

a solution is in the room.

Almost immediately after being given these words, I wrote them down on Post-It note in handwritten capitals. I can't stand my own handwriting; the shape of the S and the wide loop of the lower case L that often overlaps on other letters. The Post-It was in my wallet for a week or two before I stuck it to the wall above my desk. It lost its stickiness quickly, for reasons that will become clear later on in this text and have everything to do with the lungs and being able to breathe in a room full of dust. In the end, it was a pin that forcefully held it in place.

There are paper shredders marketed for the small home office that can shred between 4 and 16 A4 sheets at a time, as well as credit cards and DVDS. All kinds of discomfoting and secretive information can pass through the shredder's mouth and into its 20-30 litre bin. I bought one of these lower end models. Within three days I had filled 4 large bin liners, swollen fat. The pages of the shop catalogue were laminated. The whole colour scheme of the home office section was white and beechwood with a few grey plastic exceptions which included shredders and fax-scanner-printer combo machines. Looking through the catalogue I thought of my desk at home and a small Ikea filing unit with wheels and drop down files. I thought of pen holders that have come and gone. A compass set purchased long ago. A calculator, protractor, somewhere in a box.

In the catalogue, lording over the available options, was an image of a man in a white shirt and dark grey trousers. There was no sign of a jacket or a tie. Perhaps these were draped across the back of a feathered out kitchen chair in this man's tiny apartment. Who knows how large his apartment really is? This man was leaning back on his home office chair. A purple coloured text box with rounded corners, as if from outer space, cuts in on the scene and conjures a few things for him to worry about. The appropriation of his identity admin, the sublimation of the self and the possibility of disappearing.

He should begin to shred. What other decision is there? He should reduce the risks of compromising himself to criminals and he should turn any such possibility into a sea (a mountain?) of tiny severed pieces. Half a digit here, half a digit there. The slight curve of a blue logo. Something incomprehensibly small written in English. Who can try turning that into a life-blooded being. What sort of disfigured character identities are imaginable? What fantasy beasts can be dreamt of?

At the upper end of the market spectrum, who knows what's possible and at what price? Maximum material intake. Total annihilation. No imaginable painstaking recovery. The kinds of shredder not for sale on the high street, but perhaps in some faceless industrial unit on the edge of a city with a corrugated roof, where storage and trade transport advantages outweigh all else. Here, we might imagine the kind of shredder that would be required by a government administrative office on the eve of a revolution. We might imagine other shredders that are the answer to embezzlement and other callous administrative acts. Shredders that might be in a position to compete with ideas of arson or suicide or the thought of making home in a small village in the backwaters of South

America where people don't ask questions and have no access to the internet.

I started with bank statements that dated back a decade. There were a few good years. I moved on to job applications, receipts and warranties, birthday cards and personal letters. The whole process took 3 days. For the most part there was music. Some of it was my own and some of it was radio. Sometimes I would break to get a sandwich or throw together some pasta and a very simple sauce. All of the time inside that room. I kept a large bottle of water and would drink from it regularly. The room was dry with bits of indestructible paper; indestructible because these bits were the exact thickness of the blades kept inside the shredder's plastic moulding. The shredder could cut no smaller.

All moisture was sapped and suckered. The damp of the eye, the clamminess of the mouth, and the stickiness of adhesive backed paper. The whole room was as hot as hell. There was dust that drifted across the day's mid-afternoon sunbeams. It was a pleasant feeling to put a hand in amongst the shreds, which only 15 minutes earlier had been a pile of red headed bank statements. It was like putting a hand into a warm bath, testing the temperature and realising it was just right. The major difference, of course, being the lack of moisture in the room. The paper felt excitable and delinquent, and yet in a box with delicate ceramics, it could prevent damage as a result of a heavy breaking car or the indiscriminate 'seen it all' hands of courier drivers.

There's a story by Philip K Dick called *The Preserving Machine* about a man obsessed with music and its fare of survival in the modern world. I've told it to many people over a drink or two. He builds a machine that converts all his musical manuscripts into creatures, each with their own natural survival instincts and evolutionary capabilities; creatures with more chance than a piece of paper to outlast the apocalypse, or else being placed in the wrong hands. This machine saw the future in the examples of wolves in Australia, or Parrots perched on the shoulders of movie pirates, or cats at boutique grooming parlours. A future opted out of climate controlled rooms, plan chests and acid-free sleeves. Without archives and their imposing orders, without admitting everything is dead; a future where manuscript paper, all paper, objects of different kinds, could be granted a life drive of their own and allowed to linger in the back garden and stretch out in the sun.

The Philip K Dick Story doesn't end well. The creatures begin to evolve beyond their musical origins. They begin to bicker and fight. There is breeding across the species. The different kinds of musical dogs, becoming ever more mongrel with each generation, and have only ever then the capacity to make mongrel music. He panics and starts up the machine again. This time in an attempt to reverse the process and transform his motley crew of creatures back into manuscripts and musical notations. Once transformed back through the machine, the man is distraught. The musical notations are nothing but an incomprehensible junk.

The story ends there but a metaphor lingers. Those manuscripts went from paper to living beings and back to paper, carrying the imprint of what was music somewhere in its body memory. The irreversible narrative force of history. The anxious desire of permanence

and afterlife. Good music versus bad. The latent animism of objects. Or something like that. I looked at the shredder again and checked that I was pleased with it.

The room had little left in it. The books had been packed away several weeks earlier and the few things on the wall were now defined in cubic metres in a self-storage centre on the outskirts. How thinly I've lived or how thickly. The only book left was Bataille's *The Cradle of Humanity*, a essays written about the Lascaux caves and other prehistoric findings discovered in the early part of the twentieth century. This was an age of scampering outdoorsy youths with grazed knees and their own knives. An age of progressive churches, an enlightened science and developing archaeological technologies. What other age could have discovered these caves and understood them so convincingly? What is approximately 50 years of discovery, legitimacy and understanding, when stacked against 40,000 years of prior illegibility? 40,000 years in the dark.

There are now 9 or 10 black bags now stuffed into the recycling. I look at the shredder one last time before walking out of the room. The shredder's plastic moulded design is so unwillingly historically specific, it saddens the scene. How will it fare in the years to come? I made a decision to leave it behind some time ago. That and the Post-It note.

By Matt Packer, writer and curator.