

**The Mongrel Approach**

by

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presented to the University of Waterloo  
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Author's Declaration

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

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



## **Abstract**

Cities are concentrations of diverse populations that undergo continual transformation over time. This thesis deals with the question, how does the individual make place in a constantly changing environment? The entry point for this study was looking at neglected places in urban environments. I looked specifically at the Don River Valley in Toronto, Ontario and how it has developed as an open-ended and complex system. The site research is presented through a series of stories describing specific events or places in the Don Valley that have taken place over the past 200 years. This thesis offers a mongrel approach to design for a site within the Don Valley. "The Mongrel Approach" is an opportunistic way of building that is committed to survival and open as to how this can be achieved. The design proposes a series of intimate yet public infrastructural devices; a toilet, water fountain, shelter and bridge that are presented in a set of hand drawings as well as through an "Explanatory Tale." A magpie narrates this short story, which is part true, part fiction and part wishful thinking. As the earth's population becomes more urban than rural and increasingly mobile, contemporary cities are becoming home to a diverse range of individuals with complex and layered identities. The Mongrel Approach offers a way of building that can handle difference and contradiction and accommodate incongruous or inharmonious parts. It positions the designer as a conjurer or first mover. This thesis proposes Mongrel buildings that respond to change by transforming slowly and incrementally over time with the involvement of multiple authors; but at each moment, a register of time and human ritual.



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Committee: ANDREW LEVITT & TIM SCOTT

External: MICHAEL COOK

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## Foreword

This thesis started with my interest in a place, the Don River Valley in Toronto. Despite its proximity to the downtown core, it did not feel like the city. I am captivated by the way natural elements and manmade structures are woven together to create a unique urban fabric. The diversity of people that use this site is palpable; traces of their inhabitation, either temporary or permanent are evident in the peeled back fences, leftover water bottles, and informal but well trodden paths into the wilderness. My initial interest in the site prompted a further investigation, an exercise of spatial archeology into the anatomy of the place, the built environment and its development over time. It prompted the question of my thesis; how does the individual make place in a constantly changing world?

The entry point for the site research was my personal experience which included repeated visits in all seasons, at all times of day. I was interested in how the richness and diversity held within this place created unplanned juxtapositions and associations that offered different possibilities for experience. **Part 1** of this thesis is a series of photographs of the site. I wanted to explore and record the way this place had developed over the last 200 years, built slowly and incrementally over time; the permanent scars in the landscape left behind by historical events, and the temporal moments created by puddles, reflections and shadows, overlaid with the footprints of human activities. It is a site that persists through flooding, pollution, industry, and human overdevelopment. **Part 2** of the thesis is a series of stories on the Don Valley. This thesis uses storytelling to convey information about the site. In storytelling, using a narrative structure, I can address the individual's relationship with time, change, and place.

**Part 3** of this thesis offers an approach to building that was modeled from a summary of the conditions and character of the Don Valley. A persuasive essay called "the mongrel approach" presents a way of entry to the process of building that is committed to growth and survival and open to how this is achieved.

A design proposal emerged from the site and its mongrel identity. It is presented in a series of hand drawings that comprise **Part 4**. This project grows on a piece of land currently used for snow dumping, as described in a story in part one of this thesis. It proposes four new infrastructural and spatial devices; a toilet, a drinking fountain, a shelter, and a bridge to provide access to the site. These pieces of infrastructure provide basic needs that acknowledge the inhabitation of this place. They give dignity to and validate human presence on the site, thereby unifying and strengthening the cluster of users. The structures act as a symbolic knot in the centre of the site, where all the diverse and sporadic happenings on the site converge and register in one singular location. The mongrel proposal is a register of time and human ritual.

The production and craft of the design drawings is an integral part of the project. The set of drawings in this thesis were done by hand using pen and ink and ink wash. It was necessary to use a production process that allowed spontaneous interjections and imperfections to enter the project as it progressed over time. The drawings represent the structures in a moment in time. They conjure a possibility for user experience and inhabitation.

The **last part** of the thesis is an explanatory tale that takes place within the site and the proposed structures. The explanatory tale is told by a magpie; a trickster bird with an unapologetic affinity for shiny things. The magpie is a literary tool to cross boundaries of space and time, as well as to interject with moments of whimsy. The tale is part true, part false, and part wishful thinking or hopeful conjecture.



# PART 1

“I only went out for a walk, and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in.”

- John Muir





1.1

### **Mongrel Bridge**

A crossing over a small stream on the *City of Toronto* mapped trail from Bayview to Crother's Woods. It appears to be assembled spontaneously from leftover pieces of timber available around the site at the time of construction. The rock precisely positioned between the wood pieces secures this bridge in its location.

*this page*  
1.2

### **Fish in the river**

A sucker fish in the Don River in spring. The few species of fish in the Don River are pollution-tolerant and tolerant of unnaturally high water temperatures.

*opposite page*  
1.3

### **Mouth of the river**

The Don River where it empties into Keating Channel underneath Lakeshore Boulevard and the Gardiner Expressway.











*opposite page*

1.4

**Lower Don Trail & Train tracks**

*this page*

1.5

**Cyclists & Thinkers**

*this page*  
1.6

**Lower Don Trail signage**

*opposite page*  
1.7

**Riverbank: trapped debris & turtle habitat**









*opposite page*

1.8

**Cyclists coming down the stairs**

Stepped access to the site makes it difficult for cyclists to enter and exit the Don Valley trail.

*this page*

1.9

**Families & site residents**

A small group of people live in the Don Valley in a camp at the south end of the site. They have been here for 5-10 years. They are often hanging out along the bike trail.

*this page*  
1.10  
**Trees**

*opposite page*  
1.11

**Don Narrows: west rivebank**







*this page*  
1.12

**Footbridge at the Don Narrows**

*opposite page*  
1.13

**Reflections in the river from the  
infrastructure above**





*this page*  
1.14

**Bottom of the river**

*opposite page*  
1.15

**Debris left behind**

1 of 7 City of Toronto snow dumping sites is located in the Don Valley. A collection of things picked up in the snow and left behind after it melts.









*opposite page*  
1.16

### **Slipping in: Chorely Park**

*this page*  
1.17

### **Mongrel stairs down**

The stairs, carefully nestled into the site, are constructed from old railway sleepers. The steps are uneven and collect leaves and dirt inbetween each tread. The stair construction responds precisely to the different site slope on either side. One side of the stair is built up with railway sleepers to create a small retaining wall. On the lower side, a handrail assembled from old logs.

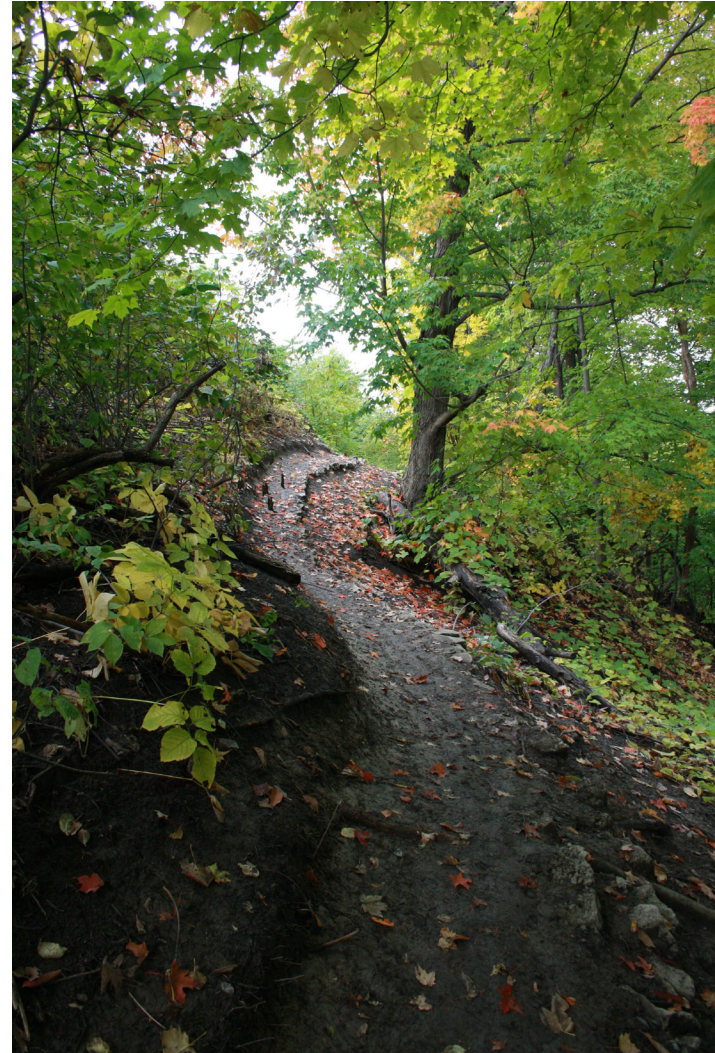
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1.18

**Trail through Crother's Woods**

*opposite page*  
1.19

**Inbetween Chorely Park &  
Brickworks Park**

A growth of trees in an undefined space on the way down into the valley between Chorely Park and Brickworks Park.







*this page*  
1.20

**In the ground: decommissioned  
oil pipeline**

*opposite page*  
1.21

**In the ground: Enbridge natural  
gas pipeline**









*opposite page*  
1.22

**In the sky: TRCA water testing point**

*this page*  
1.23

**Debris at the bottom of the Don**





*opposite page*  
1.24  
**Freezing**

Don River partially frozen. Looking north from a pedestrian bridge at the base of the Don Valley Parkway and Lakeshore Boulevard

*this page*  
1.25

**Living under the highway**

*this page*  
1.26

**Mongrel gathering space**

Making use of the natural form of enclosure created by the branches of the tree. Using found objects, an old railway sleeper, and scrap bits of wood to create a bench.

*opposite page*  
1.27

**Meandering River**

Looking south towards the Prince Edward Viaduct









## **PART 2**

The Don River Valley: On its way to being  
clean, green, and accessible



The Don River Valley runs straight through the heart of Toronto, but the City has no idea what to do with it. The current plans to naturalize the mouth of the river are the latest in a string of attempts to fix and connect to the natural space around the Don. The City's desire to fix the Don River started more than 100 years ago when the Lower part of the Don River Valley became known as the "Don Problem". The City would say the "Don Problem" is pollution. But the real problem is that the Don Valley confuses the City. The City doesn't really know where it starts and nature begins. The Don Valley is half-developed, half ignored, half river, half sewer; it has landfills and wetlands, blue herons and dead bodies. Whatever the Don Valley is, the City is always trying to make it something else. The evidence of this is all over the landscape.

## The Don Improvement Plan

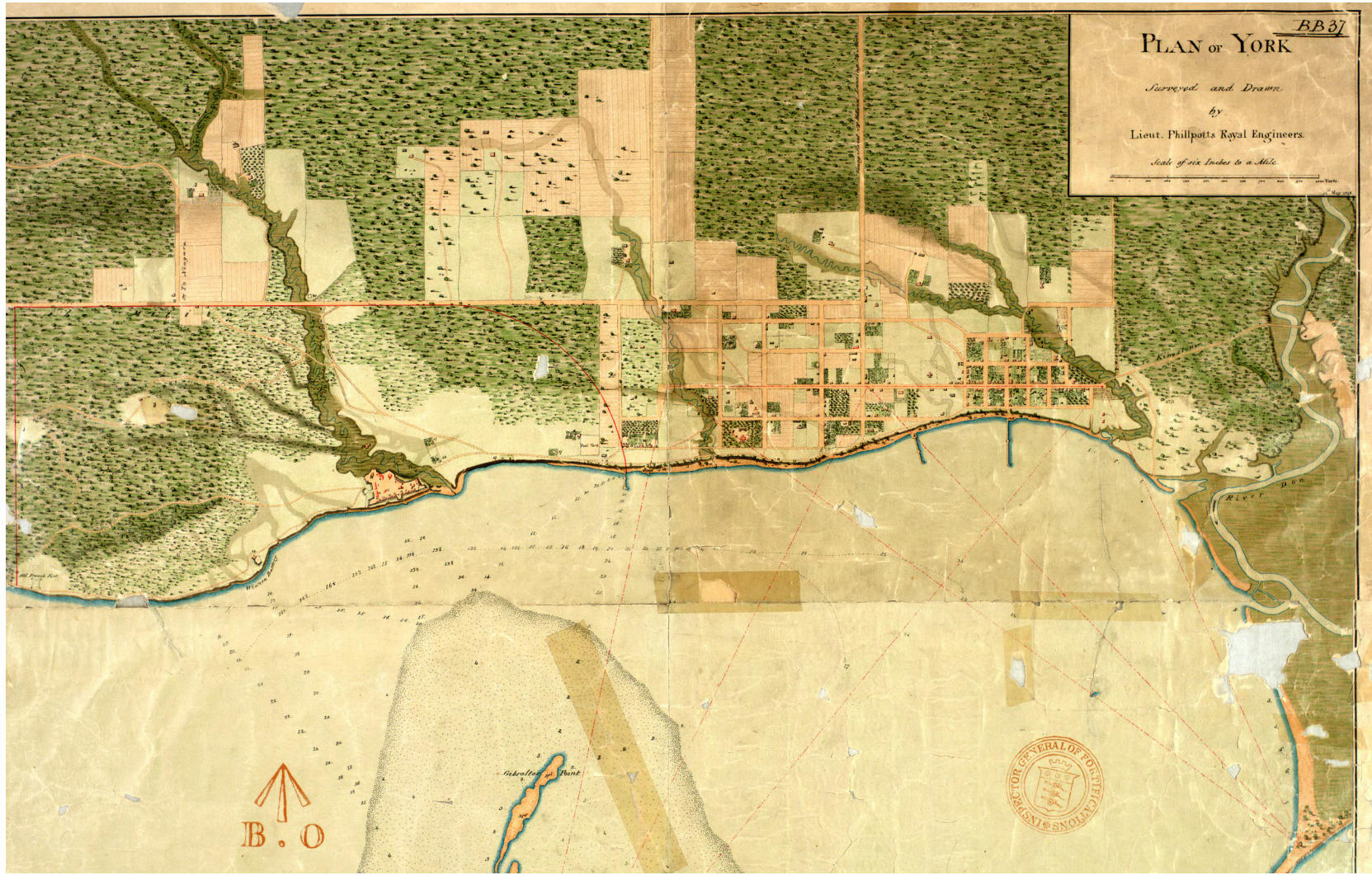
The record of the City's annoyances with the Don began with the Don Improvement Plan in the 1880s. But the story begins with the founding of York in 1793<sup>1</sup>. The Don River Valley was the eastern boundary of the settlement. The river meandered south from the Oak Ridges Moraine to Ashbridge's Marsh where it emptied into Lake Ontario. The Don was quickly established as a working river; a source of power and a dumping site for effluent from industry. Mills, factories, and breweries lined the river, with the odd swimming hole in between. But the River was unpredictable; frequent flooding caused destruction of riverside properties. In addition, the significant amount of pollution that was dumped into the River became impossible to ignore. The water in Ashbridge's Marsh was stagnant and dirty. People were concerned about the health risks of disease and infection. This became known as the "Don Problem".

In 1886, the people of Toronto voted "to improve and straighten the river Don so as to secure the sanitary condition of that part of the City of Toronto contiguous to the said river."<sup>2</sup>; the so-called Don Improvement Plan. In this plan the Don River would be straightened, widened, and deepened from the Winchester Street Bridge to Ashbridge's Marsh. The mouth of the river would be redirected to encourage water flow through the marsh. But the City had additional motives for the improvements. The City was looking to increase the land value around the Don. They envisioned the Don as an industrial thoroughfare. A wider, deeper and straightened Don River would allow barge access and benefit industry along the River. This would also allow for room alongside the Don for railway tracks. Canadian Pacific Railway wanted an independent entrance into the City<sup>3</sup>. Lastly, the few settlement to the east of the River would benefit from a better River.

However, the project was not constructed as initially planned. Construction began in 1886. Keating Channel, where the River emptied into the Lake, was not completed until 1922. British American Oil refused to surrender the lands at the mouth of River, so the water had to make a 90-degree turn at Keating Channel. This made the passage impossible for barges to navigate, so the Don did not become the industrial thoroughfare as hoped. The Improvement Plan facilitated the construction of rail lines on the west side of the river; but somehow a single rail company, CPR Rail, managed to secure independent access, in what was supposed to be a public thoroughfare. A confusing chain of letters between city officials followed. This was the beginning of the slow build up of infrastructure on the site. Keating Channel introduced a whole new set of issues for the City. The River now

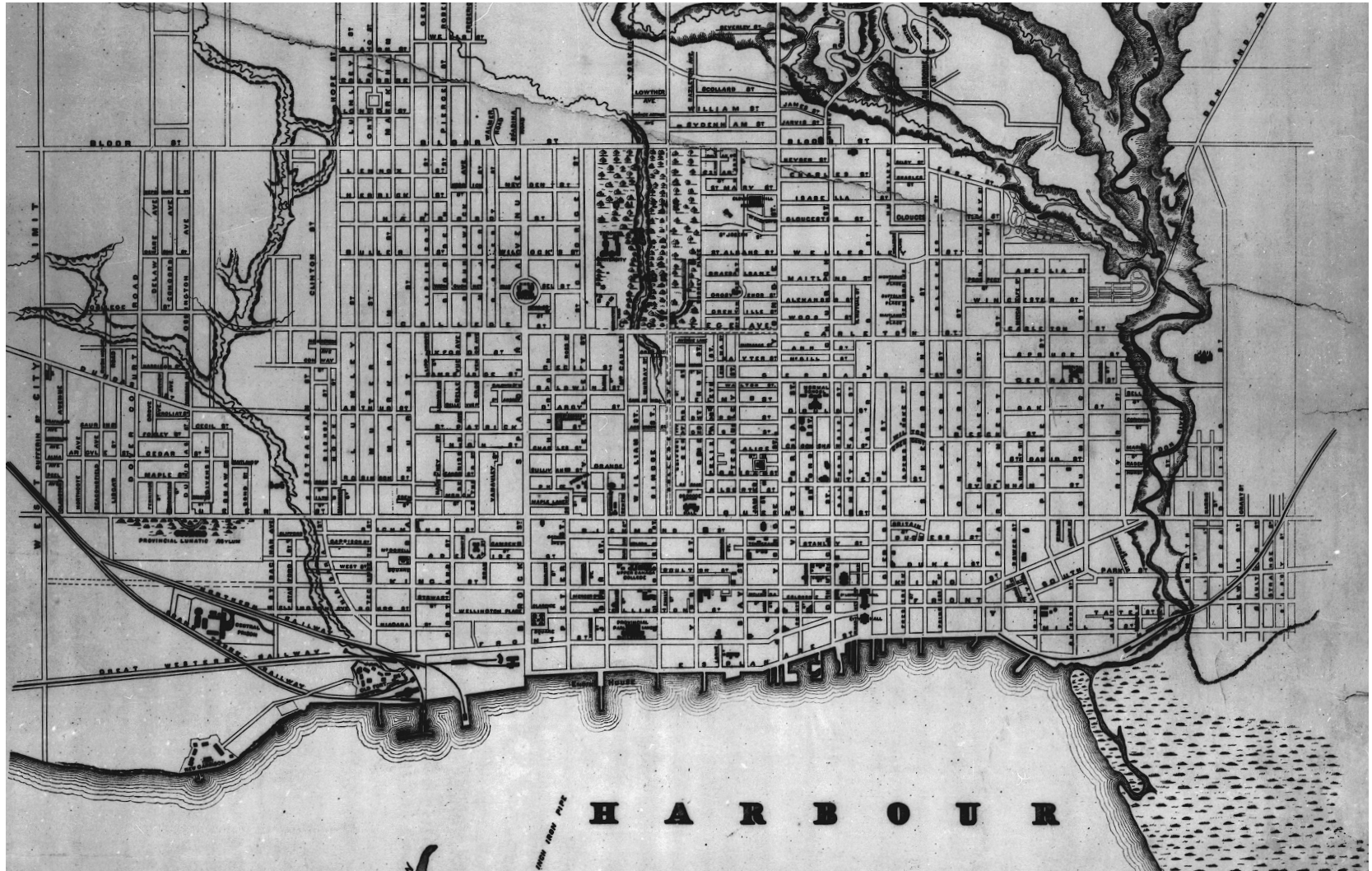
passes under a tangle of overpasses and highways into Keating Channel. Among the frequently asked questions regarding the Don on the City website is, “Where is the mouth of the river?”<sup>4</sup>. Keating Channel is a collection point for everything the river has picked up along its journey from Oak Ridges Moraine. The City spends half a million dollars each year to dredge out Keating Channel. The dredgeate is then sent over to the Leslie Street Spit, in a confined disposal facility specifically for this purpose<sup>5</sup>.

Now, more than 100 years later, the City is still trying to ‘improve’ the Don. There are plans to re-naturalize the mouth of the Don<sup>6</sup> where it currently dumps into Keating Channel, to deal with flooding and sanitary issues, again.



2.1  
Lieut. Philpotts Plan of York 1818





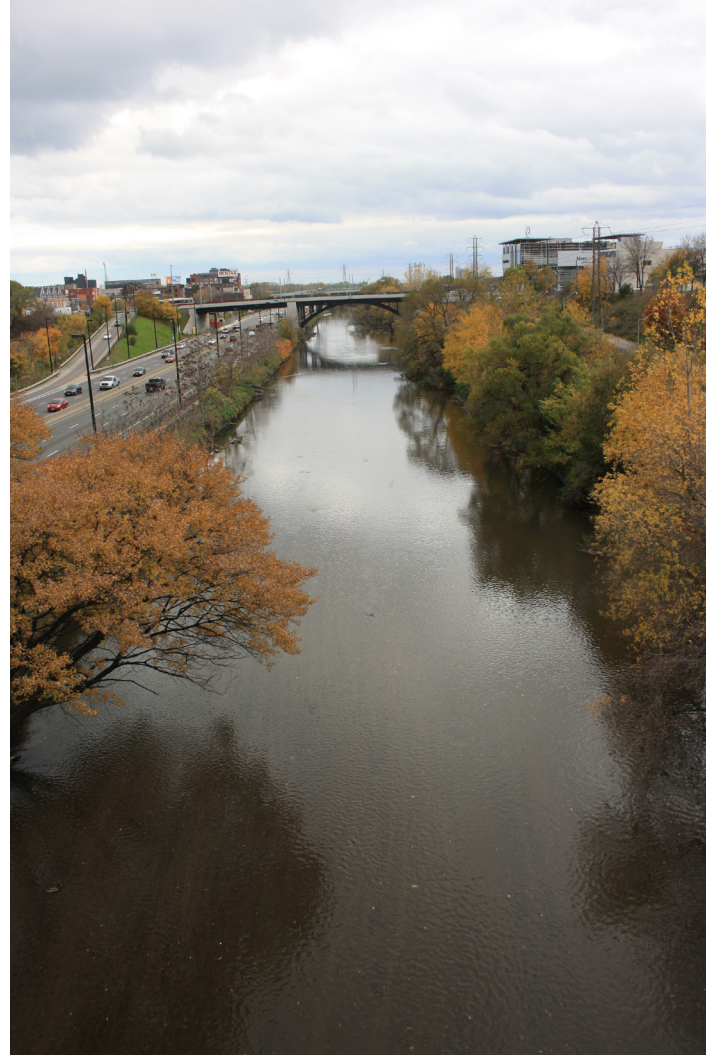
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2.4

Don Improvement Plan Wall & Don Valley Parkway



2.5  
Don River looking south from the Gerrard Street bridge



2.6  
CPR Don Valley Line west of the river



2.7  
Leslie Street Spit Confined Disposal Facility



2.7

Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates Inc. planning proposal to naturalize & shift the mouth of the Don River

## Prince Edward Viaduct: Exquisite Corpse

The Prince Edward Viaduct is an ambiguous character; an assembly of different pieces that don't quite match perfectly. This is perhaps because it was not built in one fell swoop. Over the past 100 years it has been assembled piece by piece. In this way it is reminiscent of the Exquisite Corpse, an old parlour game played by Surrealists, each of whom would write a phrase or draw on a sheet of paper, fold the paper to conceal part of it, and pass it on to the next player for his contribution<sup>7</sup>. Construction of the Prince Edward Viaduct began in 1913. The latest addition to the viaduct was finished in 2003. Today it carries bikes, cars, water, electricity and subway trains across the Valley, but this was not always the case.

As the city of Toronto grew beyond its original boundaries and a crossing was needed to facilitate mass transit across the Don Valley; the Don River was in the way. The viaduct got the go ahead in a civic election ballot. It would connect Bloor Street on the west to the Danforth in the east in three sections, Bloor, Rosedale and Don. It surprises many, to this day, that the City had the forethought to create allowance in the structure to support a future subway system. In 1918, the first cars crossed the viaduct. It wasn't until fifty years later that the first subway car crossed the bridge<sup>8</sup>. The current subway trains are from the late 1970s, with plans to release new high-speed trains on the way.<sup>9</sup>

Circumstances change and societal priorities shift. Over the years the Viaduct became known as a location for another kind of crossing. It was a "suicide magnet"; a "physical structure that seems to exert a seductive and sometimes fatal power on certain tormented individuals"<sup>10</sup> The Prince Edward Viaduct was at one point the second most fatal standing structure in the world; more than 400 deaths since it was completed and 100 within the last decade<sup>11</sup>. And now, the landscape in the Don Valley was even more treacherous. The Don Valley Parkway, a six-lane freeway passes underneath the viaduct and the suicides posed an additional and fatal risk to motorists. The City held a competition for the design of a suicide barrier. Dereck Revington won; he would add the next piece of this assembly. With support and conviction from Michael McCamus, former executive director of the Toronto-based Family Association for Mental Health Everywhere and seemingly unrelated Tribar Industries, a signage manufacturer.

The initial budget for the barrier was 1.5 million. The winning design, called the Luminous Veil,

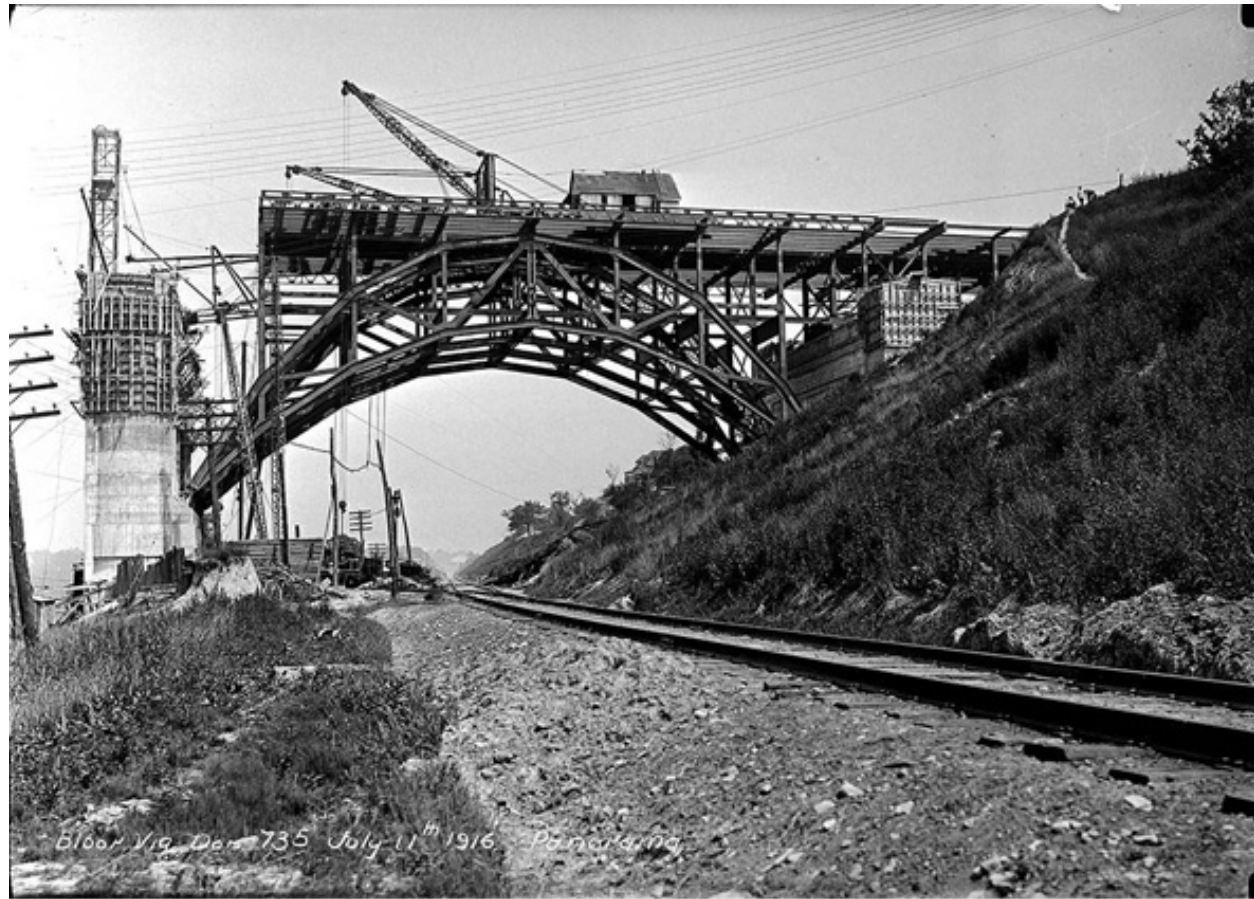


received an architectural award in 1999. The projected cost of the Veil was 5.5 million and this attracted a lot of controversy with those opposed saying the money would be better spent on education and prevention. Tribar Industries saw an opportunity to put up advertising in the highly coveted Don Valley. They offered to give 3.5 million in return for signage in the Don Valley - a cunning move. But the plan for signage in the Don was eventually scrapped for safety reasons and to preserve the limited natural space in the city without advertising. The Luminous Veil was completed five years after the initial plans and 48 suicides later. There have been no suicides from the bridge since, but it remains highly contentious whether this has affected the overall rate of suicide in Toronto<sup>12</sup>.



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1231, f1231\_it0038

2.9  
Construction begins on the Prince Edward Viaduct



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1231, f1231\_it0040

2.10

**Construction of the Prince Edward Viaduct**

Looking south from within the Valley



2.11  
Underneath the Prince Edward Viaduct



2.12  
Subway train passing on the Viaduct



2.13  
Bicycle lane on the Viaduct & Luminous Veil



2.14

View of the Viaduct from below

## Hurricane Hazel

The Don Valley resulted from glacial origins. It was formed during the Wisconsin glacialation 12,000 years ago<sup>13</sup>. The Don River is an underfit river; too small to have eroded the Valley it runs through. The river is normally shallow enough for ducks to bath comfortably in its centre. It is easy and convenient for the City to forget the latent force within the waters. Until Hurricane Hazel, the City did not seem to have any qualms about building within the river's floodplain. All sorts of things were able to find a home in the Don Valley. It was home to infrastructure that was integral to the functioning of the City; sewage treatment, landfills, Don Destructor garbage incinerator, as well as a few remaining schools, houses, farming plots (credit due to the Don Improvement Plan), shanty towns and gypsy camps.

In 1954 Hurricane Hazel hit the City of Toronto, it was the most severe flooding on record. It caused massive destruction; numerous bridges and homes were washed away, and close to a hundred lives lost. During the storm all of the sudden this latent network of ravines was pushed to the surface, water reached into the city fabric. But this story about Hurricane Hazel is not about destruction, it is about ownership and local jurisdiction. The loss of life and massive destruction of private property prompted the City to take immediate action. Fred Gardiner, Chairman of the Metropolitan Toronto Council, stated, "We must be more insistent that sub-dividers must not be allowed to develop lands lying next to rivers. They must be zoned as green belts and taken over by Metro or by local municipalities."<sup>14</sup> The City created The Metropolitan Toronto & Region Conservation Authority. "This public agency was given the mandate to acquire valley lands, regulate development and undertake projects to enhance natural river functions and lessen the impact of flooding."<sup>15</sup> They began aggressively expropriating privately owned land in the valley for flood control. (But actually, the floodplain cannot really belong to anyone, because, as Hurricane Hazel made clear, it actually belongs to the River.) The Don Valley and watershed is now preserved as a natural space under the jurisdiction of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority for The Living City.

But the City didn't really seem to know what to do with the land, and there was disagreement over the character of the place. In 1954, the Metropolitan Toronto federation was established. Its mission was to build infrastructure to support the rapid growth of Toronto. They presented plans for the Don Valley Parkway, a six-lane expressway to run straight through the Valley from the waterfront, north to the suburbs. There



was opposition to the Parkway by Charles Sauriol, a long time resident of the Don Valley and advocate for 'a wilderness at Toronto's doorstep'. But the Chairman had a different opinion, "I'll tell you what the Don Valley was, a place to murder little boys, that's what it was."<sup>16</sup> The first section of the Don Valley Parkway opened in 1961.<sup>17</sup>

The remaining land in the Don Valley is officially designated under City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation<sup>18</sup>, listed as "Don River - Lower Don Parkland". However, there are countless organizations and groups, some official, some unofficial that have vested interest in this site. The Don Valley operates like the old land institution, a commons, "the commons is both specific land and the traditional community institution that determines the carrying capacity for its various subunits and defines the rights and obligations of those who use it, with penalties for lapses."<sup>19</sup>, "The commons is a level of organization of human society that includes the nonhuman."<sup>20</sup> The City hates this. It makes it difficult if not impossible for anything to be built quickly in the Don Valley. Current redevelopment plans for the West Don Lands (within the regulatory floodplain) were initiated in 1996 and have only recently begun construction. This will be the home for the 2015 Pan American Games Athlete's Village.



2.15  
1920 Flooding in the Don Valley north of the Prince Edward Viaduct



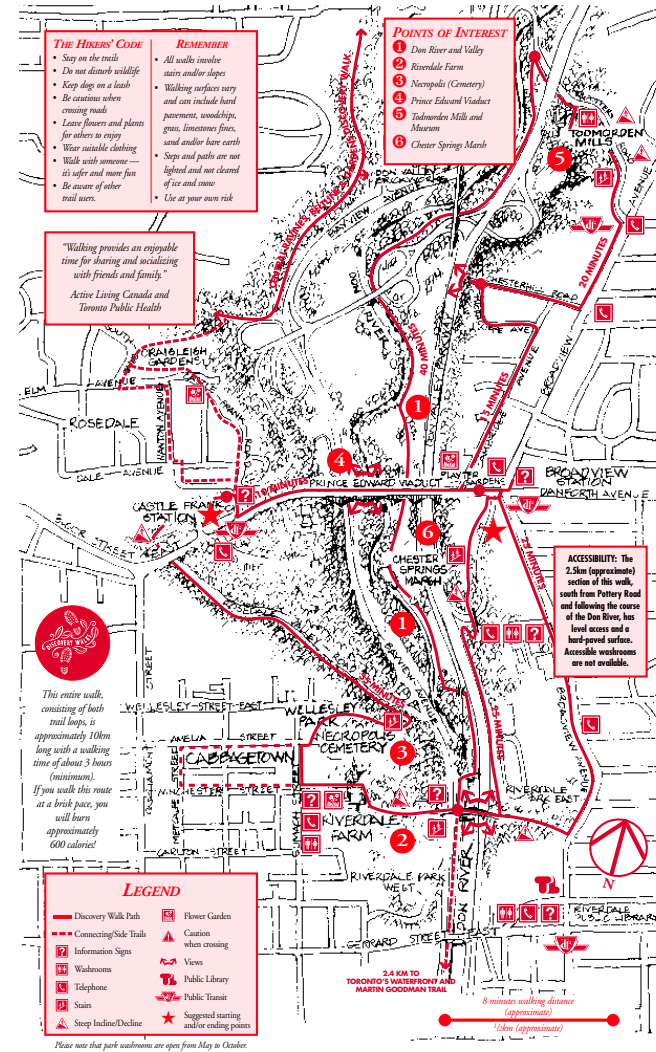
2.16  
Cleaning up debris in the Don Valley after Hurricane Hazel



2.17  
Ducks in the Don River



2.18  
Chorely Stream



2.19  
City of Toronto Parks, Forestry & Recreation Discovery Walks hand drawn map



2.20  
Don Valley Parkway viewed from the Prince Edward Viaduct



2.21  
Don Valley Parkway viewed from the Prince Edward Viaduct



2.22

Waterfront Toronto construction photo of the West Don Lands





2.23  
Waterfront Toronto rendering of proposed Don River Park

## Why Chester Springs Marsh Is Not A Marsh

To find Chester Springs Marsh you follow the trail north from Keating Channel towards the Prince Edward Viaduct. The river starts to meander and the site will open up. If you blink or get distracted by the subway trains crossing overhead, you will miss the graffiti covered sign that underneath reads “Chester Springs Marsh”. This is really the only way to find it, because Chester Springs Marsh doesn’t actually look like a marsh. It is overgrown, impenetrable. A small trodden path leads inside and the River is somewhere within this wilderness of burr bushes, stinging nettle and mosquitoes. This is a site that was built and managed by the Task Force to Bring Back the Don.

The Task Force to Bring Back the Don “is a citizen’s group working with the support of the City of Toronto to bring back a clean, green and accessible Don River watershed”<sup>21</sup>. It is a citizen’s group comprised of twenty citizens (volunteers) and three councillors appointed by City Council, largely a volunteer organization. It works in co-operation with government agencies and non-government organizations towards the restoration of the Don. Part of their mandate includes trying to restore the wetland that was lost around the River during the industrialization, a “strategy to preserve and enhance existing wetlands and where possible, create new ones.”<sup>22</sup>. Wetlands mitigate flooding from heavy rains, and also naturally filter pollutants from storm water runoff. Chester Springs Marsh was the Task Force’s first major project. Construction was complete almost 20 years ago, in 1996<sup>23</sup>. But today, the site is not a marsh. The marsh was laid gingerly on top of an old landfill the City used in the early 1900s. During the construction process the contents of the ground underfoot were exposed to resourceful and attentive onlookers. After construction was complete, scavengers came to the site digging pits to find treasures, old pieces of pottery, turn of the century trinkets, from when the site was landfilled. This created wells and drained the water from the marsh.<sup>24</sup> Also, the River clogged the channel that fed water into the marsh with silt. Water only enters during extremely high water levels and dries up before the next refresh. So what was intended to be a marsh is more like a small forest.

In 2007, the Don River won the title of one of the nation’s worst waterways<sup>25</sup>, and the worst in Ontario. Storm water runoff is the biggest pollutant of the Don River, followed by the old combined sewer overflow system that allows sanitary sewer water to mix with storm water and enter the Don during rainstorms<sup>26</sup>.

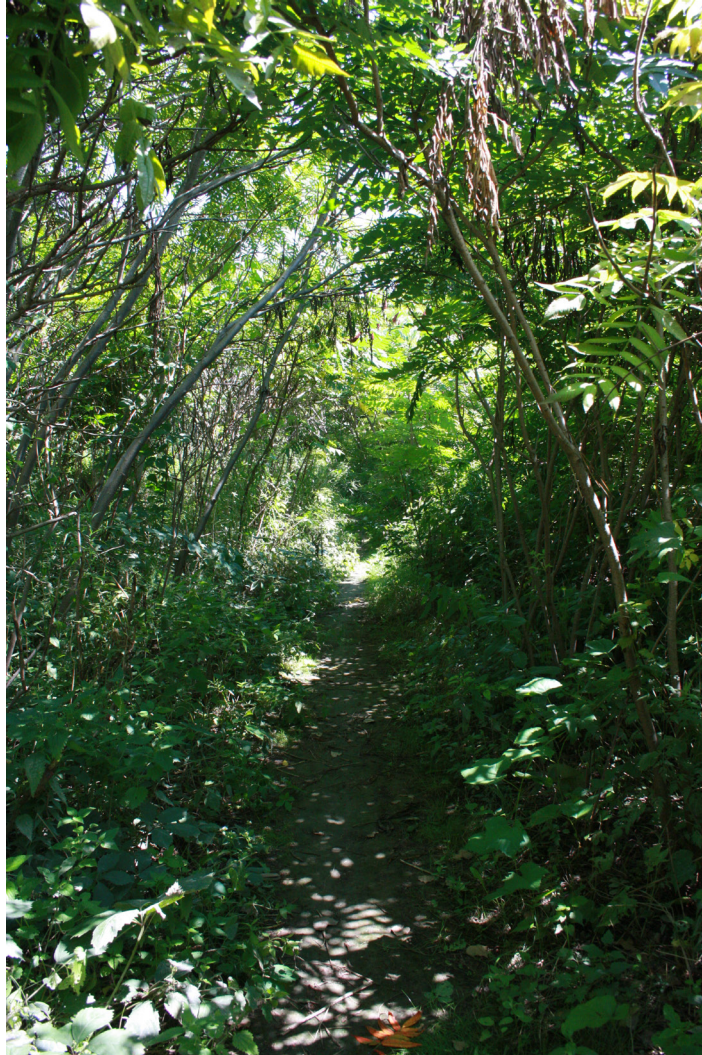
This irritates the City because there is no quick fix to the problem. The City adopted yet another plan, to address this issue - the Wet Weather Flow Master Plan (WWFMP) and a 25 year Implementation Plan in 2003<sup>27</sup>. “The goal of the WWFMP is to reduce and ultimately eliminate the adverse impacts of wet weather flow, which is runoff generated when it rains or snows, to protect our environment and improve the ecosystem health of the watersheds.”<sup>28</sup> These plans are to address the issues of flooding and pollution.



2.24  
**Hole left by garbage miners**



2.25  
Holes left by garbage miners



2.26  
Trodden path into Chester Springs Marsh



2.27

Chester Springs Marsh signage



2.28  
Piece of pottery left behind on railway sleeper





2.29

View of Chester Springs Marsh from Prince Edward Viaduct

## Where to find trinkets and treasures

There is a peculiar place, just underneath the Prince Edward Viaduct and slightly to the north. This site grows and shrinks with the seasons. It is a site that is easy to ignore and difficult to get to, but very visible from all the surrounding roadways. This is one of seven sites the City of Toronto uses to dump snow. The land is owned by the City of Toronto, under the jurisdiction of Parks and Recreation. The site has a snow disposal area of 1.5 hectares.<sup>29</sup> Subway trains rumble through the site every few minutes. The northern boundary is the on/off ramp to the Don Valley Parkway. The site is bounded on the west by the railway tracks and to the east the Don River meanders around a bend.

This snow-dumping site is not used every year. This particular site has been used three times in the last 10 years<sup>30</sup>. In the off years the site is left unused and unmaintained. The landscape is hostile. There are weeds that are six feet high and holes in the ground burrowed by small animals. This site also attracts the resourceful scavenger. He comes equipped a metal detector, pouch and sun hat, looking for treasures left over from the melted snow from winters past. And if he digs deep enough and with a bit of luck, maybe something from the shanty town which occupied the site in the early 1900s<sup>31</sup>.

This site is necessary to keep snow off the roads in the City. In the years when this site is utilized by the City for snow dumping, snow can be found here all summer long. However, because of all the sand and dirt in the snow, it looks like a pile of dirt. The most recent snow pile (three years ago) did not melt until August. Snow on the site all summer suffocates the trees that line the Don River. In the spring, before the grasses and reeds are in full growth, this place looks like a tree graveyard. The snow from the roads contains oil, grease, antifreeze and salt. Salt levels have been 20 times higher than the provincial water quality guidelines<sup>32</sup>. All these pollutants end up in the Don River. The ground here is toxic.

Just downstream is the Task Force to Bring Back the Don's Chester Springs Marsh.





2.30  
Shack dwellers in the Valley 1930



2.31

**Snow Dump 2008: Last time the site was used**



2.32  
Snow Dump site March 2011



2.33  
Dead trees and site artifacts



2.34  
Snow Dump site July 2011





2.35  
**Site scavenger**

## Dirt Bike Jumps

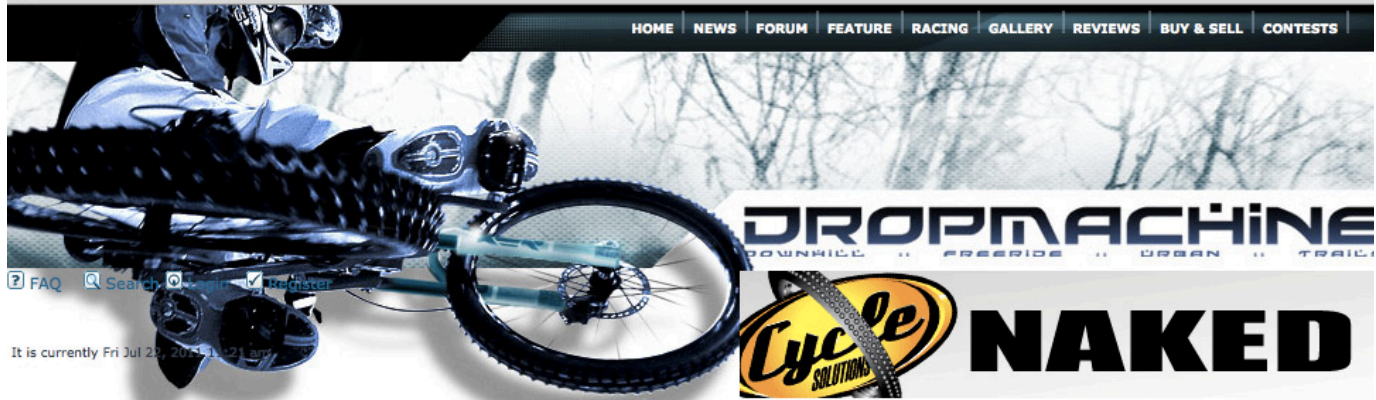
There is a wilderness in the Don Valley, just north of the Prince Edward Viaduct, called Crother's Woods. It has a history of troubling the City. It is a landscape that people can hide in. In 1952<sup>33</sup> four members of the notorious Boyd gang managed to escape from the Don Jail. Despite one of the members missing his wooden foot, they managed to hobble through the Valley and hide out for weeks<sup>34</sup>. Their escape set off the biggest manhunt in Canadian history<sup>35</sup>. Eventually authorities found them in an old barn near Yonge and Sheppard and this wouldn't be the last time people hid from the Authorities in the Valley.

However now the City not only has to contend with the physical labyrinth of the Don Valley, but also the virtual labyrinth of the internet, mobile phones, and social networks. This somewhat invisible virtual system feeds into specific physical places. In the Don Valley, a series of informally planned dirt bike jumps have been successful in part due to their presence on the internet. The dirt bike jumps are heavily blogged about on various dirt bike websites. Different users of the site starting in 2005 have built them slowly over time.<sup>36</sup> Not formally announced, they are hidden from the City in Crother's Woods. The following is a thread of comments from the dirt bike community on the website [www.dropmachine.com](http://www.dropmachine.com) regarding the dirt bike jumps and the City of Toronto's notice to remove them. The City has since removed the jumps.



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### INTRO TO THE DON

Moderators: singlesprocket, Reaction, Vince Vindaloo, YELLA-ONE, Trail\_head

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Author	Message
<p><b>jcitizen</b></p> <p><a href="#">offline</a></p> <p>Expert Class</p>  <p>Joined: Tue Apr 20, 2010 5:31 pm Posts: 298</p>	<p>Post subject: Intro to the Don</p> <p>Posted: Mon Apr 18, 2011 9:30 am</p> <p>Unfamiliar with the Don's many trails? Sick of riding solo, but don't wanna be the lone newbie on a group ride? Wondering what the hell is "PA"? Well this is the ride for you.</p> <p>I'll be at the Pottery Rd. lot at noon on Saturday April 30th for any and all who wanna get a taste of the ol' Don, and at a pace that won't leave anyone in the dust.</p> <p>Just look for the guy with the green Don shirt.</p> <p>Jesse</p> <p>ps. Rain date Monday May 7 - PM me if you have any questions.</p> <hr/> <p>Less thinking, more riding: that's what I try to tell myself at least. jcitizen.temps@gmail.com</p>

2.36

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DropMachine.COM: View t... +

http://www.dropmachine.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=2: ☆ Google


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## A RESPONSE FROM THE CITY OF TORONTO

Moderators: singlesprocket, Reaction, Vince Vindaloo, YELLA-ONE, Trail\_head

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Author	Message
<p><b>Trail_head</b></p> <p>offline</p> <p>Forum rat</p>  <p>Joined: Wed Jan 03, 2007 7:33 am Posts: 2378</p>	<p><b>Post subject:</b> A Response from the City of Toronto <span style="float: right;">Posted: Wed Apr 21, 2010 8:35 am</span></p> <p>I sent Scott Laver a link to the "Dirtcamp???" thread. His response, posted with his permission;</p> <p>Thanks for the update Tim.</p> <p>I'm happy to hear that the community is starting to understand our position on illegal building of trails and features. There are so many reasons why it is a bad idea for the community to build, or support builders, when we are trying our best to find alternatives to this type of activity and accommodate as many types of riding/recreational opportunities in a very limited space as possible. I know the process is slow and that there will always be illegal building, but we need to try to move past that and work together on solutions.</p> <p>I still have to remind people that 5 years ago there was a very strong push to ban mountain biking in natural areas in Toronto. We have progressed rather 'rapidly' to actively build and maintain trails that can accommodate many users, including some types of mountain biking. To date, a lot of my discussions with the numerous stakeholders in this process (including my bosses) still revolves around the feasibility of multi-use trails and the inclusion of mountain biking. To date, I have not been approached by decision makers who ask 'Why aren't you providing skinnies, ladder bridges and drop offs?', and are more likely to be asked 'Should mountain biking be allowed at all?'</p> <p>The mountain biking community is far ahead of the landowners and land managers when it comes to the feasibility of having mountain biking as part of the mix of users on the trails. We need to catch up, and a strong advocacy group can help us do that. If the community needs TTF's, they have to speak up and let it be known that it would be worth the City's efforts to provide them. Illegal building alone does not constitute 'need'. Just remember that the majority of stakeholders you will be talking to feel that the very inclusion of mountain biking on Toronto's trails is more than enough of a compromise.</p> <p>In regards to the Dirt Camp, we are currently co-ordinating with CN and the TRCA about the builds in the flats and will be sending in crews soon to remove all the built features.</p> <p>I hope that the community understands that there is to be <b>no building anywhere on parks and TRCA property</b>. This includes other areas of the Don, not just Crothers Woods, as we will soon be managing all trails and areas in the Don watershed. Moving builds and encouraging people to build elsewhere will only cause this type of conflict in the near future.</p> <p>Thanks again for the update and we'll be in touch soon about some of our plans this year.</p> <p>Scott</p> <p><a href="http://www.toronto-offroad.org/">http://www.toronto-offroad.org/</a> <a href="mailto:timothy.charles@toronto-offroad.org">timothy.charles@toronto-offroad.org</a></p>

2.37

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<p><b>BrianMac</b></p> <p><a href="#">offline</a></p> <p>Elite</p> <p><b>Joined:</b> Mon Sep 23, 2002 9:29 am</p> <p><b>Posts:</b> 556</p>	<p><b>Post subject:</b> Re: A Response from the City of Toronto</p> <p><b>Posted:</b> Thu Apr 22, 2010 7:16 pm</p> <p>My two cents.</p> <p>I think what strikes people the wrong way is that after having a mostly grown-up discussion about the state of Rick's build we receive a response from the city that they were going to daisy cutter everything nailed down and made of wood on the flats. Like don't worry that's done. Not OK I can see by the thread that there is general agreement that it was wrong and a willingness to do something about it. Not, hey, let's do something constructive, use it as an opportunity to meet and jointly take down the structures if that was absolutely what was needed to be done. Really it came down to tone, which is unfortunate. After the positive and successful build days last year, I think the expectation (and you can see in Paul's response) was that we were "beyond all that now let's get on with making the trails great". So that's frustrating.</p> <p>We aren't talking about kids here. While kids may ride the trails, this has nothing to do with kids. We are talking about a fairly large group of adults who passionately enjoy riding, building and maintaining trails. We all come at it from our own angle. Some folks dig the trail build and maintenance part, adding flow and improving how the trails work (thank you for the catalyst fixes). Others like to build jumps. I don't know what it is, there is something special in my mind about building lips and landings, watching a berm emerge from a pile of dirt. Some people like to build with wood. When you get people who are carpenters and have the skills combined with the passion for riding, it's hard to simply deny. Me personally, I'm not the hugest fan of skinnies, but I'd love see wooden and dirt features. While I admit when the DC drop was built, I did have the worry that no good would come of it, I still totally dig it and think it's exactly the kind of thing that I would hope to see in some parallel universe Don future. It echoes the progression in the North Shore, wide, hitable, safe but challenging.</p> <p>The key is, we are in a bit of a vacuum. A holding pattern. The trail work last year by the COT was fantastic, while maybe it dumbed down a few sections as the rocks have dug in and the gravel merged I'm kind of digging it. I'm itching to double up the wup coming down from Bayview. Unfortunately, from what I heard last year, nothing is planned for the Don this year. When you have build days with 50-60 volunteers happily showing up, it's insane that the city would be thrilled to point them at a new objective. People want to help. People want to do things. People care.</p> <p>If there was a constant and continuous set of activities maybe this is less of an issue. Perhaps if we were having a build day at the end of April, we all could have walked down to the build and collectively agreed that it had to go. I mean, Milton BMX, Horseshoe have had build days. Pete's having one on Saturday for Kelso. We had a fantastic build at the DJs on Sunday (and yes people were asking when the next Don build day was). Maybe if builders had a way of channelling their energies we wouldn't be in this situation. I know the thorny issue is the wood, but that's not impossible either.</p> <p>Speaking of the dirt jumps, I hope the city is aware of the amazing positive atmosphere that is down there. Thinking of this Sunday, it was packed full with a range of people from kids to adults, XCers cruising the pump track to the standard crew sessioning them. We had this terrific man power working together to clean up the pump track and make it more rideable. The passion is there. You don't have apathy.</p> <p>The only thing I can say is that I hope the city can find a way to view the positives and recognize this isn't a bunch of lawless activity.</p> <p>Please let me know if there is anything I can do to help.</p> <p>Brian</p>
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**Tate**      Post subject: Re: A Response from the City of Toronto      Posted: Thu Apr 22, 2010 8:57 pm

[offline](#)  
 DM Rookie  
 Joined: Mon Jul 06, 2009 4:34 pm  
 Posts: 59

**BrianMac wrote:**

We had a fantastic build at the DJs on Sunday (and yes people were asking when the next Don build day was). Maybe if builders had a way of channeling their energies we wouldn't be in this situation. I know the thorny issue is the wood, but that's not impossible either.

Speaking of the dirt jumps, I hope the city is aware of the amazing positive atmosphere that is down there. Thinking of this Sunday, it was packed full with a range of people from kids to adults, XCers cruising the pump track to the standard crew sessioning them. We had this terrific man power working together to clean up the pump track and make it more rideable. The passion is there. You don't have apathy.

Brian

Which Was orginized by me, A 15 year old kid who loves the don valley for all the awesome and fun features its contains. Tearing them down would just be ruining the a great atmospehere. Dont be such a buzzkill and agree with the cities sercret moto of "RUINING EVERYONES FUN".

If this is about liabilities, I think if someone is Volounarily Participating in an activity. Their Injuries are on them. Not on anyone else because they are volounarily taking part in the activity they had chosen to take part In....

Trail-Head, Stand up for the Mountain biking community, Dont be a fucking pussy. 🙄👍

Tate.

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**frozenkiwi**      Post subject: Re: A Response from the City of Toronto      Posted: Thu Apr 22, 2010 9:01 pm

[offline](#)  
 DM Rookie  
  
 Joined: Thu Apr 17, 2008 5:48 pm  
 Posts: 66

**roadrasher wrote:**

The message from the city seemed to be a little bit of a power trip.How we should feel lucky that mtbing is allowed it the Don at all?

I one-hundred-percent disagree. I don't think anything in Scott's response was "a powertrip" as some in this thread besides you have alleged. I've met Scott, talked with him on various issues, and he is NOT a power-tripping kind of guy, either for the City or on his own behalf. Let me quote the relevant part of what he wrote, and I'm going to bold some of it to make it bleeding obvious:

***The mountain biking community is far ahead of the landowners and land managers when it comes to the feasibility of having mountain biking as part of the mix of users on the trails. We need to catch up, and a strong advocacy group can help us do that. If the community needs TTF's, they have to speak up and let it be known that it would be worth the City's efforts to provide them. Illegal building alone does not constitute 'need'. Just remember that the majority of stakeholders you will be talking to feel that the very inclusion of mountain biking on Toronto's trails is more than enough of a compromise***

2.39



2.40  
Dirt Bike Jumps April 2010





2.41  
Dirt Bike Jumps April 2010



2.42

View of snow dumping site from the Prince Edward Vlduct

**“...a supernatural city of enchanted palimpsests, stories and memories piled on top of one another some of these narratives have been completely covered up by time before new histories were written over top of them, other stories bleed through and persist in being legible at all times, the narrative mix and mingle and confuse us.”**

- Guy Maddin



## ENDNOTES

### **DON IMPROVEMENT PROJECT**

1. "The Story of the Don," City of Toronto, accessed October 27, 2011, <http://www.toronto.ca/don/watershed.htm>.
2. Charles Sauriol, *Remembering the Don: A rare record of earlier times within the Don River Valley* (Scarborough: Consolidated Amethyst Communications Inc., 1981), 123.
3. *Ibid.*, 123.
4. "Frequently asked questions about the Don River," City of Toronto, accessed October 27, 2011, <http://www.toronto.ca/don/faq.htm>.
5. "Don Mouth Naturalization & Port Lands Flood Protection Project: Site Walk of the Mouth of the Don Summary Notes July 26, 2005" , Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, accessed October 27, 2011, [www.trca.on.ca/dotAsset/25749.pdf](http://www.trca.on.ca/dotAsset/25749.pdf).
6. "Mouth of the Don River," Waterfront Toronto, accessed October 27, 2011, [http://www.waterfrontoronto.ca/explore\\_projects2/lower\\_don\\_lands/don\\_mouth\\_naturalization\\_and\\_flood\\_protection](http://www.waterfrontoronto.ca/explore_projects2/lower_don_lands/don_mouth_naturalization_and_flood_protection).

### **PRINCE EDWARD VIADUCT**

7. "Exquisite Corpse," Wikipedia, accessed October 27, 2011, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exquisite\\_corpse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exquisite_corpse).
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## PART 3

### THE MONGREL APPROACH



3.1 Animaux Fabuleux

## INTRODUCTION

An approach is a way of entering, the action of coming nearer to something in distance or time<sup>1</sup>. This paper describes an approach to building and assembling, at any scale, that begins with a site. It is called an 'approach' because it is the action of coming nearer, but not necessarily reaching completion. This approach appreciates that a built thing is never quite complete because it transforms over time, constantly on its way to becoming something else.

The word 'mongrel' originates from the old English word 'gemong,' which means mingling.<sup>2</sup> It is defined as "any cross between different things, especially if inharmonious or indiscriminate"<sup>3</sup> or of "mixed kind or uncertain origin<sup>4</sup>." Many things are 'mixed' but can not be considered Mongrel. A mixed breed is "a domesticated animal descended from multiple breeds of the same species, often breeding without any human intervention, record keeping, or selective breeding. The ancestry is complex or not known."<sup>5</sup> This represents the defining difference between Mongrel and hybrid: Hybrid is arranged, while Mongrel is natural. In the Mongrel Approach, the parts are not deliberately selected, rather they are parts an author might have left behind. In Mongrel, there is an openness to include parts that might initially seem incongruous and inharmonious. Unlike hybrid, Mongrel has no concern for aesthetic. Mongrel crosses many boundaries, and has a richness that means it cannot be categorized. It is willing to be defiant and rebellious, allowing new combinations to result in novel and unknown capacities.

The Mongrel Approach is committed to survival and is open to how this goal is achieved<sup>6</sup>. The survival goal is important because it elicits a sense of urgency and a willingness to embrace spontaneous opportunities and accidental successes. The need to survive also provides a fresh way of understanding artifacts and landscapes. The approach, therefore, has no concern for aesthetic and instead finds beauty in all that is well-used. The Mongrel Approach demands multiplicity in authorship and use, and it likewise embraces unpredictability over time. It is carried out by a conjurer who assembles and suggests, and who enables the assembly to then grow itself. This section will discuss a Mongrel Approach to building in three stages:

Pre-design: understanding the site and the parts

The Assembly: the composition

Post-construction: how it persists over time

## PRE-DESIGN

The Mongrel Approach does not impose a new kind of order. It is inspired by the diversity that already exists on a site and in addition seeks to increase the instances of mingling. Therefore, the Mongrel Approach begins with a site out of which the built work grows. In Mongrel, neglected sites are a common point of entry, for on these forgotten sites there is no external will to order and so these places order themselves.

The pre-design stage is devoted to understanding the existing conditions of the site, how it works, and to not leaving anything out of the Mongrel process. It does not deliberately select parts to favour or focus on. The Mongrel approach is completely open and inclusive, accepting what was previously unacceptable and understanding the value of systems and kinship. Mongrel is objective about the existing conditions and what the site offers in terms of possibilities for experience. Pre-design is dedicated to discovering the anatomy of the site, the forces and patterns, and the energy that feeds the site and propels it forward. Mongrel expels preconceived notions regarding the site, environmental condition or material. For example, in New South Wales, Australia, a railway tunnel built in 1866 is currently an exotic mushroom farm. The tunnel had fallen out of rail use by 1919. Soldiers then used it for explosives storage in World War II. Following the war, the tunnel was used for mushroom cultivation of local species. In 1987, a microbiologist took over and starting growing exotic species of mushrooms for commercial cultivation.<sup>7</sup> He discovered that the concrete vault is a damp cool environment that resembles of mountainsides in China, Japan, and Korea where these exotic mushrooms occur naturally.<sup>8</sup> The tunnel is still state property,; and the farm operates on a five-year lease. This Mongrel mushroom tunnel is not too picky about how it earns its living. This allows for interjections and diversity; it is the flaws in protein that have allowed for complex life.<sup>9</sup>

In Mongrel, 'parts' are all the things that comprise and inform Mongrel assembly or addition. This can be, but is not limited to, the site, environmental conditions, materials, users, or programme. The Mongrel approach maximizes design input by including and considering all the forces and users that could potentially influence a site addition. This means being inclusive both in terms of the users who could benefit from an addition, as well as in terms of the materials used to assemble it. Mongrel beings will explore, mine and inhabit the environment. In Mongrel, materials that have been left behind, discarded or deemed 'useless' are potential sources of richness. In Toronto, for example, the rubble from demolished buildings is used to construct a wildlife and nature reserve called Tommy Thompson Park.

Mongrel accepts and welcomes the inherent contradiction that exists on a site. By being inclusive about

whom and what could benefit from an intervention, the Mongrel Approach helps strengthen the surrounding environment and community because diverse actors will feel a vested interest in the thing's future. The Mongrel Approach, then, creates 'shared value'.<sup>10</sup> It is rigorous and precise about understanding people's sensibilities and needs, allowing seemingly inharmonious things to get along. This is what makes it robust. The inclusion of all parts, even the unwanted, maintains the site's authenticity. In Mongrel, strengthening the surrounding community strengthens the addition. A Mongrel assembly is the construction of a commons, a complex and shared ownership that strengthens the local cluster of users. "The commons is a curious and elegant social institution within which human beings once lived free political lives while weaving through natural systems. The commons is a level of organization of human society that includes the non-human."<sup>11</sup> It is something that is held 'in common', meaning it has shared, layered and complex ownership.

Because the key to Mongrel is the inclusion of parts that were not deliberately selected, it is imperative to be rigorous about inclusiveness. Mongrel is precisely attuned to environmental conditions, processes and societal sensibilities and priorities. The Mongrel Approach is inspired by the complexity of the existing relationships on the site. An addition augments these relationships, weaving them tighter together and providing insight into a possible conjecture for the future.

## **THE ASSEMBLY**

The assembly is the built thing that grows out of the Mongrel Approach. It is the bringing together of all the parts discovered in the pre-assembly. A Mongrel assembly is a symbolic knot in the fabric of the site that weaves all the stories of the site together. The new structure is a kernel or core that engages and strengthens a cluster of users. Committed to allowing as much input as possible, it enables the accumulation of artifacts and evidence of human ritual. The assembly itself is both a continuation of the existing environment and a catalyst — roots, as well as wings.

A Mongrel assembly or addition is precise and efficient. It is clear and decisive in terms of what needs to be added in order for other additions to take place. There are no superfluous parts or unnecessary modifications. In Mongrel, there is no time or materials to waste, as exemplified by the mushroom tunnel, where only necessary modifications were made to the existing structure in order to accommodate the mushroom farm. There, the users made no additional finishes or aesthetic treatments. A Mongrel maintains authenticity by doing only what needs to be done, therefore maintaining the essence of places and their inherent character. The addition is highly specific in its parts, which is necessary in order to create a thing



3.2  
Mushroom Tunnel - Australia



3.3  
Mushroom Tunnel - Australia



3.4  
Leslie Street Spit





3.5  
Leslie Street Spit

of mixed-kind comprised of incongruous or inharmonious parts. Each piece is finely tuned to complete its purpose. It is like a one-man band or a bike<sup>12</sup> in that each piece is highly specialized and can be designed by multiple different authors at different times, However, each has to plug back in to serve the main function that evolves slowly over time.

A Mongrel is of the mixed kind. In building, a combination of uses is one way of achieving a mixture of the Mongrel sort. However, not all mixed-use buildings are Mongrel, often because of scale. In larger-scale projects, the overall composition might be of Mongrel nature, but the human-scale experience might not. This is because the larger the scale, the more segregated the uses often become. In a proposed Waste-to-Energy Plant in Copenhagen by BIG, two unexpected uses are brought together: It will be a treatment facility that transforms waste into energy, and its roof will be a ski slope<sup>13</sup>. However, the actual experience of building provides limited interaction. A Mongrel is human in its scale and materiality. The composition needs to be tightly woven to maximize the number of interactions that take place and ensure is a constant mingling.

The addition is resourceful and has an economy of means. Mongrel utilizes all the resources and materials within its reach, utilizing and benefitting from site conditions, found materials and natural processes. However, it is important that the Mongrel approach is not likened with the objectives of 'green' building. Mongrel has no altruistic purpose, nor does it align with any single kind of order. It is committed to opportunity. Therefore, Mongrel functions are not always determinable or straightforward. Betel Nut Huts in Malaysia are small structures — either self-standing, or making use of other shelters — that sell Betel Nuts, a plentiful local resource.<sup>14</sup> The Huts are most often seen on the side of busy highway intersections, and truckers are among the most frequent customers. Sold by scantily clad young women, it is rumored and suggested that other services are sold at these huts as well. The structures themselves are highly specific and precisely placed. Clear glazing is an expensive material, and is therefore sparsely used — just enough to reveal the shop girl. These Betel Nut Huts are resourceful, site specific, and yet somewhat indeterminate and suggestive. A Mongrel does not have time or resources to waste on aesthetics. In Mongrel, there is an accumulation or assembling of things over time, marking an intermingling of the past, present and future.

Assembling is the process, or the event in which all the parts assembled or brought together. This happens over time, and in some structures the process lasts longer than in others. In all Mongrel assemblies, however, the materials, technique and environment assume control. The Mongrel commitment to growth, opportunity and openness continues through the assembling process. In Mongrel assembling, the

assembler must have a sound understanding of the construction process, who is constructing the addition, and of the necessary skills and resources to carry out the Mongrel Approach. Schemata Artichets' Sayama flats in Japan was a project to convert 30-year-old company housing into a contemporary apartment building. The architects design statement was the following: "Our design strategy was that we only design by 'subtraction' or stripping off unnecessary elements, without 'addition'. And we designed everything on site, without preparing any drawings or giving presentation to our client. We stayed at site all the time, and gave instruction to workmen on the spot, as the stripping process went on, and worked with them."<sup>15</sup> The Mongrel Approach allows variety and imperfection in ways impossible to imagine by even by the most open of authors. When necessary or when seeking new opportunities, Mongrel users will reassemble, re-craft or reconstitute a found structure.

In Mongrel, natural forces also characterize the built structure. A Mongrel structure renders typically invisible environmental forces visible — sun, wind, rain, flood, footsteps, for example<sup>16</sup>. The structure becomes a built register of natural forces and human ritual. A Mongrel assembly places an individual in place and time.

### **POST CONSTRUCTION: How a mongrel persists over time.**

In the Mongrel Approach, building and transformation occurs over time. Mongrel is committed to growth and opportunity, because environments change and societal priorities shift. A Mongrel user is always exploring the environment for new opportunities. A site is built up slowly, mimicking evolution and working with what it has rather than starting fresh every time. Transformation of the Mongrel structure is user-driven and stems from prolonged inhabitation.

Circumstances in contemporary cities have changed over time. Today, citizens are concerned with pressing environmental issues, there has been a resurgence in community, and the global economic crisis has triggered a massive value-shift. At the same time, Mongrel assemblies are on the rise. In particular, rising energy costs have demanded advances in green technology. Solar panels are an increasingly common solution to high energy prices, and solar energy now powers over one million homes in Bangladesh, for example<sup>17</sup>. In the United States, solar energy firm Sungevity partnered with Lowe's to offer free quotes for residential solar panel installation<sup>18</sup> with options to lease or buy. In addition, unlikely retail partners are entering the same space. In Toronto, for example, mobile phone company Wind operates out of now-defunct movie rental store Blockbuster. Societal conditions are creating Mongrel alliances. The user in the reassembly stage has a central, empowered role that is tightly intertwined with the built structure. As



3.6  
Waste-to-Energy Plant proposal by Bjarke Ingels Group



3.7  
Waste-to-Energy Plant proposal by Bjarke Ingels Group



3.8  
Betel Nut Hut - Malaysia



3.9  
Betel Nut Hut - Malaysia



3.10  
Sayama Flats - Japan





3.11  
Sayama Flats - Japan

architectural theorist Sanford Kwinter has said, *“The concept behind the slogan [fast, cheap, and out of control] suggests that extremely intricate systems can most effectively be built up messily, in steps and layers, from approximate rather than finished and perfect parts, and incrementally over time, rather than in one fell swoop of assembly. Indirectedness, it appears, is actually the secret to achieving a robust, adaptive, flexible, and evolving design ... They are wild systems that range and explore and mine their environment, that capitalize on accidental successes, store them, and build upon them.”*<sup>19</sup>

A Mongrel user is always looking for an opportunity to reassemble an existing structure within their environment. In Mongrel, the building users are both planned and unexpected. In Hong Kong, women from the Philippines who work as domestic helpers gather on Sundays at the HSBC Bank designed by Norman Foster. In this otherwise empty plaza in the financial district,<sup>20</sup> they play cards, nap, eat, relax and use cardboard boxes to demarcate smaller gathering spaces. These Fugitive Piazzas are a weekly and temporal Mongrel event. In Venezuela a more permanent Mongrel occupation exists. Squatters have occupied an otherwise abandoned skyscraper. The skyscraper was built in the 1990s during the height of the real estate market, and is today one of Latin America’s tallest. Upward of 2,500 squatters have taken over the first 23 floors.<sup>21</sup> Cell phones illuminate the stairs, and there are improvised entrances and Direct TV satellite dishes. It is known locally as the Tower of David, named for the developer David Brillembourg<sup>22</sup>. With its various shops on each occupied floor — including a barber shop, Internet cafe, and a video arcade — the Tower of David has become somewhat of a symbol of opportunity. For others, thought, it is a symbol of decline, where people are allowed to ‘live like animals’.

The Tower of David and its related narrative of how things there evolved, shows a natural desire for shared existence. An architect is someone who tells stories by virtue of how they put things together — a fabler who gets to share their singular conjecture or conjured version of the universe with others, telling how and why they did so. A fabler is at peace with the continued re-invention or elaboration of details each time the story is re-told. “These stories are equal parts logical leap, fabricated detail, exaggerated memory and hopeful conjecture.”<sup>23</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

In 2008, the United Nations declared the earth’s population had become more urban than rural.<sup>24</sup> The world’s cities are concentrations of this diverse population. In “The Global Me,” G. Zachary states there is a new type of individual identity, which he calls ‘Mongrel,’ ‘Hybrid,’ or ‘Cosmopolitan’<sup>25</sup>. Although I have

defined the term 'Mongrel' differently, I agree there has been a rise of culturally layered and complex individual identities, especially in Canada's cultural mosaic. The built environment should reflect this. We need a system that can handle difference and contradiction. The Mongrel Approach is perfectly poised to achieve this as it has no concern for aesthetic and finds value in what is well-used. It enables different opportunities for experience because people are more likely to experiment with something new in a hodge-podge environment. The Mongrel Approach promotes freedom and tolerance, with no political affiliation or agenda. It is democratic in its objective.

It addresses the question of the individual and of change over time. As in, how does an individual create place in a constantly changing world? A Mongrel is a reflection of time and human ritual, registering the multiplicity of authors involved in the construction. It connects the individual to a time and place beyond their current existence because the layers of history are evident in the Mongrel, either in material, form or schema. The Mongrel Approach links the individual to something outside of their time — to something that existed before, and which will continue to exist long after their death.



3.12  
Fugitive Piazza - Hong Kong



3.13  
Fugitive Piazza - Hong Kong



3.14  
Tower of David - Venezuela



3.15  
Tower of David - Venezuela



3.16  
Solar Panel retrofit on suburban home - United States





3.17  
Solar Panel retrofit on suburban home - United States



## **Six Points on Mongrel:**

### **1. Values a systems approach to putting things together:**

Building is a process of bringing things together, the site, users, materials and environment over time. A systems approach means understanding how these things or parts influence one another within a whole. This approach values understanding relationships, whether small or large, official or unintentional; it understands that nothing exists in isolation.

### **2. Relentlessly Opportunistic:**

This applies to the users or creators of a Mongrel structure. They are open to any and all opportunities offered by immediate surroundings and circumstances. This demands spontaneity and is a driving force for constant transformation.

### **3. No concern for aesthetic:**

In the bringing together of various parts, there is no concern for the appearance of the whole to be of a finished, completed or definable work. There is no concern for creation of beauty. Mongrel accepts a state of being incomplete or in progress; a degree of unpredictability always exists in the system.

### **4. Accepts what was previously unacceptable:**

The unacceptable is that which does not conform to the existing standards and expectations. This can apply to site selection, building processes, materials, program, and space layout. Accepting the unacceptable is the driving force for change, a new lens with which to view the existing landscape.

### **5. Includes what was not deliberately selected:**

The 'not deliberately selected' includes the accidental (can be a found object), the by-products, and the shadowy counterpart. This demands honesty. Being inclusive of all the parts and not diluting or reducing their presence maintains an authenticity in the whole.

### **6. A register of time and human ritual:**

A Mongrel structure is appropriated by users and registers established routines and habits either in form, material or schema. As social priorities shift, a Mongrel structure will change or shift, slowly transforming over time. A shadow on a surface, a paint stain on a wood floor, or wood bleached from the sun registers the passage of time, in minutes, season, or years.



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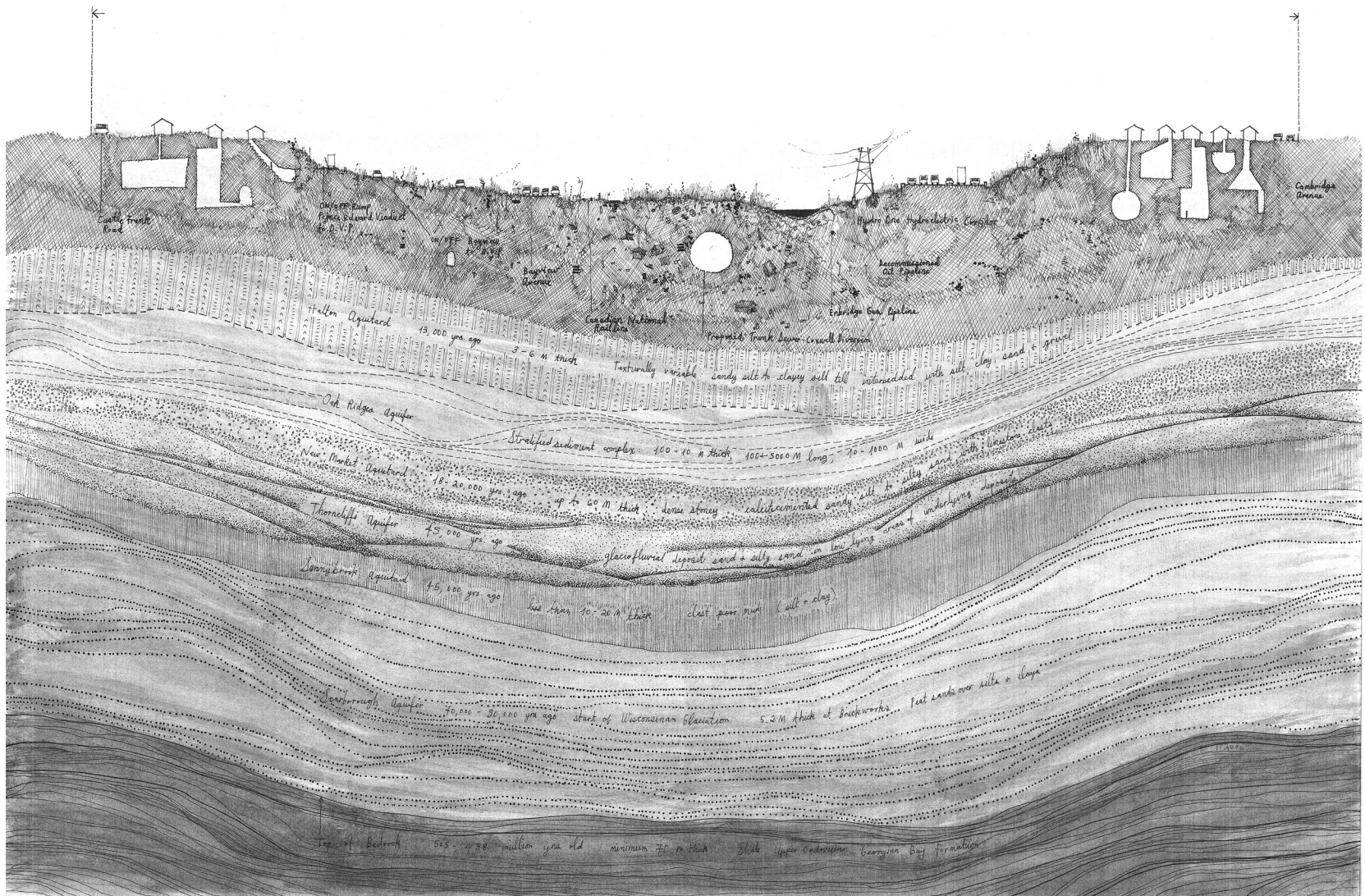


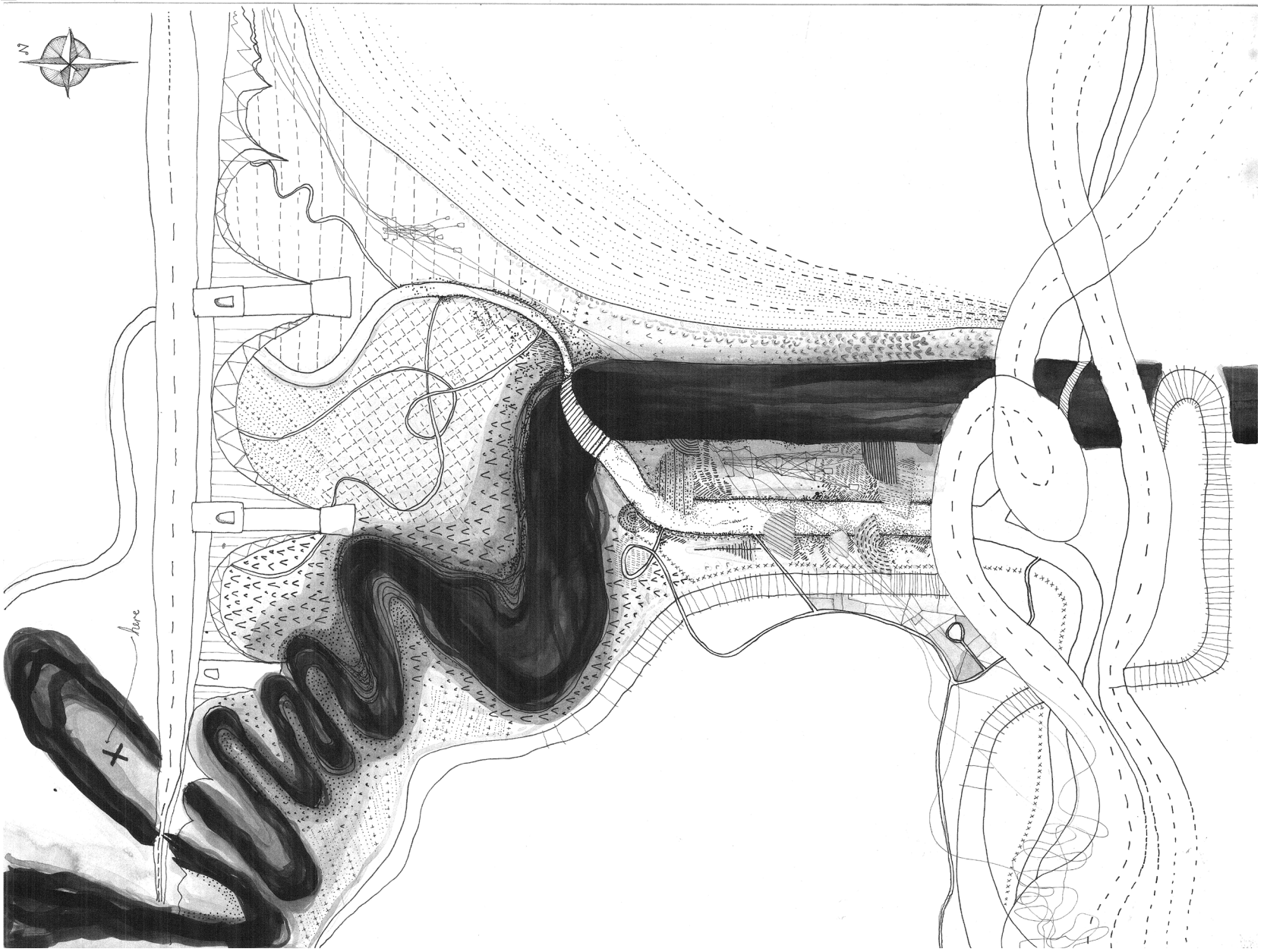


# **PART 4**

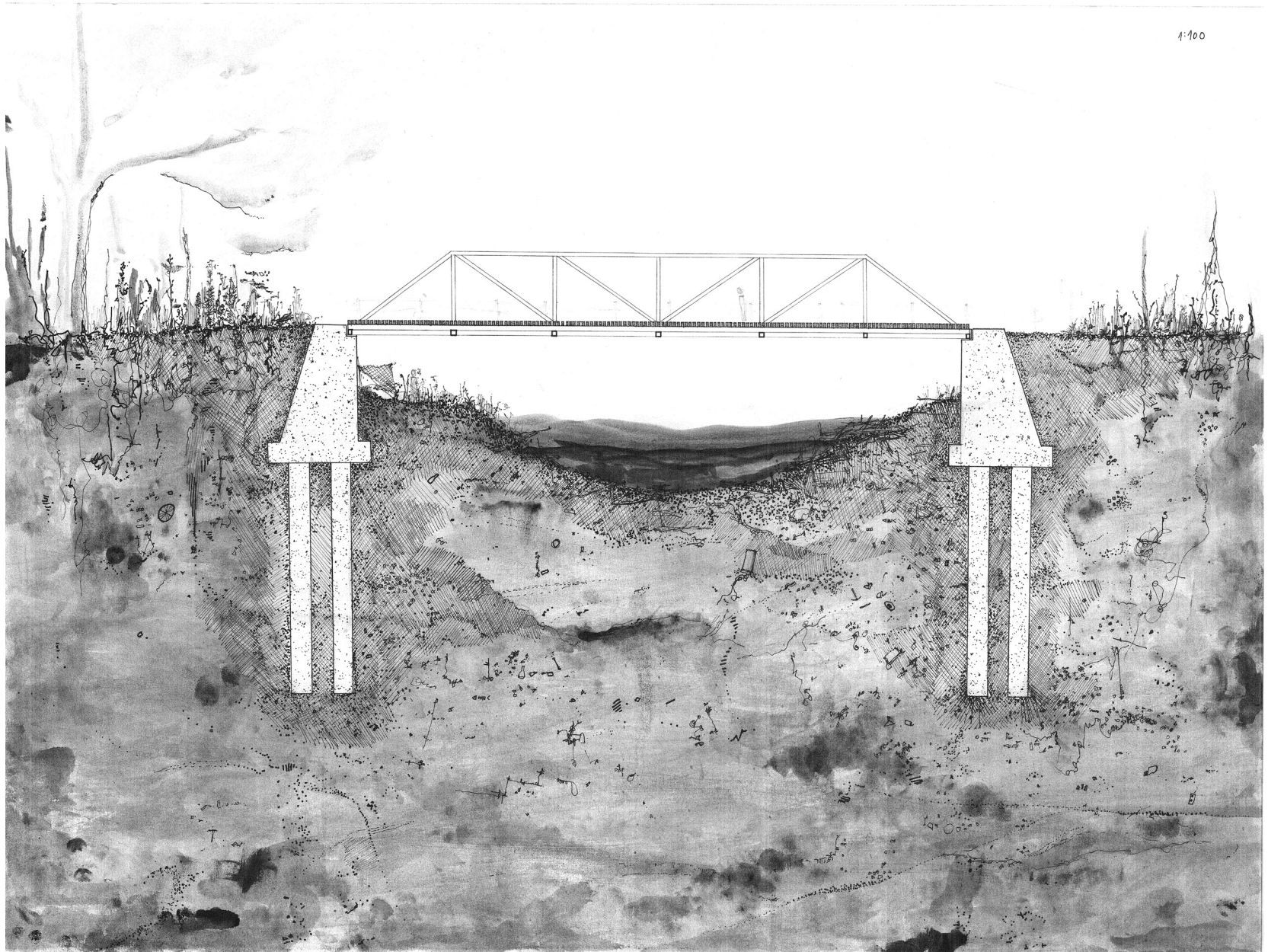
## *The Drawings*

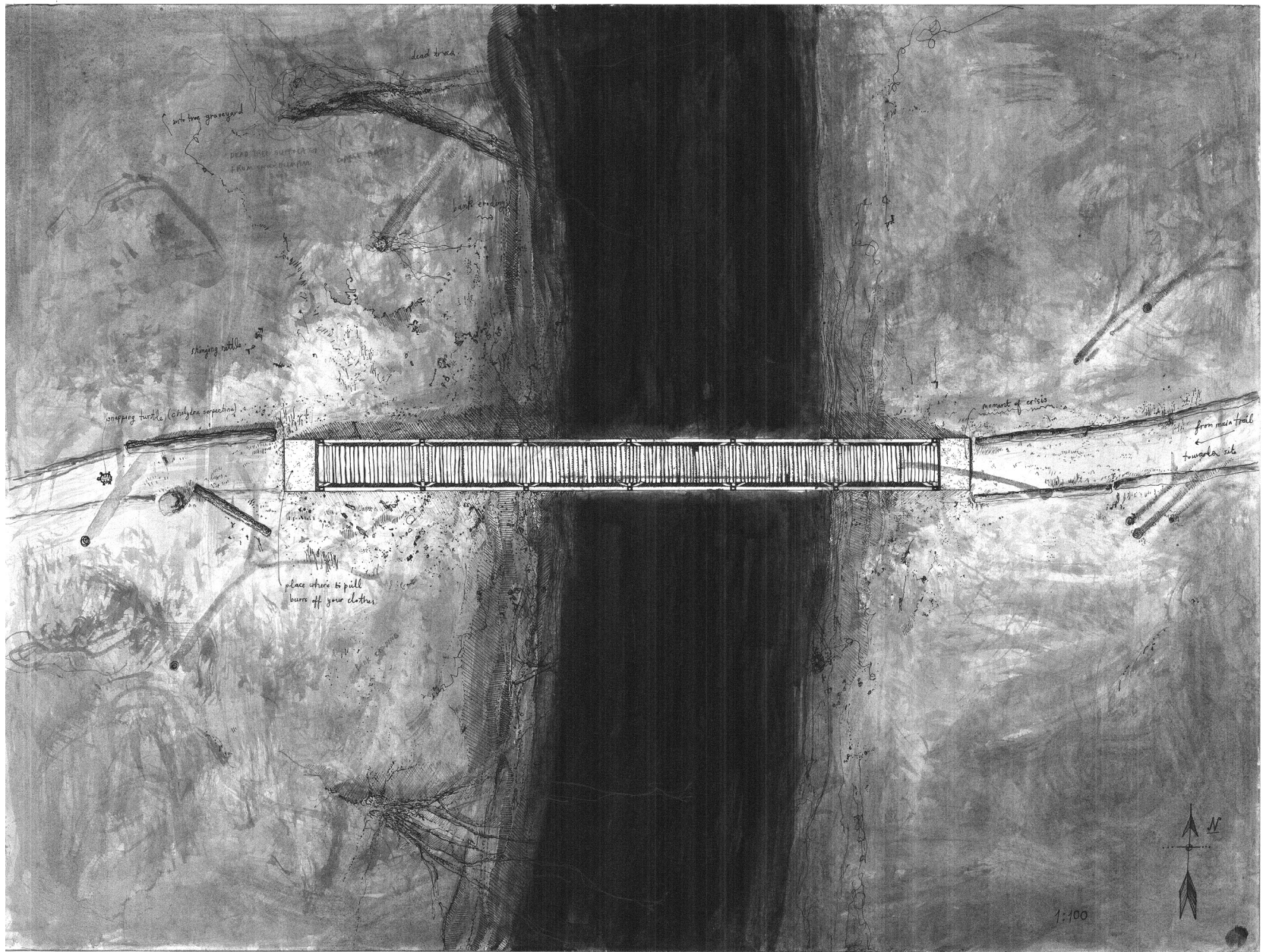
# Regional Flood Boundary



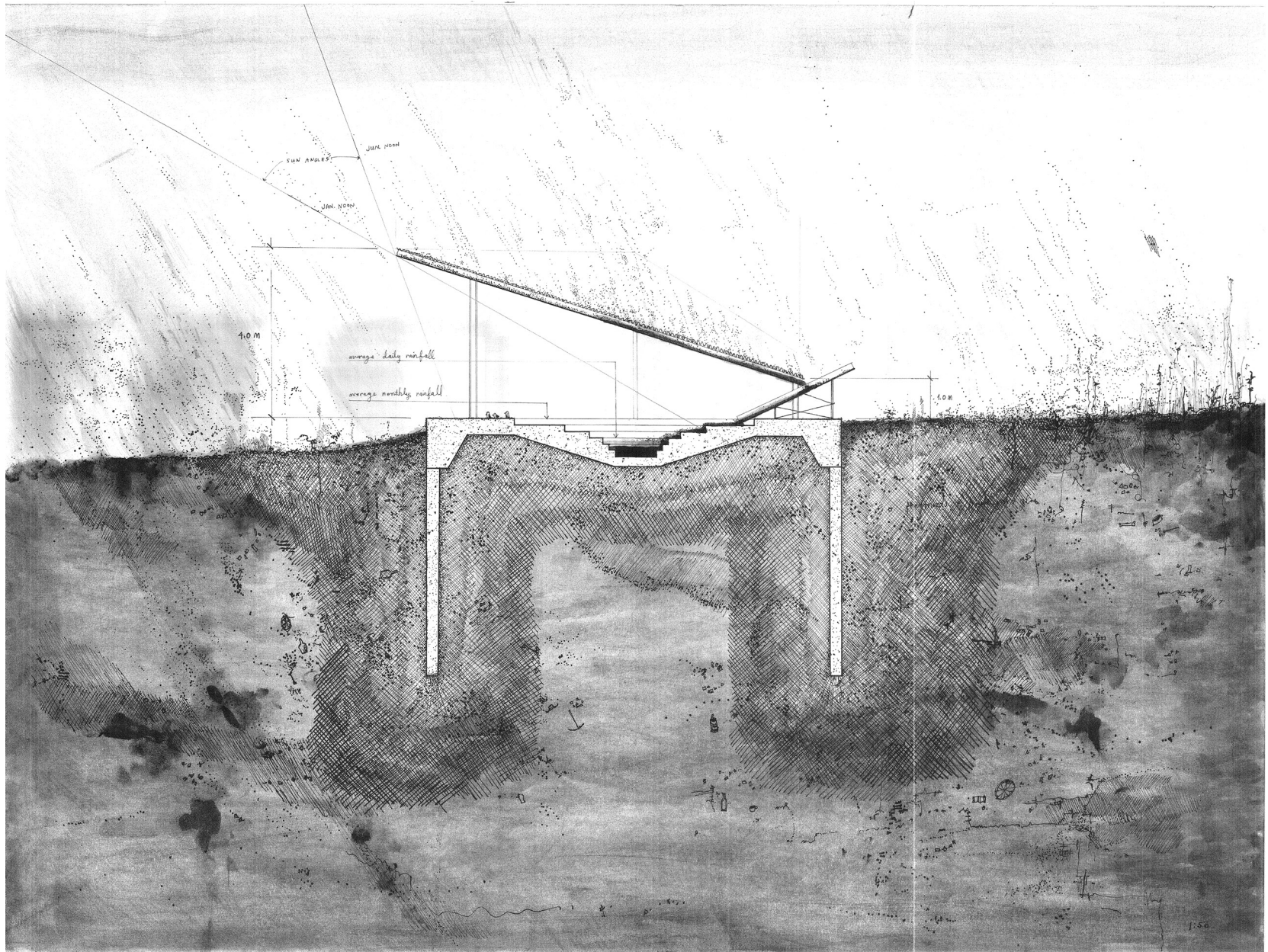




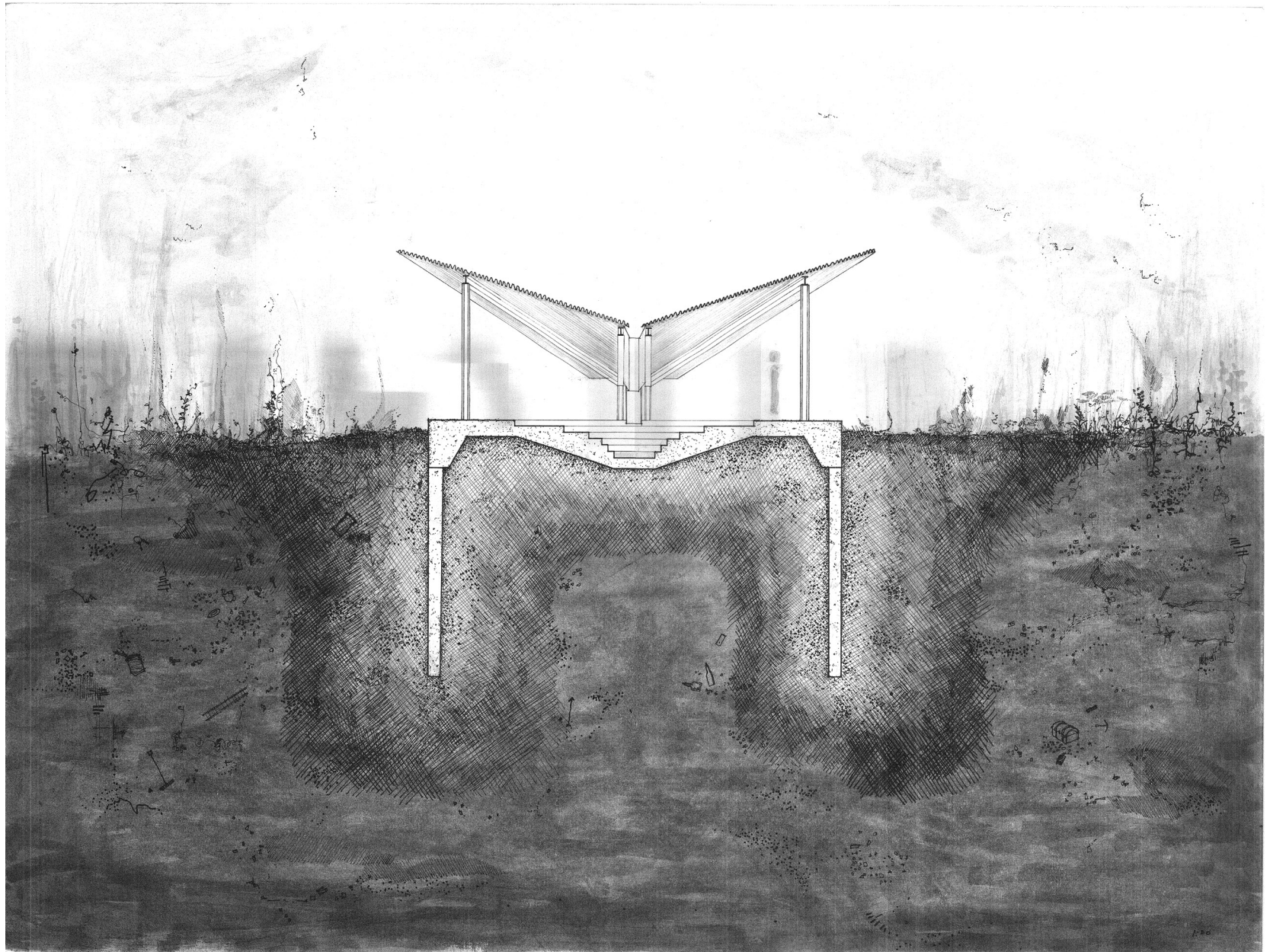


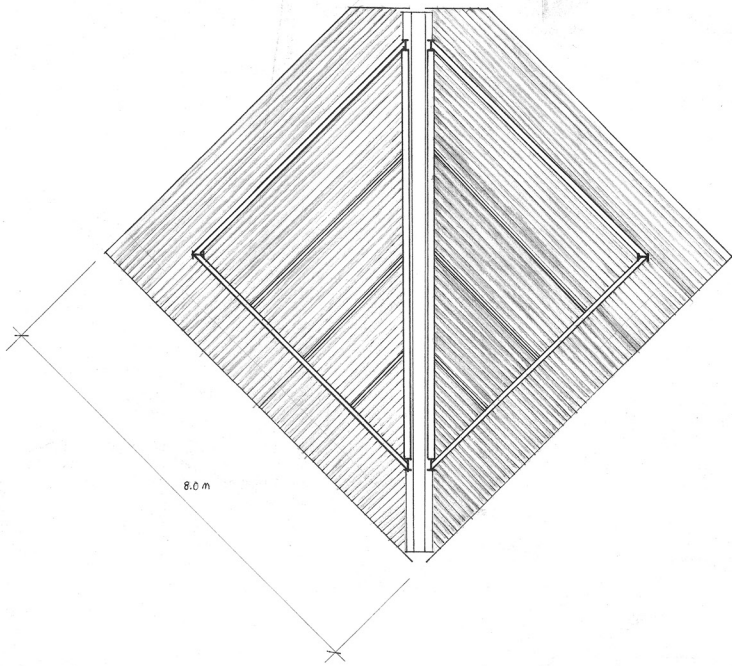




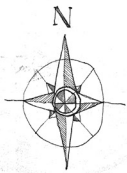




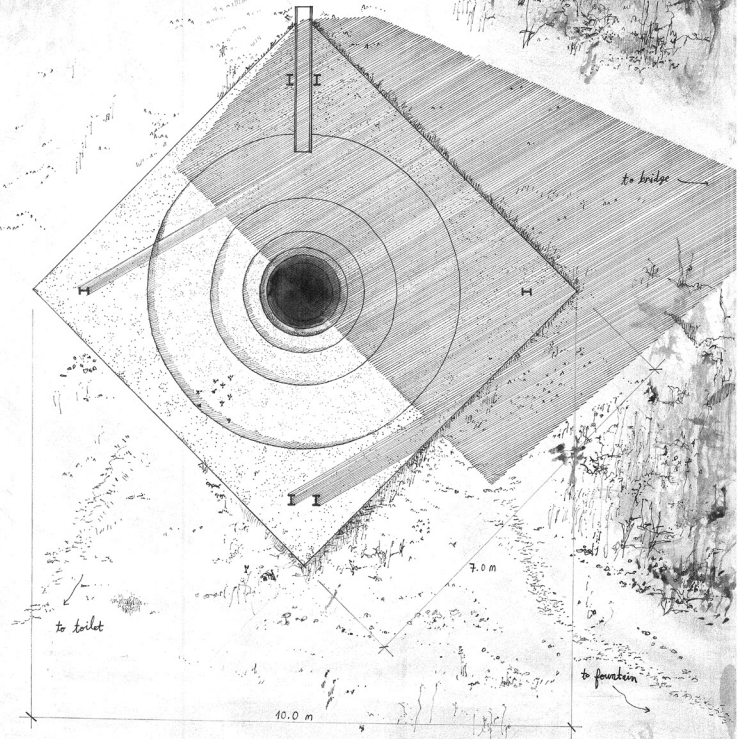




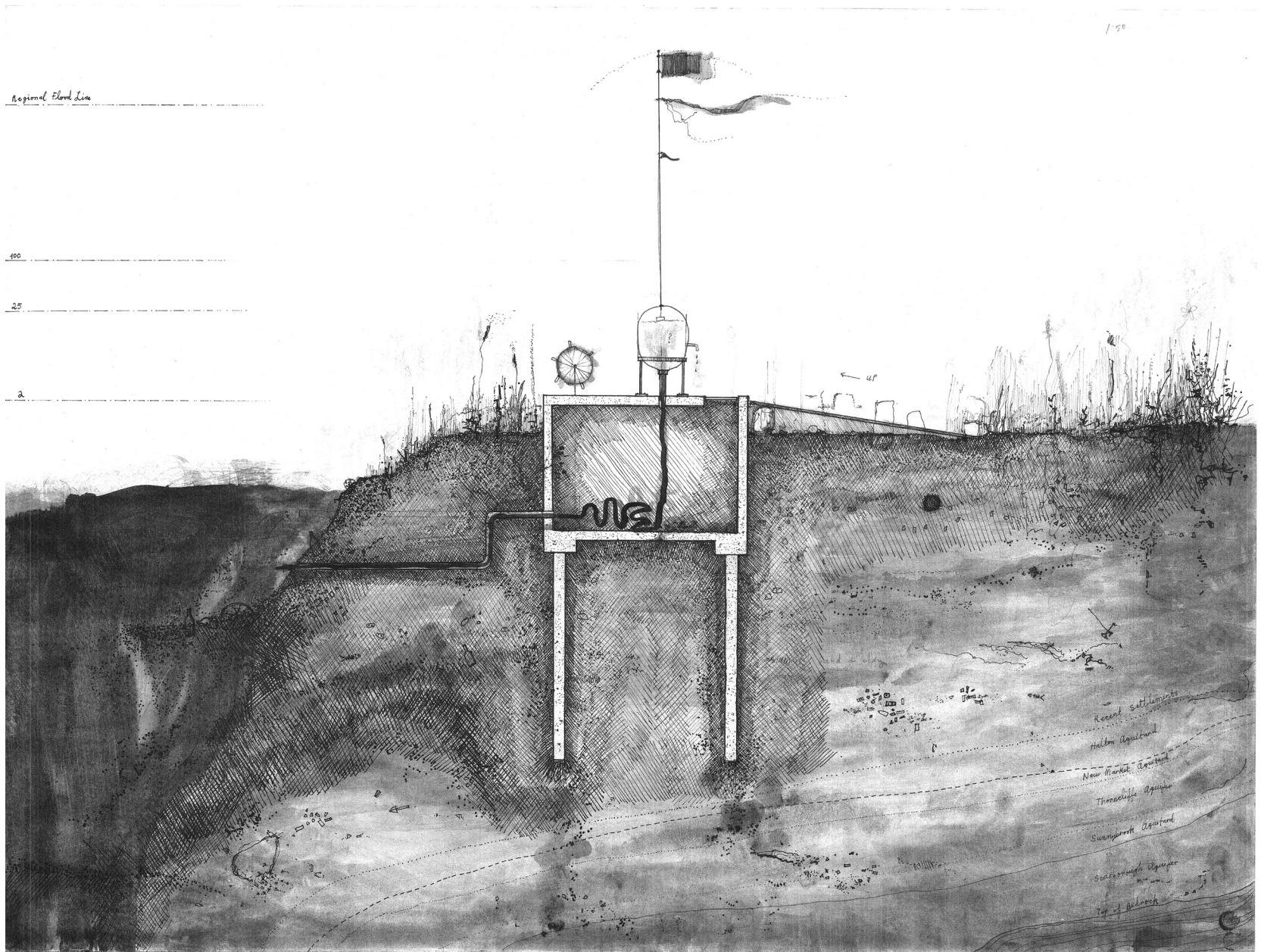
Reflected Ceiling Plan.

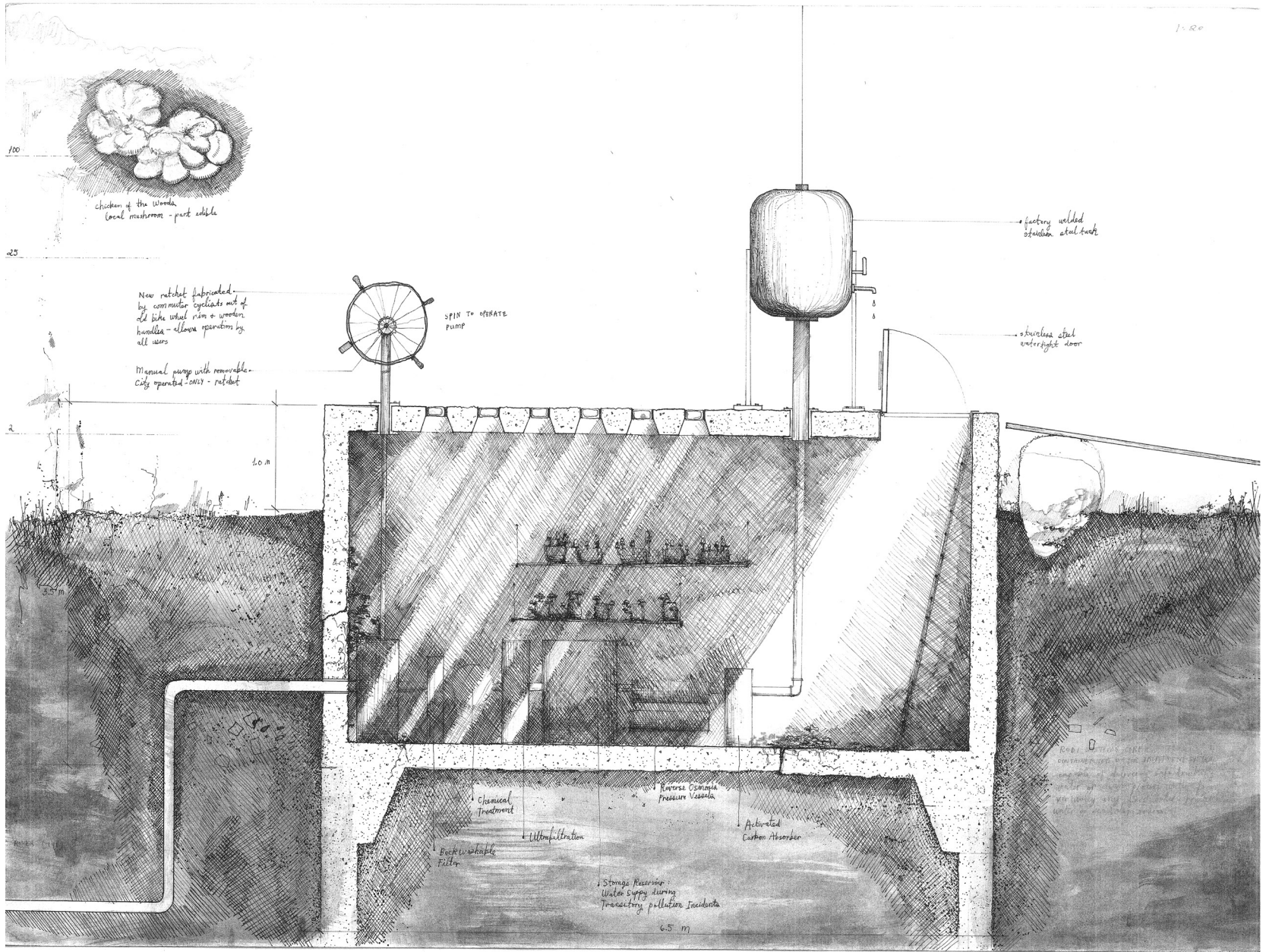


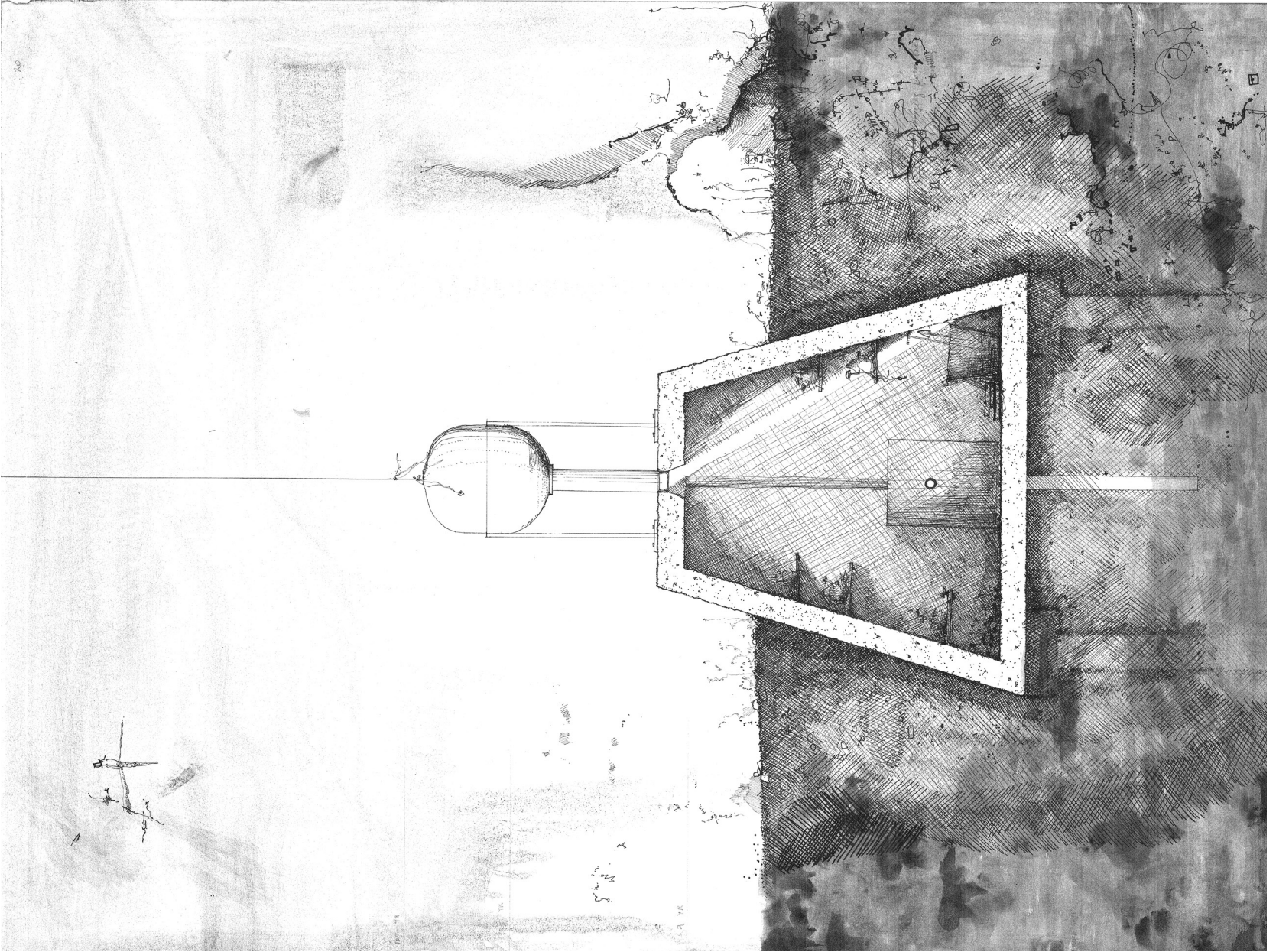
1:50

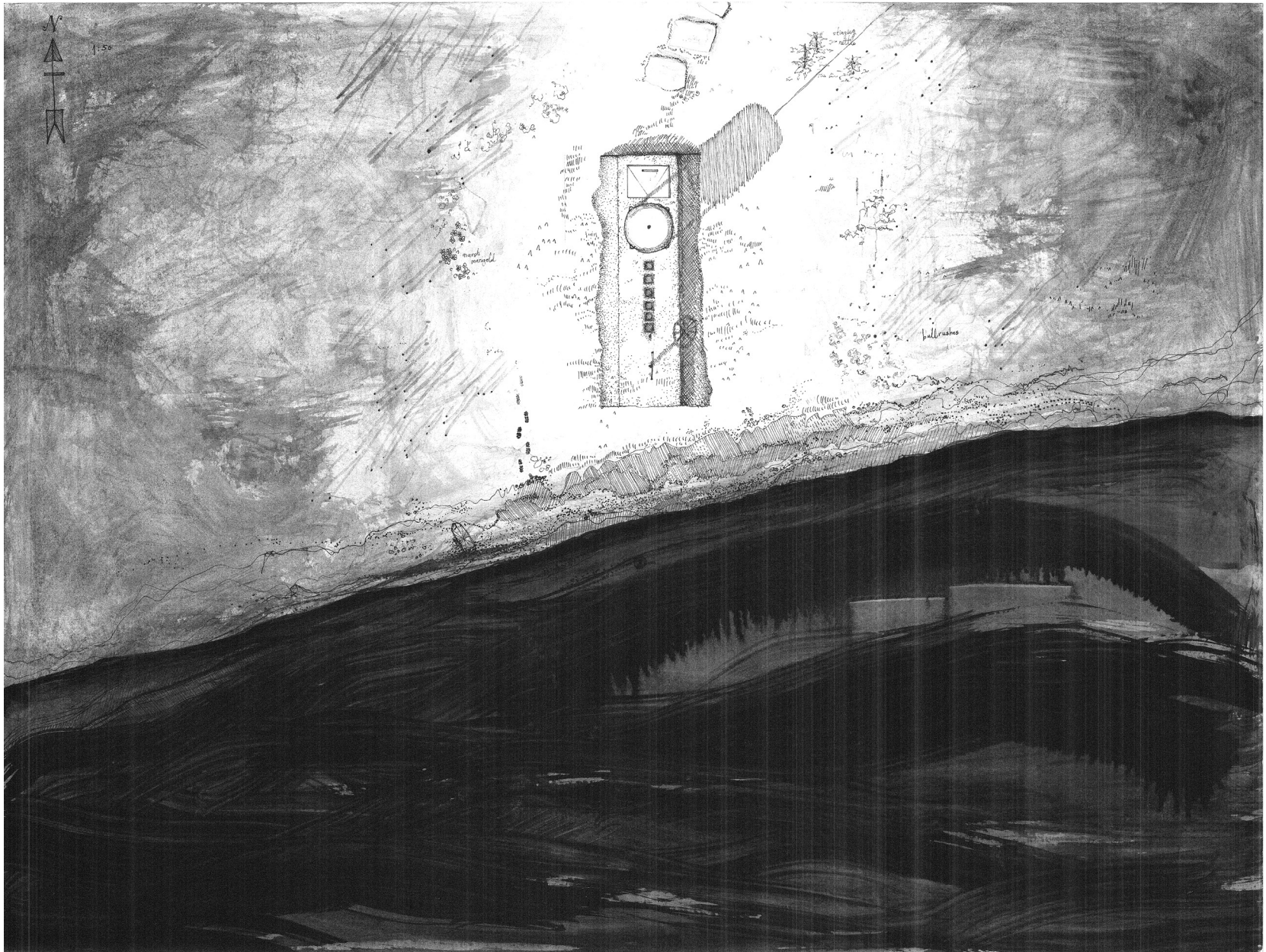


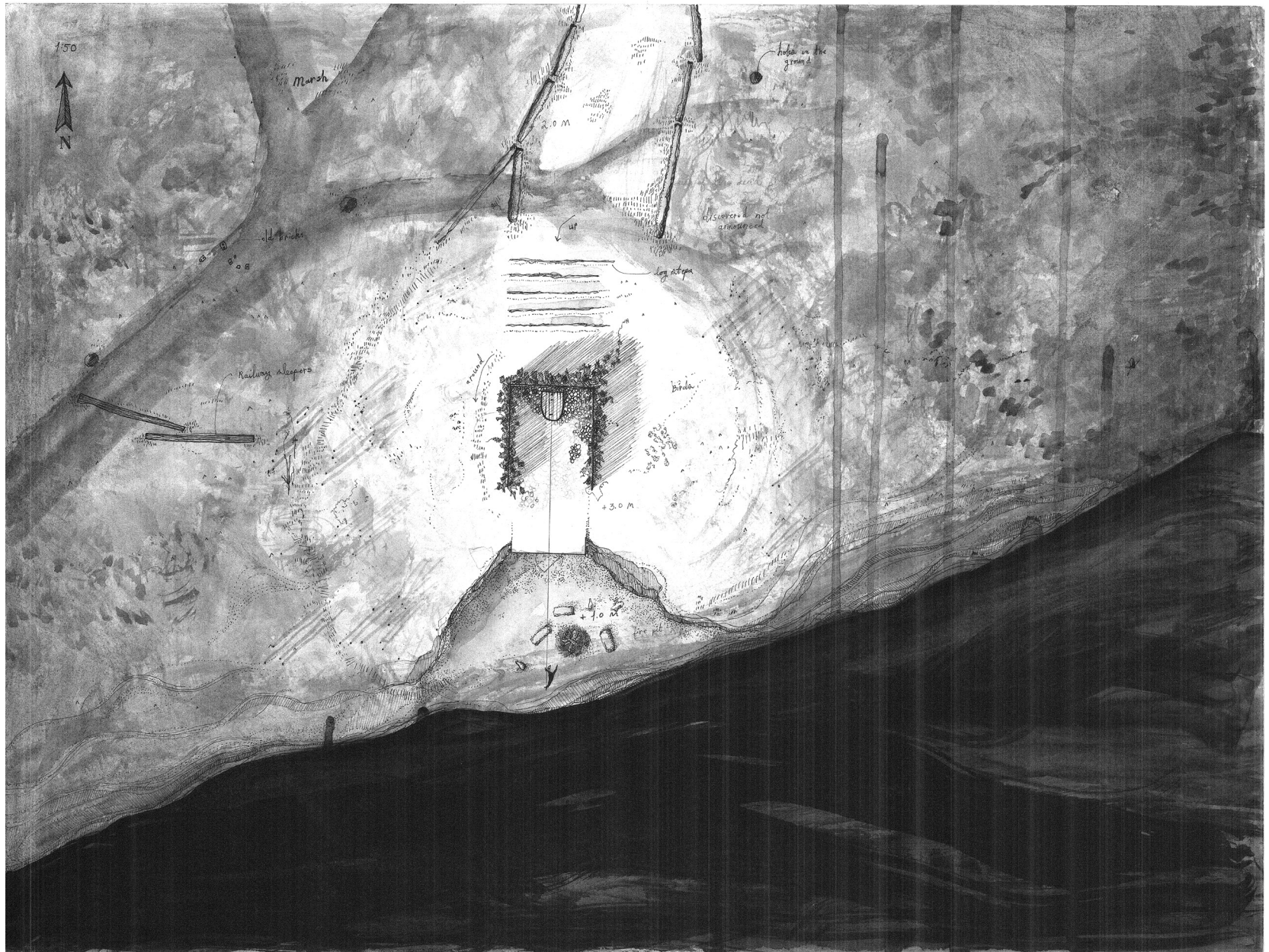
Plan











Compost Chamber

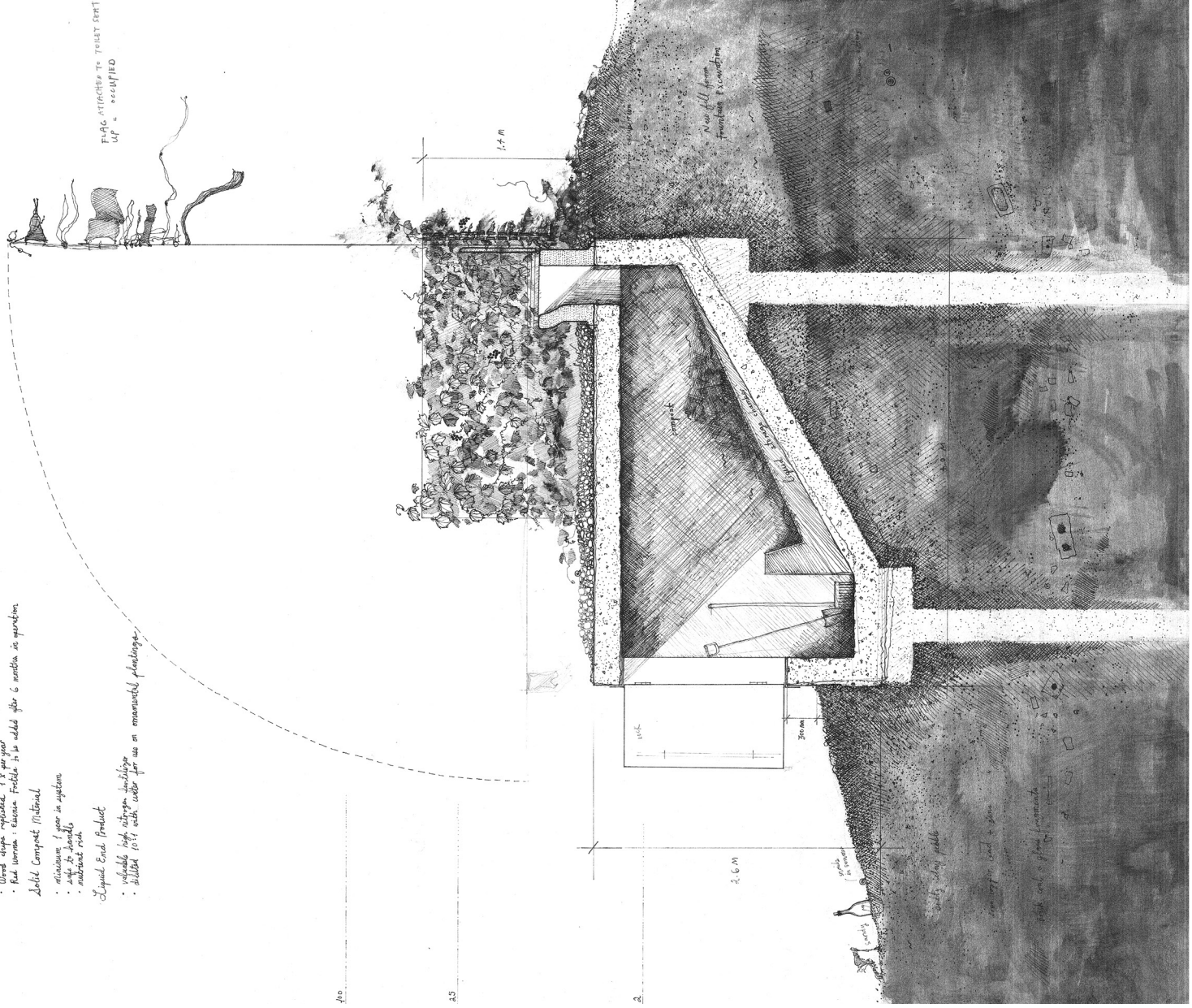
- aerobic decomposition: minimum 1 year
- 10% recycled plastic 1 x per year
- Red worm: kitchen. Filter: to add after 6 months in operation

Solid Compost Material

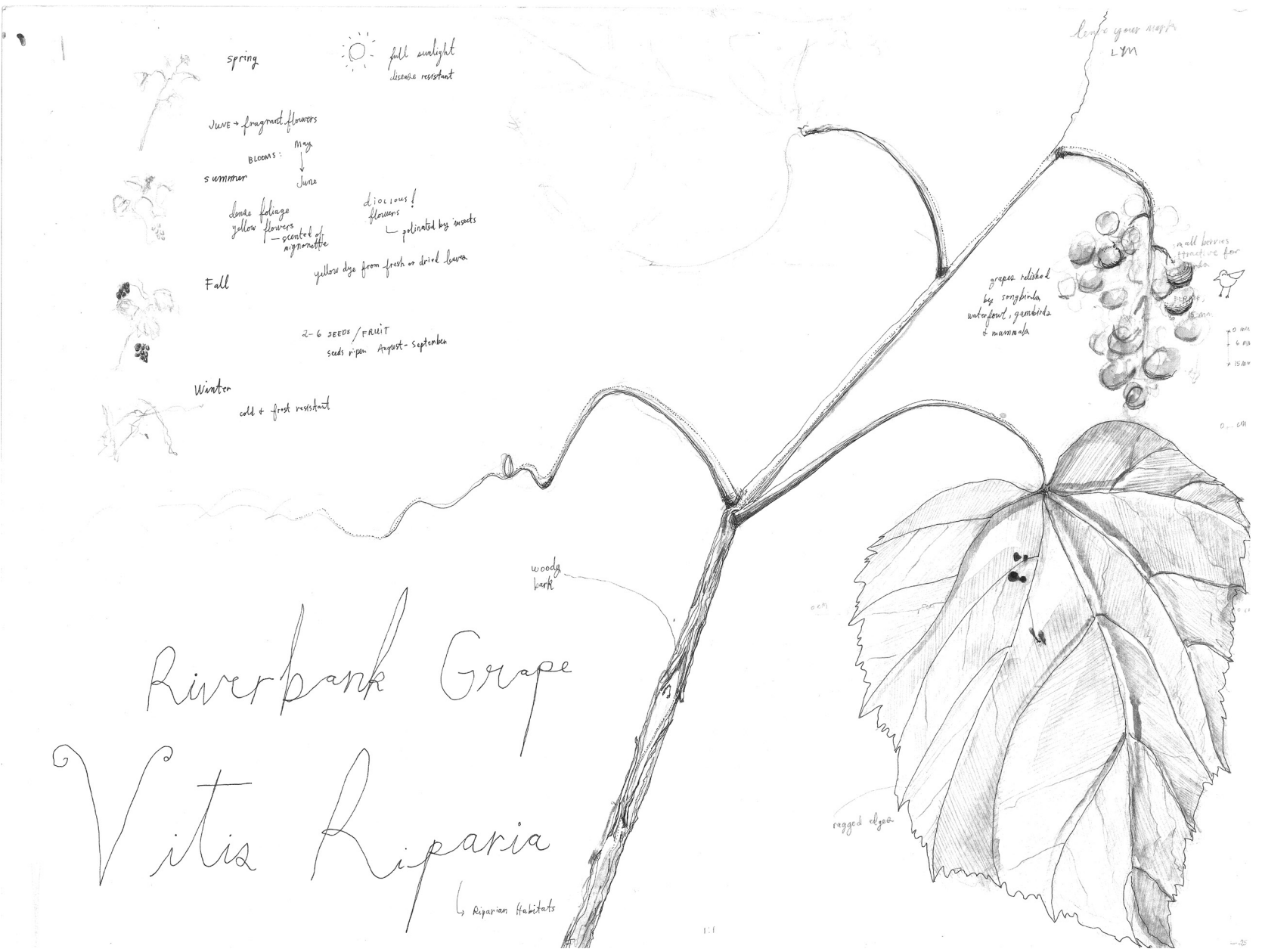
- minimum 1 year in system
- 20% of plants
- substrate rock

Liquid End Product

- reliable high nitrogen fertilizer
- diluted 10% with water for use on ornamental plantings







Spring

☀ full sunlight  
disease resistant

June → fragrant flowers  
BLOOMS: May → June  
Summer

dioecious! flowers  
→ pollinated by insects  
dense foliage  
yellow flowers  
→ scented of nectar  
yellow dye from fresh or dried leaves

Fall

2-6 SEEDS / FRUIT  
seeds ripen August - September

Winter

cold + frost resistant

leave your notes  
LM

grapes relished  
by songbirds  
waterfowl, gamebirds  
& mammals

all berries  
attractive for  
birds

0.5 CM  
1.5 CM  
2.5 CM

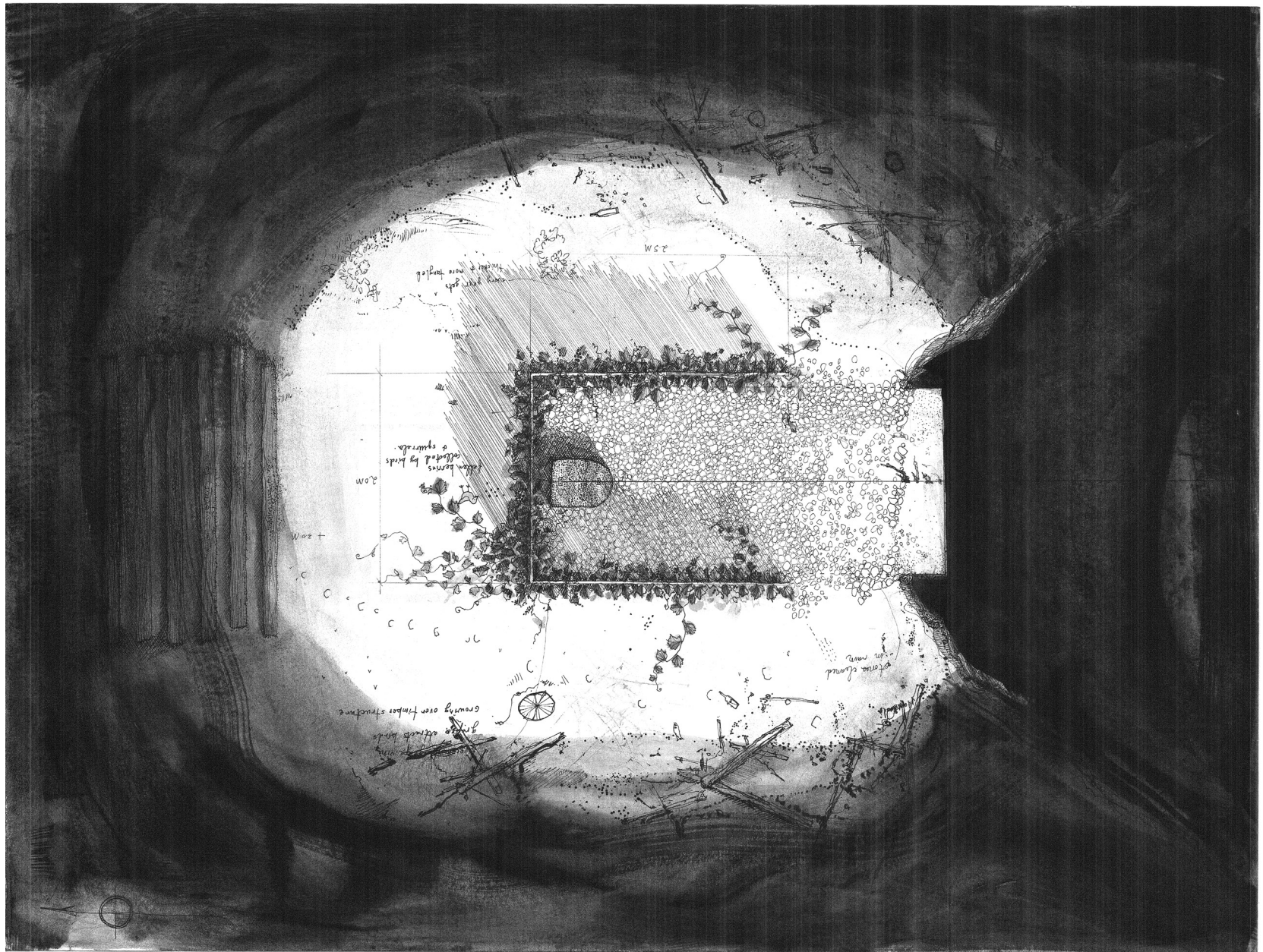
0.5 CM

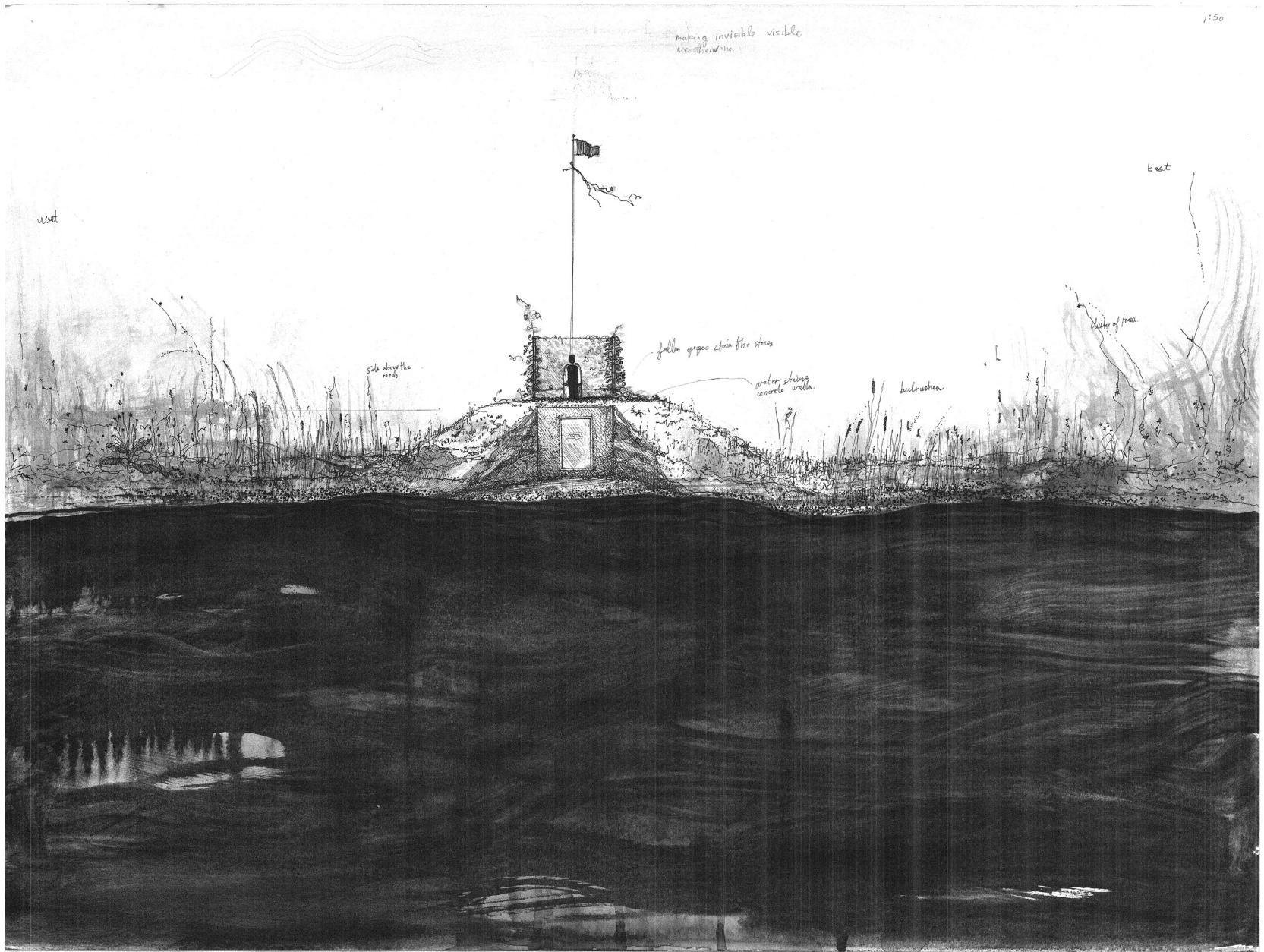
woody  
bark

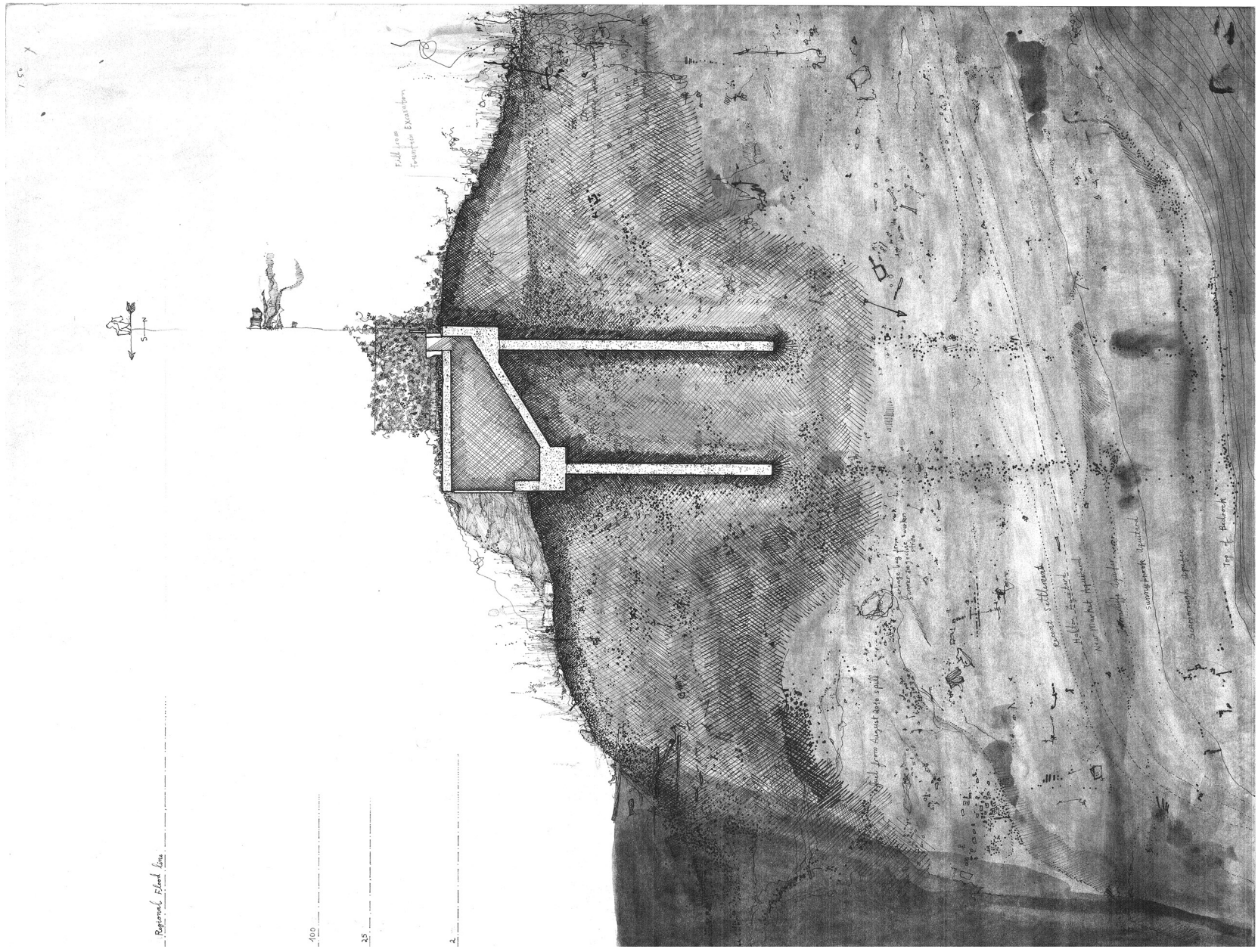
ragged edges

Riverbank Grape

*Vitis Riparia*  
↳ Riparian Habitats











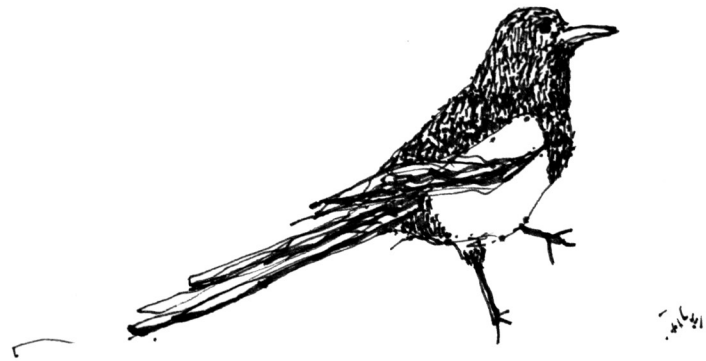






## **PART 5**

*An Explanatory Tale  
by Mr. Magpie*



The City has always suspected I am a thief. They are incorrect, of course, but I will confess I have an irresistible affinity for shiny things and I am sometimes compelled to act in a less-than-honorable manner. I prefer to consider trickery an art form that has allowed me to comfortably evade the City and dissuade it from meddling in my affairs — that is, until an extraordinary series of events during a stormy week in May that narrowly saved me from the City’s persecution. Still, the events left quite a stench in the Don Valley, my residence at the time.

The Don Valley was the best place to go if you wanted not to be found. The Don River was unpredictable, and its flooding hampered the City’s efforts to impose a definable character on the place. The City rarely ventured down into its shadowy counterpart. The very act of descending seemed strange in a City where high achievement was so valued.

I took a liking to the Valley because it was stealth in nature, and because it was a lucrative place to forage. The Don River carried the richest assortment of items from the inner-reaches of the City all the way to Lake Ontario. As a scavenger in the Valley, there was always something catching the attention of my wandering eye. One of my favourite acquisitions was a locket from Governor Simcoe’s wife, Elizabeth, who spent a great deal of time in the Valley. She reported her locket stolen, but what really transpired was this: She left it hanging on a tree branch to go swimming in the Don River and did not take it with her when she left; I was perched in said tree, and naturally swooped in to take it shortly after. I have developed a reputation as a hoarder, but the truth is I am very old and sometimes forgetful, and these things help me keep track of time. This explains why I am very particular about where I keep my things, and why I prefer very much to avoid the City’s meddling ways.

I made it my business to know about the various activities occurring in the Valley. I was always wary of the City encroaching on my space. On one particularly brisk spring morning, I noticed some usual activity on the snow-dumping site just north of the Prince Edward Viaduct. By virtue of eavesdropping on numerous conversations, I was able to cobble together the gist of what was happening — parts of the snow-dumping site had been given to the “Task Force to Bring Back the Don.” With the help of volunteers, workers had installed a toilet, a fountain, a shelter/grey water well, and a bridge to cross the river. I was unsure what everything was for: The toilet was sitting atop a hill as if it were a throne, the water-fountain tank rested on top of some kind of vault that was planted into the ground, and both had very tall flags that flapped in the wind. Something about the place gave the impression the work was still in progress. I was compelled to stay a while to see what would transpire.

I nested underneath the wooden deck of the new bridge. It was loosely bolted to the steel frame and rattled as people crossed over it. From a plethora of debris, I chose the best sticks with which to build my home and busied myself with my usual activities. As I suspected, this place proved an excellent location for finding shiny things. I adorned the top of the structures and flag posts with the treasures I found. As this place was technically under the City's jurisdiction, I was deeply concerned that someone — perhaps a City official — would discover my collection. This would be devastating given that, as I mentioned before, a few of my things had been acquired in a rather contentious manner. Many people came to this place, and I was not sure who could be trusted. I was pleased to see that the other site users appeared to share my disdain for the City's incessant dabbling in our affairs.

The fountain was powered by water being pumped manually from the Don River through an underground filtration system into a steel holding tank. The steel tank had a small spout for the easy filling of water bottles. Given the surprisingly large number of accidents that transpired in the Don River, the water was polluted and the fountain presented a number of health and safety issues. In order to mitigate problems that could arise from the contamination, the drinking-fountain pump was to be operated only by a City official. Over the years, the number of commuter cyclists increased by a million times (despite the Brothers Fordd best efforts). As the water fountain was often empty, some local cyclists pumped water themselves by fashioning a ratchet out of an old bike wheel and other random bits left behind from the snow-dumping activities. The compost toilet, which was likewise operated by a City official, posed similar challenges. The vault beneath the toilet, which contained the compost, was locked and bolted for health and security issues. The key, however, was once forgotten in the door — discovered by a local dog walker and avid gardener who, upon discovering the compost, took the key and tied it by a string to the toilet screen now covered in riverbank grape for access later. (I must also note this particular vine produced delicious berries in the fall.) Various visitors removed the compost periodically, so when City maintenance workers arrived, everything was already taken care of, prompting them to visit less frequently. I felt relieved by their increasing despondence for this place. Inversely, I noticed an increasingly strong community of people organized around these structures. Like a symbolic knot in the centre of the Valley, this kingdom attracted a seemingly inharmonious and incongruous group of users.

The local cluster was strengthened while the City, meantime, grew ever more disinterested in the place because of the continual flooding there. The Brothers Fordd halted plans to re-naturalize the mouth of the Don, instead parceling off the land and selling it to their friends, who were private developers. The Don Valley's flooding problems persisted, mostly because the kingdom was situated

on a very low-lying piece of land I should explain the floods were not of the entirely devastating sort, but rather somewhat small — sweeping some things away and leaving others, rearranging some things and leaving other alone in their existence. The little structures embedded in this site often lost limbs during these storms, and I lost a few of my own things, too. The cores of the structures, though, were sturdy, resilient and determined to remain. Slowly and incrementally, the local users replaced the missing pieces, but evidence of the flooding never totally disappeared. Everything in the kingdom, then, was constantly on its way to becoming something else.

Although the waters washed away some of the crossing's wooden hand rails and deck-slats, logs and other objects quickly replaced them. New parts were slowly added, and people visited the site often to monitor the use of their somewhat natural, somewhat intentional inventions. Typically stealth environmental forces became visible on the surface of building materials. The sun, for example, had bleached the wooden limbs. Floods dispersed the salt leftover from the winter's snow dumping activities, corroding the steel connections on all the structures. These connections were promptly replaced by rope, tied in sailor's knots. Each year, when the ground froze and then thawed, the structures moved up and down and over time the vault's foundations cracked. A local mushroom breed started growing in the cracks of the fountain vault's floor. A Task Force member took note of the optimal environmental conditions for mushroom growth and launched a rogue mushroom farm. Plants grew, and fellow birds frequented the houses. Local residents of the Don Valley, whose camp had been moved to make way for the West Don Lands development, took great interest in this place and soon became stewards of the site. They provided directions and information to newcomers, and were by far the most knowledgeable of the local flora and fauna. People could not help but be attracted to the kingdom. The professional amateurs that lived in nearby condominiums yearned for a place to share their skills. Pieces of the structures were broken and fixed even before the City took notice. This worked in my favor. Slowly, the City forgot about this place.

Over the years, I have come to the conclusion that if we want to keep the City out, we must keep the flooding in. I should admit I had a personal, vested interest in what the water left behind. The crossing's wooden decking was like a sieve, for it was lower than all the bridges and caught water during even the smallest flood. It was the best place to find treasures — earrings that had fallen down the sink drain, pet goldfish that had been flushed away, keys that had been dropped in the sewer, and things that had been tossed away along the Don Valley Parkway. The City dismissed this land as not 'good' because of the flooding, and I made sure they continued to believe this. I squawked at any City official with whom I crossed paths. I was always sure to chirp about the site's dreadful

state and the relentless flood damage — all of it so unpredictable! This worked until one day drivers, stuck in traffic jams on the Don Valley Parkway, started meddling.

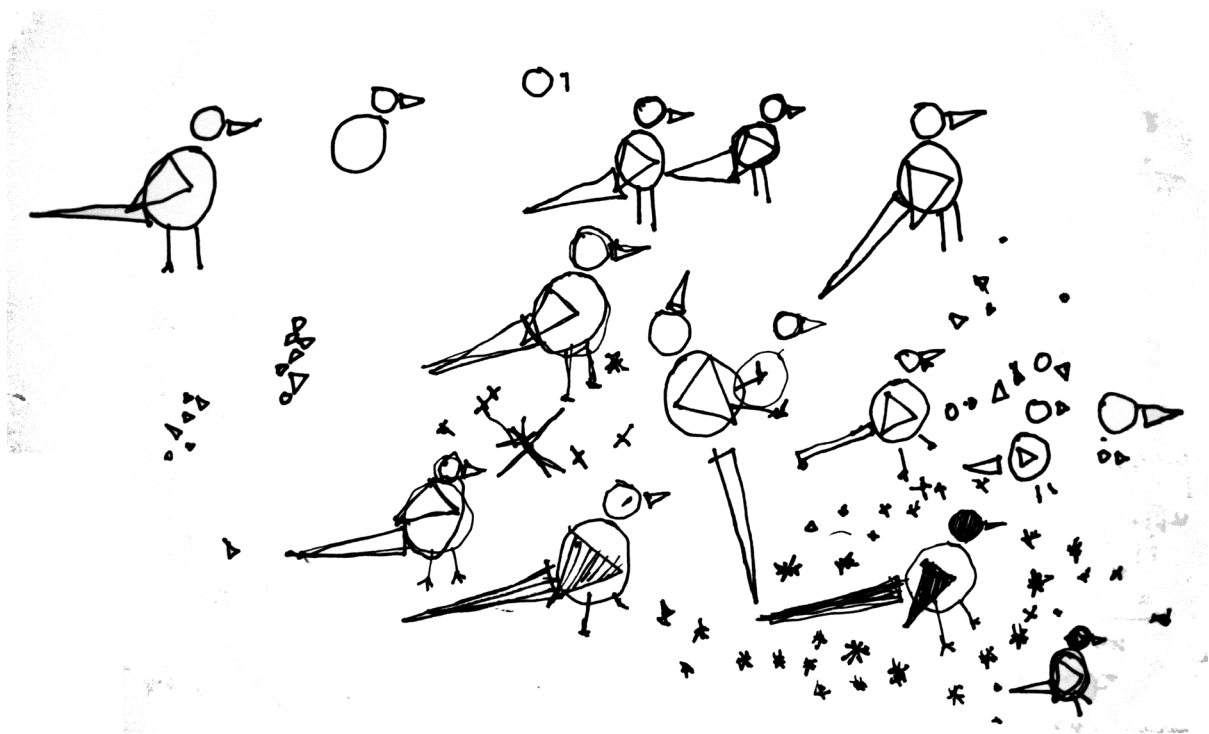
I was doing my usual swoop of the site when I noticed some City officials standing around. I went closer and soon realized they were lost. They were crowded around an electronic device, attempting to enter the address into their GPS, but it was not working. I followed them from above, eavesdropping on their conversation. The City had received several reports from concerned motorists about some suspicious activity amongst the trees, just north of the Prince Edward Viaduct. The reports included descriptions of oddly coloured flags, bits of jewelry, campfire smoke, bells and whistles. The snow-dumping workers did not recall seeing such things, mostly because the site had not required snow dumping during the past three years.

The City sent a few officials to inspect the place. If the City were to discover the structures, it would not be long before they noticed the collections I had spent years acquiring. The City returned to their offices and found records showing that long ago, several items including a toilet, fountain and shelter, had been installed on a site that matched the location described by the concerned motorists. They found records of a bridge that led there. The following day, the City returned and crossed the bridge.

The bridge had been decorated with an additional Enbridge gas line and some hydro-line power cables. Instead of finding a toilet and water fountain, officials saw a grassy knoll, ivy mound, and steel tank. They did not recognize what was before them. The excavation around these curious objects only fueled their confusion. The vault underneath the steel tank was full of mushrooms. Underneath the mound of riverbank grape, they found a toilet and a small box adjacent containing a new roll of toilet paper. On the inside of the door to the compost vault, they found a note citing the current compost rotation and the dates on which the compost would become ripe for the taking. Cyclist's tools were hung all over the shelter posts. The City officials, with their electronic records and GPS, could not determine where the structures stopped and started. They were confused and dismayed. When the officials began gathering their things to leave an unfortunate gust of wind blew Governor Simcoe's locket off the flag post and it landed at one of the men's feet. I flew off in a hurry, not looking back.

The days that followed were eerily quiet. Then a storm bomb hit Toronto and the unthinkable happened. While the Brothers Fordd busied themselves with Ferris wheels, parking lots, and mega malls, they did nothing to address the Coxwell Trunk Sewer. It had been in disrepair for a million

years, but plans to divert it had been put on hold. During the storm, the sewer finally gave way, and the sewage from the Coxwell Trunk Sewer — which carries three times the volume of the Don River — rushed over the Valley's banks and destroyed everything in its path. The kingdom was taken with the waters, and my treasures are now somewhere at the bottom of a very dirty Lake Ontario. I presume a trout (if any are still alive) might someday discover them. I am not sad at my apparent loss, though, because things do not disappear — they simply migrate or change state. I will just have to find another place to nest. I have noticed that the City has recently neglected Yonge-Dundas Square. I think I will see what is there.





## **EPILOGUE:**

*Not clean, but green*

*Many of you might be curious about what happened to the Don Valley. Despite the pull of new and shiny things that initially distracted me, I did eventually return to my old haunt.. The water was a potential carrier of disease and could not be trusted, but it was ultimately the smell in and around the Valley that kept people out. Almost every organization and almost all the infrastructure that had found a home in the Don Valley had abandoned their properties after the sewer incident. The network of streams and ravines that fed into the Don, and which had been buried and driven-over, finally resurfaced. These places were treated with fear and a cautious respect; people actually left nature alone.*

*Around the Don River watershed, the city inverted. Instead of ravines running through a city, there were highly contained bits of City within the wilderness of the Don watershed. While it was not clean, it was certainly green. The sewage had fertilized the land with nutrients, and the flora was replenished. Slowly, after many years, nature reclaimed the land. I am very curious to find out what is happening deep inside this weird, bleak and brilliant wilderness. I have yet to venture in.*



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