

56 DAYS OF SOLITUDE

by
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A thesis
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in fulfilment of the
thesis requirement for the degree of
Master of Architecture

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

Man is a social animal. He needs community for support and for the success of his life. Yet, throughout history, man has withdrawn from community to retreat into the wilderness. The journey takes him from the world, into solitude, and then back to the world again with the fruits of his experience.

This thesis participates in the tradition of solitude. It begins nearly five years ago with a sketch in a notebook of a trailer in the forest. Below the drawing, a question from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*: "What sort of space is that which separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary?"¹ Over the next three-and-a-half years, the idea for solitude is cultivated and develops before I transform a 1970's Grand Air Travel Trailer into my own solitary space. Then, on May 24, 2015, with the trailer as my shelter, I withdrew to the shores of the Spanish River in Northern Ontario, learning solitude for fifty-six days.

When I returned from my retreat, for the next four months, I lived out of the trailer in the driveway of my childhood home, producing this book by assembling entries and illustrations from various journals and notebooks I kept during my isolation. The final leg of my journey struggles to find answers in my retreat, and to Thoreau's questions. In solitude, the relationship between man and his space is the mechanism which separates him from the world, and at the same time, the stage on which the drama of his self-discovery is played out. This thesis explores architecture as the backdrop of solitude, and my relationship to the vessel that makes me solitary.

DEDICATION

To Eddie,

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is no coincidence that my journey in solitude owes so much to so many people. This brief note cannot capture my gratitude for the wisdom, kindness, and support that has been gifted to me by:

Donald McKay, my supervisor, who has been in my corner, gently guiding me, since the first days of M1. Without his words of encouragement, praise, and critique, I would not have not embarked on this journey;

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To my friends, at school and at home, who challenge, drive, and guide me: Kyle, Qinyu, Kuni, Piper, Kim, Keegan, Mike, Dylan, Jonathan, and Brandon. Without each and every one of you, this journey does not lift off the ground. You know your role, you know my gratitude.

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Fig. 1

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solitude (noun) :

1. the state of being solitary, or alone, seclusion, isolation or remoteness.
2. a lonely or secluded place

Solitude refers to the state of one who is completely alone, cut off from all human contact, and sometimes stresses the loneliness of such a condition [the state of a hermit]; isolation suggests physical separation from others, often an involuntary detachment resulting from the force of circumstances [the isolation of a forest ranger]; seclusion suggests retirement from intercourse with the outside world, as by confining oneself to one's home, a remote place, etc.³



Fig. 2

INTRODUCTION

Before I begin my story...

What does solitude mean, how does it operate, and what forces drive it? The literary, spiritual, and philosophical worlds each provide a nuanced understanding of the experience. Somehow the solitude of St. Anthony in his desert cave echoes the solitude found by Franz Kafka writing late at night. It is the same solitude Thoreau immersed himself in at Walden Pond, and that Admiral Byrd pursued during the Antarctic winter of 1934. For over twenty-five centuries, men and women have left society in favour of solitary retreat, and returned to the world with the fruits of their experience: from Lao Tzu, Hesiod, Plato, Jesus, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Petrarch, to St. Teresa of Avila, Montaigne, Rousseau, Goethe, Wordsworth, and Byron, to Shelley, Hazlitt, Hugo, Emerson, Thoreau, and Dickson, to Whitman, Muir, Proust, Rilke, Stevens, Eiseley, Carr, Tillich, and Sartre, to Camus, Storr, Kohak and Koller. The list could go on; not only does solitude exist in monasticism and eremitism, but it may be fundamental in all forms of self-discovery.

Solitude is a universal theme imbedded in nearly all cultures. In the West, it has its roots in monastic traditions. Inspired by stories of Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, and Jesus, early Christians routinely retreated into the desert to grow closer to God. In time, these isolated hermits drew disciples; their hermitages evolved into the Christian monastery. In Islam, the Prophet Mohammad regularly withdrew to a cave in Mount Hira to receive divine revelation. In the East, there are stories of Buddha sitting under the Bhodi tree lost in deep meditation, and Lao Tzu writing his manifesto before disappearing into the forest; solitude, monasticism, and meditation are linked. In First Nation and Indigenous cultures the Spirit or Vision Quest is an essential rite of passage. This is a solitary journey, undertaken by an adolescent who ventures into the wilderness to receive wisdom from guardian spirits. Even in contemporary culture, retreat into the wilderness is valued. People flock from the city to cottages, cabins, villas, and beach-side cabanas. Those who do not have the luxury of personal retreats find solitude in the chaos of society - in bedrooms, bathrooms, cars, wherever they can steal away to have a moment to themselves.

The definition from *Webster's New World Third Edition Dictionary* (Figure 2) presents four different ideas: *alone*, *seclusion*, *isolation* and *remoteness*, while the second part presents a fifth: *place*. On the surface, the definition seems to capture the common images associated with solitude: old monks in desert dwellings and mountain caves, exactly the kind of seclusion and remoteness the definition speaks of. Yet, this remains too general. Aloneness appears as a central idea, but is the solitude of a hermit the same as the isolation of a forest ranger or a prison inmate? Is solitude an involuntary separation or a self-inflicted condition? Can it be both?

Beyond aloneness, the dictionary implies a difference between the solitude of a hermit and the isolation of a prisoner. The hermit, after years of preparation, is slowly lead into retreat. The prisoner, deemed unfit for society, is punished with complete and utter separation. The difference between the two solitary conditions is marked by the "deep inner decision"⁴ the hermit makes before leaving the world. Once separated from society, the prisoner, like the hermit, is presented with a choice: either be destroyed by the loneliness that separates him from his fellow man or overcome

the isolation to dwell in the “great simplicity”⁵ of solitude. It is not the loneliness of a prisoner, the alienation of a recluse, or the isolation of a madman, but the solitude of a monk, the *monachos*⁶, that I imagined.

My journey into solitude can be reduced to a single sketch in a notebook. I had been living in New York and began feeling the weight of the city. Long hours of dreadful work coupled with perpetual traffic, constantly flashing lights, and endless crowds left me with a gnawing in the pit of my stomach. I wanted to breathe clean air, see stars, and listen to silence. The allures of the city - the hustle, the movement, and the pace - did not draw me in, it only pushed me farther away.

Sitting in an over priced Brooklyn coffee shop, I drew the first sketches of a tiny home trailer in the forest. It was an awkward, uncertain structure, but behind it's bulk there was an idea of withdrawing from the world, reducing the necessities of life, living simply with nature. The structure was small and modest but it provided all the necessities of life, with places to eat, sleep, clean, and write, and a rooftop garden with a few plants. Below the drawing, the question from Henry David Thoreau: “What sort of space is that which separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary?”⁷ That was five years ago and the moment I began this journey.

The journey borrows from Joseph Campbell's mythic structure, the monomyth, outlined in *A Hero With A Thousand Faces*. It takes place over the course of three distinct phases: *preparation, adventure, return*. Although Campbell's structure describes cultural myths, it is also applicable to personal mythology. It outlines the steps a mythic hero takes when embarking on a journey. First, the individual is initiated into the idea and develops the plans for the subsequent journey. The entire drama begins with this “Call to Adventure.”⁸ Next, the individual crosses the threshold of adventure entering into the other-worldly realm of the journey, wherein the individual is tested, having to overcome obstacles and challenges, before crossing back into the world. The individual returns to the world with the spoils of his labours and the fruits of his experience.

My journey began with a sketch, and developed as my expression for solitude. Then, on May 24, 2015, I withdrew from the world to the shores of the Spanish River in Northern Ontario, where I would remain until July 19, 2015. The trailer and I then spent the following four months in the driveway of my childhood home, where I produced this book completing the journey.

While this story focuses primarily on the fifty-six days of solitude, the first and last phases are equally important. In preparation, I lay the ground work for the retreat, developing an idea about solitude, cultivating it by daily study and reflection. For three-and-a-half years, both consciously and not, I learn solitude. I devote countless hours studying the words of solitary sages and their critics, building my capacity for aloneness. My notebooks tells the story of my initiation into solitude, through them the idea of retreat is fortified and my plans develop.

Preparation also describes the process of the trailer. The first sketches of the trailer promised a crafted structure, designed for my needs in solitude. It could not simply be another a trailer from an RV lot. And so I waited, until, on the afternoon of September 24, 2014, a trailer fell into my lap:

a 1970's Grand Air Travel Trailer found at the side of a garage in Azilda, Ontario. It was rotting from the inside out, but the base was serviceable, and that's all I needed. After securing the trailer, I took the next six months to transform it from a shack on wheels into my own solitary space. I demolished the old trailer, then re-designed, and built a new one to serve as my shelter. With the space prepared, I isolated myself on the shores of the Spanish River, beginning the second phase of the journey.

Hereafter, is the chronicle of the second phase, my fifty-six days in solitude. It describes my day-to-day life, my thoughts, struggles, and reflections. The text is taken from entries in the journals and notebooks I kept during my retreat, each day is accompanied by an illustration inspired by notebook sketches. Together they tell the story of my solitude.

Coming back to the world completes the journey. In the final phase, the book is produced and, by writing and drawing the experience, I find answers in my retreat, and to Thoreau's questions. By working with my solitude, the journey comes to an end.

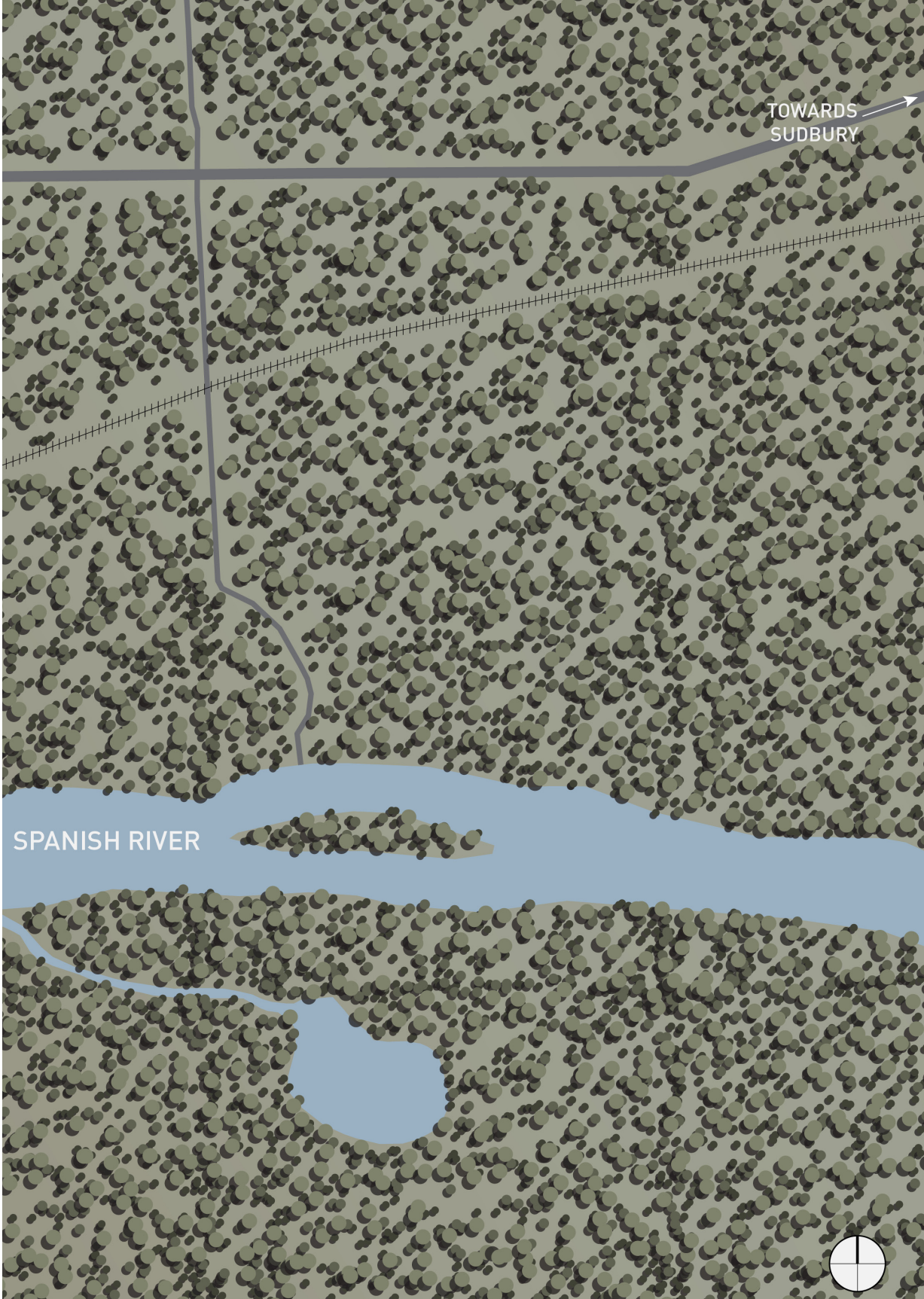


Fig. 3

56 DAYS OF SOLITUDE



Fig. 4



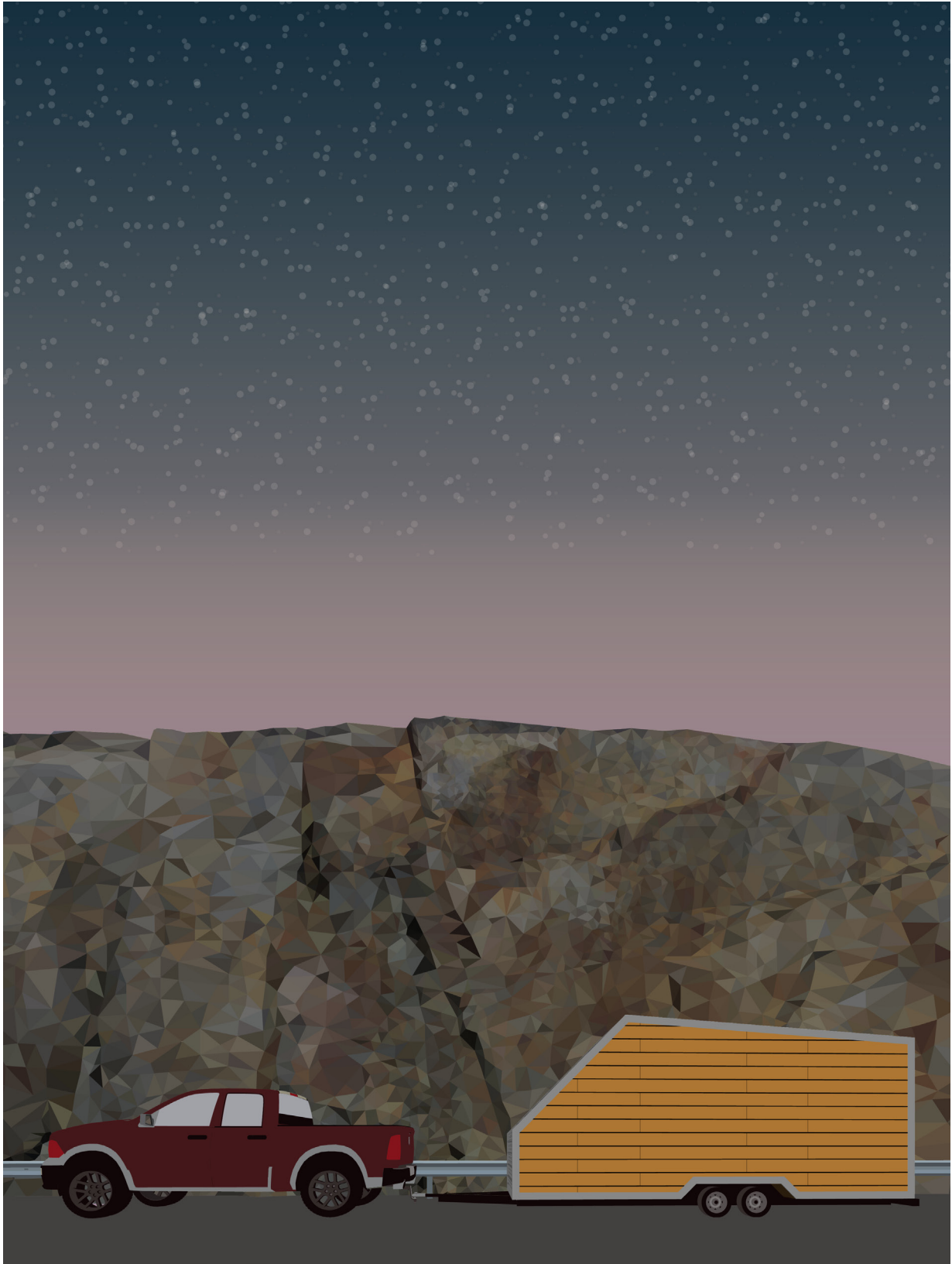


Fig. 5

DAY 1

“Will this be the last time I see them?”

Until they are lost in the distance, I watch as my brother and my mother drive off. In the fading daylight, with rain looming, dark thoughts surround me. I stare at the road, lost for a while, thinking of what lies before me. Then, shaking off the dread, I gather my thoughts and put myself to work.

The trailer survives the nine hour drive from Cambridge to the Spanish River, though the trip is a near catastrophe. Shortly after leaving school (where the trailer had been built), as we drive down Hespeler Road, a grinding noise starts in. Looking back trying to locate the source of the awful sound, I see the passenger side back wheel wobbling, threatening to fly off. Luckily, by then we are in front of a Home Depot / Canadian Tire complex. Keeping an eye on the tire, we slowly pull in and park, safely. Two studs had flown off the tire shortly after leaving the school. After some work on the tires, along with a few hundred screws added into the pieces of flashing that threatened to rip off in the wind, and checking, and re-checking, the trailer is now, without a doubt, ready for the drive.

The trailer works well for the remainder of the trip, although my head stays on a swivel, constantly surveying it, behind the truck. Its contents, however, have been thrown around during the journey, leaving mason jars, camping gear, and books mangled between building supplies and clothes. With night moving in, I sort through the scattered inventory, first cleaning an area for food and work, then making my sleeping quarters.

While I am working inside, a storm brews outside. The wind howls, rocking the trailer back and forth, but the rain is still light. I take advantage and go outside to find a dry spot for the building supplies I've brought. On the flat ground between a set of large pine trees, the forest floor is hardly wet. I put down a tarp and lay out the three sheets of 3/4" plywood down, with the four sheets of 1/4" on top. Then I take several trips back to the trailer bringing bundles of lumber - 2"x2", 1"x3" and 2"x4" all in 8' lengths. The toolbox - packed with drills, screw-drivers, hammers, screws, nails, saws and a dozen other random bits and pieces - stays in the trailer, underneath the desk. Before I can secure the building materials firmly with another tarp, the skies open up and drenches the area with rain and darkness.

Inside the trailer, the darkness is everywhere. I am blind. All I see is blackness and the scattered mess the flashlight uncovers. It is by this light that I write now.



Fig. 6

DAY 2

Waking to the sound of rain, all I see is a dark and heavy space. The sun stays hidden behind thick rain clouds. The world, the trailer, and my mood are bleak and grey. With no sun, I cannot set up the solar panel system and have no power, and no means to gauge time. I am locked inside.

I busy myself to stay calm. First, I set about organizing the scattered inventory, beginning with the small pantry of mason jars. Twelve one-litre jars are filled with rice, oatmeal, pasta noodles, flour, dates, black beans, kidney beans, and lentils. Twelve 750 ml and twelve 500ml jars are filled with dried mangoes, dried bananas, dried apricots, dried apples, dried cranberries, dried blueberries, prunes, cashews, walnuts, peanuts, and raisins. Another twelve 250 ml jars are filled with spices including pepper, salt, garlic flakes, cayenne pepper, paprika, oregano, basil, thyme, rosemary, onion powder, bouillon cubes, and cumin.

Next, I organize my wardrobe which includes a denim shirt, a flannel shirt, two pairs of black jeans, a vest, two pairs of underwear, one towel, one hooded sweater, a one-piece pyjama, one pull-over sweater, one rain jacket, one heavy coat, two undershirts, two black t-shirts, two pairs of wool socks, two pairs of athletic socks, steel toe boots, and Timberland Chelsea boots. I separate the camping gear: axe, machete, Remington 20 gauge shotgun with shells, three knives (4" blade, 6" blade, and 8" blade), fire starters, plates, cutlery, flashlight, mug, three pots, one pan, burner, six 16oz propane tanks, matches, solar panel and battery, citronella candles, batteries, lock, keys, and an iPhone to communicate any emergency. Next to the camping equipment I organize the tackle box, with an assortment of lures, lines, jigs, and bait. I put the rest of the fishing gear - fishing rod, net, fillet knife, and rope - behind the door. In my canvas bag, I put my hiking provisions: a headlamp, small knife, fire starter, tarp, and a trail mix I made from raisins, almonds, cashews, dried cranberries, and walnuts. Finally, I organize the pile of books around my desk: *The Invisible Way* by Rashad Field, *Solitude* by Anthony Storr, *A Search for Solitude* by Thomas Merton, *Earth's Mind* by Roger Dunsmore, *Lonely Land* by Sigurd Olsen, *Report to Greco* by Nikos Kazantzakis, *Labyrinth of Solitude* by Octavio Paz, *Myths to Live By* by Joseph Campbell, *Solitude: A Philosophical Encounter* by Philip Koch, *Dream, Memories, and Reflections* by C.G. Jung, *Le Corbusier and the Concept of Self* by Simon Richards, *Le Corbusier, the Noble Savage: Toward an Archeology of Modernism* by Adolf Max Vogt, *Verses from the Centre: A Buddhist Vision of the Sublime* by Stephen Batchelor, *A Philosophy of Solitude* by John Cowper Powys, *Louis I Kahn: talks with students*, *Thomas Merton Selected Essays* by Thomas Merton, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *The Plan of St Gall in Brief* by Lorena Prince, *Exile and the Kingdom* by Albert Camus, *The Eyes of the Skin* by Juhani Pallasmaa, *Walden and Other Writings* by Henry David Thoreau, *Confessions* by Saint Augustine, *Alone* by Richard E Byrd, *The Odyssey* by Homer, *The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard, *The Lady in the Van* by Alan Bennett, *Towards a New Architecture* by Le Corbusier, *Le Modulor* by Le Corbusier, *Le Corbusier a Cap- Martin* by Bruno Chiambretto, *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe, *How to Be Alone: Essays* by Jonathan Franzen, *In the Skin of a Lion* by Michael Ondaatje, *Running in the Family* by Michael Ondaatje,



Fig. 7

A Hero with a Thousand Faces by Joseph Campbell, *Swann's Way* by Marcel Proust, *Pensées* by Blaise Pascal, *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius, *Essays* by Michel de Montaigne, and *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway. Then I arrange my desk with drafting board, and a box of pens containing all I need to draw with: three black felt pens, three red felt pens, three blue felt pens, two 0.5mm mechanical pencils (with lead re-fills), one 0.7mm mechanical pencil (with lead re-fills), two erasers, one Kawecosport pen (with ink re-fills), two 0.3mm technical pens, two 0.4mm technical pens, one green highlighter, one yellow highlighter, one purple highlighter, and two black sharpies. Next to the pen box: post-it notes, page markers, tape, four moleskin notebooks, and four other lined notebooks. Below the desk I cover the five 10L water jugs - making up a small water reserve - with a tarp. I conclude the setup by organizing the few personal items I've brought with me: one carton of cigarettes (eight packs total), toothbrush, toothpaste, lip balm, water bottle, toque, hat, sunglasses, lighters and ashtray.

I make the trailer as comfortable and organized as I can. The storage unit is full, so is the pantry. And underneath the desk there is just enough room for my legs.



Fig. 8

DAY 3

Night has come twice and the storm shows no signs of weakening. Unable to leave the trailer, I feel the space weigh heavily on me. I have become a prisoner in my own sanctuary. Locked inside, I am irritated by the space. Every imperfection, every detail, every corner stares back at me. The walls are closing in.

And my growing claustrophobia is nothing compared to the anxiety regarding my cooking situation. The rain prevents any outdoor cooking, and I am unable to set up a station indoors. I have been reduced to eating dried fruit and nuts.

Time is meaningless: seconds, minutes, and hours have no definition. The passage of time is marked by an undulating darkness. It lifts only enough to hint at the sun's return and then descends once more. The day is nothing but an infinite cycle in shades of grey.

As I pace up and down the trailer, my agitation with this imprisonment grows. The storm delays work and, without any structure, I incline to idleness. I write and draw with no real direction, no motivation, moving my hands to pass the time.

Picking up a few books, I decide on *A Search for Solitude* by Thomas Merton, an all-to appropriate companion for my journey. I am indebted to Merton, who provided inspiration while I prepared for this journey. His ability to devote himself in service of God while maintaining a critical and inquisitive outlook on spirituality is refreshing. Merton is a modern monk, one who so passionately loved his God he aimed to withdraw himself from the monastery to live as a hermit. The closest he got to his hermitage was an old shed in the Kentucky blue grass hills of Gethsemani. That was good enough for him.



Fig. 9

DAY 4

The site where I've isolated myself - a large piece of land on the banks of the Spanish River - had been generously offered to me by Mr. T. He acquired the site, *Whalen Pond*, some time in the 1970's and over the years it became a retreat for the T. family. The bay bordering the property to the south-east is completely uninhabited, save a public launch and a few empty camping trailers. Further down the river, well out of earshot and eyesight, are some more secluded sites. The entire area is scarcely populated and the bay provides privacy from the main run of the river. I am forever indebted to the T. family for their help and support during this journey. There could be no more idyllic place to wrestle with my aloneness.

The site is mostly wooded, with one large clearing leading down to the river. On site there is an existing 40' camping trailer, attached by a large deck to a smaller 18' sleep camp trailer. The equipment on the property is at my disposal, including camping supplies, rods, tackle, a 12' aluminum barge (with no motor), a set of paddles, life jacket, shovels, axes, knives, saws, drills, BBQ, and a whole host of other things scattered around the outhouse. Tall grasses and saplings dot the path to the back of the property where my trailer is stationed, facing east towards the water. Mr. T has cut a path from the main gate, intersecting the clearing leading into the woods. The path curls around the low marshland, eventually leading to the brother property facing the river.

The Spanish River is a 338 kilometre river flowing from the Spanish Lake and Duke Lake, to the North Channel on the Georgian Bay, outside of the town of Spanish. Historically, the river was used as a transportation route by the Ojibwe First Nations and by later fur traders. Today, the river has four hydroelectric dams: Big Eddy, High Falls, Nairn Falls, and one at the Domtar Mill in Espanola. Once, the industries polluted the river, nearly destroying entire ecosystems. Measures were put into place to rehabilitate the area and now fish and wildlife populations are thriving. Bears, moose, deer, birds of all kind and water fowl frequent the bay. Coyotes, wolves, lynx, and other predators are also present, although sightings are few and far between. The river is used as a fish sanctuary, for recreational purposes, and for travelling the nearby provincial parks.

Here, my solitude will be complete.

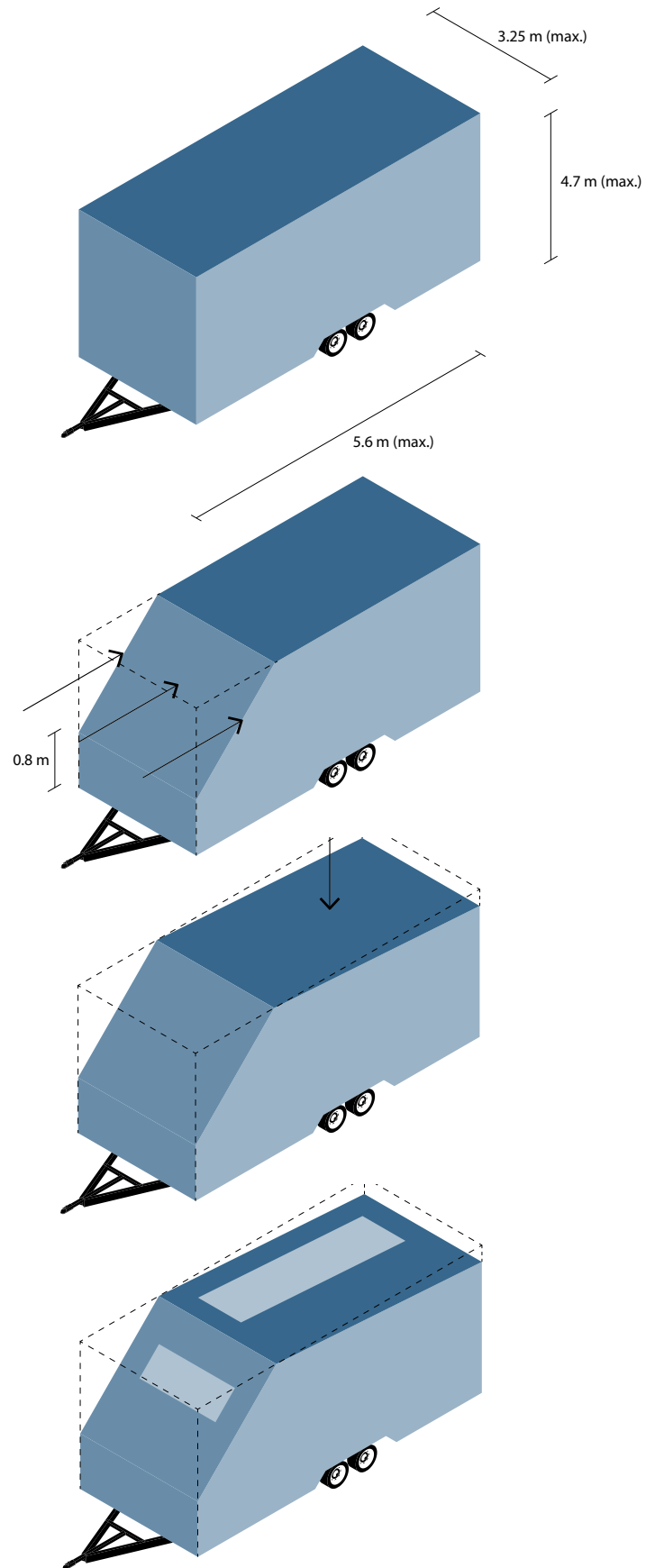


Fig. 10

DAY 5

Every now and again the storm appears to lose strength and die down to a light drizzle. But, as soon as I step outside to claim my freedom, the hurricane begins anew, forcing me back. If it were a light rain, I would take a walk outside, but the storm is constant, throwing broken branches and pushing the rain in angry sheets. This is a cruel joke. I came to enjoy the beauty and peacefulness of nature, and I am forced to wait inside the trailer. Inside, the world disappears.

I built the space for solitude, not just solitude here in the woods but solitude wherever the trailer and I may find ourselves. The trailer begins as a 5.5m x 2.4m x 3.1m (l x w x h) prism of empty space. The *vas bene clausum*, a hermetically-sealed volume of empty space with no windows, views, or light, nothing but a door, four walls, a floor, and a ceiling. The volume is shaped to the trailer. The front face is split 0.8m up from the base matching the general level of a truck's tailgate; the remaining face tilts back to make less surface for the wind to hit during towing. To drain, the roof slopes back from the front face. Any openings in the volume are above eye level; there are no direct views to the world around. One's gaze is inward; the internal life of the trailer, is concealed. The clerestory window and skylight reveal only a dark and angry sky.

The volume is equipped to support the demands of life in solitude. A bed, bench, and table unit concentrates the main functions. It rests as a bench for the majority of the day. I sit cross-legged, eating nuts, watching the sky above. The top of the bench folds up, revealing a single mattress, sleeping bag, and pillow. Hooking the platform up leaves me a comfortable rope-frame bed. The entire ensemble hinges up, making a tabletop for eating, although, unable to cook, I have no use for it. The small kitchenette has a sink, but no running water. I can wash my face and my hands. I have counter space and a small propane stove. I only use it for coffee in the morning. The small camping propane tanks are inefficient, and burn out quickly. I could easily run through my propane supply in a few weeks. Above the counter, the pantry is full with mason jars. The desk at the far end of the trailer, below the clerestory, is long enough to accommodate my scattered style of work. It already has my notebooks thrown across stacks of books. The old rocking chair from my home is the only seating I've brought. Leaning back now, the sky above gives strange inspiration to the work below.



Fig. 11

DAY 6

The trailer has not held up well in the storm. The main clerestory window leaks from the middle pane of glass. The constant dripping echoes through the space, unaffected by the rain hammering down on the metal roof. The sound crawls into my brain and eats away at it. I made my cell, locked myself inside, and threw away the key. It has only been a few days since I last saw another soul. Locked inside, it feels like an eternity. The world has disappeared. The day is dark and the night is only darker. Floating, with no motivation or purpose, I am alone with the constant dripping.

Thunderstorms of this magnitude are not uncommon in Northern Ontario. Rain showers lasting several days are often coupled with heavy winds and lightning, although, it is unusual for a storm to last this long and with such persistent intensity. Perhaps the changing climate is to blame. The weather in Northern Ontario has been fairly unpredictable over the last few years. Last winter was particularly harsh, with bitterly cold temperatures and heavy precipitation; the springtime thaw leaves the ground throughout the Great Lake area over-saturated and soggy. Now, this gives strength to the storm.

The Great Lakes are the great weather churning mechanism of these lands. They act as in-land seas, driving weather systems that mix colder Arctic air with warmer air from the United States. Driven by jet-streams, these forces erupt in violent weather, producing thunderstorms in the summer and severe blizzards in the winter. The lakes, though, also give life to the land. They not only drive weather, but are transportation routes for animals, humans and goods alike. For centuries, the First Nations people have revered the lakes. They possess an immense strength, but they also connect this small isolated site to the larger world. From the Spanish River, the water flows down towards Manitoulin Island and into Lake Huron. From there the water makes its way past Detroit and into Lake Erie before it drops from Niagara Falls into Lake Ontario, then further into the St. Lawrence River before entering the Atlantic Ocean. From my campsite, I could paddle the little barge all the way to the Ocean.



Fig. 12

DAY 7

The storm has lost significant strength and, in the night, it reduces itself to a light rain and a stiff breeze. I lie awake (though my eyes are closed, hiding from the darkness) listening to the sound of rain drops on the metal roof and the dripping from the window.

I am drifting. The hammering thunder brings me back. Its roar fills the trailer, urging me out of bed. I stand at its command, looking out the clerestory to dancing lightning bolts. Each strike sends shock waves ringing through the forest and deep into my chest. The sky unleashes itself all around me. The trailer leaks, shakes, and trembles but, in the end, it stands firm. The lightning show over the bay continues for another moment before the storm carries its anger onwards.

In its wake the rain slows and the clouds part momentarily, showing a star-filled sky beyond. Without putting on pants or tying my boots, I stumble outside, breathing the fresh, cool forest air. The sweet smell of wet pine and grass fills the forest, but the ground is oversaturated. The rain has reduced the site to a marshland. My boots sink in the mud. I make my way towards the bay stopping to stretch my back in the moonlight. I study the clouds, trying to see if the storm has passed. A northwesterly wind blows gently, but the clouds to the north swirl in the opposite direction. Dense rain clouds cover the entire southern sky. Beyond the bay the storm continues to rage, even while the northern skies show promise of more rain. This peace is nothing but a intermission in the onslaught. Soon, it gathers more strength for another pass. Not letting the weather deter me, I head to the bay for a swim. Nearly a week of poor hygiene and tight quarters has left me filthy. I feel wretched. As I reach the dock, the rain begins anew, and even before I can take off my boots, the storm has moved in. The wind whips up the waters and waves crash into the dock. No good for swimming. Drenched with rain I strip down and clean myself against the waters of the storm and waves.

Wild and naked and dripping with frustration, I head back into the trailer, bringing water and mud in my wake.



Fig. 13

DAY 8

Since I arrived, the storm has not yielded. I have spent nearly every moment inside the trailer. I have grown frustrated with the space. The absence of any horizontal view forces my gaze inward. That offers no relief. There is no break in the perpetual turning of one's internal mechanisms. There exists no balance. Without the peacefulness of the surrounding forest to balance the isolation, the trailer is nothing but a handsome cell.

My reading has slowed. I make notes as I read, thoroughly, prolonging the entire process, reading with purpose, like a detective trying to solve a case. I've read through Byrd and Merton already, and have made the inevitable move to psychoanalysis with Anthony Storr and his work *Solitude*. Storr illuminates my own motivations. I have taken this path without fully understanding it.

I crave a proper meal. I eat only dried fruit and nuts. I feel significantly weaker. I have, however, grown fond of the combination of almonds, raisins and dates. Along with a steady diet of cigarettes and water, they dampen my appetite. I smoke entirely too much. It gives me momentary breaks, but the trailer fills with smoke too quickly, giving me a headache. The nausea has not stopped my addiction.



Fig. 14

DAY 9

Although it continues to rain, the day is not as grey as it has been. There is a lightness in the sky, with the sun poised behind weakening rain clouds. Light pouring in from the skylight lifts the spirit of the space for the first time since my arrival. I crank open the windows and open the door, ignoring the rain, letting forest air and ambient light flow through the space. In the gentle rain the trailer, the forest, and I are at peace.

Three factors make the trailer my hermitage: 1) economics 2) ability 3) providence.

Like Thoreau, economics was a chief concern when attempting a break with society. We need certain resources to even consider living outside the walls. Thoreau's America was still wild, and largely untamed. He could find a plot of land, stake a claim and begin building an empire. The rules are different today, and do not easily allow us to walk into the woods to build a hut. The trailer exists outside the boundaries of traditional dwellings. It is not bound to any specific site, rescuing us from issues of property, ownership, and taxation - providing an alternative domestic space. The trailer is a *tabula rasa*: a blank slate.

Ability describes the two-fold circumstance of the space: my ability to design, manage, and build the space myself, and the space's ability to "make a man solitary."⁹ For practical reasons, the space needs to be big enough for me to live in but small enough to manage. The trailer provides comfortable living conditions and is small enough for me to manage alone. The long solitary hours working on the trailer - thinking it through, drawing it in detail, building it from the ground - were hours of useful practise preparing myself for the aloneness of the woods.

Then there is the space's ability to build solitude. With no horizontal views, the trailer breaks the visual connection with the world. Inside, I am alone. Whether here in the woods, in the parking lot of a Wal-Mart, at my home in Sudbury, or in the middle of a city, inside the trailer the world disappears. With only sky to distract, the trailer is built for solitude.

The final reason, probably the most important, really begins the story of the trailer. I had had no plan to purchase a trailer. The idea of building a trailer and isolating myself in the woods was several years old, lost in a stack of notebooks. But, I had ignored the call to solitude and it was time I answered it. On the afternoon of September 24, 2014 the trailer appeared. It had fallen on hard times, rotting from the inside out. Duct tape held plexi glass in place; it replaced a missing pane of glass in the middle frame of the side window. The roof sagged and the door barely held closed. For the trailer to appear where it did, at the time it did, is a coincidence. All that is can be said is: "Ask and it will be given to you."¹⁰



Fig. 15

DAY 10

I do not sleep well. During the night, I lay awake, eyes closed, listening to the rain and the forest beyond me. When I sleep, it is only for a moment. I have not felt at ease or relaxed since I arrived. I am constantly on edge, unable to rest in my surroundings. This is not what I envisaged for my journey. This is not living, I am no hermit. I am barely surviving. I am a prisoner.

Hygiene is quickly being lost. Unable to make it to the outhouse without getting drenched I am forced to evacuate myself outside the door. Neat and proper piles are swept away by the rain.

The day appears to be ending, although, with the sun still locked away behind dense clouds, it is impossible to tell. The rain shows no signs of letting up. Fed up, I turn to Nikos Kazantzakis' pseudo-autobiography, *Report To Greco*, to soothe my irritation. By flashlight, set to the soundtrack of the howling wind, his words come alive. Inside, the great Greek writer's passionate words fill the trailer: "Every person has to find his own road and save himself. From what? From the ephemeral. Save himself from the ephemeral and find the eternal."¹¹ The violent storm disappears as I lose myself in his thirst for life. I am with Kazantzakis as he makes the ancient climb to the summit of Mount Sinai. The growing night dissolves into the prophetic desert, and the sound of rain is replaced with holy silence. For an eternity, I am at the top of the sacred mountain, lost in peaceful thought, utter nothingness, until the whistle of a distant train breaks the spell. The storm, the wind, and darkness emerge once again. The whistle in the distance grows louder and louder, until the sound fills the trailer. For a brief moment it drowns out everything, and then as magically as it appears, it fades away, leaving the rain and blackness behind. With thoughts of Mount Sinai, I close the book, curl into my sleeping bag, and wait for the storm to lift.



Fig. 16

DAY 11

It is misting this morning but the sun does not dare warm the ground. It stays cold, damp, and soggy. It has become a breeding ground for mosquitoes and other monsters. I keep citronella candles burning to deter them. The screen door and the candles are useful, but a few still menace the space. With little rain, I throw the exterior door open to the lush green forest beyond. The rain nourishes the trees and animals. Grasses stretch to the sky and leaves sag with moisture and health. Still, they, like me, await the sun.

This afternoon, while I am reading, a blue jay visits. She lands on the skylight and pecks at fallen seeds. The corrugated polycarbonate skylight channels water away. The corrugations make long pockets for debris to collect in, and with the wind and rain, the bounty from surrounding trees falls onto the roof. A few birds have visited, but none stayed for as long as the jay. I watch as she hops around inspecting the length of the skylight, pecking here and there, stopping for a moment to stare down at me, before hopping to a new spot. When she flies off, without her dance, the trailer is empty.

We avoid solitude. We have been lulled into a complacent stupor by what Blaise Pascal once described as “divertissement” - systematic diversion or distraction.¹² “By those occupations and recreations, so mercifully provided by society, which enable a man to avoid his own company for twenty-four hours a day.”¹³ Society distracts the individual from exploring his own internal world. We have created entertainments - movies, television, sports, theatre, cinema, and public life - to keep the individual wrapped in the illusion about himself and the world. The first step into solitude renounces diversion. Most people are so caught up in the fantasy they have built, in the masks of society, they fail to cultivate their own internal world, unable to sit with their aloneness.

When the individual renounces diversion he is faced with the “absurdity”¹⁴ of his own life. He is forced to confront those same masks he once held up, and must, break the chains imprisoning his soul. He must face “[t]he anguish of realizing that underneath the apparently logical pattern of a more or less well-organized and rational life, there lies an abyss of irrationality, confusion, pointlessness and indeed of apparent chaos.”¹⁵ Why are most people so adverse to solitude? Perhaps, it is nearly impossible to face the abyss without losing oneself in the chaos. Perhaps, we would rather not take on the challenge of climbing out of the darkness.

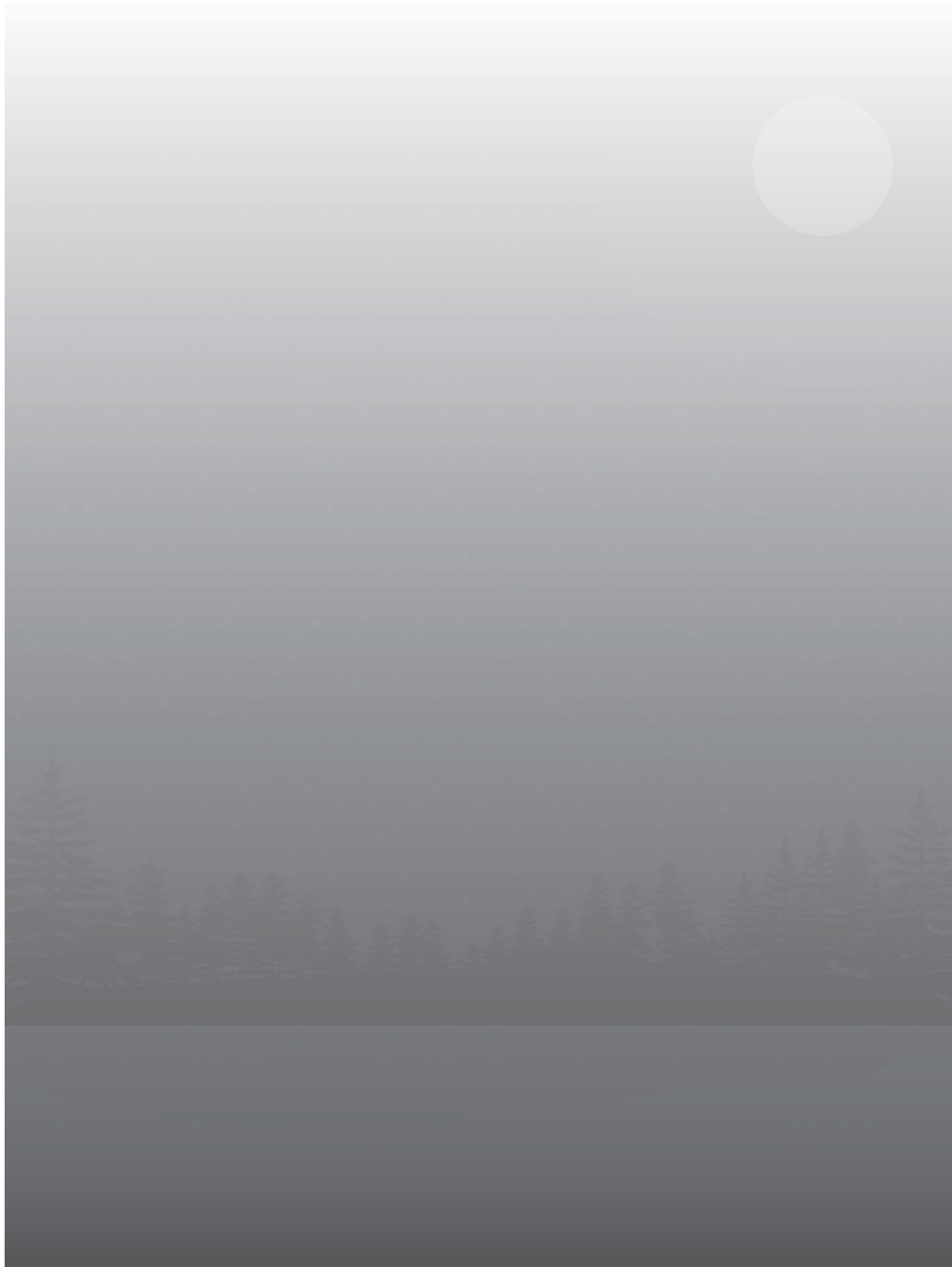


Fig. 17

DAY 12

There is near silence tonight, only the occasionally rustle from the trees above. As I lie in bed, feeling awful about myself and my circumstance, the scream of a nearby duck breaks the anguish. A series of yelps, howls, and roars, quickly follow the scream. From inside the trailer it sounds like a pack of coyotes and a lynx are fighting over a group of ducks. The scene is playing out right at my door. Petrified, I grab the flashlight and shotgun but wait to shine the light. I fear the violence outside will notice me. In the dark, sitting up with the flashlight held to my chest, I wait as the battle unfolds, until a final scream echoes out throughout the woods, signaling an end to the fight and the return to silence. I wait in the silence for a while, before shining the light, loading the shotgun, and putting on my boots to inspect the scene. Rain drips off of the roof onto my head as I step out into the evening. A light mist covers the ground and a heavy fog sits over the bay. With the flashlight I make my way to the dock in search of any evidence from the fight. Nothing.

The fog obscures the entire bay, covering the horizon. I am in the clouds. The air is cool and refreshing. I lay the shotgun on the dock and sit next to it, watching the bay. Ripples in the water brush up against the dock and rustle the grasses. A loon makes her morning call. Her song surrounds me before fluttering off into the woods, rousing other birds to respond. Alone still, the anxieties of the night have disappeared. I am filled with calm. As the fogs begins to lift, the mist grows into a rain and I am forced to leave the silence of the bay, and return to my prison.



Fig. 18

DAY 13

In a 1952 interview with *Brassai*, the architect Le Corbusier, foreshadowed his own death, describing his time at his personal retreat “Le Cabanon”: “Je me trouve si bien dan mon cabanon que, sans doute, je terminerai ma vie ici” (I feel so well in my Cabanon that, without any doubt, I will end my life here)¹⁶. Thirteen years later, on August 27th, 1965, Le Corbusier left his Cabanon for the last time, went for a swim in the Mediterranean Sea, and never came back.

Le Corbusier spent his summers in the 16m² cabin, overlooking the Mediterranean sea, at Cap-Martin in the south of France. It was one of the few projects he built for himself. More than a simple vacation hut, Le Cabanon was Corb’s own solitary space.

Charles-Edouard Jeanneret is known to the world by the mask *Le Corbusier (The Raven)*. The mask was his face to the world. He put it on when he became the architect, designer, or master planner. But away from the prying eyes of society, while at his retreat, the mask of Le Corbusier was left behind. Away from prying eyes, he dedicated his time to painting and enjoying the Mediterranean landscape. His paintings, generally in the Purist style, are a departure from the rational and logical order of his architecture. While Le Corbusier is concerned with putting order to the exterior world, Charles-Edouard concerns himself with putting order to his internal world. Le Cabanon reflects the duality in his life. The interior of the space is modern, articulated, and crafted, while his murals contrast the space with bright colours and organic forms. The tension between the two is the embodied tension between Le Corbusier and Charles-Edouard.

We all have our own spaces of solitude, the place where we feel comfortable to paint, naked in the morning light.



Fig. 19

DAY 14

Though it continues to rain, the day is light, and a great peacefulness washes over me. The darkness disappears, leaving me content in my place. The calm persists, until - while opening a pack of batteries for the flashlight - I slash the top of my middle finger on my left hand. The cut, long, and shallow, bleeds furiously. In haste, I squeeze the cut against my thumb, keeping it closed to help the blood coagulate. With my free hand I search for the First Aid Kit.

I keep my entire left hand raised in the air; with my free hand I search. I rummage through the camping gear below the desk. The First Aid Kit is unmistakable, bright orange, about the size of the life jacket found underneath passenger seats on commercial airliners, with "FIRST AID KIT" in oversized red letters. In it I will find the tools to stave off infection. With my left arm numbing, I bleed from my finger into the cupped palm of my hand, and down my arm. I look through every shelf on the storage unit. The trailer is not large, there are very few places the kit could hide. I go through every article of clothing, through all the camping gear, the entire pantry. Nothing.

I am losing feeling in my left arm. I lower it. I realize... I left the most vital component in my garage in Sudbury. It does me little good there. Blood drips from my hand onto my pants and socks. The bleeding is slowing. I release the pressure and expose the wound. The flesh around the cut is already starting to wrinkle from the moisture from my thumb, it saps the skin of all its colour. With the blood still pulsing slowly out of the cut, I cut a small patch of fabric out of a shirt, and tear off a length of duct tape, to make a rudimentary bandage. I stick my arm outside in the rain to wash off the dried blood from my hands and forearm. It's a foolish injury, and it is throbbing painfully.

The rain continues and my mood sours. A simple injury is less a distress than annoyance. But, without a First Aid Kit, I'm afraid. It makes isolation too real.

It is dark and, once again, I have no concentration. I can't read or write. It's back to bed with prayers for a better tomorrow.



Fig. 20

DAY 15

During the very light rain this afternoon, I manage to caulk the window from the outside and the inside. I hope this will mitigate the dripping. Outside, I am eaten alive by a battalion of monsters. Mosquitoes are the first to attack. They come straight on towards my face. Soon after, the black flies flank my left side, and the horse flies my right. As I swat them away, the hornets and bees rush me from all sides, throwing me in a flailing dance. I reduce the damage by covering every inch of my body save my eyes. Unfortunately, inside the trailer, the army has already infiltrated. For the next while I hunt them down with a citronella candle and pillow, shoo-ing them out of the space. I would swat them dead if I had the strength to carry on, but they really mean no harm and deserve life as much as me. Mostly, I do not want mosquito and fly bodies smearing the walls and floors.

I did not want to change the bandage, but while caulking the window, I rubbed my left hand against some silicone, and now it is crusty. Before opening it up, I prepare the next bandage, repeating the steps from the night before. A piece of cloth and some duct tape, this time however, I cut the tape into thin strips to loosen the pressure on the wound. With a knife, I cut away the old duct tape. The top of the finger is moist and discoloured. Not infected, it just needs air. The bleeding has stopped and the cut is bare. Flesh has already started to regrow. I blow against it, testing its sensitivity. The cut burns. I leave the cut exposed for a while, then make a new bandage. The second one is far more elegant and comfortable than the first.

Luckily, the cut is on my left hand. On my right hand, it would have ended the journey. My left hand is practically useless while the top of my middle finger is healing. Each movement causes the cut to sting as the new flesh strengthens. It steals my energy, pushing me to an early night.



Fig. 21

DAY 16

In the night, panic sets in. I can no longer handle my aloneness. My breath is short and my head throbs, I pace frantically, trying to calm myself. I sit in a yogic pose concentrating on my breathing, but I cannot settle it. When I turn to Merton, his voice irritates me. When I go to Thoreau, his words upset me. I turn to the Qu'ran and God's words cannot stop my shaking. I realize I can no longer stay in the trailer, or in the woods. In haste, I put on my boots and throw open the door. Outside the world is dark and cold, angry rain falls from the sky, and nothing moves in the onslaught. Without putting on a jacket or tying my boots I run outside, into the rain. I run straight onto the dock, throw off my boots and jump into the water. The storm rages as I swim to the middle of the bay. Rain hammers my face, forcing my eyes closed. The water thrashes wildly, throwing my body back and forth. Fighting for a moment to keep my head above swirling waves, I give in, letting my limp body sink.

Caught in a battle, my body, heavy with hysteria, desperately wants to sink to the bottom, leaving the trailer, the woods, and solitude behind. I want to be done with aloneness, and with the pains and pressures of the world. I want nothing more than to find some peace and quiet and tranquility. Instead I am a prisoner, an animal in a cell. I want to be done with the hypocrisies, madness, and evils. I want to be done with the rampant injustice, the brutality and violence. I want to forget about the growing imbalances tearing the world apart. I want to forget all my sins, failures, and wrongdoings. I want to give up on the struggle.

As my body sinks down into a cold darkness, my chest begins to heave, begging for air. In the final moments before I close my eyes, letting it all disappear, I feel the soggy bottom of the bay. It's not as deep as I thought. Bending into a squat, I hurl myself up back to the surface, clawing my way up. My head light, my chest burning, I start kicking furiously. Darkness grows and I see nothing at all. The fear of death over grips me, I gasp, bringing water into my body. Chocking and sick, my flailing slows, my eyes close, and I start to sink back down again...



Fig. 22

DAY 17

I wake on the opposite shore, my body bruised and sore, vomiting water, blood, and bile. Rolling over onto my back, the rain closes my eyes.

I do not know how I got here.

Pulling myself out of the water, I strip off my wet clothes. Completely naked, I walk in the direction of camp. A little moonlight gets through the clouds and reflects off the water. By its light, I walk slowly and sadly, belongings in hand, ashamed of what I tried to do. The world spit me back out when I gave myself to it. I walk long enough for the monsters to have a feast on my exposed skin.

Continuing along the shoreline, head down, I make my way to the dock where I pick up my boots, pause for a moment, and head back towards the trailer. Ignoring the bugs and the nighttime chill, I linger outside the trailer for a moment. Unable to go back inside, I sit on the tongue, naked and dripping, until darkness engulfs me. The rain continues to pour. Filthy and wild I give myself up to the night. The darkness and the world dissolve. My eyes close. I lose myself in nothingness.



Fig. 23

DAY 18

My eyes remain closed until the sun shines again. The birds cheer its return and the trees wave their limbs in celebration. Standing up, I greet the sun with all my masks washed away, in naked honesty, my skin sticky from the rain, aches from the bites of a hundred mosquitoes. It grows warm. The day heals in the morning light. The storm is over and the insanity has passed. Looking down at my nakedness, thinking of the day past, I thank the sun for returning, and go into the trailer.

The day is vibrant and the forest is alive and thriving. I take advantage and walk among the renewed woods. The rain has left the forest teeming with monsters. Covering my body head to toe is the only defence, even though it makes the walk hot and uncomfortable. I walk the path, cutting through the cattails and beaver dams towards the main river. The trees jockey for position to catch the sun. Rabbits run about. Birds dance above, and in the distance a family of deer graze the land. The ground is still soggy and soft; it keeps the air cool. Cresting over a small hill, I uncover an entire universe dedicated to this river. The view stretches in all directions, and the forest marches well beyond the horizon, rising and falling with the rocky terrain that is Northern Ontario. Two moose cross a shallow expanse. I take a seat, watching them until they are well onto the other side and out of sight. Magnificent as they may be, the moose is not a terribly handsome animal. I make myself comfortable under a large cedar tree and drink from a mason jar of water. The sun is high in the air and most of the mosquitoes have retreated into the cooler woods. I take off my sweater and shirt, letting the sun and wind and air flow through me. Sweat beads off my forehead as I take in the scene and drift into sleep.

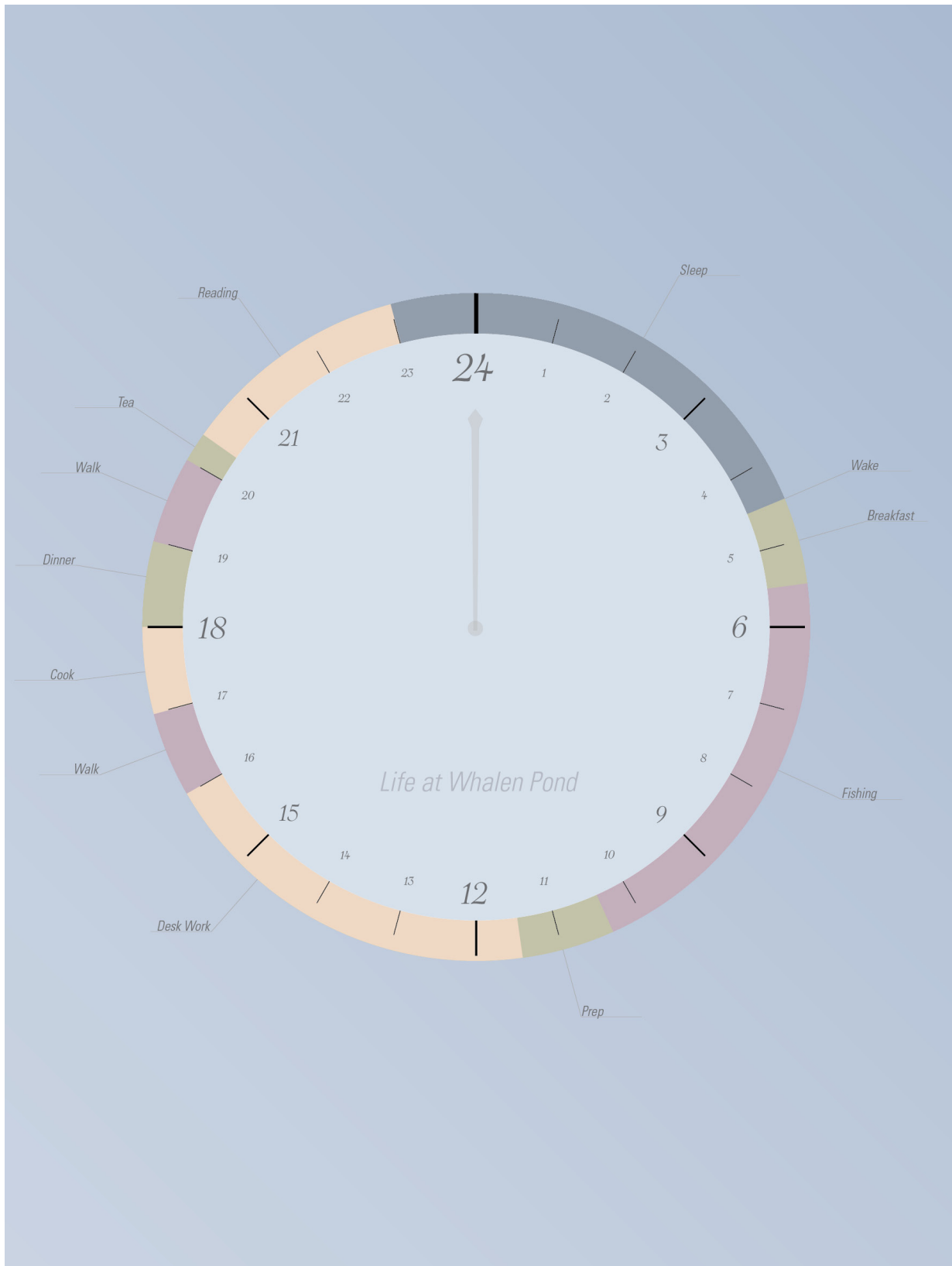


Fig. 24

DAY 19

Now that the storm has passed, I am beginning to return to equilibrium. The storm prevented me from establishing a routine here in the woods. There has been no order to my aloneness, no rhythm to my isolation, no harmony in my solitude. With no order, I fear losing my mind. John Cowper Powys stresses the importance of routine in his philosophy of solitude:

A well-managed solitary life, whether surrounded by people or protected from people, is a very delicate and a very difficult work of art.

Routine plays the leading part. Men and women who do not insist on routine in their lives are sick or mad. Without routine all is lost. Just as without some kind of rhythm all is lost in poetry. For routine is man's art of copying the art of Nature. In Nature all is routine. The seasons follow one another in sacred order; the seed ripens, the leaf expands, the blossom and the fruit follow, and then comes the fall. ¹⁷

The day begins at 0430, when I rise with the waking sun. My body has already adjusted to the motions of the sun and the trend continues. After a breakfast of coffee and oatmeal, I aim to prepare the day and set off for the morning fish by 0530. By 1030 the sun warms the bay enough to send the fish into a temporary slumber. At this point I head back to camp to clean the catch and prepare the night's meal. At 1130 I comfortably settle into quiet study. After a few hours of reading, with the sun still high in the sky, I go for a walk in the woods, returning to camp by 1700 to begin making the fire and to cook dinner. Cooking takes no more than an hour. By 1900, with the sun setting, I clean, organize, and prepare for the following day. In the city, I always enjoy a walk after dinner with the evening light; I continue the practice here. By 2030, with the coals of the fire still warm, I make my nighttime tea and settle in for an evening of writing in my journal, other desk work, or reading by the fire until 2300 when I go to bed.

The routine reflects the only necessities of my life here in the woods: feed my body, mind and soul. I take nourishment from the land, cook by its fuel, breathe its air, and listen to the forest speak.



Fig. 25

DAY 20

How I came to choose a trailer still baffles me. To be frank, I did not so much choose it, as it chose me. The trailer, or caravan, was the traditional home of the Romani people, nomadic people of Indian origin, who travelled across Asia and Europe entertaining and living out of their horse-drawn carriages. They lived in small communities whose numbers swelled and shrunk as unpredictably as their lives. When the automobile became the preferred mode of transportation, the caravan evolved into the trailer: a towable structure used for hauling or recreational travelling. North America saw an explosion of trailers, reaching a peak in design, with the *Airstream* trailers of the 1960's. These unibodied, aluminium-clad horizontal silos were equipped with all the necessities of life: full kitchen, bathroom, and living spaces, compact and efficiently organized and stored.

In these storms, the old trailer would not have lasted. It barely made it through the last winter. Water from the leaking roof pooled at the front end of the trailer. Under its own saturated weight, the sodden ceiling paper was tearing itself apart. Ripping it down revealed a rotted roof structure. True 2"x4" members formed a rough roof truss spanning the trailer. Rather than a triangle, the upper chords formed a trapezoidal shape to rough out the finished shape of the curved roof above. Fibreglass insulation filled the space between the trusses; it was wet and un-useable. The smell of rot grew stronger as the layers came down.

The trailer was framed with true 2"x2" members, nailed together. Fibreglass insulation lay between the wooden frame and the interior wood panels. Most of it was either infested, wet, or missing. While the structure of the trailer was lightweight, it was barely stable. Without the binding lateral strength of the aluminium shell surrounding the frame, the trailer would have broken down years ago.

Tearing apart the inside yielded an array of carcasses, feces, and nests. The winter cold had killed off the bugs, rodents, and the other creatures that called the trailer home. Entire lives passed here: born, ate, worked, shat, and died all on the same 18' x 8' chassis.

The Grand Air trailer is now a memory, preserved in words and drawings.



Fig. 26

DAY 21

I spend the afternoon on the dock reading Philip Koch's philosophic treatise, *Solitude: A Philosophical Encounter*. As he describes the various schools of solitary thought, I drift off into an afternoon nap in the warm sun.

In my dreams a rainbow-coloured eagle flies high in the sky. His massive wings cast shadows on the ground, engulfing my body. He circles above, coming closer and closer. With each pass his body grows larger, wilder, and more colourful. Bright reds and oranges stream from his beak, blues and greens colour the sky around his wings, and his body drips yellows, indigos, and violets. The painted eagle lands on my chest. His talons dig into my skin, dripping paint onto me. He hops up and down my body, digging in. Without opening my eyes, asleep still, I seize him between my hand and chest. I open my eyes in horror. The flattened carcass of a baby budgie lies in my hands.

This thing was just a chick, it could barely fly. Blood from the tiny body pools on my chest. I clean off my chest with my shirt and some water, and place the body of the bird next to a tall cedar tree nearby.

I offer an apology. It was a sincere accident. It did not stand a chance. I dig a small hole for the body to rest. With the bird's body still fresh on my hands, and blood stains on my shirt, I feel sick to my stomach. Rummaging through my bag, I find water to drink, and at the bottom of the bag, I find one of the knives I had made for myself years ago. The knife is hand-carved from a block of persimmon, sanded smooth to fit my hand and finished with linseed oil to bring out the true colours of the wood. I had made the knife in a moment of great anxiety, and found relief in carving its handle. Holding it in my grasp, I remember shaving away my worries with each flake of wood. Enlarging the grave, I place the knife next to the bird and close it with a mound of earth, marking it with a handful of nearby stones.

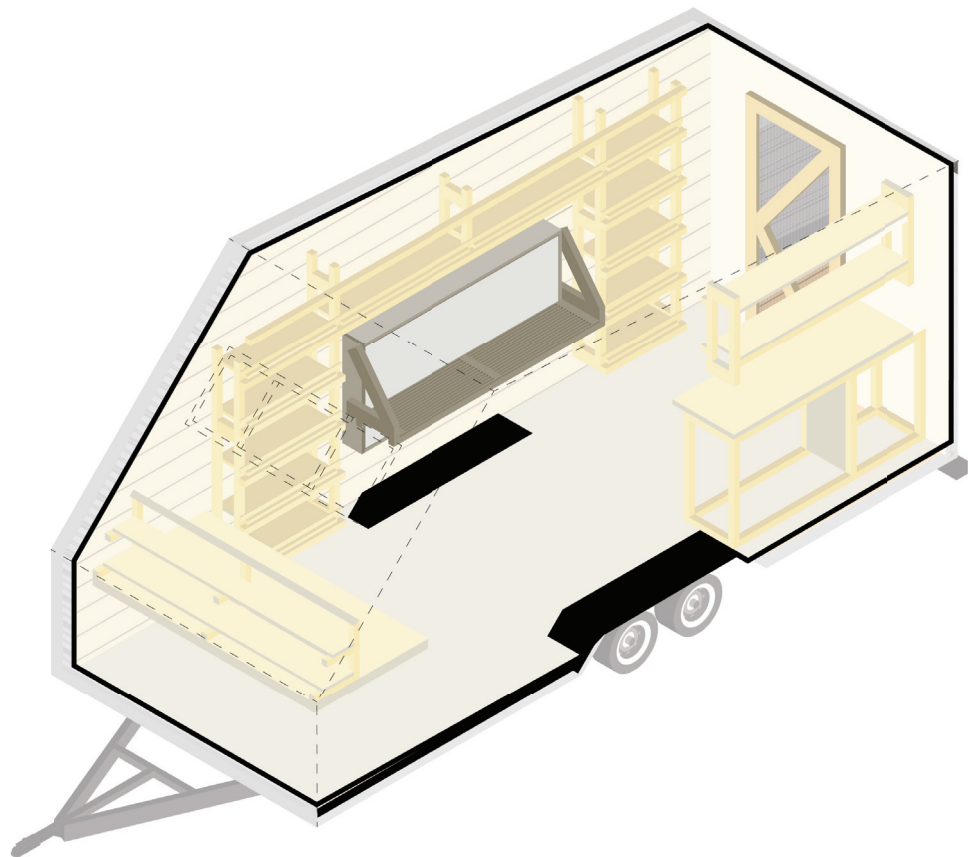
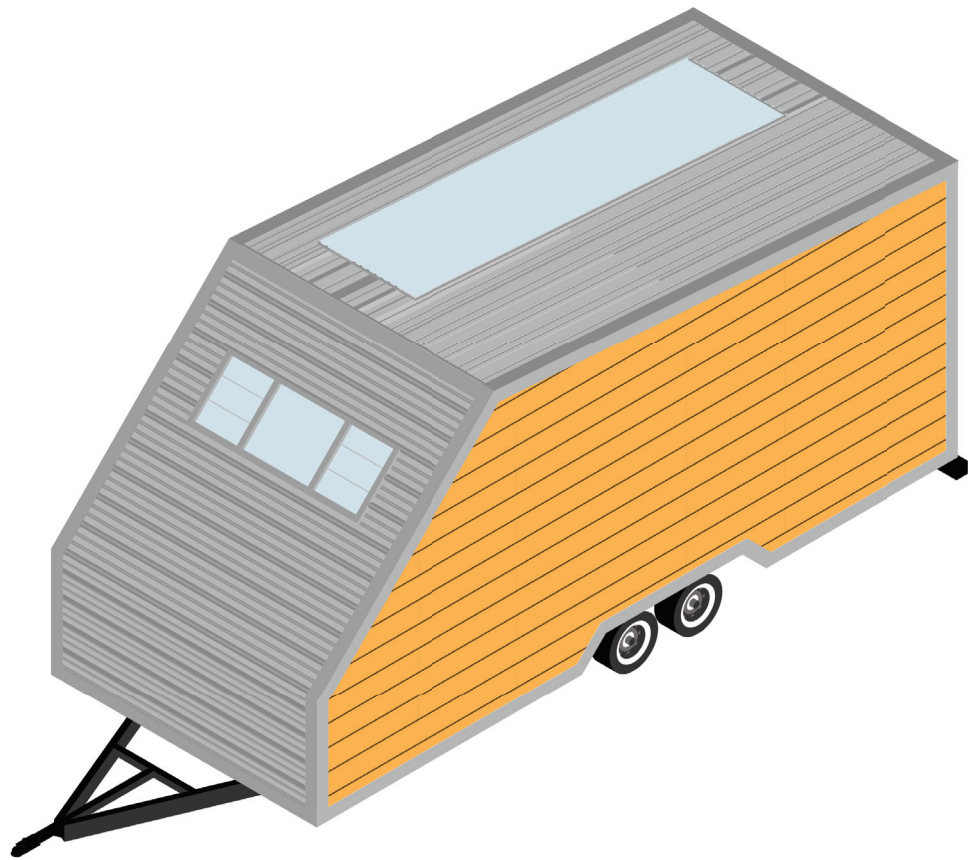


Fig. 27

DAY 22

“I am the space where I am.”¹⁸

The trailer is both a tool, and a cabin on wheels. Clad in pine boards and corrugated aluminium - save the lone window shining into the sky - the exterior reveals nothing of the trailer's interior life. Metal wraps itself around the trailer like a mohawk, book ended on either side with pine boards finished with cedar stain, bringing out the reddish hue in the wood. A four-inch band of flashing runs around the exterior, separating the wood from the metal. Around the back, a door disguises itself in the same corrugated metal. Behind the first heavy, aluminium clad door, a second screen door frames the first view of the inside. At the far end, a desk for studying. To the right, in the middle of the wall, below the skylight, a table hangs surrounded by the affairs of my life. To the left, a small kitchen with several mason jars of non-perishable foods. The inside of the walls are clad with the same pine as the exterior, giving the impression the side walls are of solid wood. In the interior, however, the wood is left unfinished to match the finished plywood cladding the remaining surfaces. The blonde wood soaks in the light and warms the trailer as crisp shadows move slowly across the finished floor.



Fig. 28

DAY 23

The first rays of light cut their way across the floor, warming my face. The trailer radiates in the gentle glow of morning. A delicate silence hangs in the air, the last moments of peace before the day's activity. The morning birds urge me out of bed. Sleeping in the forest is gentle and light, with dreams of distant places. My eyes, remembering the night's adventures, struggle to adjust to the light. Mornings are refreshingly cool, my breath is nearly visible. Without much effort, I strip and dress in day clothes - jeans, shirt, hooded sweater, socks, and work boots.

When I open the door, the forest fills the trailer with the smell of grass and pine cones. The sun hasn't yet crested the horizon. It bathes the sky in a lilac hue. Birds continue their morning songs, adding more voices to the chorus. Leaves are heavy with dew, leaving the forest sagging and slow. Gradually, all the flowers, grasses, saplings, and trees turn up to the sun. They stretch slowly, shaking off the water. I rub sleep out of my eyes and, in turn, stretch to the sky.



Fig. 29

DAY 24

Before the sun has taken its place in the sky, I have paddled to my fishing location at the far end of the bay, a small inlet protected from the sun by a large rock outcrop. The secluded area has cooler water and plenty of structure for the fish. I anchor the boat to a nearby tree on shore, sip from a mason jar of coffee, and greet the bay.

Armed with a *Len Thompson* two-inch white spoon with a streak of red down the middle and a three pronged hook, I cast towards the middle of the bay, let the water run with the lure for a moment, then start reeling in. After several casts, the line suddenly tightens, pulls to the right, then takes off towards the other side of the bay. The line runs for a second before I yank it and start reeling in. The commotion breaks the silence of the bay and the glass-smooth water, sending a pattern of waves and ripples in all directions. As I draw the fish closer to the boat, it thrashes desperately trying to escape. Holding the rod in my right hand, I lean over to take the net with my left, and use it to pull the fish out of the water. I've hooked the 3 lbs. pickerel across the mouth. I grab it by the gill and ease the hook out of its flesh, and examine the fish. It is long and slender, dark in colour with silvery green accents. It has three sets of fins on its belly and a set on its spine. Its scales shimmer in the light. I greet the fish, thank it, put it in a pail, and cover it. I wash my hands in the bay and continue fishing.

In a short time, I have already caught another pickerel slightly smaller than the first and a pike. They flap around in the pail every once in a while, but I take little notice of them. The sky and forest are reflected in perfect symmetry in the still water. Floating around the bay, silence takes over. The only sound I hear is the water as it rocks the boat from side to side. The wind is cool and, with the early sun, the entire scene is a postcard. Laying back in the boat, my face to the sky, I close my eyes and let the wind run over me. The sun bathes my body in light.

On a calm day it takes no more than a fifteen minutes to canoe to the mouth of the bay. I take a few laps, taking in the sights and sounds of the woods. Nearby, a beaver has left his den and splashes in the water. By the mouth of the bay, a moose crosses the river. All the while birds circle above, searching for their prey. The chatter of the forest animates me. The animals are my only companions.

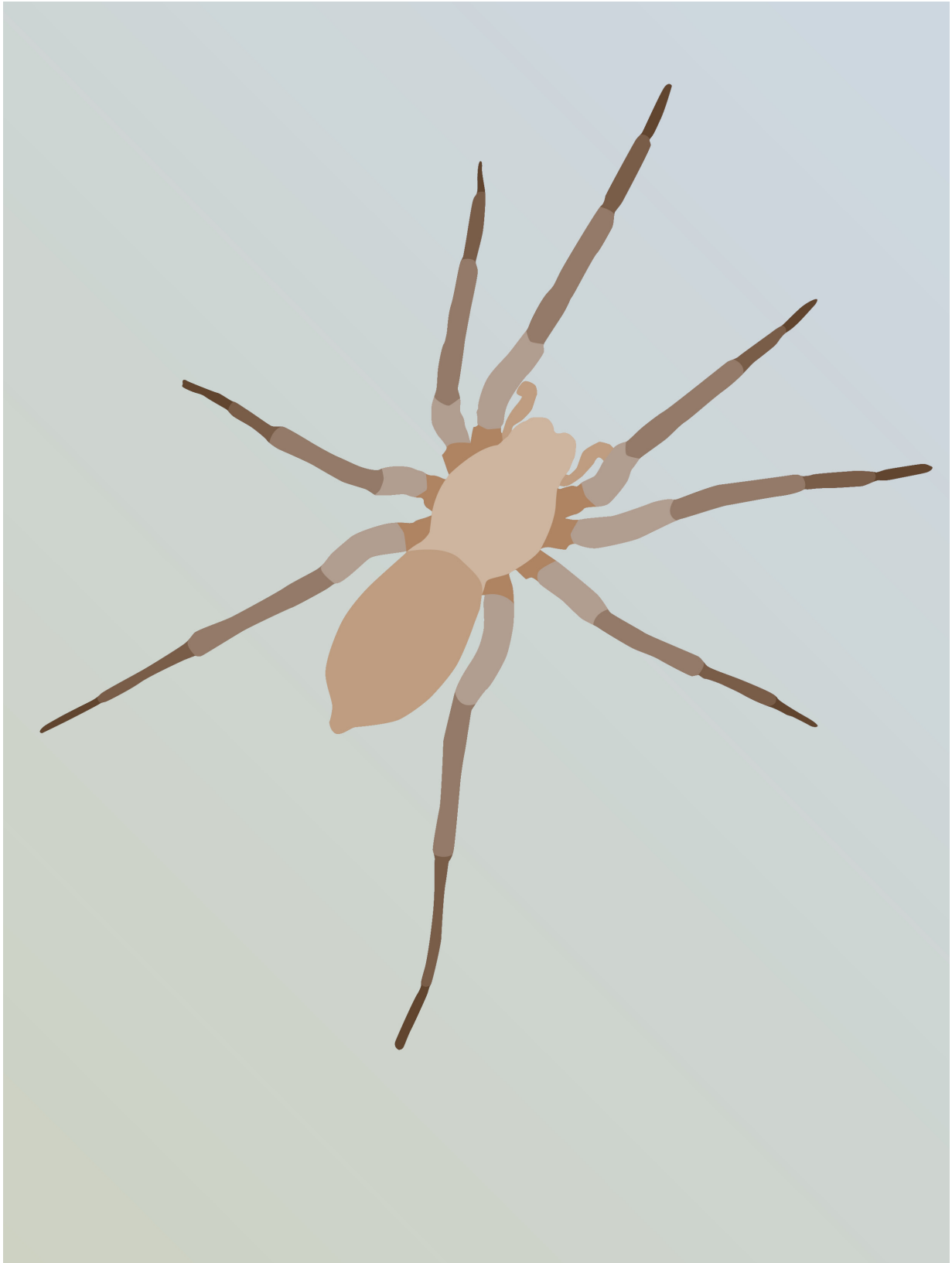


Fig. 30

DAY 25

I suffer from arachnophobia, the fear of spiders. My earliest memories of spiders and fear come from childhood. My mother used to threaten me with a big plastic spider she kept above the fridge. The thing was the size of my head, with long hairs and a menacing look. I knew it was fake, but nonetheless it threw me into a panic every time she brought it out. That fear remains, but I've managed to keep my panic internalized. So it is with great distress that I find a spider about a quarter the size of my palm, crawling on the ceiling this afternoon. Frozen, I watch it for several minutes. I could kill it, or I could capture it and release it. That would mean interacting with the creature. Killing it does not seem right. It has done no harm. It is innocent. I have the unreasonable problem with its existence. I should be the one to change, not the poor spider. Watching the creature make its way across the ceiling, I decide on a plan.

First, I need an empty mason jar. That would be enough to catch it, enclose it, and release it safely into the woods. I find an empty jar and position myself underneath, but still behind it. As I inch towards it, its spots, patterns, and hairs become visible. Its two front legs extend past its curled head. It hides its fangs and most of its eyes. Only two keep a watch for what is ahead, unaware I am closing in behind. Its other six legs sprawl across the ceiling. They are thick, strong, brown, and awful. They could make the jump, propelling those hidden fangs into me at any moment. The mason jar is just a few inches from the creature, when its abdomen twitches, and it leaps forward. I jab with the mason jar but miss, and losing my balance stumble forward. Quickly, the spider moves across the ceiling towards me. Its path unwavering, I gather my balance, step underneath it and trap it in the mason jar. Making sure not to hurt the creature, I slide the jar onto the cap. Carefully removing the assembly, I take the seal and enclose the spider. It is at the bottom of the jar, frantically trying to claw its way up. It manages to get nearly half-way before falling down again. The clear, clean glass of the mason jar is too slick for the spider to catch a grip on. It stays at the bottom scratching at the glass. I bring the jar close to my face and examine the creature. The poor thing must be so confused, with no conception of what is going on. Or does it? Does it fear death? What force propels its motion?

I spend hours staring at the spider in the jar. The thing is so strange, so alien. It does not belong where it is.



Fig. 31

DAY 26

I do not have the heart to let the spider go.

I spend all night thinking about it, and I decide, in an effort to destroy my fear, I will keep it as a companion. I'll see to getting it some food and maybe a more comfortable home. For now, Eddie, as I call him, stays at my desk and keeps me company while I write. Behind the safety of the glass, I can observe Eddie as he, in turn, observes me.

He, or at least what I believe to be a he, stops trying to escape when I explain my intentions, and after I give it some time to think it over. He stops his clawing and settles at the bottom of the jar. We spend hours staring at each other, both wondering the same thing: What the hell is this thing looking at me? I can see no evolutionary reason why spiders have to look so menacing. There is nothing appealing, redeeming, or remotely acceptable about the spiders nature. It is just horrible.

Feeling guilt, I decide to make him a little home in his mason jar. A few twigs, branches and leaves gives him structure to build his web and space to move. I give him pieces of dried fruit but he does not touch it.

He seems to be settling into his new life, no longer clawing at the glass to escape, and no longer staring at me with his eight resentful eyes. I look into them and now see only my reflection.

I cannot tell if I am going mad...



Fig. 32

DAY 27

With dry wood from the wood pile and coals from the previous night's fire, I set out to make a new one. The fire starts quickly. Using a rack made with branches, I hang a pot of water over it. Two branches lashed together form an X at their peaks. They are placed on either end of the fire acting as the vertical supports for a straight branch placed across, resting within the X, making the horizontal support from which the pot hangs. I turn to the outhouse to have my daily movement. There is a certain luxury in relieving myself wherever I choose, without consequences. I add the last clause because urinating in public has become a curious issue of mine. There was a time where I had numerous infractions for relieving myself in public. I always chose the darkest alley, the tallest bush, or the most private place I could find, and still, without fail, I would be met by a police officer with a ticket in hand. It is a commentary on the shortage of public restrooms in the city. There are times when the nearest Starbucks is not close enough (Starbucks has free public restrooms), while the dumpster behind the McDonalds seems like a throne fit for a king. I have tried to be stealthy about my operations, but, I suppose I would make a terrible thief.

My solitude, here in the woods, offers certain liberties, which I should not take for granted. The outhouse is unpleasant but provides a sheltered area to have my daily movement. I could, in theory, run around completely naked slinging shit from the trees. I wouldn't, but the fact remains, I could. Solitude provides an unparalleled level of privacy that I thoroughly enjoy. Without prying eyes there is no need to close the door or draw the blinds. I have nothing to hide; there is no one to hide from.

After, a quick dip in the river to clean myself, then back to the fire to dry off, warm up, and drink my coffee. I use the remaining water for my oatmeal, to which I add raisins, dried cranberries, hand-crushed almonds, and honey. It is a heavy breakfast that will last me until dinner. I have my breakfast by the fire, eating slowly, watching the flames dance against the backdrop of the forest. After eating, I prepare dinner by soaking rice, black beans, and kidney beans in a large pot with salt, pepper, garlic flakes, and a little paprika. By the end of the day they have soaked up plenty of water and cook quickly.



Fig. 33

DAY 28

Today, the fish simply are not biting, so I spend most of the day casting and reeling. I switch tackle a few times, trying out different spoons and lures. Among the scattered gear laying around the property, I found a tackle box with some interesting bait. I try a frog-like lure that floats above the water. For a while I watch it float above the weeds, hopeful for the big catch. It never comes. After all the experimentation, I finally catch two 3 lbs. pickerel with my trusted white and red spoon, and call it a day.

The entire cooking production takes a lot of energy out of me. I sit by the fire, with no power to move. The fire roars, crackles, pops, and shoots flames high into the air. I follow its flame up to a star-filled sky. The layers of stars are plain in the clear night, lit with a million streams of light. Sitting still, I turn to examine the full panorama. The stars lead my eyes to the horizon over the bay where the new moon hangs over the water. Its reflection touches the shore on the opposite side and stretches out into the middle of the bay. The crescent is the crown jewel in a diamond sky. Relaxed by the fire, I watch the moon cross the sky, growing more distant in its ascent.

By the time the moon is at its peak, the fire has died into smouldering coals. And, unwilling to exhaust the energy, I pull myself up and head into the trailer. Inside, the space is filled with moonlight. I don't need a flashlight.

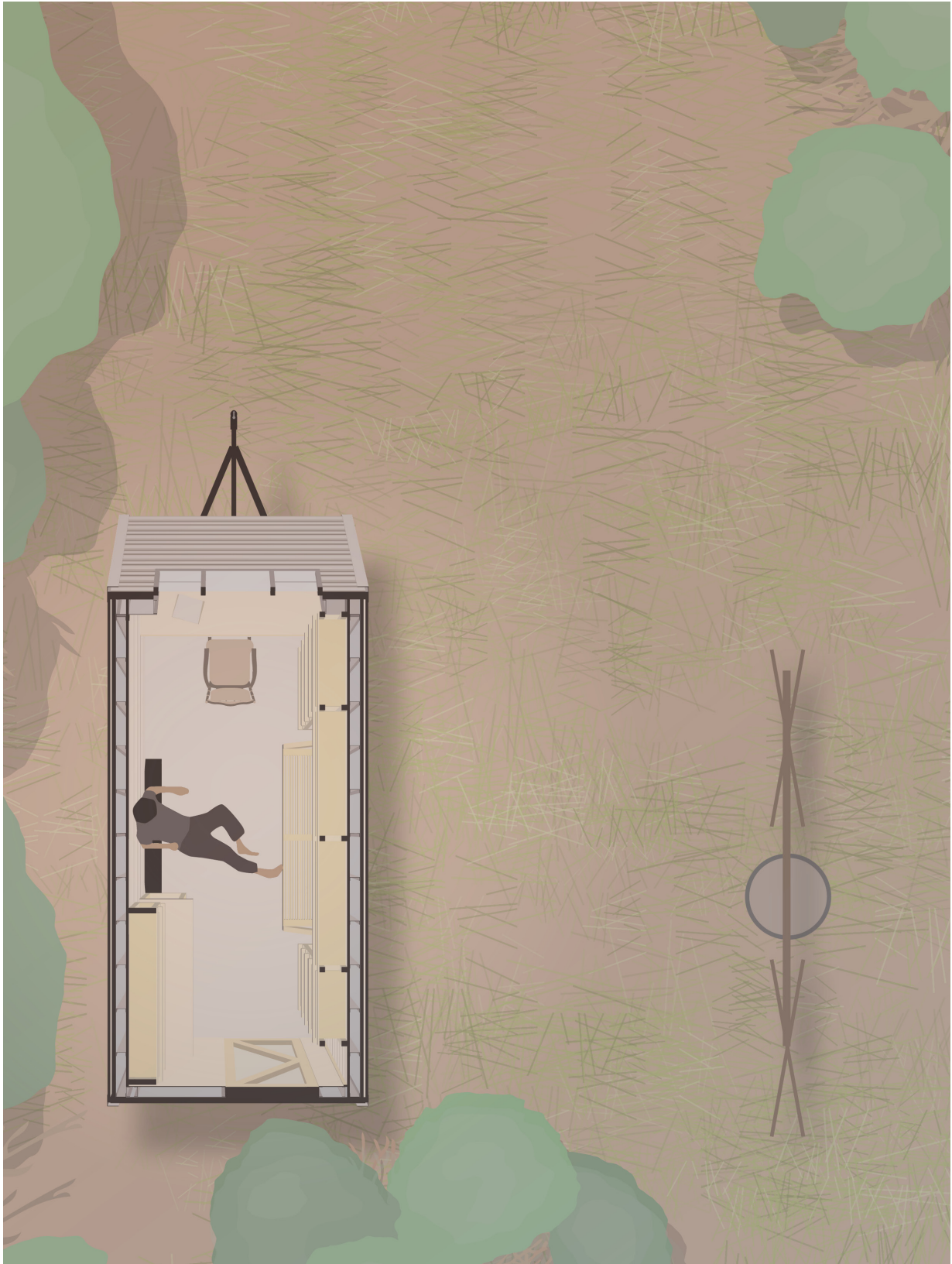


Fig. 34

DAY 29

While cleaning the fish today, a wave of sadness fills me as I watch the pickerel's life extinguish. I claim, here in the woods, no man has dominion over me and my life, and by extension that I hold no dominion over any other form of life. How can I take the life of this fish? It is a serious moral question. If I can take the life of a fish, can I take the life of a man? Is one life more valuable than another? What gives me the privileged to take this life? What makes me the judge? As I stare at the fish lost in my thoughts, in the corner of my eye, a bird appears. A large bird, too far away to recognize its real nature, circles above the bay. I face it as it dives down, plunges into the water, disappears, then flies out with a fish in its beak. The circle of life. We all do whatever is necessary to survive. Be respectful of the process.

I look the fish in the eye and offer my thanks before cutting off the head and throwing it into the bay. Over the pan that I will eventually cook in, I scale and gut the fish, throwing the discarded contents into the water. I carefully fillet the meat.

It took me a good while to learn to fillet fish successfully. I butchered the first few dozen, too eager to eat fresh food. I would forget to scale the fish, leave in bones or hack at the meat. Now, after a good deal of practice, I take my time dealing with my food. I ease the blade through the fish, carefully separating the meat from the spinal column, then peel the bones off the meat, leaving a fresh thick slab. Still fresh with life, the meat needs nothing more than a little salt and pepper. I leave it to marinate in the trailer and head out into the woods for a hike.



Fig. 35

DAY 30

From the first day of the trailer, my resolve and the trailer's strength are tested. Our first adventure comes when it is time for the Grand Air's final voyage. On November 21, 2014, I bring the trailer from the side of a garage in Azilda, Ontario to the parking lot at the School of Architecture in Cambridge, Ontario. A six-hour drive turns into day-long ordeal. The day begins with a series of trips to Canadian Tire to ensure the trailer is safely hitched to the truck with functioning signal, break, and hazard lights. A noon departure time becomes 3pm, which means I have barely three hours of daylight left to make the six-hour drive.

Soon after leaving the town of Azilda, heading south on Highway 69 - a two-lane highway with a posted speed limit of 90km/hr - we meet a snow storm head on. The dying sun and light snow is, at first, pleasant to drive in. It is peaceful and quiet. The snow muffles the sound of the tires and the trailer tows gently behind. The calm ends with darkness, and with it, a blizzard of biblical proportions. Off in the distance, headlights sway, first to the right, then to the left, before disappearing into the darkness. Driving slowly past fallen vehicles it is clear it will be more dangerous to stop than to continue. With each gust of wind the trailer slides, skids, and shakes until it finds the strength to re-align itself. The truck lurches in response to the trailer's movements, nearly throwing us into the ditch each time. I can see only what the headlights illuminate. Snow blankets the road. We are caught in the middle of the blizzard. The drive ceases to be pleasant. Coffee in hand, and darkness ahead, I am primed for the storm. For the next three hours we do not go faster than 40 km/hr. The highway is mostly deserted now. Every now and again a car will dare brave higher speeds and overtake us. With each pass, snow and slop from the tires splash onto the windshield, and the trailer shakes in the vehicle's wake. The light from on-coming traffic bounces off thousands of snow flakes. I am forced to squint to see through the kaleidoscopic viewport. My hands hurt from gripping the wheel. Concentration fills the truck.

When we reach the 400 highway series in Barrie the storm and the roads clear. The worst was over. With the storm behind us, we arrived in Cambridge shortly after midnight, completing a twelve hour journey and the first test of own collective resolve. The trailer and I survive the storm and have been fortified to face the storms ahead.



Fig. 36

DAY 31

Why retreat into the wilderness? Why pursue solitude? For thousands of years people have been attracted to solitude precisely because it provides a productive space for contemplation. Solitude and contemplation walk hand in hand. The purpose of solitude is:

contemplation. But not contemplation in the pagan sense of an intellectual, esoteric enlightenment, achieved by ascetic technique. The contemplation of the [Christian] solitary is the awareness of the divine mercy transforming and elevating his own emptiness and turning it into the presence of perfect love, perfect fullness¹⁹

Merton's description of contemplation brings to mind August Rodin's bronze sculpture *The Thinker*. It captures the deep inner reflection of contemplation, the nearly tortured thought dissolving the outside world leaving only the thinker and his thoughts. Rodin's sculpture describes contemplation, the solitary vocation. But what does that mean for me, to sit around thinking deeply?

Contemplation is derived from the Latin word 'contemplatio' which has its base in the word 'contempio'. This Latin word is a compound word consisting of the prefix 'con' and 'templum'. Con refers to a collocation or simultaneity, a joint action, an enclosure or containing, a dual or reciprocal relationship. Templum denotes the area of sky or land an augur would read during the ceremony. An augur is a Roman priest who, during the augury ceremony, would interpret divine messages from the gods by observing occurrences within the predefined space of the templum. The augur would come to define the location where sacred places would be built and therefore templum came to also refer to a building. This has its roots in the Greek 'temenos' and 'temmo' referring to a specific piece of land assigned and dedicated to a god, sanctuary, or holy precinct.²⁰

Contemplation can be thought of as a kind of augury, where the augur - instead of a Roman priest - is the solitary individual. The contemplator predefines a space for the contemplation to occur. But unlike the augur, this area is not in the sky or on land. It is a virtual space, sacred nonetheless, found within the individual. The contemplator retreats into an inner temple to interpret the personal messages and reflections he receives. It is the Western equivalent to the East's meditation. Contemplation is not simply thinking deeply, but entering a space of internal dialogue.



Fig. 37

DAY 32

Have you ever seen a summertime snow?
Tiny diamonds are falling from the sky
A gift from above, a heavenly show
The sun shines and they dance, and multiply
A storm of little prayers surrounds me
Obscuring my view and soothing my soul
The day is lost in a calm reverie
Eyes close, my heart becoming whole
And yet there is no one here to see me
In summer's snow I am nobody



Fig. 38

DAY 33

I gather my food and prepare the fire. The coals are still warm from the morning and the fire starts quickly. Mesmerized by it, I cannot contain myself when the first sparks and flames dance before me. “I have made fire !”²¹

The large pot of rice and beans hangs over the fire for the first hour and then continues to cook on hot coals until the water evaporates. After the side dish, I start grilling the fish over fresh flames. Grilling takes no more than a few minutes and soon I have a fresh meal, with leftovers! I give thanks before eating. I give thanks to the land, and the bay for food and fire. I thank the fish for its life and the wood for its flame. I thank the sun, the moon, and the stars before thanking the heavens, and myself, for life and meal. Amen.

Looking down at the fish, a shadow of remorse comes over me again, but my mouth waters. The fish is fresh and cooked to perfection. I sit back against the trailer, plate on my lap, and watch the flames. I eat with my bare hands, tearing into the white meat, peeling bones out of my mouth. With a large walnut spoon I carved for myself a few years back, I take heaping piles of rice and beans into my mouth, mixing the flavours as I chew. After several helpings, I put the pot and plate down, drink as much water as I can take, sit back, and watch the fire.

With every flicker of flame I am reminded of Tom Hanks in *Castaway*, prancing in a loin cloth around his deserted island. Most certainly alone, he never seemed to “take responsibility for his own inner life,”²² and thus, as Merton describes, never enters solitude. His character, much like Robinson Crusoe, did not choose his circumstance. Each fell into his aloneness by chance; neither chose it, like a hermit or monk. Their time in aloneness is characterized by a desperate hope that their circumstance will change, they will find themselves in society once more. Unlike Hanks and Crusoe, I do not wish to return or be saved. I am at peace, and do not need companionship here. The forest sings and the fire entertains. I can remain here in solitude for a while longer.



Fig. 39

DAY 34

Loneliness is definitively not solitude. Loneliness hinges on the absence of the other, while solitude is the state of being without the other. The lonely long for companionship and recognition. They call out for their voices to be heard and for their faces to be seen. The solitary does not simply turn away from the world, they step outside of the social body confining the lonely. Loneliness is an emotion, it is “the unpleasant feeling of longing for some kind of human interaction.”²³ The lonely’s inability to detach from the world gives rise to feelings of depression, anguish, despair, and gloom.

Even if Thoreau found “a companion that was so companionable as solitude,”²⁴ he certainly felt loneliness bite down from time to time. It is nearly impossible, when recognizing one’s aloneness, not to feel loneliness; unless those feelings are quickly effaced the individual will undoubtedly find himself in a “sick solitude.”²⁵ The mere withdrawal of the lonely is “without meaning and without fruit.”²⁶ His aloneness becomes nothing more than an act of individualism and egotism. The true solitary are not the ones who reject society in public, but cling to its warm bosom in the evening. The true solitary condition is “neither an argument, an accusation, a reproach or a sermon. It is simply itself.”²⁷ For the goal of the solidarity life lies outside the bounds of the social spheres all together; it exists only as a means to become “fully awake.”²⁸



Fig. 40

DAY 35

Vacates atque non cactus deus adert
(Summoned or not summoned, God will be present) ²⁹



Fig. 41

DAY 36

Last night, after eating dinner, a wave of exhaustion came over me. Not willing to fight it, I quickly cleaned things up and ended the day curling up in bed.

It may be two in the morning, no later than three, when I awake to a great bellowing growl. The noise jolts me awake. Immediately, all my faculties are operating at full capacity. Again, the growl fills the space. It is deep and snarling. Short panting follows long bursts of angry grunts. Unmistakably coming from a bear. Alert and fearful, I wait for more. Silence follows the first growls, but now the sound of heavy walking fills the trailer. The noise is right outside the door. I think back: did I clean the blood, guts, and meat from dinner. What if the smell carried the bear to the trailer?

The moon shines off the bay; it gives enough light to see by. I stand onto the desk to look out the clerestory. A shadow lumbers. I know the trailer would not hold up to a bear attack. I creep down off the desk, making as little noise as possible. I take the flashlight I keep underneath the bed, turn it on but keep my hand above the light. I find the shotgun case beneath the desk. Bringing the case to the desk, I turn off the flashlight. By moonlight, I grab the gun, pocket the shells and creep to the door. I steady my breath, and listen deeply. The padding of steps fade away. Silence retakes the woods. I stand, waiting for another noise. Silence. The minutes go by. An owl hoots. I stand at attention. Nothing from the bear. More minutes pass. Silence still. I have not moved. Then a rustle in a bush, and I am alert again. The rustle disappears as quickly as it came. Silence returns. I wait to hear another sound until morning light starts to burn my eyes.

Finally, with the sun shining brightly, I open the door and inspect the area. Footprints show bear tracks, most likely a mother and two cubs. They concentrated their efforts around the fire and where I gutted the fish. They didn't take much notice of the trailer.



Fig. 42

DAY 37

It begins to rain again this afternoon. The morning was clear and sun-filled, but by midday, legions of dark clouds have amassed overhead. The dense rain clouds press down. I can feel the pressure in my knees and ankles. The animals notice it as well. The low cloud-line takes all the birds out of the sky. They seek refuge under tree canopies and in their nests. I prepare the trailer for another storm.

The trailer leaks from the window, but with the inclined face it is difficult to secure a tarp over it. Instead, I drape the tarp over the peak of the roof so it covers the top quarter of the window. With rope, I secure the tarp to the trailer. While I tie down the tarp, the wind starts to pick up. In the distance, the whip of lightning flashes across the sky in a roar. The storm brings sheets of rain, forcing me to finish securing the trailer. I wrap the fire wood in a tarp and store it under the trailer, and bring in all the fishing gear.

Since the first storm I have been blessed with Eden-like weather, only sweetened by the occasional summer rain. I pray the storm does not last as before. Since the last, I have prepared and fortified myself. I am more relaxed and at ease with my surroundings. Routine has taken over, shielding me from loneliness.

Concentrating on my breathing I am more prepared to deal with aloneness.



Fig. 43

DAY 38

The rain has not stopped. It continues throughout the night and into today. The sun stays locked away. Time dissolves. Loneliness creeps in. When it does I stop my writing and face Eddie.

“How long will this one last?”

The spider stays staring at me and most likely several other things. He then moves up the branch to face the sky. He stays there for a moment, then moves back to his original spot to stare back in my direction. I in turn, face the sky, and study the clouds. They are an avalanche covering the sky. Dark and swollen, they roll over each other, and show no signs of weakening. I prepare for another long stretch of enclosure.

“Longer than the last?”

Grabbing the mason jar, I bring Eddie close to my face. He does not move from the branch when the mason jar is disturbed. Instead he stays cemented on the branch with all eight eyes fixed on me.

“Please, not longer than the last”

Eddie remains unmoved. I keep him close, staring out at the ocean of clouds above. When greyness dulls my mood, I put Eddie down to stretch. The trailer is big enough for my body to extend in all directions. I take full advantage and ease the tension out of my muscles, tendons, and joints. My back crackles like a cement grinder, my neck pops and my knees crack, my body a symphony of protest. Feeling loose and light, I sit on the floor facing the sky, cross my legs, close my eyes, and drift away.

Although I have never practised meditation before, here in the woods, I am learning its value. With deep breathing, my heart rate slows, and the agitation melts away.



Fig. 44

DAY 39

More rain and more pain. Once again I am reduced to eating dried goods and I am beginning to feel rather weak. My food supplies are nearly half done and my water reserve is three weeks from empty. I have plenty of food, but my stomach is sore from the diet. I have not entirely adjusted to dried foods and nuts.

I spend most of the day with no motivation to read or write. Instead I stare out the door. As the rain hits my face through the screen, I watch the wet, dark forest beyond. The wind moves the trees above but the forest floor is still and lifeless. The hours go by unnoticed as I stand, staring out, lost in thought. Occasionally a shadow moves across my view deep in the forest, but I see no signs of life.

I do not know how much longer I can stand being alone. I need a break, a momentary release from the pressures of this isolation. Perhaps I will walk into town when the storm passes. Until then, I must wait out the weather.

With darkness, a cold, wet, wind blows through the forest. I close the door, and put on my pull-over sweater underneath my hooded sweater, to stay warm. Bundled up, I huddle at my desk, writing by lightning flashes. Eddie stares, watching my pen move in the light. Like me, he is trapped. The only difference is, I locked myself away, whereas he is a prisoner. I do not know how much longer either of us can take.



Fig. 45

DAY 40

Unable to handle my loneliness, I spend much of the day in bed. The storm still rages and I only leave my bed to urinate out the door. My mood is dark, and I am at my wits end with this aloneness, the confines of the trailer, and my circumstance in it. I try to calm myself. First, I practice deep breathing exercises and they seemed to help for a short time, but my mind keeps drifting to dark places. Sitting eyes closed, crossed legged facing the sky, I try to let the ugly thoughts wash away. Instead they grow in intensity until I can no longer sit still. Pacing up and down the trailer I decide the best course of actions is to sleep until the storm passes. I crawl back into my cocoon and wait.



Fig. 46

DAY 41

It took a long time to fall asleep. When I did, I fell into a deep slumber, only to awake to the roar of thunder. The storm continues.

Eating a handful of dates and almonds, I stare outside gauging the time. Darkness is lifting, and daybreak is near, but the storm locks the sun away, and shows no sign of stopping.

This day has been the hardest since I arrive forty-one days ago. I cannot stand it any longer. Sitting at my desk, I struggle to focus on any particular task. I watch Eddie as he watches me. He is really so fragile, his tiny body would not stand a chance against the weight of my boot. If he were to die, the world would be unaffected. It will not change, the seasons will turn and the sun will rise and fall again. Life will march forward without skipping a beat. Eddie and I are not different, we all die and the world continues to turn. What am I holding onto? What's the point of trudging through the mud of life trying to fill all the holes? In the end everyone will drop dead. There's no meaning, no rationale. It's all a joke, but no one is laughing.



Fig. 47

DAY 42

I can hardly sleep this night. In its anger, the storm batters the site and rocks the trailer back and forth. Awake, staring at the dark sky, I feel the weight of my aloneness press down upon my chest. My breathing is heavy and fast, I cannot settle it down.

I pick up the shotgun and look over every inch of its cold body, learning its curves and edges. The wind howls and my stomach growls in response. The gun is heavy in my arms. With effort, I raise it to my eye and stare down the barrel. All light and sound is sucked into the hole.

Delirious and lonely, I open my mouth, and place it over the barrel, clamping my teeth around it. The sound of teeth on metal echoes throughout the trailer, before the rain drowns it out. I close my eyes thinking of the abyss.

It takes a great deal of courage to pull the trigger. There is no cowardice in it at all. Pulling the trigger affirms the control over one's life rests solely within the individual. It takes courage to walk up to the edge, stare into the chaos, and jump into nothingness. My eyes close, there is nothing but darkness all around. That, and the cold metal of the gun slowly warming in my mouth.

The seconds turn into minutes, and into hours. The gun rests on my lamp. I stare at the wall, watching darkness lift. Light is accompanied by slowing rain and the songs of morning birds.



Fig. 48

DAY 43

The sun pours down its loving light. I fall out of bed, drop the gun on the ground, and stumble out of the trailer in nothing but my underwear. The fresh air clears my madness away, the sun heals my heart, and I feel the heaviness of the night fade away.

Wilder and filthier than ever I make the pilgrimage to the bay to bathe. I walk straight into the water, ignoring the dock. The cold water sends shivers through me. My feet sink in the sandy river bed. Tall grass and weeds tickle my legs. I trudge through the shallow water to my chin. Stiff with cold, I take a deep breath, and submerge myself, swim a few strokes towards the middle of the bay, and emerge once more out of breathe. I wade for a moment, submerge myself once more, take a few strokes towards the dock, and resurface again. A third time I dip, swim closer to the shore, then resurface as my feet touch the bottom. Then walk back towards camp.

The sun is high in the sky and blistering hot. The ground is already dry, the bay is nearly steaming. I lay myself out on the deck of the old trailer camp. My body dries in the sun. My eyes, tired from a long night with little sleep, grow heavy. It's not long before I drift away.



Fig. 49

When St. Anthony withdrew into the Egyptian desert, unknowingly, he began a tradition that persists to this day. A Christian living in the 3rd century, he is inspired by scripture to slowly rid himself of the burdens of possessions and relationships, until he is ready to accept the challenge of withdrawing into a desert cave. There he remains for twenty years and, through his struggle, inspires over 2000 years of monasticism and eremitism.

Although many were inspired by St. Anthony, there were others who questioned the practice citing the Bible's clear opposition: "Then the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner."³⁰ Elsewhere in Ecclesiastes : "For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help."³¹

Nonetheless, eremitism grew in popularity, so much so that St. John stumbled upon the ultimate paradox of the practice. He is cited to have observed how his hermitage drew disciples who effectively destroyed the solitude he sought, and how, when in the safety of community, he felt he could rest peacefully within himself because his internal solitude was no longer being threatened.

Hume, several centuries later, famously denounced "monkish virtues" of "celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude."³² He saw the practice as a self-serving egotistical act, leading to the torrid madness characteristic of many solitary men and women. Even St. Basil questioned solitude and went as far to forbid the practice: "the life of solitude violated the divine law of love and was injurious to the soul of the solitary in nursing a sense of self-sufficiency and spiritual pride."³³

The ancient debate ultimately rests upon what St. John first observed: the "active" against the "contemplative" life. Many find value in the "active" life of community, service, and society as opposed to the "contemplative" life of silence, solitude, and aloneness. The Bible, Hume, St. Basil, and other critics warn of the delicate balance the hermit focuses on. The solitary does not live in absolute isolation. There is always a community to support its endeavours. Monasticism developed with this idea at its core: community is in service of the individual's pursuit. Man cannot live without society; humanity has evolved to depend on community for individual survival. Critics caution against the "sick solitaries"³⁴ who enter aloneness with an overinflated sense of self-worth and individualism. Ultimately, as Merton describes, "what they want is not the desert but the womb."³⁵



Fig. 50

DAY 45

When the skeleton of the trailer was first erected and sheathed, the space became, for the first time, real and defined. I could not keep my hands off of it. Stepping inside, my body gauged itself freely against the enclosed space. I stretched out, running my hands up and down the members feeling the embodied strength, the tension in the structure. Moonlight poured in from the window and hole in the roof where the skylight was to be installed. The space was raw and perfect, full of potential. An idea starts from a random sketch in a notebook, then grows, and gains traction and strength, until I inhabit it. I cannot help but love the space, no matter how imperfect or awkward it may be. It is mine, brought into being with my blood, sweat, and tears. Sitting inside of the trailer on that first day, I fell in love with it. And although it leaks, and I hate being imprisoned by it, I still love my trailer.

While, compared to the main run of the river, the bay is a low traffic area, on occasion, a boat or two visits. They take a few laps around or stay for a while, fishing in the weeds, and every now and then, someone will drive up to the public launch to take their boat out for the afternoon. I am normally off the water by the time the bay sees any activity. I fish and enjoy the water before others make their way there.

I am hardly even fishing, mostly laying half-awake, lost in thought, when the roar of a distant motor breaks my dreams. I reel in my line, but nothing grabs the lure. The sound, growing louder, approaches. It will continue down the river as most boats normally do. I ignore the deafening noise, and lay back with my rod next to me. The sound, does not continue its expected path, eventually disappearing. Instead, it grows louder, until it engulfs me. I look up, a twelve foot dingy makes its way to the far end of the bay to the weed beds. The driver raises his arm in greeting. I follow suit. I watch him find his spot until the ripples from his wake have all subsided and the water becomes calm again.

With three fish already in the pail, I keep my rod in the boat, and try to recapture the dreams. I cannot rest while someone else intrudes in on my bay. For a while I am restless. I untie the boat and paddle back to camp. The fisherman is still in the weeds and does not appear he will be moving anytime soon. He raises his hand to greet me once more when I am near the dock. I return the gesture and hurry back to the safety of the trailer.



Fig. 51

DAY 46

Throughout history, men and women have been compelled to retreat into solitude. Some withdraw from the world to wrestle with their maker, others needed aloneness to master their craft, while others find the world they lived in unacceptable and decide for themselves to forge a life outside it. So many have found solitude a necessary circumstance in their lives. If solitude is such a fortifying condition, why is it so difficult? Did all these sages go through the same insanity I did?

I have tasted darkness. I felt it take me and warp my thoughts. I am ready for my solitude to come to an end. I have spent forty-six days alone in the woods and have exhausted myself in my struggle. I cannot take my aloneness much longer. The journey has to come to an end. I cannot stay here forever. I came to find solitude, to see out “how good peace and quiet really are.”³⁶ I have done my time.

I have not once turned my iPhone on. I put it away, and never bothered to setup the solar panel to charge it. I wanted to save the battery for the utmost emergency. Picking it up, I see my face in the reflection of its liquid black screen. My beard is wild and untamed, my eyes are sunken and weary. My face has thinned out and shows the marks of a thousand mosquito bites. I am worn. I turn on the phone. I am over-taken by a thousand beeps. Forty-six days of text messages and emails all at once. I turn off the sound and put it down until the barrage is over. I scroll through the text messages to see if there has been any emergencies, catastrophes, or miracles while I have been away. Nothing comes up on first glance, just well-wishes and hopeful advice. I scan through the 356 emails. Nothing of importance, mostly junk, and school related things. Then I make the call home.

My mother answers the phone. She sounds relieved to know I am safe and I have decided to return. We draw up a plan for my retrieval ten days from now. My time in solitude is coming to an end.



Fig. 52

DAY 47

I remember when solitude and I first met. It was during the 2013 heatwave in New York City. Although there have been shades of delight, the entire relationship, from the start, has been coloured in discontent. Many have sung the praises of solitude, but what I first found in the bowels of New York City's underground was anything but "companionable."³⁷

It was late in the evening, and I was finally leaving the office. Given the heat that tormented the city, spending the day in a well conditioned cubicle was pleasant. Now, the weather made the subway platform thick with heat. The platform was foul: the smell of urine and sweat hung in the air, the musk of homelessness drenched the benches, vomit patches traced lines from the stairs to the tracks where rotting garbage lay, and vermin scuttled in reckless amusement. My stomach began to turn.

The platform was, rightfully so, deserted. No one would willingly subject himself to this abuse. Yet, I remained waiting for the train. My eyes fixed on the darkness from the tunnel, waiting to see a light. Heat, decay, and filth rendered me delirious: I realized that I was alone. Alone in the physical sense, yes, that was quite clear, but the aloneness I felt on that platform was much deeper than bodily aloneness. I felt it deep within my being, a kind of gnawing from the very pit of my stomach. In that state, my body failed to register the subway platform; the heat disappeared, the smell vanished, and even the rats stopped their games.

While my body remained firmly planted on the platform, my mind had drifted in lonesome reflection. Lost in a sea of thoughts, real aloneness began to emerge. I felt nothingness all around me - no meaning, purpose, or destination, nothing but blackness. I didn't snap out of my delirium, until a pair of night-goers entered the platform. Looking around, the sign indicating 'no service at this station' became glaringly obvious. I left the station, hailed a cab, and headed home. But that feeling of 'aloneness' remained with me. I felt an uncanny urge begin to swell in me - the desire to feel that solitude again.



Fig. 53

DAY 48

I do not fear aloneness anymore, I fear returning to the world. I fear the weight of the world will once again drive me into withdrawal. I fear the peace I found here in the woods will fade away, leaving me, once more, with a gnawing in the pit of my stomach.

“How will my solitude continue once I come back to the world?”

Eddie stares back at me. He stays behind his web. It hangs effortlessly between three branches. Its arm extending to five locations on the branches holds the web taut. He clings to it, but his eyes stay fixed on mine.

In a society driven by outward appearances, it is increasingly difficult to find moments of solitude, and even more difficult to find those explicitly seeking it out. The hermit and the monk have fallen out of favour. Solitude and contemplation have fallen out of favour. Once-revered aspirations have been lost in time. Our capacity for solitude is dwindling as we spend more time engaged with the world than we do with our selves. Yet, for centuries solitude has provided the productive space for writers, musicians, and artists to elevate their crafts, and for monks and hermits to come closer to their maker. The literary, philosophical, and spiritual worlds are an ocean of resources, each presenting solitude as a fundamental human experience. What is it about solitude that Admiral Byrd found ‘so good’ and Thoreau found ‘so companionable’?

Surely they too faced the dark lows of the storm. Byrd himself nearly died from carbon monoxide poison, and in his delirious state surely questioned his circumstance. From time-to-time, Thoreau too must have felt the longing for companionship, tenderness, and human affection. But these men, and countless others, faced the darkness only for it to strengthen their resolve. They grew peaceful, accepting of their circumstance. When you stop being alone, and start being in aloneness, you begin to taste what is so good about solitude.



Fig. 54

DAY 49

Praise the day!

The sun shines with a love so strong it bakes the trailer to near sauna-like temperatures. The air is thick, still, and humid. I crank the windows and open the door to let whatever breeze flow through the space. While the trailer cooks in the sun, I head into the woods to spend the day in the cooler forest.

There are no cares as I wander about the property. My mind is blank: the dark days are past, and the pressure of the days to come are all soaked up by the woods. The sun dapples the forest floor with a glowing pattern of light and shadow. I follow the moving path through the forest until I come to the grave where I buried the budgie. Now the grave has grasses growing through the stones. I greet it, and again sit against the large cedar tree. With my eyes closed, I mumble a few words of gratitude and remorse, then announce my departure. A final farewell to the bird, and the knife. I continue wandering through the woods.

Past creeks, marshes, and ponds, I end where the train tracks cross the road. Without taking much time to decide, I continue west, following the railway line. The Canadian National Railway maintains the width of land the railway rests on. The gravel sides are well groomed and easy to walk on. I continue walking, keeping an ear for the sound of a train. Properties border the rail line. Occasionally, signs of “No Trespassing” or “Private Property” are nailed to a tree. Some properties are fenced in, some are well groomed, while others are wild. With the sun pouring down, I open my shirt, letting a cool summer breeze roll through me.

I walk until the trees to my right start to thin and I see houses. I am approaching the town of Spanish, but I do not press forward into the town. I have no business there. Most people would be a little taken aback at me. The walk has left me no place to have social interactions. I turn to head back, following the tracks towards camp.



Fig. 55

DAY 50

With my impending departure, I begin to prepare myself and the trailer for the return. The trailer needs less work than I do. It is prepared to move at a moment's notice, whereas I need the remaining days to deal with the inevitable questions. I dread having to tell and re-tell my story.

Eddie sits above the body of a fly, and I assume he is slowly eating it. He takes no notice of me. He is concerned only with his survival. After the long hours we've spent with each other, he seems no more a sage than a rock. He moves with a deliberateness and precision, giving real purpose to his actions. He obeys only The Great Laws of Nature that bring harmony and balance to all things. They govern the movement of the heavenly bodies, the power of the wind and water, the strength of fire, the hardness of rock, and the rhythm of the moon. They govern life, birth, death, and decay. All things, living or not work by these laws. The sun rises and sets by it. Everything has its purpose, a role to play in the great cosmic dance. The land, the seasons, the sun, the moon, and the stars all existed well before I or Eddie breathed our first breaths, and they will continue long after we go. Nature is resilient, ever changing, all inclusive. We are part of it, work with it, and learn from it. The sequences of nature are effortless, nothing stresses itself to reach a particular goal or to complete a task. Nothing worries, over-thinks, or grows frustrated. Everything flows, water over rocks.

Watching Eddie, I see these laws are irrefutable, and my dread fades away. He has not moved from his position over the fly. I lean back against my rocking chair, fold my arms, and watch the star-filled sky. Layer upon layer of lights fill the view. My eyes, tired and heavy close. I fall asleep in place.



Fig. 56

DAY 51

The grass around the trailer and entrance has grown significantly. To ensure there are no issues when it comes time to haul the trailer out, I decide to spend the day cutting grass and cleaning up the area. With no real tools to perform the work, I hack away at grasses and bushes with a freshly sharpened machete. The blade cuts perfectly fine, but the tool is short and requires me to bend down with each swipe. It is back-breaking work, but soon the grasses around the trailer are trimmed and the fire pit is clean and free of debris. The entrance generally stays in the shade and doesn't have much to clean up. I decide to haul the firewood from the pile outside to the covering by the outhouse. The work is slow. I can only carry an armful of logs at a time. Each log is covered with crawling monsters. I blow them away from my face and shake them off my arms as I make the walk from the pile by the trailer to the enclosure. Many of logs are soggy and wet, some are even rotting from the inside. The bark looks fresh, but the inside has turned into mush, and is filled with a thousand living things. I throw those rotting logs into the forest. Several things have bitten me while lugging wood. Many of the bites are from mosquitoes and show only localized swelling. Two bites, one on my left wrist, the other on my left forearm, look like some fanged creature was biting me as it climbed my arm. Three bites have slightly elliptical localized swelling, one on my right hand between my second and third knuckle, one half-way up the inside of the forearm, and one a few inches below my elbow. One completely unique bite, on the far side of my left hand, is small and circular, and stings very badly. None seem threatening. None have increased in severity.

After a few hours of work, I am drenched in sweat. I take refuge in the shade. My back aches from all the bending, and my arms are sore from the various bites, but I am happy with the work. Smelling the grass, I am reminded of Merton cutting the grass at Gethsemani. For the monks, manual labour was serious. *The Rule of St. Benedict* describes, in detail, the lives of monks in a monastery, including the importance of manual labour. St. Benedict saw every act as a potential act of meditation, and as an opportunity to step closer to God. His rule dictates two, roughly three-hour, stretches of time a day dedicated to manual labour.³⁸ The repetitive act of digging a hole, sawing wood, painting, or cutting grass was an act of losing oneself in the present and a chance to enter a space of contemplation.



Fig. 57

DAY 52

While reading Jung's biography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, I watch Eddie crouched on a branch staring out in the direction of the door. Suddenly he stands erect on all eight legs. Both the screen and the exterior are door open, and the windows are open as well. Air rushes through the trailer. I turn to see what it is. A hummingbird is hovering in the doorway. Maybe she smells the honey on my oatmeal, or just wants to say hello. The hummingbird is green with a silvery blue undercoat. Her wings are accented with white and black ends. Her face is black, and is separated from the green of her body by a band of white. She has a green and black mohawk, and a long, slender beak with a golden point. She is hardly the size of my hand. Her tiny body floats in the doorway. She buzzes from corner to corner, then darts inside the trailer.

First she goes to the pantry and hums around the jars, then moves on to inspect the storage unit, concentrating her efforts on my clothing, then she buzzes by the desk. She takes one more lap around, still ignoring Eddie and I, then darts into the doorway. She pauses for a moment then flies into the woods. I run to the door to see her leave but she has already disappeared. I come back to the desk and Eddie is crouched on the branch, as before.

Instead of returning to read, I take advantage of the day and take a long walk in the woods. The day is cool and breezy, the bugs have vanished, and I am free to stroll unbothered. I walk the border of property and end up near the railway again. This time I decide to take the line eastward, and walk until the sun starts to set. When it does, I turn and head back towards camp. By the time I leave the railway corridor and head into the forest towards camp, night is setting. The moon is bright in the clear sky. My flashlight is unnecessary in its light. I enter the site from the south and see the trailer standing exactly as I had it, only now it is bathed in soft moonlight. I watch it for a moment, half amazed and half confused.

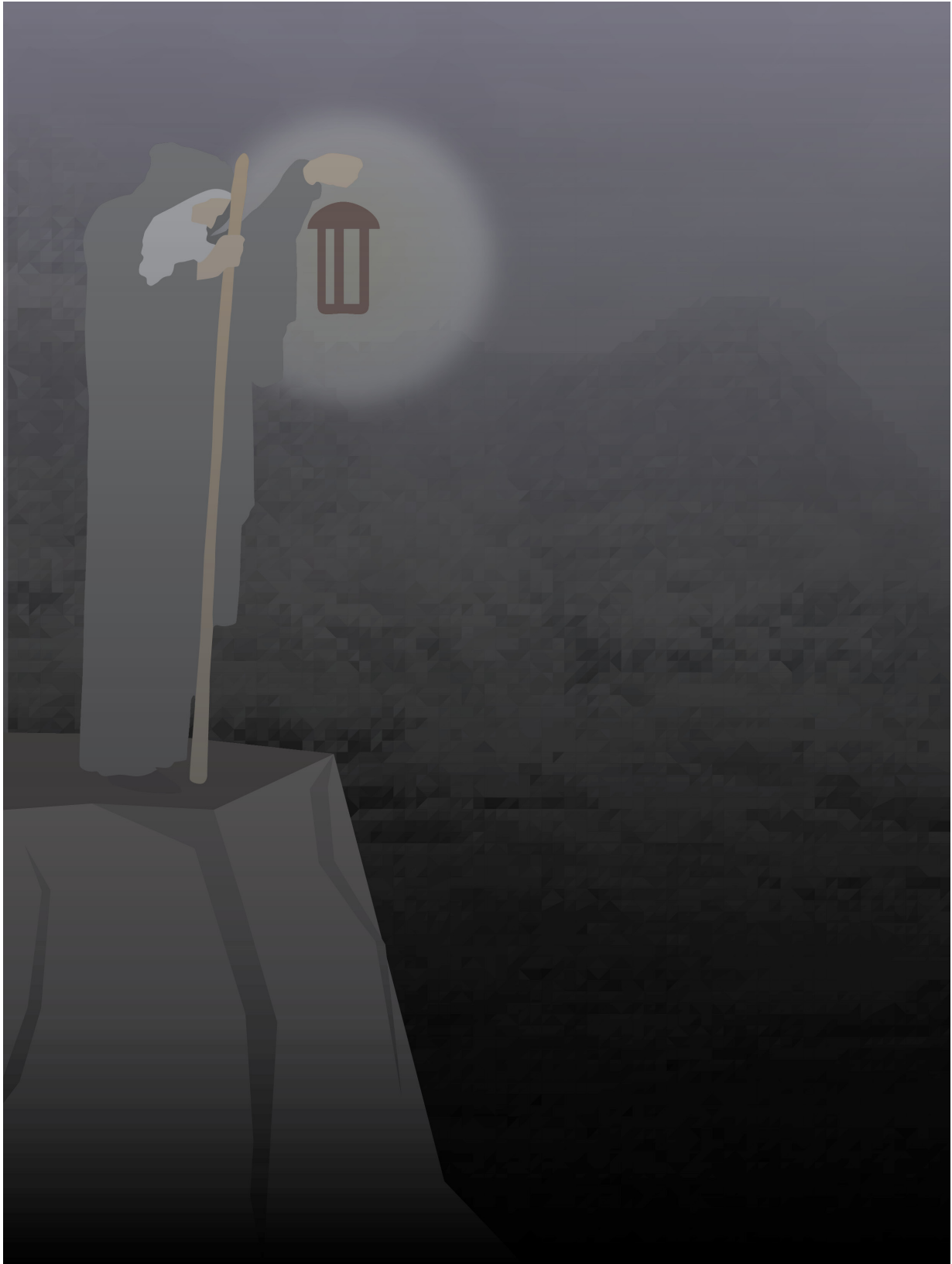


Fig. 58

DAY 53

Quaero quod impossibile
(Seek that which is not possible)³⁹



Fig. 59

DAY 54

A man can only stand himself for so long before losing his mind. He may pour his attention into God, the surrounding nature, or some other object of focus. But, he must - and simultaneously, cannot - face the absurdity of his life. He needs to be both, reminded of his aloneness, and offered a chance to transcend it.

I was sick with solitude when I found Eddie, I am not better off when I release him. Since we first met, he reminds me of my isolation, and that I am also never truly alone. Physically, isolation only hints at the deeper metaphysical aloneness Merton describes as “universal aloneness:”⁴⁰ the aloneness that simultaneously unites the individual with the collective through the mystery of life. When we come into this world we are alone. Each individual has to, for him-or herself, breathe in the first breath of air. Death makes this even more explicit. When a man dies, he dies alone. He, and he alone, must cross the threshold from this world into the next. We all share in our aloneness.

With Eddie by my side, I trudged through the mud of aloneness, and am set to return to the world. He has played his role, and the time has come to release him back into the woods. We spend the morning together. I eat by his side, then have my coffee as he works on his web. I tell him of my concerns, my disappointments with my time in solitude: disappointments with the unpredictable weather, the constantly soggy, saturated ground, and disappointments with my inability to cope with aloneness. I tell him what I enjoyed most: fishing on the bay, watching the fire late into the night, the silence, the stillness, and waking to the sound of birds instead of an alarm. I tell him about my plans to return to solitude, and how, next time, I will bring a First Aid Kit, and set up a full solar panel to run my laptop and other devices. I explain how, next time, I won't be as extreme in my solitude. I will gladly entertain visitors and keep correspondences. Then I acknowledge that through Eddie, I have learnt the balance between solitude and community. I also tell him of my ambitions, my dreams. I tell him about my fantasies and the peaceful life I one day hope to have.

With the sun high in the sky, I finally decide to take Eddie home. I walk him to the edge of the property, open the mason jar putting the cap and seal into my bag. Then I leave the open mason jar on its side on the forest floor.

“Good-bye Eddie”

The spider disappears into the forest.



Fig. 60

DAY 55

“What sort of space is that which separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary?”⁴¹

Thoreau’s question is the question I have been asking myself since solitude first entered my world. The question though, is really two questions acting as one. The first question asks: what space separates a man from others? And the second question: what sort of space makes a man solitary?

Thoreau’s questions depend on two factors. The first question depends on one’s relationship to ‘his fellows’, and the second question, imbues space with the power to make a man solitary. The first question is straightforward. Solitude is a state of aloneness, it places the individual in relation to the collective. If one is to be solitary, one is to be alone, separated from others. The second question is my departure point: How can space make a man solitary?

The solitary space of Thoreau’s inquiry is man’s temple to himself, for himself. He asks, what space makes a man solitary. It is a space where one feels comfortable and safe, akin to the feelings evoked by one’s childhood home. It is a protective space, promoting inquiry and exploration, leading to contemplation. It is a space of security and intimacy, where silence and peace can overtake individuality. Each individual has his or her own unique answer to the question. For some, the space is a church, mosque, synagogue, or other sacred space. For others, it may be a domestic space: a bedroom, den, bathroom, a nook or corner. Some even find it in the security of individual pieces of furniture: a couch, a chair, a desk, or table. Others require significant physical separation, and withdraw to cottages, cabins, chalets, or cabanas. Each scale of space presents the individual with the opportunity to transcend his or her condition and dwell in the “great simplicity”⁴² of solitude.



Fig. 61

DAY 56

With my departure this evening, the hours move slowly. I awake startled and alert, and hurry about the day cleaning up the remaining gear and tools outside, and organizing my affairs before the trip home. I can hardly eat, only a handful of nuts and raisins. I have no desire to go out for a last fish. I cannot bear saying a prolonged good-bye.

Before my brother and the truck come to haul me out of my isolation, I make a final farewell to Whalen Pond. I thank it for nurturing me and challenging me. I thank it for its bounty and its beauty, and promise never to forget my time on its shores. I thank the woods for its support, for its wisdom and for its patience. And I thank the sky for the chaos and the pain it has caused me. I thank it also for its warming light, for its endless ocean of stars, and to for its forever-changing clouds. I thank the grasses, the waters, the trees, and the leaves. I thank the animals, the bugs, the flying monsters, and the distant sound of whistling trains. I thank the river, and I thank my struggle with aloneness. I thank the harmony of nature and the madness I faced fighting my demons. I thank the forest and everything that calls it home. I shared fifty-six days with the woods and now it is time to come home.

COMING BACK

I arrived in Sudbury, on July 19, 2015, after fifty-six days on the shores of the Spanish River. The journey though, did not end. Instead, after leaving the woods, I parked the trailer in the driveway of my childhood home, and spent the following four months living out of it. I still saw few people, mainly my brother, mother, and father. Occasionally, a friend would stop by, or I would leave the cul-de-sac to run an errand, but mostly I've remained alone. Although my context had changed, solitude persisted. Here, though, it is balanced. In the woods, I struggled to find harmony because solitude is not isolation. Every solitary has a community to support him. Thoreau was known to have had weekly dinners with his mother, he had visitors, and he kept correspondences. In severe isolation, Admiral Byrd stayed in contact with his base at Little America. Merton moved in and out of solitude at Gethsemani. Even hermits do not exist in isolation; they have the monastery to support their practice. I arrived at Whalen Pond rejecting community and renouncing society, isolating myself to find solitude; through my struggles and, with Eddie by my side, I have learned about the ever-present tension between solitude and community. We need both to support our lives. Too much community and one loses one's relationship with oneself. Too much solitude and one loses touch with the world. Like the ying/yang symbol, solitude and community seek harmony.

Eddie helped bring my solitude into harmony. He was my guardian spirit, watching over me, and teaching me. He was both my companion and a symbol of my solitude. Trapped in his mason jar, he reflected my own condition. The spider is an ancient symbol found in many mythologies across the globe. They elicit a wide range of emotions from fear and panic, to curiosity and intrigue. They often symbolize resourcefulness, creation and destruction, wisdom, patience, and death. Eddie, however, was not the bringer of fear and death. He was my protector, like the spider who spun his web around the mouth of a cave protecting the Prophet Mohammad (and King David) from his enemies. As Eddie watched over me and provided companionship, I learnt about solitude.

Since returning from Whalen Pond, I've worked on producing this book by going through the journals and notebooks I kept during the retreat, and by producing the accompanying illustrations. The exercise is the final part of the journey. By working with my solitude, writing and drawing it out, my motivations become clearer. I am forced to re-live the events of my retreat, bringing back the torment, peace, and excitement of the experience. I now see an apparently logical order to the events of the past five years. Flipping through my notebooks, every entry is a piece of a much larger puzzle. The pages contain more than notes, they tell the story of the trailer throughout this journey. The space begins with a sketch, and it is developed page-by-page. The drawings, notes, sketches, lists, reflections, rants, and details give life to the space. The entries are hardly rational, barely legible, and do not follow any particular logical structure. I imagined solitude, and built a space to accommodate that desire. In my efforts, my journey and the trailer coalesce. It is the mechanism that separates me from the world, and the stage on which the drama of my solitude plays out. The trailer's transformation mirrors my own.

My journey began with a sketch, and ends with the conclusion of my architectural education. The lessons learnt throughout the journey are inherently framed by architecture and personal questions. This thesis is an experiment in the production of architecture, that acknowledges these two streams of learning. It is a journey of self-discovery, and in building, detailing, construction management, and design. Building the space helped to understand the practical and technical side of producing architecture, while learning to live inside the space taught me about the very real influence architecture has on our ability to flourish.

The relationship between the trailer and I also demonstrates our inherent tendency to imbue things with meaning. We imbue objects, people, places, and spaces with meaning, and they in turn reflect back to us our intentions. In solitude, with one's life pared down to the bare necessities, the relationship between the inhabitant and the space is greatly amplified. Space, like Thoreau's cabin, Le Corbusier's Cabanon, or Jung's tower, ultimately reflects its inhabitants. It embodies their philosophy, growth, and explorations. As Winston Churchill pointed out: "We shape buildings; thereafter they shape us."⁴³ It is a slogan that is too often reduced to a simple silhouette inhabiting a section drawing, or the graphic standards used to arrange furniture. The reality is more profound and far reaching. Entire lives will be lived out in the spaces we create, and the spaces we create will be inhabited in ways we could never imagine. Someone will cry, someone will smile. Someone may notice the sill detail, while another may not. Someone may die, or someone might be born. Fights could break out, love could strike, or someone might embarrass themselves. Architecture is the setting on which the drama of our lives plays out. We inevitably tell stories about the space we inhabit. We dream about these spaces. They become a living part of who we are. This reciprocal relationship between place and self is the mechanism that gives architecture the power to both make a man solitary, and offer the possibility of community.



Fig. 62

LIST OF NOTES

1. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Other Writings* (New York: Bantam Book, 1982), 204.
2. List of sources paraphrased from Philip Koch, *Solitude: A Philosophical Encounter* (Peru, Illinois: Open Court Publishing, 1994), 6.
3. Webster's New World Dictionary Third College Edition (New York, NY: Merriam-Webster, 1988) "solitude".
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