often used to depict Finland-Swedish minority literature is obviously of relevance. Being a minority literature, Finland-Swedish literature has been sensitive to place and space as the Finnish-speaking majority has for longer than a hundred years questioned the existence of the Swedish speaking population in Finland in linguistic, political, economic, or social terms. According to literary scholar Merete Mazzarella, narrow and claustrophobic rooms, and emotions of spatial loss and anxiety have characterized novels written by male Swedish writing authors in Finland from 1880s to 1980s. She interprets the narrow rooms, which frequently occur in Swedish novels in Finland, as expressions of the minority's constrained linguistic space.<sup>18</sup> After all, Finland-Swedish literature surrounded by the dominant Finnish and Swedish literatures, constantly needs to negotiate its place in relation to the two majorities. The narrow room is a space connected to (loss of) power and hierarchy, and constructed around an opposition between those who suffer from a lack of real or imaginary space, and those who control the space, inside and outside. Whether the ›narrow rooms‹ really dominate the spaces and places put forward in the novels, or whether they are typical of Finland-Swedish literature, has been discussed.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, Mazzarella's book launched a vivid and enduring metaphor used by many literary historians to describe Finland-Swedish literature and its linguistic, cultural and societal conditions during the twentieth and twenty-first century.<sup>20</sup> Giving the collection of poetry the title *Wunderkammer* is a

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17 BROSSEAU: 2017, 13–14.

18 MAZZARELLA: 1989, 7–11.

19 MEIDAL: 1990, 63–69.

20 See MALMIO: 2013; MÖLLER-SIBELIUS: 2018.

humorous way of alluding to the tradition of Finland-Swedish literature, and simultaneously, a questioning of its limited possibilities.

Postmodernism put forward a new spatial sensibility, in many ways an opposite of the narrow room. Going back to Henri Lefebvre and Michel Serres, Westphal concludes that postmodernism set forth a radical heterogeneity and insecurity, which affected both space and time.<sup>21</sup> Westphal refers to Serres' *Atlas*<sup>22</sup> which describes postmodernism as the era when »being-there expands«, leading to the era of *pantopia*, total space, »all places in every place and every place in all places, centres and circumference, global conversation«. <sup>23</sup> Such late modern developments as globalization, new media, expanding capitalism, and migration, gave birth to postmodernism as an aesthetic current, which altered even the sphere of Swedish literature in Finland. Postmodernism transformed Finland-Swedish minority literature by offering novel narrative strategies and new ways of approaching space and place.<sup>24</sup> Obviously, contemporary Finland-Swedish novels have reworked many traditional spatial and geographical limits. As Julia Tidigs has shown in her analysis of the works of authors Johanna Holmström and Sara Razai, the linguistic and spatial ties of the stories have loosened from their national context of origin.<sup>25</sup> The traditional basic premises of Finland-Swedish minority literature, its »natural« ties to identity, territory, and language, are now in a flux. Similar developments take place in the works of Finland-Swedish author Monika Fagerholm in her frequent combining of local and global milieus, mixing of fiction and reality, and in her use of a language »born translated«. <sup>26</sup>

Obviously, postmodernism even transformed the spaces and places of Finland-Swedish poetry, which *Wunderkammer* shows in an illustrative way. By using the tradition of cabinets of curiosities, Andtbacka gives room for a huge world to enter Finland-Swedish poetry, and questions and transgresses the limits of the Narrow Room of the Finland-Swedish minority literature. Neither the »cabinets of curiosity« generally nor this *Wunderkammer* specifically do suffer from narrowness or claustrophobia,

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21 WESTPHAL: 2011a, 38.

22 SERRES: 1996.

23 WESTPHAL: 2011a, 40.

24 MALMIO: 2013.

25 TIDIGS: 2016.

26 MALMIO: 2017; TIDIGS: 2016; idem: 2019.

on the contrary: both polytopy, ›a composition of different spatialities‹, and isotropy, ›systemic indeterminacy‹, the central characteristic traits of postmodern spatiality, can be found here. *Wunderkammer* is an example of postmodern spatiality, I think, on a maximum level, and builds interestingly on an earlier form of spatiality with a high relevance for today. Lately, artists and museums have started anew to use the logic and conventions of cabinet of curiosities as their principle for creation and organization.<sup>27</sup> According to Westphal, some of the significant features of spatiality from the time before the Renaissance have returned with postmodernism. He argues that a certain protomodernity that proclaimed »the coherence of a world under the sign of nonexclusion and coexistence of all things« has reappeared.<sup>28</sup> Certainly, the way spatiality occurs in *Wunderkammer* supports this argument.

#### Svalbard—a name, a point on the map or a found object?

12 assemblage (Svalbard)

Nr 1 Sensation cut plug

Nr 2 Medicine show (hidden vanitas)

Nr 3 Die letzten Dinge

Nr 4 Another perfect holiday

Nr 5. Navel orange

Nr 6 Hommage à Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts

Nr 7 Dionysus Piccard

Nr 8 Allt är tal

Nr 9 El grito de Harpo

Nr 10 »I have wasted my life«

Nr 11 Satori (plötsligt en dag medan jag mjölkade mina bläcksniglar)

Den här. boken. håller på. att. nå sin qlrhfqöu.

på flera veckor. har den. inte.

öwjhöowhqewäivjew3vjqevp

utan istället. alla dessa. kökkenblöddingar.

wrunderkammer. hälle.rr. på.

att. Gjyttra in i. murkr. av lqiurujthester.

utan inbördes

hjord.

ning

*som Du skrev: Brukar Du uppleva detta som.*

(Nr 12 Landet med de kalla kusterna)<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> MALMIO: 2019.

<sup>28</sup> WESTPHAL: 2011a, 2.

<sup>29</sup> ANDTBACKA: 2008, 138.

With the poem »12 assemblage (Svalbard)«<sup>30</sup> spaces, places, and referentiality come to fore. The poem makes a somewhat absurd and enigmatic impression. Born digital, it requires frequent use of search engines by the reader in order to make sense of the list of references, the ›numbers‹ which establish the assemblage, a three-dimensional artwork put together of a group of readymade, found objects (this means, of course, that the poem transgresses the dimensions of ordinary texts, as they usually are two-dimensional). Besides the title, it consists of four parts marked by breaks: 1. a numbered collection of various disparate objects, phenomena and citations; 2. a metapoetic passage in which »this book« undergoes a transformation; 3. a sentence from a letter, and finally; 4. a return to part

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30 The poem needs as much an opening up of the various references it lists as it needs a translation of the words in various languages used in it in order to be understood by an reader not familiar with English, German, Spanish, or Swedish. What more, ›translating‹ it either demands a highly varied and overarching knowledge from its reader; or, alternatively a regular use of a search engine. What is more, search engines gives various results, depending on who is searching, where, when, and with what kind of program. My translation is as follows: »Nr 1 Sensation cut plug«: might refer to a toy used in sexual acts or old tobacco tins some people collect./»Nr 2 Medicine show (hidden vanitas)«: vanitas are pieces of art representing the shortness of human life./»Nr 3 Die letzten Dinge«: a German phrase meaning the last things and reference to the same topic as vanitas./»Nr 4 Another perfect holiday«: might be the name of an internet site for holidays, but might as well refer to something else./»Nr 5 Navel orange«: is the name of a certain type of winter orange./»Nr 6 Hommage à Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts«: refers to a Flemish painter, who lived ca. 1630 ca. 1675. He worked in Belgium, Germany, Denmark and Sweden in the second half of the seventeenth century, and specialised in trompe-l'œil, an artistic genre aiming to trick contemporary viewers into believing that the painted, two-dimensional illusions were real three-dimensional objects. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornelis\\_Norbertus\\_Gijsbrechts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornelis_Norbertus_Gijsbrechts)) [January 22, 2020]./»Nr 7 Dionysus Piccard«: gives very varied search results: *Hermes and the Infant Dionysos* from the Archaeological Museum of Olympia as well as luxury watches of different kinds, and a pair of golden cufflinks designed by Lucien Piccard./»Nr 8 Allt är tal«: »all is numbers«, is a Pythagorean idea, according to which everything can be described in numbers./»Nr 9 El grito de Harpo«: is the name of a Spanish Indy rock band, established in 1997./»Nr 10 ›I have wasted my life«: is an ordinary sentence, which many readers might be able to identify with./»Nr 11 Satori (plötsligt en dag medan jag mjölkade mina bläcksniglar)«: »suddenly, one day when I was milking my snails«. Satori is a Japanese Buddhist term for awakening, and the type of snails referred to exist in South America, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satori> [January 22, 2020]. The next part of the poem describes the unidentifiable process »this book« is about to undergo or fulfil, as the next sentence states that for several weeks the book has not »öwjhöwhqewäivjewzvjqevp«, but instead, all these »kökkenblöddingar«. Wunderkammer is about to conglomerate into an unidentifiable »murkr. av lqiuurjthester«, without an inner organisation/»som Du skrev: Brukar Du uppleva detta som.«: »as you wrote: You usually experience this as.«/(Nr 12 Landet med de kalla kusterna), »the land with the cold coasts«.



1. The collection of objects as well as the poem ends with number 12, a sentence that includes the second reference to Svalbard, put into brackets in the same way as in the title. Making use of several languages, the poem includes objects, references, brand names as well as former and present practices and traditions of art, science, and life. It obviously describes a process of some kind, which includes a transformation of »this book« but also of language. Vanitas and Satori in turn refer to transformations that take place in humans and indicate existential reflections upon the development and meaning of life.

Characteristic of Andtbacka's *Wunderkammer* is its constant striving towards polytopy. Cabinets of curiosities are already as such spatial, and the poem here studied refers to still another spatial artwork, an assemblage, which are typically—first—put together of parts, which are not uniform in neither nature nor origin and—second—which actively fits the parts together by establishing relations between them.<sup>31</sup> The poem even includes a »wrunderkammer«, producing a kind of Chinese box-effect, as this slightly defect »wrunderkammer« is situated within the overall *Wunderkammer*.<sup>32</sup> Being an assemblage, the poem opens and ends with the name of a Nordic site, a reference to a geographic point on the map. The name ›Svalbard‹, referring to an Arctic archipelago, first appeared in twelfth-century Icelandic annals and signifies »The land with the cold coasts«. <sup>33</sup> The brackets surrounding »Svalbard« and »Nr 12 Landet med de kalla kusterna« might be a visual way to refer to Svalbard as the utmost geographical periphery of the North. They might also signify that ›Svalbard‹ is a side issue here, not central nor important, despite the fact that name is a part of the title.

But what is Svalbard here, besides a point in the map, and a name with a history? Is it a place at all? In *Literature, Geography, and the Postmodern Poetics of Place*, Eric Prieto defines ›place‹ in the following way: place is any geographical site (of any size, scale or type) that is meaningful to someone for whatever reason. Two features are essential to this idea of place. First: place is a human relation, that is, a site does not become a place until a person enters into a meaning-generating relationship with it, and second: the relation is a variable one, a given site can be

31 DE LANDA: 2016, 2.

32 See also MALMIO: 2019.

33 See also RYALL: 2018, 75–103, WÆRP: 1017, 530–554.

thought in terms of place if somebody sees it as such.<sup>34</sup> Place is perspectival, Prieto concludes: space requires an experiencing subject in order to be activated as a place.<sup>35</sup> The poem suggests (at least) two alternative, opposite ways to interpret ›Svalbard‹. On the one hand, I might understand ›Svalbard‹ as a place; after all, the author mentions it twice and its position at the beginning and the end of the poem enhances its importance. Thus, it has a thematic significance given to it by the author. On the other hand, the assemblage form creates a rather different impression—this Nordic site is present here due to an occurrence, to the same illogical logic as the rest of the phenomena listed in the catalogue. What more, no explicit experiencing I with perceptions and emotions appears in connection to this only geographical place directly referred to here. Seen from this perspective, I might question an interpretation of Andtbacka's Svalbard as a reference to a place. Instead, it must be seen as one among the humorous and partly absurd ›ready-mades‹, found objects (including ›found‹ sentences, citations, and references) which the poem is put together of.

Alternatively; we might think that the combination of the various things, found objects, sentences, citations, and references, together produce the ›Svalbard‹ of the title and ›Svalbard‹ as a place. Andtbacka's assemblage clearly shows the presence of isotropy, ›systemic indeterminacy‹, the second defining feature of postmodern spatiality. The objects combined have no uniting features. Rather, they have in common only their absolute heterogeneity. Being an assemblage, Svalbard is a ready-made, and is put together of found materials and references. The use of found materials is a typical feature of postmodern poetry, going back to early modernist avant-garde practices.<sup>36</sup> This way of creating art began in the twentieth century art, and became even more fundamental in postmodernist poetic practice, which according to Brian McHale understands the ›found‹ in an expanded sense.<sup>37</sup> Being an assemblage, it deconstructs any exceptionalism that might be attached to this site in the ›North‹, apprehended for example as exotic, peripheral, or unknown. Whether we perceive it in terms of a place or an assemblage, it is utmost complex.

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34 PRIETO: 2013, 13–14.

35 Ibid., 29.

36 MCHALE: 2004, 250.

37 Ibid, 254–255.

Even as a cabinet of curiosities, a collection of rare objects, »I2 assemblage (Svalbard)« is contradictory. Antbacka's book includes elements from all the categories found in the original cabinet of curiosities as Jonas Ingvarsson has observed, taking his point of departure in Bredekamp's view on the cabinet of curiosities.<sup>38</sup> What Ingvarsson does not notice is the somewhat ironic or parodic relation of Andtbacka's cabinet of curiosities to its predecessors. This comes obvious when taking a closer look at the objects enlisted in the Svalbard poem. Bredekamp divides the natural and human objects in the great collections of cabinets of curiosities in four categories. 1. *Naturalia* includes objects from the nature, minerals, and products made of minerals (like ancient sculptures), as well as specimen of vegetable and animal life. When related to the poem studied, »navel orange« might suit this category; somewhat more ambivalent is the reference to »Dionysus«, to which I will soon return. 2. *Artificialia* involves arts and craft, refined objects made from organic and inorganic materials giving the impression of dissolving the boundaries between natural and human creations. The sensation cut plug, whether understood as objects used in the anus in sexual acts or old tobacco tins, might count as an example of *artificialia* here as well as the »Hommage to Gijsbrechts« and »Die letzten Dinge«, both being art works which relate to death. What more, even words and phrases can be included in *artificialia* as their material qualities are emphasized in the text by a kind of process of ›breaking down‹. The words and the book transforming, maybe becoming rotten, dissolve the boundary between natural and human creations. This is also the fate of the word ›Wunderkammer‹ in »I2 assemblage (Svalbard)« as it is about to turn from a collection to something impossible to identify, a »murkr.av lquruthester«, words reminding of »murkna« (become rotten), and »rester« (rests). For several weeks, the narrator explains, this book has not »öwjhöwhqewäivjew3vjqevp/but instead. all these. kökkenblöddingar«. The last word might be a transformed, humorous version of ›køkkenmødding‹, a Danish word for a pile of domestic waste from the Palaeolithic, Old Stone Age, found in Southern Sweden, Denmark, and Northern France, consisting of shells of mussels, oysters, coal, and fish bones.<sup>39</sup> Being a form of transgressivity, the »odd« alteration of language and »this book« visualizes and concretizes even

<sup>38</sup> INGVARSSON: 2015, 53–54.

<sup>39</sup> <https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%B6kkenm%C3%B6dding> [January 22, 2020].

the transformation of culture, ways of thinking, and knowledge. Bredekamp's category 3. *Scientifica*, includes globes, watches, instruments for measuring and weighing. At a first sight, no objects from this category appear in »12 assemblage (Svalbard)«, unless we take into account the numbers used in counting the objects in the poem, or the number 8 Pythagorean sentence, meaning »Everything is numbers/countable«. However, when one writes the words »Dionysus Piccard« in a search engine, one gets as—ironically—references and links not only to ancient sculptures but also to design watches. Temporality enters in still one, humorous form. Bredekamp's last category, 4. *Exotica*, consists of objects from exotic places (objects that could even be placed in every other category).<sup>40</sup> Most of the objects listed in this poem, Svalbard as well as the South American snails and the Japanese Buddhist term for awakening, suit nicely the category of *exotica*. Andtbacka's collection of poems obviously imitates and corrupts its art historical predecessor, when it comes to the objects included, the structure and logic of the collection as well as its efforts to map the world. Through the art works, objects and references mentioned in, it reaches various geographical parts of several continents: a fruit and an Indy rock band from Spain, artworks from Belgium, Germany, Denmark, and ancient Greece, design watches from France, Satori for a state of feeling from the East and Asia, combined with snails from South America, Svalbard for a place in the North. The eventual ›exoticism‹ of Svalbard disappears as it is placed in relation to other, as exotic objects and species.

The relation of Andtbacka's *Wunderkammer* to its historical predecessors is, then, that of a (corrupted) simulacrum, a copy of a copy, a parodic, ironic and detached simulation of a cabinet of curiosities. Repeatedly, it creates parallels between past and present, the time of the great journeys of exploration and the global capitalism and colonialism connected to it, and now. Here again, Svalbard, »Landet med de kalla kusterna«, enters. The use of found material, typical of postmodern poetry, gets here a new, playful relation to the journeys during which European explorers travelled to places unfamiliar to them and declared the places to be »found« and »new«. Not surprisingly, then, one of these places occurs in the poem by name. In 1596, during the Age of Discovery, Dutch Willem Barents, a cartographer, navigator, and Arctic explorer ›discovered‹

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<sup>40</sup> BREDEKAMP: 1995, 34–35.

Svalbard. He also called it the New Land.<sup>41</sup> Seen in this context, »12 assemblage (Svalbard)« is a part of the world-mapping project typical of colonialism and a part of the global flows of objects, artworks, phenomena, and geography connected to it. As Kristin Loftsdóttir and Lars Jensen explain, Nordic exceptionalism refers to two notions; first, the idea about the Nordic countries' peripheral status in relation to the broader European colonialism and to the more contemporary processes of globalization. Second, it can represent a self-perception according to which Nordic countries are intrinsically different from the rest of Europe, including a form of nation branding, which carries the notion of the Nordic countries as global ›good citizens‹.<sup>42</sup> Seen from this perspective, the brackets surrounding Svalbard might be interpreted as a visual display of historical, colonial amnesia. The complex and contradictory characteristics shows the poem's depiction of space and place being a typically postmodern one. In »12 assemblage (Svalbard)«, the Svalbard in brackets is at the same time discovered and found, peripheral and exceptional, a cultural citation and a real place on the map, connected to the global colonialism and a playful comment upon it. Similarly, the Arctic North is both the object of colonialism and a part of it in a way as the rest of the Europe. The name connects Svalbard to an ›inner‹ Nordic expansion, as the area got its name »landet med de kalla kusterna« from the early Norwegians, while being a found object in the cabinet of curiosities connects it to European colonialization and globalization, in the past as well as today. Being a mixture of many various things, ideas, and phenomena from various parts of the globe, the poem illustrates postmodernist space and place, and exemplifies the result of the expansion of space and place since the great journeys of discovery. Simultaneously, it also shows ›Svalbard‹ existing in relation to the objects from the rest of the world.

### ›Svalbard‹ and the Polar avant-garde

Being a found object in an assemblage, ›Svalbard‹ also refers to avant-garde literature. Henning Howlid Wærp describes how Nordic authors and explorers during the last 150 years have depicted the Arctic areas, including Svalbard, in fictional and non-fictional Polar literature. A stand-

<sup>41</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Svalbard> [January 22, 2020].

<sup>42</sup> LOFTSDÓTTIR and JENSEN: 2012, 2.

ard feature of these texts is the descriptions of »isolation and extreme surroundings, together with the marginal situation itself (both mentally and geographically) and the events playing themselves out in places nobody else has ever been«. <sup>43</sup> I find nothing of this in the Svalbard put forth in *Wunderkammer*. However, the poem has affinities with a group of writers and texts Howlid Wærp calls »the Polar avant-garde«. Drawing parallels between artistic avant-garde authors and Polar voyages, he argues that they shared certain common traits, namely, »the crossing of boundaries, the exploration of the unknown, and the duel with the impossible«. <sup>44</sup> They were »a vanguard in the geographic sense and as a challenger of intellectual boundaries«. <sup>45</sup> Similar kind of transgressivity characterizes both »12 assemblage (Svalbard)« and *Wunderkammer*; both the poem and the book stretch the boundaries of geography and language as well as thinking and understanding. Assemblages and cabinets of curiosities were efforts to make sense of a rapidly enlarging geographical awareness and human knowledge of the world.

As a representation of the world, however illogical, absurd and hard to decipher, *Wunderkammer* is an example of cognitive mapping, as Fredric Jameson describes it. Jameson's ideas have been of seminal importance for the apprehension of postmodern spatiality. He defines cognitive mapping as »a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster [...] ensemble of society's structures as a whole«, used to map a complex and vast totality created by a multinational, global capitalism, impossible for people to understand. He apprehends representations as forms of cognitive mapping and emphasizes the power of the imagination to project a meaningful ensemble that can then be used to aid in the navigation of social spaces as a way to overcome existential alienation of modern life. <sup>46</sup> Seen from this perspective, assemblages, cabinet of curiosities, and vanitas are historical and present forms of cognitive mapping. So is the poem itself. The poem simulates a cabinet of curiosities (which in turn simulates the world), it simulates an assemblage and an organic process, the »life-line« of the book *Wunderkammer*. Going back to various historical forms of cognitive mapping it signals of the

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<sup>43</sup> WÆRP: 2017, 539.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 547.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> JAMESON: 1991, 51; see also TALLY: 2018.

continuity but also the change the world is undertaking. For example, it transforms the cabinet of curiosities by including objects not found in the original cabinets of curiosities, such as broken things and garbage.

Despite the fact that the poem does not include an experiencing ›I‹, there is a presence of a vague subject, a writing ›I‹ of some kind to be found between the lines in »12 assemblage (Svalbard)«.47 In the first part, we have no subject, only a list of numbers/objects. Somebody has however decided to combine these numbers. In the second part, the subject is »this book«, a reference to the object in our hands, which in the poem is placed between the various geographic parts mapped in the catalogue and a »You« from a text addressed in the poem. There is an ›I‹ to be found in the poem that becomes visible only indirectly, by referring to something ›You« has experienced. Thus, the speaking ›I‹ is situated in the middle of a world mapping process. The references to the materiality of »this book« has to be taken seriously as they urge us to include to our reading of the text the materiality of the surrounding reality as well as the mixing of all elements, words breaking down, unidentifiable processes taking place, impossible to understand and shattering every possible order.

To conclude; the spatiotemporality of *Wunderkammer* is highly complex which can be observed in the use of cabinet of curiosities with its links to the great journeys of expedition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Transgressivity is found in the way in which Andtbacka's poem overthrows the hierarchies and binary oppositions which construct Western, rational thinking, including those that construct our views on space and place. His assemblage blurs the boundaries between normal and abnormal, human and animal or non-human, nature and culture, art and nature, fictive and real, text and non-text, local and global, inside and outside.<sup>48</sup> Here also the boundaries drawn between Europe and the world, and Europe and North disappear, and consequently, also the grounds for any Nordic exceptionalism. Referentiality takes place through the presence of the name and the phrase referring to Svalbard, which is also the point where the geographic, historical and cultural levels in the poem meet. The poem is finally a situational representation on the part of the (collecting and writ-

47 McHale observes that postmodernism in poetry typically »entails the effacement or occlusion or dispersal of the traditional ›lyric I‹«, and states that many postmodernist poems foreground and thematise the making and unmaking of the poetic subject, for example by using the second-person pronoun ›you‹ (MCHALE: 2004, 256–257).

48 MALMIO: 2019.

ing) individual to a vast totality, and the geocritical perspective with its emphasis on ›real and imagined places‹ a fruitful approach to scrutiny the very complex nature of spatiality.

Simultaneously, however, all exceptionality also disappears from both the Nordic dimension of Svalbard and the colonial history of the North. Svalbard is exceptional as little as any other phenomena in the world. The poem makes use of many languages, and creates a Swedish in the middle of destruction. It is put together of words in English, German, Dutch, Spanish, Japanese, and Swedish languages, it does not emphasize a linguistic identification with Scandinavia. Nor is this Nordic site referred to by an observing or experiencing ›I‹ with emotions or ethics connected to any especially Nordic dimension, in terms of superiority or guilt. Svalbard is not present as a form of nation branding, which carries the notion of the Nordics as exceptional compared to the French, British, Dutch, or Russian people who have used the place in their own interests. Rather, Andtbacka empties Svalbard of meaning and deconstructs its relation to colonialism and the great voyages of discovery. After all, discovery gets a novel content when the author draws parallel lines between the journeys of ›discovery‹ and the found objects he includes in the poem. The poem puts forward the uttermost artifice of ›found‹, ›objects‹, place and language. In that way, it opens up a potential novel understanding of a Nordic place. Why Svalbard? Because it is a means to comment upon Nordic exceptionalism, and to put an end to it. With postmodern spatiality, the old-fashioned exceptionality of the Nordic places disappears. *Wunderkammer*—in terms of cognitive mapping—contributes in the creation of a new understanding of the world within which the place called Svalbard exists in new relations and combinations.

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