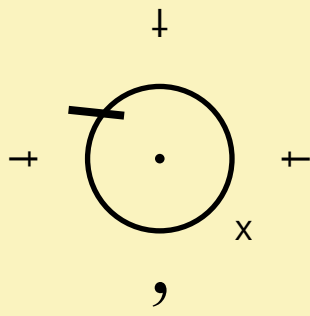


***THE BECOMING***

*by*  
Dhroov Patel

A thesis  
presented to the University of Waterloo  
in fulfillment of the  
thesis requirement for the degree of  
Master of Architecture

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I. **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

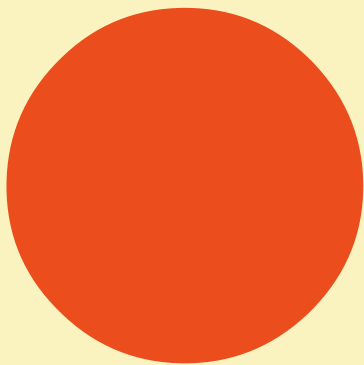
*I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.*

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



**ABSTRACT**

A child wanders into a thicket of northern red oak and black raspberry to soothe the wounds of the past. The child is plagued with the malaise of the soul, otherwise known as major depressive disorder, and seeks to heal. As the forest is a reservoir for encountering extroverted mystical experiences in the form of epiphanies, the child sensitively roams the moist woodland terrain to gain insight into the sacred Truths of Being – notably of wholeness, love, awareness, and death of the ego and time – in order to heal his psyche and soul, and to access the Greater self. The child seeks for mystical experiences in nature through epiphanic phenomena by virtue of developing a ritual practice as a form of pilgrimage in the woodland, known as the mystic's pilgrimage. The pilgrimage involves: entrance to site, path, arrival, mindfulness meditation, observation, documentation, creation, prayer, and departure from site; a complementary meditation hut, known as the mystic's hermitage, is crafted for contemplation and meditation during the solitude. The ultimate goal of *The Becoming* is for the child to emerge from this pilgrimage a more peaceful, self-aware, and knowledgeable individual. This thesis is partially a feat of escapism – not in the sense of cowardice – rather, an opportunity to seek solitude from artefacts of anthropological phenomena and the ego in an in-situ, wiigwaam-esque dwelling constructed from the immediate resources of the forest. An act of deep observation, anecdotes and thick multimedia documentation of relevant abiotic and biotic material, ecological relationships, natural phenomena and mystical experiences will be developed to relay the intimate mystical experiences while acting out the pilgrimage in the woodland.



III. **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I wish to express gratitude to:

Philip Beesley, for encouraging a departure to the forest and to “drink it in”; Val Rynnimeri, for illuminating The Path; Mark Baechler, for instilling in me the Eye of the Builder; to my M(a) Cohort, for The Flame that kindles my hearth; to the Señoros, for make existence palatable,

Vishakh and Nima for the extra hands and backs to lean on,

*And*, to anyone who may have stumbled upon this document.

**Thank you.**





*To my mushroom,  
wherever you are.*



*Those who can breath the air of my writings know that it is an air of the heights, a strong air. One must be made for it. Otherwise there is no small danger that one may catch cold in it. The ice is near, the solitude tremendous – but how calmly all things lie in the Light! How freely one breathes! How much one feels beneathoneself!*

*Philosophy, as I have so far understood and lived it, means living voluntarily among ice and high mountains – seeking out everything strange and questionable in existence, everything so far placed under a ban by morality. Long experience, acquired in the course of such wanderings in what is forbidden, taught me to regard the causes that so far have prompted moralizing and idealizing in a very different light from what may seem desirable: the hidden history of the philosophers, the psychology of the great names, came to light for me.*

Friedrich Nietzsche



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 Photograph by author.
- 357 **FIGURE 6.16** Cut finger.  
 Photograph by author.
- 359 **FIGURE 6.17** The frame of the hermitage nears completion.  
 Photograph by author.
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 Photograph by author.
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 ling members together.  
 Photograph by author.

- 365 **FIGURE 6.20** Completed hermitage frame. All that is left to do is to clad the frame in fallen oak bark and line the floor with sphagnum moss.  
Photograph by author.
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Photograph by author.
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Photograph by author.
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Photograph by author.
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Photograph by author.
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Image by author.
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Image by author.
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Image by author.



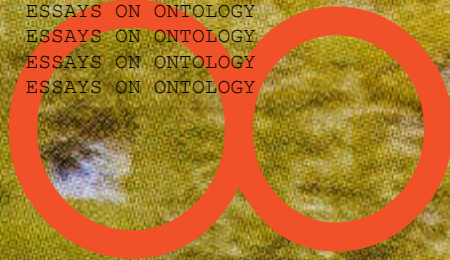
PROLOGUE

FROM DISMEMBER

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# INTRODUCTION





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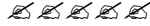
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**T**he *Becoming* captures and reflects on an individual's pilgrimage of cultivating mystical experiences in the woods in an effort to liberate the self from the grasp of major depressive disorder. This is revealed through the practice of a monastic ritual in the woods, consisting of the careful observation, documentation, and analysis of the woodland phenomena, while contemplating and meditating in an in-situ hermitage constructed from the immediate materials of the woodland to compliment the practice. Major depressive disorder, or more simply *depression*, is something that I, alongside many others, have found myself at the mercy of for quite some time, and, as I age and become more aware, I find the symptoms of depression increasingly responsible for the degradation in the quality of existence. Mystical experiences, on the other hand, are instances of powerful, numinous phenomena that may enlighten the individual with bouts of unity, enlightenment and love, amongst other spiritually-enriching peculiarities – I believe they hold potential for assisting the mitigation of depression.<sup>1</sup> With this research, I aim to address the relationship between the invasive major depressive disorder and the overlooked encounters of mystical experience from an architectural and a psychological lens to establish mystical experiences as a necessary component for healing.

*The Becoming* consists of an introduction, three major Acts, and a concluding chapter. Following the introduction, I provide a personal manifesto developed at the emergence of the thesis. The First Act, 'THE PATH,' consists of a cluster of passages to outline and frame the thesis position; the Second Act, 'THE TRIAL,' accounts for the creation and enactment of the thesis ritual in the form of the mystic's pilgrimage from the autumn of 2019 through the springtime of 2020; the Third Act, 'THE ARRIVAL,' consists of the construction of the mystic's hermitage alongside the pilgrimage during the summer through the autumn of 2020. The thesis is closed with the conclusion, titled 'THE RETURN; GRATITUDE.' Each Act is segmented into

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1. Benning, Tony B; Harris, Kylie P; Rominger, Ryan. "Depression and Mysticism: Case Report and Literature Review." *Spirituality in Clinical Practice (Washington, D.C.)* (2021). doi:10.1037/scp0000260.

chapters outlining the broad extents of the thesis position; each chapter is then further divided into sections to finely detail the position. Each Act is organized along a spectrum of natural phenomena symbolizing progression of time, in some ways more conceptually or abstractly than others, while ultimately representing the progression of the self. For example, during the first chapter of the First Act, 'Lost,' the reader is taken along the progression of a foggy evening and hollow night, and to a rainbow interrupting the dawn as the thesis progresses towards the next Act. Here, images of fog symbolize the often confusing and cloudy state of a depressed individual, the hollow night symbolizes the void of nihilism manifested from the depression, and the morning rainbow symbolizes the hopefulness of the positive effects associated with mystical experiences occurring in depressed individuals. For each section, I have carefully selected and gathered a group of individuals, all delicately bound together by the fine thread intersecting the realms of religious studies, philosophy, psychology and mysticism, motivated to excavate and understand the hidden origins and phenomenology of the relationship between religious ecstasy and the human psyche; though, this motivation is perhaps where the confines of their similarities lie and end.

As mentioned above, the thesis is initiated during the first chapter of Act I – titled 'Lost' – introducing major depressive disorder in the self and nihilism in the collective as the antagonists of *The Becoming*. Introducing the thesis using a matter rife with personal tensions ordains the often highly personal and anecdotal facets of the thesis; philosophical and naturalistic accounts supplement the more anecdotal data in the later chapters to provide depth to the passages. The phenomenology of depression is thoroughly discussed in section of 'Lost,' titled 'The Fog' – dark, ambiguous motifs of an evening shroud in fog serve as the symbolic analog for the depressed self. Depression clutches not only myself, but many other individuals with its cruel grasp, and so, it becomes the objective of this research to identify and become aware of the origins, influence and explanations of depression to then cultivate a methodology to attempt to quell the symptoms of it. Here, I primarily refer to developmental biologist Lewis Wolpert's historical and scientific inquiry on depression, *Malignant Sadness*, to provide

a general overview of the mood disorder. 'The Fog' further covers the existentialist extents of individual and collective nihilism (the idea that Life or existence bears no intrinsic value). I reference the works of Friedrich Nietzsche – notably *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Gay Science* – to provide a philosophical inquiry into nihilism. Somewhat Romantically, Nietzsche believes collective nihilism derives from the over-rationalization of the systems responsible for the explanation of existence, with meaning becoming highly abstract and intangible. I believe the tenet of nihilism to be fundamentally flawed, as it only represents the experience of existence from a pessimistically reductive and materialist metaphysical perspective. As a response, mystical experiences hold potential to eradicate the plague of nihilism by virtue of providing the individual with epiphanies related to personal well-being and meaning.

The second chapter of Act I, 'The Dawn,' begins with intensely personal accounts of mystical experiences in nature described in the first section, 'The Origin,' unveiling the mystical foundation of the thesis and the personal importance of cultivating them. Motifs of the emergence of Light at dawn following the endless void of the fog extend from the previous chapter, as this chapter ventures into complete detail of mystical experiences. In my previous time spent living amongst the charcoal breccia outcrops and stark white paper birch forests scattered along Sudbury, Ontario, I had come to find the natural realm's ability to manifest peace in the self – inquiry into this spiritual phenomena acts as the catalyst for this body of research. These personal accounts of mystical experiences in nature reveal the often spontaneous nature of the experiences and how they have brought gifts of unity and profound knowledge to a suffering individual in a time of need.

The informally anecdotal prose of 'The Origin' lies in direct contrast to the more precise and scientific approach taken in the following section, 'The Mystic,' strongly anchored by independent religious researcher and philosopher Paul Marshall's noteworthy dissertation on extrovertive mystical experiences, titled *Mystical Encounters with the Natural World*. I have specifically chosen Marshall's research as the keystone of *The Becoming* as it is by far the most expansive text on the matter, and it shows very little biases

in its characterizations of the phenomena. This is crucial to the understanding of mystical experiences as many authors in this domain tend to have their personal views saturate their work, resulting in fragmentation of the subject matter. Marshall is able to weave between the realms of psychoanalytic speculation, naturalistic explanations and metaphysical reasoning, with his inquiry into the mysteries of religious ecstasy intersecting at the threads of psychology, neuroscience, biology, religious studies, anthropology, metaphysics, philosophy and culture, providing an intense and well-rounded foundation and serious discussion on the often neglected domain surrounding mystical experiences.

The third section of 'The Dawn,' titled 'The Mystic's Pilgrimage,' is reserved for a discussion on the cultivation and access of mystical experiences through the process of enacting a pilgrimage in the woods, which ultimately serves to inform the intricacies of the ritual practice. Generally speaking, a pilgrimage is a quest where an individual forays into the realm of the unknown, searching for mystically-oriented knowledge to elucidate the transformation of the self. I reference Jean Dalby and Wallace B. Clift's *The Archetype of Pilgrimage* to provide a brief on the notions of pilgrimage from a Jungian perspective, which Clift and Clift believe to be a Jungian archetype. An archetype is a universal, innate psychological and social symbol derived from the collective unconscious – the hidden mental meaning concepts universally shared by humans. To further expand on Jung's theory of archetypes – specifically of the myth of the Hero and its relationship to the psychology of meaning – I briefly reference Joseph Campbell's *The Hero's Journey*. References to Thomas Barrie's *Spiritual Path, Sacred Place* provide the first instance of the relationship between pilgrimage and Jungian psychology to architecture. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* serves as primary reference and inspiration to this chapter and thesis altogether. *Walden* accounts for Thoreau's time during a minimalistic and self-reliant pilgrimage in a self-constructed English-style cabin on the shore of Walden Pond near Concord, Massachusetts, spanning the time of two years, two months and two days, with architectural implications functioning as a compliment to Thoreau's transcendental act. Thoreau encounters mystical experiences in the

woodland to emerge as a more patient and self-aware individual, better able to engage with contemporary society.

The First Act is concluded with the fourth and final chapter of the act, 'To Mark,' dedicated to Mark Baechler, my very first studio professor, which also serves as a play on words elucidating the act of marking on the land through architectural intervention. This chapter covers the architectural extents of the thesis and foreshadows the construction of the hermitage. The construction of the hermitage is reduced to three particular dimensions: site, architectural typology, and ontological position. The first dimension, site, briefs the physical and mystical implications of site selection and processing. Segments of John Kricher and Gordon Morrison's *Eastern Forests* are referenced throughout the thesis to provide an ecological understanding of the greater site extents to establish environmental sensitivity and intimacy when planning and constructing the hermitage. I reference both Ellsworth Jaeger's *Wildwood Wisdom* and Joseph Rykwert's *The Idea of a Town* during the initialization of the hermitage generation to provide an inquiry into the physical and mythological ritual foundations of architecture. Functioning as a binary, Jaeger's text provides guidelines on pragmatic building in the wilderness, while Rykwert suggests that building rituals, whether of Roman origin or not, seek to ordain a space into a place through divine intervention, thus, allowing for the place to become meaningful and subject to emplacement within the confines of the Universe.

For the second dimension, architectural typology, I brief the typological elements – namely that of the primitive hut, survival shelter, Anishnaabe wigjwaam, and the hermitage – that form the genetic basis of the hermitage, as I wish to understand the fundamental extents of transcendental architecture from a purist and somewhat reductive perspective. I primarily reference Marc-Antoine Laugier's conception of the primitive hut referenced in his passage *An Essay on Architecture* to understand the fundamental essence of dwelling itself. I look to Mors Kochanski's *Northern Bushcraft* and return to Jaeger's *Wildwood Wisdom* in an effort to understand the pragmatic extents of constructing a survival shelter. Texts on pragmatism, such as *Northern Bushcraft* and *Wildwood Wisdom* are passages geared towards

“survivalist architecture” – urgent dwellings that are exclusively utilitarian and dependent primarily on the resources endemic to the context; these texts serve to outline the essentialist nature of the hermitage, lending a perspective into understanding the fundamental relationship between matter and architecture.

For the third dimension, ontological position, I look to Robin Wall Kimmerer’s *Braiding Sweetgrass* and the works of Eve Tuck and Kwame Anthony Appiah to gain further perspective on the synergy of Indigenous traditional knowledge during the modern world. The hermitage’s form is evidently based on an Anishnaabe wigiwaam – a dome-like dwelling constructed of a tensile, tree sapling frame, clad with bark or other local sheathing materials, constructed by early North American First Nations Mississauga Peoples, amongst other Indigenous groups, along what is known today as Ontario. The decision to honour the wigiwaam in this thesis had not been merely stumbled-upon clumsily or approached light-handedly – incorporating anything of Indigenous essence as a non-Indigenous person for personal use risks potential malevolent appropriation and false virtue, particularly with the state of the political climate surrounding Indigeneity on colonial lands such as ours, and especially when there is no direct cultural arbiter auditing the work. I have attempted to familiarize myself with the intricacies surrounding Indigeneity, previously studying at the McEwen School of Architecture, and reading works by Kimmerer, Davis, David Abram, Douglas Cardinal, Appiah and Tuck. With this in mind, I do not wish to malevolently appropriate a truly oppressed, demographic minority for the sake of personal gain, nor do I wish to exhibit false virtue in the name of reparations by proxy of some sort of self-indulgent, narcissistic sham. I do not wish to blame; I do not wish to coddle. I merely wish to I wish to acknowledge, become aware of and respect the land by doing what I believe to be the only appropriate manner to act – by crafting a dwelling that is sensitive to and belongs with the land it sits upon. I digress.

The Second Act, ‘THE TRIAL,’ takes place from the autumn of 2019 through the springtime of 2020. I begin with the chapter *The Fall*. Somewhat aimlessly, I catapult into the nearby woodland of Dumfries Conservation Area in Cambridge, Ontario, to simply Be; to



once again search for and savour the peace I had found in the breccia and birch landscape of Sudbury. I title this section as 'The Fall.' I come across a rich, infinite spectrum of Life, and record what I observe through anecdotes, sketches and photography. This soon evolves into the primary aspect of the ritual practice for the pilgrimage – the means of deep observation and documentation of nature and mystical experiences through multiple forms of media to translate the milieu of nature from the lens of the changing seasons – reminiscent of Dillard's personal pilgrimage, I label this as the "mystic's practice." I carry this practice until the very last day of my time in the woods. In the second section of 'THE TRIAL,' 'The Three Epiphanies,' I develop a handful of architecturally-related sketches in and from the materials of the woods to explore concepts related to the origins of consciousness, aesthetics and architecture. This directly informs the development of a "mystic's hermitage," which later is constructed to compliment the mystic's practice in the Third Act. The chapter is concluded with a final intervention in the woods crafted in the December of 2019 in the section titled 'Yawn,' outlining the beginnings in the understanding of spatial delineation from chaos. During the second chapter of the Act, 'Snowchild,' I continue the mystic's practice by virtue of documenting the sleeping winter season, occasionally tracking a heard of white-tailed deer by their quiet rustles, pebble-like droppings and heart-shaped hoof prints, seeking out the chaga fungus on the milky trunks of paper birch trees cloaked by the crisp, white blankets of snow, and chilling my rear-end as I conceal myself at the base of many trees, patiently observing the slumbering landscape. As the Earth begins to thaw, I establish my practice as follows: entrance to the forest, arrival to the site, prayer, meditation, documentation, meditation, prayer, exit.

The Third Act, 'THE ARRIVAL,' marks the beginning of the physical manifestation of the mystic's hermitage, alongside the continued documentation of the woods as the season begins to transition from the tame springtime to the intensity of summer. A spot in Victoria Park, Cambridge is selected as the building site. I conclude with the final chapter, 'Gratitude,' recounting my days as a pilgrim in Victoria Park.

The monastic practice endured as a process of this thesis consists of an attempt at a personal Hero's Journey archetype enactment in the woods. I select a northern red oak hardwood forest striated with tender maple saplings, peppered with thorny black raspberry briars, crawling with predators and prey, infested with an infinite spectrum of mycelium – I study the ecosystem with anecdotes, sketches and photography. I adopt a ritual of a half an hour of meditation upon arrival of the place, followed by a few hours of observation through photography and sketching, and documentation with anecdotes, poems and research of the ecosystem. Construction occurs after this ritual is performed on viable days, and a twenty-minute meditation and prayer is performed prior to the construction process. The final architectural work is a pseudo-archaic dwelling, which will function as a place to seek shelter from elements, to dwell in, and in which I may reflect on the mystical experiences I have encountered during my time in the forest. As this thesis is architectural in nature, the primary architectural objective is to understand the fundament of architecture by working with the constraint of artificially removing modern resources, alongside which I may understand the fundament of the unconscious through the process of encountering mystical experience and natural phenomena. The unorthodox nature of this thesis – particularly the notion of self-reliance when performing acts of designing and building, foraging food and seeking spiritual gratification – serves to fulfill an inner need of security, wherein even during a situation of ultimate catastrophe, I may have the resources to survive; I believe that the fulfillment of these insecurities may help mitigate the effects of depression. The research conducted provides an insight into the fundamentally pragmatic nature of architecture, as well as the necessity of constructing a physical form of meaning, contrasting with the symbolic and spiritual affects of it, as well. It is in the very practice of a ritual, in my case, to the journey into a woodland, that I may, metaphorically, separate the wheat from the chaff – that is to say, I may be able to construct meaning and order from the chaos of Life through mystical experiences, and rid myself of this melancholic ailment.



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take deep breaths, drink plenty of water  
*meditate & become one with the Universe*

make your bed every single morning  
*patterns & cycles; order & chaos*

convert suffering into art  
*Life, death & creation*

"it's not you, it's me"  
*forgiveness & love*

be wary of the devil  
*discipline*

plant a seed  
*patience*

give thanks  
*gratuity*

**trust in the Universe**  
*unwavering faith*

FAITH,

~~FEAR?~~





# I

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## ACT I

*The Path*





# CHAPTER 0

*Lost*



## THE FOG

*Oh, how I have fallen!*

*Where I lay, I do not know. My eyes no longer sense the glowing horizon; my fleshy, beating heart yearns for the Light as it remains scattered somewhere else, though, as I recall I am still caged in the raven-clad night. A salted tear drags along my cheek – it is all I have savoured since the Sun last brought its warmth. I suffer; we all suffer – as is the nature of existence.<sup>2</sup> Because we suffer, my Others, we look at the world from Elsewhere. Where we are, I do not know. From Elsewhere, we do not only see with the eye, but also with the mind and heart and ear and hand.*

## THE WORLD FROM ELSEWHERE

**A**round the age of seventeen, I had found myself suddenly shrouded in a fog of dullness and melancholia. When I would retreat from superficially fulfilling distractions, in my solitude, it would feel as if my heart had annealed to stone, and, with its heft, my chest would slump over, facing the underworld, leeching the very soul from my eyes, drawing my gaze further and further away from the Light. As the flaming glint in my eyes had begun to suffocate, my vision had become tainted with grey; as my ears were drowning in mud, the starlings, mellifluously carolling at dawn, rang flat. I would feel much too fatigued to practice self-compassion, often succumbing to my impulses. Foolishly, I had started to seek refuge in places of pleasure, though it only served to distract from deeper anguish and bring shame to my dopaminergic circuitry. In the joy of others, I found misery in the self. In my wake, I would slumber, with minutes, days and months passing by within seconds – in my slumber, years of war would take me back to adolescence. During these foggy moments, beset with

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2. Lopez, Donald S. "Four Noble Truths." <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Four-Noble-Truths>.

pity, I would ghastly lay to waste, pathetically and comfortably rotting away in a sea of shame. Urges to dissipate along with the wind of Time would follow the frequent visits to the hollow chasm of hopelessness and loneliness. Neurotic conditioning vowed to keep me trapped in Hell. My health – of mind and matter – was crumbling between the spaces of my fingers. I felt as if I was somewhere else, somewhere I did not belong, lost in a place far away from home: *elsewhere*. I came to recognize this malaise of the soul as “major depressive disorder,” or simply depression.<sup>3</sup>

## 0 . 1 . 2 .

## THE DULL &amp; THE MELANCHOLY

Depression is challenging to define as an illness or disorder as there seems to be no current objective, biological marker which accurately diagnoses the illness.<sup>4</sup> The symptoms tend to be vague and general. Often times, individuals may exhibit no traditional symptoms yet still be depressed, and at other times, individuals may experience symptoms of depression yet not have depression. The National Institute of Mental Health defines depression as a mood disorder, characterized by low mood and specific symptoms that persist for at least two weeks.<sup>5</sup> Emil Kraepelin, a German psychiatrist involved in the early studies of the depressive disorder, qualitatively assesses the features in a depressed individual as, “indescribably unhappy, as a ‘creature disinherited of fate’; he is skeptical about God, and with a certain dull submission, which shuts out every comfort and every gleam of Light, he drags himself with difficulty from one day to another.”<sup>6</sup>

During the time of the Ancient Greeks, it was understood that disease supposedly arose from the disproportion between humors

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3. Wolpert, L. *Malignant Sadness: The Anatomy of Depression*. London: Faber and Faber, 2006.

4. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*. 5th ed. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013.

5. “Depression.” . <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/index.shtml>.

6. Wolpert, *Malignant Sadness*.

– the four basic vital body fluids, known as blood, yellow bile, phlegm and black bile, founded in Ancient Greek medicine responsible for the overall health of the human.<sup>7</sup> As early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, Hippocrates of Kos hypothesized that an excess of black bile caused *melancholia*, the earlier term used by Hippocrates in his *Aphorisms* for what is now referred to as depression, and correlated with “aversion to food, despondency, irritability and restlessness and fear.”<sup>8</sup> In fact, the term melancholia is derived from the term used to refer to black bile, where *melas* means “dark, black” and *kholé* refers to bile. During the time of Hippocrates, melancholia had been understood as a palpable disease with both physical and mental symptoms associated with it. Interestingly enough, melancholia did not seem to bring with it the baggage of stigma; Aristotle likened the temperament of the creative to the melancholy, supposing creativity to be fed by black bile.<sup>9</sup> Later, In the 10<sup>th</sup> century of the Muslim world, physician Ishaq ibn Imran developed a dissertation of melancholia titled *Treatise on Melancholy*, spreading the concept to the eastern world.<sup>10</sup> During the Middle Ages, religious explanations had begun to overshadow the humoral paradigm of melancholia as a result of the influence of the Christian Church of medieval Europe. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the term *acedia* – referring to the “sin of sloth” – derived from a condition described as “a weariness of distress of the heart” was listed by the Church as a cardinal sin. In some instances, melancholia was even assumed to stem from demonic possession.<sup>11</sup> Six centuries after Ishaq ibn Imran’s treatise, Robert Burton develops the medical textbook *The Anatomy of Melancholy* in 1621, speculating the ailments of the human body through the lens of melancholia, remaining humoral in explanation. Here, Burton

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7. Liddell, Henry George and Robert Scott. *A Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.

8. Wolpert, *Malignant Sadness*.

9. Wolpert, *Malignant Sadness*.

10. Omrani, Adel, Niki S. Holtzman, Hagop S. Akiskal, and S. N. Ghaemi. “Ibn Imran’s 10th Century Treatise on Melancholy.” *Journal of Affective Disorders; J Affect Disord* 141, no. 2 (2012): 116-119. doi:10.1016/j.jad.2012.02.004.

11. *The Pleasures of Melancholy. A Poem*. London: 1747.

suggested that melancholia could be managed with art, diet, sleep and some sort of greater purpose. Naturalistic and psychiatric explanations would arise during the 18<sup>th</sup> century following Newtonian mechanical view of the Universe, challenging previous explanations.

The term depression originates from the Latin *deprimere*, meaning “to press down”; one of the earliest accounts of the use of the term was by Sir Richard Baker in his book *Chronicle*, referring to an individual having “a great depression of the spirit.”<sup>12</sup> The term depression started to become more favourable to clinicians during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps first used by Kraepelin. By the 1860s, the term had begun to appear in medical documents to refer to the psychological lowering of emotional function, with Kraepelin using it to encompass different types of melancholia; later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kraepelin condenses most mood disorders into a system of “manic-depressive insanity.”<sup>13</sup> It was, however, Adolf Meyer who first argued the use of the term depression over melancholia.

## 0.1.1.3.

## THE MALIGNANT MIND

In Lewis Wolpert’s comprehensive analysis of depression titled *Malignant Sadness*, Wolpert analogously compares cancer to depression; whereas cancer suggests the an abnormality in the growth process of cells, depression can be likened to “normal” sadness that has gone out of control or become pathological, which Wolpert labels as “malignant sadness.” Sadness is an emotional pain associated with feelings of disadvantage, loss, despair, grief, helplessness, disappointment or sorrow, and is one of the six basic emotions as described by Paul Ekman.<sup>14</sup> Sadness can be understood from an evolutionary perspective as an adaptive strategy that has persisted

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12. Wolpert, *Malignant Sadness*.

13. Wolpert, *Malignant Sadness*.

14. Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence*. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Bantam Books, 2006.

to the time of the modern human by virtue of natural selection. In this regard, sadness, although perceived as negative, is theorized to be beneficial for the survival of the organism. For example, sadness may be felt when a mother is separated from her child; thus, in the interest of the survival of her own genetic code, the sadness encourages attachment to the child to ensure a protective response.<sup>15</sup> Though, in regards to depression, there is no compelling theory to suggest that it provides an evolutionary advantage for the survival of the organism.<sup>16</sup> As with any illness or condition, it is always desirable to attempt to understand the underlying factors as an explanation. In so far as depression is an illness of such great magnitude that positions itself among the infinite spectrum of human consciousness, it is helpful to narrow our sights through the lenses of psychology and biology to make explanations more digestible and clear.

Early studies by Freud suggest that depression is generated by the loss of an object or person, with the individual's response to the bereavement as ambivalent. Karl Abraham later poses that the lack of oral gratification in early years of development may be the source of depression. Edith Jacobson suggests that the loss of self-esteem may play a major role in developing depression. Though many theories have been proposed, it is quite clear that in most cases of depression, the individual has faced adversity or loss of some sort during childhood, and the sadness generated from these events either invades or rewrites the cognitive processes to distort them in a manner characteristic of depression. This sadness would then progress to alter cognitive and emotional function. Wolpert summarizes depression as "the result of thinking in the cortex continually telling the rest of the brain that something very stressful is occurring, and the activity in the cortex is maintained by input from regions like the amygdala."<sup>17</sup> Generally speaking, the neurobiological explanation of depression can be understood as the changes in neurochemistry, particularly related

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15. Wolpert, *Malignant Sadness*.

16. Wolpert, *Malignant Sadness*.

17. Wolpert, *Malignant Sadness*.

to structures of the amygdala, thalamus and cortex differing in volume or neurotransmitters differing in quantity or function when compared to healthy brain function. Alex Korb summarizes depression ultimately as “result of poor communication between the thinking prefrontal cortex and the emotional limbic system.”<sup>18</sup> The prefrontal cortex, the most recently evolved portion of the brain, is implicated in complex behaviours including planning and personality development, whereas the limbic system, dating back to mammals as far back as 100 million years ago, is responsible for processing emotion.<sup>19</sup> Korb suggests that it is within the tuning between the connections of these neurological structures that may explain in depression. Studies have also shown that the dorsolateral regions of the prefrontal cortex consistently exhibit decreased function in depressed individuals, which suggests a link between depression and sense of self. A lack of motivation may suggest a lack of the neurotransmitter serotonin (the chemical related to the reward system) in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex. In regards to the unconscious functions of the brain, the amygdala (a part of the limbic system responsible for processing memory, decision making and emotional responses) may have become malfunctioning due to conditioning during childhood, causing an irrational state of fear or anxiousness for the individual.

## 0.1.4.

## RUMINATIONS FROM UNDERGROUND

Depression, from a cognitive behaviour standpoint, can also be characterized as the presence of negative thought patterns (known as *schemas*) which consist of dysfunctional outlooks of the

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18. Korb, Alex. *The Upward Spiral: Using Neuroscience to Reverse the Course of Depression, One Small Change at a Time*. California: New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 2015.

19. Korb, *The Upward Spiral*.



self.<sup>20</sup> According to Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, ruminative thinking can be understood as, “the focused attention on the symptoms of one’s distress, and on its possible causes and consequences, as opposed to its solutions.”<sup>21</sup> This ruminative head-space is one of the major cognitive etiologies for depressive psychopathology as it involves the catalysis and sustenance of the depressive mood,<sup>22</sup> and generates negative cognitions including delusions of inadequacy, self-worthlessness, sloth and suffering as a form of cognitive *products*.<sup>23</sup> Factor analyses of the Ruminative Response Scale, developed by Nolen-Hoeksema and Jannay Morrow, have identified two subtypes of ruminative thinking: reflective pondering and depressive brooding.<sup>24</sup> Reflective pondering is a state of cognitive problem solving as an attempt to improve mood, while depressive brooding involves the passive focus on symptoms of distress and the attempt to understand them. Koster et al. state, “rumination in response to negative mood increases vulnerability to depression.”<sup>25</sup> Through some sort of transcendence from feeling to thought, these negative thoughts can manifest negatively in the mind and spirit, leading to states of depression if left unresolved. Koster et al. speculate that one of the key factors of either rumination subtypes is whether or not an individual can disengage with negative self-criticism and thoughts.<sup>26</sup> Their research finds that those who do not exercise their attentional discipline in response to their thoughts are likely to

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20. Koster, Ernst H. W., Evi De Lissnyder, Nazanin Derakshan, and Rudi De Raedt. “Understanding Depressive Rumination from a Cognitive Science Perspective: The Impaired Disengagement Hypothesis.” *Clinical Psychology Review* 31, no. 1 (2011): 138-145. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2010.08.005>.

21. Nolen-Hoeksema, Susan, Blair E. Wisco, and Sonja Lyubomirsky. “Rethinking Rumination.” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3, no. 5 (2008): 400-424. doi:10.1111/j.1745-6924.2008.00088.x.

22. Smith, Jeannette M. and Lauren B. Alloy. “A Roadmap to Rumination: A Review of the Definition, Assessment, and Conceptualization of this Multifaceted Construct.” *Clinical Psychology Review* 29, no. 2 (2009): 116-128. doi:10.1016/j.cpr.2008.10.003. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19128864>

23. Koster, “Understanding Depressive Rumination,” 139.

24. Koster, “Understanding Depressive Rumination,” 139.

25. Koster, “Understanding Depressive Rumination,” 139.

26. Koster, “Understanding Depressive Rumination” 139.

experience persistent rumination.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, it is speculated that temperament – a general term describing consistent, mainly heritable, differences in an individual’s emotional stability and regulation – functions as a crucial component in the etiology of ruminative thinking.

An interesting speculation may be drawn between Dostoevsky’s Underground Man and a person who finds themselves in a state of rumination. Dostoevsky’s assessment of a “person of illness” in *Notes From Underground*, is described as the Underground Man who is a specific pseudo-archetypal figure, suffering from the illness of “acute consciousness in a particularly scientific society”<sup>28</sup> – that is to say, a particularly overly-conscious individual finds themselves in a social collective which prioritizes rational thinking and nurtures a somewhat fatalistic psyche. Here, the Underground Man is seen caught in a disturbing duality, conflicting between self and other, individual and crowd, and between depressively obsessive self-consciousness and blissful obliviousness. It is in the obsessive nature of the Underground Man to seek refuge in solitude from the crowd, ultimately leading to his demise. Though, this suggests, however, that the Underground Man has failed to incorporate the crowd into his boundaries of self – meaning that his failure to integrate himself partially into society, and ultimately as a character embodying the fullest extend of his human nature, leads him to descend into a form of ruminative madness – resulting in an existential depression

## 0 . 1 . 5 .

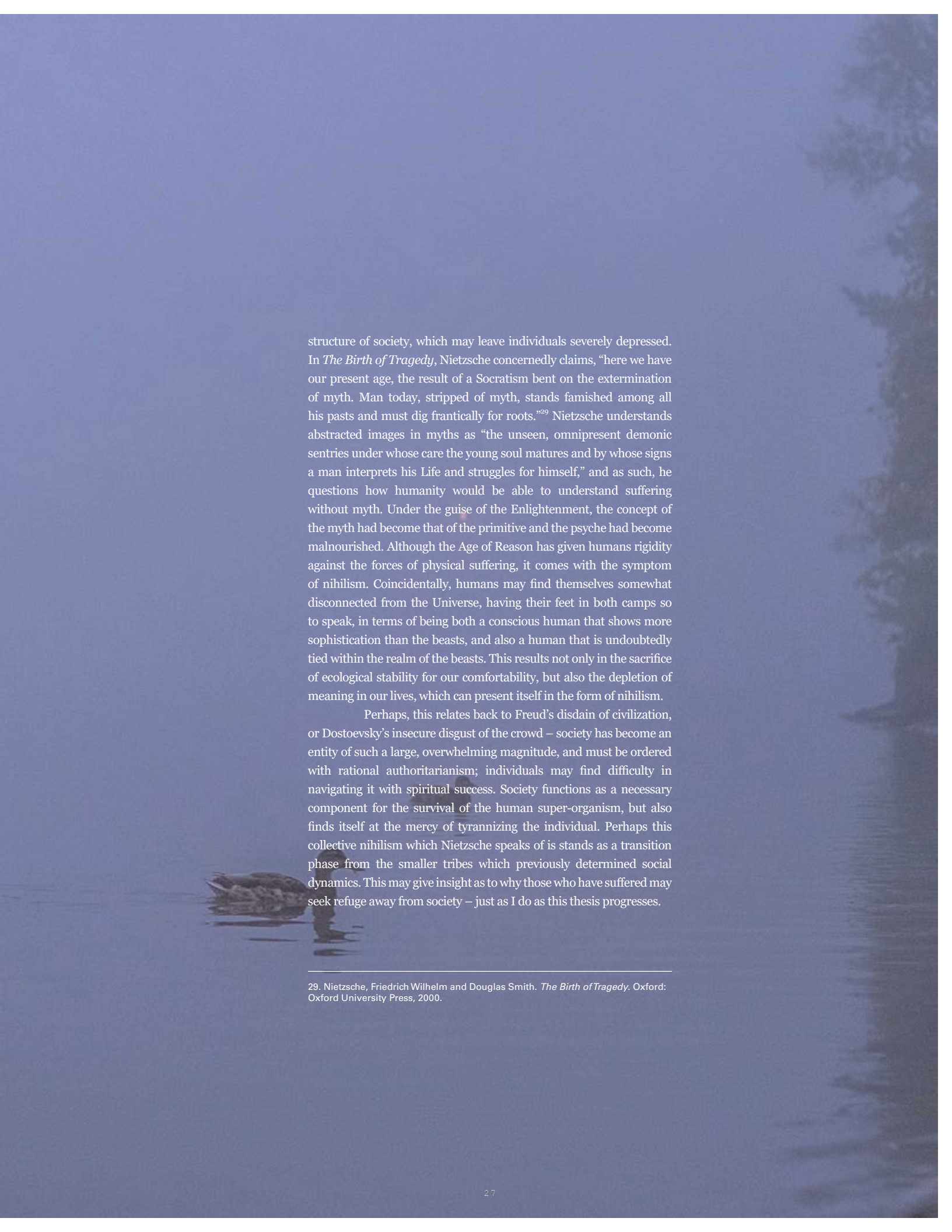
## THE DEATH OF GOD

The existentialist thinkers also provide philosophical insight into ideas of depression stemming from the duality of the individual and the collective. For Friedrich Nietzsche, a collective nihilism has manifested as a result of the rationalization of belief systems in the metaphysical

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27. Koster, “Understanding Depressive Rumination” 139.

28. Kaufmann, Walter. *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*. New York: Meridian Books, 1956.

A serene landscape with a body of water, a duck, and trees under a blue sky. The scene is captured in a soft, slightly hazy light, possibly during dawn or dusk. The water is calm, reflecting the sky and the surrounding environment. A single duck is visible in the lower left quadrant, swimming towards the right. The trees on the right side are silhouetted against the sky, adding depth to the scene. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

structure of society, which may leave individuals severely depressed. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche concerningly claims, “here we have our present age, the result of a Socratism bent on the extermination of myth. Man today, stripped of myth, stands famished among all his pasts and must dig frantically for roots.”<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche understands abstracted images in myths as “the unseen, omnipresent demonic sentries under whose care the young soul matures and by whose signs a man interprets his Life and struggles for himself,” and as such, he questions how humanity would be able to understand suffering without myth. Under the guise of the Enlightenment, the concept of the myth had become that of the primitive and the psyche had become malnourished. Although the Age of Reason has given humans rigidity against the forces of physical suffering, it comes with the symptom of nihilism. Coincidentally, humans may find themselves somewhat disconnected from the Universe, having their feet in both camps so to speak, in terms of being both a conscious human that shows more sophistication than the beasts, and also a human that is undoubtedly tied within the realm of the beasts. This results not only in the sacrifice of ecological stability for our comfortability, but also the depletion of meaning in our lives, which can present itself in the form of nihilism.

Perhaps, this relates back to Freud’s disdain of civilization, or Dostoevsky’s insecure disgust of the crowd – society has become an entity of such a large, overwhelming magnitude, and must be ordered with rational authoritarianism; individuals may find difficulty in navigating it with spiritual success. Society functions as a necessary component for the survival of the human super-organism, but also finds itself at the mercy of tyrannizing the individual. Perhaps this collective nihilism which Nietzsche speaks of is stands as a transition phase from the smaller tribes which previously determined social dynamics. This may give insight as to why those who have suffered may seek refuge away from society – just as I do as this thesis progresses.

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29. Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm and Douglas Smith. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

0.1.6.

## THE DAWN AFTER

As depression is a multifaceted mental illness, it is still not exactly known as to what it truly is or what may properly explain the condition – much is yet to be uncovered. Though, here I have attempted to provide a brief explanation of understanding depression from a historical naturalistic and existentialist standpoint for the case of this thesis. Depression is a very confusing ailment – though the root causes may be clear, one cannot exactly be certain in what may propel it in the moment. Any and every facet of existence may play a role in the sustainment of it. The very reason why one enters a state of depression may also be the reason by which they are trapped in it. Depression withers the individual insofar as they do not wish to summon effort – and if they do not wish to summon effort, how may they work towards alleviating depression? It often feels as if there needs to be an external intervention, or at the very least, the individual may desperately hope for one; they may often pray outwards for change. It is because of this, that, perhaps, divine intervention through mystical experience may be of interest for the depressed. In the following chapter, ‘The Dawn,’ I will introduce mystical experiences, a phenomena that I believe to be the antithesis of nihilism and has clinical evidence to help remedy depression, and I will discuss the multi-faceted extents of mystical experience. Perhaps with this research, we can learn the manners in which to cultivate these experiences to attain spiritual salvation.





# CHAPTER 1

*The Dawn*





## THE ORIGIN

In my earlier years studying within the jagged, boreal moonscape of Sudbury, Ontario, I would instinctively escape into the nearby paper birch and white pine woodlands to manage depressive episodes. In the natural realm, I had come to rediscover my views towards religious and mystical experiences. During the tenders years of early adolescence, I believed that I had relinquished the tyrannical fetters of an illegitimate religious indoctrination. Though the renounced atheism brought bouts of freedom, inevitably I was spiralling towards nihilism. It must have been an otherworldly blessing to have been called towards nature. Through the epiphanic encounters gifted to me by spending time in the indescribable ecstasy of nature, it had evoked in me a new understanding of spiritual healing. Happening across the occasional lone moose hoof print, charred crust of chaga or the autumnal clusters of wild lowbush blueberries, I had come to find that this realm provided some sort of relief from the misfortunes of society.

## ESCAPE; 2017

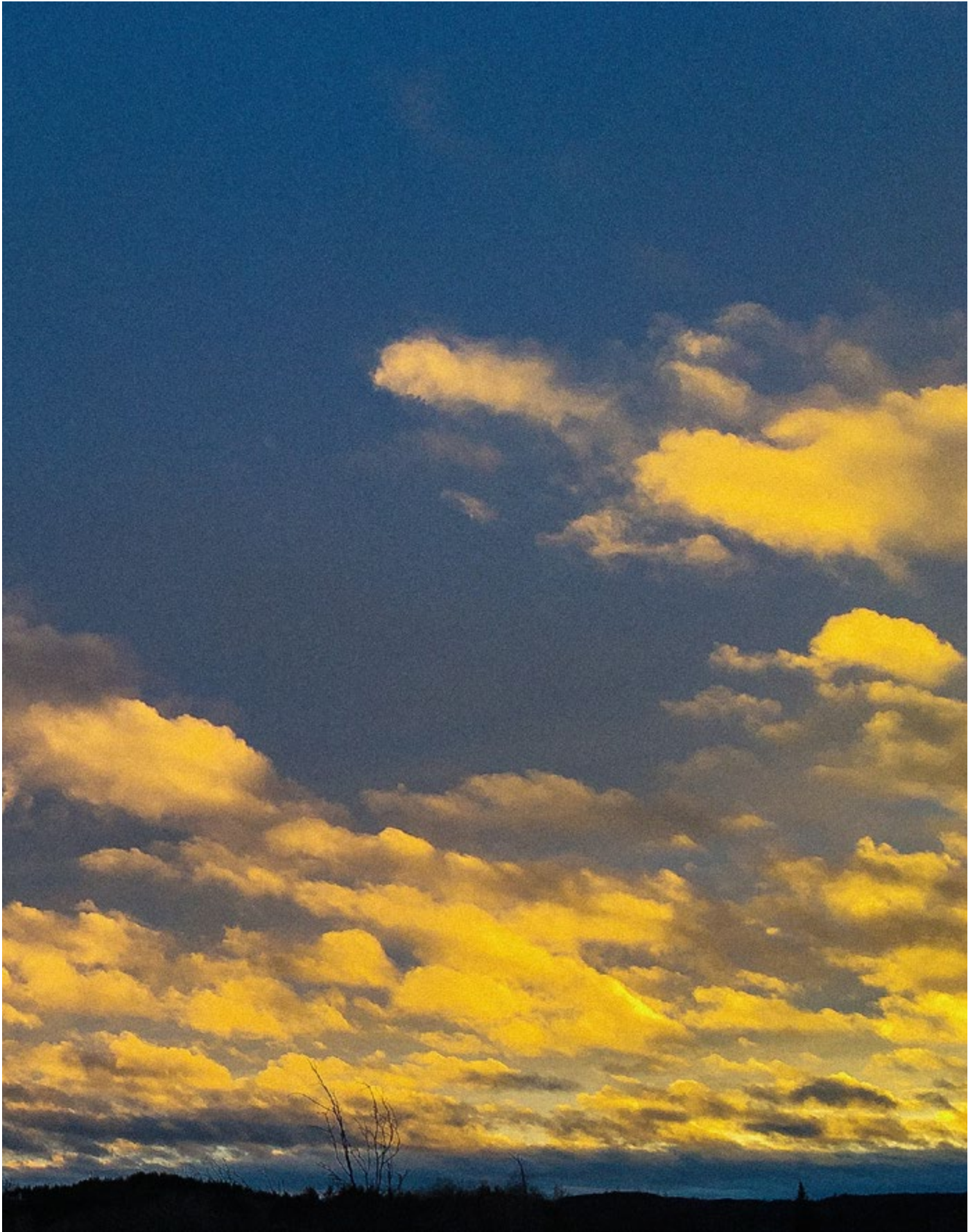
On the twenty-first of April, in the year two-thousand and seventeen, I sadly saddle myself on a brittle concrete ledge and look out westward toward the falling Sun. Moments before the Sun was to be consumed for the horizon's supper, and for everything in the path of dusk to be subject to its frigid shadow and exiled to slumber, the Sun had touched a position two fingers above the outcrops to illuminate the underside of the floating cumulus clouds in a blazing inferno as it bid farewell for the night. Prior to this moment, I partially lived a cosmic delusion where I had assumed the Universe simply existed as an elaborate torture mechanism for my mind. How narcissistic of me to assume that the Great Creator had devised such a marvellous and infinite experience simply to bring me pain! I had wondered if the sky and clouds and birds were merely an image reel, revolving around this loveless planet, with, perhaps, an otherworldly audience crowding around some sort of looking glass to point and howl at my misery. The sheer beauty, though, made me question this position of victimization – I come to

find that my entitlement is a curse which causes suffering. It could not be possible that such infinite detail and meticulous beauty were merely the products of some elaborate cosmic prank, and that I had merely constructed a victim perspective to alleviate myself from responsibility to seek improvement. My very own mind was the only thing shackling me to this suffering. I am blessed with a new-found unity between myself and the external world. No longer am I tethered to the illusion of an otherworldly, sadistic entity that wishes to see me hurt – rather, I come to find that I am simply an increasingly self-aware piece of this world, and that I may choose to consciously respond to external stimuli, rather than unconsciously react to it.

## 1.1.1.2.

## ILLUSION OF TIME, DEATH &amp; THE SELF

In the rocky woodlands of the Canadian Shield, I look to the acidic soil covered in by a bedding of juniper moss and decaying black spruce needles, and I see myself in there, somewhere. I realize that one day I, too, will, with absolute certainty, erode into a small amount of soil; my bones to align the walls of plant cells, my decaying flesh to sustain an ecosystem of fungal mycelium and insect larvae, and my soul... well, who knows? With death, I find wholeness in the environment. Though, as I become aware of the *space* around me, I become aware of *time* as well. In this place, there is no future or past. I realize time is but a mere construct that serves to leech the awareness of the moment. Our collective fears run on the notion of time “running out” – we must rush to accomplish things of the future to correct things of the past. Though, I wonder, when I die, where do I go? As the various saprophytes deconstruct my complex carbon molecules into more simple ones, does each molecule, each atom retain some memory of I? Will these compounds rearrange once again to reconstruct me somehow? Although unbound in material fact, this type of epiphany, or numinous experience, has somewhat untethered me from the burden of time and death. I feel as if I have always been conscious and always will be. I realize I only have control of what I do *now*. Time is now dead. I start to wonder: what is reality? I previously had assumed the future was



**FIGURE 1.01**

The mystical experience triggering sunset that I had the honour of witnessing on April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017 in The Donovan suburb of Sudbury, Ontario.

reality – that what I *will* become is who I am. Though, I learn here that reality is the present moment. How much am I able to strip reality to uncover what is fundamentally true? I will attempt to dismantle reality and reconstruct it from inside out.

I, then, look to the bland, modernist buildings of the Laurentian University's main campus towards the south, entrenched in a swamp of mixed deciduous and conifer forest. The buildings are slightly rotated, so the yellowed concrete and glass facades absorb the burning orange Light of the setting autumn Sun. Oddly, the buildings look as if they had been made by the Earth as they nestle into their wild, Cambrian habitat. Though, are they not? We seemingly claim that they are "man-made," as if to suggest that these constructions are somehow alien and separate, and even dangerous to this planet we call our home, and in parallel, reflecting on ourselves and our relationship with the Universe. If we humans are of the Earth and of the Universe, is that not to say that these buildings are of the Earth and the Universe, just as the mound of an ant is? Perhaps, it is that the ant does not construct in cubes with sharp corners, but constructs in compliment with the form of gravity and laws of the Universe. Or, perhaps, it is because the ant's ant-sized bricks can be readily absorbed back into the Earth's matrix, unlike our predictable and processed concrete and plastic fortresses which will impose the land for the centuries and millenniums to come. Perhaps, it is that we are unable to share this "awareness of being aware" with any other organism, and in our existential loneliness, we cast ourselves away from the Universe in pity and entitlement, while also attempting to escape it.

## 1.1.3.

## THE PREDICAMENT OF HUMANITY

Would, then, a primitive human dwelling, such as an Irish *clochán* or a Japanese *Jōmon* pit dwelling, be considered as such – of the Earth, or would it be of human construction? Would this suppose that decomposition time is the metric which separates humans from the world? I believe it is fair to say this: i. humans are nature, ii. humans are not nature, and iii. humans are immersed in nature

while in superposition of being and not being nature. I believe it is also fair to believe that we somehow find ourselves divorced from the natural world by virtue of over-processing and excessively refining our constructed worlds. As the reader will find later in the text, humans once feared nature, believing it to be the source of all evil and chaos. It was only until our supposed mastery of nature that we now revere it; one may find a sense of irony in that. Still, it may be that we do not find such Truth and true beauty in our everyday lives, such that when we are thrown into the gradients and geometries of unadulterated nature, we may experience the extraordinary and supernatural. It may be that the predictability and order of our cities leave the religious, meaning-making portions of the brain insatiated, so the brain becomes enchanted when confronted with the senses of absolute chaos. Whatever it may be, the following section covers this interesting phenomena of mystical experience. Perhaps, if anything at all, it is the Universe's method of tuning the brain towards favouring healing by virtue of episodes of religious ecstasy. Perhaps, there is some force out there that truly shows admiration towards the experience and substance of existence.



The feelings of unity, knowledge and reality that I had encountered during the setting of the Sun on that one very fine evening are known to philosophers, psychologists and theologians as a mystical experience. The term is used to describe an experience that is “characterized by profound knowledge, unity, or a sense of contact with reality;”<sup>30</sup> though there is no solid consensus among modern scholars on a hard definition for mystical experiences due to the subjective and personal nature of the phenomenon, a section on phenomenology will help illustrate the breadth of the features and characteristics of a mystical experience. This section covers the origins of the conception and study of mystical experiences, the role of the Romantic era shaping a cultural “extrovertive-ness,” ultimately leading to the study of extrovertive mystical experiences, the phenomenology of the experiences, and the clinical and metaphysical explanation of the phenomenon. The study of mystical phenomena branches into two broad categories of scholarly approach: mystical tradition (used interchangeably with the term mysticism), and the aforementioned mystical experience. Though *The Becoming* is primarily a documentation of an individual’s extrovertive mystical experiences in nature (extrovertive mystical experiences will be outlined in **subsection 1.2.3**), a brief outline of the etymology and history of the term mysticism follows to better understand the conception and application of the typologies associated with mystical experiences, and will help position the phenomenon in the context of psychology, religion and Western philosophy.

Psychoanalyst Dan Merkur defines mysticism as “the practice of religious ecstasies (religious experiences during alternate states of consciousness), together with whatever ideologies, ethics, rites, myths, legends, and magic may be related to them.”<sup>31</sup> The word

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30. Marshall, Paul. *Mystical Encounters with the Natural World: Experiences and Explanations*. Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2005.

31. Merkur, Dan. “Mysticism.” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/mysticism>.

mystic originates from the Greek *mustēs*, which, during the Hellenistic Age, was used to refer to a small group of individuals that would share obscure knowledge in secrecy; *mystes* itself is derived from *muein*, meaning “to close” – particularly the eyes or lips.<sup>32</sup> Early Christians later appropriated the term mystic to refer to “practitioners of doctrinally acceptable forms of religious ecstasy.”<sup>33</sup> From the 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century, Christian authorities on mysticism would refer to the practice of prayer as a contemplation of God’s omnipresence in the world as *unio mystica* (Latin for “mystical union”); the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the expansion of the contemplation to include the Holy Spirit. As the Romantic movement had caused a shift in the Western view of religious thinking and spirituality from theology towards individualism at the end of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the term mysticism had been created as a response to the worldwide unity of Christians, further extending to the unity among all religions as psychological and religious studies would further develop.

Between the 19<sup>th</sup> century and 20<sup>th</sup> century, the documentation and analysis of mystical experiences had begun to amass philosophical interest amongst lay scholars studying topics of religion, psychology and philosophy. Efforts were made to classify the different types of experiences, to understand the relationship between the experiences and culture, and to understand the metaphysical, religious, psychological and biological mechanisms behind the phenomenon. One of the earliest modern accounts for the study of the phenomena was in William James’ book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, published in 1902, which both criticized the reductionist attitude towards mystical experiences in psychiatry and illuminated a transpersonal analysis of mystical experiences in nature.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in 1901 Richard Maurice Bucke reflects on Edward Carpenter’s concept of a transpersonal cosmic form of consciousness which transcends ordinary self-consciousness, while rejecting the rational reductionist

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32. Merkur, “Mysticism.”

33. Merkur, “Mysticism.”

34. Paul, *Mystical Encounters*.





**FIGURE 1.02**

Anonymous, *Flammarion Engraving*, Wood engraving, 1888 | Appearing in Camille Flammarion's book *L'atmosphère: météorologie populaire*, the image is often used as a metaphor for the pursuit of mystical knowledge. The painting depicts a robed mystic at the edge of the Earth peering through the edge of the firmament.

view of the Universe and putting forth a pantheistic angle towards the relationship between God and the Universe,<sup>35</sup> thus highlighting the supposed interconnected unity between subject and Universe that a mystical experience would entail. William Ralph Inge and Evelyn Underhill both rendered aspects of Christian mysticism – notably those of immanence and transcendence – into typological terms branching into two distinct categories: the immanent method of external mysticism and the transcendent method of internal mysticism.<sup>36</sup> Soon after in 1927, Romain Rolland describes a “sensation of eternity” regarding a feeling of an individual “being one with the external world as a whole,” and terms this sensation as an oceanic feeling in a letter to psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. Rolland speculates that the state of experiencing this sensation presupposes the religious experience, and may be understood as the source of religious energy. Freud later reflects on this sensation in *Future of an Illusion* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*, describing the oceanic feeling as a type of infantile consciousness of one who has not yet differentiated themselves from other external entities. Theologian and philosopher Rudolph Otto provides the term *numinous* in his book *Das Heilige* in 1917; Otto fragments the concept of “the holy” into the common descriptor of “moral perfection,” and the lesser used definition, “non-rational, non-sensory experience or feeling whose primary and immediate object is outside the self” – the latter descriptor elucidating a “numinous experience.” Jung further applies this borderline concept to aspects of psychoanalysis to describe when an individual surrenders their identity of self and psychically connects with an other entity.

The works and concepts of these thinkers have been gathered here because they all attempt to investigate – whether subtly or overtly so – a type of spiritual energy that serves to grant an individual with visions of unity, knowledge or love through a transcendental vessel. Rolland’s conception of the oceanic feeling may be something which

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35. Bucke, Richard Maurice. *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind*. Philadelphia: Innes & Sons, 1905.

36. Paul, *Mystical Encounters*.

manifests from within the confines of the human realm and may be activated autonomously when conditions are met, whereas Bucke and Carpenter's cosmic consciousness radiates from the realm external to the human and functions more like a cosmic signal to be received by the individual during events of transcendence. Otto, on the other hand, likens the phenomenon to an enigmatic "sweeping" mood that is "at once terrifying and fascinating,"<sup>37</sup> and delineates it as a facet of the concept of the holy, distinct from notions of moral symbolism in religion. Freud neglects the phenomenon and writes it off as infantile and underdeveloped, while likening the feeling to a "death instinct";<sup>38</sup> Jung understands it as an invitation to individuate. Though each thinker varies somewhat in the use of terminology and in their understanding of the concept, the broad thread that tautly tethers these concepts in parallel is the thread of the mystical experience.

1 . 2 . 2 .

#### ROMANTIC CONCEPTION OF NATURE

Near the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the emergence of the Romantic era began to fundamentally shift the Western philosophical position surrounding the idea of wilderness, from one of "nature as inherently hostile and oppressive" to one of nature as a place for "spiritual nourishment, nostalgia and yearning."<sup>39</sup> As humans had, for the very first time, found a means to domesticate the wild forces of nature, rather than to be manipulated by them, civilization had become the new source for the feelings of hostility and anxiety previously associated with the wilderness, and allowed for nature to emerge now as a place – or, more accurately, a collective conceptual idea – reflecting a prelapsarian vision of the Universe associated with motifs of the innocence of the child. The idea of a nature that was wild,

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37. Bucke, Maurice. *Cosmic Consciousness*.

38. Freud, Sigmund and James Strachey. *Civilization and its Discontents*. New York: Norton, 2005.

39. Soper, Kate. *What is Nature?: Culture, Politics and the Non-Human*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.

untamed or unadulterated by culture would emerge as a collective refuge in the human psyche for the Romantic to be able to escape from the spiritual debris left by the Industrial Revolution, the norms of the Age of Enlightenment, and the stagnancy of scientific rationalization.<sup>40</sup> Though the Enlightenment came about to generate security in a world of unknowns and chaos using reason, the dissolution of traditional authoritative institutions and power structures as a byproduct of the Enlightenment had followed, leading to the loss of a common foundation of meaning and belief associated partially in the authoritative realm of the wilderness.<sup>41</sup> In parallel, as the modern scientific method had begun to develop, the natural realm of chaos would become transformed from a place imbued with layers of mythical and spiritual power into a sterile, quantifiable entity. Similarly, under the weight of scientific rationalization and individualism, civilization would begin to see the threads between religious institutions and the search for individual meaning unravel.

As the Romantic era had pronounced the wilderness as no longer treacherous, nature would slowly shift from being an otherly entity to something that is intertwined with humanity and a fundamental component of existence. Romantic literature would inform and stimulate heightened levels of integration with the world as a whole, partially as an attempt to reconcile the void of meaning, and promote ideas of unity between subject and object, self and world, and the understanding of humanity as a fragment of the world, as opposed to being the center of or separate to it. Romantic literature had set up nature to possess a moral component of intrinsic goodness to it, and, with anxieties of industrialization magnifying as humans began develop efficient ways to deconstruct the landscape and reconstruct the resources into molecules of increasing complexity, humans would naturally fit in as morally bad in this narrative. Personally, I object this binary narrative of good and bad, just as I would typically object

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40. Soper, *What is Nature?*, 28-29.

41. Green, Karen. "Catharine Macaulay and the Concept of 'Radical Enlightenment.'" *Intellectual History Review* 31, no. 1 (2021): 165-180. doi:10.1080/17496977.2020.1856021.

to most generalized narratives of this sort. Though I do agree that industrialization and modernity has brought forth many, many issues which both affect our planet and ourselves, I do not find humanity as intrinsically bad or evil, and I do not believe that this twisted form of collective self-hatred brings much value in attempting to any solve real issue – it seems more as an entitled hero-complex of sorts that stems from some sort of guilt of privilege, and, in attempting compassionate virtue, this narrative risks tribalism through ignorance of complexity. I digress.

It is still important to briefly investigate why, culturally, we seem to view the wilderness as a place to act out escapism or pilgrimages away from civilization, as there is a genuine phenomena regarding the desire to get away from the orderly metropolis, and, to find something of spiritual value or to replenish one's spiritual energy. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche speaks on two fundamental artistic forces which inform a dualistic energy: the Apollonian, named after the Greek God Apollo, of order, rationality, and delineation of boundary, and the Dionysian, named after the Greek God Dionysus, of chaos, impulse and excess. Nietzsche witnessed a world too engorged in Apollonian tendencies, and believed a Dionysian intervention could restore some degree of cosmic balance to society.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps it is the Apollonian-ness of society that ruffles one feather too many, and it is in the often ill-toned, routinized monotony of civilization that makes us wish to seek out chaos and novelty in the Dionysian realms of the wilderness.<sup>43</sup> Freud also mentions this uneasy tension between civilization and the individual in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Freud suggests that an individual fundamentally seeks to be untethered and free from authority, whereas the crowd – or civilization – demands conformity and the repression of the id through an authority, resulting in discontentment if the exposure submission to authority is prolonged – thus, individuals may seek out

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42. Nietzsche, Wilhelm and Smith. *The Birth of Tragedy*.

43. Nietzsche, Wilhelm and Smith. *The Birth of Tragedy*.

states of chaos to remain fulfilled or even sane.<sup>44</sup> In *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau seeks to escape the overly-civil realm of society to the wilderness at Walden Pond, believing that, as a transcendentalist, he may be able to forage “absolute” Truths of Life outside of culture.<sup>45</sup> Thoreau is completely appalled by the material untruths of civilization, believing that what is of “pure” and “true” essence may be found in the areas least affected by humans, and believes that he may find salvation is a supposedly wild and separate place untouched by culture.

1.2.3.

## EXTROVERTIVE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES

The term “extrovertive mystical experience” was first introduced by philosopher Walter Terence Stace in *Mysticism and Philosophy* in 1960, and was used to categorize a type of experience in which the mystic – the individual receiving the mystical experience – perceives unity in “the multiplicity of external material objects.”<sup>46</sup> As vague as the terming of this phenomena was, the creation of the concept of extrovertive mystical experiences allowed for a primary insight into the psychology of how the brain may experience altered states of consciousness leading to religious and/or spiritual enlightenment in the context of extrovertively oriented phenomena. Stace’s definition, however, accounted for experiences that are only physically extrovertive, or as “seen through the eyes.”<sup>47</sup> In *Mystical Encounters with the Natural World*, Paul Marshall describes extrovertive mystical experiences also as being extrovertive in the content of the experience.<sup>48</sup> An extrovertive experience can mean that its environment and/or its contents are oriented towards the natural world. This means that a

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44. Freud, Strachey, *Civilization and its Discontents*.

45. Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden; Or, Life in the Woods*, by Henry D. Thoreau. Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday Anchor Books, 1960.

46. Stace, W.T. *Mysticism and Philosophy*. 1st ed. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1960.

47. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*.

48. Paul, *Mystical Encounters*.

mystic may encounter a mystical experience in a physically extrovertive environment – such as a forest or a music concert – but have a mystical experience which is introvertive in content, where the mystic looks within and finds enlightenment in the self. This also means that a mystic may encounter a mystical experience in an introvertive environment, such as through Zen meditation, that may be extrovertive in content – an experience where the mystic finds themselves relating to the world outside of the self.<sup>49</sup> What follows is a short list of descriptors outlining extrovertive content that an individual might encounter during a mystical experience that distinguishes the experiences from other types of spiritual or metaphysical encounters:

*(1) unity with the world or some of its contents, (2) incorporation of the world into the self, (3) intuitive comprehension of the world, (4) a love that encompasses all things, (5) expansive vision of the world, (6) extraordinary beauty of the world, (7) luminous transfiguration of the environment, (8) an altered temporality that includes all times and places.*<sup>50</sup>

It is important to distinguish between the two definitions of extrovertive, just as Marshall has in his work, as the term extrovertive may lead to confusion as discussed in **subsection 1.2.2**. The term “natural mystical experience” is used by Robert Charles Zaehner as one of three types of mystical experience – the other two being “monistic” and “theistic.” Just as Stace defines mystical experience, for Zaehner, mystical experiences similarly entail unity with an orientation towards the world, hence using the term natural. As in both cases, it can sometimes not be apparent what the term nature may entail; there is reason to believe that, although a cultural construct, the construct is still valid as we seem to understand and use the nature/culture dichotomy often in the West on a cultural level. In Zaehner’s case, it is not entirely self-evident that the term natural simply signifies “the

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49. Paul, *Mystical Encounters*.

50. Paul, *Mystical Encounters*.

world as it is” or “the extrovertive realm” – it can also mean something like the “romantic conception of the natural realm,” or even “savage and devoid of culture.” For the intents and purposes of this thesis, I use the term extrovertive to define the contents of the mystical experience; the terms nature and natural will be used to distinguish and narrow these experiences to mystical experiences encountered in settings perceived as wild and natural.

## 1.2.4.

## EXTROVERTIVE PHENOMENOLOGY

Extrovertive mystical experiences in nature allow for one to transcend the realm of the mundane into the realm of the sacred. From what once was an ordinary landscape of sky and ground may transform into a cosmic dance of unity and love. To understand the breadth of the mystical phenomenology associated with an extrovertive mystical experience, I outline the key features associated with extrovertive mystical experiences, primarily stemming from Bucke, Otto, Stace and Zaehner, analyzed by Marshall. Though difficult to distinguish from the other distinct features of mystical experiences, it is important to examine unity as it weaves and permeates through the other major features, of which love, self, knowledge and Life will be covered in this subsection. An expanded list of features is available in **table 1.01**.

Different forms of unity are encountered during extrovertive mystical experiences. Among them, the most common one appears to be integral unity, in which one perceives all things in the world in a continuous harmony.<sup>51</sup> An individual may feel that everything exists as it should, that no one part is awry or awkward, that all is an unbroken whole. Another form of integral unity is the filling in of gaps that appear to separate entities in the cosmic fabric – an act of dissolving the self and the ego, not unlike an ego-death – so that the individual

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51. Paul, *Mystical Encounters*.



| FEATURE                       | CHARACTERISTICS  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Unity</b>                  | Feeling part of the whole; the world contained within; everything intimately connected; community  |
| <b>Self</b>                   | Relaxation of individual identity; identification with persons, animals, plants, objects, even the entire cosmos; discovery of deeper self   |
| <b>Knowledge</b>              | Intuitive, all-encompassing knowledge (knew everything); specific questions answered instantaneously; insights into order, harmony, and perfection of the world, the meaning of suffering, evolutionary development, the rightness of things (all shall be well); recognition that one has come home |
| <b>Love</b>                   | All-embracing love; sense of being deeply loved  |
| <b>Beauty</b>                 | Extraordinary beauty; everything equally beautiful   |
| <b>Miscellaneous Feelings</b> | Bliss, joy, elation, uplift, peace, relief, gratitude, wonder, power, fearlessness, humour, surprise, insignificance, humility, unworthiness, awe, terror, discomfort with sheer intensity   |
| <b>Time</b>                   | Time stops; past, present, future coexist; harmonious flow   |
| <b>Reality</b>                | Sense of contact with normally hidden depths of reality  |
| <b>Realness</b>               | Very real ordinary experience seems less real  |
| <b>Life</b>                   | Everything animated with Life, consciousness, energy; things once thought living are lifeless in comparison  |
| <b>Presence</b>               | A presence or power in nature or in the immediate vicinity   |
| <b>Attention</b>              | Heightened awareness; focused attention; clarity   |
| <b>Vision</b>                 | Special light suffuses or obliterates surroundings; vivid colours; transparency; vision of cosmic scope  |
| <b>Sound</b>                  | Silence; music   |
| <b>Body</b>                   | Sensations through the body or at places along the spine   |
| <b>Fusion</b>                 | Light, love, bliss, knowledge fused together; synaesthetic fusion of sensory contents  |
| <b>Paranormal</b>             | Extrasensory perceptions; out-of-the-body experience   |

**TABLE 1.01**

A list of features commonly associated with mystical experiences.

perceives the world as a continuity.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, individuals in contact with a mystical experience may feel a sensation of “becoming a part of” the world, known as immersive unity, where they feel as if they have been accepted into the cosmic fabric. The opposite may occur, too; an individual experiences an incorporative unity when they find and contain the world within themselves. Less common types of unity expressions are communal unity, where one feels love, empathy and fellowship with other beings, and source unity, where “the Many are united with the One that supports them, and they are united amongst themselves through their common origin.”<sup>53</sup>

Marshall analyses individual accounts of knowledge acquired during extrovertive mystical experiences, and find that they often refer to experience that consist of “profound knowledge, insights, understandings and meanings.”<sup>54</sup> The most commonly reported type of knowledge experienced is comprehensive knowledge, where the individual perceives everything as known and a state of omniscience is attained. A profound understanding of meaning may also be experienced, wherein the individual feels as if the ambiguous “answer to Life” or to the big “why” has been found, and that there is a sudden understanding of purpose and reason. Often, this experience is accompanied with a sense of “returning home.”<sup>55</sup> Additionally, individuals may experience specific insights; as Bucke documented, individuals would often report “realizations of unity, order, harmony and Life of the world” and the “supreme importance of love.”<sup>56</sup>

Notions of self are also challenged during extrovertive mystical experiences. An individual might find that their boundaries of

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52. Miles, Grahame. “Seeing the Invisible: Modern Religious and Other Transcendent Experiences Edited by M. Maxwell and V. Tschudin. Religious Experience Research Centre, University of Wales, Lampeter, 2005. (First Published in 1990, Reprinted in 1996, and in 2005.)” *Implicit Religion* 13, no. 2 (2010): 245. doi:10.1558/imre.v13i2.245.

53. Paul, *Mystical Encounters*.

54. Paul, *Mystical Encounters*.

55. Paul, *Mystical Encounters*.

56. Paul, *Mystical Encounters*.

self begin to dissolve, or that they surrender the conception of the self completely, resulting in the potential death of the ego. The extrovertive experience may also lead one closer to a heightened, deeper form of the self, such as Gopi Krishna's "titanic self" in his passage *Kundalini*.<sup>57</sup> Similarly and closely related to unity and self, individuals often express strong feelings of love towards others or the world as a whole during moments of extrovertive mystical experiences. This can be understood as an extrovertive love. In other instances, individuals feel love for themselves, or perceive that reality or the world as a whole is a fundamentally loving entity, which is appropriately known as introvertive or inner love. Thus, Marshall speculates that feelings of love may be antecedent to the extrovertive experience.

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#### MATTER, MIND, METAPHYSICS AND MYSTICISM

A simple question of immense breadth and of equal ambiguity – one which seems to haunt thinkers of all creeds, whether naturalist or theologian, postmodernist or deconstructionist, intrapersonal or transpersonal – must be posed: why do mystical experiences occur? Attempting to illustrate the explanations of an extrovertive mystical experience results in much conflict amongst thinkers, as the treacherous path of investigating supernaturally-suffused phenomena related to non-ordinary states of consciousness teems of problems relating to the complex and often empirical qualms of environmental conditioning, shifts in states of consciousness, psychoanalytic theories, natural science, and mind-body dualisms, to name a few. A Jungian materialist may wonder why the brain spontaneously intuits and organizes sensory inputs from extraordinary external stimuli to generate states of religious ecstasy or meaning as a response, whereas an empirical pharmacologist might be inclined to investigate the

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57. Gopi Krishna, and James Hillman. *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man*. London, Robinson 1971, c. 1970.

neurochemical mechanisms of psychoactive drug interactions during mystical states of consciousness induced by ingesting psilocybin-containing mushrooms or peyote cactus buttons. A cross-cultural psychoanalyst would wonder whether such a common thread exists across the phenomenological typologies of mystical experiences regardless of context; a radical contextualist may question the relevance of the unitive transpersonal reality contacted during an extrovertive mystical experience altogether in favour of rendering the experience to be a result of religious indoctrination or social-constructionism. The monistic realist asks: is there some sort of Greater, transpersonal consciousness broadcasting a “mystical signal,” upon which the brain functions as a receiver for and generates a compact subset of the Greater consciousness? To help explain the intricate antecedents of mystical experiential phenomena, a deconstructionist argument will introduce the basis of explanation, and help position the matter. Psychoanalytical and biological examinations allow for intrapersonal contributions and will help anchor the explanations with naturalist and clinical accounts, while a discussion on metaphysical dualism and monism will cover transpersonal contributions to entertain theories of extracerebral phenomena and noumena.

Stace, along with many other thinkers before him, posits the essentialist argument that mystical experiences are phenomenologically the same across religious practices, as they all seem to share the mystical core of some type of non-ordinary consciousness by accessing a spiritual reality. Cross-cultural examinations of extrovertive mystical experiences reveal that the experiences cannot simply be elucidated by religious indoctrination or social constructionism,<sup>58</sup> as the radical postmodern mystical contextualist of the 1970s, such as Bruce Garside or Steven Katz, would argue. The contextual argument is somewhat warranted, addressing some problems associated with the sweeping unanimity of perennial-natured mystical philosophy arguments by emphasizing specificity through elucidating differences between different mystic traditions and contextual conditioning. The

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58. Paul, *Mystical Encounters*.

contextualists, however, reject the essentialist notion of mysticism, denying that mystical experiences fundamentally differ across religious traditions. Though the experiences most certainly may be influenced by social, cultural or religious conditioning in some cases, far too many accounts occur outside the bounds of traditional practice or feature characteristics of novelty and context-obliteration for this to be true.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, rather than a radical postmodern contextualist argument to supplement the core understanding of mystical experiences, a deconstructionist argument will be developed, which supposes that the mystical experience results as a deconstruction of the ordinary flow of experience.

*'Deconstructionism'* – Our flow of experience is constantly subject to discriminatory forces, bringing certain elements to the foreground, and others to the background according to biological and emotional factors. As psyches develop, habitual patterns of judgement, conceptualization, attention, etcetera, are developed and condition the flow of experience to ensure biological efficiency. One of the most dominant discriminatory forces is the act of separating the self from the other. Deconstructionists argue that mystical experiences occur in response to the disturbance or inhibition of this discriminatory faculty through various stimuli or ritual practice, similar to Huxley's description of the reducing valve.<sup>60</sup> For example, Arthur Deikman suggests a theory of deautomatization of habitual attention, where it is hypothesized that an individual can perforate the mystical realm through a practice of undoing an automatized habit, being "a basic process in which the repeated exercise of an action or of a perception results in the disappearance from consciousness of its intermediate steps." This allows for a shift in attention towards previously unnoticed or suppressed elements, allowing for the expansion of consciousness towards mystical states. Henry Nelson Weiman suggests that habitual discriminatory attention degrades in response to specific stimuli, such as "bewilderment, disappointment, awe at the wonders of nature, love,

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59. Paul, *Mystical Encounters*.

60. Huxley, Aldous. *The Doors of Perception*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1954.

profound discussion, group excitement, or silent repose,” generating a diffusive awareness. Interestingly enough, Asian religions and philosophies advocating for the “non-dual awareness of the world” serve as the antecedent to the idea that misleading understandings of existence can stem from discriminatory cognitive function. Yogachara, a school of idealistic Mahayana Buddhist thought established around 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, acknowledges the distortion of experience as a result of discrimination and labels it as *vikalpa*, deeming it responsible for disharmonious ideologies. If we suppose that the cognitive discriminatory faculties generate a dualist metaphysical position, we can intuit that the faculties function as a barrier to the truer perceptions of the flow of experience; thus, a non-dualist philosophy capable of deconstructing the flow of consciousness would be appropriate to illicit this.

*‘Psychoanalysis’* – According to Marshall, to the extents that govern the psychoanalytic explanations of mystical experiences, psychological development and mental health govern the bounds of concern; thus, psychoanalytical explanations of mystical experiences can generally be organized into two distinct paths: that of Jungian thought, which suggests that the experiences are to be understood as indicative of psychic development to achieve individuation and wholeness, or that of Freudian psychoanalysis, suggesting that the mystical experience is an urge to regress to a former infantile type of consciousness. Erich Neumann, a psychologist studying under the wing of Carl Jung, describes humankind’s “original cosmic sense” as the ego prior to isolation from the non-egoic elements in his paper *Mystic Man*. Though lonely, the developed, modern ego retains Romantic traces of the original cosmic sense as an archetype of idealistic wholeness. As the modern ego faces tension from the separation of the non-ego, the modern ego becomes determined to once again unite with the non-egoic elements as a result of extraordinary stimuli beset with transformative power, thus facilitating a mystical experience through regression to unity. Jung, himself, believes mystical experience, or numinous encounter, is begot when the mystic shifts the focal gravity from the ego to the Greater Self; when the inner limited ego is possessed by the more potent forces of the unconscious, such as that of God. For

the Christian, one who can identify with God, “enter the body of Christ through his scars,” and have the ego “absorbed into the body of Christ” subordinates their limited ego to the infinite consciousness of God, which Jung understands as the individuation of the God archetype.<sup>61</sup> The ego expands to the dimension of collective consciousness and greater reality, triggering the mystical experience. Freud, on the other hand, dismisses the mystical experience – referred to as the oceanic feeling where one feels an “indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world”<sup>62</sup> – as a facet of the pre-oedipal ego manifest in the psychic state of a newborn infant that has yet to discern self from teat. Though Rolland, in his letter to Freud, shows acclaim for the oceanic feeling, believing it to be the source of religious energy, Freud states that the oceanic feeling may be a component of religious energy, but is not the origin of it, as Freud believes religion occurs as a response to the helplessness bred from ego separation.

*‘Neuroscience’* – It was, perhaps, William James, in 1908, who had begun to raise interest regarding the role of the brain during religious and mystical experiences with his lectures titled *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.<sup>63</sup> As neuroscience was just an emerging field at the time, the neurology of mystical experiences was never able to come to fruition, though James did begin to nudge the natural sciences away from the conclusion that religious experiences were merely a consequence of psycho- and neuropathology. Around the 1970s, interest in the brain regarding mystical experience reemerged as epileptic individuals with seizure foci in the temporal lobes would report intense religious experiences. Researchers have also found that religiousness in both frontal lobe and temporal lobe epileptics significantly correlates with reduced volume in the right hippocampus, but not

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61. Coward, Harold. “Mysticism in the Analytical Psychology of Carl Jung and the Yoga Psychology of Patañjali: A Comparative Study.” *Philosophy East & West* 29, no. 3 (1979): 323-336. doi:10.2307/1398935.

62. Freud, Strachey, *Civilization and its Discontents*.

63. McNamara, Patrick. *The Neuroscience of Religious Experience*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

with the amygdala,<sup>64,65</sup> resulting in over-activation of the amygdala. Similarly, schizophrenic patients describe an increase in frequency of religiousness. Schizophrenic brains experience hypofrontality – the enhancement of the dopaminergic activity in the limbic system and the reduction of activity in the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex – which may potentially lead to hyperactivity of the subcortical dopaminergic functions.<sup>66</sup> Just as with the temporal lobe epileptics, the dysfunctional neurological components in schizophrenics include limbic networks, the amygdala, the hippocampus, the left temporal lobe, and the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex. Additionally, the temporal lobes and right pre-frontal cortex contribute to the symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder. Patrick McNamara, author of *The Neuroscience of Religious Experience*, establishes that the same neural regions activate in healthy individuals during religious experiences. McNamara speculates that the limbic system, the right temporal lobe, prefrontal cortex are the crucial nodes in a neural circuit that mediate religious states.<sup>67</sup> With these findings, some researchers, naturally, speculate that there may be a neural sub-structure or network that is associated with religious experience, primarily consisting of orbitofrontal, right temporal, limbic system, and the serotonergic and dopaminergic systems. McNamara adds “the most important regions of the brain for studies of religious expression appear to be a circuit linking up the orbital and dorsomedial prefrontal cortex, the right dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, the ascending serotonergic systems, the mesocortical DA system, the amygdala/hippocampus, and the right anterior temporal lobes... in summary, the circuit that mediates religiousness involves primarily limbic, temporal, and frontal cortices on the right.”<sup>68</sup>

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64. Wuerfel, J., E. S. Krishnamoorthy, R. J. Brown, L. Lemieux, M. Koepp, L. Tebartz Van Elst, and M. R. Tremble. “Religiosity is Associated with Hippocampal but Not Amygdala Volumes in Patients with Refractory Epilepsy.” *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry; Journal of neurology, neurosurgery and psychiatry* 75, no. 4 (2004): 640-642. doi:10.1136/jnnp.2003.06973.

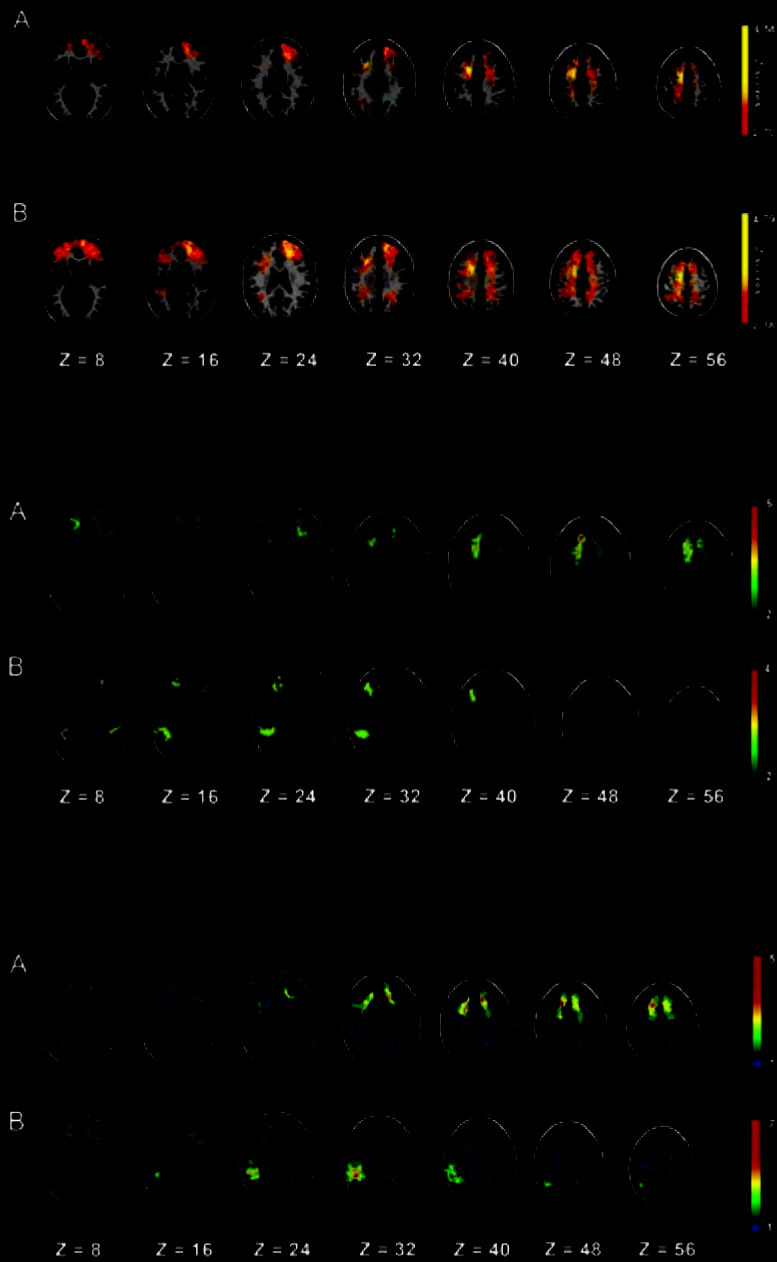
65. Cristofori, Irene, Joseph Bulbulia, John H. Shaver, Marc Wilson, Frank Krueger, and Jordan Grafman. “Neural Correlates of Mystical Experience.” *Neuropsychologia; Neuropsychologia* 80, (2016): 212-220. doi:10.1016/j.neuropsychologia.2015.11.021.

66. McNamara, *The Neuroscience of Religious Experience*, 2009.

67. McNamara, *The Neuroscience of Religious Experience*, 2009.

68. McNamara, *The Neuroscience of Religious Experience*, 2009.





**FIGURE 1.03** Voxel-based lesion-symptom mapping showing lesions in patients experiencing mystical experience with penetrating traumatic brain injuries. Coloured areas show neural regions activated throughout all patients.

'*Metaphysics*' – Deconstructionist theories are merely the seed for which the expansive tree of the explanations of mystical experiences grows. Furthermore, psychoanalytic explanations are not complete as they do not seem to provide much other than philosophical speculation. Neuroscientific explanations help ground psychoanalytic and philosophical explanations with objective accounts through natural science, though often they are reductive and also do not explain the phenomena in its entirety.<sup>69</sup> Psychophysicists Alexander and Andrew Fingelkurts both speculate that religiosity simply cannot be reduced to brain function<sup>70</sup> – there seems to lie something much deeper. Marshall suggests an idealist philosophy adjusted for mystical experiences to supplement a metaphysical foundation for explaining the phenomena. The philosophy would be "realist in attitude towards the external world, representative in its theory of perception, and monadological in its theory of matter."<sup>71</sup> Through idealism, the Universe is understood as mental in nature – matter is the conception of a monadic Greater mind, with our smaller, finite human minds functioning as specialized sub-domains. With a realist attitude, the conception of a noumenal reality existing outside of our phenomenal experience can stand without conflict. Adopting a representative theory, we can then say that the noumenal matter of the Greater mind is physically and causally represented in our finite minds, thus evading the dualist mind-body problem where the mental realm exists outside the physical, while still remaining as an idealist theory as everything occurs within the Greater mind. This idealism functions monadologically in nature in regards to the manner in which phenomenal experience is organized. This means that phenomenal experiences are not generate by the human brain per se, but that the Greater, monadic mind is an experience in itself; thus, the brain is

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69. Fingelkurts, Alexander A. and Andrew A. Fingelkurts. "Is our Brain Hardwired to Produce God, Or is our Brain Hardwired to Perceive God? A Systematic Review on the Role of the Brain in Mediating Religious Experience." *Cognitive Processing; Cognitive Process* 10, no. 4 (2009): 293-326. doi:10.1007/s10339-009-0261-3.

70. Fingelkurts, Fingelkurts. "Is our Brain Hardwired to Produce God?!"

71. Paul, *Mystical Encounters*.

the location in which phenomenal experiences occur. Now, if this is true, then the sub-domains are endowed with the noumenal contents of the Greater mind, and function as the background to phenomenal experience.<sup>72</sup> What individuals encounter during a mystical experience is that of the totality of noumenal phenomena existing in the Greater mind thus explaining the ecstasies of unity, profound knowledge, love, etc.

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#### MOVING ALONG

As discussed above, mystical experiences may be encountered by any individual during any point in time. It is safe to conclude that mystical experiences are a universal phenomena capable of immense healing and knowledge, and may be bracketed as a large facet of religious experience. The literature, although expansive, seems yet to be conclusive – speculative accounts remain abstractive and naturalistic accounts are just beginning to scratch the surface of the phenomena. Studying mystical experiences poses challenges, as they are often spontaneous in nature and can be vastly subjective. The study of drug-induced mystical experiences is also of controversial nature, leading to ethical and legal issues as the effects of the war on drugs lingers. As neuroscience develops and hallucinogenics and empathogens start to see legal and cultural status changing, as well as the paradigm shift aroused by the development of quantum physics, we will come to understand the human mind and the architecture of the psyche with greater clarity.

We have discussed what mystical experiences are, how they have come to be known, what they entail, how they may be useful, and possible explanations as to why they occur – though, how can they be cultivated? Where and when might an individual encounter these supposedly psyche-altering episodes? In the following chapter, we shall discuss the means of cultivating these experiences – that is to say, we will explore the means of increasing the chances in which we may encounter these experiences.

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72. Paul, *Mystical Encounters*.



## THE MYSTIC'S PILGRIMAGE

## 1.3.1.

## THE PATH &amp; THE DESTINATION

Just as with any sort of religiously-oriented act of enlightenment, or, even more generally speaking, mystical phenomena, a pilgrimage is an individual's attempt at *meaning making* – that is to say, the individual's attempt to draw symbolic relationships and, ultimately, *order* from the abstractly-experienced chaos of existence – a consequence of sudden “thrownness” as Heidegger might describe.<sup>73</sup> The search for meaning ultimately results from asking existential questions such as “what is the meaning of Life?” or “what is the purpose of existence?”; questions fuelled by the experiences of the Heideggerian “angst.”<sup>74</sup> Pilgrimage may be enacted to attempt to find a personal solution to these questions, or even simply find peace with Life. Thus, a pilgrimage may be generally understood as a sacred ritual enacted to elicit bouts of meaning by virtue of mystical experience. This section covers the definition and pilgrimage from a Jungian perspective, arguing for pilgrimage as a universal human archetype and, therefore, providing the argument for the universal human need for pilgrimage to support transcendence. This is done by deconstructing the pilgrimage archetype into a two smaller pieces: the Jungian origins of meaning and the archetype, and the biological origins of religious belief. These will provide psychoanalytic and evolutionary evidence for the pilgrimage archetype. Furthermore, a discussion and analysis of Thoreau's pilgrimage at Walden Pond will supplement the cultural extents to understanding pilgrimage and its relevance to modern times, and how mystical experiences may be extracted from pilgrimage. Finally, the section is concluded with the relationship between pilgrimage and sacred architecture.

During a pilgrimage, the pilgrim travels to a place of religious or spiritual significance – which may often be foreign or unknown (and may include the inner realms of the psyche) – in search of expanded meanings about higher Truths through mystical experiences and

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73. Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*.

74. Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*.

religious ecstasy.<sup>75</sup> Though sometimes enacted in groups, pilgrimages tend to focus on the individual's journey in understanding the inner and outer fabric of reality. Pilgrimages may be journeys that are formal, organized, officially sanctioned or commemorative – they seem to come in many flavours and functions. The type of pilgrimage that I study during this thesis is the universal, “transformative” type (which runs parallel to the Hero's Journey myth), wherein the individual journeys towards a place of hardship to eventually return transcended.<sup>76</sup> Though pilgrimages are typically understood as an act based on religious importance, pilgrimages may also transcend beyond the bounds of religion towards the realm of the universal human spirit and psyche, argued by Jean Dalby and Wallace B. Clift as the “archetype of pilgrimage.”<sup>77</sup> Clift and Clift define it as such: “pilgrimage is a journey, a ritual, a commemoration, a search for something, perhaps something the pilgrim cannot express in words, perhaps even something the pilgrim does not fully perceive. Pilgrimages are connected with the spirit, but it is difficult to say precisely how.”<sup>78</sup> It is apparent here that often times the individual may not be totally conscious of the affects and precepts associated with the act of pilgrimage; it may be a result of duty, it may be a result of call, or, it may be a result of something much more deep and covert. Just as mystical experience seem to manifest, the pilgrimage arises in a spontaneous manner from within the individual,<sup>79</sup> and suggests that the brain fundamentally may operate in a mystical manner.

Just as with various mystical and religious phenomena, structural similarities of pilgrimages exist transculturally, leading some thinkers to posit, as stated above, that pilgrimage may in itself manifest

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75. Barber, Richard W. *Pilgrimages*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1991.

76. Campbell, Joseph, Cousineau, Phil., Brown, Stuart L. *The Hero's Journey: Joseph Campbell on His Life and Work*. Novato (California): New World Library, 2014.

77. Clift, Jean Dalby and Wallace B. Clift. *The Archetype of Pilgrimage: Outer Action with Inner Meaning*. New York: Paulist Press, 1996.

78. Clift and Clift, *The Archetype of Pilgrimage*.

79. Clift and Clift, *The Archetype of Pilgrimage*.



**FIGURE 1.04**

The Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, shown above, is the spatial destination for Christian pilgrims enacting The Way of St. James. It is supposed that the remains of the apostle Saint James the Great are held here.

as a particular expression of the human spirit – a Jungian archetype (explained further in detail in the following subsection). Pilgrimages typically share the following characteristics (and note the similar nature to the Hero's Journey archetype): i. spiritual preparation, ii. separation from one's society and everyday Life, iii. trials and rituals along the path, iv. arrival to the pilgrimage site, and v. the return.<sup>80</sup> Richard Barber echoes Mircea Eliade's sentiments on initiation rites, suggesting that pilgrimages may be the contemporary versions of the primitive initiation rites<sup>81</sup> which functioned to transcend individuals from the sacred to the profane in a similar manner (preparation, separation, return).<sup>82</sup>

## 1.3.2.

## THE ARCHETYPE: BELIEF, MEANING &amp; JUNG

Carl Jung is considered the father of analytical psychology (often referred to as Jungian analysis), which is defined as the empirical research into the science of the "psyche." Jung is understood as the founder of psychoanalysis, as well as the progenitor of the concept of archetypal phenomena. Jung had a profound impact on the understanding of the unconscious human psyche and the unconscious matter that becomes manifest through spiritual encounters. Before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the term psyche stemmed from the Greek term *psukhē*, meaning breath, Life or soul. As Freud, and later Jung come to develop their psychoanalytical doctrines, the term psyche becomes more akin to refer to the mind. In terms of Jungian psychology, the psyche is the aspect of an individual's total personality, which comprises of their thought, behaviour, feeling and emotion.<sup>83</sup> For Jung, the study

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80. Barrie, Thomas. *Spiritual Path, Sacred Place: Myth, Ritual, and Meaning in Architecture*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Boston: Shambhala, 1996.

81. Barber, *Pilgrimages*.

82. Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959.

83. Jung, C. G. and Wolfgang Pauli. *The Interpretation of Nature and the Psyche*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1955.



of the psyche was the foundation of his research regarding human consciousness, stating, “man has developed consciousness slowly and laboriously, in a process that took untold ages to reach the civilized state. And this evolution is far from complete, for large areas of the human mind are still shrouded in darkness.”<sup>84</sup> The psyche functions as the spinal member to many of Jung’s psychological concepts, such as the “collective unconscious,” archetypes, the “shadow,” and “individuation” to name a few.

Once intense collaborators and good friends, Jung and Freud split ways after six years as they began to fundamentally disagree on ideas of the development of the unconscious. Jung was much more interested in the concept of the collective unconscious as a fundamental anchor in the evolution and development of consciousness, and viewed Freud’s theories of sexual development in adolescence as rather incomplete. For Jung, collective consciousness refers to the matter of the unconscious mind which is mutual among members of the same species, and is defined primarily by intuition and archetypal phenomena.<sup>85</sup> Jung understands the collective consciousness as something that does not exist physically nor geographically, but rather is understood when analyzing the ubiquity of archetypes over space and time. Mystically so, Jung describes the collective unconscious as the soul of humanity at large, stating:

*In dreams, fantasies, and other exceptional states of mind the most far-fetched mythological motifs and symbols can appear autochthonously at any time ... working on the individual, but more often without any sign of them. These ‘primordial images’ or ‘archetypes,’ as I have called them, belong to the basic stock of the unconscious psyche and cannot be explained as personal acquisitions.*<sup>86</sup>

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84. Jung, C. G. and Marie-Luise von Franz. *Man and His Symbols*. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1969.

85. Jung and Franz, *Man and His Symbols*.

86. Jung, C. G., Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler, Hull, R. F. C., and Herbert Read. *Collected Works*. London: Routledge and Keagan Paul Ltd., 1979.

It is apparent, here, that Jung has an almost occult-like association with the concept of the psyche, influenced partially from his upbringing in academic theology and from his interests in Hindu philosophies, among other eastern philosophies. Although Jung rejects the title of a mystic, the *Magnum Opus* of Jung's research was his work on individuation, which is the human quest for archetypal wholeness through the symbiosis of the psyche's conscious and shadow (unconscious) components, in which the enlightenment for symbiosis can be achieved through processing suprapersonal phenomena, religious ecstasy and mystical experience, or even psychedelic compounds. It is during Jung's phase of interpreting religion that he likens dreams and myths to archetypes, suggesting that these components of the psyche are expressions of instinctual patterns, and that with the analysis of these abstract symbols of unconscious material one can achieve proximity to individuation.

## 1.3.3.

## RITUAL BEGINNINGS

To understand the biological origins of pilgrimage, we must take a look at the very evolutionary origins of religion and belief-systems. As early as the Middle Paleolithic era, there is historical evidence that archaic species of humans had been performing complex religious rituals to derive meaning from chaos. As a result from the rapid evolution of neural faculties moderating imagination around 300,000 years ago, Neanderthals and other species of *Homo sapiens* around the Middle Paleolithic period living around what is known today as Europe, Africa and the Middle East would have buried their dead in side-laying sleeping positions, surrounded the corpses with consciously-placed animal horns, bones, tools and other items of symbolic importance around the corpse, and placed limestone blocks underneath or over the head and shoulders.<sup>87</sup> This suggests that the spiritual concerns of

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87. Joseph, R. "The Limbic System and the Soul: Evolution and the Neuroanatomy of Religious Experience." *Zygon* 36, no. 1 (2001): 105-136. doi:10.1111/0591-2385.00343.



**FIGURE 1.05**

Remains of Upper Paleolithic hunter-gatherers, dating to around 34,000 BCE, found at the site of Sungir, Russia. The decorated ornaments and modifications seen on the skeletal remains is one of the earliest accounts of complex mortuary behaviours, and depict early signs of spiritually-motivated behaviour.

archaic humans would grow to revolve around offering the deceased a safe passage to the afterlife signifying the conceptual emergence of a human soul, and ultimately signifying the conception of religious idea – a result of the limbic system and inferior temporal lobe (the same areas of the brain responsible for mystical experiences, as explained in **section 1.2.5**) dramatically increasing in size in proportion to the other parts of the brain around this time period.<sup>88</sup> As the limbic system is universal to humans, this explains why mystical and religious experiences occur transculturally, and why humans are inherently tethered by the notions of the collective unconscious (explained further below).

Biological anthropologist Agustín Fuentes, author of the book *Why We Believe*, posits that the origins and evolution of religion (regarding religious transcendence and mysticism for personal salvation, which is distinct from, but not entirely neglecting, the nature of collective religious structures) had followed a three-part evolutionary process: (1) the development of imagination, (2) the means of making meaning from the patterns in chaos manifested from imagination, and (3) the interpretation of meaning in chaos as to form a belief system.<sup>89</sup> As members of the *Homo* genus would begin to develop heightened senses of imagination, members began using imaginative abstract reasoning for problem solving. With the discovery of fire and advent of basic stone tools around the Old Stone Age as a product of imaginative thinking, *Hominins* had the resources to access a much wider array of nutrition – thus, leading to the increased development of the limbic system, prefrontal cortex and inferior temporal lobe during the Middle Paleolithic time period.<sup>90</sup> The increase in volume of these neural regions brought with it heightened reception to stimuli and the foundation for emotional states, and thus the awareness of patterns in supposed chaos and ability to establish relationships between the chaotic matrix.

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88. Joseph, "The Limbic System and the Soul."

89. Fuentes, Agustín. *Why We Believe: Evolution and the Human Way of Being*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019.

90. Fuentes, *Why We Believe*.

## PILGRIMAGE AT WALDEN POND

Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* accounts for his time during a minimalistic and self-reliant pilgrimage in the wilderness as he escapes a place of "over-civilization," spanning the time of two years, two months and two days in an English-style cabin on the shore of Walden Pond he constructed near Concord, Massachusetts, with architectural implications functioning as a compliment to Thoreau's transcendental act. Thoreau emerges from the woods more patient, self-aware and better able to engage with contemporary society by encountering mystical experiences during his time in solitude. Thoreau's journey to Walden Pond generally fits the structure of traditional pilgrimages: Thoreau initiates the pilgrimage by preparing the materials for his hermitage; whereas the pilgrims of Christianity or Hinduism may prepare by adorning sacred articles of clothing, Thoreau is crafting a different, more architecturally oriented skin. Thoreau then separates from society to experience nature to the most unctuous degree. For Thoreau, the destination is not necessarily the hermitage; rather, the destination is the Truth of Life, or mystical experience, and the path is the search for the mystical experiences – whether it be through fishing, farming or contemplation. Thoreau then returns after two years and two months with his gifts.

Thoreau's quest in the woods is one of finding the absolute essence of Life, as Thoreau states he "wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of Life";<sup>91</sup> in part, Thoreau believes that with freedom from excessive material possession and independence from the capitalist mechanisms of the state, only then can one live their "truest Life."<sup>92</sup> Thoreau expresses his need to strip Life of its unnecessary baggage in *Walden*, as he claims he "went to the woods because [he] wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of Life, and see if [he] could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came

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91. Thoreau, *Walden*.

92. Thoreau, *Walden*.





**FIGURE 1.06 (LEFT)**

The replication of Henry David Thoreau's cabin at Walden Pond located at Tyler Arboretum in Pennsylvania.

**FIGURE 1.07 (ABOVE)**

Though the initial cabin was deconstructed shortly after Thoreau's pilgrimage, a memorial has been left in its place.

to die, discover that [he] had not lived.<sup>93</sup> Thoreau takes the position of understanding the world as a spectrum between civilization and nature, and believes that there is some kind of Truth to be found when distancing oneself from the “corruption” of the state – this attempt to understand ontology in a spectrum of two polar ends is something I also attempt to dissect in this body of thoughts, though Thoreau tends to take a misanthropic position on the matter, whereas my stance is of neutrality. It is fair to say that both Thoreau and I have the tendency to romanticize the “raw, savage delight<sup>94</sup> of the wilderness.

As an abolitionist, and of rebellious temperament, Thoreau dismisses figures of authority, which in part allows him justification for his self-reliant woodland affair. He claims in his essay *Resistance of Civil Government*, that, as state-governing bodies supposedly create more harm than help, there is no justification for individuals to allow for governments to rule over their consciousnesses; Thoreau seeks refuge in the woods to evade the looming shadow of societal power and, as a testament to his disobedience, has even spent his hours in prison as consequence for rejecting his poll tax payment, as it would connote support of slavery and the Mexican-American war. Perhaps Thoreau did not undergo such a pleasant experience being fathered in his adolescence, and thus must seek out some kind of radical encounter with forces of uncertainty in the woods to reconcile some kind of absent fathering. Perhaps I am doing the same.

1.3.5.

## GENESIS

Throughout the history of spiritual and mystical practice – whether it be known as pilgrimage, religious journey and ecstasy, the path of spiritual transcendence, ascetic lifestyle, achieving ego death, or otherwise – sacred architecture finds itself accompanying the philosophies,

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93. Thoreau, *Walden*.

94. Thoreau, *Walden*.



metaphors, symbols, myths, and rituals surrounding the practice.<sup>95,96</sup> Sacred architecture, as Thomas Barrie describes in *Spiritual Path, Sacred Place*, is defined as a built structure that is used to “symbolize the meanings and accommodate the rituals of the particular belief systems of its time.”<sup>97</sup> Sacred architecture fulfils not only the basic need of providing shelter, but also acts as a vessel to portray and translate the often unconscious and non-material religious, mystical and spiritual phenomena through the physical manifestation of meaning using abstract symbolism in the architectural design, and may be understood fundamentally as “built myth.” Barrie argues that the meaning imparted in sacred architecture exists on three levels: through literal physical representation, through deeper, abstracted physical representation, and through the correspondence between enacted rituals of belief and architectural form at the deepest level, as the phenomena is actualized in both the form of the architecture, the spiritual practice, and the synergy between them.<sup>98</sup> As the psyche yearns for spiritual orientation, transcendence, and wholeness through spiritual, religious or mystical forms of divine intervention, sacred architecture, therefore, functions as the physical vessel for the psyche’s need of transcendence and, furthermore, functions as an instrument used to compliment the path of spiritual transcendence.

In Victoria Park, oak bark lays dormant on fallen trunks, awaiting the polymeric decomposition of lignin chains courtesy of the budding xylophagous fungi flesh. Young maple saplings reach their limbs and leaves out towards the Heavens to optimize each ray of Sunlight to be consumed and each drop of rainwater to be dispersed. Sphagnum moss finds refuge on the exposed limestone faces as it weathers down even the most disagreeable of aggregates. Each material exists with its own essence, as its own entity. Though, in a

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95. Barrie, *Spiritual Path*.

96. Waaijman, Kees. *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*. Leuven: Peeters, 2002.

97. Barrie, *Spiritual Path*.

98. Barrie, *Spiritual Path*.

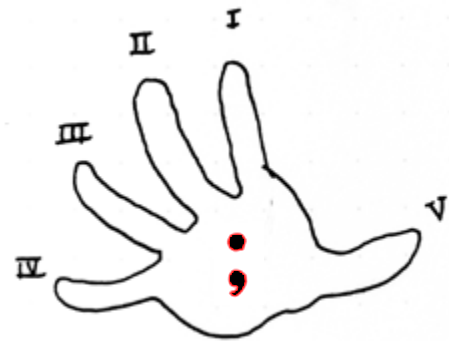
moment, an individual approaches the forest as a pilgrim and hermit, and by virtue of enlightenment, the individual begins to collect these various essences to compose them with such synergy along his own consciousness and soul that an object of an entirely new identity is formed. It is with these foraged essences that the individual sets out craft the mystic's hermitage – an architectural instrument that will be used to compliment to the mystic's pilgrimage as it houses the mind and matter of the self while the soul embarks on the spiritual practice in the surrounding woodland. The mystic's hermitage is a bentwood-frame survival shelter largely drawn from the Anishnaabe *wiigwaam*, nestled within the briers Victoria Park's hardwood red oak forest, just as the Cistercian hermitages in medieval Europe were, hidden amongst the thorny shrubbery, quarantined from the collective of dopamine abuse and worldly pursuit. The mystic's hermitage affords the individual's isolation from the society and culture, serving as a refuge from the forces of the ego so the individual may dwell and contemplate Truths in the solitude of the woodland – the parameters of this architectural intervention will be discussed in the following section, concluding this Act.





## CHAPTER 2

*To Mark,*



## THE MYSTIC'S HERMITAGE

## 2.1.1.

## BUILDING AND DWELLING

As the hermitage serves to compliment the pilgrimage through pragmatic and metaphorical function, specific parameters must be met and certain paradoxes must be reconciled. Three distinct founding dimensions regarding the conceptualization, design and construction of the mystic's hermitage will be covered in detail in this section: i. site, ii. architectural typology, and iii. ontological position. Each of these three dimensions themselves fragment into further layers strata. The first domain – site – denotes the threads related to the spatial, ecological and mystical context in which the hermitage will be implanted: analysis, selection and preparation. The second domain – of architectural typology – elucidates the material and historical extents of the building typology, focusing primarily on the analysis of the primitive hut and conception of the hermitage as a physical manifestation of the need for solitude and transcendence. The third domain – of ontological position – addresses the position of Indigeneity taken by the mystic's hermitage as an ontological assessment of the mystic's hermitage, and addresses the issues associated with the appropriation of cultural artifacts. These dimensions will be covered in depth in this chapter, concluding the written portion of the thesis.

## 2.1.2.

## NEST

Although a major component of the mystic's pilgrimage is to intimately observe the woodland, a brief analysis of the geographical and ecological extents must also be outlined as to illustrate the entirety of the landscape so one may be sensitive towards the landscape. I primarily reference *Eastern Forests, North America* by John Kricher and Gordon Morrison, along with a few other supplementary texts to gain a more vast ecological understanding of the landscape. Victoria Park, located in Cambridge, Ontario, serves as the secluded substrate from which the mystic's hermitage may grow. Victoria Park is situated near the centre of the Grand River Basin in Ontario. Many of Southern Ontario's

tributary creeks and rivers drain into the Grand River, making it one home to one of Southern Ontario's largest watersheds. The dolostone bedrock (limestone rich in magnesium) and glacial deposits which cover the bedrock form the major geological composition of the Basin, and host significant aggregate and groundwater resources.<sup>99</sup> Victoria Park is a northern hardwood forest (a type of eastern deciduous forest community) with some elements from boreal and oak-hickory forests. Often times, the northern hardwood forest is referred to as the "transition forest" due to the commonalities shared with the Boreal forests to the north and the oak-hickory forests to the south.<sup>100</sup> The forest typology is indicated by the population of northern red oak and American beech trees in the canopy, green alder, mountain-ash, and elderberry species in the undergrowth, with painted trilliums, common wood-sorrel, kidney-leaved violet, wild sarsaparilla, mayapple, false Solomon's seal, and trout-lily species – among many others – present as herbaceous indicator plants.<sup>101</sup> Dark-eyed juncos, black-capped chickadees, white-throated sparrow, red squirrels, red-backed vole and white-tailed deer serve as the animals indicating the northern hardwood forest.<sup>102</sup>

## 2.1.3.

## PLACE &amp; SPACE

To ensure optimal dwelling conditions regarding the location and massing of the hermitage at the site in Victoria Park, I reference three key texts on wilderness survival: Ellsworth Jaeger's *Wildwood Wisdom*, Mors Kochanski's *Bushcraft*, and the *U.S. Army Survival Manual*. The three texts provide general outlines on selecting shelter sites to advantage the architectural fitness of the hermitage, and in essence, provide architectural implications for rudimentary and

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99. Janzen, Bob. *Geology of the Grand River Watershed: An Overview of Bedrock and Quaternary Geological Interpretations in the Grand River Watershed*. Cambridge, Ontario, 2018.

100. Kricher, John C. and Gordon Morrison. *Eastern Forests, North America*. Norwalk, Conn: Easton Press, 1988.

101. Kricher and Morrison, *Eastern Forests*.

102. Kricher and Morrison, *Eastern Forests*.



urgent architectural dwellings. According to Jaeger, the shelter site must be open and level, with a source of drinkable water relatively close in proximity to help avoid dehydration; though, one must be mindful of rising water levels if building near a shore or riverbank.<sup>103</sup> The site should lay on relatively level ground to allow for efficiency of construction and comfort of space. The site must also be high in elevation to ensure vast points of vantage, and must be situated on a peak as to not be caught in the line of rainwater drainage.<sup>104</sup> Access to the eastern morning Sun is favourable, so the shelter apertures may open towards the east to collect early morning heat and Light of the rising Sun.<sup>105</sup> Thickets and deeply-wooded bottoms are to be avoided during summer time, as insects tend to swarm in these conditions.<sup>106</sup> Constructing directly underneath a large tree is unfavourable as the tree may drip onto the building during rain, or a large branch may suddenly collapse during a storm; the shelter may be located near the centre of a tree to avoid concentrated rain from foliage during seasons of leaf coverage.<sup>107</sup>

Just as important as the hermitage itself, the land on which the dwelling will lay must also be imparted with symbolic importance, for, aside from the pragmatic and rational dimensions of the hermitage, there also lies the realm of the mystical and spiritual. Herein, perhaps, lies the first binary quandary: that between function and symbol – that is not to say that these polar ends are like water and fat and that they do not become one, but rather that they are in a delicate predicament, in need of finding equilibrium through a calibrated dance between matter and meaning. On the one hand, the land which the hermitage rests atop must be processed with intuitive and rudimentary functional operations, such as clearing or debris, levelling and compacting of land, relocation or removal of intrusive plants, and marking building

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103. Jaeger, Ellsworth. *Wildwood Wisdom*. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1945.

104. Jaeger, *Wildwood Wisdom*.

105. Jaeger, *Wildwood Wisdom*.

106. Jaeger, *Wildwood Wisdom*.

107. Jaeger, *Wildwood Wisdom*.

extents. However, on the other hand, the land must also be processed by symbolic ritual operations – a means for a mystical and spiritual ordering which imparts meaning into the dwelling by virtue of relating the land to the dwelling, and the dwelling back to the Universe. The individual takes twelve paces from east to west, then north to south, mark the center point of the space. The journey begins from the east to signify the birth of the hermitage and the rising of the Sun. Water from the nearby Devil’s Creek is collected and sprinkled onto the base – as the water returns to the creek, and the hermitage becomes anchored to the very elixir that sustains Life on this planet. Prayers are offered to the trees of the forest for good fortune. The living matter removed during the clearing of the site is placed in the center of the space and lit ablaze; the ashes are then spread around the site; from death, comes Life.

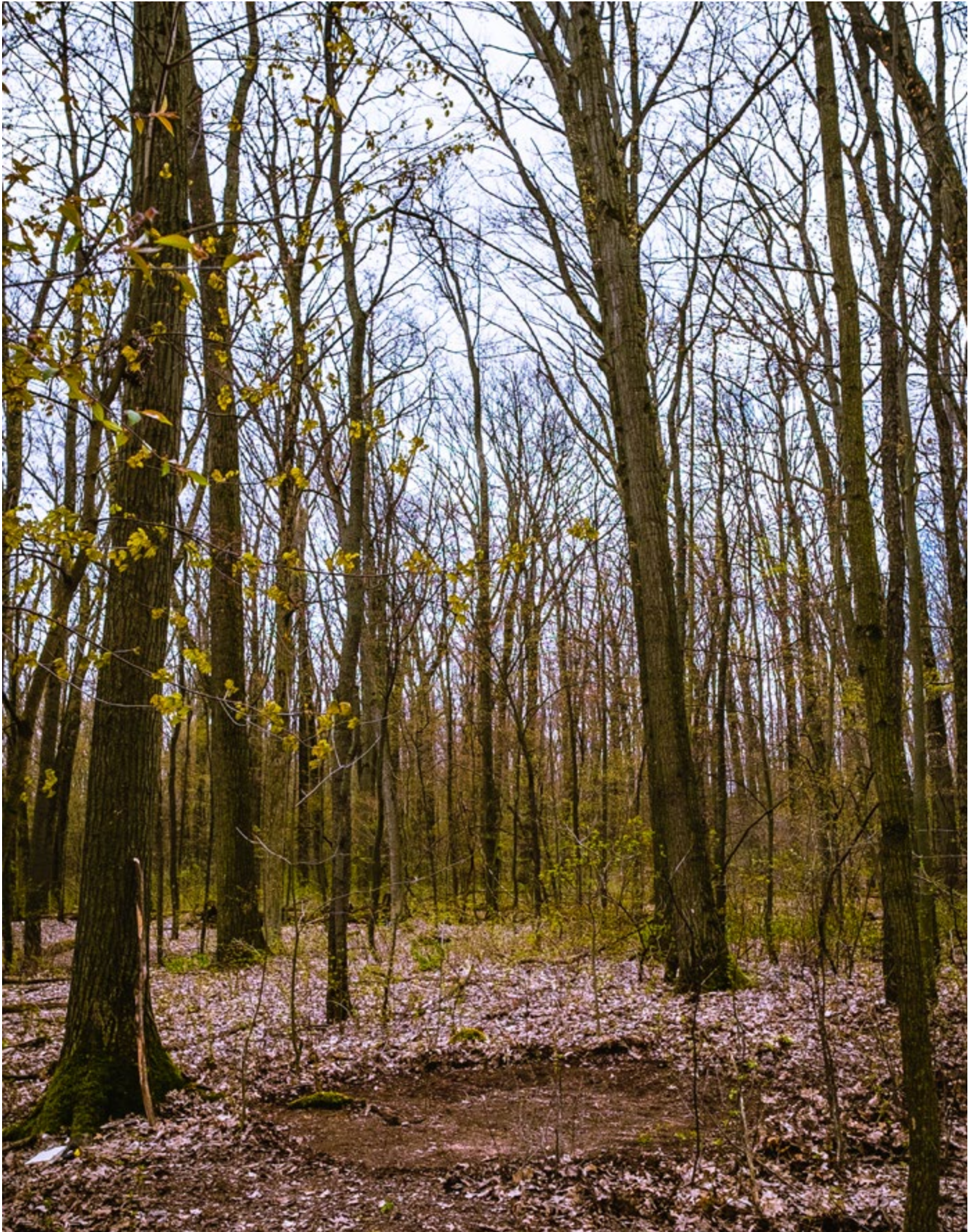
## 2.1.4.

## MYTHS &amp; MEANING

Although the foundation rituals for the mystic’s hermitage were based primarily on pragmatic reasoning and mystical intuition rather than strict cultural custom (perhaps this is a projection of my own precarious identity onto the hermitage), a brief discussion on the foundation rites performed when developing ancient Roman cities may provide substance for understanding the divine architectural implications on the means of preparing the landscape for the construction of architecture – whether microcosmic or macrocosmic, sacred or secular – and how the ritual foundations may hold symbolic value for the citizens that inhabit the space. According to Rykwert in *The Idea of a Town*, for the Romans, “the city was organized according to divine laws”<sup>108</sup> – that is to say, the relationship shared between the individual and the collective (in this case the governing state) was one of divinity and not only pragmatism, something which critics of modernism

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108. Rykwert, Joseph. *The Idea of a Town: The Anthropology of Urban Form in Rome, Italy and the Ancient World*. 1st ed. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1988.



**FIGURE 2.01**

Image of excavated section of land for the construction of the mystic's hermitage at Victoria Park in Cambridge, Ontario. The building spot is located on a relative high-point with a light canopy to help shed rainwater. Raspberry briars cut within the perimeter were collected to be burned in the initiation fire after completion of the hermitage as a part of the building ritual.

believe to be one of the reasons for the degradation in the experience of architecture and the metropolis. The complex rituals enacted in the homes by the paterfamilias were of the same sort as the rituals that the associates of priests enacted for the state.<sup>109</sup> Divine order at the urban scale allowed for the individuals in ancient Rome to not only afford a relationship with the state, but also with the land on which the state rests atop, to which Rykwert states, “so often the home is felt to be a miniature of the city: not as it is, but as we want it.”<sup>110</sup> Perhaps for the need to optimize everything around capital and time in our modern eyes, the Roman rituals seem almost anti-pragmatic; modern designers might regard them as not important, or not important *enough*.<sup>111</sup>

Foundation rites were often of mythological origin and were used to guide planners and builders. Perhaps one of the most familiar myths associated with Roman foundation rituals is found in Plutarch’s *Life of Romulus*.<sup>112</sup> As it appears, fratricide seemed to be a common archetype associated with the foundation of cities in Western mythology – in the Book of Genesis, Cain builds a city in the Land of Nod after being exiled there by God as punishment for murdering his brother Abel; similarly, Romulus, the founder and first king of Rome, struck his twin brother Remus, killing him, after Remus had ridiculed the foundation of the city wall.<sup>113</sup> As the Romans viewed the founding walls as holy, Remus had violated the sacredness of the wall, and was thus punished by Romulus, resulting in his death. Romulus, as Plutarch describes, then carries on with the foundation ritual as follows:

*The founder fitted a brazen ploughshare to the plough, and, yoking together a bull and a cow, drove himself a deep line or furrow round the bounds; while the business of all those that followed after was to see that whatever was thrown up should be turned*

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109. Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*.

110. Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*.

111. Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*.

112. Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*.

113. Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*.

*all inwards towards the city, and not to let any clod lie outside. With this line they described the wall and called it by a contraction pomoerium – that is, postmorum, after or besides the wall; and where they designed to make a gate, there they took out the share, carried th plough over, and left a space; for which reason they consider the whole wall as holy, except where the gates are.*<sup>114</sup>

Religiously-derived foundation rituals were of utmost importance to the ancients of not only Rome, but extending to most cultures. The Ancient Greeks would refer to mythical passages, such as *Peace* by Aristophanes or the *Song of Ilium* by Homer, to perform building foundation rites. In *Song of Ilium*, Zeus becomes enraged with the Achaeans after Poseidon complains that they had constructed a defensive wall without providing a hecatomb to the Gods, thus leading to Zeus commanding Poseidon to destroy the wall. For this erasion, animals were sacrificed before the construction of defensive walls in ancient Greek architecture. In ancient Egypt, foundation rituals were performed by the king for the construction of a new temple. Ancient Egyptian ritual acts would consist of marking the plan of the building, scattering of gypsum over the construction site, or placing a specific quantity of minerals in pits located and the four corners of the temple.

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114. Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town*.



## THE FIRST DWELLING

## THE PRIMITIVE AND THE PRAGMATIC

The act of marking a boundary in chaos to create an instance of order – we call it space. We generate substances and gadgets that attempt to solidify a secure condition of permanence in this so-called space to withstand the pressures of time and entropy, and, perhaps, in a delusional daze, we hope to quell the fear of mortality – or, in the least, distract ourselves from it. The most fundamental act of spatial delineation an organism enacts is the creation of its dwelling – an instance of order marked out by the organism to satisfy fundamental physiological needs located at the base of the Maslow’s Hierarchy Pyramid, and thus, allows for the organism to establish a relative point puncturing into the psyche of the organism’s perception of space-time to allow for the organism to relate and calibrate itself to the Universe accordingly. From a purely pragmatic and physically functional standpoint – which is, perhaps, the most urgent in its relationship to architecture from a utilitarian perspective – the mystic’s hermitage can be considered a type of survival shelter. Referring to it with other such loose terminology from a slightly more anthropological perspective, it may also be referred to as a reenactment of a primitive hut or an archaic dwelling of sorts. Put in the most simple terms, the mystic’s hermitage is a dwelling, and that, too, a most fundamental one. Just as the mystic embarks on learning the most fundamental Truths of existence to rid the self of depression, his hermitage must also sing in the same tune. Therefore, in part, the design of the mystic’s hermitage is concerned with the fundamental need for shelter, finding itself amongst air, water, food, sleep and reproduction at the foundation of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs,<sup>115</sup> and is also concerned with the fundamental conception of the hut. In *An Essay on Architecture*, Marc-Antoine Laugier describes an individual in a similar predicament as the mystic:

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115. Maslow, Abraham H. “A Theory of Human Motivation.” *Psychological Review* 50 (1943), 370-396.

*Let us look at man in his primitive state without any aid or guidance other than his natural instincts. He is in need of a place to rest. On the banks of a quietly flowing brook he notices a stretch of grass; its fresh greenness is pleasing to his eyes, its tender down invites him; he is drawn there an, stretched out at leisure on this sparkling carpet, he thinks of nothing else but enjoying the gift of nature; he lacks nothing, he does not wish for anything. But soon the scorching heat of the Sun forces him to look for shelter. A nearby forest draws him to its cooling shade; he runs to find a refuge in its depth, and there he is content. But suddenly mists are rising, swirling round and growing denser until thick clouds cover the skies; soon, the torrential rain pours down on this delightful forest. The savage, in his leafy shelter, does not know how to protect himself from the uncomfortable damp that penetrates everywhere; he creeps into a nearby cave and, finding it dry, he praises himself for his discovery. But soon the darkness and foul air surrounding him make his stay unbearable again. He leaves and is resolved to make good by his ingenuity the careless neglect of nature. He wants to make himself a dwelling that protects but does not bury him. Some fallen branches in the forest are the right material for his purpose; he chooses four of the strongest, raises them upright and arranges them in a square; across their top he lays four other branches; on these he hoists from two sides yet another row of branches which, inclining towards each other, meet at their highest point. He then covers this kind of roof with leaves so closely packed that neither Sun nor rain can penetrate. Thus, man is housed.<sup>116</sup>*

Laugier illustrates this urge of the “savage” human – though it may be better to understand this rather as a most primal instinct or impulse which all humans embody – to seek solace in shelter. The primal instinct for the human in Laugier’s essay is to first escape from unfavourable settings, and, perhaps, as a result of the lack of control,

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116. Laugier, Marc Antoine and William Dendy. *An Essay on Architecture*. Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1977.



the primitive human may in his various scavenged environments may have to construct a simple hut as a solution. Thus, the human erects logs and covers them to generate what is the archetype of Platonic-ideal of a hut – the first dwelling. Laugier identifies the three most fundamental elements of architecture: the column (modeled by the logs), the entablature (the leaves which form the roof), and the pediment (the Earth upon which all sits).<sup>117</sup> This, Laugier argues, is the absolute essence of all architecture. Similarly, the mystic scours Victoria Park for saplings to fashion into load-bearing columns and oak bark to sheath the roof from the moss-clad base.

2 . 2 . 2 .

#### ARCHITECTURE OF THE WILDERNESS

In the mystic's search for fundamental Truths of existence and the spirit, his hermitage seems to strike the same chord. Though, the mystic's decision to construct his hermitage in the form of an archaic shelter comes from not only the search of the fundamental essence of architecture, but also as a means to relinquish himself from the grips of the ego by virtue of an ascetic practice, relying primarily on materials untouched by the hands of the ego. Just as the primal instinct for the Laugier's human is to *survive*, so is the of the mystic, thus, the mystic's hermitage takes the mark of a survival shelter. Now, survival shelters are not exactly akin to archaic vernacular dwellings, though in concept they share many features. Survival shelters may be regarded as *guidelines* for the construction of simple dwellings from the Earth on the basis of urgency, and may allow for a systematic understanding of such matter.<sup>118</sup> Survival shelters essentially function to provide the organism with a micro-environment condition, functioning as a supplement for or allowing for the removal of clothing while providing protection from environmental and biological hazards.<sup>119</sup> Survival

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117. Laugier, Dendy. *An Essay on Architecture*.

118. Jaeger, Ellsworth. *Wildwood Wisdom*. New York: Scribner, 1945.

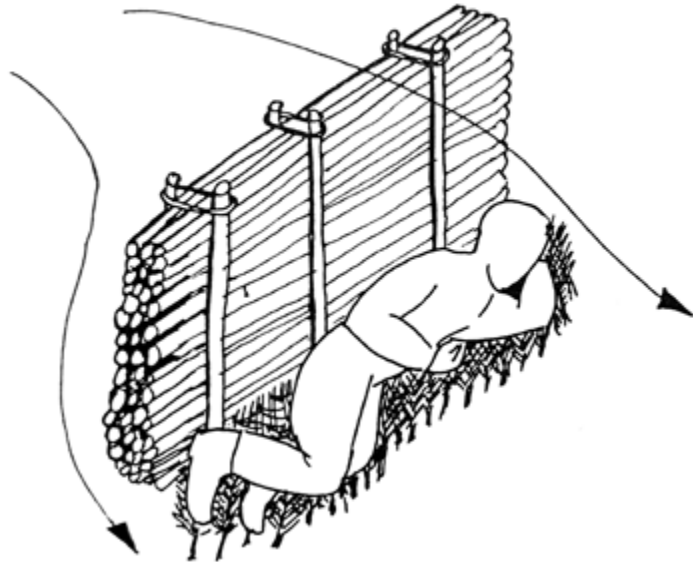
119. Kochanski, Mors. *Northern Bushcraft*. Edmonton, AB: Lone Pine, 1987.

shelters can also feature furnishings, such as beds and fire pits, where the shelter's insulative properties can help conserve resources required for the warmth of the fire. Shelters must feature four particular elements to be viable for sustaining Life in sub-standard conditions encountered in northern climates: a source of heat, protection from cold wind, an insulative base, and overhead protection. In Mors Kochanski's inquiry on wilderness survival, titled *Northern Bushcraft*, Kochanski categorizes survival shelters for northern climates into three types: open fronted, partly enclosed, and fully-enclosed.

*'Open-Fronted'* — Open-fronted shelters are the most primary of the classifications of survival shelters, for they may be constructed with relative ease and speed from readily available local materials.<sup>120</sup> Open-fronted shelters allow for the efficient generation of a space that may offer quick relief from unfavourable environmental elements, and may be heated by fire or direct Sunlight from openings. The back of the shelter must be in close enough proximity to the source of heat to provide optimal thermal efficiency, and, therefore, are limited in volume; thus, they are typically suited for individual or paired survivalists, functioning somewhat as an extension of clothing. The shelter must be positioned in such a manner that minimizes cold air entrance into the shelter; the dwelling space, fire, and wind must run parallel as to avoid smoke entering the dwelling space. The fire must be designed so that it is a few steps away from the front of the shelter, and must be looked after quite frequently, resulting in shorter periods of rest. During the particular climate conditions, some elements may be temporarily omitted, such as the need for fire during the peak of summer. Of the open-fronted shelters, the most basic is the windscreen (**figure 2.02**). It may be constructed at a moments notice with minimal amounts of foraged materials, and may provide protection from cold air carried by dominant winds. This shelter can be erected with thermal bedding, underneath a canopy and alongside fire for quick protection during the colder

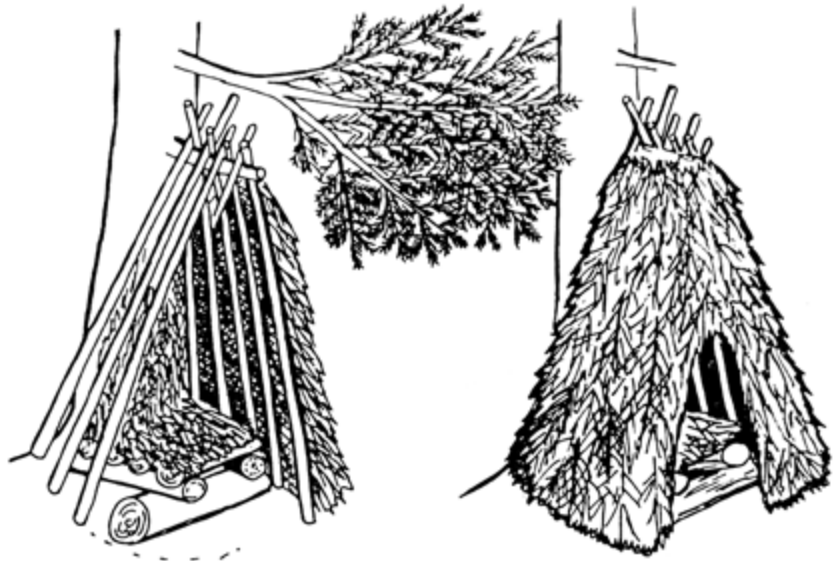
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120. Kochanski, *Northern Bushcraft*.



**FIGURE 2.02**

An illustration of a simple windscreen shelter. These may be constructed in a pinch in extreme conditions with simple materials such as fallen wood and vegetative bedding.



**FIGURE 2.03**

An illustration of a sitting-up insulative shelter. An example of a simple survival shelter that may be constructed of limited local elements with an additional insulative factor. If coupled with an adjacent fire, it may prove to be an effective, semi-permanent shelter.

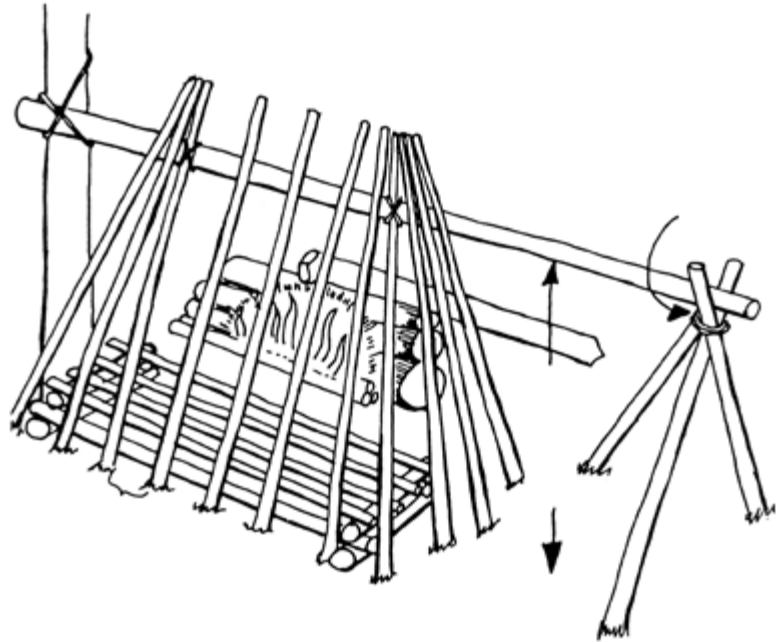
seasons. If conditions allow, there are options for more complex forms of open-fronted survival shelters, such as the sitting-up shelter (**figure 2.03**) and the lean-to (**figures 2.04 and 2.05**). These shelters make use of more complex forms, geometry, materiality and tectonics to provide improved dwelling conditions and much more control over the micro-environment within the shelter. The sitting-up shelter provides a chance to create a small insulated space with grasses, mosses, earth or snow, allowing for greater retention of heat and, thus, less expenditure of calories. The lean-to design allows for a slightly larger area, affording the individual or pair an increased amount of comfort and spatial control.<sup>121</sup>

*'Partially-Enclosed'* and *'Enclosed'* — Partially enclosed and fully-enclosed structures can offer much more thermal efficiency compared to the open-fronted shelters. In colder climates, these shelters typically contain the fire within the shelter, and can also be insulated with fibrous, lattice-like materials, such as grasses, mosses or needles, or other materials which contain many air gaps, such as snow.<sup>122</sup> Partially-enclosed shelters differ from fully-enclosed types due to the fact that they require openings for the entrance, air-intake and smoke exhaust, leaving them more susceptible to energy loss. The most well-known of these shelters may be the wiigiwaam and tipi, constructed by the Indigenous peoples of North America. As the design of the mystic's hermitage is based heavily on the wiigiwaams of the Anishnaabe peoples, I will cover the cultural implications in the sections below. The wiigiwaam is a semi-permanent dome-shaped dwelling constructed of a bent-wood frame, typically sheathed in bark, hide or woven matting, varying from region to region and ecosystem to ecosystem. Young, green saplings of nearly any local tree species are used to frame the dome, typically ranging from ten to fifteen feet long segments. The thin veil of bark is removed from the saplings and the ends are charred to provide resistance against decay. The saplings are then secured into the Earth

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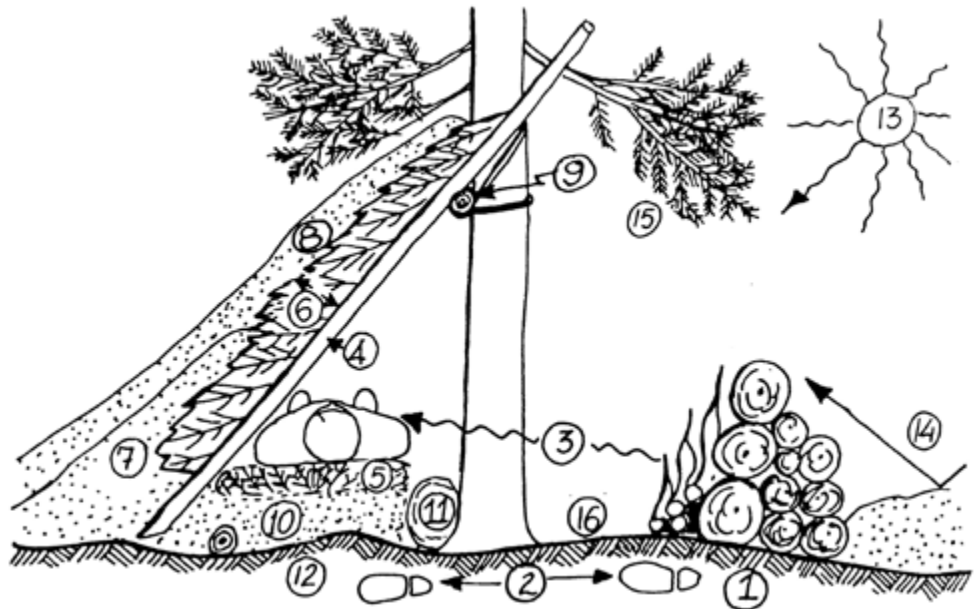
121. Jaeger, Ellsworth, *Wildwood Wisdom*.

122. Jaeger, Ellsworth, *Wildwood Wisdom*.



**FIGURE 2.04**

An illustration of a lean-to shelter skeleton. One of the more advanced shelters, the lean-to shelter takes advantage with an open front for heat circulation and external structural support.



**FIGURE 2.05**

A cross-section of a winter lean-to shelter. 1. Waist-high wall-backed fire. 2. Safe distance between fire and shelter. 3. Large fire ensures heat reaches shelter without fire risks. 4. Back of shelter helps retain heat. 5. Insulative boughs protect snow from melting. 7. Banked snow. 8. Shelter is covered with snow. 9. Ridge pole must sustain weight of snow. 10. Snow bed. 11. Snow-retaining log, prevents melting. 12. Elevated bed allows for uneven ground. 13. Shelter faces Sun. 14. Snow burm helps direct heat towards shelter. 15. Additional protection from canopy. 16. Snow must be cleared between bed and fire.

and arrayed in a circular figure as oppositely-facing paired sets. Each set is arched over and lashed with cordage (typically made from fibres found in bark or woody vines), followed by adding horizontal rings of saplings functioning as lateral bracing, and then sheathed to form the dome-shaped shell (**figure 2.06**).<sup>123, 124</sup> The tipi is a conical tent used by the semi-nomadic Indigenous peoples of the Great Plains and Canadian Prairies (although many old stereotypes incorrectly associate the tipi with all American and Canadian Indigenous peoples). The term tipi is derived from the Lakota language, where *thipi* is used to define “a dwelling,” coming from the word *thi*, meaning “to dwell.”<sup>125</sup> The frame of the tipi for a family is constructed from fifteen to eighteen feet long wooden poles which are similarly secured in the ground in a circular figure, and meet at the top, creating a conical skeleton. For the individual scale, the pole lengths may be scaled down according to body proportions. Cladding materials, such as prepared animal skins, fibrous textiles or bark, are then placed along the exterior of the structure and lashed or pinned. A flap in the crown of the dwelling is created to allow for smoke to be properly exhausted, which distinguishes the tipi from other vernacular conical tents.<sup>126</sup>

## 2.2.3.

## THE HERMIT AND HIS CLOAK

I have made much mention of this mystic’s hermitage; through one lens crafted to view things in a purely material manner, it may be seen as a glorified survival shelter, providing the mystic a place of refuge from the chaos of nature and rudimentary facilities for dwelling – this is the relationship the mystic’s hermitage shares with the body. Moving

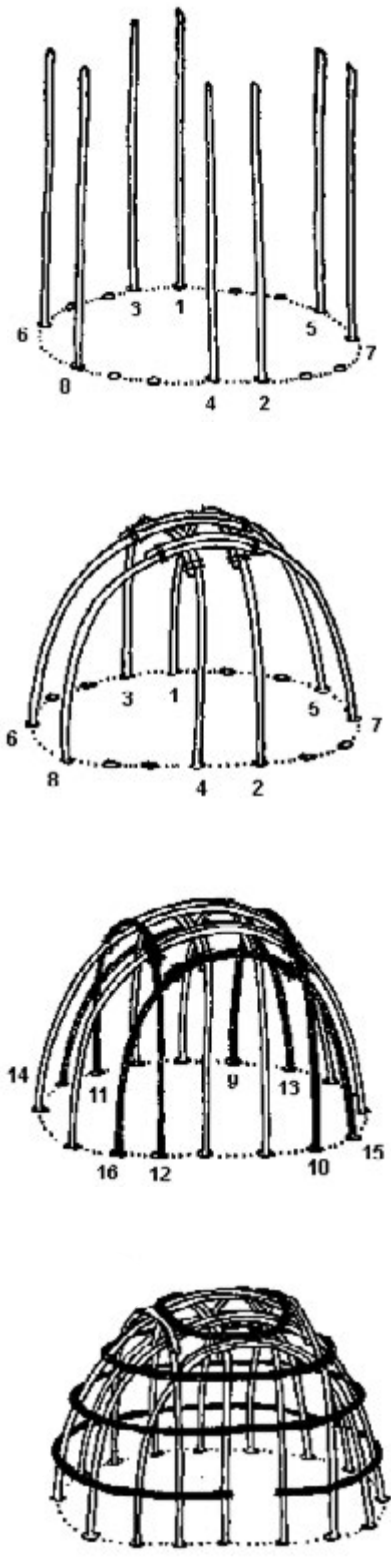
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123. Prindle, Tara. “Basic Wigwam Construction” <http://www.nativetech.org/wigwam/construction.html>.

124. Jaeger, Ellsworth, *Wildwood Wisdom*.

125. Keoke, Emory Dean and Kay Marie Porterfield. *Encyclopedia of American Indian Contributions to the World: 15,000 Years of Inventions and Innovations*. Infobase Publishing, 2009.

126. Jaeger, Ellsworth, *Wildwood Wisdom*.



**FIGURE 2.06**

The various stages of the wigiwaam frame construction. First, the primary saplings are inserted. Next, arches are formed with oppositely-paired saplings. Then, additional arches are installed to increase surface area of shell and increase compressive strength. Finally, horizontal saplings are added to increase rigidity.

beyond the technicalities of the physical domain through a much more nuanced lens crafted to see beyond the physical, we approach deeper into an interpersonal domain concerned with the elements reflecting what the hermitage symbolizes for the individual's subconscious mind and soul – this is the relationship the mystic's hermitage shares with the individual's pursuit of mystical experiences, and reveals to us the spiritual facet of the architecture – the *hermitage*. An hermitage is a secluded domicile which serves as a place for an individual, referred to in this case as a hermit, to live a Life in solitude, ultimately for the purposes of achieving spiritual transcendence. In this sense, the hermitage may also be considered as the physical manifestation for the individual's need to seek solitude. Solitude has been regarded as an essential component in the pursuit of spiritual transcendence by many individuals and across many cultures.<sup>127</sup> Many spiritual leaders, such as Moses, Jesus, Muhammad (peace be upon them), and the Buddha, along with Dostoevsky, Thoreau, Emerson and the likes, have sought the embrace of solitude, receiving gifts of knowledge and mystical experience during their quests of transcendence, and returning to society to share their enlightenments; interestingly enough, the archetypes of the hero's journey and pilgrimage share much in common with pursuit of solitude, as solitude is often an important component for these enlightenment archetypes.

## 2 . 2 . 4 .

## THE ANATOMY OF SOLITUDE

Perhaps the first mention of the value of solitude can be found in Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*.<sup>128</sup> During the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC In China, two philosophies existed to teach individuals about fulfilment and enlightenment: Confucianism and Taoism. The system of Confucian

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127. Long, Christopher R. and James R. Averill. "Solitude: An Exploration of Benefits of being Alone." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 33, no. 1 (2003): 21-44. doi:10.1111/1468-5914.00204.

128. France, Peter. *Hermits: The Insights of Solitude*. 1<sup>st</sup> edition. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.



philosophy spoke of *ren* (仁) as the basic human virtue, which is understood as the doing of “the right thing by your fellow human being.”<sup>129</sup> Virtuousness and self-respect of the individual is earned from their status in society in the eye of the Other. Lao Tzu, on the other hand, found little interest in society and was indifferent to social status, finding Life within social walls an obstruction to the freedom of the individual. Thus, in the teachings of Taoism, wisdom and freedom may be found through “retreat rather than pursuit, by inaction rather than action.”<sup>130</sup> In solitude, the individual may begin to unlearn the “superficial cleverness” adopted as a means of attempting to assimilate with the crowd and return to bear witness to the healing influence of nature.<sup>131</sup> In Hindu philosophies dating as far back as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, the call for seclusion from the realm of worldliness had been well established.<sup>132</sup> As it was written in the Upanishads, it was expected for men to retreat to the forest at a certain stage in Life to pursue asceticism, earning them the title of the *Samyasi*. For the Hindu, there were four stages of Life: *Brahmacharya*, the stage of apprenticeship as a student, *Grihastha*, the stage of the householder, where one shoulders the responsibilities of Life, marriage and children, *Vanaprastha*, the stage of the forest dweller and ascetic, where the individual relinquishes worldly responsibilities as a hermit on a spiritual path; the final path, of *Sannyasa*, is achieved when the individual renounces all worldly possession in the supreme pursuit of enlightenment and Greater Truth.<sup>133</sup> Extending into the scale of the collective, the social condition of the hermit was also well woven into the fabric of Indian society, finding itself covered even in the ancient legal text and constitution of India, the *Manusmriti*: “... let him live without a fire, without a house, wholly silent, subsisting on roots and fruit... chaste, sleeping on

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129. France, *Hermits*.

130. France, *Hermits*.

131. Lao-tzu and David Hinton. *Tao Te Ching*. Washington, D.C: Counterpoint, 2000.

132. France, *Hermits*.

133. Moore, Charles A. *The Indian Mind: Essentials of Indian Philosophy and Culture*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1967.

the bare ground, dwelling at the roots of trees.”<sup>134</sup> *For the Hindu, the Sannyasi is the greatest state of the individual, and thus is the ideal which all may aspire.*

In the Western world, the ancient Greeks were of the first to figure out a philosophical system justifying the means of solitude. Those following the religious cult of Orpheus congregated into ascetic groups, attempting to purify their souls through diet and clothing. For the Orphics, the *soma*, or body, was the *sema*, or tomb, of divinity. In Orphic mythology, the Titans had consumed the body of Dionysus after destroying and boiling the body of Dionysus shortly after his birth. Zeus had blasted the Titans, creating a new race of humans from their ashes, and in each of them a fragment of the divinity of God. Thus, in an effort to preserve the divinity within their bodies from the tarnish of carnal desire, the Orphics would practice ascetic abstinence. The Pythagoreans, which were exponents of Orphism, practiced this religious form of asceticism by withdrawing from society, and emphasized the individual’s mission for salvation of the divine soul; thus, generating the first religion-based ideological basis of solitude seen in the West. Though, it was not until the influence of Socrates that Greek society, and ultimately the Western world, had become familiar with conceptions of solitude and hermitage. Though Socrates was far from being a hermit, insofar as completely rejecting the “fields and trees” of the countryside, he established the ideological grounds for the rejection of society for the sake of the individual conscience by adopting ascetic practices of abstinence. For Socrates, society was the optimal place to experience the pleasure of restraint, famously stating at a public marketplace, “[look at] how many things there are that I do not want!”<sup>135</sup> Socrates believed that divinity was approached by surrendering desire, and the closest one could be to the Gods was by desiring as little as possible. Socrates’ ascetic practices led to teachings of self-sufficiency – as Peter France states, “for [Socrates] the wise man was not the one whose abilities had been expanded to fill his

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134. France, *Hermits*.

135. France, *Hermits*.

needs, but one whose needs had contracted to balance his abilities.”<sup>136</sup> Following the death of Socrates, his philosophy of “indifference to popular opinion” was evolved into a complete rejection of society by some of his followers. These followers, known as the Cynics, rejected material possession and refrained from acting on desire; they naturally became outsiders to the *polis*, believing that *nomos*, or culture, was the “great distorter of human values,” all the while seeking refuge and Truth in *physis*, or nature, claiming that nature was “at the core of the individual when the artificialities of society had been stripped away,” oddly echoing the 6<sup>th</sup> century remarks of Lao-tzu and the 20<sup>th</sup> century remarks of Freud. Thus the Cynics lived on an irreducible minimum – as ascetics, minimalists, and as individuals – on the basis that it was *kata physin*, or “according to nature.” The Cynics eventually began to wander the streets of Rome following the advancement of Cynic philosophies by virtue of the conquests of Alexander the Great. As Cynics, and later ascetic philosophers, altogether, were expelled from the city walls during the first century AD, Cynics found refuge in the Eastern European community, finding commonalities amongst themselves with their shared hostilities towards Græco-Romanian civilization; thus, we find the influence of Socrates in the Christian Church.

2 . 2 . 5

#### HERMITS OF THE DESERT

It is not until the quests of the Desert Fathers that we find the first mention of the hermitage. The origins of the term hermitage are in fact derived from the Greek term *erēmos*, meaning “desolate”; the term *erēmia* was later used to refer to “desert,” and eventually, *erēmitēs*, to refer to a recluse living in the desert. This term then traveled through Latin, then French, then Middle English into the term *hermit*;

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136. France, *Hermits*.

the term *hermitage* was ultimately borrowed from Anglo-French.<sup>137</sup> Often located in natural caves, temple ruins or constructed as simple huts, the hermitage was a humble tool used as a rudimentary shelter to support the spiritual quests of the Desert Fathers in solitude. As a result of tensions between the Christian Church and various Gnostic sects, question of poverty, and asceticism around the second and third centuries AD, certain individuals began to separate themselves from society to become hermits.<sup>138</sup> The hermits chose the Life of solitude and discipline to seek salvation of the soul towards perfection, signifying the “integrity, health, freedom from fault and illness.”<sup>139</sup>

Of the Desert Fathers, it is, perhaps, St. Antony of Egypt who is most well known. After selling his possessions to give to the poor after receiving the enlightening words from Jesus, St. Antony went on to live at a deserted fort at Pispis, fifty miles south of Memphis. For twenty years, he lived in solitude without as much as seeing the face of a fellow human. He was brought supplies of bread and water every six months by friends. Occasionally, friends of St. Antony would hear shrieks and groans behind the locked doors of the hermitage; as this eventually became unbearable for his friends, one of them knocked down the doors to find a completely healthy and sane St. Antony, with knowledge gained by mystical experiences in solitude. St. Antony was not the only individual taking part in ascetic solitude – forty years after St. Antony’s death, a traveller passing through Egypt had noted that there were at least as much desert hermits as townsfolk. Peter France describes the conditions of the hermitages of the Desert Fathers:

*Their lives, though for the most part conducted in isolation, were remarkably similar in domestic conditions. The hermitage would be a hut of stone with a roof made from branches. It had a door which could be closed and locked, for we often read of visitors*

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137. Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “hermitage,” accessed November 16, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hermitage>.

138. Wortley, John. *An Introduction to the Desert Fathers*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

139. France, *Hermits*.



**FIGURE 2.07**

A desert hermitage located in the Wadi Araba, south of the Dead Sea basin.

*knocking there. Inside was a reed stool on which to sit when working, a reed mat on which to sleep, and a sheepskin. This last item seems to have been the only one which a hermit would carry away if changing locations. In fact some of the stories mention that a hermit took up his sheepskin and left the cell to indicate that the move was a permanent one. There was a lamp or candlestick, a jar of oil for the lamp and one of wine for visitors. There would also be another jar of brackish water for the hermit to drink and in which to steep the palm leaves to soften them for working. The preserved food would be dried peas and lentils, and these, after soaking, could be cooked and seasoned with herbs from an outside garden.<sup>140</sup>*

The hermitages were often very rudimentary in nature, providing only the essential architectural aspects required for dwelling – in this regard, the hermitage is a reflection of asceticism by virtue of restraint and removal of distraction and desires. Incidentally, the hermitages were often in places of difficulty, physically echoing the structure of the pilgrimages themselves. The hermitages would serve as the destination and reward for its pilgrims.

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140. France, *Hermits*.



FIGURE 2.08

An early depiction of Antony the Great (St. Antony of Egypt), on the left.





The mystic's hermitage evidently takes on the form of the Anishnaabe wigjwaam. It was not a light-handed choice to implement the traditional and culturally sensitive construction methods and architectural typologies of the Indigenous artifact, particularly as a non-Indigenous person, as one may face the risk of cultural misappropriation, or perhaps an even greater offence from individuals and institutions in implementing anything from an identity group that has faced past turmoil and that continues to face issues during the present. So, with the mystic's hermitage, I do not come to offer false virtue in order to seek approval from my neighbour or to satisfy some narcissistic need of self-importance – the choice to have the mystic's hermitage imbued by the characteristic of an Indigenous dwelling was, in my opinion, the *only manner in which I could honour the land in which it sits on*. How else may the architecture better be sensitive to the landscape, to the ecology, and to the culture of the land? Which other architectural typology could be more appropriate for its place? Using the local materials, which other architectural typologies may emerge, if not for what existed prior to colonial contact? Building an essentialist, rudimentary shelter rather than a culturally-sensitive dwelling for a thesis project sitting on the land which the Mississaugas Anishnaabe peoples have inhabited would simply disregard the cultural implications of the site.

As a non-Indigenous person, is this misappropriation of a cultural artifact? I do not believe so. Though, as a non-Indigenous person, who am I to say that? Does the fact that I share human blood, and therefore the human experience, warrant an understanding of the Indigenous identity, and therefore, a tiny share of the Indigenous identity and a pass to appropriate aspects of the culture? Or, does the fact that I am a person of colour warrant a certain degree of permission to exist in Indigenous cultural space and appropriate a percentage of a fellow person of colour's cultural artifacts? Perhaps, as a person whom has also faced intergenerational trauma as a consequence of colonialism grants me some relation to the matter?

The hypothetical answer to these rhetorical questions may lie anywhere from “no” to “perhaps.” In fact, for an Elder I met many years ago, they did not find much issue with this type of cultural representation as long as research was done or an Indigenous representative would be counselled; another Indigenous friend seemed to show slight disdain in the mystic’s hermitage, as I appeared to be invading a space that did not rightfully belong to me; a third Indigenous friend believed that “anything goes” as long as the Indigenous individuals are not disrespected or exploited. In *The Lies That Bind*, Native-African cultural theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah explains that “the real problem isn’t that it’s difficult to decide who owns culture; it’s that the very idea of ownership is the wrong model.”<sup>141</sup> Appiah explains that cultural practices and artifacts are “mobile” and are almost all in themselves a product of amalgamation. According to Appiah, this does not mean that cultural appropriation does not exist, as it most certainly exist in cases where the appropriator exploits or insults the group by trivializing or abusing something they hold as sacred. To this degree, I understand that in using Indigenous methodologies for the creation of the mystic’s hermitage, I may offend some individuals; though, I must say, it is not my intention to do so. It is my intention to offer the knowledge that all humans have accessed through the will of the Universe, God and nature, and the mystic’s hermitage functions as a vessel for the reception of sacred knowledge to the individual.

## 2 . 3 . 2 .

## EXPLOITATION IN THE NAME OF VIRTUE

I also wish to address the dangers associated with social justice, which I believe is extensively relevant to matters relating to the treatment of Indigenous culture in our academic space. Along with the need to implement social justice, a corrosive miasma of negative emotions always seem to be strung along; this is, perhaps, the very

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141. Appiah, Anthony. *The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity, Creed, Country, Color, Class, Culture*. New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2018.

mark of humanity. There are many individuals who genuinely wish to do the right things, and there are individuals who wish to *express to others* that they are doing the right things – often, this type of individual wishes to cast a gaze of negativity which only serves to hurt others and increase their virtuousness amongst their peers. Some seek to right wrongs, some seek to accept the past and move onwards, and some wish to cause more destruction in the name of justice. In *Decolonization is not a Metaphor*, Indigenous scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang attribute this self-indulgence to something termed as “settler’s guilt.” According to Tuck and Yang, the settler seems to be distraught and consumed by the guilt associated with colonial actions, that they escape into acts of virtue to primarily rid themselves of the guilt.<sup>142</sup> Often times, I see many, many individuals – particularly in the liberal arts, and especially in the architectural domain – which, perhaps unconsciously, seem to incorporate aspects of Indigenous culture merely for the sake of receiving bullet-proof praise. Though not from a place of intentional malice, this kind of abuse of Indigeneity does not actually address any social issues, and as Tuck and Yang claim, only serve to benefit the appropriator.<sup>143</sup> There also many instances of individuals who preface their predictable opinions on topics related to minority identity politics with the phrase “as a white settler” in order to establish an odd game of submission that, again, does not seem to offer any kind of solution to any social problem but merely acts as a marker of virtue. No thought here is unique, deep or poses any sort of intellectual risk, and only seems to try and erase some kind of irrational guilt.

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142. Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang. “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1-40. Even

143. Eve and Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor:”

## 2 . 3 . 3 .

## ON WHITE PEOPLE

On the other end of things, I find the treatment of “white people” in much of the social justice literature and discourse problematic. Often times, the term settler is used synonymously to refer to white people (individuals that appear to have white skin). As the term settler is associated with being anything but good, a global meta-narrative describing white people as the ultimate oppressor emerges; as an extension, it has become acceptable in academic and political social justice discourse to criticize white people simply based on race. Furthermore, it has also become acceptable to assume that one cannot harbour racist views towards white people based on the ideological fallacy that the oppressed are inherently good and that the oppressors are inherently bad, and therefore, the false belief that minorities cannot hold racist views. It baffles me that I must utter these words in our times in an intellectual space that is meant to tolerate Truth and freedom of speech, in an institution that is supposed to combat authoritarian ideology and nurture individualism over all other tenets; although this does not pertain directly to the thesis or the mystic’s hermitage and is more of a digression, I believe it is an important perspective to express when talking about theories related to the Marxist oppressor/oppressed narrative as it seems to be drowned out in the social justice echo chamber. This type of rhetoric is tribalism at best and does not serve social progress. It does, however, cast individuals into various politically-charged group identities and spits in the very face of the essence of this thesis – *unity*. Perhaps this is the untruth of the crowd that Dostoevsky speaks on, perhaps this is why the Cynics fled from society, and, perhaps this is why even I seek the comfort of solitude. I digress.

## 2 . 3 . 4 .

## A-ROMANTIC

Aside from politically-charged social implications, the implementation of the essences of the *wūgiwaam* within the mystic’s hermitage also expresses an ontological position, pertaining to the relationships

humans *ought* to share with the Universe according to Indigenous philosophy and knowledge. Often, referencing Indigenous teachings which involves the treatment and status of the environment risks the romanticization of the culture through the unconscious expression of the noble savage archetype – one which expresses the Indigenous or the natural savage as pure and good, though often in a condescending manner which casts the natural being as intellectually inferior compared to the cultured human which has been enlightened by consciousness and, therefore, self-awareness.<sup>144</sup> We must tread with care as to avoid romanticizing a minority culture as it tends to impose colonial values and may skew the perceptions of the individuals within the group. Gregory Bruce Johnson, professor of religious and Indigenous studies at the University of Colorado Boulder illustrates three ideological aspects of romanticizing Indigenous cultures that can be problematic:

*First, romanticism is reactionary and escapist: romantic views of indigenous peoples spring from other peoples' needs and desires, not from an appreciation of indigenous people in their own right. Second, romantic tendencies are predicated on a kind of social evolution model, even while its valuations are ostensibly reversed from the imperial pattern. Native peoples are looked to as an antidote to modernity precisely because they are understood – however uncritically – to inhabit the social past, specifically as anachronistic representatives of an imagined natural past (which explains why Native American exhibits are frequently located in natural history museums). The ramifications of such a view are anything but comforting. Third, romanticism reifies the very traditions it exalts, paradoxically suffocating that from which it seeks inspiration. Romantic images portray tradition as fixed, stable, uncontested and, linking us back to our earlier points, anti-modern. To imagine tradition in this way eliminates the prospect that the people romanticized will be heard when they speak in their*

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144. Soper, *What is Nature?*

*own voice – even when it comes to speaking about those things which matter to them most, like the land and nature itself.*<sup>145</sup>

The romanticization of Indigenous cultures, and as an extension natural cultures is a narrative that exists in primarily as an archetype or social construct with roots in colonialism that is essentialist in flavour and tends to generalize groups, but it prevalently cascades into academia and into the political sphere, particularly here in Canada, by misinformed individuals who seem to have created an augmented representation of Indigenous peoples as surrogate messiahs of nature that are supposedly tasked with the responsibility of nature as “land custodians.” This type of romanticization tends to obscure actual environmental efforts as well as the wellbeing of Indigenous individuals, as does any stereotyping or generalization of any identity group.<sup>146</sup>

As we seek distance from the romantic angle, we can find a true representation of Indigenous philosophy as a philosophy of nature. In *Gathering Moss*, Potawatomi citizen and plant ecologist Robin Wall Kimmerer expresses how her grandfather’s Indigenous teachings of the natural world are fundamentally teachings of relationships. Kimmerer states that “in Indigenous ways of knowing, it is understood that each living being has a particular role to play,”<sup>147</sup> expressing a notion which dismantles traditional hierarchical structures and attention to even the smallest of beings. I attempt to express this in the design of the mystic’s hermitage: the circular foot print of the structure expresses an equality shared with any member that wishes to dwell; the central focus is the light and warmth of the fire – the source of all Life, representative of hope, love and God. Kimmerer further expands on this by remarking

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145. Taylor, Bron Raymond, Jeffrey Kaplan, Laura Hobgood-Oster, Adrian J. Ivakhiv, and Michael York. *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*. London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005.

146. Waldron, David and Janice Newton. “Rethinking Appropriation of the Indigenous: A Critique of the Romanticist Approach.” *Nova Religio* 16, no. 2 (2012): 64-85. doi:10.1525/nr.2012.16.2.64.

147. Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Gathering Moss: The Natural and Cultural History of Mosses*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2003.

that Indigenous teachings are also fundamentally teachings of the local land, and are rooted in the intimacy and individual shares with the land.<sup>148</sup> The hermitage represents my effort to establish an extremely sensitive relationship with not only the local land, but in times are global and macrocosmic as ours, the Universe which we all inhabit. With each knife swipe on the many maple saplings that find themselves as limbs of the hermitage's frame, I feel the softness of the young bark as it encapsulates the sensitive, raw, green smell of the fawn flesh, and the sticky, subtly sweet nectar of the sapling's blood. It is perhaps as intimate as the act of lovemaking, where I discover individual quirks of the saplings, such as the round eggs of an unknown insect deposited in a sealed wound, or how one sapling readily strips its bark, while another is much more shy to do so. As I expand in more detail in the following sections documenting the time constructing the mystic's hermitage and spending time in Victoria Park, it will become clear that intimacy with the natural realm is simultaneously intimacy with the self – this, I believe, is a source of mystical experience. Kimmerer also echoes the sentiment of receiving the natural world intimately, and actually as much of ourselves as the cultural world in *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Kimmerer expresses this as a phenomena known as species loneliness: “a deep, unnamed sadness stemming from estrangement from the rest of Creation, from the loss of relationship. As our human dominance of the world has grown, we have become more isolated, more lonely when we can no longer call out to our neighbours.”<sup>149</sup> Often, in the throes of societal life within the walls of the metropolis, one might tend to forget the very substance of their being and their environment as things tend to become highly processed. In this pursuit, the mystic's hermitage attempts to be constructed mainly from unprocessed materials of the forest, enriching the mystic's connection with the essence of the Universe.

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148. Kimmerer, *Gathering Moss*.

149. Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2013.

2.3.5.

## THE MARK OF THE MYSTIC

Following this section, I will begin with the documentation of the Mystic's Pilgrimage – the journey into the wilderness areas around Cambridge, Ontario. Beginning first as an awkward attempt to encapsulate the phenomena of the forest into words and images, slowly the forest emerges as a reservoir for deep knowledge, eternal beauty and boundless love. The forest becomes a motif for the origins of humanity, and though it may seem as if we have control over these regions of chaos, we still have much potential to learn and even be destroyed by it. For, in the forest, we find the rawness of the laws of physics, mechanics of biology, and the beginnings of cultures and societies; ultimately, we find the Self. The reader can notice the gradual improvement in my writings and visual media as I learn to become comfortable with my mind and the world it sees. On the following pages, I will join you on September the 14th, 2019 to count my days in nature and ecstasy.







# II

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## ACT II

*The Trial*



## CHAPTER 3

*The Fall*



**FIGURE 3.01** As I enter the Dumfries Conservation area in Cambridge, Ontario, I am greeted by black-eyed Susans, wild carrot, and Canadian goldenrod, among the many classifications of flora.

19-09-14

HERE

08:05  
19 °C/  
clear skies

**N**ow that I'm *here*, I become aware of my worrying and doubt. The angst possesses my right arm; I can only muster vague scribbles. I am so sensitive. I seem to fixate on even the most minute details. I make it seem as if it is a curse of some sort, of which it may very well be. Though, I am brought to a stop as I cannot help but notice just how much I worry. As I inhale the toxic fumes of doubt, my lungs feel tight. The venom makes its way to my mind and chest. My head is heavy and my heart is shut. I cannot help but repeatedly mutter to myself, "what treason may I have committed?" I love to torment myself. *wrong wrong wrong WRONG WRONG!* I am *wrong*. I am *deficient*. I just have to keep reassuring myself that. Why? I have to keep reminding myself what to worry about. Why? I have to keep reminding myself that I should be anxious.

08:42

Though, *now that I'm here*, I gaze at the clouds, and escape and dissolve into the atmosphere just as they will. The clouds make it clear that the Earth breathes, too, just as I do. The Sun wants to peek through, though, the clouds are on their own journey eastwards, so the Sun's warmth pulses through the course of the moment. My nose is cold – my nose is always cold, so it invites the decadent warmth of the Sun. The shadow cast by the morning paints my white paper blue, and the Sun tints my cold heart warm.

09:25

I pick out distinct fragrant accords and notes. *Fougère*, a category of fragrance formulated by Paul Parquet, is inspired from the ferns of the forest, and comprise of green, mossy and animal notes in the base accords, coumarin notes in the middle, and florals in the top. Crushed grasses, bruised foliage and sphagnum mosses compose a cool, mossy bed for the coumarin-laced symphony of sweet grass, tobacco, fungus and soil. Wild flowers and the aquatic wafts from the nearby creek create fleeting top notes that complete the fragrance of the northern woodlands. The Sun's warmth has an olfactory quality as well, and binds the entire composition together.







**FIGURE 3.02**

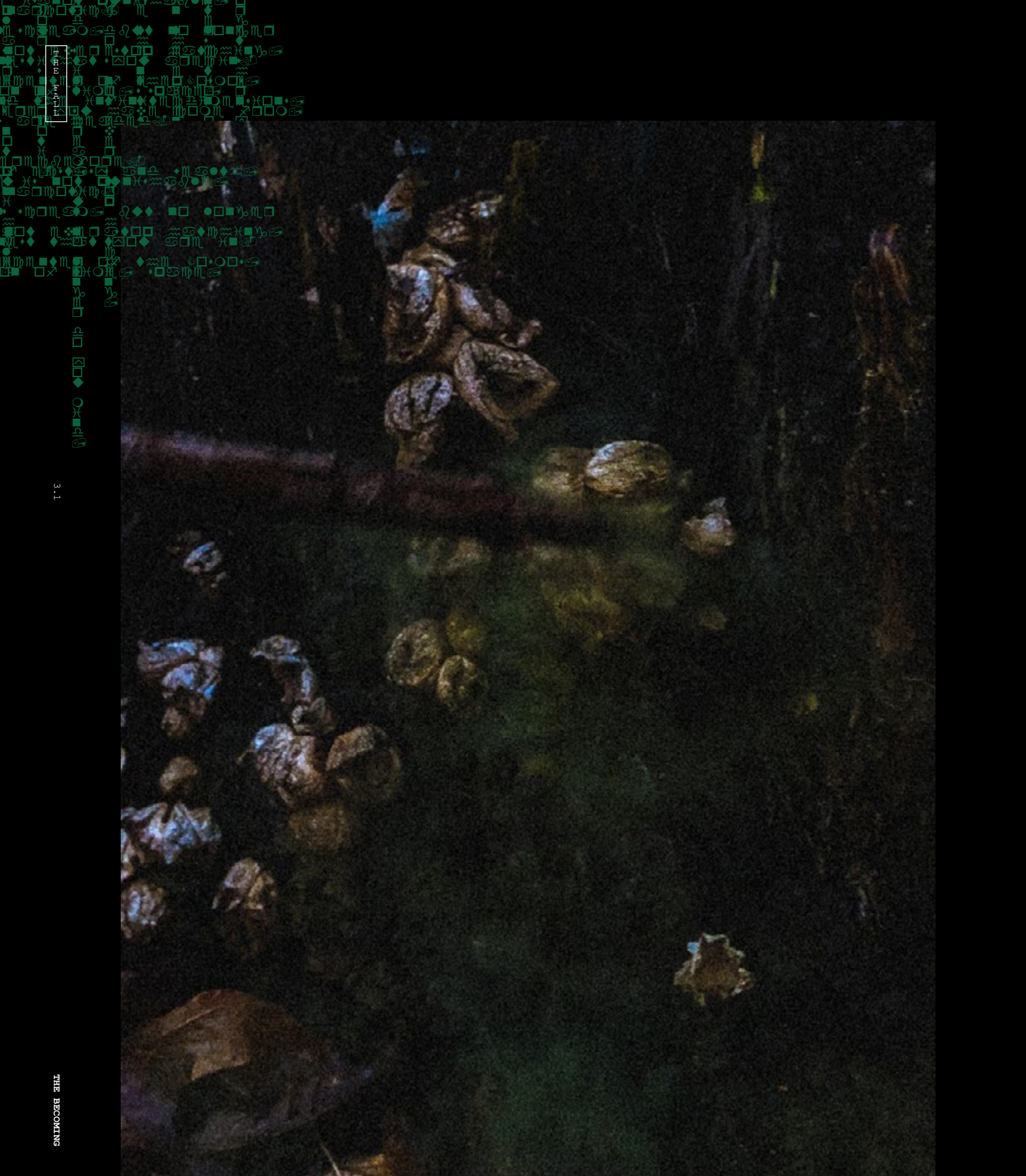
A small grove of eastern white pines near the north-east corner of Dumfries becomes by place of refuge as I consume my lunch.

- 09:31 I look up. It is difficult to make eye-contact with God.
- 09:45 How can you *not* feel sad here? How can you *not* feel alone here?
- 10:01 She wants to sleep. She is preparing for slumber. A long rest. For all of the hard work She has done. She is the closest thing to perfection – if such a standard even exists – but She gets tired, too, you know.
- 10:12 I feel my nose clearing up. I feel that my mind is not so heavy anymore. I am learning to resist temptation, to control my impulses. I'm learning to love again.
- 12:36 There are so many things that seem to manifest right in front of your eyes when you start to look closely (**figure 3.03**). "Get on your damn knees!" I tell myself. And it all seems to blend together. It is like pointillism or impressionism. All of these greens, yellows, reds, blues in the microscope form this sludge of death and decay to the naked eye. It feels like every piece in the strata of the matrix just belongs. This is it! This is the source! This is the source of Life. It looks dirty and disturbing. It feels damp and gelatinous. And everything just blends in. But when you look closely, you can really see what's happening. Seed pods, tiny, tiny little mushrooms, decaying leaves and their skeletons, twigs, sticks, grasses, rocks, pebbles, dirt. All of this - the perfect recipe for the perfect growing medium, the matrix is born.
- 12:45 I want to go home. Why? I am scared that I am doing nothing here and that I will be able to do something there. But how will I be able to do something there if I have done nothing here? It is fear and anxiety. I am scared that I will have nothing for Thursday. I'm scared. Because I'm scarred.
- 13:04 Catching my breath in this maze of lanky pines, I get whiffs of this mentholic, aromatic, herbal scent. I suspect that it might be the smell of pine resin! I forage for a drop of pine resin. I ignite it.



**FIGURE 3.03**

Macro photographs of micro-fungi and slime molds that pepper the ground. Top: young yellow-tipped coral fungus (*Ramaria formosa*), Middle: unidentified slime mold, perhaps of the *Myxogastria* class. Bottom: Bark bonnet mushroom (*Mycena corticola*).



3.1.1

THE BECOMING

FIGURE 3.04

Decaying pear-shaped puffballs on a decaying stump. Propels trillions of spores when provoked.



**FIGURE 3.05**

A cluster of bleeding mycena (*Mycena haematopus*) growing from a decaying oak substrate. The mushrooms produce a dark red latex when bruised, hence the name. The fruiting bodies and mycelia are faintly bioluminescent.

- 13:26 It is interesting how the clouds shade the environment with this gloomy, nostalgic, lost in the woods feeling. When the Sun peeks out and weaves its way through the tall trunks and fibrous needles, a completely different set of feelings washes over the scene. It just seems so much more energetic, full of Life. When the shadows lift, the contrast mellows and everything is quiet - even my heart.
- 13:52 *Now that I'm here*, the shadows speak to me with such enabling poetics (**figure 3.07** and **3.08**). In element, they are simply two-dimensional beings with one parameter: shade. But as they dance along the textures of the forest, they... GOD DAMN. It is hard to summon words that can accurately convey the ephemeral beauty as the shadow of one tree cast a symphony of breath on another. Shadows project the whispers of wind - they, too, show that The Earth is living and breathing. And each coniferous needle has the task of adding yet another fragment of resolution and complexity to the whole composition.
- 14:01 I am too scared to sketch them. They almost ripple like the water. This steady dynamism - the gentle breeze of autumn, the calm stream of a morning river, the undulating folds of altocumulus and stratus clouds. They all express a sense of calm and control.



PINE AT PINELUMBS



**FIGURE 3.06**

The absolute chaos of the forest.







**FIGURE 3.07**

Shadows dancing on the textured trunks of slender eastern white pines in their orthogonal arrangement in a plantation forest at the southern entrance of Dumfries.

PATIENCE





**FIGURE 3.08**

Groups of tan-capped mushrooms (perhaps of the *Agrocybe* genus) scattered in a peculiar, ring-like arrangement across the floor of the plantation pine forest.

## NOSTALGIA

19-09-27

10:46  
20 °C/  
cloudy

*I had a dream. It was eerily nostalgic, sacrilegious and psychedelic – some of my favourite things. There was a wedding taking place. I found myself being one of the subjects for a group photograph. I became shamefully self-conscious of how I acted and moved. I could see myself. I looked awkward and ugly – as if that should reflect how I carry myself. The 'I' I saw is assumed to be my old self - the old self I have come to judge and hate, rather than accept and love. This recipe forbids me from internal happiness. I later find myself in a neglected room. The mutual atmosphere amongst my family members was that this room had not been touched for over ten years. I felt an intensely nostalgic warmth permeating through my core. Snacks that we had sold for a school charity years ago were also laying there, dormant. I remember eating one. It was comforting, though, lurking in the shadow of my being was anxiety – foreshadowing what blasphemy was to come. There was a window exposing a hidden garden, and there was a door leading to it. I enter the garden. A Christian alter hides in the shadows in ruins. Jesus is on a cross and His blood is on the walls, the rubble and the fragments of the statues. I felt as if I was being watched – soon to face the same fate as the figure on the cross. I close my eyes. I see a psychedelically infinite plane of eyes staring at my grief. They want me to let go. They want me to die. I should have trusted them; I didn't. There was a voice in my head that was justifying the murder of Christ.*

Now that I'm here, *what do I do?*

14:36

This artificial, orthogonal forest is weird. It is oddly quiet and static. I can hear the flickering whistle of crickets in somewhat of a distance, and the jeering calls of a family of blue jays. They seem upset. A handful of chickadees, robins, and a sprinkle of goldfinches pepper the audioscape for a few moments at a time. The odd ant will patrol the fortress of needles and twigs that compose the ground cover. I see some squirrels frantically securing plant embryos and fat reserves to bulk up for their great slumber. A few wolf spiders lay dormant. If it weren't for

their beautiful, cyclone-like webs, I would not know that they are home. The fauna vaguely resembles that of an urban setting. I would not be surprised to find a skunk or raccoon skunking or raccooning about. Oddly enough, there are quite a few different species of mycology fruiting here. And how could I forget? Fucking mosquitoes.

14:45 When you are being followed, you also might be being guided. It takes some effort to end up somewhere, whether under your will, your pursuer's will, or the will of the supernatural. Starting this thesis, I've been cursed with anxiety-ridden dreams. I feel out of control. I feel like I'm being chased, haunted. I feel tense. The unknown void might be the scariest place of the human condition – in contrast, at least Hell is comforting.

15:56 Meditate. *Breathe.*

19-09-28

#### FALLING SHORT

16:35  
18 °C/  
cloudy The crows are not here to sound beautiful. Here I am, sitting in the most comfortable part of the forest. There are almost no insects here. It is not very damp or smelly. Relatively flat and ergonomic. There is order and void. So I have a sense of comfort and control. Now, here I find a very low resolution ecosystem. This spot isn't wild. Yet it is ephemeral. Anyways, here, there is one particular tree that stands out from the others. At the base is a relatively large pile of squirrel debris consisting of mainly the husks and chips of pine cones that they have been nibbling on (**figure 3.09** and **3.10**). Is this a squirrel's home? Why does this tree have the most squirrel debris at its base? Is the tree genetically prosperous? Interestingly enough, this tree has the largest trunk girth.

18:33 I hear the cutest chickadees and sparrows I'm also getting the occasional robin and blue jay calling for their mates. The many peeps that which I cannot decipher. Goddamnit! This feels good. There is a feeling to autumn. This Sun is much more gentle and the temperature is





**FIGURE 3.09**

Various seed-bearing fruits and cones collected at the base of an eastern white pine.

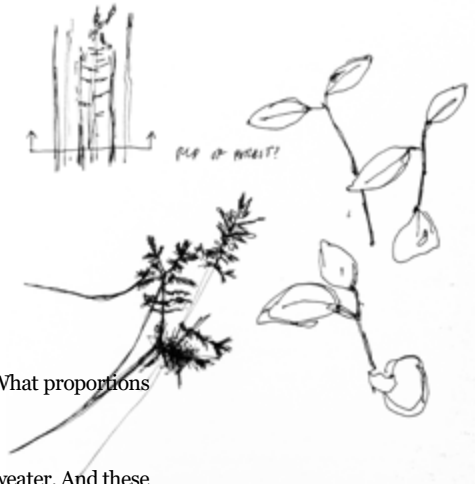






**FIGURE 3.10**

A closer examination of the seed pile. It appears a squirrel may be attempting to stockpile resources for the coming winter.



much softer. How can music remind us of seasons? What proportions influence the relationship between them?

It's getting quite cold now. I had to put on my fleece sweater. And these fucking mosquitoes won't leave me alone. It's funny how I always seem to forget about them, even though they are such a nuisance. I'm sorry mosquitoes.

3.1



19:29

Animals are symmetrical, but plants aren't... for the most part? But the digestive tracts for animals also aren't symmetrical. Hmm...

Are the crickets getting louder? Or is there just less Life awake? The music orchestrated by these nighttime critters is enchanting. This lullaby puts this forest to a slumber. It creates such a rich resonance. It sounds like Christmas, it sounds like a kettle, it sounds like a whistle. It

THE BECOMING



makes me think... what note is this? Can I play this song? Man... err... the human yearns to capture the melody and vibrancy of his... err... their environment. But human always falls short. This is how I felt in adolescence, so the sting is bittersweet and runs deep. This really isn't a place to be happy. I want to be sad here. I want to be alone. I want to be better. This lullaby is putting me to sleep.

What the fuck do these beetles know about permanence? How does the beetle see space? How does the beetle experience it's environment? What is architecture for the beetle?

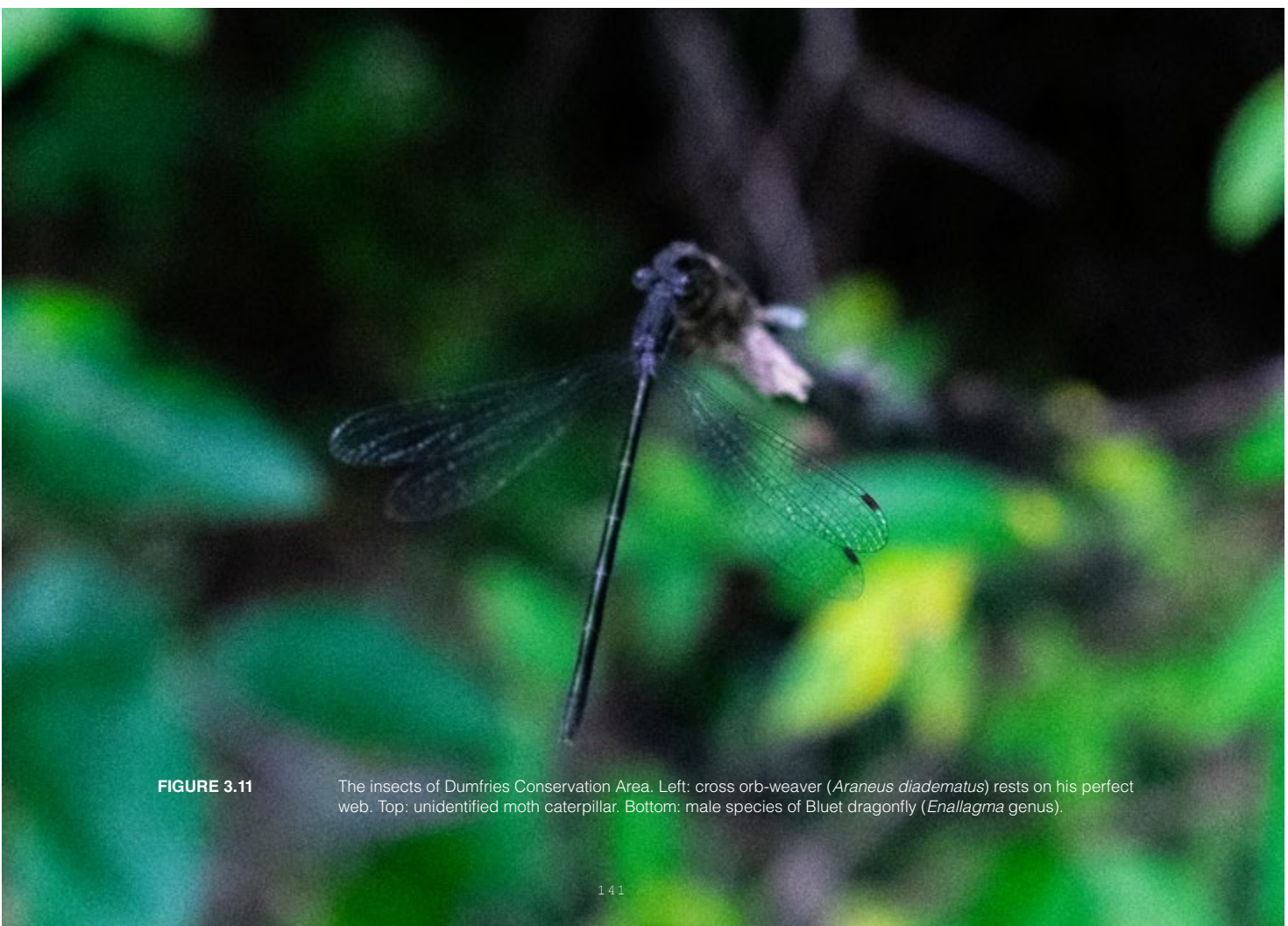
They seem to have complete reign over the earth – these insects. While we're stuck manoeuvring the Z-axis through such orthogonal means. Maybe the generation of some sponge-like space can provide a more interesting and porous experience? Something not solid and not empty?



Some type of sponge appropriate to human scale and resolution? Not only like the caverns formed by insects, but the filigree-like lattice formed by leaves and their stick counterparts. They are delicate. They are detailed. Intricate. Ornate? Not necessarily. Actually, I don't know. What is ornament? Unnecessary detail? Filler to superficially produce bursts of dopamine?







**FIGURE 3.11**

The insects of Dumfries Conservation Area. Left: cross orb-weaver (*Araneus diadematus*) rests on his perfect web. Top: unidentified moth caterpillar. Bottom: male species of Bluet dragonfly (*Enallagma* genus).



**FIGURE 3.12** A patch of moss on the forest floor where a constant level of light is available.

## THE THREE EPIPHANIES

3.2.1.

## AESTHETICS, ORIGINS &amp; BOUNDARIES

19-09-29  
12 °C/  
cloudy

Sometimes, I feel as if there is nothing to do – rather – nothing that I *should* do. When I think of existence, there are two polarized ends that form the continuum of my understanding of the human condition. There is the barren abiotic, material perspective where matter is inherently “something that does not have purpose or consciousness” – but rather Life, or at least complex organizations of fundamental particles, are just a product of circumstance due to the laws of physics and mere chance. The opposite end of the continuum is one that is spiritual in nature, purpose-driven – where there is a consciousness that orders these elements. Both these ends are hard to prove or disprove – hence they form a continuum, and I happen to sit in the middle of it. Lukewarm. And when I think of what it means to Be, it seems like we can manoeuvre in something like a conscious environment through forms of manipulation driven by purpose and intent. The idea of being thrown into Life – thrown into self awareness – something that separates us from what is not us. Why we feel divorced from the animal, plant and fungal kingdom.

20:38

My mind creates a home: it marked something to be familiar, comfortable and somewhat permanent, and this was highlighted in my sight (**figure 3.13**). I mean that my spot was slightly more bright than the rest of the space. At least that is how I perceived it. Because this space is a place. Now, this place already had traces of dwelling: a fire pit, marks of movement and some litter. And maybe people occupied this space because of some trees that had fallen over to form a seating condition. And maybe, there had formed an opening in the canopy, which caused the area to be slightly brighter than the surrounding. And then, maybe, a sense of enclosure had been realized due to the fallen trees forming a perimeter. I start to understand the concept of home and comfort and security with this mystical architectural encounter – this somehow results in this home space to appear slightly brighter than the surrounding. As I then drift into the abyss of the dark, lanky, pines, I feel a certain connection to my established home – a thin, invisible thread pricking at the back of my neck, anchored to the







“

HOME

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**FIGURE 3.13**

A place within the plantation pines where I contemplated architectural phenomena as products of the forest. Visible is my backpack, notebook, consumables, and a fire pit.

centre-point of my home, to my child whom I must keep alight – my fire. Interestingly enough, I'm not scared of dying, currently.

---

It's almost like water/moisture can regenerate a certain degree of tensile capacity. It's like wood is not yet dead, or rather it has some degree of memory. The biological components still allow for the physical properties of wood to be sustained until the biological component degrades.

---

21:03 As I lay next to this bed of glowing embers and ash, I gaze at the naked sky. Or is it covered? It's completely cloudy. I gaze at the blanket that seems to cage us physically, but frees us spiritually. The silhouettes of these tall, tall pines seem like shadows projected onto the ambiguous sea. It makes you think of the seed that gave birth to these pines, and the time that has given Life to the scales on the bark. This kind of space has an insane degree of complexity. This is the epitome of a spiritual experience.

A sweet, smoky, leathery, amber-y smell envelopes my home, most likely due to the burning and smoldering of wet pine limbs and their resinous content. Maybe some smoldering fungus.

21:26 I can only help but think of the solid/void relationship between the canopy of these pine needles (**figure 3.14**). If these trees act as these giant filters of the ecosystem – essentially converting our waste product and using it to manufacture it into it's own food source – it makes me wonder about the fluid dynamics associated at the threshold of solid/void – what are these pine needle doing to air, and vice versa – to the air at a microscopic scale? How can air circulate around and through these filigree-like structures? This gives a new meaning to transparency.



**FIGURE 3.14**

A grainy photograph of the canopy of the plantation pine forest depicting the intricate lattice formed at the edges of each tree.

I feel like a character in an archetypal experience. You know, when the night gets late and cold, your guard is down – death is lurking. I can't help but just want to reflect. After an intense emotional and spiritual experience, reflection follows. And to me, it is fascinating how – psychologically – something in nature has given birth to such an archetypal experience. I mean, this is the key to understanding fulfillment and depression, and building connections with others; to be in archetype.

And so here I lay, thinking about moments this summer where I had gotten myself into bad arguments with my mother. I just feel bad. It's funny because she wasn't the greatest mother. But I still want to be unconditionally loving. Can architecture shape such an experience? People act like it can.

Raindrops are pecking my face, taking little nibbles. Raindrops get hungry, too.

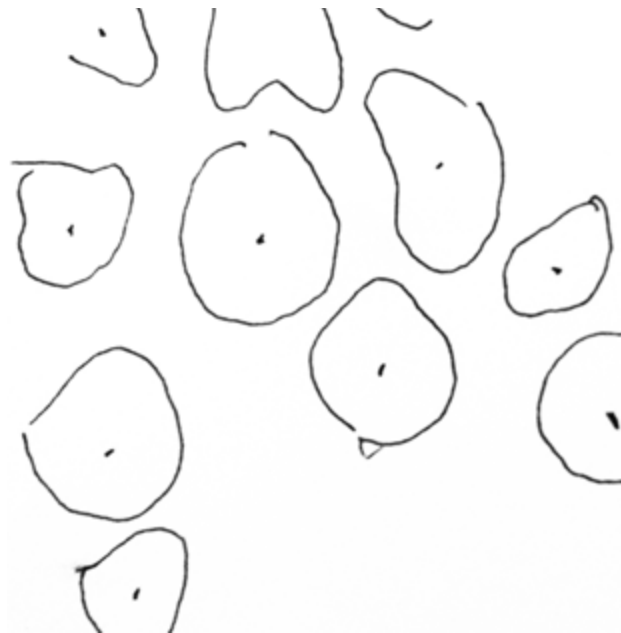


3.2.2.

## CELL

19-10-03  
9 °C/  
overcast/  
light rain

*Cell* is a design intervention expressing the projection of tree canopies using yellowed *Juglans nigra* (American black walnut) leaves, translating the voronoi phenomena created by the tops of *Pinus strobus* (eastern white pine). Mathematically speaking, the voronoi phenomena is the partitioning of a plane into regions that are close in proximity to the objects in a set. The phenomena is expressed in as voronoi cells, and speaks on the tendency for nature to organize itself to maximize efficiency. Trees don't bump into each other; they respect each other. Thus, the relationship expressed by the entities of nature reveals something about the beauty of proportion and balance. *Cell* inquires into the general intricacies of the complex topologies of nature. The idea for this intervention came to me as I gazed towards the canopy of pine trees at the Dumfries Conservation Area. Constructed at Dumfries Conservation Area. The following pages document the intervention.







**FIGURE 3.15**

A photograph of the completed intervention. The yellowed black walnut leaves provide good contrast before the dark forest floor.







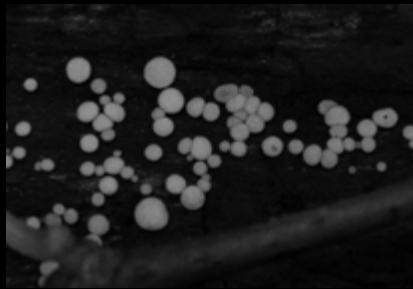
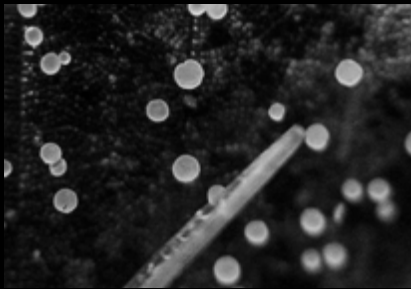
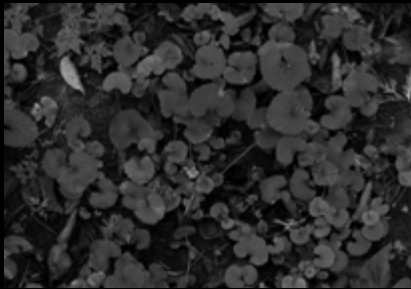
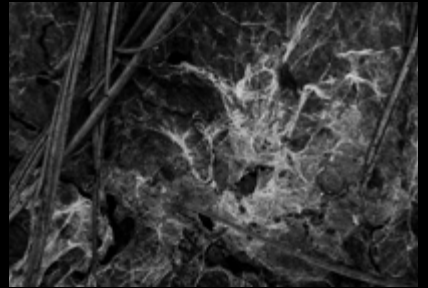
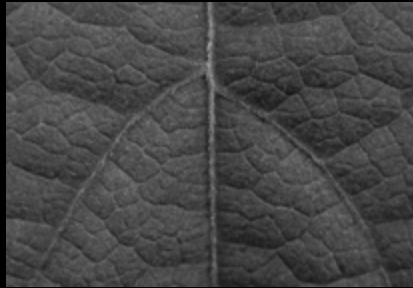
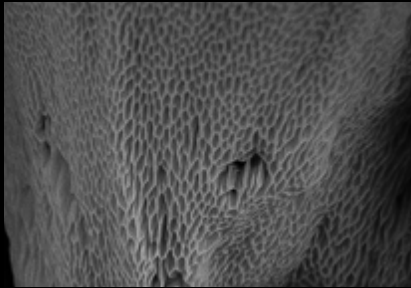
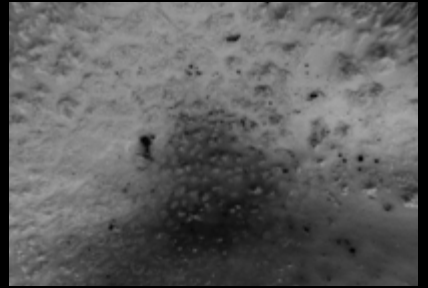
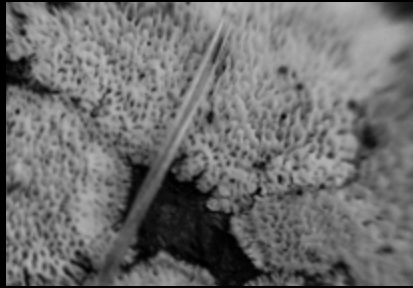
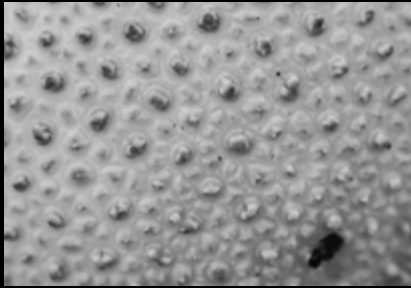
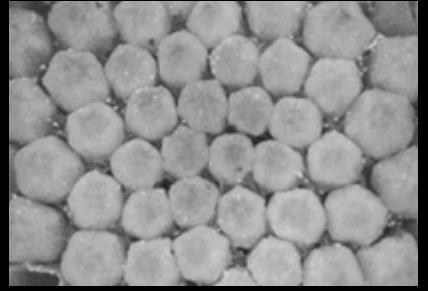
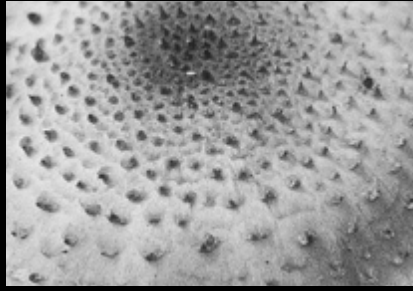
**FIGURE 3.16 (LEFT + ABOVE)**

Detail photographs the following day. Unfortunately, some of the leaves have been swept away, leaving a less-defined intervention.



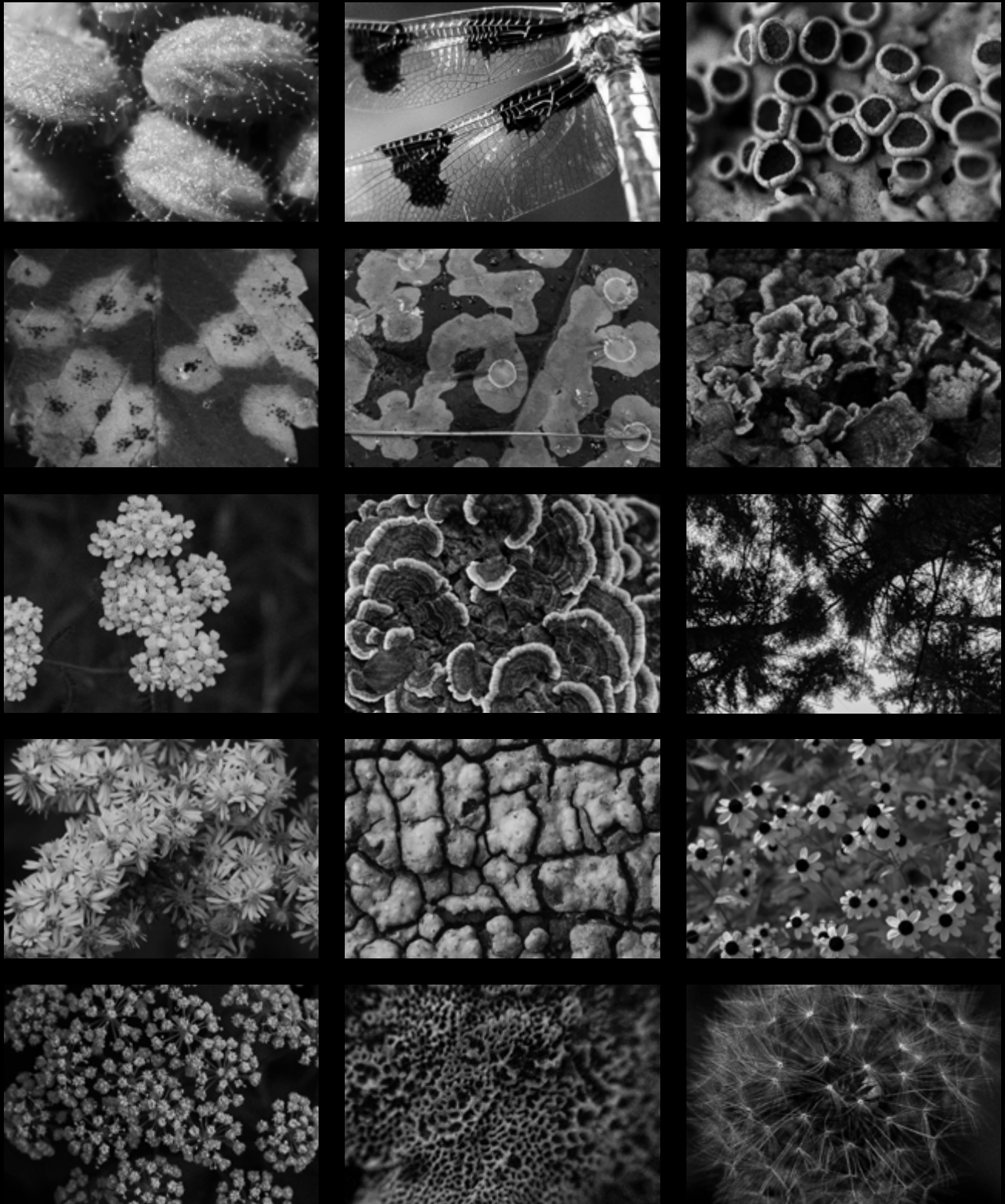


**FIGURE 3.17** Images of the collected black walnut leaves.



3.2

THE BECOMING



**FIGURE 3.18** A visual array of the many cell-like voronoi conditions found throughout the forest. Voronoi reveals itself as a language of nature, expressing the importance of efficiency and the beauty of proportion.





**FIGURE 3.19** Scale floor plan of intervention.

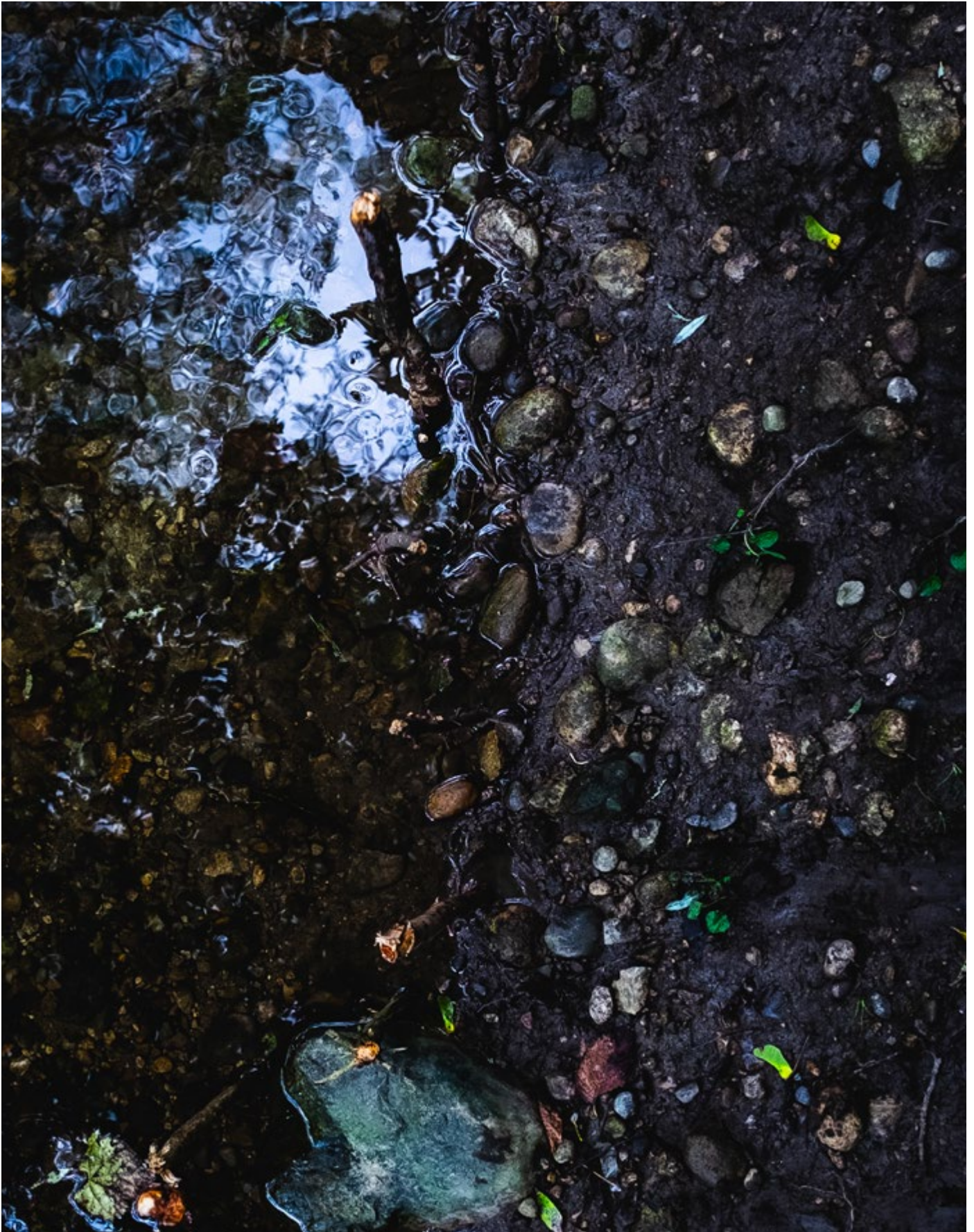
## 3.2.3

## THRESHOLD

19-10-04  
 11 °C/  
 cloudy

*Threshold* speaks on the boundaries between entities in nature. When we image rivers and coastlines, we imagine them as general constructs, similar to Plato's conception of ideals or Sartre's conception of essence. This supposes that where a river ends, a coastline must begin. But, this is not always the case. The Coastline Paradox is the observation that the measurement of a coastline does not have a well-defined length. Depending on the resolution, and therefore criteria, for measuring, the length of the coastline is subject to radical differences. For example, one could measure a coast of a river generally and intuitively, or, on the other hand, one could measure the coast with each pebble and stone that is found along it. If we account for the porosity of the coast, perhaps it would be even more accurate to measure the complete penetration of the river, down to each grain of sand. Though extremely counterintuitive and absurd for any general purpose of measurement, the Coastline Paradox appeals to the idea that entities are not as hard as they appear to be. With *Threshold*, a section of a river within Dumfries is lined with foraged sticks to emphasize the coastline condition. The following pages contain images and diagrams of the intervention.





**FIGURE 3.20**

Where does the river meet the shore? These entities live as vague, hard concepts in our minds, but in reality the threshold between is of a much higher resolution.

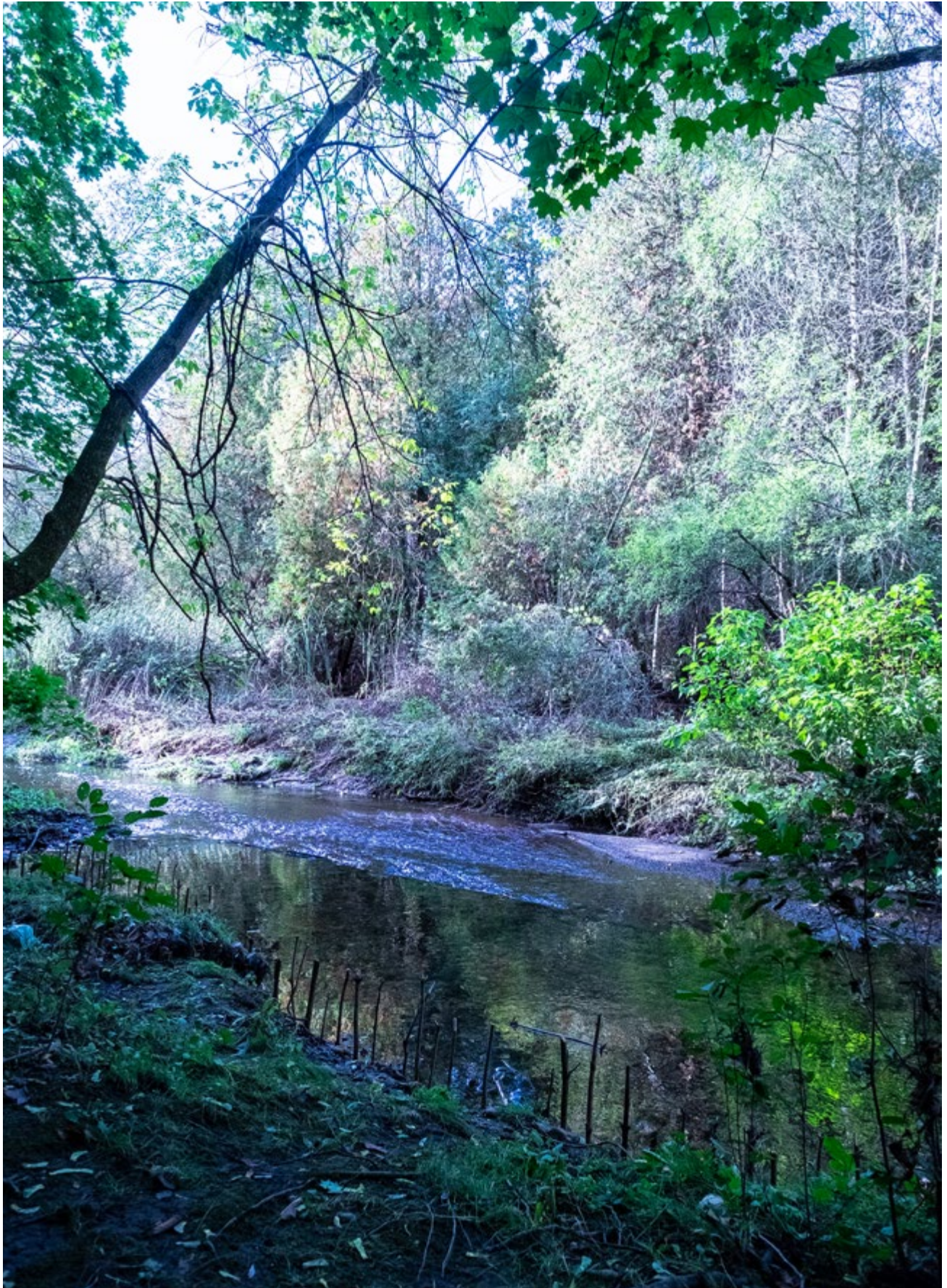




FIGURE 3.21 (LEFT + ABOVE)

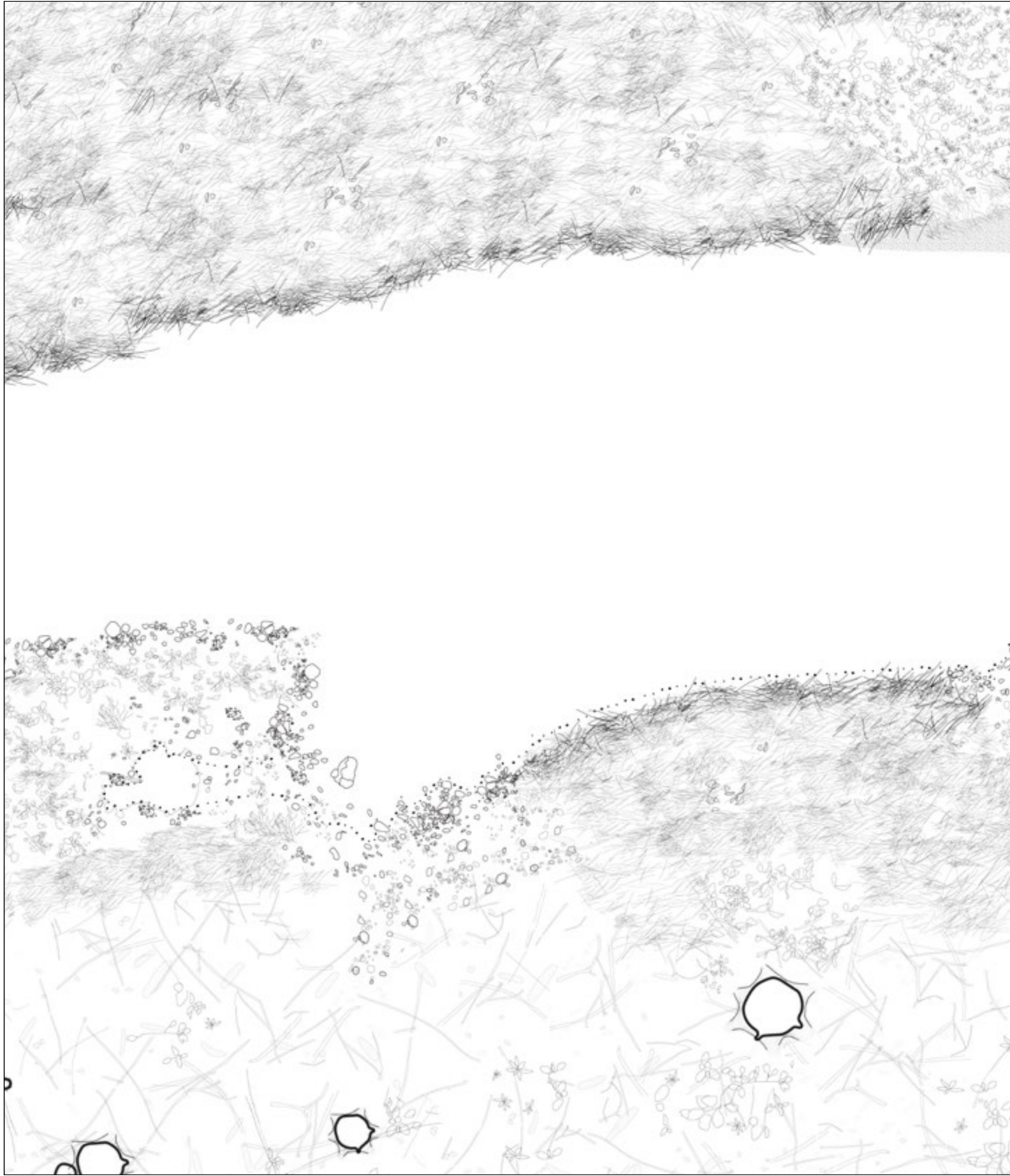
Photographs of the intervention marking the threshold between two elements of nature.





**FIGURE 3.22**

Detail photograph of intervention.





**FIGURE 3.23** Scale floor plan of intervention. *Threshold* can be seen at the southern part of the river.

## 3.2.4

## EMBRYO

19-10-04  
6 °C/  
cloudy

*Embryo* explores the forest origins of human consciousness and spatial awareness. As described in the documentation on the 29<sup>th</sup> of September, I had suddenly become sensitive and hyper-aware of my attachment to my place of rest. It had felt as if I were attached to the space – which had now unconsciously transformed into a place – with a tiny thread. The attachment to the space made it appear as if it were slightly brighter, as well. Perhaps it was the open canopy that was also subtly illuminating the space. Perhaps that is also why I may have even chosen the space in the first place – subconsciously gravitating towards a more perceptible space. I understood these hyper-subtle interactions with the space as triggers that allow for the organization of humans in areas of chaos. When conditions are just correct enough, Life tends to organize itself accordingly; I had the privilege of experiencing this firsthand through this spatial-charged mystical experience. To express this, I had found another spot that had been slightly illuminated by an opening in the canopy – it also had a bedding of moss. I then sketched a fence with some fallen pine logs to emphasize this as a familiar place. The next few pages contain the images and diagrams of the intervention.





**FIGURE 3.24**

Photograph of *Embryo* depicting a spatial sketch of an enclosure as a primitive cognitive realization of space and place. Fallen pine logs are hung around a 'familiar' space to form a rudimentary snapshot of psychological attachment to space.

THE FALL

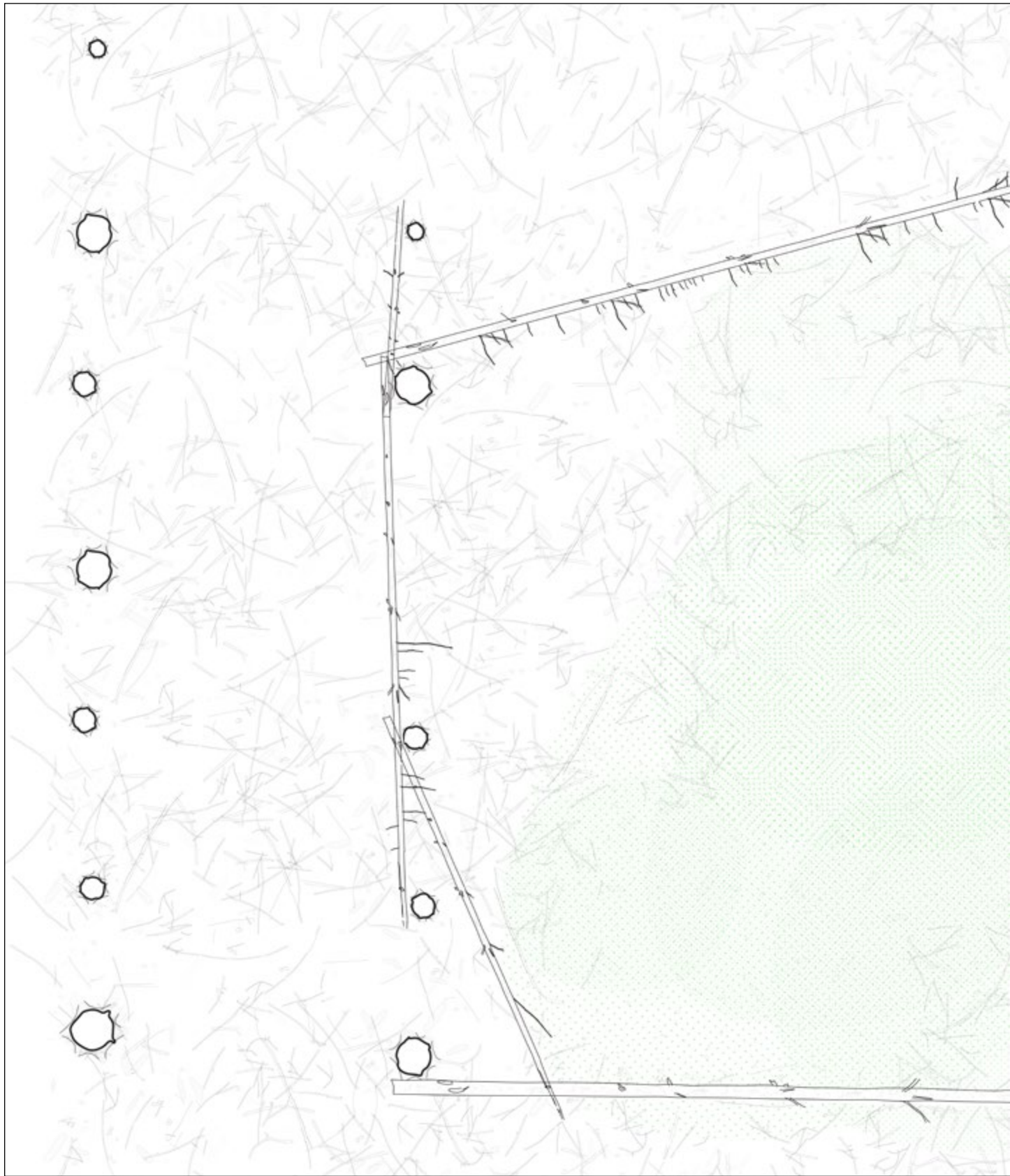
3.2

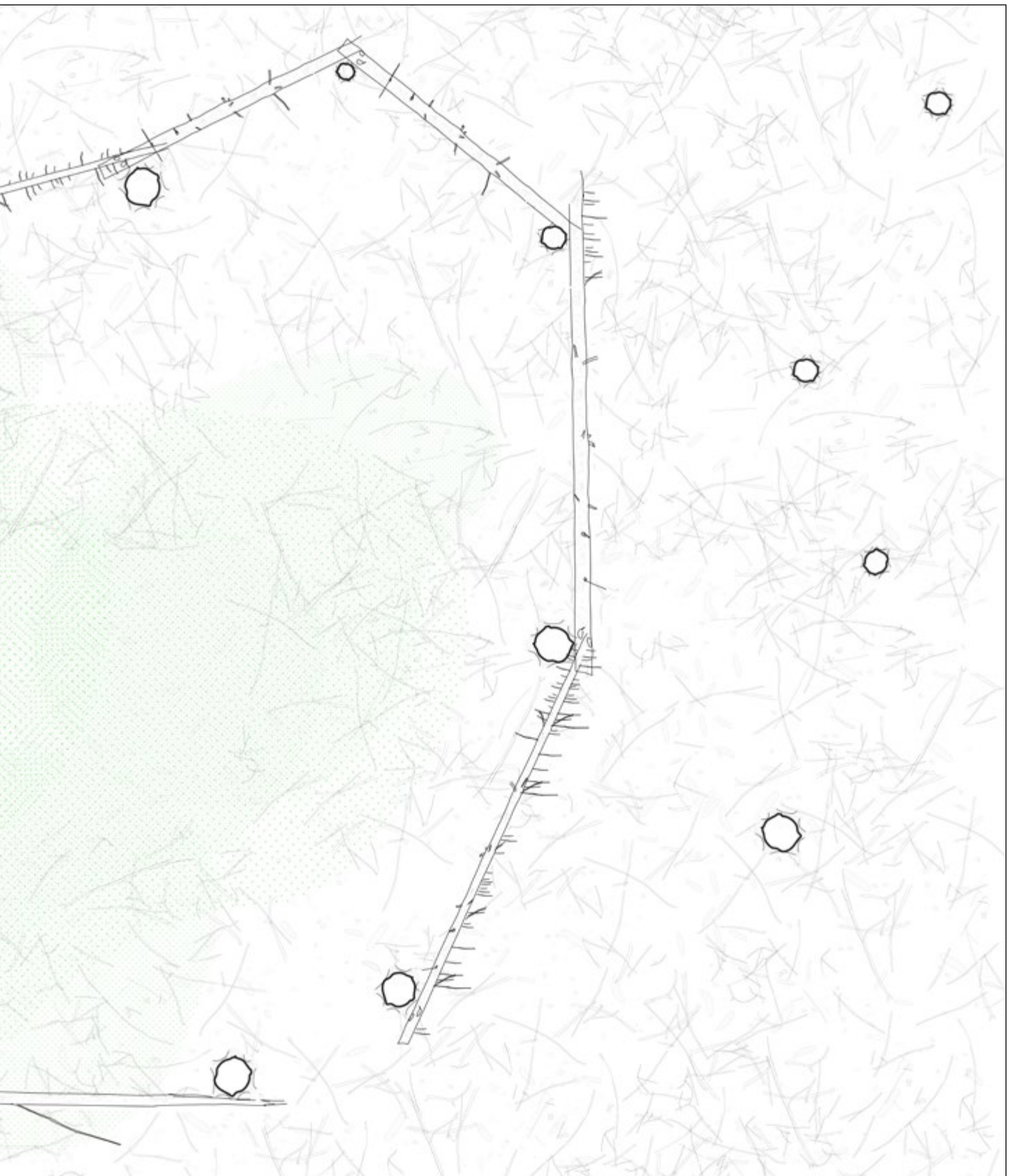
THE BECOMING





**FIGURE 3.25** Photograph of intervention with human for scale.



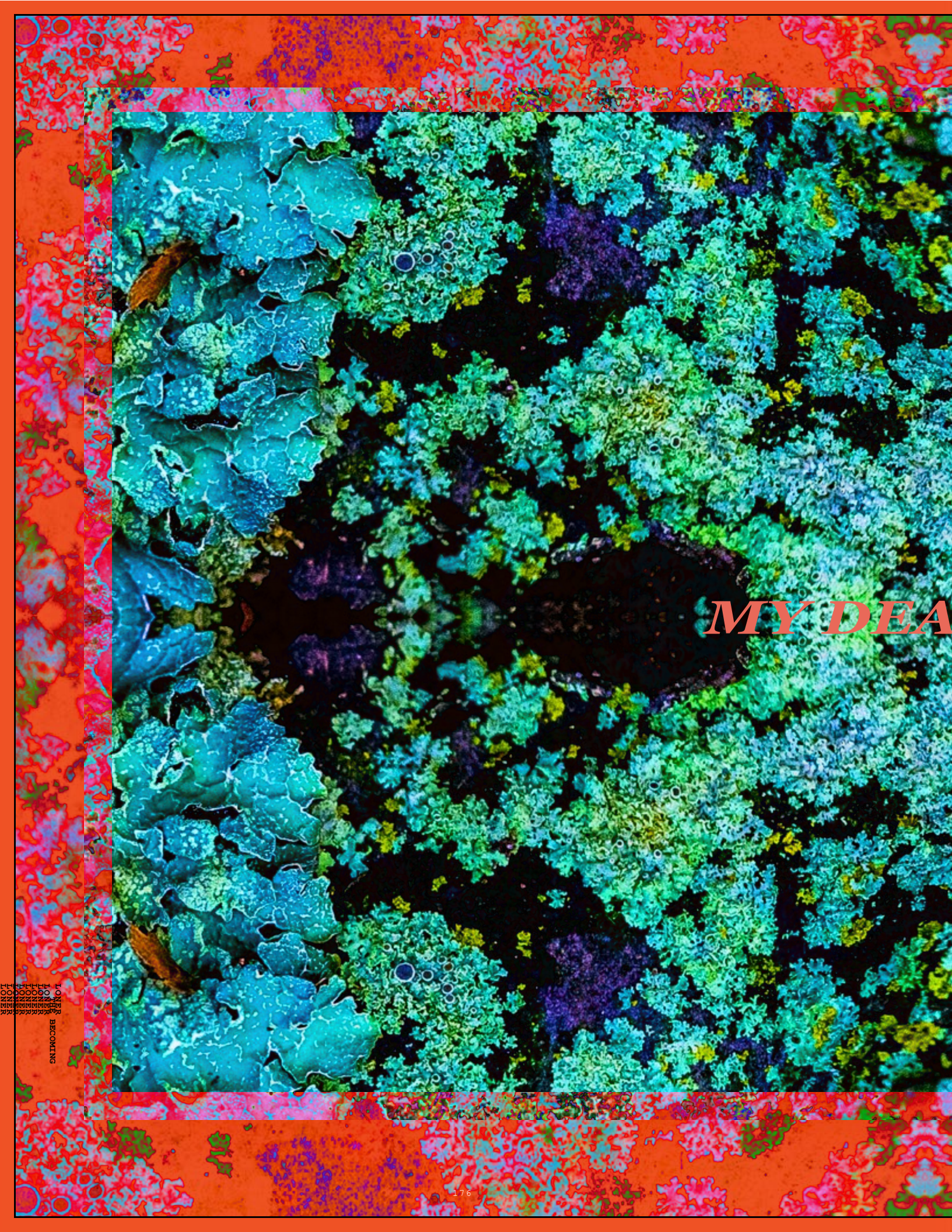


**FIGURE 3.26**

Scale floor plan of intervention. Logs can be seen circling a patch of moss.







*MYDEA*

LOOPER BECOMING  
LOOPER  
LOOPER  
LOOPER  
LOOPER  
LOOPER  
LOOPER



*R, LEAF*









**FIGURE 3.28**

Intervention site as-is.





**FIGURE 3.29**

Intervention site after excavation of forest decay debris.

FHWA FALL

3.3

RECORDING

TOUR





**FIGURE 3.30**

Completed intervention.







**FIGURE 3.31** An eastern grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) munching on a red oak acorn on a fallen branch.

19-11-26

BOREDOM; DEATH

**P**erhaps it is man's sheer existential boredom, anguish and constant hunger with/of the self that fuels the disregard of the natural realm; humans generate and generate material artefacts to serve as distractions from the dread of existence. Perhaps we seek some sort of distance from the natural realm as it is a blunt reflection of our fragile mortality. As I contemplate the relationship humans share with the Earth, I am utterly baffled away at our evident negligence of our planet and the intricate systems and connections that it has to offer us. But that begs the question – what is enough of a relationship we can share with our planet?

15:18  
9 °C/  
clear skies

I sit at the base of a *Pinus strobus* (eastern white pine) situated in a gathering of its many coniferous cousins. I've have two squirrels, one black and one gray, lock eyes with me, then cheerily carry along with their business (**figure 3.31**). Upon closer inspection, I am able to make out the rather messy and overgrown striated arrangement of the trees, and can confirm that I have landed myself in another pine plantation. Compared to the plantation to the south, this one houses smaller pines in closer proximity, and the ground is saturated in the barren limbs of various ferns and shrubs. I can hear black-capped chickadees basking in the Sun, and some squirrels gnawing at the citrusy-bitter green husks of the fallen walnut fruits in order to secure a fatty morsel for the upcoming winter. The crows do not hesitate to relentlessly flaunt their sonic presence, with a clumsy flamboyance akin to my cries during my more awkward teenage years. A tiny chipmunk decides to play hide-and-seek with me, with the chipmunk coming out victorious. I could not find that little chipmunk again.

There is an enormous flushing of *Pluteus cervinus* (deer mushroom) present today – an ever-so-slightly fuzzy fungal fruiting body sporting a convex cool-grey pileus that darkens at the center; the off-white gills are true and converge at the stem. There are at least 500 individual fruiting bodies present in the area that I have covered - there are quite possibly 10,000 present through the entirety of the area. I also located



1

3.4

THE BECOMING



**FIGURE 3.32**

Photograph of willow bracket fungus (*Phellinus igniarius*) on a dead red maple tree host.

some deflated *Lycoperdon perlatum* (gem-studded puffball). I also ran into a sinister looking clump of *Hypholoma fasciculare* (**figure 3.33**), a yellow-ish mushroom that is bountiful of the toxin *Fasciculol E*.

19-12-04

#### ESCAPE INTO DISORDER

15:18  
1°C/  
50 mm of  
snow/  
overcast

Am I coming *here* to escape? I want to know why people do *this* – what people find *here*. There is no comfort here, no safety here. No street, no anger. No un-orchestrated vibrations, no un-harmonious hums. In direct contrast, the city sounds like the melancholy. The whirring of the engines of passing vehicles, the ambient hums of the baritone mechanical systems, or the digitized accents which supposedly take the place of tiny house sparrows – it stirs my stomach and I feel ill. These homogeneous walls we humans have constructed around our urban zones reek of the safe and the mundane. There is no room for free and wild ecstasy – it is much rather the complete opposite.

My ass is frozen. I need better pants.

*During every second of my being, I am looking for pleasure. Constantly trying to maximize pleasure, for that is so comforting. EVERY FUCKING SECOND. I'm looking for some form of love, and trying to fill this endless & hollow cavity. It is so tiring. How much time and money will I waste?*

My plunge into the wilderness hold my unwavering faith of wanting to remedy this. This has to do with the spirit, man. This has to do with the abstract, man. You cannot just fix this bitter suffering with a dab of glue and a strand of tape - no; to meander through the knotted cerebral trenches and tend the gnarly paths of constructed meaning, to trim the frayed ends of mental clarity, and to polarize each trench with a fine-toothed comb - to find love. So how in the world can the wilderness fix me?





**FIGURE 3.33**

Stark, yellow sulphur tuft mushrooms consuming the remnants of a decaying log.

How does one reconcile *that* feeling? That feeling that one is inadequate? That one had been *thrown* into this conscious mess? The fact that one *knows* that they face an inevitable ending? In this over-analytic and pessimistic regard, awareness almost feels unfair. One did not ask for this. One was blessed with this suffering. This inability to express how unfair this predicament is. For one to be aware that there is no knowing of all origins. Then, perhaps, origins is not a matter to be known in material terms.

It is kind of cute to see bird footsteps pit-pattering along the freshly gessoed snow canvas. Today, I am on the hunt for bird nests. These little structures were the highlight of my adolescence. The bird nest is the dwelling for the winged creature. What is fascinating is how these little birds collect our scraps and fashion them for their utility. I wonder if she knows. *I think she knows*. Why did she use the plastic film? Rather, why didn't she not use the plastic? As birds use different species and typologies of materials to construct their homes, this must mean that birds possess some degree of material awareness. It seems that she used this sheet of plastic refuse for its waterproofing capacity as the plastic is positioned underneath the nest. One can spot a nest quite easily during this period of shallow snowfall - each nest has a cute cup of snow inside its cavity, distinguishing it from the rest of the chaos.

As I search for nests on the beefy, semi-evergreen *Ligustrum vulgare* shrubs, I notice some movement underneath the canopy. Mice! Shouldn't they be in the kitchen of a Pizza Pizza?

19-12-06

#### THE SHELTER

18:21  
-3 °C/  
75 mm of snow/  
cloudy

I cannot control here. I can manipulate. I can seduce. I can try to crush. I cannot blame. I cannot curse. How dare one blame chaos? A nihilist might. The act of self-reliance and self-accountability is one aspect of chaos that can regulate ones impulse mechanism; the id. One can only be hyper-aware here. I came here to try and construct meaning by summoning nature-based architectural interventions. I had a rough

upbringing. I was not allowed to be engaged in the world, so I was not able to construct a healthy meaning structure. I think too much. My mind is fixated on the anxiety over the doubt that I may be doing something incorrectly - that I may be doing *everything* incorrectly. It often feels as if this grumbling clamour cannot ever be satiated. I always feel tired.

---

This forest is home to many old trees! In front of me, a shagbark hickory stands proud and tall. There are a handful of grandma and grandpa red and white oaks, and sugar maples, and a few beeches. The oaks distinguish themselves with distinct gray-brown flattened furrows and stout trunks, with most branching occurring at the top of the tree. Sugar maples are intensely twisted and gnarly - you might be able to spot a face or two in there. Beeches have relatively smooth, ridge-less bark with many burl-like deformations scattered along the surface of the bark, and a distinct cool-grey finish. Sometimes the leaves do not leave their petioles - you can spot the bleached yellow leaves hanging on during the barren winters. These older trees seem to have an important sacred appeal to them, almost as if they are meant to be worshipped, to be learned from.





**FIGURE 3.34**

A photograph of the rudimentary shelter seen from within the pine plantation forest. As the members of wood decrease in length towards the bottom of the structure, a helix-like form appears.





**FIGURE 3.35 (LEFT + ABOVE)**

Photographs of structure from various angles.







**FIGURE 3.36**

View from the interior of the structure.



## CHAPTER 4

*Snowchild*



**FIGURE 4.01**

The moon spotted underneath a stray branch; it appears as an eye that keeps watch over me after hours.

4.1

## SLUMBER

20-01-27

EXISTENCE; PURPOSE

23:12  
-1 °C/  
10 mm of snow/  
cloudy

The striations on a snails shell – there must be some reason, some *purpose* – that they exist. That is to say, everything down to the level of fundamental particles must have some degree of importance and necessity for the biological fitness of the organism. So when one decides and judges, do we do useless things? What I mean to say is that, does a useless act exists when judged from the eyes of the Creator of the Universe? Perhaps this supposes a rational understanding of purpose – perhaps this also refutes the existence of free will. Are we to judge or let the cosmos organize it? Or both? Then how does the individual plug into the cosmos?

20-02-15

未来

16:45  
-2 °C/  
125 mm of snow/  
overcast

Winter lays her own eggs. Nestled on top of the loose bundle of twigs that birds call their home, the snowy hats that take refuge during the winter allow for each nest to be clearly marked in the arborscape. Suddenly, the matrix of shrubbery is dotted in white particulate. Will the red-tailed hawk eventually acknowledge these hats as indicators of house sparrows? Will the sparrow realize that their dwelling is compromised by this cold toque?

20-02-29

LOVE IN THE SKY

16:41  
-4°C/  
400 mm snow/  
cloudy

Today, I'm feeling extra anxious. As I trace over the veins of this wooded labyrinth with my blacked-out 6" Timberland boots, I succumb to the twisted pleasure and reassurance of the negative, useless & abusive parasite burrowed in my mind.

I gaze upon the largest black cherry tree I have ever come across! It is at least 800 mm in girth. The bark is distinctly scaly for a deciduous tree, which resemble uniformly craggy slate-coloured potato chips. Much of the black cherries can be found emitting a candy-like amber-y resin





**FIGURE 4.02**

Photograph taken at the Walter Bean Conservation Area – I shift my studies over to a new location.

through their bark due to the demise of the peach tree borer. One can find the remnants of their pupae glued in-between the ridges of bark scales along with neighbouring wolf spiders that have also taken refuge between the nooks of the bark. The trees are very long and lanky with a few kinks along the way, almost as straight as their white ash tree-brethren.

17:23

Wind assumes a much different form and presence amongst these tall, cellulose-celled drinking straws. This sponge of a forest partially absorbs the wind as if it were some thirst-quenching elixir, then the forest molds the wind into whistles and growls and slices the gale into fluid wisps. The occasional hexagonal crystal of snow hitches a ride with the wind, and finds itself caught in my sight amongst the cleavage of the blackened limestone alvars. I wonder, does the form of the snowflake aid in its function, or is the form a mere byproduct of physics and chemistry? Drops of liquid precipitation don't suspend themselves in the matrix of the atmosphere; they puncture through – its target: a thirsty victim.

I can smell it. My hands are cold. That piercing ammonia-like breeze that captures death and sex. The smell of the unwashed gym shirt, a roommate's slobbery dog, consummation, and one of the most ancient perfume ingredients: pheromone. That marking of territory through scent, marking of pleasure of some sort; the mask that may conceal, or may reveal. Something taboo, perhaps. I have noticed your markings. You see, we humans have found ourselves in disdain smelling this smelly smell – unless it is of our own or someone intimate.

20-03-03

## HARBINGER OF SPRING

08:25  
1°C/  
50 mm of snow/  
foggy

Last night, I had predicted at around 03:00 that the emergence of a warm bloc will gently shroud the horizon in a creamy fog. I am quick to wake at around 08:00 this morning as I notice from my bed that outside no longer existed – the portal to the external seemingly had me gazing into a hollow void. As I polish the dream candy from the





**FIGURE 4.03**

Ash, ironwood and aspen act as columns in the Walter Bean cathedral.

corners of my fogged eyes, the spindly branches of the distant black walnuts and sugar maples peek through the fallen sky. As I approach my window, it becomes clear that my prediction was somewhat correct – a fog has submerged Galt in milk. I rush to get ready.

10:35

2°C/

As I make my way to the site, I encounter Him. The unmistakable red-orange breast, the gunmetal coat of armour, and the eyes in a cross-hair – the Harbinger of Spring has been waiting for me in a lowly ornamental bush on Churchill Drive. He was quick to go. As he traversed the thick atmosphere, his song of spring fertilizes the soil and has excited the buds.

12:31

3°C/

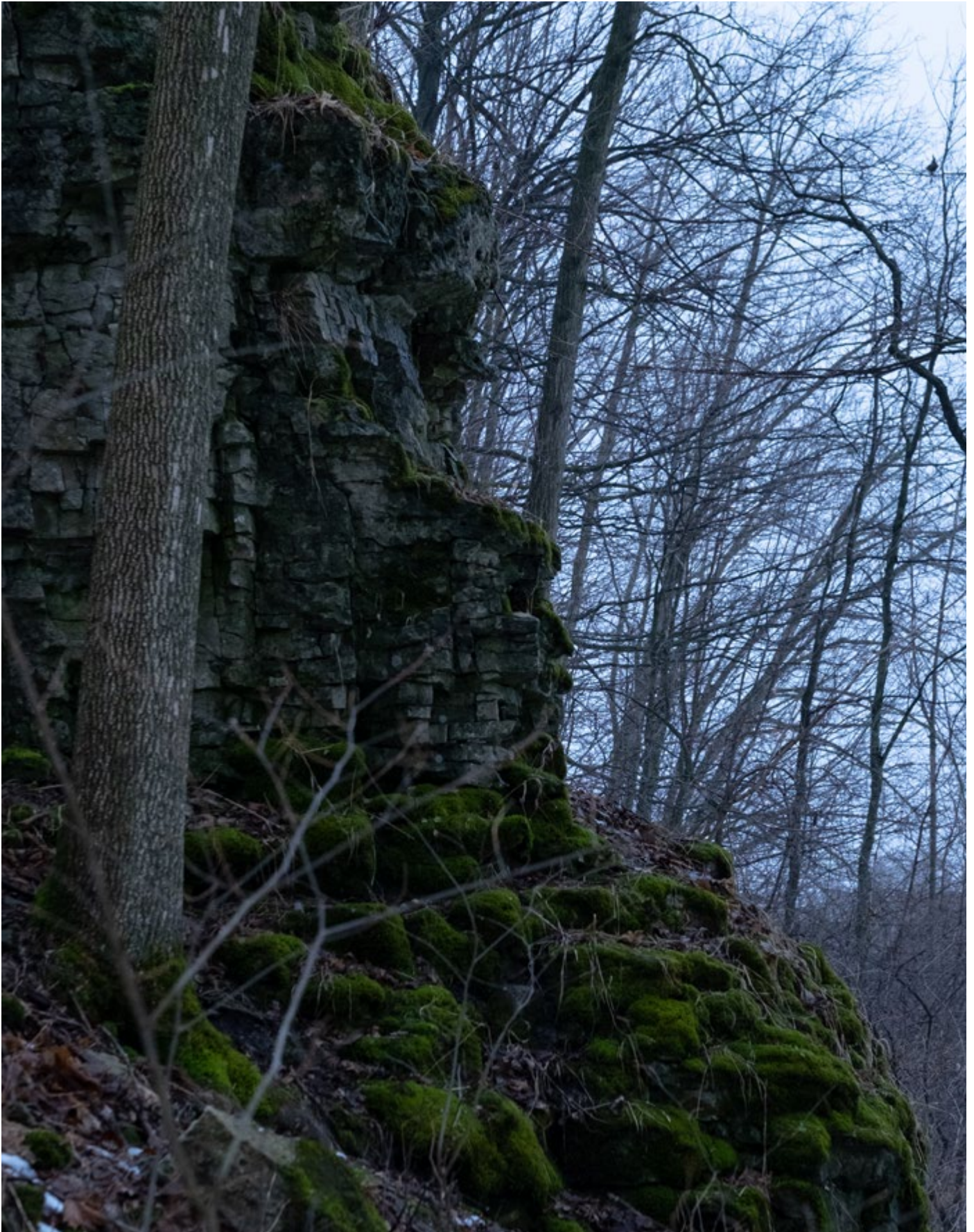
light drizzle

Now that I'm *here*, I am greeted by the striking red crest and cloak of a shy northern cardinal, whistling to protect his less flamboyant, olive-toned female companion from my dashing good looks and intimidating form. During my adolescence, cardinals were extremely scarce in my neighbourhood, most likely due to the gang violence present in the area. I had maybe seen two or three in total.

12:45

Prior to the Heian Period, the people of Japan did not see blue and green as two distinct pigment categories - the word *ao* (青) was used to express the colours corresponding to 450 - 530 nm on the visible light spectrum. *Ao* was also used to describe the adjectives fresh and verdant.

As I descend into the first lower wetland of the Walter Bean Conservation Area, meticulously shuffling along the limestone-and-slush clad slope, each particle of fog expands to summon a light drizzle of downpour. At the floor of the alvar-enclosed wetland, I notice the youthful fawn-toned underside of a pack of *Stereum hirsutum*. The hungry saprotrophic mushrooms are working away at decomposing a dead white ash tree. The poor bastard was only around fifteen years of age before it became the victim of an emerald ash borer - indicated by the bore holes scattered along the bark. Amongst the grey facades of old sugar maples and dead ashes, the brown-grey skins of the red oaks and the charcoal-grey scales of the black cherries, the underside of the crust



**FIGURE 4.04**

Limestone alvars and outcrops – an extension of the Niagara Escarpment – adorned in lush sphagnum moss amongst other organisms living in its crevices.

fungus has caught me by surprise. False and actual turkey-tails are quite easy to locate and identify with their distinct polar-arrayed shelf-like fruiting bodies, concentric zones and flat morphologies. Through, more often than not, mold, algae and rain have either rusted or washed away their *ao* appearance. This can be said about anything in the forest, really. The entropic act of returning to the Earth, re-soiling is a character that captures the essence of chaos, the wilderness - the thing we want to avoid and prevent and sweep under the proverbial rug. In the corner of my eye, I notice a handsome grandfather sugar maple there. And right there, my eyes converge to one point – *ao*. About ten feet above, a woodpecker has punctured a hole in the armour of the maple to gain access to a helpless larva dwelling in the sapwood of this tree (**figure 4.05**). And against that rough, silvery shell, a glimpse into the moist and vulnerable innards of the maple alerts a deep instinctual response in my caged and sterilized psyche – moisture. Specifically, water. Fungal spores have been laying dormant peppered along matter which needs nutritional distribution, waiting for even the smallest drop of the transparent elixir. The bulbs of mayapples and the rootstock of Canadian wild ginger are waiting to unfurl their plumage and stretch out their cramped limbs after their nap. It permeates every corner of Life and death.

13:10  
heavy rain

The drizzle has gradually intensified into a steady sprinkling of the elixir. As the temperature of the air rises, the fog retreats – the forest has now taken the atmosphere of a morose cathedral. The torrent summons territorial markings in the form of yelping blue jays and warbling robins that have taken a lazy Sunday morning refuge amongst the towering white ashes and hickories. I also hear the squawking of Canadian and cackling geese coming from their docking areas in the Grand River to the east. I am surrounded by a fortress of the outcropping alvars hosting the forest-like carpets of what appears to be *Anomodon rostratus* moss. The verdant, cedar-like shagginess of the moss strikes great contrast with his tar-black substrate – this, too, bleeds of *ao*. As I lay in the belly of this limestone-clad cathedral, I bask in the elixir of springtime – the sprinkling has now intensified into a drenching.



**FIGURE 4.05**

The vulnerable innards of a sugar maple exposed by the drilling of a woodpecker's beak.

20-03-06

## THE SEARCH FOR CHAGA

09:26  
-1°C/  
100 mm of snow/  
overcast

I wake to a thick, four-inch coat of fluffy snow on the eager blades of grass and perky deciduous buds. A flock of flurries has been, yet again, summoned by some ill-willed force to taunt the dormant bulbs of wild leek and to sleight the return of the Springtime Harbinger. The clusters of delicate and frothy snow are, once again, collecting quietly on the limbs of soon-to-wake trees and shrubs - I must savour this last dusting.

P

D  
chaga  
S

14:30  
0°C/

I arrive to Walter Bean in search of the chaga fungus. The sclerotium of the *Inonotus obliquus* is collected from its parasitized birch host and can be brewed as a tea-like beverage or tinctured in a solvent. Winter is the perfect season to collect the cork, as the host trees are dormant, meaning moisture in the collected fungus is minimized and nutritional content is maximized. They can also parasitize alders, beeches, oaks and other *Populus* genera.

15:26

“Shaga shaga shaga ... shaga shaga shaga ... shaga shaga shaga ...”

I have devised a chant that will help draw me towards this sacred fungus. The good medicine is a powerful antioxidant, and can be used to improve cognitive function and memory loss. Not dissimilar to many other types of fungus, chaga sourced from birch trees can be used to shrink some cancerous tumors due to its betulinic acid content.

...

**WAIT.**

What is that!?

There,

rustling in the bramble;  
my eyes do not mistake this grace,

Though,  
I did not hear.

Her, the doe, hurries away, as I pull my feet out from the leaves. They slice through the spongy brush and scrub, like slivers of saxophone through the soul.

They are shy. And they are gone.

...

15:33

Canadian geese stream overhead, and take my eyes to what seems to be the medicine I've been calling out to for the past few days. I approach this tumorous bulge latched onto what was, in retrospect, a young aspen, but at the time, a gray birch in my eyes (**figure 4.06**). I was ecstatic!

I chipped a piece off to confirm the rusty-mustard interior masked by the charred exterior. It was tough to cut. Why is this corky conk so callous...?

Hmm... Oh.

Unfortunately, this protuberance was not the good medicine - it was just a burl.

I decided to follow the white-tailed deer's tracks. I want to earn the respect of these almost mythological mammals. Fresh coffee bean-like droppings and heart-shaped footprints illuminate the traces of them. Their tracks are firmly pressed against the loose snow. Analyzing the angle of impact, I can assume the trajectory of the herd. There are around four to five deer; one of them is a fawn.

As I trace their impressions, I am shifting into a deer myself. I drop my abdomen parallel to the earth's curvature; I expose my genetic sac and assume an almost quadruped position. It's perplexing to try

and even manoeuvrer with the silence of a shadow, the agility of the wind, the serenity of a wind-borne seed, and the precision of God's hand, as the deer move. Their footprints bleed into and get lost in the undulations of the unadulterated snow blanket on the occasion. After some adaptation, I become accustomed to the rhythms of these white-tailed angels. I can see the carvings of their travels left in the brier patches of wild raspberry, bristly blackcurrant and greenbriers. The snow further distinguishes the depressions left in the terrain by molding to the contours.

!

16:17

The white flick of the tail startles us both.

It is very quiet. The silken snow has made its final return. The robin from a-few-moments-ago must be a little upset and chilly. The snow does not want to melt just yet, though. I have not yet noticed a single squirrel – not a sound, not a sight. Perhaps they, too, are a little upset at the Earth for teasing them so; the melody of the Harbinger promised them and the sleeping bulbs and the shy buds that it is now the time to wake from their nap – they yearn to flash their plumage.

In the quietude, the odd school of chickadees pepper the pillow-like softness of the auditory realm with their “phee-bees”; goldfinches are also performing their acrobatic entanglements to attract.





**FIGURE 4.06**

A burl I mistook for chaga.

20-03-15

## WAKING UP

09:45  
-1°C/  
5 mm of snow/  
clear skies

The forest has opened up her melodies and her organs, and I have, in return, opened my vulnerable heart. Only traces of snow remain; the departure of their presence has released the forest from the snow's frigid clutch – it is time to wake up! The Sun's azimuth reads around  $38.5^{\circ}$ , and I look East to seek my cleansing and rebirth. The Sun's haze casts a dance on the decaying and punky floor as Canadian geese hack through the cloudless, dry sky. The horizontal members of the emerging spiders' webs are crisply illuminated by the Sun's warmth, providing the dominantly vertical oak-and-hickory rails with delicate rungs of silken threads. The spiders must be hungry from their long dormant periods hiding underneath the snow-covered leaf litter.

10:30

There is still the odd grouping of snow in clusters, scattered here and there, taking refuge in an outcrop's shade or avoiding the inevitable thaw in the path of a cold current. Approaching the Newman Creek, I notice some stubborn sheets of ice just a few millimeters thick. The sheets are just hovering above the receded stream and have mutated into dazzling crystalline fractal geometries. A light touch or gentle warming could result in their complete extinction – I simply observe them and let them be.

10:36

My eyes scaffold across the face of the moss-crusting limestone wall – there is the *ao* green, the oriole black, but, the white snow no longer greets me. The wall is now awake. At the top of the alvar, Ted, an eccentric eastern chipmunk and I encounter each other in an engagement. We have found each other entangled in our gazes - we cease to as much move an inch. After a few moments, Ted continues his frantic frolic amongst the vaguely prismatic cleavage, in the rockface. Where have you been? Emerging from his hibernatory slumber, Ted is looking amongst the forest floor floor in search of unscathed hickory nuts and acorns. I take one step closer towards Ted, hoping he can discern my smile from my intimidating figure, but Ted is too shy, and scurries off.

10:51

I hear some rustling atop the summit of the alvar - what is that? I stand still for a long pause to simply listen. Is that the herd of deer I hear? I want to see them again. I pray my steps do not bring them too much fear. I hastily hoist myself along the cliff face and find myself greeting another hollow of oaks and hickories, and beeches and aspens.

I stand still again.

Was I fooled? This is not an uncommon occurrence. Nature is man's oldest prankster. It only makes sense that what I, in excess naivety and eagerness, had thought were the gentle sonic markings of white-tails were merely some crisp crackles generated by perhaps a passing breeze or some supernatural phenomena.

I have a moment - I am perceiving this portion of the site for the first time.

This section has been blurry in my mind – this beyond the wall kind of feeling. Society – the Universe – seemed to have caged me inside this fortress and has forbidden any attempt of uncovering the forbidden fruit. This is seduction. It is not the fruit that is tempting, rather the fantasy of what such a fruit may be. The yearning of potential. Romanticization. What lies beyond the veil? Perhaps a breast? The Devil whispers in my right ear: only knowing may cure this temptation. O' Heavenly Father, what art thou concealing? Is it the future? Why art thou concealing? Will this free me from the shackles of pain and suffering? O' Heavenly Father, I beg for thy forgiveness, for I must sin. I must be punished – for only then can I know what it means to know.

!

A familiar movement catches my still moment off balance - there, in between the spindly ironwood and the burly beeches, I lock eyes with you, once again.

A few smaller white-tail scurry west into the thicket of the woods, where the thorns of the briars offer a lattice in which the deer navigate effortlessly, while the threatening bipedal ape is completely insoluble in the matrix of thorns.

The One and I have locked eyes with stands at a distance of roughly twenty meters. After a thirty-second-long exchange, The One continues rummaging through the shrubbery in the search for *ao* buds and the first few mychorizzal fungus friends.

I want to get closer.

I stand there, observing him.

He isn't making a noise. The ambiance of the wind reads louder than any movement from the white-tail. Silence is louder than the deer, for Fuck's sake. I notice that he isn't facing me head first – rather I am facing westwards towards him, and he faces south. Does he also want to bask in the silken warmth of the Sun? Or does he want to keep an eye on me?

I decide to take a step.

I realize that I must learn how to walk again.

In foresight of my step, I ever-so-gently raise my clumsy US size 9.5 six-inch Timberland-clad foot off of the forest floor as if I were the delicate smoke wafting from a stick of incense. I must caress the landscape with my footsteps as not to startle him – for after all, this, too, is a game of seduction. When my knee reaches its apex of movement, I become completely aware of my clumsy, elephantine lack of grace. My left leg is trembling – I realize I am signaling fear and illiteracy to the Spirit of the Woods. I raise both my hands to my sides in order to compensate for my lack of balance. I try to gain control, but I fail and force my raised leg down in front, insufficiently completing my first step. We lock eyes, once again. I offer an apology – am I showing weakness?

After another thirty seconds or so, he returns scrounging a green meal, almost ignoring me with his eyes. He doesn't respect my weakness, it seems. The Id in me wants the acceptance – it wants the belonging; it wants to calcify and be comfortable in permanence.

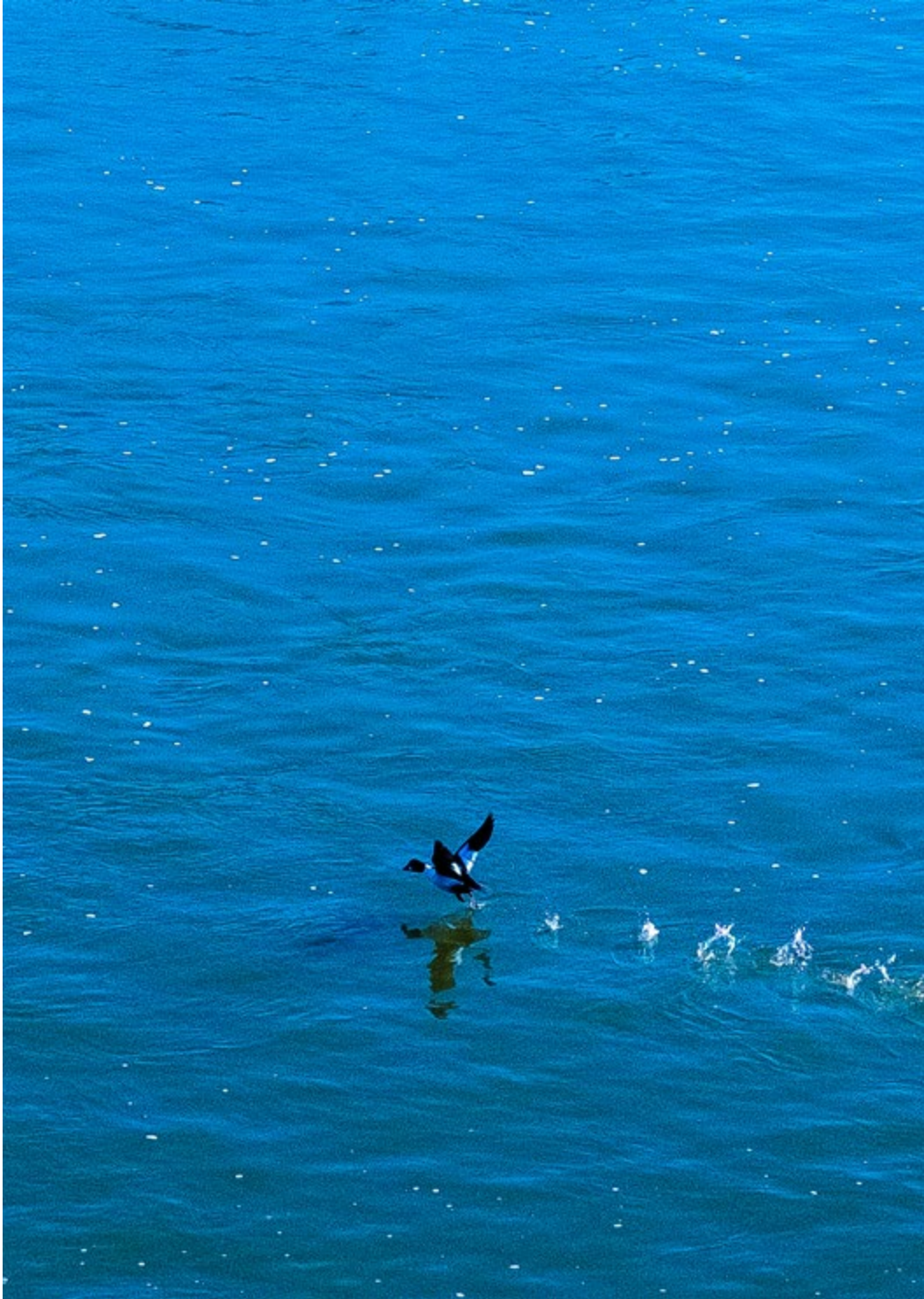
I take another step.





**FIGURE 4.07**

Look closely, and you will see someone looking back.



**FIGURE 4.08** A common goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) takes off from the Grand River.



## MINOSKAMIN

20-03-22

HATCH

09:22  
14 °C/  
clear skies

**S**he unfurls her plumage and expands her call. As The Golden Sun sends His blessing and calls for the surface to thaw, it gives birth to the first set of cumulus clouds of this fresh, new decade.

I once ran into and conversed with Jordan – a depressed and suicidal botanist who I ran into on the Cambridge Pedestrian Bridge after a drunk driver has slammed into a light pole in front of Water Street Auto. Prior to my encounter with Jordan, I had been observing an orb-weaver spider craft their web for around forty-five minutes. After confiding in me about his deceased friends, and feeling so depressed that he wished to join them, I hugged him and we continued to bond over botany, and the wonder of nature in general. He is ecstatic about our leafy brethren. He explains how plants have crafted us evolutionarily, and how they essentially manage the hydrosphere and lithosphere. The most meaningful artifact of knowledge I received from Jordan was his understanding of plants as something analogous to the alveoli in the lungs – a beautiful way to visualize the mechanics of nature. After we parted ways, Jordan and I did not speak again.

09:54

This winter did not leave behind much frost, indicated by the stressless mullein that have been left unharmed. Much springtime foliage is quick to expose their raw and rare shoots. The shoots of neighbours lilies and daffodils are starting to emerge, but are still shy. Although a mild winter, the atmosphere is still chilly, as I am currently sporting a wool jumper with a paisley pattern and a light patchwork duffle coat. Life is stagnant – the Cree Peoples refer to this as the “break-up” season, or *minoskamin*. Life is slowly procuring nutrients to explode from its slumber. The air is still and dry, the Earth is preparing for warmth, wetness and birth.

A I slowly traverse the land, I take note of the shifting groundspace – at the large scale, one may not notice much, but at the micro-scale, things are charging up for The Great Event of Life. Sclerotium are waking from their dormancy to release and activate their stored oils –

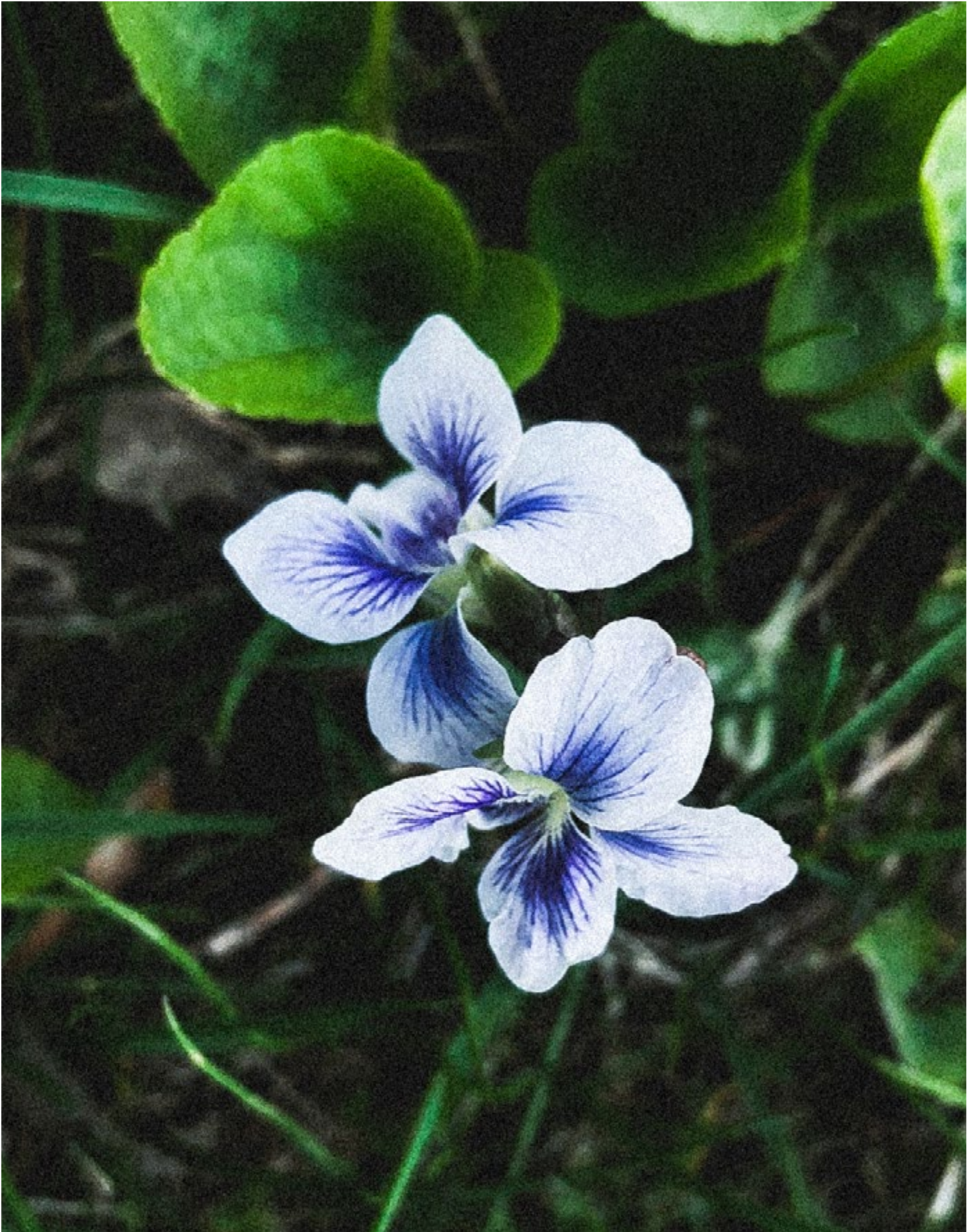
calories. Birds are scrounging to source sticks and twigs in order to sow their cup- and basket-shaped nest to welcome their children. Moths and flies are seemingly falling out of solution from the elixir of the sky – they are an ode to the snowflake. The limited moisture embodied within the Earth is making its way to the seeds of bloodroot and the rhizomes of mayapples. Surprisingly, only a few fresh fungal fruiting bodies of the common jelly fungus have shown up. Spores lay dormant, awaiting the slightest drizzle.

20-04-04

## BLOOM

13:43  
15 °C/  
cloudy

An eruption of colour peppers my eye and salts my heart. On the shaded lawns of unsuspecting victims, the romantic and showy zygomorphic corollas and spurred flowers of the sweet violet take refuge. The early-blooming snowdrop has now closed its reproductive organ, generating a glucose-rich fruit. The shoots of day lilies protrude and parade the soil – white squill and daffodil heads stand proudly, biding until a pollinator attends their stamen's will. Hyacinths saturate the air with an indolic-floral, and slightly peppery-green accord. The flowers finally have their reproductive organs open for business, calling out for the rear-end of a fuzzy bee or the nose of an innocent bystander with the seduction of their fragrance or curves or colour. Similarly, the other organisms of springtime are scouring to become pollinated, or pollinate, through display of song, dance and vulgarity. The flowers of the sky are frantically searching for abandoned appendages of trees and lost hair of grasses to start their domicile construction projects. Amphibious creatures are now poking their noggins from their thawed chambers to start their egg-laying rituals. Every single organism is pouring in all of their resources to support their genetic future. Spring, is the ancient festival of *sex*, with *ao* being its signifier.



**FIGURE 4.09**

A long-spurred violet (*Viola rostrata*), cropping up amongst thousands of others of its kind. These little flowers can typically be seen sneaking onto the lawns of unsuspecting neighbours.



1

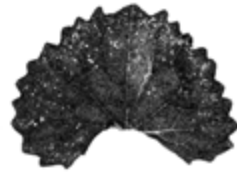
1. *Quercus palustris* (pin oak)



2



3



4

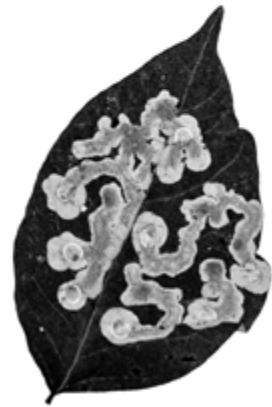
2. *Berberis thunbergii* (Japanese Barberry)  
 3. *Scrophularia nodosa* (woodland figwort)  
 4. *Alliaria petiolata* (garlic mustard)



5



6



7

5. *Prunus serotina* (black cherry)

6. *Quercus bicolor* (swamp white oak)

7. *Toxicodendron radicans* (poison ivy)

**FIGURE 4.10**

A collection of flora from the forest.

20-04-05

## INPUT → OUTPUT

20:31  
10 °C/  
overcast

There are many resources required for initiating and sustaining a survival fire. The act of fire-making is a lesson unto itself – about economics, science & the Laws of the Universe.

Fire-making requires three grades of wood: tinder, kindling, and fuel wood – each ascending in scale and density from the previous. Fire-making is a type of magic or alchemy in itself. The act is not necessarily logical or self-evident – intuitive, sure, but it is as if one makes something appear out of nothing. An inferno seems to manifest from thin air. It is in spirit the symbol of Life and death – creation and The End. Our ability to control and concentrate energy and heat in such an efficient manner has given us the luxury of comfort. Though, this has left us somewhat foggy in the effort required behind the physical exchanges occurring. Our stove-top burners may be able to reheat our frozen butter chicken gravy at the torque of a knob, but for that luxury, we have invested considerable energy in creating cooking appliances, natural gas and electrical infrastructure, and research & development costs. At the rotation of the knob, we do not feel the effort of the labour of even having the oven hoisted from warehouse to kitchen. If we cannot feel and embody effort, how may we be aware of the strain our actions place on the Universe?

20-04-12

## THE WILD LEEK

18:03  
14°C/  
overcast

*Allium tricoccum* is one of the first species of flora to sprout after the winter subsides. Colloquially known as the ramp, these broadleaf bundles are a delicacy for the foraging individual, as the palette crosses the pungent flavour of grocery store garlic with the morphology of a green onion. Ramps, garlic and onion all hail from the genus *Allium*, and are loved by chefs who favour seasonal and local ingredients.

To my delight, I spot a small cluster of ramps among a grouping of the distinctly mottled purples spathe of the skunk cabbage and the seated



**FIGURE 4.11** A botanical illustration of *Allium tricoccum*.







**FIGURE 4.12**

A bonfire along the Grand River.





**FIGURE 4.13** The snow thaws.

leaf-like stipules of the yet-to-bud marsh marigolds. I bruise the tip of one ramp leaf to confirm the presence of thiosulfates – the onion-y scent that clings to my thumb, index and middle finger confirms it: this is a ramp! As this is the only cluster in the immediate vicinity, I leave it be, and search for a more populous patch of ramps.

After a short walk, I enter a lightly wooded area to find a substantial flushing of ramps! I pull out my trowel and reusable canvas bag and start my first forage of the year. At the base of the exposed portion is a slimy, rhubarb-coloured membrane that serves as the bulbs threshold between itself and the rest of the world. To dislodge the ramp with its bulb from the subterranean realm, I insert my four-inch Swiss Army blade at a slight angle towards the base of the ramp into the soil. I must penetrate the soil at just the right angle, for I do not want to risk the decapitation of the delectable bulb below from its foliage above. I use the knife to partially excavate the decaying matter the ramp has found itself in, and in one swift motion, I slice the roots off of the rootstock while gently rocking the ramp from its plum-toned stalk. I gently extrude the pungent smelling plant from its growing substratum and peel the gelatinous membrane away from the bulb. The end of the membrane leads me to the rootstock. I nimbly snap the rootstock off of the bulb, decapitating the roots, soil and slimy membrane from the rest of the ramp, removing almost all of the soil leaving little to clean. My first few ramps were quite laborious – I initially broke my trowel from the spine attempting to pry the ramps from the compact soil and the tough root system. I slowly learn to quickly collect them, and place them in my tote bag, one by one. I only collect a maximum of 5% per cluster, and I completely avoid young clusters to ensure prosperity for the future of the ramp. It is easy to let greed take action on your behalf, but you must be sensitive and considerate to these plant-gifts.

This evening, I prepare a pork tenderloin with a sage stuffing, herb-roasted ramps & potatoes, and a ramp & mushroom cream sauce to dress.

20-04-19

## THE MAYAPPLE IN APRIL

07:00  
14°C/  
clear skies

I find myself caught in a rare moment – I wake at 7:00. The robin’s high-passed and reverberated chirp filters through my shoddily-sealed window. It seems as though morning is comprised of a Sunny, dewy assault of Light and rebounding cries of birds – “wake up! wake up!” – they let everyone know. It smells calm. It looks silent. It sounds bright. The dawn feels pleasant. It carries an atmosphere of stillness. One may find simple pleasures here, such as the decadent chocolate note in their morning brew, or the cyclical turbulence of their breathing – or perhaps the verdant, green chewiness of a freshly descended acorn.

07:54

Right underneath my right foot, I take pleasure in noticing a little vibrant seafoam-green crown of a mayapple shoot. As I raise my head up from the young plant, my visual field is barraged by an entire field of the tiny, closed green umbrellas! The arrival of the mayapple foreshadows the epitome of foraged edibles – the *Morchella* genus of fungi. As the mayapples start to unfurl, it will be the optimal time to search dead and dying elms for the gourmet fungi with the merulioid ridges on its cap – the morel mushroom. These elusive mushrooms are extremely difficult to source, and are nearly impossible to cultivate on a commercial scale as they share complex mycorrhizal relationships with their environment and will only fruit for around three weeks of the entire year. A fresh pound can cost up to sixty dollars.

Adjacent to the mayapple shoot by my foot is a handful of *grandiflorum* trilliums that have yet to flaunt their flora. Trilliums were one of the first plants I could successfully identify as a child, so finding them is always a delight. Rosettes of *Sedum turnatum* are starting to stretch their cabbage-like foliage towards the Heavens. At the base of a 60-year-old red oak tree, I spot the closed petals of a few bloodroot, tucked inside their lone basal leaf. The foliage of the woodland strawberries are also leaving their underground burrows, ready to begin their explosive spread and delightful production of sugar-rich rubies.

20-04-27

## A PLANT A DAY

16:41  
15°C/  
clear skies

The bloodroot has now opened up to expose her golden stamens for the soft abdomens of the similarly golden clade of *Anthophilla* pollinators (**figure 4.14**). I wonder, have these busy bees evolved to match their floral friends? When a bloodroot is cut from the stem, it oozes a red-orange juice, which contains the toxins of benzylisoquinoline alkaloids – a compound that destroys animal cells and forms necrotic tissue.

Much of the floor is starting to experience change. Patches of evergreen sedges are collecting their hair-like leaves around the depressed areas, where water tend to pool. Day lily shoots are in full *ao* effect – against the oxidized post-autumnal carpet of fallen oak and maple leaves, the shoots do not shy away from attention. Bunches of sweet-scented bedstraw are colonizing the damp shadows cast by the towering red oak trees, awaiting their aromatic bloom. Small, leafy patches of houndstongue, Canadian goldenrod, and dame's rocket have cropped-up on locations penetrated by the warmth of full, loving Sunshine. In a few weeks, what was once a small clump of leaves will have morphed into a tall, flowering plant.

The past few days, there has been an eruption of the so-called “April-showers.” They seem to indeed have brought the beginnings of “May-flowers.” A nodding, ripe mango-tinted hermaphroditic flower greets my fresh-tinted vision (**figure 4.16**). I notice two mottled leaves at the base of this flowers reddish-brown stalk. The suede-saffron scent wafting in this afternoon's ether coerces my nose and tickles it with its stamens.

Mhhhhhhh...

Ahhhhhhh.

An agreeable safranal-leather scent. The trout lily will sadly droop if it cannot locate the Sun.



**FIGURE 4.14**

Bloodroots (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) beginning to flower and expose their golden stamens. One of the very first flowers to emerge after winter. The flowers close slightly during night.

ПРОСНИЛИ

4.2

THE BECOMING







**FIGURE 4.15**

As the pandemic sweeps in, I begin to transition my studies to the nearby forest of Victoria Park. In this photograph, the emerging skunk cabbages, groundcover and sedges can be seen in the wetland section of the site.

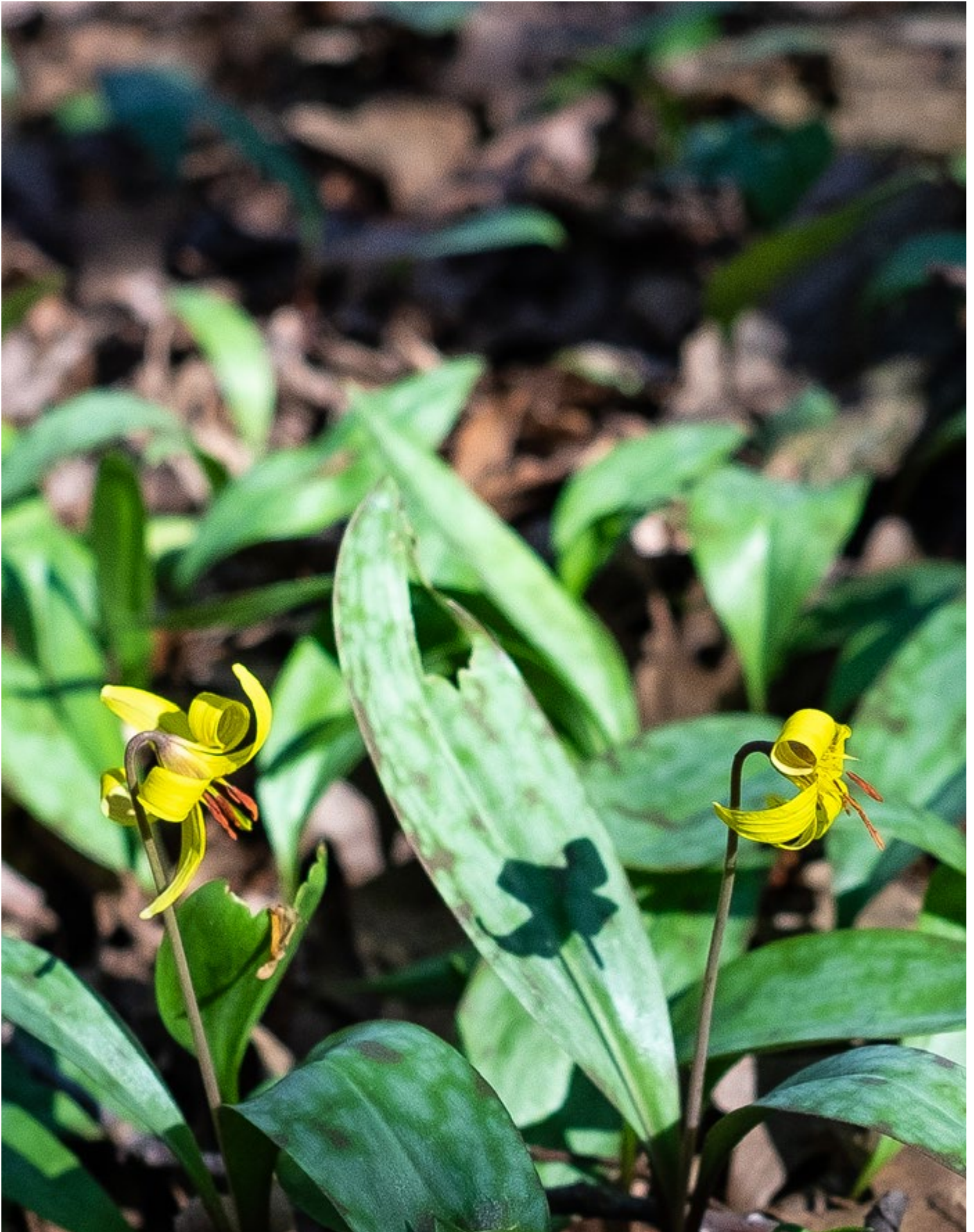
A few alpine squill innocently occupy some ordinary soil. Their six, pure-cobalt petals and fragile stalk are a delight to view. To the west of the squill, a patch of uninvited common periwinkle invades a stretch of red and white oak trees.

A planar particle is caught in the wind and is caught in my visual field. I notice this mirrored, leaf-like, animated napkin fluttering in the atmosphere – partially in control, and partially hitching a ride along the invisible streams of the wind. This little leaflet sports specks of blue on the edge of its wings. I take a closer look as it perches near me on a layer of weathered oak leaves. The mourning cloak butterfly is often referred to as the first butterfly of spring, and live a staggering twelve months as adult insects. Entomologists suspect that the upper part of the wing's pattern emulates a feeble caterpillar on a maroon substrate. If a bird were to prey on the stationary *Phopalocera* species, the camouflage will serve as a distraction from the butterfly's delicate body. Bill marks can be seen on the left wing in **figure 4.17**.

I attempt to slowly approach the mourning cloak butterfly. I spend about five minutes simply appreciating his psychedelic blue eyes, blond edges and maroon, mohair wings. The mourning cloak remains as still as ice – he does not activate a single nerve ending. I get fairly close to him – about a foot's distance away. I inch slightly closer, but he then evaporates. A few seconds later, I catch him in an entanglement with a her. They are getting ready.

As the entanglement of butterfly seemingly vanishes from my vision, my eyes lock onto a near patch of *ao* – shy wild geranium. A plant that the Indigenous peoples of North America have used, the roots would be steeped for teas and mashed as a paste for medicine.

Eastern chipmunks run wild. As I travel through the striations of movement, the striped, walnut-hued rodent distorts my peripheral perceptions of the landscape. The little mammal scurries along fallen tree trunks and rummages through the paper-like leaf litter in search of a quick fatty meal. Sometimes, we lock eyes.



**FIGURE 4.16**

Nodding yellow trout lilies (*Erythronium americanum*) enjoy what little time they have in the year basking in the Sun's rays; when the Sun is hiding, the lilies begin to droop.





**FIGURE 4.17**

A mourning cloak butterfly (*Nymphalis antiopa*) perches on the leaf litter of Victoria Park, flaunting his intimidating wings for my lens. Spring is here.



**FIGURE 4.18**

An eastern chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*) perched near the base of a northern red oak tree (*Quercus rubra*).

4.3

## AWAKENING

20-05-01

### THE DAFFODIL, IN SLUMBER

16:33  
15°C/  
scattered clouds

What remains of the bloodroot, now, is merely its lonely leaf and stalk – the petals have completed their task and enter dormancy, once again. The tulips are now flowering, though, their daffodil neighbours are slowly approaching slumber. The once stern, stout corona and honeyed tepal of the daffodil now bows; *wilt*. The smell of some variants still carries – the herbaceous-floral, *Tagetes*-like scent caresses my nose. Trilliums have also unfurled their three sepals and petals, and now track the Sun. As each day passes, a new species exposes itself.

Bluish-purple stalks and striated, green foliage point to two iconic medicinal plants – the Solomon’s seal and the false Solomon’s seal. The false seal dons a verdant, green stalk which grows one leaf at a time, where as the true seal unfurls telescopically from its lanky stalk. The true *Polygonatum* bears its flowering stems hanging at the bases of the leaves, whereas the *Maianthemum* only produces a flowering organ at the end of the limb after it has procured enough nutrients. The starch-rich rhizomes of the *Polygonatum* are consumed as a “potato-like food,” and the shoots resemble an “asparagus-like food.” Both plants have been used as various medicines by Indigenous Peoples. I pull out a rhizome of the true Solomon’s seal, and peel it to remove the skin and soil. I take a bite – it tastes slightly earthy and rooty with a floral note, and the starchy texture of a potato crossed with a pear.

In the lap of a boxelder maple, I notice a handful of arrow-like, kidney shaped, fuzzy Canadian wild ginger leaves (**figure 4.20**)! I scratch near the root to confirm. I bring my saffrole-saturated finger towards my olfactory cavity. It smells sweet, slightly herbaceous, clove-like-spicy, and Christmas-like-gingery. This is wild ginger! The rhizomes contain similar aroma-chemicals to the better known *Zingiber officinale* (household ginger), though both plants are genetically unrelated. Indigenous Peoples have historically used the rhizome as a seasoning, but recent chemical analyses have discovered that there is an unknown concentration of asarone and aristolochic acid present in







FIGURE 4.19 Left: botanical illustration of *Trillium Grandiflorum*. Above: botanical illustration of *Polygonatum biflorum*.

the rhizomes of the wild ginger, both of which are carcinogens. To eat or not to eat? That is the question.

Beside a limber clump of garlic mustard, I notice a distinctly purple-tinged plant with toothed, oppositely arranged leaves. I rub the leaves, unsure of what toxic element I am potentially making contact with. I smell the tip of my finger. Curry leaves? The discernibly pungent, slightly musty and astringent savour that I am nostalgically attached to – any time my mother would prepare a dish, curry leaves were among many other spices to form a browning base, accompanying cooking onions, cumin, cinnamon, cardamom, peppercorn, chillies, garlic, ginger and a vegetable oil of some sort. The concoction would perfume everything in its vicinity, completely assaulting the atmosphere, lingering on any textile article, only to be inhaled by an innocent bystander the following day. Upon further research, this is a woodland figwort, which has been used for detoxification of the body and skin disorders. It may also be used in incense.

My self-taught crash-course in botany is momentarily interrupted by the trance-like tap-tap-tapping of a couple of downy and pileated woodpeckers. Chickadees perform acrobatics between the nearby eastern pine trees, pecking away at the bark in search for an adequate insect. Among the evergreen needles, I notice a solitary chipping sparrow, basking in the afternoon Sun with his brick-coloured cap. Squirrels hued in a monochromatic rainbow slink along the crunchy ground-cover, startled at the sound of my booming footsteps. Even lily-of-the-valley shoots are lifting from the warming land. The forest is finally coming alive.

20-05-02

#### OUR LAST DAY

16:39  
17 °C/  
overcast

As each day passes, the few rainy pauses signal some new species of flora to erupt from the crust of the earth. In the valley of Walter Bean, a grouping of Dutchman's breeches have cropped up alongside the limestone alvars. The nodding, double-spurred, creamy, white flowers



**FIGURE 4.20** A botanical illustration of *Asarum canadense*.





**FIGURE 4.21**

A downy woodpecker (*Dryobates pubescens*) perches a beech tree in search of lunch.

are arranged in clusters on the leafless stalk, erect from the feathery basal leaves.

A handful of hooded jack-in-the-pulpits have also popped up from the scrubby floor, and are looking as skeptical as ever with their cloak-like hooded spadices (**figure 4.22**). Eventually, the hood unfolds to reveal a striated interior spathe (the “pulpit”), housing the spadix (the “jack”), which attracts finger gnats. The plant contains calcium oxalate crystals in all parts of the plant, which provides an intense burning sensation when consumed. The Indigenous Peoples would cook this plant and consume it as a peppery root vegetable, or would grind it into a flour.

Alongside the path, the melted snow reveals one of Walter Bean’s wetlands. Among the skunk cabbages, freeze-dried cattails, and sedges, an intricate clump of foliage attracts my eye. An erect bunch of pond water-starwort shares the small body of water with pond skaters and newborn tadpoles.

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A slate-toned shelf dresses the receding, buff Heaven-field. The Grand River lies crouched, imitating the floating plane, revealing the infinitely-ascending cosmos. The threshold of the shelf – once here – is now there.

As the Sun must sleep, I start approaching towards order & asphalt. Something so vulnerable, so guiltless, so naïve and virginal catches my closely guarded heart. The honest down and furry bottoms of the clumsily-nibbling Canadian goslings cease the moment (**figure 4.23**). As I approach ever-so-diligently, the goslings repel from me en mass – I receive cold glares from their aunts and uncles and I nearly defecate in my trousers. I watch as they waddle towards the River’s edge, and they hop in.

The Sun slumps past the low-bearing, slate shelf-cloud.



**FIGURE 4.22**

The herbaceous jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*) emerges from from the soil as the Earth warms.

For a moment, what was once a Pantone paradise, now lies in a deep, plum slumber. For a moment, the robins and grackles quiet. The River takes a rest from its dance. The coy squirrels perch at the crotch of a nearby maple or black walnut tree. They all bear pensive masks.

For a moment, it is still.

As the setting Sun inches deeper into its slumber, the billowing clouds opposite take on the infinite spectrum of Light itself. The lithosphere – us, the audience; our lights dim as to lend focus to the cottoned Heavens. I feel as if I am afloat. I am ascending towards the Heavens. Gravity ceases to function. I no longer exist in this world.

The salmon peaks of the stratocumulus clouds bloom into an assault of fruit and fire, bolstered against a backdrop of cold ice (**figure 4.24**). This is the end of the Earth's ritual. This is the end of Life. The forest will stop singing for now. Bloodroot cloister their stamens. Suspended moisture now finds itself able to tack-onto nearby cold surfaces. I am left depressed, as, in a matter of mellow minutes, the atmospheric inferno is extinguished by the recession of someone else's constellation.

20-05-04

#### THE PERCHED ROSE

09:13  
12 °C/  
clear skies

As the northern hemisphere tilts in favour of the Sun's generous warmth, the various subterranean plant embryos are in the process of being incubated. As each revolution of sunrise and sunfall endlessly transpire, the surface is greeted by some new Life form or another attempting to reach for the Heavens. The usual suspects are out scouring for breakfast: American robins rummaging for insect larvae, various species of sparrows trapezing from branch to branch in search of seeds, and common starlings annoying innocent passerby whilst adorning their speckled, iridescent coats of carbon-black feathers.

Skunk cabbages have now unwound their beefy leaves, and are scattered alongside the just-bloomed marsh marigolds, fresh common

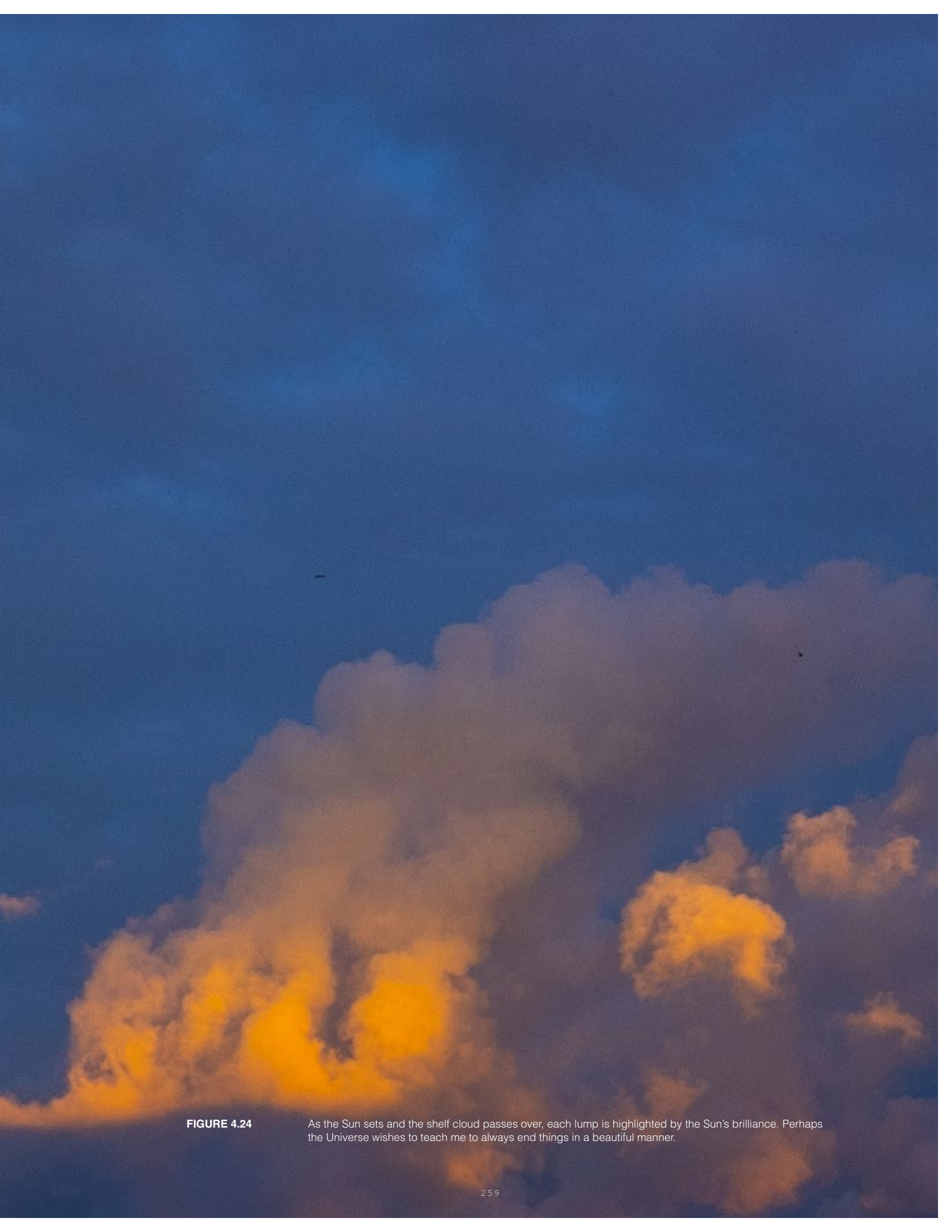




**FIGURE 4.23**

The goslings of Canadian geese.





**FIGURE 4.24**

As the Sun sets and the shelf cloud passes over, each lump is highlighted by the Sun's brilliance. Perhaps the Universe wishes to teach me to always end things in a beautiful manner.

wood sedges, and last year's flattened cattails on the wetland areas. The young leaves of cutleaf coneflowers and wild carrots start to fill much of the groundplane in areas which receive plentiful Sunlight. The tips of black willows and trembling aspens are starting to bud. Red-winged blackbirds perch atop dried common reeds and some cattail stalks, and orchestrate a symphony of somewhat metallic sounds – I am unsure whether they are greeting me or want me to leave. I look to my left, into the tangled abyss of the budding flowering dogwoods and cherry birch trees which cage me. A crimson-chested grosbeak, which I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting, greets my vision. The male, rosy-breast finds itself in most of the southern reaches of Canada during the breeding season, and arrives a few days prior to his female partner in search of an opening in a wooded area to nest, and some insects and budding trees to forage for nourishment.

20-05-06

## PROPOLIS EUPHORIA

13:30  
5 °C/  
cloudy

The last few showers have summoned great biodiversity. I make my daily gait through the wilderness. Much of the base is now crusted in patches of young common nipplewort. The early meadow-rue have now unravelled their once-eggplant leaves for a full delicate display of an olive-toned, lacy foliage. The hooks of low-lying black raspberry briars latch onto my technical Lululemon hiking pants. Barren strawberries have also made themselves present, and occupy level soil in patches – I am careful not to stomp on them. I notice a lonely, yet cheery stickywilly resting beside a fallen red oak log. The Japanese barberry, red elderberry, and evergreen gooseberry have now exposed their foliage – I await their fruiting bodies. I find a stout Japanese knotweed – what brings you here, knotweed? Common gypsyweed, greater burdock, and the leaves of the Canada goldenrod pepper the ground, alongside the ephemeral white fawnlily and purple deadnettle. I am elated to spot a stinging nettle bush! The flavour is said to be that of spinach laced with cucumber when cooked, and is rich in vitamin A and C, iron, manganese, potassium, and calcium. A staple in the Indigenous Peoples' springtime cooking and tea. As I reach the clear expanse of the forest, I notice the incredibly elusive, ivory head of a lone bald eagle! Amongst the awestruck emotion, I don't even think to take a photograph.



**FIGURE 4.25**

Skunk cabbages are now in full bloom, expanding to roughly half-a-meter in width and height. Pussy willows surrounding the wetland are also beginning to produce their flowering limbs.



# III

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ACT III

*The Arrival*





# CHAPTER 5

*The Seed*



**FIGURE 5.01** I scout the landscape in search of the perfect *place*.

THE RENAISSANCE MAN

20-05-07

FULL CIRCLE | SITE SELECTION

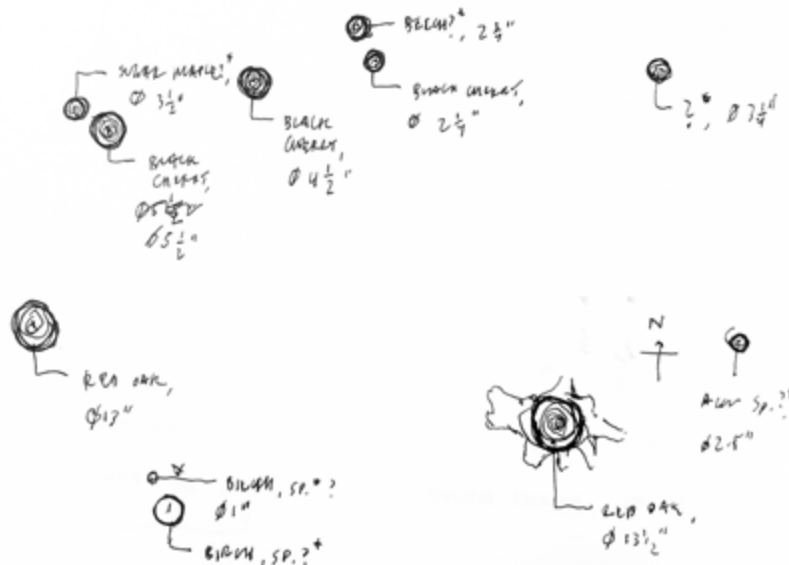
17:07  
11 °C/  
scattered clouds

I Trace along the subtle veins of kinetic flow in search of a *space* in Victoria Park, Cambridge, Ontario – in order to conceptualize a *place*. I osmose through the bramble, evading the many mayapple shoots and tiny trillium stalks that cross my coarse travel. I tread along the soon-to-bloom patches of raspberry briars over the course of a couple of afternoon moments in search for a sufficient site. A few chipmunks poke their white-and-black striped heads out from their burrows. They rustle along the crispy dry floor as the play hide-and-go-seek with each other.

As I spy on the miniature rodents, little do I know, I am actually the one being spied on.

May 7<sup>th</sup> marks the point in time where I locate a space. A place to make my own? A space to make a place. A point on a plane. The intersection of axes in a volume. I envision a dome-like structure reminiscent of the wigwam of the Anishnaabe peoples, bastioned from the laws of physics with tensile saplings and garrisoned from the elements with a scavenged-bark cladding. A moss carpet will divide my soul from my casket, and an aperture or two will allow for the Sun to penetrate into my space, waking my cold shell from slumber.

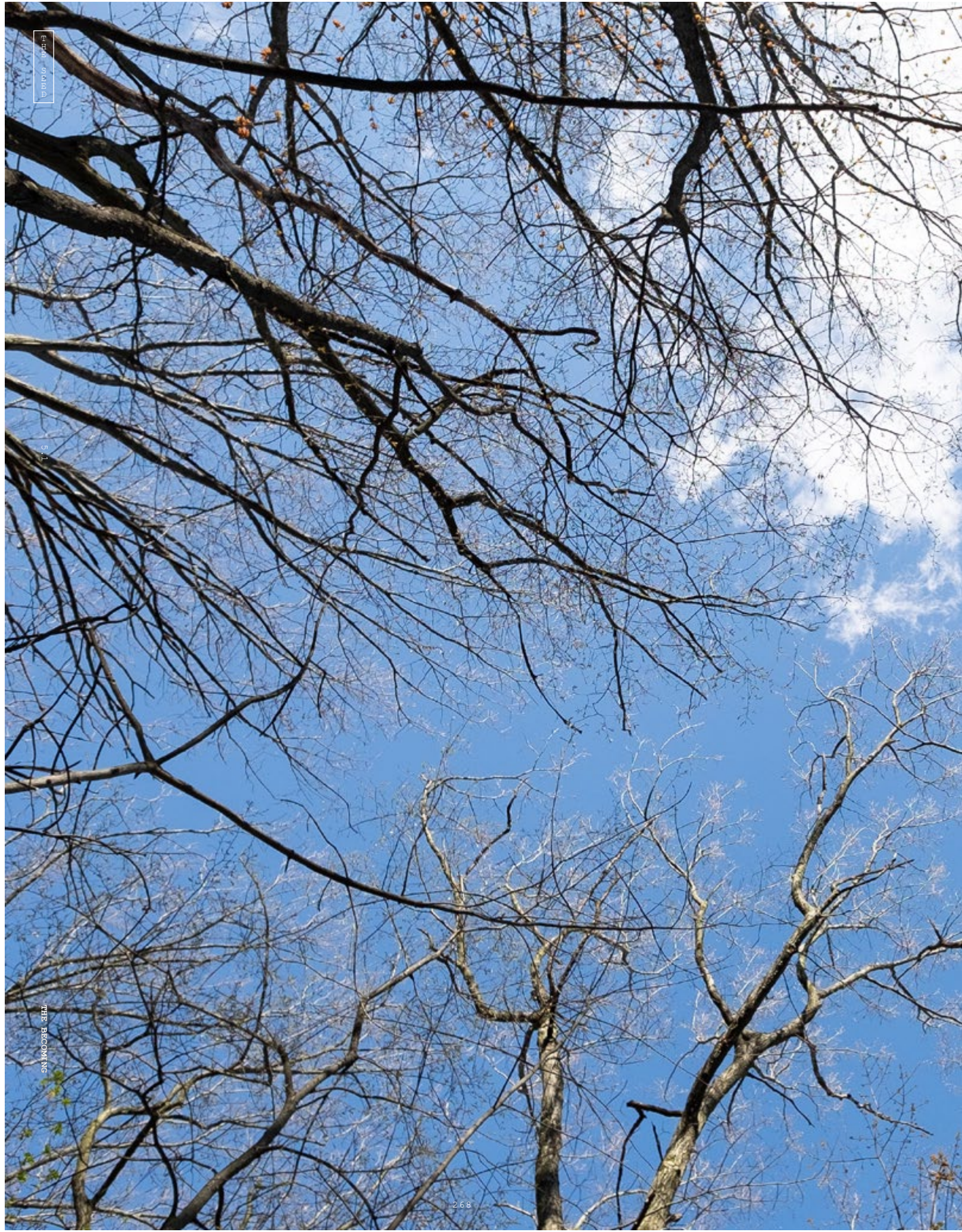
I map out the site, and proceed to excavate the footprint of the building.



THE RECORDING

5.1

THE RECORDING





**FIGURE 5.02**

The hermitage must not directly be underneath a tree, for falling branches may pose danger, the shelter may still take advantage of the canopy by placing it in close enough proximity to the branches to help with rainfall protection and provide shade.

20-05-08

15:07  
4 °C/  
overcast

## THE ENACTMENT | LAND PREPARATION

A film of parched and brittle red oak, sugar maple and beech leaves shield the mantle of pulpy and gooey brew of worms, larvae and decomposing material that hides from the eye. Overcast clouds don the sky in response to my disturbance of this sacred land. The sky and wind mourn for what is about to come.

To aid with the excavation of the land, I locate a fallen stick, registering a diameter of two inches. I take the first swipe; my arms engage in a dance of pivots and locks to send the first layer of leaf-crust acrobatic. A few swipes in, my stick briefly meets the light resistance of some string-like neon yellow mycelium (**figure 5.03**). Another swipe of the stick unearths yet another bundle of dried leaves, and displaces the cover of an earthworm and a few millipedes. The earthworms wring around as if they are a squids tentacle subjected to the infernal blaze of a steel wok in Osaka. The millipedes instantaneously contract into an endless spiral at the exposure of the Light.

Some black raspberry briars grow inside my space. I proceed to trim them, and place them in the omphalos of my boundary. At the ending of the building process, I will light a fire with all of my unused building elements during the closing ceremony, so I will leave all of the scraps in the center of my building. As I grab the base of the raspberry plants to trim them with my Swiss Army knife, I am pinched by their thorns. Even the gutsy raspberry leaves me with a memorable farewell message.

I am enacting on the Earth. This enactment will result in the death and displacement of my slimy brethren. This feels unjust. I am not used to killing with my bare hands. Perhaps it feels this way because I am taking Life without giving. Our first-world society is precisely that – the constant taking of lives for our own material prosperity. Perhaps, I should let the mosquitoes feast on my arm and buttocks in full gluttony. Perhaps, that shall restore the balance.



**FIGURE 5.03**

As I uncover earth during my excavation, I discover threads of mycelium and various insects.



THE WOODS

5.1

THE WOODS





**FIGURE 5.04**

The unearthed beginnings of the hermitage.

20-05-24

14:14  
28 °C/  
scattered clouds

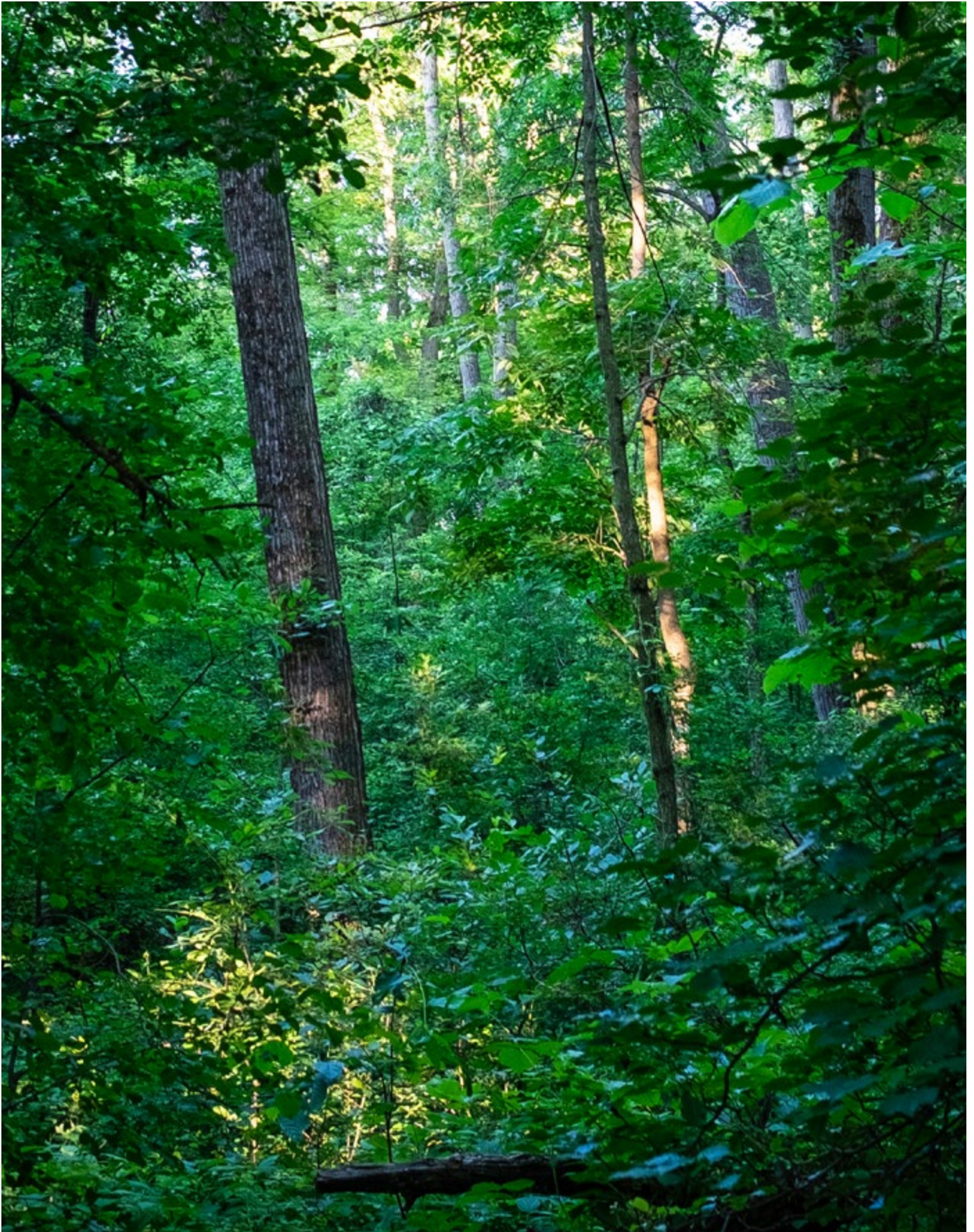
## LUMBERJACK | COLLECTING SAPLINGS

I return to the Wilderness after a much needed rest. During my absence, the forest has undergone a complete lush metamorphosis. Much of the canopy is now covered with these interesting green photo-receptive panels, which seem to be as delicate as silk and as turbulent as the soul of the wind itself. The introverted leaves of the Norway and sugar maples I remember a mere week-and-a-few-showers ago have now blossomed to stretch and spread for the Sun's exhaustive attention. Similarly, the spotted geranium, lily-of-the-valley, and woodland strawberries have finally found the courage to flaunt their delicate petals. As I bring my olfactory receptors close towards the pink, drooping and nubile bells of the deadly lily-of-the-valley, I am pleased by the uplifting and creamy floral aldehydes and ketones that have been the foundation of fancy, classic French perfumery – light, lush, fleetingly-fruity, though, never sharp.

The chipmunk population has exploded – they are chasing each other and dissolving into the briars and bramble, occasionally disappearing into their holes. I frequently hear their rustling between the leaves and their sparrow-like trill and I make my way along the site.

The flora of the Heavens has manifested in its primary tones – the red northern cardinal, the blue jay, and the American goldfinch. Each takes turns enunciating a forest spell, which occupies the distant upper-range in the melody of the Wilderness. A semitone lower, the rolling whistle of the pileated woodpecker breaks the small songbird ensemble. As the behinds of bumblebees buzz and meander around the cascades of the seductive flora, their pondering hum tremolos around my aura. As a breeze washes the canopy, a white noise fills the entire symphony with a supporting consonance. The spring I once knew so well is now transforming into summer before my eyes.

To frame the dome-like form of my dwelling structure, I need to procure tensile green saplings for their flexible and long quality. I take a long stroll, dreading the moment of my saw making contact



**FIGURE 5.05**

The lushness of the forest after good rain and warmth.





**FIGURE 5.06**

The tools of my trade. From left to right: a Sportneer compass, a Swiss Army fisherman's pocketknife, an Indian farmer's axe, a Primos folding saw, and a stake made from a maple sapling

for the slaughter of the first four- or five-year-old sapling. My options are: beech, black cherry, red oak, chestnut, sugar maple, red maple, Norway maples, hickory and black walnut saplings. After careful observation, I select maple as the sapling choice. In general, they fulfill the twelve-foot length requirement, and they are relatively straight. They are also among the more populous trees, with many seedlings populating the negative space of the forest floor to replace their soon-to-be decapitated siblings.

I locate my first *Acer saccharum* specimen to send to the guillotine. Yet again, I find myself in the position of committing murder. This is not like purchasing a pre-sawn, pre-milled segment of maple from Home Depot, but in the most true sense, it is. Similar to the oink-less sweet-and-smoky rack of ribs prepared to accompany an India pale ale, or the cluck-less breaded and deep-fried chicken leg with its signature blend of eleven secret herbs and spices, we are completely oblivious to the taking of Life. At the flick of the wrist and push of a switch, I retract my Primos folding saw and grab the base of the trunk of the sugar maple. My offset-toothed saw blade makes contact with the bark. I lightly score a mark at the elevation of where I will make the cut. I start working the blade into the *ao* flesh of the maple, cutting through both the sapwood of the tree and the tension in mind and soul. With a few strokes, I am halfway through. I move my free hand above the cutting plane, and pull the sapling towards the direction of the cut in order to prevent pinching of the blade. A few more strokes in, and I have made it through completely. I cradle the tree as it falls, without making a sound. There are a few appendages that I must also take care of. Using my Indian farmers axe, I coarsely hack away the limbs, revealing a flexible, slender maple sapling. Within minutes, the leaves on the dismembered limbs have gone limp – their lives taken and evaporated into the Heavens.

The clouds now guard the Sun. They stare at me in judgment. The robins seem upset. The red raspberries do not hesitate to sting my legs. I feel some guilt. But I remind myself that taking is a part of Life. I also remind myself that I must give back. But how? The clouds ease up, and the robins sing once again their cheery worm-seeking melodies.



**FIGURE 5.07** The 'stump' of a cut maple sapling.

20-05-29

## BUTCHER | PREPARING SAPLINGS

10:05  
26 °C/  
clear skies

I collect eight saplings for now – I need around twenty to thirty for the entire grid-shell structure, but am only collecting a few at a time to ensure that they do not dry out and remain flexible.

The bark must be stripped from each sapling to extend the life of the structure. If the bark is not removed, it may collect moisture and rot the sapwood itself. I find a suitable fallen tree to sit on and perch my saplings. I lay the sapling on my lap – I start with the base of it and work my way towards the top. I score around one forearm length's worth from the bottom, marking the section of the sapling that will be submerged into the ground. Using my Swiss Army pocket knife, I start swiftly shearing the grey bark, revealing an fawn-toned, *ao* sapwood. I start following the carver's rhythm.

Swipe. Swipe. Swipe.

As I wedge my knife between the bark and the wood, the bark neatly slips off. I run into a knot left from a limb. I grab my folding saw to flatten the nub, as the axing is not very accurate. I plane the nub with the saw, then fillet the sharp edge with my Swiss Army, leaving a fluid transition between sapwood and knot. I want to express the existence of the knots. In traditional carpentry, knots delineate an inferior member of lumber due to the high levels of stress around them. The occasional pesky mosquito approaches a vulnerable spot on my arm for to quench their thirst. I let them feast.

Swipe. Swipe. Swipe.

I continue to whittle away at the bark.

After around forty-five minutes, I complete stripping the first limb. I pay my respects to this tree that has sacrificed its life for this thesis.

I mourn.





**FIGURE 5.08**

A photograph documenting the processing of a sapling. The extra appendages must be hacked off, the bark must be skinned, and the ends must be charred.





**FIGURE 5.09** A completely processed sapling.

20-05-31

15:56  
14 °C/  
clear skies

## ACUPUNCTURE | FOUNDATION HOLES

The saplings must sit one foot inside the Earth to remain upright. A one-and-a-half-foot long off-cut is tapered with my axe to form a stake for pounding into the soil. Using the stake, I trace the exterior wall footprint into the soil – a circle with a diameter of twelve of my own feet. I then place my compass in the center to locate east – this will be roughly where my entrance is positioned. I trace a line from where the east and west axis intersect my circle, and another line for north and south. I mark out two points, offset perpendicularly by one of my feet, from where the coordinate directions intersect the circle – this is where the saplings will be inserted. I position the stake on one point. Perfectly perpendicular to the ground plane.

BANG!

BANG!

BANG!

BANG!

BANG!

BANG!

BANG!

I wedge the stake in a foot deep. As it is friction-fit in the Earth, it is difficult to remove. I proceed to do the same for the hole opposite.

20-06-01

19:52  
20 °C/  
clear skies

## BRICKLAYER | FORMING AN ARCH

I have prepared two saplings to penetrate the Earth for the structure. I insert the first structural member and, using almost all of my body weight, force the sapling into its new home (**figure 5.10**). A busy bee traverses around my site, thirsting for some pollen among the wild privet shrubs and honeysuckles, whose flora matter emits a fragrance similar to Kellogg's Fruit Loops sprinkled on a bed of creamy purple magnolias. I then insert the second.



**FIGURE 5.10** The first sapling inserted into the Earth.

rustle

rustle

rustle

rustle

I cut a 12-inch section of 2-ply of jute. I slowly bring the tip of the first sapling towards the center – I don't want to snap it. I tie one end of the twine onto the sapling, approximately where this sapling will intersect with the opposite one. I then carefully bring the tip of the opposite sapling towards the intersection point, which lies directly above the east-west dividing line of the circle below. I try to tie them together... AHHH! I lose tension in the string, and both saplings fling away from me.

*\*rustle\***\*rustle\***\*rustle\***\*rustle\**

My ears perk up. The rustling melody I had been unconsciously registering in my peripheral hearing has transported to the forefront of my senses. I turn my head around a full 180 degrees. A fawn is casually nibbling on leaves of a beech tree (**figure 5.11**). Unlike typical animal behaviour, the fawn does not seem to mind my presence, and I am very much enjoying the company of the fawn. Casually, she walks from tree to tree, shrub to shrub, looking for a delicious herbaceous morsel. I take a moment to appreciate her beauty, and carry on constructing.

I continue by tying both saplings together using the twine on the initial sapling. This time, with the blessing of the deer, I am successful, so I proceed to secure the ends of the saplings to each other.

I complete this process for another two saplings, and I am left with two arches (**figure 5.12**).

rustle

rustle

rustle

rustle

rustle



**FIGURE 5.11**

The beginnings of the hermitage peaks the interest of a white-tailed deer fawn. I am delighted by its presence as it goes on foraging herbaceous foliage.







**FIGURE 5.12**

The primary set of longitudinal arches are completed.



**FIGURE 5.13**

A caterpillar of the gypsy moth (*Lymantria dispar*) catches my presence. Unfortunately, this insect is aggressively invasive.

20-06-08

METAMORPHOSIS | FLESH

15:44  
26 °C/  
clear skies

**L**ike the beaded curtains in a psychic's single-story office, I run into the fine threads of the bagworms and spiders, disdainfully. Every five minutes or so, I find a caterpillar latched onto my t-shirt, boot, arm or packsack. On the sensitive flesh of my inner forearm, their delicate spines give me a pleasant tickle. Perhaps my towering figure will give them protection from the bountiful American robin population rummaging through the leaf litter, searching for a quick protein-packed snack. Mosquitoes do not hesitate to subtract my iron-rich blood with their straw noses in accordance with our equal-exchange pact. Flies circle around my ears as if I am an indole molecule – perhaps they are attracted to the smell of my perspiration.

20-06-14

APPROACHING THE APEX | YOU

18:19  
17 °C/  
clear skies

The distant memory of a season not-too-long-ago, with a hard, cold forest floor coated in a dry deciduous leaf, hardwood sprig, and rusted pine needle rub superimposes my mindful state. The once plainly visible, furry conifers have now been forgotten behind the fog of green Norway maples and red oak leaves. The previous naked, barren forest floor has disappeared under the sponge-like textile of deciduous foliage of infinite resolution. The wind now tickles the foliage and this woodwind of a forest ensues its melody. As the Sun filters through the canopy, its silken rays allow for the flow of Life to approach the apex of the energy dance.

The patches of lily-of-the-valleys have dropped their creamy, pink bells – the robins rummage through them. False Solomon's seals have awoken their flowers at their telescopic ends; soon they will bear fruit. The forest is now adorned in lush ornamentation. Bath asparagus now bloom striped, white flowers; trailplants tuck themselves underneath fields of young black cherry and white ash shrubs; the woodland figwort have now taken on a grass green hue, and nestle themselves amongst meadow onions and wild sarsaparilla – perhaps I can craft a thirst-

quenching root beer! A lonely gem-studded puffball proudly positions itself in a plot of porous peat, and its neighbouring Robert's geranium blooms and nettle-leaved bellflowers offer the puffball welcoming company; a dwarf honeysuckle offers shade to the towering stinging nettle, the broad arctic coltsfoot and the frail common fleabane – few patches of ground-cover are fortunate enough to be showered with His warmth.

To capture this dynamic dance has been proven to be extremely difficult – well, impossible. Capturing the subtleties of how the air transforms from a frigid eau de toilette into a verdant extrait de parfum, or how the leisurely journey a woodland strawberry travels to cloak its receptacle and achenes in its petals in order to summon a sugary fruit, or how the evolution of an infantile gosling into a honking Canadian goose – how can I convey this feeling to others? How the eruption of *Morchella americana* adjacent to a fallen elm log after a dense shower cools down the warming soil, or how the trout lily which only radiates for a mere two weeks before its saffron-steeped filaments and mottled leaves disappear without a trace, or how the towering height an erected spotted geranium flower achieves as it reaches for the source of li[-ght/-fe] – you have to be here for this. That tickling sensation as the Sun peeks through the shady canopy for a quick sip of warmth as October approaches November, or the chipmunks playing tag to secure a position on the dominance hierarchy, or the red-tailed hawk which remains invisible to the eye, yet strikes both fear and awe to the soul – no one hears the song of the wild.

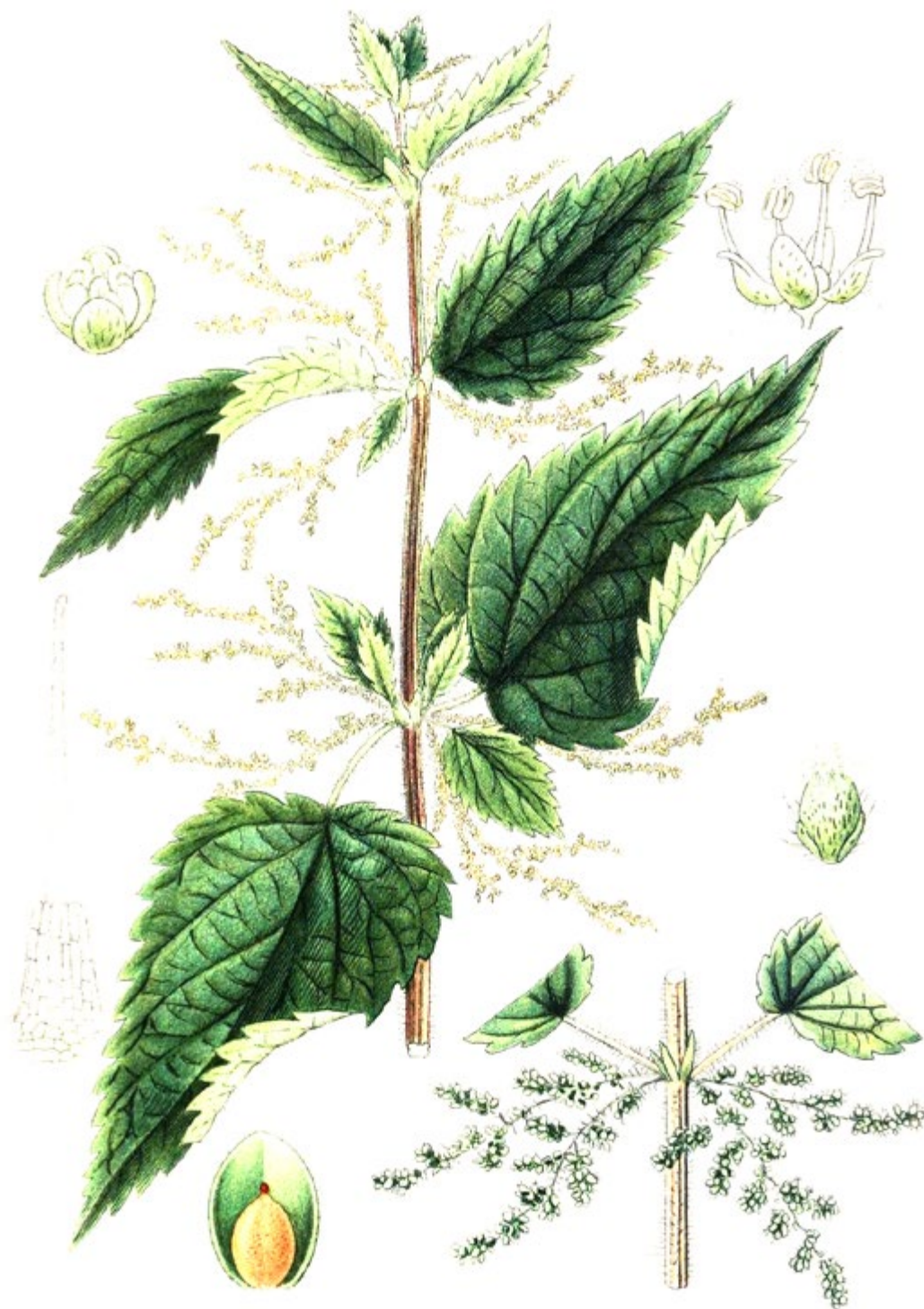
20-06-17

LI [-GHT/ -FE]

06:55  
26 °C/  
clear skies

I awaken early today, so by 06:55 AM I arrive at the site.

I close my eyes and attempt to meditate. As I breath in and out, I melt into the forest – the boundary which divides myself from what is not myself appears to dissolve. Though the forest speaks in a thousand voices, it is quiet and serene. I am aware and I hear each voice – I then



**FIGURE 5.14** A botanical illustration of stinging nettle.





**FIGURE 5.15**

The forest becomes increasingly intense as the days pass.



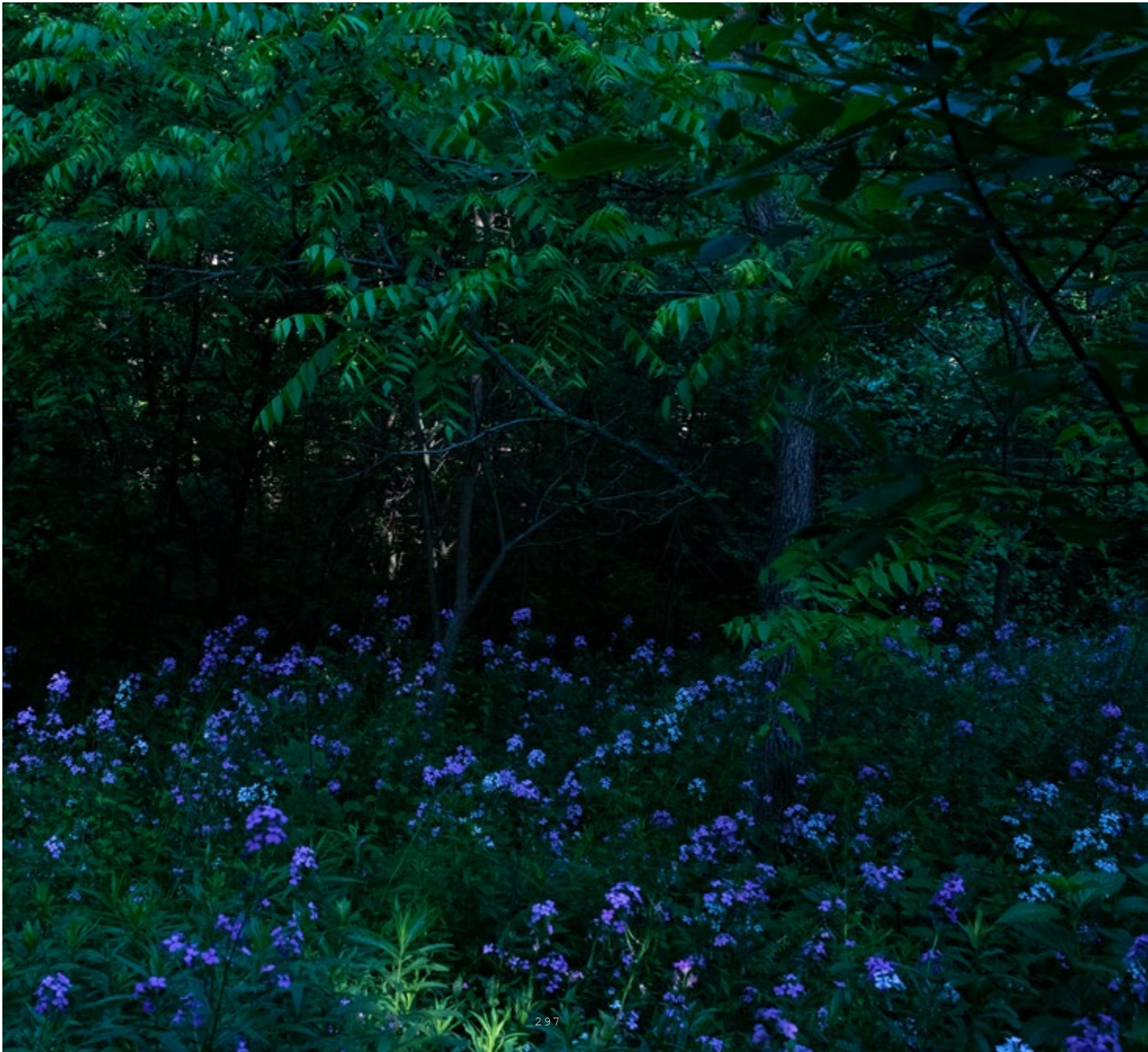
5.2

THE BECOMING



**FIGURE 5.16 (LEFT + BELOW)**

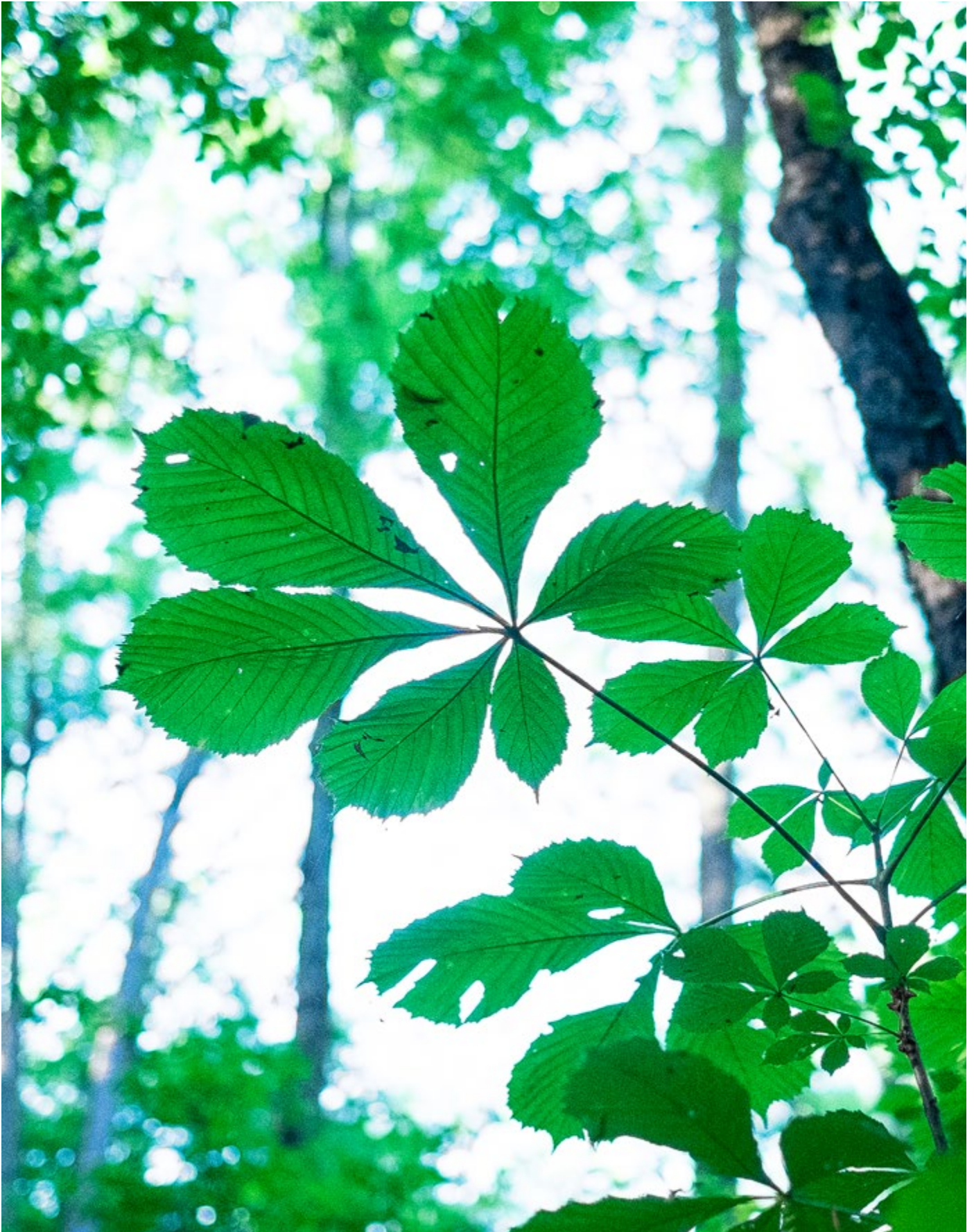
The dame's rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*) seeks refuge underneath endangered butternut (*Juglans cinerea*) trees.



find myself in each voice. The innocence of the nuthatch, the ignorance of the mosquito, the ferocity of the wind – I become whole with this symphony of lifeforms! I see white, and then I visualize a pearl forming from a drop of the ocean's water. The drop of water is what I use to focus, and the ripples in the water are a reflection of my awareness. The pearl is beauty and Truth.

As the Sun rises a few inches, the newly blossoming tops of red, red raspberries and dame's rocket are illuminated in a golden hue, inviting pollinators to suckle on their sweet ambrosia. Solomon's seals are beginning to bloom as they weave between the fruiting lily-of-the-valleys and flowerless Canadian goldenrod. A lone American chestnut tree shoots through the ground cover greets me with its open, five-leaved palms; it is a delight to see a chestnut tree in the wild as it they are exceedingly rare, with an estimation of only two thousand trees left in Canada due to an invasive fungus known as chestnut blight having annihilated their population (**figure 5.17**). A celandine waves its lobed leaves at me, so I timidly wave back – it contains many alkaloids which may poison me if I do not tread with caution. Alongside the celandine, the uncommon water-dragon entices me with a citrus-like aroma; a smooth carrionflower giggles as it catches me in the water-dragon's fragrant trance, though I suspect that the carrionflower is a tad bit jealous.

Today, the Sun is relentless. It appears to want to char my already chocolate skin. It has not rained it a while, so the forest lags on. With high temperatures approaching upwards of 30 °C, I am having difficulty getting tasks completed during this inferno, even under the shade of the red oak canopy. I drink plenty of water, take frequent rests, and strip off my musky, sweat-drenched white cotton t-shirt, though it seems the Sun is not forgiving this week. I attempt to skin my maple saplings under the cloudless sky, but do not make much progress.



**FIGURE 5.17**

A lonely, young American chestnut tree (*Castanea dentata*). Though, due to its age, it appears to have been planted by a human, it is still uplifting to see such a rare tree surviving in a natural habitat. I make sure not to even touch it, as I do not wish to disturb it.

THE SEED

greater plantain

Roberts geranium

garlic Mustard

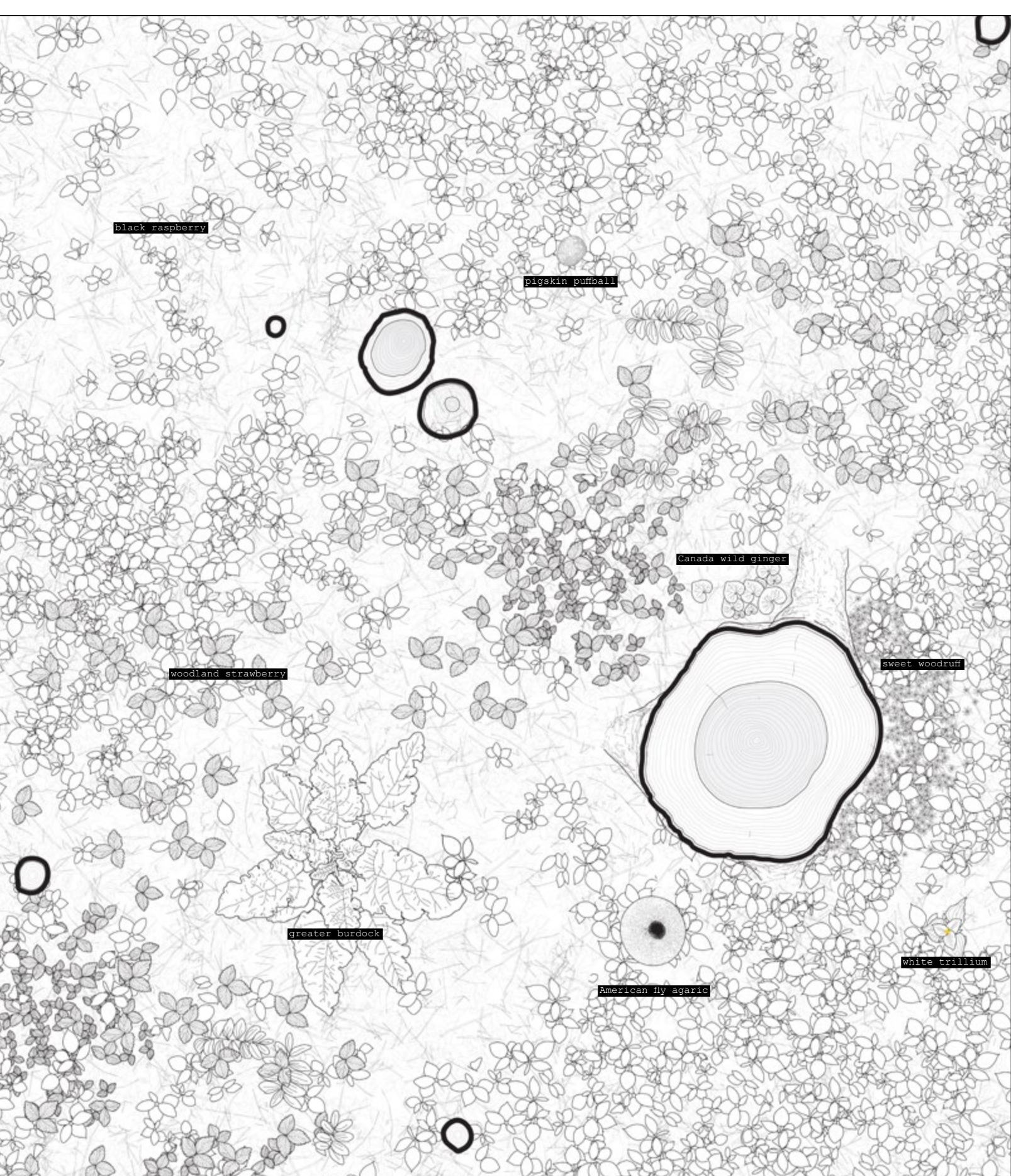
evening primrose

Soloman's seal

THE BEDDING

wild geranium

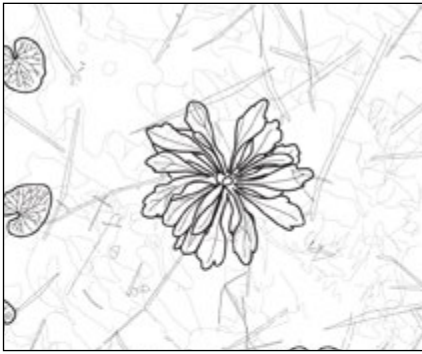




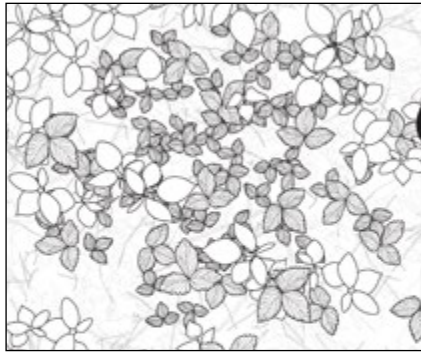
**FIGURE 5.18**

A floor plan of the forest floor of Victoria Park. Numerous species of flora and fungi are represented, and yet only make up a small fraction of the species found here.





***Erigeron canadensis***  
(Canadian horseweed)



***Fragaria vesca***  
(woodland strawberry)



***Galium odoratum***  
(sweet woodruff)



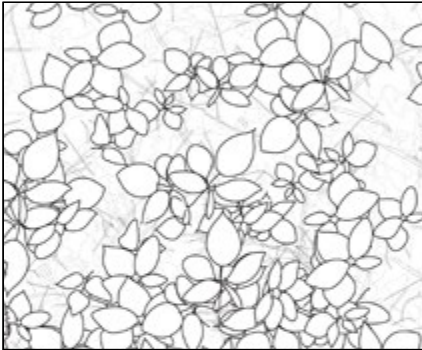
***Lapsana communis***  
(common nipplewort)



***Oenothera biennis***  
(common evening-primrose)



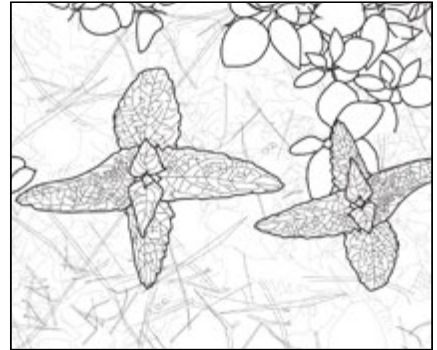
***Petasites frigidus***  
(Arctic sweet coltsfoot)



***Rubus occidentalis***  
(black raspberry)



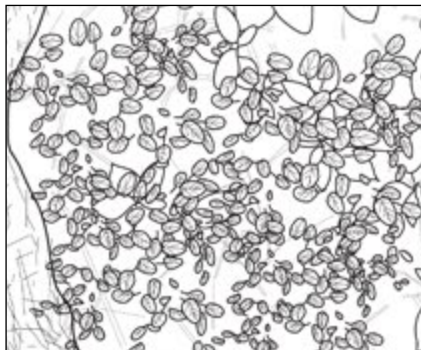
***Sanguinaria canadensis***  
(bloodroot)



***Scrophularia nodosa***  
(woodland figwort)



***Urtica dioica***  
(stinging nettle)



***Veronica officinalis***  
(common gypsyweed)

**FIGURE 5.19**

The various plants that can be found at the site.

20-06-25

15:53  
24 °C/  
broken clouds

## THE APEX

Finally, rain!

The showers during the last few days have brought forth an onslaught of biotic phenomena, and has nudged Life to prosper. The Apex has arrived. The native eastern enchanter's nightshade takes refuge amongst the plentiful St. Benedict's herb, perhaps to help ward away evil spirits. The fragrant, flowering panicles of the invasive European privet glow in an innocent off-white – the delicate coumarin-laced towers of woodruff flower in a similar, more minuscule manner.

Solomon's seals have now begun to fruit – bunches of tiny, green berries dangle from the leaf axils beneath the stem. Though the rhizomes and young shoots of this plant are edible, the rest of the plant, including the unripened and ripened fruit, is not. The similarly-looking false Solomon's-seal is also fruiting, though at the ends of the plants' stem rather than in bunches along the underside of the stem. They are starting to ripen slightly sooner than the true Solomon's seals, and are, though in poor taste, edible, nonetheless. Petals of raspberries now have dropped to the forest floor; perhaps their young fruits are the perpetrators. Soon, I will be able to snack on the red and black berries by the thousands! Similarly, the woodland strawberries have begun to produce pale, green, hairy-looking fruit. A lonely black currant grows alongside a patch of its prickly gooseberry brethren; I hope to feast on these fruits of the *Ribes* genus by the thousands, as well. The mayapple fruits have ripened. Resembling the skin of a wrinkly citrus, the fruit is surprisingly edible – the entire plant apart from the ripe yellow fruit, though, including the seeds, is highly toxic due to its podophyllotoxin content, possibly causing death. Even the consumption of the fruit, in large quantities, can cause poisoning. A colony of ear-like brown cup fungi listen to my whimpers as I prick my thumb attempting to shove the limb of an invasive Japanese barberry aside, and a grouping of dead man's fingers fungi point and laugh at my pain, while the crown-tipped coral fungi sits on its decomposing oak log throne and finds amusement at my expense. The edges of early meadow-rue leaves





**FIGURE 5.20**

Top: Solomon's seal has begun to fruit, and bears unripened, green berries dangling underneath. Bottom: crown-tipped coral fungus (*Artomyces pyxidatus*) latches onto a decaying log.





**FIGURE 5.21**

Left: macro photograph depicting textured surface of a gem-studded puffball mushroom (*Lycoperdon perlatum*). Above: dead man's fingers (*Xylaria polymorpha*) creep up from underneath a fallen oak log.

now appear to be transforming into a pale green hue – it appears that they will soon cease to Be. Pixels of the mayapple’s large leaves are also turning yellow – they, too, will soon cease to Be.

I return to the site and install two more arches perpendicular the first two. I am pleased with the progress.

20-07-18

#### THE LESSER

18:36  
31 °C/  
clear skies

I return to my site after a not-so-short hiatus. The scorching Sun continues to blaze on.

I enter the woodland following the usual ritual: I enter from the south-eastern mouth of the woodland, marked by the old American beech tree and a tall, tall northern catalpa. The catalpa has started to drop its mesmerizing flowers – like a honeybee, I buzz over to one of the white, tubular flowers and extract the last of its honeyed scent. As I release the flower from the grasp, I notice a large, rusty, cascading figure concealed behind a red oak tree. Enchanted by its allure, I approach it.

What the...?

I am struck with slight fear, which it itself brings bouts of excitement and anxiousness. My mind attempts to patch this mysterious object together to make sense of it. This sensation – a new, and *distinct thing* – elates my senses, and the dopamine content explodes in my brain. On an old red oak stump, I encounter a giant specimen of Berkeley’s polypore (**figure 5.22**). It is at least 400 mm in diameter, and 300 mm in height. Following the brief onset of fear, I also experience a rush of disgust with equal feelings of awe. I am shocked as this mushroom was not here a week prior. The caps feature cinnamon-toned concentric rings, and its pore surface is a creamy honeycomb lattice. A camel cricket observes me as I spend a few moments observing this humongous fungus. I then make my way over to the site.



**FIGURE 5.22**

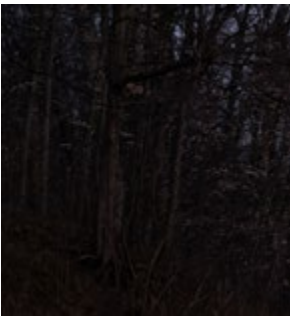
The strangely enormous Berkeley's polypore mushroom (*Bondarzewia berkeleyi*) grows from a long decayed stump.





**FIGURE 5.23**

The glowing, unripe berries of the alder buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*). Though unfortunately an invasive species, the tree has many commercial uses.



Recently, I have find myself plagued by some sort of dark energy, so I gather some leaves of St. Benedict's herb and scatter it around the base of a red oak tree and attempt to enter a meditative trance. I close my eyes and steady my breath. I navigate to the source of my painful throes.

There it is.

I locate the tether which ties me to despair. My chest turns to stone – I wish to scream and cry, for perhaps the physical release of this dark energy may help dispel this curse. I see a little, brown child. Tears stream down his cheekbones as he lays on a his side on a thin polyester matting in the darkness. He has, time and time again, wished for peace, for security and for strength. He feels inadequate and undeserving of the Earth's love. He feels alone. So, I hold his hand and put my arm around his shoulder. He cries again, though not with the tears of anguish, but now, with the tender tears of love.

"Perhaps, I lack discipline," I tell myself, the same as I have told myself time and time again. "Perhaps, I am not equipped to deal with the conflict of this world" – the ruminative trance continues. "Perhaps, I am fundamentally flawed" – ah, that feels oddly warm. These mental utterances and critiques of the self give me some kind of comfort, as outlining certain issues I have come to identify with helps with searching for the solution. Though, I have become obsessed with this fault finding, and I have become overtly judgemental of myself, too. I have become lost in my thoughts, lost in my very self. I paint this narrative – of being a completely worthless being which has been sabotaged from the very beginning – and I have come to identify it and let it trample over me. I hear one hundred voices of discouragement, and they keep me sick. I hear one thousand anxious voices in my head, though not one of them is my own.

Though, after ten minutes, I awake from this meditation, and analyze the chatter. They are just *thoughts*. Rather, this is just an illusory Life I have crafted and placed myself within. These are just the unfortunately



derogatory words and phrases and paragraphs and lonely nights that others have passed on to me due to their own forms of psychological malnourishment. Somewhere deep within me, I realize, that, perhaps merely given the gift of existence is prerequisite enough to be welcomed on the Earth, for Life in itself, the Earth, the Universe, and God Himself, have welcomed me to this very world.

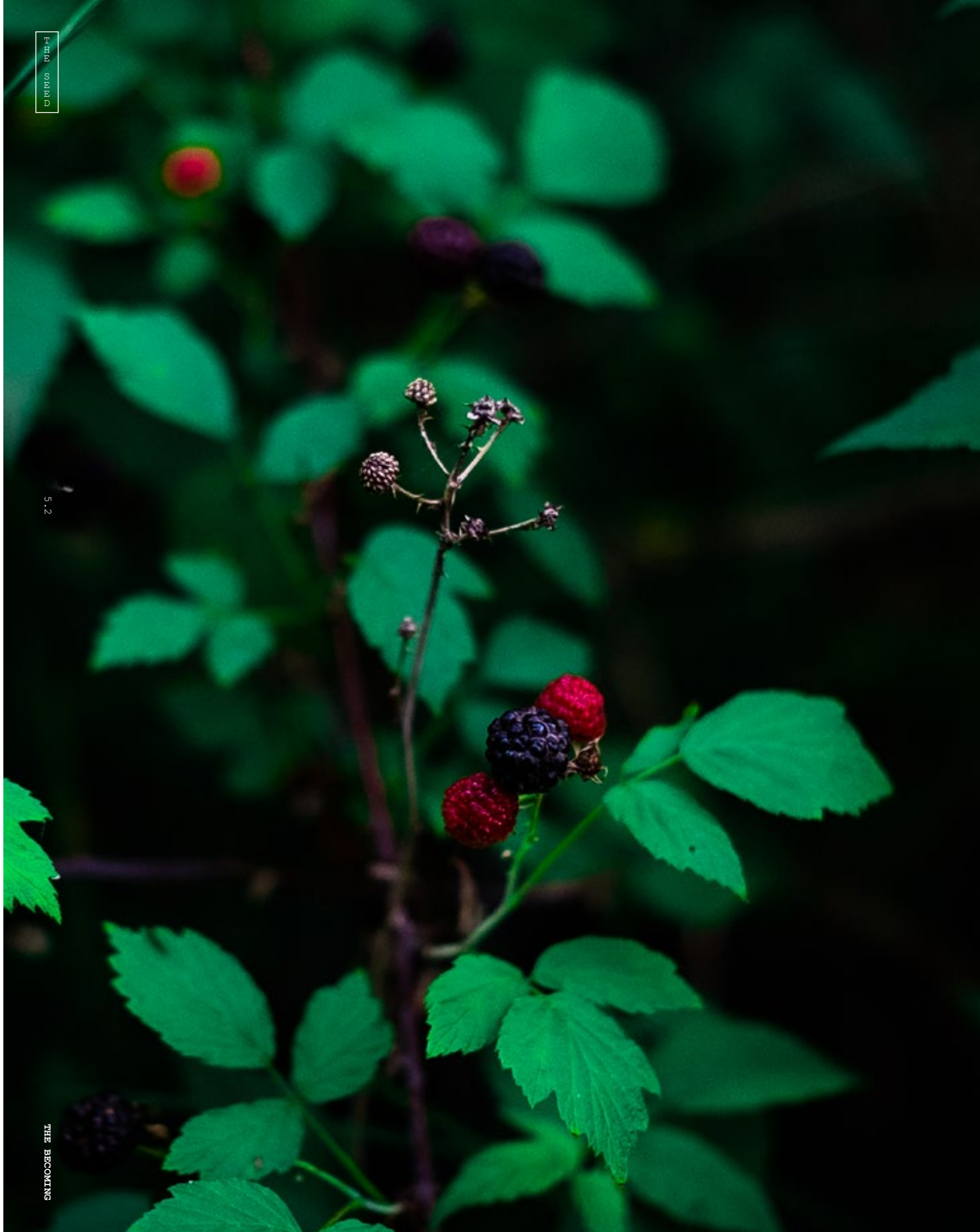
I continue onwards, locating the ideal, straight, young maple saplings to hack and slaughter for my hermitage.

20-08-19

#### THE FLOWERS, THE FRUIT, & THE FUNGI

18:29  
22 °C/  
broken clouds

The spiky inflorescence of a wild basil greets me to the site. I wish to collect a few of its aromatic leaves for making a refreshing tea, though I decide to leave it for the time being. A curious, erect umbel of flowers draws my attention – it is what is left of the wild ramp after the leaves have died back. The lily-of-the-valley has lost its fragrant flowers, and green, unripened berries have taken their place (**figure 5.24**). Make no mistake – as beautiful as they may appear with their appealing form and white detailing, they are just as toxic as the rest of the plant. Black raspberries have come to fruit, as well as the woodland strawberries and prickly gooseberries! The choice is mine – shall I pluck a red raspberry or black one (**figure 5.24**)? I select the black variant and examine it. It is a rounded, glossy, blackish-purple berry with about one hundred drupelets, and a powdery substance between each crevice. It is cratered from the portion attached to the receptacle, and is soft and squishy to the touch. As I have bruised some of the delicate drupelets, my fingers are stained in a rich, plum wine. I suckle on the leftover liquid – tart! I launch the berry into my mouth from the palm of my hand, and crush it with my ivory teeth. A discernibly wine-like sourness coats my palate, with fresh, fruity, sweet and berry-like notes that follow. I noticed some extra resistance from the grainy seeds within the fruit. I collect a few more raspberries, both red and black as to not discriminate, and consume them as well. I forage some gooseberries, too. Following the same palm-launching ritual, I thrust the thorny fruit into my mouth.





**FIGURE 5.24**

Left: the black raspberries (*Rubus occidentalis*) have finally begun to fruit, and I may now enjoy them for the next few weeks. Above: lily-of-the-valley berries (*Convallaria majalis*) on the other hand, are extremely poisonous.

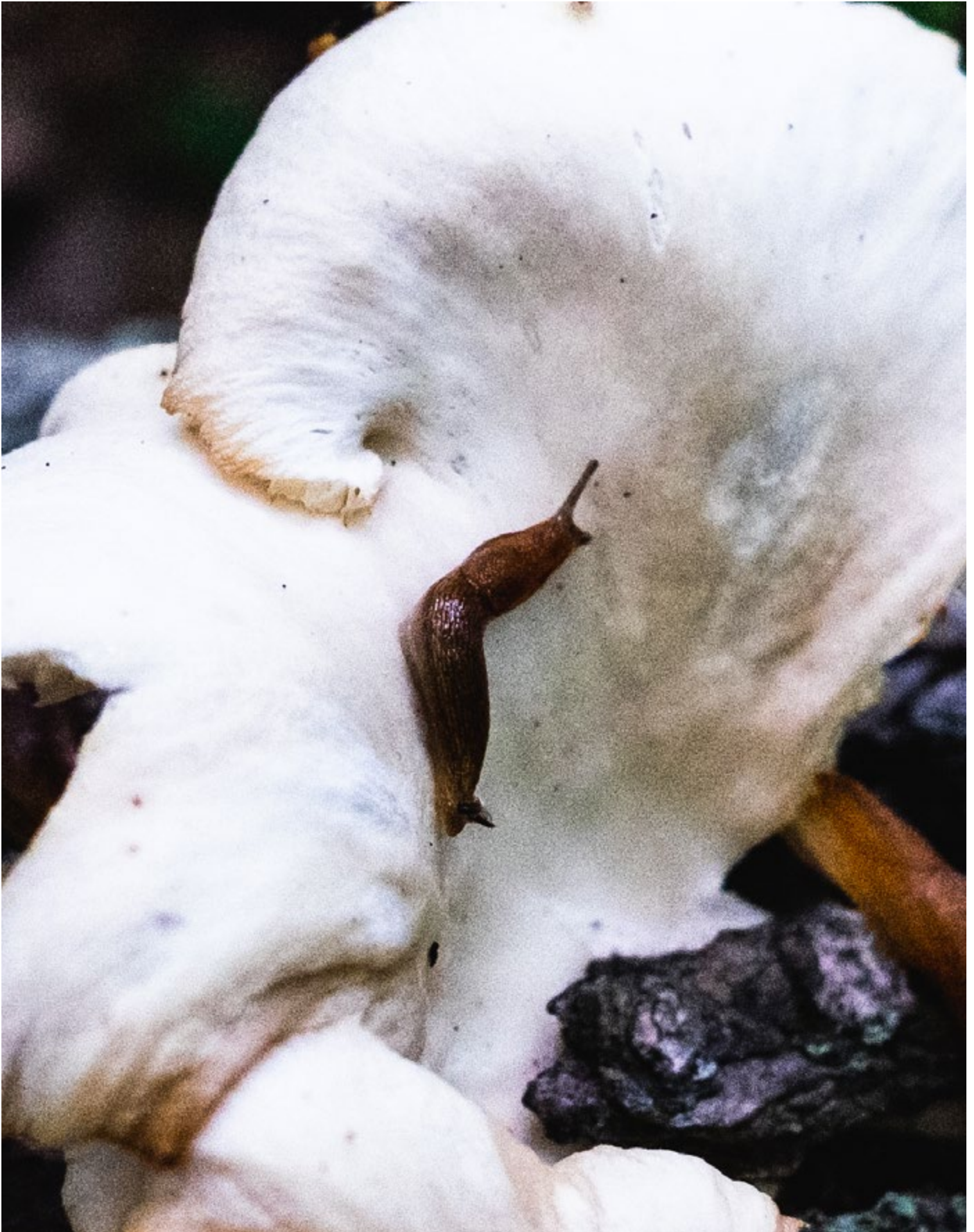
*\*CRUNCH!\** I am welcomed with a vegetal sour note, and an interior of seeds which constitutes for at least fifty percent of the fruit. Not as pleasant as the raspberry, but still intriguing.

Upon consumption of another prickly gooseberry, I contemplate our relationship with food. We are completely reliant on acquiring our food from convenient sources, and it seems to sever our primal, intimate and intrinsic relationship with the Earth. Often, the franchised and homogeneous grocery store chains sprinkled around our urban fabric house monotonous and mundane produce that has been selected and engineered for aesthetics and shelf-life, rather than being engineered for our nutritional and spiritual nourishment. Upon taking up the act of foraging, we engage and interact directly with the phenomena of nature. As I lick the last drops of purple juices from my fingertips, I am able to thank the generous Sun that gives to all Life, the water that quenches, and the soil that feeds our food.

Interestingly enough, I gander around the woodland – there appears to be a feast held by the high court of the wilderness. A xylophagous artist's conk fungus devours the lignin on a long fallen beech log, while a lonely garden slug munches away at a decaying tree oyster mushroom (**figure 5.25**). If it was not for the decay, I would have collected the mushroom for myself. Meanwhile, pinwheel mushrooms consume the remnants of wooden debris, while a ghost pipe leeches chlorophyll from a nearby tree (**figure 5.26**). The clusters of fall webworms encapsulate a crevice of the black walnut to snack on the surfaces of its leaves. I catch a red squirrel in his act of pure gluttony, eating away at a chicken of the woods mushroom at the base of a living red oak tree.

Wait a second...

Do my eyes deceive me? A fucking chicken of the woods mushroom in all its glory! There are two rosette-like fruiting bodies: one which the squirrel had been eating, and the other, a *perfect* specimen. It is quite young and untouched by any other being other than the very atmosphere around it. It is the *semialbinus* variant, with a lightly



**FIGURE 5.25**

A garden slug feasts on a decaying oyster mushroom (*Pleurotus ostreatus*).





**FIGURE 5.26**

The ghostly ghost pipe (*Monotropa uniflora*) eerily seeks refuge underneath a grove of American beech trees. These plants are white because they do not produce any chlorophyll – instead, they are mycoheterotrophic, sourcing their chlorophyll from photosynthesizing trees with the help of its host fungi.







**FIGURE 5.27**

Minuscule bark bonnet mushrooms tucked in the crevice of an old sugar maple tree.

orange coloured cap. It is a shame that I have no where to place it, currently. I shall return for you as well.

I am not a lonely feaster – one could say that the sole mechanism of nature is the process of feasting, where a complex system of exchange between various organisms and biotic matter give and take molecules and nutrients, and most importantly – energy. This is the dance of Life. One day, I, too, will confront death, and, I, too, will relinquish what remains of my chemical composition to the Universe.





# CHAPTER 6

*Reap*



**FIGURE 6.01** Various types of galls laid on oak leaves by gall wasps.

6.1

## GOD'S PALETTE

20-09-15

### THE RETURN TO THE EARTH

09:50  
18 °C/  
clear skies

As autumn approaches, the Sun's eternal, infernal gaze starts to quiet. As the Earth winds its way around the Great Sun, this part of the rocky mass tilts away from it, thus cooling the surface of the northern hemisphere. With this phenomenon occurring, I deduce that the Earth must, indeed, be spherical, and not flat. This gentle cooling signifies to the forest start to prepare for the slumber of winter.

Seeds must be deposited onto the leaf litter or into the atmosphere – the plants themselves reduce moisture and the receptacles lose hold, releasing the genetic code from their grand archive. The smaller rodents start to sway the limbs of the red oaks and the bitternut hickories to dislodge their fatty nuts – some may be consumed, some may be hoarded and hidden away, and some may be forgotten and sprout into new trees. Some of the oak leaves are sprinkled with various types of wasp galls to protect the gall wasp's larvae (**figure 6.01**). I do not think to go too near to them as to upset any of their parents that may be lurking nearby – I must mention that I have an intense case of spheksophobia. An American toad basks in the afternoon Sun, cherishing the remaining few moments of heat (**figure 6.02**). Bees and some species of butterfly prepare for their migration southwards where they can enjoy the nectars of the foreign lands.

The fungi – well, what better entity embodies the beauty of the ritual of the return to the Earth? They hide as cryptic beings through mycelium networks, out of sight, underground and through living and dead matter to fractionate molecules – the fruiting bodies are the harbingers of their Being and allow them to reproduce with spores. Fungi are just as enticing as they are grotesque. The dying materials of the forest have allowed the mycelium networks to fluster and produce fruits, which are a pleasure to observe. Clumps of orange mycena pepper the fallen oaks with their yolk-orange fruiting bodies, while giant puffballs, the size of cantaloupes, dot the underlying shrubbery with their mystical, white blobs. The staccato cap of the *Pholiota squarrosoides* assaults







**FIGURE 6.02**

An American toad (*Anaxyrus americanus*) ponders some of Life's eternal questions as it basks in the August Sun.

my vision with its dramatic appearance (**figure 6.03**), while the trembling merulius tucks away from sight with its timid, layered morphology. I locate some flat oysterling and lung oyster mushrooms to my delight. As innocent and graceful as they look, they are not for consumption. I am elated to see more choice edible mushrooms – the a handful shrimp of the woods, numerous wood blewits and a lone rosy russula mushroom. I contemplate collecting some shrimp of the woods to consume for later, but I decided to let them be as they are not very numerous, and I do not wish to disturb them.

20-10-05

## THE FALL: ACT II

07:37  
13 °C/  
scattered clouds

I wake before the Sun does. I peer out of my window, and cumulus clouds are doused in the fiery colours of autumn – they welcome to the new season. I look to my left, and notice that the clouds have fallen, and the Sun peeks through them.

I take a stroll around. Mist engulfs the landscape. It is quiet and peaceful. I do not feel the need to express the pure feeling of the warm Sun wafting over the brisk air with pompous wording – nor, do I even attempt at trying to express what colourful delight my eyes see and what tender quietude my heart is gifted. The stream of the Grand River flows gently, and a few mallards drift by. As I approach the River, a cooling sensation surrounds my body. I wish to weep, I wish for everyone to experience this, not blindly, but mindfully – perhaps we could all, then, feel the love of the Creator. Streaks of the Sun's luminescence caress the ridges of eastern white pines and spruce trees through the misty fog. The silken web scaffolding along a common teasel collect the humid dew from condensation, as does the pads of a lonely common mullein. Clouds lazily drift along the sky, borrowing various colours of the spectrum from the Sun and the River. The stark trunks of paper birch and trembling aspen seek resistance from the shadows of the underbrush. On top, though, lies a relentless fractal kaleidoscope of cadmium red, cinnabar rust, bright vermilion, pumpkin orange, cashmere saffron, Alphonse mango, sulphur yellow, mellow turmeric,



**FIGURE 6.03**

A spiky *Pholiota squarrosoides*. The appearance of these mushrooms signify the return of autumn.



© 2014

6.1

THE BECOMING



**FIGURE 6.04**

Fall-time foliage with varying coloured leaves of the different maple species.

1000000

6.1

THE BECOMING





**FIGURE 6.05**

A fall photograph of a trembling aspens (*Populus tremuloides*) colony.







**FIGURE 6.06**

Overlooking the Grand River with a curious sunken cloud hovering above.



6.1

THE BECOMING



**FIGURE 6.07**

Fog piercing through a coniferous canopy.

20-10-14

14:30  
15 °C/  
thin clouds

THE FALLING ACORN

and fawn ochre impose upon a cerulean sky. The death of these leaves sends a static chill down my spine – perhaps this is the woodland’s final dazzling performance before Her slumber. Worry does not exist here, just awareness, beauty and love.

*OUCH!*

An acorn falls on my head.

The air is still and cool – pellets of acorns hail from the canopies of red oaks as the bushy-tailed, earth-toned rodents forage them for fat and protein. Autumn has brought with it a spectacle of fire and ice. The floor of the now wilts as it once again approaches death and dormancy. Many organisms must procure enough resources to outlast the winter. I must do the same, as I will become very depressed and ill, soon. The floor is dotted in the rusted, oxidizing leaves of Norway maples and black cherries, with ochre-beech and canary-walnut leaves as accents. Acorns adorn the damp and limp forest floor by the thousands, hoping to one day grow as old as the elders they come from. Hundreds more of the pure, ivory, gem-studded puffball fruiting bodies crop up alongside the other hundred bonnet mushrooms. Fallen galls of the gall wasps larvae also garnish the leaf litter – in the following spring, or the spring after, or, the spring after that, they shall emerge, pupated.

In the distance, I hear the shrieking of a red-tailed hawk; I have yet to see her, though her cries echo through the columnar forest. She watches every one of my steps; she places her eyes everywhere. I believe her to be the guardian of this woodland. The sprinkling of salt and pepper squirrels strike me with suspicion. My ears are cold. The sharp utterances of the distant blue jays pierce the wilting and rusty foliage of the canopy. A downy woodpecker catches my hearing with its pulsating pecks. My eyes trace the twisting, arched limbs of the flowering dogwoods and I spot the spotted woodpecker assessing the



**FIGURE 6.08**

An eastern grey squirrel processing an acorn to prepare for his pre-hibernatory feast.

lanky trunks for nutrition. The woodpecker is working in a reversed fashion – he tap, tap, tap-tap-taps then blindly hops backwards, as if the tree itself has a segment of the woodpecker’s genetics encoded in its form (**figure 6.09**). He is not very shy as he traverses from dogwood to dogwood, limb to limb, in search of a wriggling meal.

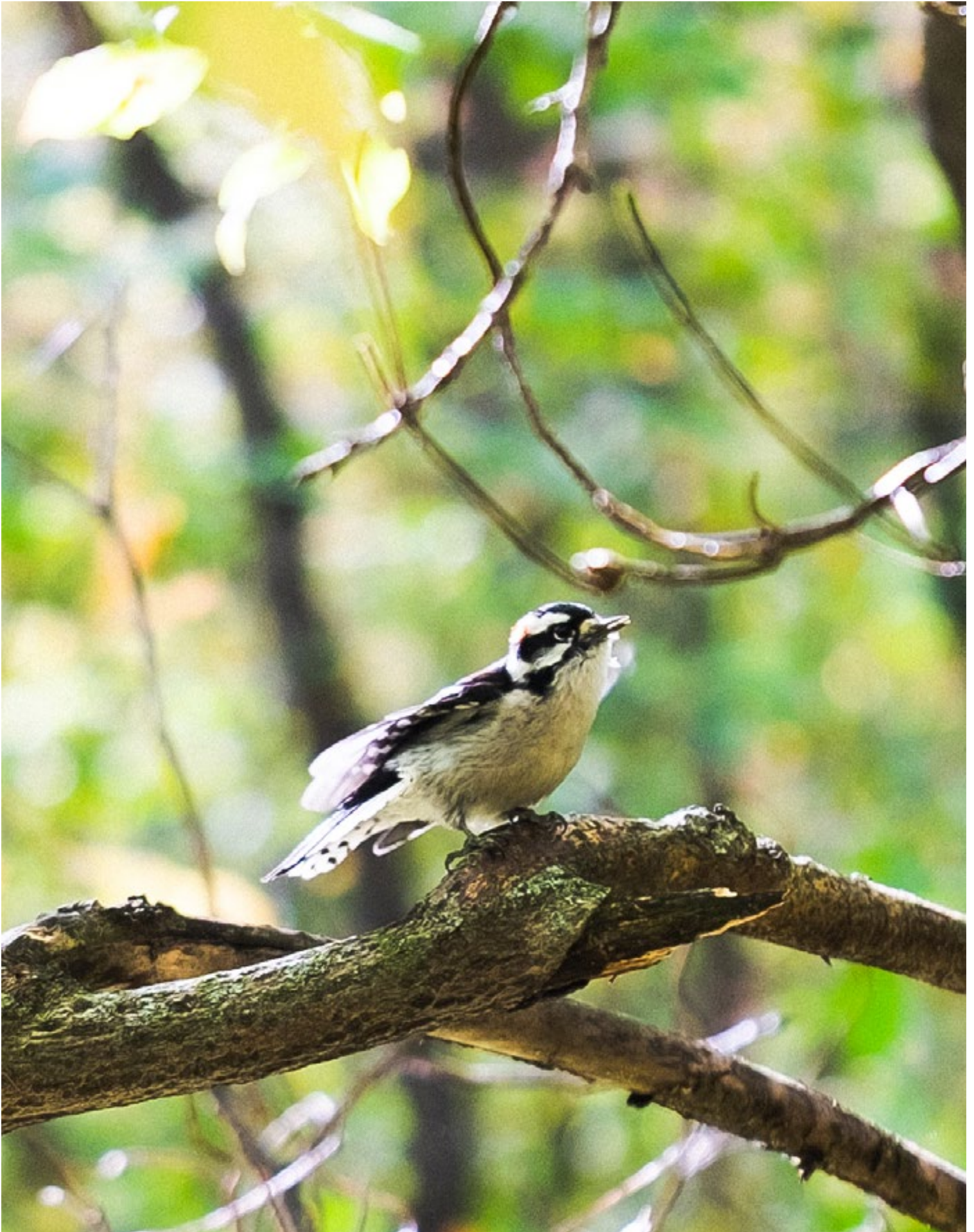
What is that?

rustle  
rustle

A bushy tail fluttering amongst the decaying leaves of the raspberry briars catches me off guard as I continue to whittle away at a maple sapling. The tip of the tail is white, and it is no squirrel or chipmunk. A flash of red emerges from the bramble, and swiftly perches on a fallen oak log. His chic, crimson fur coat sits in stark contrast with the rusty, green leaves and the dark grey trunks. His brushed tail paints the environment with soft blood. I am lost for words, as I have encountered a red fox! No, rather, he has encountered me. As he gracefully strides along the log, he takes a moment to lock eyes with me. I am not scared, though, I am anxious. I carefully reach for my camera, as I do not wish to startle this beautiful fox, and thank myself for attaching my longest lens. I am lucky to capture the fox in its pursuit of its pre-hibernatory meal. Within seconds, he vanishes.

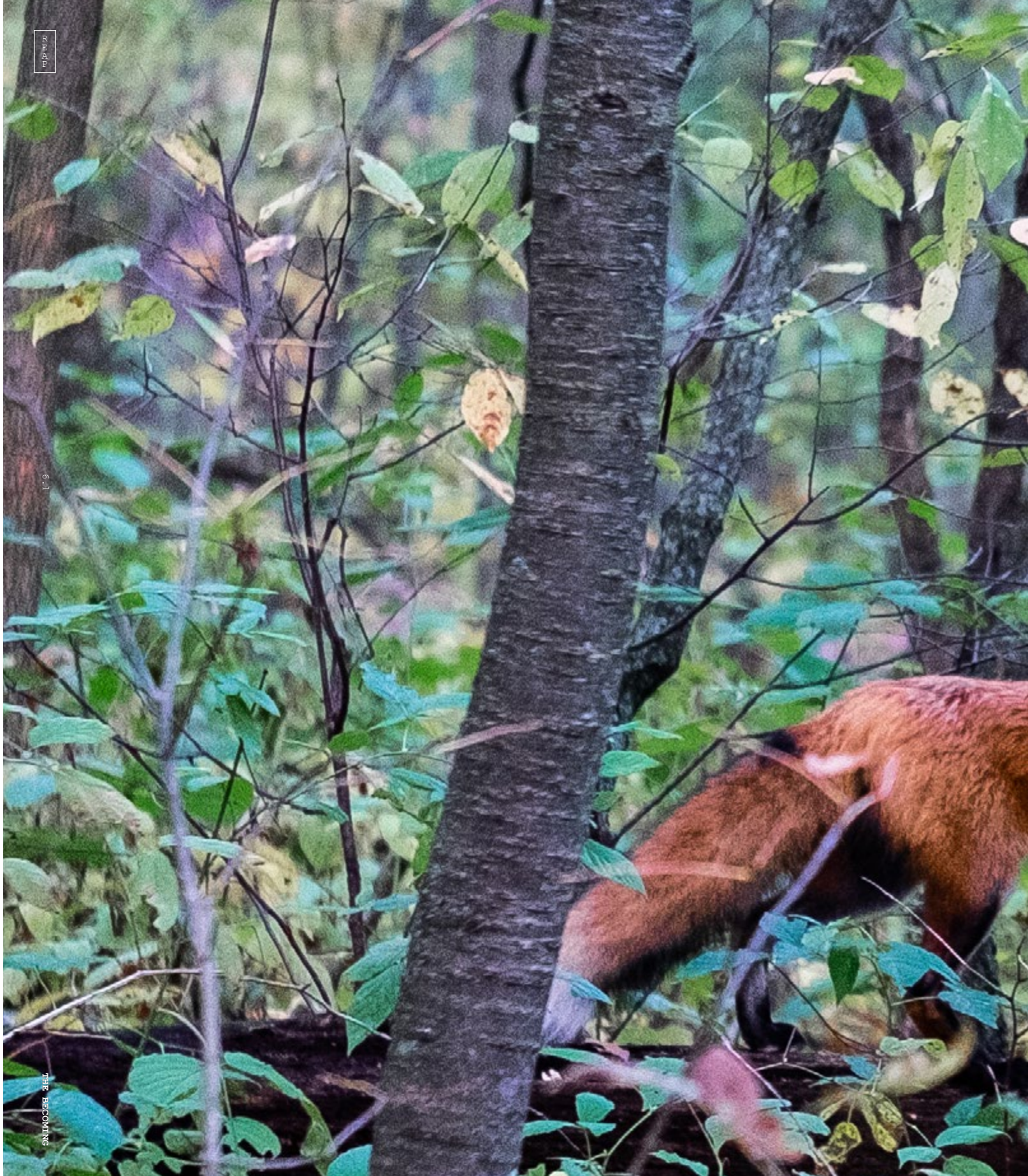
rustle  
rustle  
rustle

I continue to carve the sapling.



**FIGURE 6.09**

A downy woodpecker flitting about the dogwoods.







**FIGURE 6.10**

A majestic red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) timidly watches me as I whittle a maple sapling.



**FIGURE 6.11** A resinous polypore fungus (*Ischnoderma resinosum*) complimenting the red fur of the red fox.

20-10-26

OXIDE | ALCHEMY

4:09  
8 °C/  
overcast

On this very overcast day, I am joined by Vishakh and Nima – my two brothers-from-other-mothers – to assist me with the construction of my dwelling. It is a shame that neither Julian, Edward, nor Tahir could join this escapade, as they are off living their best lives in other parts of the world. Vishakh is a walking encyclopedia – he knows something about everything. Nima is a wizard with electronically devices – there was a time when my computer was behaving erratically. He merely touched my desktop tower and the issue disappeared.

First we sit and chat for a while as I brief them on today's goals. Having them in my company is a meditation unto itself. Then, we take a brief stroll through the forest to document.

A quite large resinous polypore clings to a small decaying log (**figure 6.11**). It is about a foot wide. The underside is a white pore surface, which is slightly dewy due to guttation, and wraps over to meet the deep, blood red surface. It exudes a sweet, anise-like odour. According to some studies, the mushroom may help inhibit growth of cancerous tissue. We run into the interestingly-named fried chicken mushroom, densely bundled up against itself, with species of sweetbread mushrooms and a lonely honey mushroom nearby. All three of these mushrooms are edible, though, we decide to leave them undisturbed as there are only minute fruiting bodies available. Tucked inside the crevice of an old sugar maple tree, we spot the microscopic bark bonnet mushroom. They are translucent, cool-white all over, and are roughly two millimetres in diameter. They are quite adorable. Buttery collybia are scattered around the forest floor, and they have grown quite large as there has been a good showering recently. A few hen of the woods have cropped up, tucked under a fallen oak log. We locate some black witches' butter – a bouncy, wrinkled, gelatinous fungus – on a fallen eastern hemlock branch, along with a tessellation of stark, beautifully intricate hammered shield lichen (**figure 6.12**). Near the centre, a cadmium yellow hue finds its home, and as the lichen spreads





**FIGURE 6.12**

A kaleidoscope of colour exhibited by the hammered shield lichen (*Parmelia sulcata*).

outwards, it takes on a grayish, blue-green tone with light grey edges. I decide to collect this to take home and further examine, though as I turn it over, a blackened garden slug feasts on something. I decide to leave it be, and put it back.

In the thicket, I notice a fuzzy-looking, white object. I momentarily leave Vishakh and Nima to uncover this mystery. The thorns of the raspberry briars catch onto my technical pants, though it does not bother me. The remainder of the wilting stems of the Solomon's seals snag my Nike SFB boots, though it does not bother me, either. I trample over some sphagnum moss and crush the decaying debris in my path beneath my feet. I reach my destination – marked by that sole white entity – with clumsy demeanour and disregard for the series of traps along the way. I am delighted to see the pure, crystallized, lattice structure of a coral tooth fungus! Better yet, there are two fruiting bodies! It is as white as the snow, and is constructed with a framework of coarsely toothed branches. I pull out my Swiss Army pocket knife and slice the mushroom from its nodule. I place it securely in my backpack, and reunite with my brothers. The following day, I fry it up with some bacon fat and enjoy it alongside French toast. Crispy and nutty.

We return back to the site and get right to work. I have some fresh saplings prepared from the previous days, so we begin to put together the skeleton of the dwelling. Nima grabs my Fujifilm X-T1 camera, and starts firing off photographs as Vishakh and I fumble to hold the saplings together. First, I puncture a couple of holes where the designated saplings are to be inserted. Though, as I have kept my stake lying in the wilderness, after a few strikes, it snaps in half along the grain. I locate one of the unusable saplings, saw off a foot and a half long section, and hack it at the end to form a taper. With my new stake, I return to acupuncture the surface of the Earth.

BANG!

BANG!

BANG!

BANG!

BANG!

BANG!

BANG!

BANG!

BANG!

BANG!  
BANG!



**FIGURE 6.13**

Process photographs taken by Nima as Vishakh and I tressen the processed saplings into arches.







**FIGURE 6.14**

Visualizing meditation and sin.

As the stake is now penetrated inside of the Earth, half-a-foot's worth protrudes outwards. I wiggle it around to ensure I have enough clearance for the saplings butt end, and yank out the stake as if it were Excalibur. Vishakh hands me a processed sapling, and I wedge it into the Earth using all of my body weight. I preform a few jumps to ensure it fills the entirety of the hole. We do this for a few more saplings. Vishakh helps hold to opposite facing saplings together, and I proceed to tether them to each other, fusing the two saplings into another arch. For members that lap, I use a common whipping knot. For members that intersect, I use a variant of the surgeon's knot. As we complete this for several more arches, Nima assertively snaps photographs. Before we knew it, we achieve roughly a 50% completion of the structure. As it starts to slightly drizzle, we pack up our things and head to civilization.

20-10-31

THE GEMINI | BIRDS

10:46  
4 °C/  
overcast

I return to the site with only Vishakh today. Today is a simple day. It is quite cloudy, yet the Sun peeks through on the brief occasion. It is becoming slightly chilly, though our hands are warm enough to engage in the detail-oriented work.

As I depart elsewhere to collect some more maple saplings, Vishakh is processing the remainder of the saplings from the previous days. He puts on his navy Beats™ by Dre™ headphones and starts to hack away. It is a repetitive, and quite mundane process, but Vishakh finds it a time to meditate and listen to some podcasts.

I traverse the woods and locate a few handfuls of saplings, and start my massacre. As around 30% of the leaves have fallen to the ground, it is ever-so-slightly easier to locate the appropriate saplings. Thankfully, unlike the elms and hickory trees, the maples still have yet to eject their leaves from their receptacles. I cut down six saplings, and arrange them in a common area. I can only carry two saplings at one time due to their varying lengths and, ultimately, their awkward weight distributions. So little by little, I carry the saplings back by the double.



**FIGURE 6.15** The final pile of processed saplings.

Just as I arrive back, Vishakh has nearly completed processing the saplings. As I have a spare Swiss Army pocket knife, I join him on the elevated, fallen oak log in skinning the saplings.

We complete skinning three more saplings over the next hour-and-a-half, as each takes about forty-five minutes to process, and proceed to continue constructing the dwelling. Vishakh points out a pair of gem-studded puffballs near the site, to which we are both elated to observe their intricate skin. We begin to frame out the entrance. A sapling is placed outside the circumference of the existing set of arches, and is brought over to the eastern end and lapped with the rest of the structure. We then array the framing for the remainder of the entrance, and fuse it the central arches. As I tie the twine around an intersecting joint, I accidentally slip and thrust the blade into my thumb (**figure 6.16**). I can now say that I have placed my blood, sweat and tears into this project.

75% of the structure is now complete, and what remains is the horizontal bracing members which will reinforce the structure from lateral stress and function as an element for the bark cladding to rest upon.

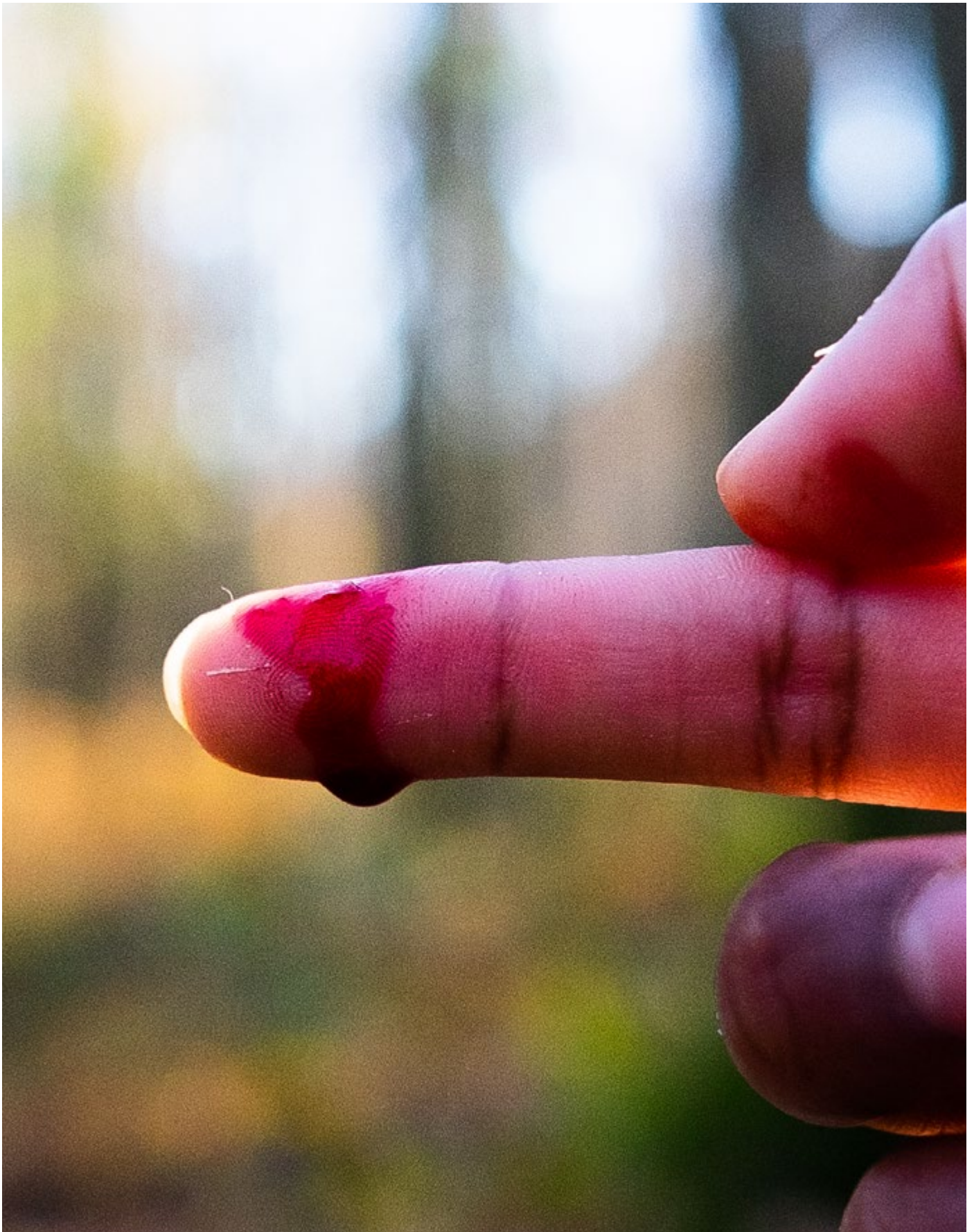
20-11-08

THE HORIZON | EVENT

14:11  
17 °C/  
scattered clouds

As we return to the site, we are greeted by a lone blue jay scouring the ground for sustenance. We take a few careful steps as not to startle him, but he notices us and ascends to the Heavens.

Again, Vishakh has taken upon the task of preparing the saplings, while I search for the remaining saplings to chop down. As we plan on finishing the structure over the next few days, I locate and saw down seven remaining saplings – five for the horizontal members, and two extra for lenience.



**FIGURE 6.16** Cut finger.





**FIGURE 6.17**

The frame of the hermitage nears completion.







**FIGURE 6.18**

Vishakh and I joining the arches to form the grid core frame.



6.2

THE BECOMING



**FIGURE 6.19**

Detail photograph of a common whipping knot to tie lapped sapling members together.

20-11-09

THE END | ?

14:22  
23 °C/  
clear skies

I carry back the saplings bit-by-bit, and for the remainder of the afternoon, we finish preparing all of the saplings (**figure 6.15**).

We return, yet again, to the site, in hopes to complete the structure. It is a warm day lit amply by the Sun. Even the Gods above have faith in us, today. We start with constructing the lower lateral brace. We tie the end of the first sapling to the interior set of arches that shape the innermost part of the enclosing, spiralling form. As I hold the sapling in place one-and-a-half feet from the ground, Vishakh uses the surgeon's knot to tie it to the next, adjacent horizontal member. From this point, we attempt to wrap the sapling around the first third of the helix, as if the sapling itself was emerging from the entrance. As this sapling is slightly thicker and is wrapping around an extremely tight curve, it takes an immense amount of strength to form it around the structure. Both Vishakh and I have to buttress ourselves to the ground and lean into the sapling to ensure we can wrap it around – with our combined weights, are just able to complete the arc. As we are putting every ounce of strength into holding the form, Vishakh hastily ties another surgeon's knot to secure the arc. We take a short gasp of air as we attempt to recuperate our strength. We then tie the horizontal sapling to the remaining vertical members to evenly distribute the stress across the joints. We continue this for the other two saplings, using all of our might to ensure a tight and taut wrap around the structure, and as the second half of the second hour passes, we complete the first lateral brace.

We move onto the higher brace, another foot-and-a-half up. Following the same ritual, we complete the second lateral brace. As the curve is much less dramatic, and the saplings slightly more slender, it is completed in forty-five minutes. Some of the structural form has warped, so we spend the final hour releasing tension in some areas, and adding it to others until we reach a satisfactory figure. We clean up the loose threads, and our structure is now complete! As Vishakh is moving to Toronto this evening, we return home and pack a rented cargo van with his belongings, and drive off to the city.



**FIGURE 6.20**

Completed hermitage frame. All that is left to do is to clad the frame in fallen oak bark and line the floor with sphagnum moss.





**FIGURE 6.21** The unexpected occurs.





20-11-11

6:66

-273.15 °C/

skies crying blood

I approach the site to commence my cladding practice, to adorn the bones of my survival shelter with a rigid skin. Upon arrival, I have come to find a catastrophe has been unleashed upon my near and dear structure. At first, I notice the saplings flailing up towards the Heavens, seemingly unfurled from their twine holding cells. Though, something is awry. The saplings have been forced to shear along their joints. The threaded joints by some means have been strenuously liberated from their taut configuration. Many of the members have simply disappeared, leaving nothing but an acupuncture penetration as a trace of their existence. Is this an act of God, or this is an act of consciousness? *I am dead*. We are all dead. Horrified and angered at the dismemberment of my divine creation, my eyes take on a blood-red shade. The Devil is consuming me. I recall the tools I carry on my person: two Swiss Army knives, one 8" hunting knife, a two-pound metal mallet, an axe and a saw. I think to myself, "why?" Playing the card of the victim, I succumb to the anger and sadness left by this destruction, and let it consume me momentarily. Though, I have a newfound awareness. I may let the darkness eat me alive, or I may stand up on my two feet and progress onwards. The choice is mine; mine alone.

Following this passage, one may find the final images and documents illustrating the completed mystic's hermitage. As it was unfortunately destroyed, I have resorted to graphic representation to attempt to translate the physical conception of the mystic's hermitage. Though it does not fully convey The Cynic's need for solitude, or the urgency of a survival shelter, or even the rawness of a wigiwaam, here, I have put forth my best attempt at representing the mystical essence of the hermitage. Perhaps if it were fully constructed, I would have been able to prepare a springtime wild leek and morel mushroom stew as the Earth would thaw, or I would, perhaps, have been able to collect focus as the central fire would keep me comfortable and alert. Though, as a coping device, I must accept that this was meant to be – meaning that somehow in the grand scheme of things, this tragic event had been orchestrated and composed in the symphony of Life and the Universe. Perhaps, this event is a reminder that Life must be taken as the current moment. Perhaps, this event has brought acceptance of uncertainty. Or, perhaps, this event has put me to terms with death.





**FIGURE 6.22**

Exterior rendering of the mystic's hermitage during the summer season. The hermitage was to be clad in bark from fallen red oak trees.





**FIGURE 6.23**

Exterior rendering of the mystic's hermitage during the winter season. The hermitage would ideally be insulated by bundles of cedar needles to help retain warmth during the colder seasons.





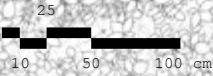
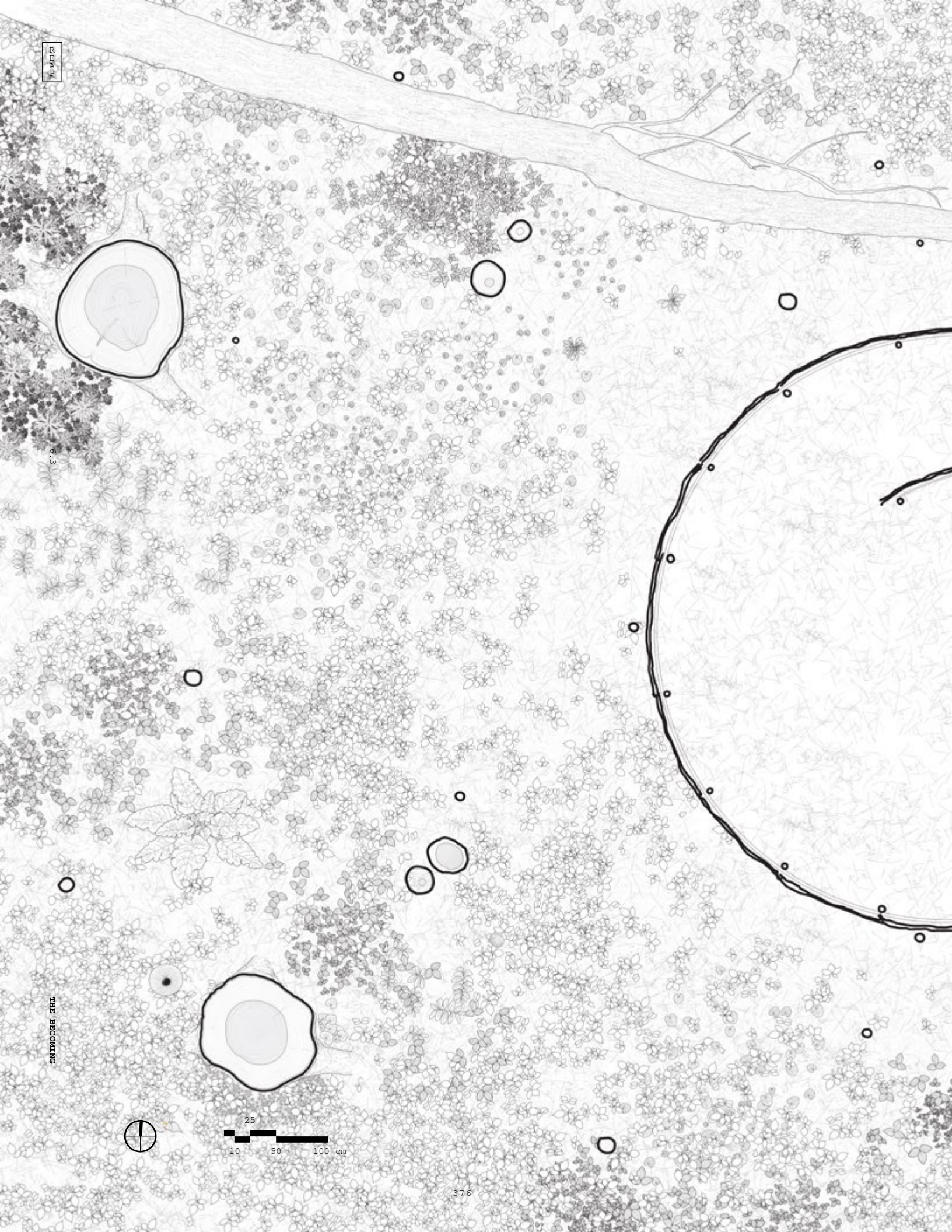
**FIGURE 6.24**

Interior rendering of the hermitage depicting the sapling frame, bench and fire pit. The floor consists of a sphagnum moss matting.

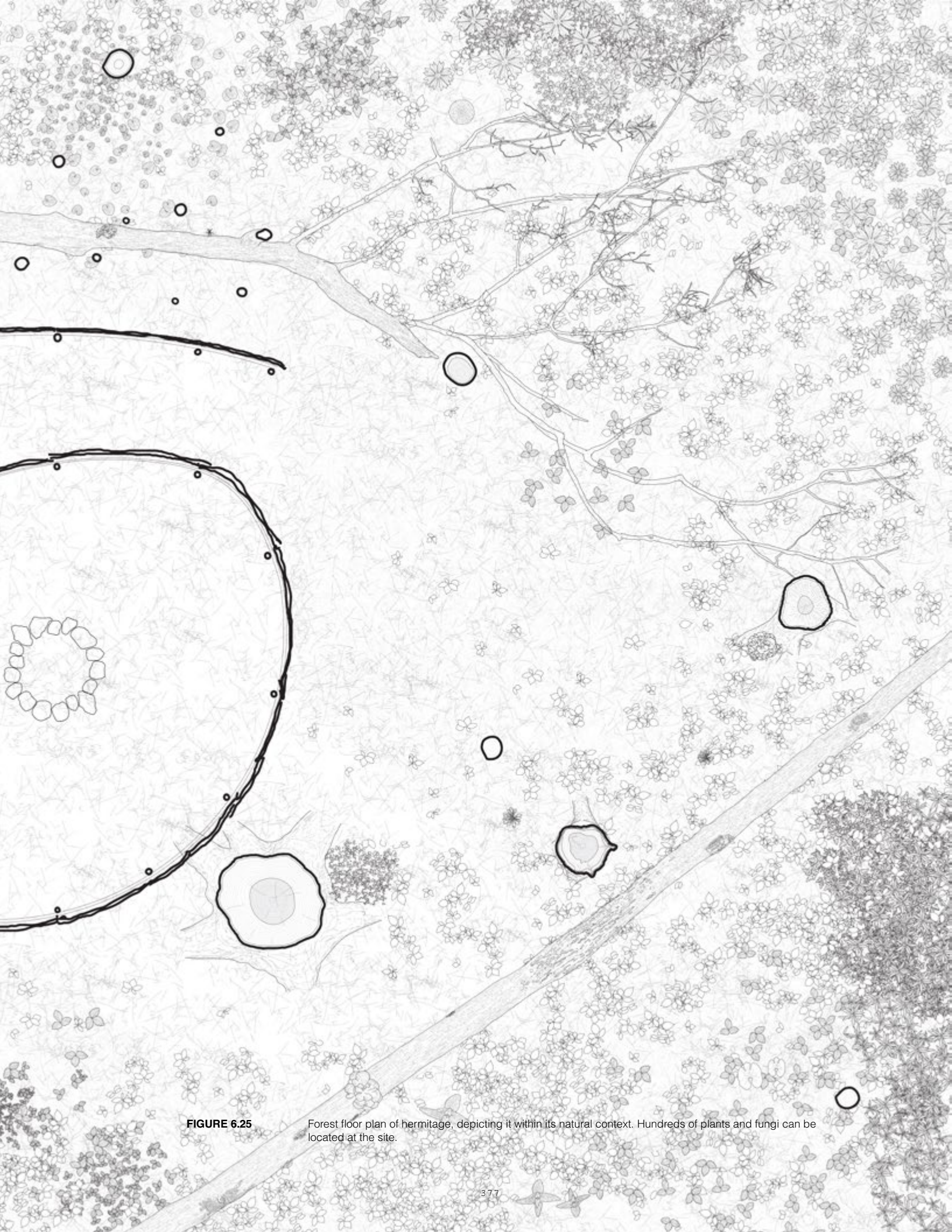
2010

6.3

THE BECOMING







**FIGURE 6.25**

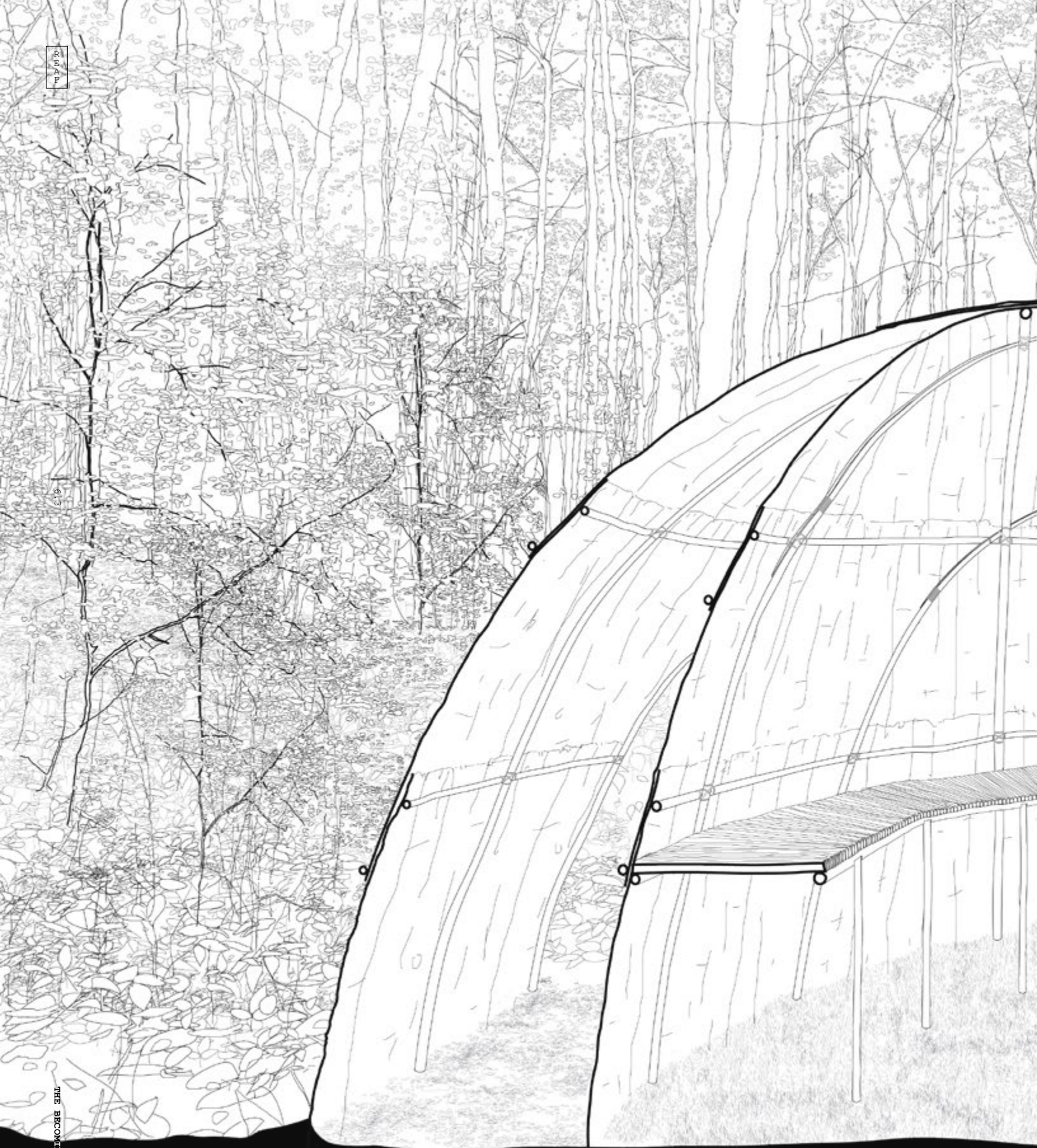
Forest floor plan of hermitage, depicting it within its natural context. Hundreds of plants and fungi can be located at the site.





FIGURE 6.26

Perspective section cut of the hermitage, looking north.



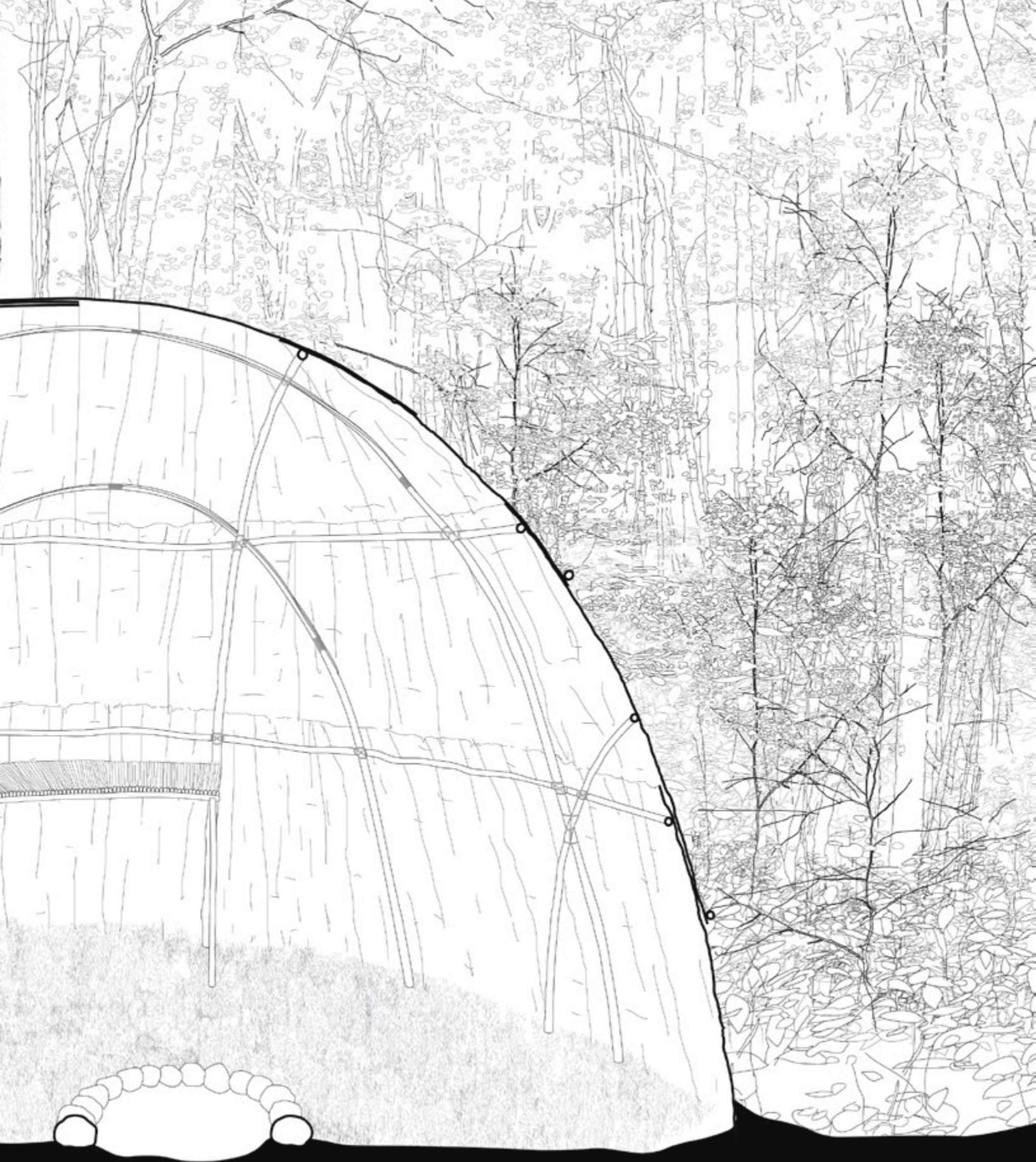


FIGURE 6.27

Perspective section cut of the hermitage, looking east.





THE RETURN





## GRATITUDE

**D**uring the very beginning of *The Becoming*, I had stated that I was lost somewhere in a fog-space – where my emotions would bubble away in turmoil, my psyche would fail to accept the shadow within, and with my awareness tucked away in the land of Elsewhere. I identified the issues of personal depression and collective nihilism as the antagonists of this thesis, and sought to heal myself, as the shamans once did, through engaging in the search for mystical experiences by crafting a mystic’s practice and hermitage dwelling in a nearby red oak woodland. From my previous experiences, the forest, an extension of the Universe and a portal to the divine, seemed to offer opportunities to heal the body, mind and soul through divine knowledge from these mystical experiences. So, in the autumn of 2019, I had awkwardly plunged myself into a nearby woodland, naïvely meandering around the tall, tall trunks of white pine in awe at the infinitude of matter and Life which teased my senses, stealing sips from the vibrant secretions flowing between the craggy limestone cliffs and fuzzy sphagnum moss to replenish my celestial thirst, and breathing in the fresh, verdant air provided by the sacred plants to exorcise the sadness toxins of the mind. As I would fall to my knees to honour the simple scent of the soil’s soul, I would become enchanted by the endless scales of Life emerging from the matrix of death. Flecks of white slime moulds even more minuscule than the neighbouring grains of sand would attempt to restore the mineral equilibrium of the forest. Lime-green sprouts of common nipplewort would emerge from the crevices of long-gone red cedar needles and cellulose-striated chips of unrecognizable logs burnished by oxygen and time. I was enthralled. And, I was curious.

I would often ask myself – *why?* Why does nature function as a reservoir for deep, cosmic power capable of sparking episodes of profound religious ecstasy? Why does this natural realm – insofar as the Romantics were concerned – offer the individual opportunities to heal, as if the Universe were somehow concerned with the wellbeing of its inhabitants? Why do we seem to gravitate towards nature for spiritual sustenance? Intuitively, there was a persuasive force pulling at the strings of my wounds, yearning for time to be spent in the forest. During moments of extreme tension, the forest offered a place of

escape, solitude, patience, stillness and awareness. Though, perhaps, the greatest gift amongst the others that nature had provided was the ability to find myself in the world outside of myself. For one reason or another, I had been conditioned to feel as if I was not seen or heard or sensed or loved from adolescence. I felt as if I was an Other; fundamentally flawed and un-belonging to this world. Though, as I fell to my knees to smell the soil or encroach towards a lone white-tailed doe or fling an acorn towards a chipmunk scouring the forest floor for sustenance, I found myself within them. On the forest floor, I would see the mineral deposits I would leave for the next generations of Life as my body would begin to wither away; the remnant carbon chains left by my skin and bones would nurture coming mayapple fruits; perhaps, another mystic would happen upon a psilocybin-containing mushroom inoculated amongst the grave of my husk and summon their own mystical experience in a time when such medicines are publicly accepted without consequence. In the mammals, I sometimes sensed a shy iris or two returning my gaze from the inky woods; I felt the ever-so-slight breeze of fanning pinnae attempting to position my clumsy gait; I felt the humid, moist wafts of snivels, scouting for my scent. Warmed by the rays of the Sun, piercing my frozen heart, I would accept the welcoming embrace of a black cherry trunk and I would let the clouds wash over my impure self. It was during these moments in the woods that I truly felt loved and a sense of belonging to the world outside of myself. To put it frankly, I felt an all-encompassing oneness cradling the hurt child within. Although I do not believe for mystical experiences to be the end-all cure for the melancholia I had been conditioned to accept (if that were the case, I would have finished this thesis months ago!), during those sweet, brief moments I had felt the symptoms of depression wash away in the presence of the ultimate dance of Life.

I believe humanity shares this kind of existential loneliness to some extent. Are we a lone planet aimlessly hurling around in an endless shadow? Is there meaning beyond the confines of social and cultural construction? Will one ever be able to be known in one's entirety? I believe it is this collective nihilism and loneliness that summons a culture so maliciously hungry for pleasure and

purpose. Our cheap vices, unfortunately, do not satisfy the cravings of true ecstasy, so some of us look to nature to seek pure Truth and chaos. While industrialization has allowed for humans to sustain the requirements at the base of the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs pyramid, we have been left blind to the dependence of cyclical balance of Life and the scalar consequences of rapid consumption. It appears that, as Nietzsche or Freud would put it, we have ever-increasing supply of order and safety, so much that we might drown in it. This is why it seems that humans tend to gravitate towards risk and discomfort – for the finest pleasure of true greatness may only be reaped by those who return from chaos states transformed and transcended. And so, I believe the collective soul craves chaos, just as a newborn craves milk from its mother, to nurture and temper the soul, and it is this very chaos that can be sourced from as much as a nearby conservation area. It is undeniable that each and every one of us craves greatness in some sense or another. Perhaps some become blinded by sin, perhaps some lack esteem, perhaps some need love.

Interestingly enough, during my time spent in nature, I had only come to find nature to be in *everything else*. Blurred have the boundaries become between nature and consciousness – all is the child in the eyes of the Universe. Prior to the construction of the mystic's hermitage, I held a misanthropic and pessimistic outlook on the human race, believing that somewhere along the line of processing nature into culture in the modern era, we had gone too far and lost the realm of the natural to the sterilization of society. I simply do not find this true, anymore. Constructing the hermitage with the simulated reduction of modern resources, I would often try to reconcile the realm of constructing an hermitage of the Earth, such as an ant colony carving and sculpting its nest from the soil, with the realm of constructing an hermitage of the ego or consciousness, where I have the privilege of constructing from abundance rather than necessity, bidding the hermitage to my aesthetic will. I have come to realize that it is a matter of balance – the monotonous narrative of assuming consciousness as intrinsically evil or parasitic as compared to the innocence of the noble savage character stock risks tribalism and does not seem to promote progress. After all, it is with the advent of such modern tools that I

may even express my hatred of consciousness, is it not? Perhaps it is a blight of being conscious in which we somehow find ourselves as both of nature, not of nature, and in a tension between nature and culture, and we must be aware of this burden, but not fall victim to it.

With the closing of this thesis, I close the pilgrimage and the journey to the forests of Cambridge, Ontario. Though, I was not able to complete the hermitage, imprints of my actions have been left at the site in the form of givings and takings. Though, in the moments I was there, I had felt completed in a sense. When you spend much time amongst the trees, you start to see yourself in each lanky limb and craggy bark you stumble upon. With this thesis process, I believe I had found a way to emplace myself within the fabric of the Universe, enacted in a local forest. I believe with this hermitage, I have been able to reconcile the self with the rest of the world. This, I believe, is what humans have been attempting to do for as long as the middle paleolithic era – to cope with self awareness and to understand our place in the Universe. And that, too, is what depressed or nihilistic individuals are anguished with – the inability to find self worth within the greater makeup of the Universe. I believe the mystic's hermitage expresses the Universe's way of speaking in an architectural manner, which is both in chaotic vigour and orderly beauty, wrapped in a cocoon of brutal truth. In attempting to build the hermitage, the simplicity of architecture had stuck me with such clarity. I had found myself truly embodying archetypal constructions, which I absolutely believe, with certainty, may destroy depression, at least for the infinite present moment. When one is filled with such meaning and responsibility, the past and the future cease to exist. So now, with the proper closing of this thesis, I may find final rest.

My greatest wish is for a suffering reader to find hope in my words and my actions, as it seems the Universe is willing to provide even the most reductive nihilists profound knowledge and love. How beautiful is that? One may not even love themselves, but just knowing that the Universe loves you and is willing to take care of you may relinquish one from the burden of suffering. I still find myself in somewhat of a shock, as you may notice in my sometimes awkward ramblings or contradictory sentiments. After all, this thesis has been an attempt to locate myself within the dance of Life, and I find myself

reaching closer and closer to Truth and love as the moments change. I am left with bittersweet tears as I remember the very first mushrooms and fruits and animals I had encountered during the autumn as the thesis had begun to take shape.

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