

THE ARCHITECTURE

Daniel Persson



I am driving through the late evening in the car (culture) I took. The window (culture) is down, the air flowing around me alternates between warm and cold. It feels good. In the back there's a chainsaw (culture), bag of fertiliser (culture), sleeping bag (culture), shovel (culture), bottle of diesel (culture), can of gasoline (culture), a homemade skewer, trangia (culture), water tanks (culture), backpack (culture), sheet of plastic (culture) and a box (culture) of mostly homemade gadgetry. On the back of the car (culture) a bike (culture) is strapped on.

The landscape (culture) is shifting between forest (culture) and farmland (culture), disruptively and slowly progressing into dense forest (culture) as I drive. The shifts have a rhythm. I make a couple of stops at farm fields (culture) to take vegetables, the farmhouses' (culture) windows (culture) are either black or glowing in blue.

The highway (culture) I am driving on is a highway (culture) by name only. It is just wide enough for two cars (culture) to pass each other. Not that there are any cars (culture) to pass at this time. The forest (culture) is at its densest now. It is planted (culture) in straight lines (culture), trees as close as possible to each other, to grow to yield as big a revenue (culture) as possible, as fast as possible. It is pretty long term anyhow, planting and waiting seventy years to harvest. People have different priorities.

I find the small dirt road (culture) that attracted me when looking at maps (culture) of this area. I turn off the highway (culture) onto the dirt road (culture). It goes straight into the forest (culture), continuing long and deep into it, according to the maps (culture) at least. There is a slit of dark blue sky in the jagged black mass of trees. I steer the car (culture) over rocks and bumps and potholes (culture) along the slit of sky. I don't even have a driver's licence (culture).

In the morning I wake up in the car (culture), in the middle of the dirt road (culture). Sun is shining, I am mosquitostung, sweating. I get out of the car (culture), stretch out a bit, then get back in, start it up and search for a small opening to drive it into the forest (culture). It doesn't make it more than twenty meters (culture) or so on the forest (culture) floor before getting stuck. I get out and continue on foot deeper into the forest (culture) to find a location.

I am back at the car to get the box (culture) of gadgetry, skewer and water. I carry my awkward stuff through a dense mesh of branches, on uneven ground. It is discouraging, I am getting tired already, it is no good. In the afternoon it will probably start getting hot even in the forest (culture). At my location I put down my stuff and start clearing the ground from branches and rubble.

Trees are high around me and close, no sun reaches down to me. I have finally worked my skewer down a couple of meters (culture) into the dirt between the trees. Sweat is pouring into my eyes. I used up all of the water I brought to slur the dirt when working my skewer downwards. It worked well, but now I am thirsty and out of water. I look at my box (culture) of gadgetry, wondering if it is really a good idea, what I am about to do.

The explosion is muffled, more felt than heard, a squirt of dirt erupting from the hole, a dirt geyser, a d.i.y. toy volcano. The sensation is tickling, vibrating, visual. I feel potent, it is my explosion, even if it is small; it is my first. Now I have to eat. And I have to drink. I am exhausted.

After lunch (culture) at the car (culture), I carry the fertiliser (culture), diesel (culture) and plastic sheet (culture) to the location. I empty the fertiliser (culture) bag (culture) on the plastic sheet (culture), pour some diesel (culture) on, and mix it with a stick. I run my skewer up and down the hole to make sure it is clear, and start pouring my mix down to the cavity I blew before at the end of the hole. With a stick I make sure the mix doesn't clog the hole on the way down.

I am nervous when I assemble the second detonator. Homemade hardware store (culture) explosives, taped onto the end of a fuse (culture), I am lowering it down through the hole into the half filled cavity. I empty the rest of the fertiliser (culture) mix down the hole. I take a deep breath. It tastes of diesel (culture) in my mouth. I carry away all of my things. Sitting on the ground resting for a while, I stare along the endless rows of trees. I go back to the hole, light the fuse (culture) and walk away, fast.

There's a muffled roar from the explosion, the ground heaves along with the trees on it, the location lifts, opens up, dirt is hurled up and outwards, trees are losing their grip, haphazardly falling into the crater, and onto the banks of exploded dirt surrounding it. Things are shaking, tumbling, dusting, finding their new place in the new composition boulders. I am amazed.

The sensation of potency and joy is strong. This is my work. It is great, but a bit tainted with a sadness of irreversibility and paranoia. I hope the first explosion scared off the animals. I hope no one is curious enough to seek me out, not until my work is done. Not much smoke or dust went off into the air above the treetops, a good thing. I should have waited until the night or picked a location in a secluded valley, so no one could possibly notice it. It was stupid to drive the car (culture) into the forest (culture), leaving trails pointing here.

When having dinner (culture) at the car (culture) I make a final decision not to worry, but to enjoy. It is weird, the explosion and recomposition and settling down of the location seem to reflect in my consciousness. In my new loneliness my consciousness is roaming free, for good or bad, there is no one to gauge against or be responsible to. The constant activity is accelerating the loneliness, filling my consciousness with stuff that I do not share with anyone. The only possible communication (culture) with anyone else so far is the explosion, but that was one way and unconfirmed. Even so, I gauged myself on the basis of that, imagining the opinion and judgement of others. The cuffs of culture are hard to shed.

Getting restless, I carry the chainsaw (culture) to the location and start working. I was planning to wait until tomorrow, but I might as well get on with the work. It is early evening and still warm. The sun is reaching down in the clearing created by the explosion. The crater is a about three meters (culture) deep, a bit less than ten (culture) meters (culture) wide, with a couple of trees lying haphazardly in it. Close to the crater trees are leaning in different directions, both inwards and outwards from the crater. The perpetual verticality of the planted forest (culture) is disrupted, the sun playing its game of light and shadow with the new angles at the border of the clearing. The plan was to cut down all of the leaning trees, but I like their role in the architecture now that I see them. I decide to only cut down a few.

I cut two of the leaning trees close to their roots so that they fall into the crater. My body is shaking, I don't know if it is from the vibrations of the chainsaw (culture) or from being exhausted from the day's work. The explosion was thoroughly felt, but it was remote, now I am working close to the mass that I send tumbling down. I have woodchips in my boots. Woodchips lay on top of the porous exploded dirt. The combination is simultaneously soft and crispy when walking on it. The ground is woodchip blond before, black and blond mixed after walking on it. There are seven trees in the crater now.

The trees in the crater seem to have found their place, a collective equilibrium, none of them feels unstable as they lay. I walk carefully on them. I try to push on them, but they can't be moved, at least not with the force I am able to muster. The problem is that the architecture can't be completed with this configuration of trees. I have to cut a couple of them off, close to where they rest at the slopes of the crater, and hope that they find another equilibrium. It is a losing game (culture) of pick-up sticks where the sticks can crush me.

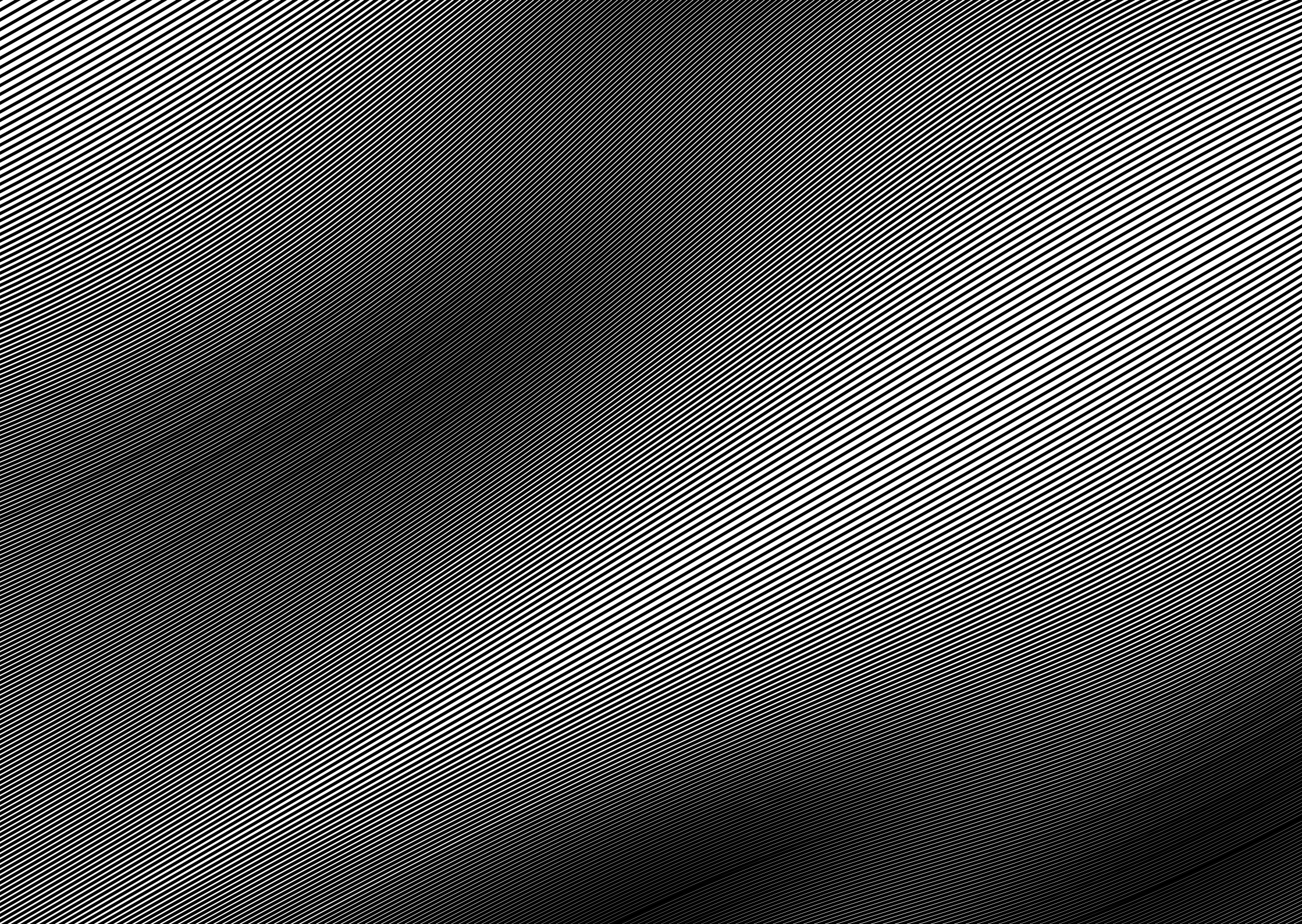
Should I cut from above or from below the trunk? I have no idea, below I'm guessing. Sun is setting as I start cutting from below, making a triangular cut, cutting it larger in small steps. I am scared, ready to throw myself backwards as soon as the trunk breaks. As long as the chainsaw (culture) is running, I will not hear the trunk starting to break, but I can see it vibrating more and more. Feet as far away from the trunk as possible, I attack the trunk in intervals. Suddenly it breaks, the long part drops down on the crater slope, kicking up dirt in a deep thump, the small part slides after the big part, I throw myself backwards, in that order. I am too slow. Another tree starts half rolling, half sliding towards me, but it is slower than me. I am alright.

After sleeping a second night in the car (culture) I don't want to do it again. My body feels broken. At the location I check the trees in the crater. They seem reasonably settled. I start cutting simple planks from a tree I cut down earlier in the morning. The tree stood a couple of meters (culture) to the south of the crater, and now I curse myself for thinking of the cosiness of the sun shining on the crater's northern slope. I revert, unwantingly, into routine, habit, into conventions. I want the clearing to let in enough sunlight to create a different climate than the surrounding forest, to host another biotope. The clearing just have to be wide enough, in what direction in relation to the crater doesn't matter. Here I am instead making a space for sunbathing. Predetermining a use for the space was one thing I absolutely wanted to avoid. But since I started, I might as well continue cutting to the south. Never mind.

At midday I have started mounting the planks on the trees in the crater. Sun is scorching the clearing, no wind, I am sweating like a pig, body aching. The planks are rough, branches kept as anchors on each end so that the planks won't slide or fall off the tree trunks. I make shallow grooves with the chainsaw (culture) in the trunks for the same reason. Some planks have one of their ends pushed into the slope, rocks around them for support. In the crater there are now six overlapping platforms, starting at the bottom, and ending about one meter (culture) below ground level. From above, the crater looks covered with planks. The platforms are leaning in different directions, but are all close to horizontal.

My hands are bruised from handling the planks, they hurt. It is afternoon. I shovel loose dirt from the edge of the crater onto the platforms. The dirt will cover the platforms entirely, it will become a wavy surface, smooth and porous, malleable and penetrable. It is a huge and thoroughly boring undertaking to shovel the dirt. My hands hurt. I go make something to eat. After eating I take a nap in the car (culture).

The shovelling is done. It is evening. I am cutting down trees with the chainsaw (culture), I am getting secure with it, I have learnt how to cut. It feels good. There is not much fuel (culture) left. I hope there is enough to finish the architecture, in which case it should be finished before dusk. The trees I cut are close to the edge of the now covered crater. I let them fall over the crater, one onto the other. It is great, great, the finishing touches, gigantic, painting my architecture with a chainsaw (culture) and trees, improvising spatiality, the sounds, the smells, woodchips flying. It is total enjoyment. The sense of completion, fulfilment, when the last tree is falling onto the heap of other trees, making the entire architecture tremble, kicking around some dirt, before everything settles. Completed.



Halfway between the architecture and the car tracks (culture) leading off the dirt road (culture), I think that I should take my clothes (culture) off. It feels a bit silly, but I do it in the name of taking my thoughts seriously. So I throw off all the culture I can. I walk through the forest (culture), it is cool and shadowy. I scratch my body on the branches, putting my feet down cautiously at every step as I move, to not bruise or sprain them.

As I enter the clearing the air gets much warmer. Sunshine is not only warming it, but lighting it, dazzling my eyes as I enter. This is a different space from what surrounds it. The trees affected by the explosion points in a multitude of angles. They delineate the architecture. Birds have found their way here, they are singing. I am naked. The ground turns into porous dirt, as it waves down under the straggling heap of trees, its lines pointing in a all different directions. They lie in angles biased towards horizontality, unlike the vertical bias of the trees affected by the explosion. It is composed, improvised and random, it interacts and interleaves. This is my work.

I walk up to the closest tree in the heap, and balance walk on it to the top of the heap. As the trunk thinnens, more branches shoot out from it for me to use as handles. The bark has a rough texture, in a more tickling than scratching way. I look around. The heap feels stable, but I can sway the tree I am standing on as it bridges between two other trees. It might be dangerous; I notice being more pleased with living my life than worrying about losing it.

I slept in the car (culture) the third night too. I couldn't figure out what to do with the architecture, I was tired and thought it better to wait to explore it until I'd be properly rested. It seemed banal to just sleep there, it is architecture waiting for a function, I didn't want to turn it into shelter just because I was tired of sleeping in the car.

I dig out the wheels (culture) of the car (culture) to get it out, I think it is risky to have it standing here. I manage to scratch it a bit, but I get it out on the dirt road (culture), and drive it out on the highway (culture). I park the car (culture) at a lay-by (culture), hoping someone will take care of it without tracing it to me, contacting the owner (culture), perhaps. I lock (culture) it, keep the keys (culture), and take the bike (culture) back to the architecture.

Climbing down through the heap of trees, I put my hand on some resin. The resin is sticky, it smells good. I heave myself over a trunk, scratching one of my thighs, under another trunk, into the space between two other trunks. The trunks squeak as I move among them. My thigh bleeds a little. The sun is filtered by the foliage, branches and trunks. The pattern made by the sunlight and shadows moves and changes as trunks, branches and foliage move in different rhythms. I sit on a trunk, leaning my back against another one. It smells of newly cut wood. I like this space.

My feet touch the porous dirt as I stretch my legs down. I sink down to my ankles as I stand with my full weight, cool dirt between my toes. I get on all fours, dirt between my fingers, and crawl under the bottom trunks of the heap, nose almost touching the dirt. The smell of dirt is not intense. This close to it, it is dominant anyhow. I start to dig an opening with my hands, to get between and below the platforms. Dirt is moved from in front of me to behind me, slowly making a wave in the dirt. This is the first wave in the dirt, it will be followed by many more. While digging I get a splinter in my hand when I hit a plank.

I peek my head in under the plank platform, crawl forwards, grab a branch with my hands, drag myself in and carefully swing my body down. My feet search for somewhere to stand, they find it, I release the branch and land. It smells of dirt and wood equally, there are woodchips under my feet, they are rough, pointy, uneven to land, stand and tread on. It is dark under the platforms. The hole I crawled in through is letting in a feeble light, accompanied by a couple of sharply defined rays of sun cutting through the space. The rays are let in by holes here and there where my shovelling of dirt hasn't properly covered the platforms. Or maybe it is where I have just trodden and kicked the dirt away, or where the trees fell and wiped away the dirt.

There is the feeble light behind me as I crawl under the platform. The space on the other side is completely dark, my knees hurt. I try to rise, carefully. Moving my hands slowly around me, I try to grasp the space. There is a couple of branches above me, that would mean that there is at least one trunk there too. I move my body like a snake to avoid branches and trunks, moving my feet carefully around, exploring the ground for good places to stand, not wanting to lose balance. There is a freedom to the darkness, I become aware of my body, how it moves, where it ends, the tension of the muscles. I am set free, in a sense. From a sense, perhaps. I have managed to stand myself up.

I move my hands around slowly, trying to find another platform, another way out. My hand feels a branch, following it to a trunk, following the trunk to a plank. The platform is in the height of my chest. There is a trunk to tread on, I find it with my foot in the air. My hands feel around for a branch to hold on to, I put my hand in some more resin. It is dark, I step up on the trunk. I hope I don't get buried here, that I don't make the heap collapse on me. Carefully patting my hands I locate the platform, the planks, and the soil on it. There is a sturdy branch on the trunk that supports the platform. I put one of my feet on the branch, and heave myself up, hands on the platform, both legs bent, like a frog, in equilibrium. I feel the dirt in my face. I close my mouth and my eyes and push through. Like a diver, this time I do not penetrate the dirt in a slow wave, but in a slow splash. It is a caress of dirt, from head to toe, of the entire outer limit of my spatial form.

Lying under the heap I sneeze. I have dirt in my nostrils and dirt in my ears. Glimpses of sky can be seen between trunks, branches and foliage. I crawl from out under the heap and rise myself up. Full of a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction, I look around at my architecture, dirt still clinging on here and there to my body. What an architecture! I continue moving leisurely and curiously over and under, in and out of the spaces, smelling, looking, hearing, feeling, wondering why I never before experienced this kind of spatial sensuality. My architecture is triumphant.

The temptation to lie down on a wave of dirt facing the sun is hard to resist. I lie myself down, the dirt is warm and comfortable, embracing me, there is no wind. The sun is shining on me, it is totally agreeable. I am filled with satisfaction. I fall asleep.



I wake up freezing, it is shadow now where I lie, in the dirt, still naked. It is evening, I am hungry. Moving around to get the warmth up, I feel an uncomfortable urgency rising. The immediate need for warmth and food feels subversive to all the work I have done. To go take my clothes (culture) on and fire up the Trangia (culture) and cook, I just don't want to do it. There is a need for a strategy, but I have none, I only have predicament. I haven't even decided yet what use the architecture should have. Neither giving in to culture nor making hasty decisions on use feels satisfactory.

I make up a fire. It is a temporary solution, after getting warm and eating some I will be more fit for making a strategy. Still in my naked state, I build a ring of stones at the brink of the crater, in the delineation of the architecture. There is no other suitable space for a fire. I go get matches (culture) and vegetables. The fire catches on, woodchips, small branches, then larger ones, I roast the vegetables on a stick over the fire. It is good, I am warm and pleased that I only used a couple of matches (culture) to get to here.

The fire is good, it is warmth and light. Around it, it is slowly getting colder and darker. Finding a use for the architecture has been preempted by need: I didn't find a use, the use found me. I need fire, but now that I got it, I realise I don't necessarily need it within the architecture. I could have a fire somewhere else.

I have no strategy for what to do here. Maybe it is the wrong kind of thinking altogether to give the architecture a use. It might be alright to just leave it as it is, to let it purely be spatial and sensual experience. The only things I know I have to do here is to eat, drink, sleep, and survive. That would translate into an architecture of production and storage, of reproduction of myself, and of shelter. I could make another architecture for all that. This one could be for recreation and stimulation. I could lie in the heap, making myself invisible as I watch the animals pass, as I listen to the birds sing. I could get my exercise climbing around in it. Why on earth would I do that? I have an entire forest for recreation and stimulation, this architecture would bore me fast. No matter how sensual it is, I would get to know its particular materiality and spatiality inside out and it wouldn't stimulate me any more than it would confine me. What I need is a shelter. An architecture where the fire is. An architecture where food and water is. An architecture to sleep in. An architecture to survive in. But why separate that architecture from the one I got? This one could be a shelter and it could be recreation and stimulation, while it lasts, and it could be storage and production and reproduction.

I need the fire on the edge of the crater, one of the fires, for good weather. The other one will be on the bottom of the crater, I will make a bowl of stones there as a fireplace. Holes can be made in the dirt on top of the platforms, to create chimneys and let in oxygen depending on wind and weather. The stones will keep the heat from the fire, as will the mass of dirt and wood on top of it. It will be important to control fire and smoke, I don't want to get smoke poisoned, and the entire crater looks like a giant fireplace, not something to make happen. If heated from below, you could probably sleep on the dirt under the heap of trees. Plants can grow in the dirt and profit from the heat, giving them a longer season to grow. The heap of trees will unfortunately counter this with their shadow, but anyway, plants on the slopes facing the sun. The smoke from below might even fend off insects and pests. It might make it grow worse too, it is pretty futile to speculate. Anyway, it is worth a try. I need to get a water source, I need to go scout for a stream first thing in the morning. I am almost out of water. Then I need to take some vegetables, potatoes to plant, I am almost out of food.

Pleased at my strategy I stare into the fire. Sparks are flying, sometimes landing on my skin, burning me slightly, but not painfully. It is a beautiful situation. The darkblue sky, the black forest (culture), the yellow fire sending sparks, its light making some of the architecture visible. I can't help but feel that the architecture is the least important part in the composition. In the light of the fire I go into the forest to get my sleeping bag, still in its stuff sack, just in case. I will try to sleep in the warmth of the fire, but if it doesn't work out, I don't want to end up as miserable as after my last nap.

I dream about my life in the architecture. There are vegetables growing in the soil, a lot of them. Some plants cling to the heap of trees in the middle to reach the sun. There is a string of smoke coming from a hole in the soil. The sun is shining. Just beyond the clearing, water is running in a small canal diverted from a stream deep in the forest. In the crater an abundance of harvested vegetables is stored. On the edge of the crater my beloved walks, alternating between gazing at the birds and inspecting the vegetables. My brother is sitting in the heap casually leaned against a trunk, talking with my sister about art, she is carving a pattern in another trunk. In the forest I see my mother and father, waving as they approach the clearing. They are in the company of some of our friends. We all go to greet them to the architecture, it is joyous, we are laughing, hugging. I show them around the architecture, they feel the warmth in the clearing, and how it is even warmer in the dirt on the crater. They are impressed by all the vegetables, and even more so when we peek in under the platforms, and they see all the food in storage. I explain the system for regulating the fire, airflow and heat by making holes in the dirt. We build a fire on the brink of the crater as the evening comes, we eat, we talk about what we have been up to as of late, people are telling stories. We are laughing and enjoying ourselves deep into the night.

The rain wakes me up. The fire is totally extinguished, and the remaining wood, ashes and stones hisses and sputters less for each drop that hits it. I am cold, miserable, I'm shivering, and the dirt around me is turning to sludge. It is pitch dark, I am desperately reaching out for the sleeping bag. I have to get down under the dirt, under the platforms, away from the rain, and wrap myself up in the sleeping bag. I stumble in what I think is the direction of the hole in the dirt I made in the day. The dirt is sucking up the rain worse than a sponge, it is turning from soft and porous to this slippery sludge. I slip, then crawl slowly on all fours feeling in front of me with my hands, at the same time as I try to keep the sleeping bag out of the wet, squeezing it between my thighs and my belly. I give up on finding the old hole, why would I bother, digging a new hole is the one thing easy.

Cold, wet, dirty and scratched on the planks and branches, I am underneath the platforms. The torrent of waterdrops on me, and the roaring noise of them hitting everything around me, have ceased. It is muffled down here. I try to move as many parts of my body as possible, it is an awkward dance in a confined, totally dark space. The dance is for getting warm, to get off some of the water, the dance is desperate. I pull the sleeping bag out, put it down on the still half dry bottom of the crater, and slip and tangle and untangle myself into it.

As I lay in my sleeping bag I am succumbed into the architecture. An occasional drop of water hits me in my face, more frequently drops hit the sleeping bag and the dirt and trunks around me. They make music, they have different tones, timbres and velocities, near and far, it is in overlapping rhythmic patterns, with randomness, constantly changing. It is beautiful, with the sudden omnisensual intensity of a drop hitting my face. I am still cold, wet and dirty. I couldn't care less.

The wet slippery soil, the trunks and branches, the woodchips, the feel of them, the smell of them, the music of the waterdrops, the darkness, all this I adore. I fear the collapse of the trunks and plank platform construction, under the load of dirt saturated with water. The first major change to the architecture, to its smells, looks and feels, to its workings, and more changes will follow. It is slippery now, more pronounced in its smells than before, the dirt is getting compacted by the water. It will again get more porous as I dig myself out, and maybe dig around, but I think this is my first as well as my last night here.

In the darkness under the platforms, in my assigned shelter, I imagine what will come. There will be plants growing, reinforcing and permanenting the waves of dirt above me. In the long run, the planks of the platforms will rot and disintegrate, hopefully leaving a surface of dirt reinforced by roots, still with some kind of space underneath. That would be the dirt thick membrane surface in its pure form, without any planks to support it. I would love to experience that. The architecture will see flowers, animals, some people even, there will be different smells. Much sooner, the foliage will fall off of the cut down trees, giving the spatialities of the heap stricter delineations, internally and externally. Eventually most of the architecture will have collapsed into this space I am in, leaving a random surface filled with plants. Maybe after heavy raining there will be a water hole. Hopefully the leaning trees at the brink of the crater will continue to grow, so that in the end there is still a clearing delineated by leaning trees, separating it from the deafening verticality of the surrounding forest (culture). That would be a beautiful last stage of the architecture.

Water is still dripping through the darkness from the soil and platforms above, but it drips less frequently now. The musical tempo is slowed down. It seems like the worst part of the rain has passed. Tomorrow morning I probably have to get away from here. If I am to live here, I definitely need to have a fire going. I don't have that many matches (culture) left. Not that it would last long, anyway: Fire is inviting culture here. The owner (culture) will notice or get notified, for sure, and he will come to figure out why there is smoke coming from his forest (culture). Maybe he brings his shotgun (culture). All the stuff I took to make the architecture, they might find out and charge (culture) me for it. There is no way to plausibly deny the crater and cut down trees to be my work. I'll be sentenced (culture) to compensate for the lost revenue (culture) from the trees. If the making and detonation of explosives is a major crime (culture), I might go to prison (culture). I am not taking any chances, sticking around to find out. My escape vehicle is a bike (culture). Culture will come to get me. I have to get out of here.

As I close my eyes to sleep I think that I also am alone, and that I rather not be.

It is about 80 km (culture) to the nearest trainstation (culture). That would be about four hours (culture) of uninterrupted decent tempo pedalling, on a flat nicely paved road (culture). Which would mean more than the double on a questionable road (culture), carrying a heavy backpack (culture), taking pauses and detours, scouting for water and food. I really need to wash myself and my clothes (culture) too, if I am to be let on a train (culture). I'd better get going.

Daniel Persson - Nyfikenhet
Spring 2008
AAHM01: Degree Project in Architecture
LTH, Lund, Sweden
danielperssondeluxe [you know] gmail.com
danielpersson.info

Tutor: Christer Malmström
Examiner: Lars-Henrik Ståhl