

A GUIDEBOOK TO LIFE ELSEWHERE



C.A.T. CONTENT

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I AM A C.A.T.

INVESTIGATION

SHELTER

07

Maximilian Gallo



Coming to the woods I firstly pressured myself into developing some kind of artistic idea, asking myself what I could build out of the material that the forest, the dells and hills were offering.

Upon entering the glade on which we settled I asked myself: as what are you entering this place? What is your purpose or your goal? At first, I forced myself to think about something that I could build, for me as well as for the group. Apparently, I had left the city, but the urge to work and be productive still lingered within me. Over the whole time, I could not lose this; the forest did not, as might be expected, heal the wounds that a city-centred lifestyle seems to rip open in one's perception of the world. So, again: who am I here? A city person dwelling in the open fields, between thorny bushes and rotting leaves, between trees and soil, between water and waste. But I am no Thoreau, I am not the Unabomber fleeing society to beat my own path, a grudge against civilisation encased in my thoughts; I am an alien, I am a Catastrophic Animal on Terra and yet I am an alien to this rooted world.

The forest harvests light; like a

ceiling made of a thousand leaves, the trees try to capture as much energy as possible, to grow, to create offspring, to survive. Every little sapling yearns for this impalpable nectar from the sky, stretching its tiny leaves towards the places yet unbarriered by the taller trees.

We were not in the same situation; for me, food was not scarce and in the event of a storm, I could retreat back into civilisation. Yet I was wondering about the effort it would take me to build a shelter for myself, to shield myself from the elements. The template for the shelter I had in my mind looked like the roof of an ordinary house, a triangle from the front and a rectangle from the side. I began to collect dead wood, cutting it into shape and beginning to work the soil. It worked back. The limey earth was hard as stone, and after failing to put the wooden branches into it, I angrily dug out pieces of earth with my hands and with my machete. The outlines for the shelter soon were standing, but with this came another problem: how was I to fill the gaps? Using smaller branches did not do the job, so I went to cut the long grass that was growing in bushels around the site.

The grass fought back, cutting into my fingers, every cut releasing a myriad of small insects whose home I apparently had invaded, stinging my skin and leaving a long-lasting itch. I was exhausted, I was not prepared and my blueprint for the house was rather stupid. After conversing with the others, I was advised to build a smaller shelter, with just one roof and two supporting branches. After another day it was built; it was anything but perfect and the rain still dripped through the grass.

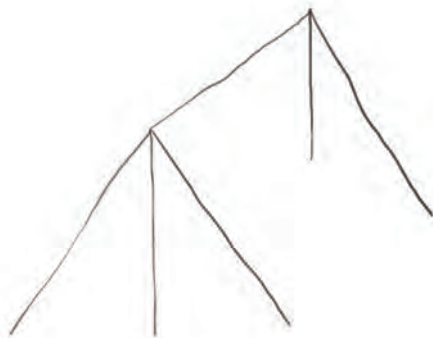
Only after the shelter was built, I saw that I had constructed it above an ant-hill that I was too blind to see. With this I probably gave an ant colony a significant advantage.

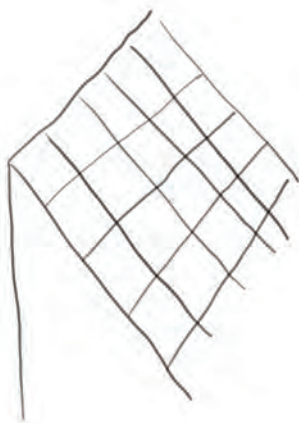
After building the shelter I felt that I had only been minding my own business; I wanted to construct something and I did, with the help of others, but I constructed it also as a personal experiment. The next thing I did was to dig up pieces of lime from the ground, grinding them and adding water and moss, to create a flexible yet durable mass. Out of this mass I formed three small cups, which I later burnt in the fireplace we had made. One of them was glazed, using a mixture created from yolk and powdered brick. I gave this one to Tania to thank her

for helping us at the landing zone by bringing us food and company. One of them acted as an ashtray for the group; it should be a small contribution, a vessel for everyone to enjoy.

* * *

While building, my relationship to the forest changed. I looked at it not in wonder, not in admiration; rather, I perceived the forest as a resource depository that I could use, but at the same time, using it would mean taking it from the forest. But this working with the forest made me feel as if I was a part of it; I felt the stings of tiny insects on my skin, I felt the bark on my palms, and I felt the wet loam in my hands. The forest was no longer outside of me, but I was, at least for a short time, a part of it. It felt me and I felt it.











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