

Alterlives

Solitude, Ecosophy, and Shooting Things

*"First the insects and then the larger non-humans arrived to occupy the architectures. Unexpected forms of life flourish in unexpected places. Furniture is re-used, and all sorts of insects moved into the slits and cracks ... Plants grow where once a wooden floor had been polished."*¹

Alone in the Remote Lab; yet not on my own. Scrablblings in the eaves, warblings in the walls, arachnids crawling in the bathtub and gastropoda sliding across the kitchen floor - I am, in fact, surrounded. All manner of uninvited guests have made their home in the perimeters of my temporary residence. Maybe I'm the only one then who is uninvited?

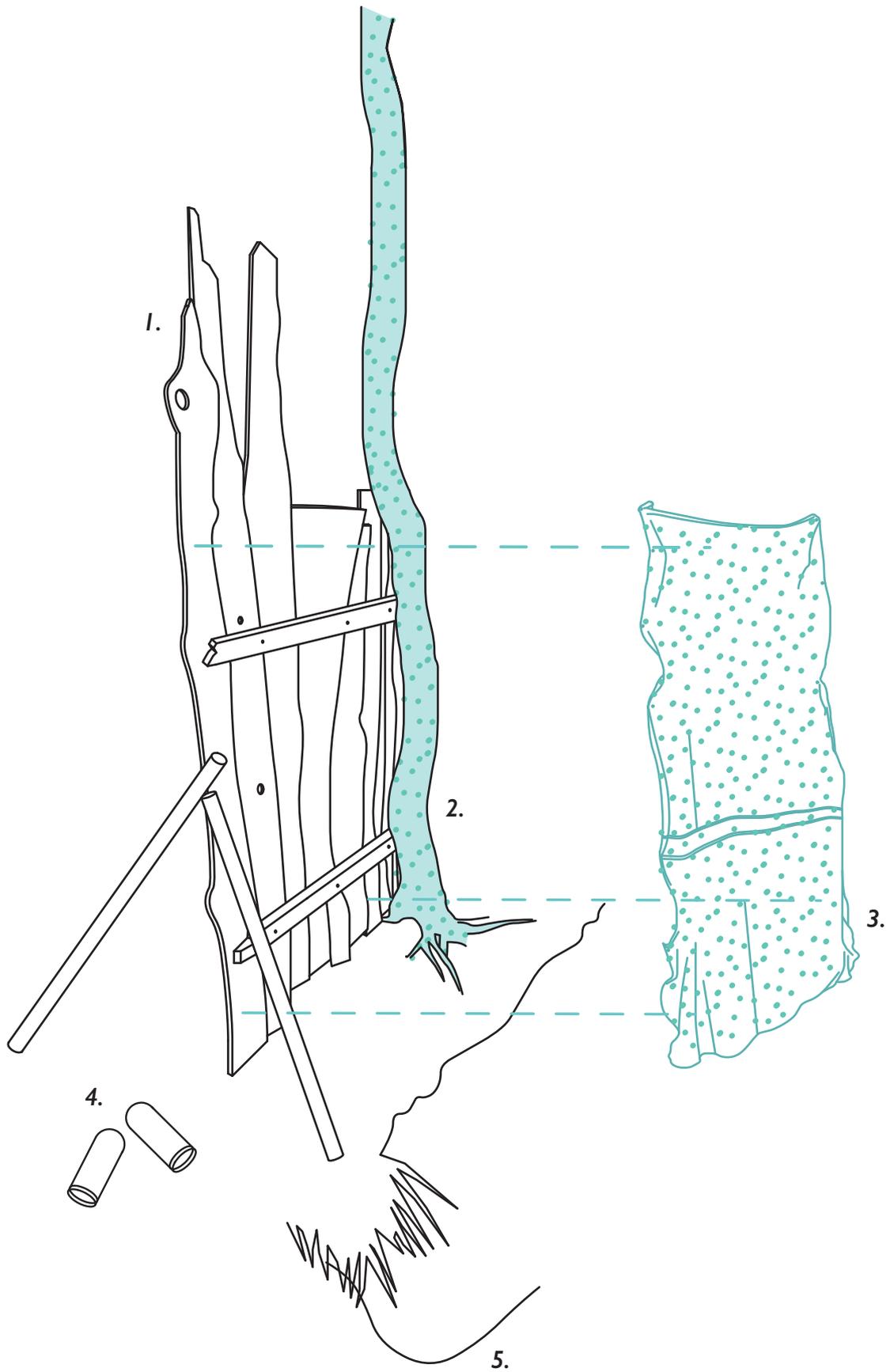
In the *Alterlives* feminist writers, architects and critics describe how human-made architectures are 'radically altered by non-human uses and adaptations.'² Built to keep unwanted incursions of weather, wildlife and woods out, the architectural boundaries of the lodge are being expanded by uses and inhabitations other than intended. Through these incremental reclamations 'nature' is expanding one architecture into many; architectures for humans and non-humans together.

Remoteness and isolation can be incredibly productive and rare. It is this aspect of the Remote Lab that has felt so valuable. Whether a week or a month, the placement into a context of solitude where humans are the minority is an incredibly special experience.³ Nevertheless, whilst there is remoteness and isolation, the human presence remains at every turn.

The woods themselves, described by the Forestry Commission as 'ancient woodland,'⁴ are performed and maintained in the same level as any urban environment. In *Wildlife in the Anthropocene: Conservation after Nature*, Jamie Lorimer, describes how "the assemblage of conservation is heterogeneous. In addition to lively human and animal bodies, it comprises nature reserves, fences, and guns; scientific instruments, maps, papers, and databases; legal designations, action plans, and market mechanisms; and films, websites, and online transfers."⁵ As Sam, Forestry Commission Ranger tells me, "the whole site, everything here is managed." The notion of the constructed landscape is of course nothing new. Feminist theorist Donna Haraway uses the notion of 'naturecultures' to critique Western accounts and binaries of nature/culture, human/non-human landscape. In place of universalism and relativism, "subjects, objects, kinds, races, species, genres, and genders are the products of their relating."⁶ For Haraway landscape then is not natural or wild but rather a marking of that interaction, "tying together geography, history, and natural history."⁷ The context of the Remote Lab then also provides the perfect location to explore current and pressing urgencies, whether alone or with others, to rethink our relations to our non-human(ly) populated environments.

Current ecosophical⁸ and feminist thinking repositions the human in an interconnected, collectively conscious manner, with the notion that if we change how we relate to each other, including our non-human counterparts, this could change the world for the better.⁹ It is the ability of 'nature' to thrive and constantly threaten to take over that provokes the endless human management and maintenance in the woodland. Within these tensions, or rather as Susan Carson describes 'the balance of nature' in which 'Man' is part of a 'fluid, ever shifting, balance,' there are contradictions and seemingly conflicting positions.¹⁰ Alongside the productive landscape of the Forestry Commission there exists the commodified landscape or leisure pursuits of the pre-arranged early morning and late night hunting trips with those who have the privilege of hunting rights. In this context, the ad-hoc and man-made defensive structures that occupy the nearby disused Paintball site seem strangely relevant - a material presence of a situation where woodland is re-performed and reclassified as a battleground and through which moving targets become a leisure pursuit for human actors in a managed wild environment.

It is these conflicts and contradictions human/non-human, nature/culture, productive/leisure, wild/managed, that are so pertinent in the woodland and which also hold relevance and connection to our urban lives beyond. In the final few days of my residency the blue tits have started to make their way through the plaster soffit of the lounge window. I wonder, not without a little anxiety, how long the nest debris of bird droppings and insulation foam, falling at a slow but steady pace onto the windowsill beneath, will take to reach my cup of tea.



Barricade #1

- 1. Barricade; 2. Tree - sycamore; 3. Netting;
4. Spent paintball ammo clips; 5. Ditch*

References

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Notes

¹ Karin Reinsinger 'Between The devil and The Deep Blue Sea' Lecture, Architecture and Feminisms conference, KTH Stockholm, November 2017.

² Ibid, see also Michelle Murphy 'Alterlife in the Ongoing Aftermaths of Chemical Exposure.'
<https://technopolitics.wordpress.com/technoscience-meets-biopolitics/> accessed 31 May 2017.

³ A key reference here being *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau 1854.

⁴ Forestry Commission Website
<https://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/englandnorthamptonshirerockinghamforestfermywoods> accessed 31 May 2017

⁵ Jamie Lorimer, *Wildlife in the Anthropocene: Conservation after Nature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), p. 10.

⁶ Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto* p. 7.

⁷ *ibid.* p. 23.

⁸ Ecosophy is a term coined by Felix Guattari who argues for a realignment of thinking to recognise the shared nature of our environments, and our collective impacts that reveal the commons on which we are dependent for Guattari 'Now more than ever, nature cannot be separated from culture,' See Felix Guattari *The Three Ecologies*, London: The Athlone Press, 2000 [1989]. p. 42.

⁹ Rosi Braidotti is a key thinker on feminist posthuman ethics see 'Transformative Thresholds: Braidotti, Butler and the Ethics of Relation.' deboRahMmm withers <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/transformative-thresholds-braidotti-butler-ethics-relation.#> accessed 12 September 2016.

¹⁰ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, London: Penguin Books, 2000 [1962].p. 215.