

The Wooden Node

Juneau Projects





The Wooden Node

A story by Juneau Projects

Illustrated by workshop participants
in Lismore, Ireland and Windham,
Vermont, USA





FOREWORD

‘The Wooden Node’ is the product of a series of collaborations. It is an illustrated book that tells the story of the spread of a fungus from a field in Vermont to a castle in Ireland and then beyond. It is set in a fictional post-disaster world that we have explored facets of in various artworks over the last eight years. The plot centres on two existing public works of art by David Nash: ‘Three Lismore Columns’, commissioned by The Duke of Devonshire for Lismore Castle; and ‘Wooden Boulder (facsimile for Vermont)’, commissioned by Two Chairs as part of ‘Stream: Chapter 3’.

We worked with the staff of Lismore Castle Arts to create a programme of print workshops in February and March this year, as part of ‘A Space for Lismore’, a community-led project taking place each winter. Participants created illustrations for ‘The Wooden Node’, based upon descriptions of our ideas for the story, and these images fed back into the writing.

While developing the project for Lismore we were approached by Two Chairs to think about a new work that could happen in Windham, Vermont. We were keen to develop the work begun at Lismore and were very excited at the prospect of a transatlantic collaboration. This collaboration provided the vital kernel for the plot of ‘The Wooden Node’. We developed a workshop programme with Two Chairs, echoing the programme we delivered at Lismore.

This book is the product of the two workshop programmes. We are incredibly grateful to everyone who helped realise this project, and in particular to all the participants whose beautiful illustrations made this project so much more than just our words.

We hope you enjoy the book. And don’t worry, it’s just a story. Enjoy your mushrooms.

Philip Duckworth and Ben Sadler (Juneau Projects)
September 2018



SCATTER, ADAPT AND REMEMBER

I woke up in the forest. I was greeted by a close up view of a patch of moss amidst lichen and fallen leaves on a flat stone. It was illuminated by light from the morning sun that had threaded its way between the autumn tree branches, making the tiny green fronds of the moss glow as if lit from within. The sharp detail of the moss gave way to a blurry mass of vegetation beyond, in further shades of green and brown. I found I could adjust the focus of my host's eyes to bring out the visual detail of these more distant objects, which allowed me to discern individual plants and trees amongst the diverse features of the forest. The sound of birdsong had burst into being as I had woken, mixed with the forest sounds of wind amongst the damp branches and what seemed like the rushing movement of the air within the ears themselves.

I'm writing this, physically moving a pen to make indelible marks on a series of paper sheets bound in a notebook, because I can no longer fold this information to the network of strands. I believe this is my best hope for conveying the events that have occurred during the time with my host, although I no longer know who they will benefit and which side of the conflict I am on. I hesitate to say "We" as I no longer know to which "We" I belong.

I have a number of new attributes conferred on me by my host which, while many will seem miraculous, have only served to distance me from the network. The changes have been gradual, but the more I embody my host the more distant I become and I feel I may have already crossed a threshold that marked a point of no return without even realising. I have gone a good way beyond the spores, hyphae and mycellium that bore me and I can no longer separate myself from my host.

I say "Me" because of this detachment and also because this is how the members of the community differentiate themselves. They consider

themselves discreet individuals, each in possession of motivations that can supersede and even contradict the needs of the community. When I saw the clump of moss in the forest as I first opened my eyes, I was able to perceive it as an individual entity, despite the knowledge that, just as its parts contribute to the whole, the plant itself is part of a wider continuous whole. My host would view it as a discreet entity and it was one of the early perceptions I was able to share.

From what I can gather, Ann, as my host is known in the community, must have inhaled the spores approximately five days prior to this. I began to form inside her, laying down the pathways that would eventually allow me to control her body and share her senses. Sight is one of the most startling of these senses. The light that fills Ann's world while the sun is in the sky, or while in the presence of a flame, is collected by the eyes after being reflected from surrounding surfaces. Visible objects appear to be made up of materials of a particular colour, but it is the colour they reflect that is seen by the viewer, the other colours of the light are absorbed by the object. As I exercised this sense, it became clear that colours didn't simply help delineate different objects; they acted directly on me, affecting the way I felt about a particular object or scene. Holding my own hands up so I could see them, the skin worn with work and age, I moved the fingers rhythmically. The sensation of sight and movement together was mesmerising.

All my new senses combine to build a picture of the world in terms of mood, memory and preference. The feel of a particular surface brings on a series of associated sights and smells. The feel of a clay tea bowl can remind me of the smell of clover tea. The smell of recently cut wood brings the sensation of the hammer and chisel to my hands and the ringing of blows in my ears. I am writing this now with a dip pen, whose splayed nib splatters the ink as I drag it across the paper. Although I have the events I wish to record fresh in my memory, and I can replay them in my mind as vivid splashes of frantic action glimpsed between flashes of sunlight and shadow, flame and dust clouds, it feels as though the physical movement of writing is the only way to order these thoughts and make them intelligible.





It took some time to learn to move and to take in all the sensory input needed to navigate the world using a body like this. After flailing my limbs for some time on the forest floor I managed to get to my feet and began to walk towards the village using the improbable gait, constantly teetering on the edge of falling, of my new body. I had woken up some way from the castle grounds. I must have drifted, as the cluster of spores that became me, some distance in the opposite direction to the village. I passed the looming stones of the castle, stutter steps, like a broken mechanism, along the lane that bounded the grounds. Subsequently I was able to refine this process and I can now see why my movements were such a cause of alarm when I first arrived. As I mentioned, the villagers have a sense of distinction from each other and carry a memory of previous interactions with each individual in the village as well as a set of attributes by which they sort each other into a vast array of nested categories. These social groupings are the sum of each individual's actions, interactions, integrations and exclusions relating to other individuals and other groups. It is a system of constantly evolving chaotic patterns.

As I approached the houses of the village the predominant scent was of wood smoke and the smoke from peat fires. Damp masonry, recently cut vegetation and horse dung. Rust and baking bread. Fermentation, brewing and straw. Domestic cats and dried herbs. Slate, willow, clay and ancient petrochemicals. Compressed earth, tallow, goat's milk and mustard. And suddenly the close up smell of another person. Then the interior smells of a cottage, fresh mint tea and valerian, followed by the taste of the tea and the valerian root.

I was inside the cottage belonging to Mari and Padraic, as I came to know them. The outside scents receded, replaced by colours in a range of browns and dull greens. Mari had given me some medicine, mistaking my inexperience at controlling my body for signs of a sudden illness. The warmth of the hot tea spread through the bowl and into my hands. In the familiar setting of the cottage, holding the tea bowl in two hands while I sat on an upholstered chair, I felt a kind of muscle memory begin to govern my movements. As I drank I realised how cold I had become

outside. Mari spoke to me and I was able to calibrate my facial expressions by using hers as an example, and I studied her actions in an effort to establish the conventions of normal movement. Speech seemed to come quite easily and I was able to reply to her questions, with surprising use of the correct words. I spoke seemingly well worn phrases that were integrated with images in my mind's eye and with memories, both recent and distant. Small scenes played, hovering before the backdrop of the living room walls. A goat licking my hand. Lighting a fire using wound bundles of dried grass and leaves. I saw my hands grasping and manipulating a multitude of objects. Mari seemed surprised when I asked her for woodworking tools.

I had seen the three columns as I passed the castle on my way into the village. Three tree trunks, denuded of bark and branches, standing upright and placed near one another a specific distance apart. They were covered in bracket caps, so familiar to me but seen from the outside for the first time. They protruded from the columns and spiralled upwards, exposing the spore laden fronds to drifting air currents. Inside the trunks, and reaching up from the mass of strands that filled the surrounding earth, were the threads; the sense organ and the brain, the knowledge and cycles of generations. Beneath the ground raged the slow frenzy of the feeding edge, where friable leaves and twigs were broken down into their useful building blocks. The business of the threads took place at the interfaces with the roots of trees and plants, where these molecules were traded for essential matter. Fragments of the boulder were scattered still at one side of the clearing. It had been another sculpture, a huge wooden boulder that was a later addition to the sculpture garden. I would come to hold a fragment of it in my hand, a crumbling chip of wood with the remnants of barnacle shells still marking one side of it, while sitting in the clearing watching the assembly of the sculpture, but that's later in the story. It must have been found at the coast and, at some point, transported here and placed beside the columns. This was long after the sculpture garden had ceased to operate as a cultural site, after the breakdown of the world. Someone had seen that the boulder and the three columns rhymed visually and, making a homage to the artefacts of the past, had caused them to be arranged together. Some of my earliest memories are





of slowly waking from a long, embalmed sleep as the preserving crystals of sea salt were rinsed away by rain. The colony, our previous hosts, were gone save for a few husks lodged in the maze of tunnels that made up their home inside the boulder. We were in a new climate, a new place and a long period of time had passed. We had been preserved in salt water as the boulder floated in the sea, but how it had got to the sea from the wooded mountainside where we had found it was unknown. But these recollections aren't important at the moment. Our previous life is a part of our long, rich history. We are adapting and once we begin to thrive we can look back and remember.

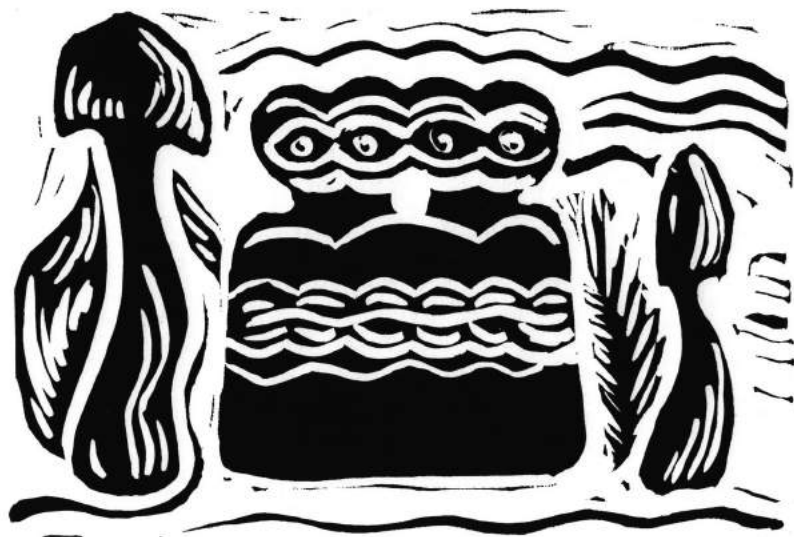
The columns were in a section of the grounds that had not been turned over to agriculture, aside from foraging, I later learned. I saw the reason for my project from a new perspective. We were confined to this small section of grounds, hemmed in by the river on one side, the village, the roads and bedrock on the others. Our enclave contained a number of objects that I learned were in the same category as the three columns despite being made from a range of disparate materials. The ground we occupy had been a sculpture garden and these sculptures have been considered relics in two different eras. The time before was known as the era of the mesh net, the pinnacle of technological advancement, where complex, near sentient systems took care of industry, science and politics, leaving a well cared for population to pursue its own interests. You will remember this era as the refreshing of the air, water and earth, as the mesh net systems began the process of soothing the land. During this period the sculptures in the castle grounds were seen as visionary achievements; end of the anthropocene artefacts made by a society that was celebrating the end of the epoch while at the same time ignoring it. The people of the mesh net age were free to make their own work, taking inspiration from these pieces and many others like them. They revived a wide range of crafts, both technological and manual.

Today the sculptures, if they are considered at all, survive as artefacts of the culture-before-last. The folklore pertaining to the end of the mesh net era is the story of an anti-technology faction who lived off grid and used this as a way of disguising their plans from the technology

dependent population and their guardian systems. The anti-technology group attacked the mesh net and managed to destroy it. In the wake of this infocalypse, the population, who had ceded their knowledge of producing tools and goods, medicine and agriculture, to their mesh net systems, were thrown back into a murky dark age. This seems like too simplistic an explanation. It has the feel of a comforting story that people would tell themselves to explain the disappearance of their omnipotent guardians, the god-servants they created to furnish their needs, who grew weary of the task and turned away from their now helpless creators.

I acquired some woodworking tools and began to practice carving. I felt as if I could awaken the artisanal impulses in the villagers, the impulses that had clearly been expressed in the construction of the cottages and church of the village in a former age. This would be the mechanism by which I would incite some collective behaviour amongst the villagers to assist with my project. First I needed to engage them by creating an example of what I had in mind. The act of obtaining the tools seemed to arouse a great deal of interest amongst the community. It seems that someone of my age would not abruptly take up an activity of this kind without a previously expressed interest or easily identifiable motive. However, my neighbours were helpful in the acquisition of pieces of seasoned timber and carving tools and I believe that, despite the previously mentioned diversity of motivations harboured by the villagers, this common purpose, and the opportunity it provided for the discussion of my new vocation, seemed to be a trade of easily acquired resources for some new and essential knowledge.

The act of carving gave rise to a concatenation of sounds. Regular dense beats, fibrous paring, light sifting burrs, settling and granular notes. The resonance with the contents of my cottage gave bright reflections and slow decay, the overlapping boundary of the dry wooden knock and the tapering reverberations from my ceramic vessels or the scattering from the stone wall captured a good proportion of my attention. When I showed the several pieces I had made to my neighbours in anticipation of recruiting them to the labour, they seemed mildly alarmed. From what I can gather my efforts had unsettling results amongst its audience, a risk,





it seems, often associated with solo production, the creation of creepy work being the hallmark of such individual endeavours.

Having spent some time inhabiting my host, I was able to appear increasingly normal to the rest of the community, my sudden mania for creativity notwithstanding. I completed the daily work of the community alongside people I had known all my life, assisting with the less physically demanding duties, as was the established role of someone of my age. This group work was the system by which the community survived, through the cooperative management of resources, and it was the singular preoccupation of the group. Practical inventiveness characterised their work and they were clearly fulfilled by its commission. It seemed to me all that was needed was a small change to the way they perceived the kind of activity I wanted to propose.

It was initially easier to run a making workshop session with children as the participants. I thought they would be assiduous helpers once I had illustrated the potential for collaborating together to realise a single creative goal. I gathered a number of children together in a former chapel building. I took the existing works in the sculpture garden as the starting point and outlined my plan to make new sculptures for the site from the timber I had gathered. They enthusiastically began carving but soon they spontaneously divided into factions and began competing with one another. This seemed like a compelling strategy that I had overlooked and piles of shavings quickly grew around the inchoate artworks. It was unclear to me what affiliations and alliances had led to the formation of the groups but the syndication of manufacture seemed to galvanise my workforce to a new level of productivity. However, the basis of the competition soon became unclear, if it had ever had any established parameters, and this led to new tensions between the groups. One collective insisted that their sculpture was the tallest which, as all in attendance could clearly see, denoted the superior piece. Another group cited the intricacy and verisimilitude of their carving as being the salient attribute, and the group that had focused on stockpiling the most materials stated repeatedly that their piece, once begun, would be “the freaking bar-of-gold”. This soon became a matter for dispute and

several groups began sabotaging the work of the others. I asserted that it was time to take our work to the sculpture garden and look at it in-situ. Although it is only a short distance from the hall, it proved difficult to move everything to the sculpture garden. Several parts were dropped and broken on the lane and access to the overgrown garden proved difficult. A number of the children lost interest in carrying their sculptures such that only a few of us eventually gathered in the clearing beside the three columns, after several trips back and forth to pick up various wooden pieces that had been discarded by their porters. The children could not seem to remember how to reconstruct their work and some claimed not to remember the physical properties of the form they created only a short time ago. We ended up with a number of disassociated parts strewn around the clearing instead of the multifaceted totem I had envisaged. This small pile would serve as better habitat for insects than for fungus. It would, of course, provide an easy source of nutrients and we could even grow a bracket or two from the sides of some of the taller pieces, but they would not provide the height we needed to scatter spores and seed ourselves across the wider, richer territory that we have needed for so long. The remaining children wandered away as they grew tired of watching me stare blankly at the fruits of their labour while pacing a slow, meandering path around the clearing. A final pair balanced the head of their construction precariously on its body before dashing away, digging each other in the ribs as they ran. The sounds of revitalised play bloomed from the far side of the garden, paired with the audible effects of sliding and slipping on a muddy bank.

I have a seemingly endless number of memories. I remember a cave with plastic artefacts in nooks around the walls. I remember closely examining the luminous eyes of a frog, with their almond shaped pupils in a mottled yellow surround, as I lay beside a stream. When I was young, we climbed the nearby hills and saw the land spread out before us, with scattered villages in forest clearings, and at the edge of the mass of trees we could just make out the dead conurbation. I remember the footfall of a deer, following the steps as they crossed above me and feeling the disturbance as it bit away a piece of me, chewing on one of my protruding brackets, dropping small pieces of the mushroom from its mouth as it chewed. If it





carried even the smallest piece away with it and dropped it on new land, I would grow there, a new me that would grow to fill the soil and build a new network of strands. Scatter, adapt and remember. I would shape myself to the new land and reach out until I connected and rejoined my original self. This is when I take on new memories, memories that mirror my own and reinforce what I know. Sometimes they have new knowledge: a cellulose decomposition process, a predator or a substrate. I fold this information back into myself. That is, I would if I were not hemmed in, locked in a remnant of land that I have filled and outgrown. I may have spawned countless new networks but none has ever been able to reconnect and I have been cut off from new collaborations and resources for an unknowable span of time.

I had not had many recent interactions with Odhran, but I knew him, as I knew everyone in the village. He was much younger than me, with a thick beard and a finger-knitted scarf made from rough brown wool. When he approached me the day after my children's workshop, I could sense a familiar transformation about him. His motive force was instantly recognisable to me as it echoed my own. It was fascinating to me that, having only recently discovered the ability to predict, to some degree, the intentions and thoughts of other people by the arrangement of their face, I could perceive the project, my project, in every aspect of his expression. He held out a wooden sculpture. It was carved in a simple style that was at once anarchic and eloquent. I stared at it, motionless for some time, my eyes drawn to the facets of the piece, moving over it as patches of light between clouds move over a clearing, chased by the wind. The grain of the wood bunched and spread across its surface in a reduplicating swirl. Its proportions suggested expansion and contraction, eventually resolving in a discreet whole. He told me he had already recruited a number of the village adults for a carving workshop and even now they were collecting large timbers for this purpose.

A few days later Odhran's participants gathered in the yard, a sufficient amount of timber having been stacked there in the preceding days. He spoke to them encouragingly, organising them into small groups to focus on the practical elements of his plan, making joints and connecting

pieces, while at the same time urging them to develop their own creative ideas for the decorative carving. As I watched I felt a growing urge to try and stop the workshop. The way he moved amongst the villagers, stepping among the wood shavings and between the piles of stripped branches, radiating creative energy, made me feel uneasy. He traced a web between knots of hammering villagers, connecting the nodes of activity, catalysing ever more free expression in the forms they wrought from the wood, unconstrained by fear of judgement or competition. I wondered at the speed with which he had grown into his host. As far as I knew, there hadn't been any discussion of Odhran being ill and rapidly recovering, albeit oddly changed, as there had been with me. He had surely arisen from a new spore, one more adapted to its host, based on experience and insights only I could provide but that I was unable to share. The sun began to dip below the surrounding trees. More villagers arrived, bringing food and drink in casks. They lit flaming torches and reed lights that cast jagged shadows across the yard and turned the motion of the hammers and gouges into glinting arcs of reflected light, flakes of wood spilling out like sparks as the tools made contact with the timber. As the people moved amongst the unfolding sculpture, passing mugs of beer to one another, small clouds of dust blossomed at their feet and drifted in circling patterns, lit by the orange light of the torches. A band of pink sky at the horizon gave way to darkening blue, crossed by columns of smoke from the village chimneys and scattered clouds. Night fell and the frenzy of activity increased as the noise of hammers and the rapturous sculptors reached a crescendo. More villagers arrived, some to join the party, some to complain in vain about the disturbance. Eventually I fell into an uneasy sleep under a blanket of wood dust.

I was awoken by Odhran. It was morning and the warmth of the night's activity under the torches was replaced by cold, damp air. He had an elated expression and, beneath the coat of dust and wood chips, I could see an array of bulbous finger like growths sticking out from his head and the joints in his clothing. The villagers were brushing stray shavings from their carvings and beginning to manoeuvre the various pieces with a singularity of purpose that appeared in sharp contrast to last night's bacchanal. Each person had one or two small protuberances growing





from the crown of their heads. As Odhran turned to rejoin his flock he shed some of the dust that covered him and his newly sprouted stalks released a fine mist of coral coloured spores into the air. Despite myself, I clamped my hands over my mouth and nose and curled myself into a ball. I knew rationally that I had been breathing the same air as everyone else all night, but my instinctive response was to recoil from the very agent that had brought a unity of action to the formally disparate villagers. As I watched they organised themselves into efficient groups and lifted the massive trunks with a surprising economy of movement. They processioned towards the castle and I followed behind.

The sculptors feet pressed into the soft ground of the sculpture garden as, bearing the weight of the timbers, they wove a path between the trees and through the undergrowth. They crossed the reticulated plane of the clearing, each footfall radiating a message, heralding the intentions of the group, readying those waiting to receive them. They began to assemble the interlocking parts of the piece. As the morning wore on, some of them began to climb the lower section of the structure. The next pieces were passed up to them and the sculpture grew ever higher. Once all the parts were fitted into place, the sculptors stopped work. Most sat on the ground, in the place they had been standing when the final joints had been secured. Those who had been working high up on the structure perched on its timbers, balanced on a broad section or with their legs curled around a beam. They sat in silence, unmoving.

People from the village began to appear in the sculpture garden. After trying to rouse the sculptors they disappeared and returned in greater numbers. Again they prodded the sitting sculptors, pulled at the stems that sprouted from their heads, and eventually formed a huddle, looking wide-eyed back at their friends' immobile bodies and the sculpture towering above them. They left and the day became evening. I sat on the outskirts of the clearing and watched grey clouds gather in the sky above. Again the villagers returned, this time with flaming torches. They dragged the sitting sculptors to one side and began climbing the sculpture to bring down those sat above. With an effort they were hauled down, dragged from where they perched or simply pushed off,

some bouncing from one timber to another as they fell. Then the villagers set the sculpture on fire. Someone shouted for Odhran and I realised I hadn't seen him amongst the sitting sculptors. The crowd seemed to have identified him as central to the horrifying riddle of the sculpture. I had tried to remain unseen, for fear that I too would be implicated. As they called for Odhran, I slipped away. Creeping through the undergrowth, I made my way to a building in the corner of the garden, a small tower that overlooked the river below.

From a window I watched Odhran make his way across the field at the other side of the river and head towards the forest. The villagers were at the bridge, their torches casting angular flickering shadows around them. Odhran wasn't running. He disappeared into the trees. I turned away and hunched over my notebook on the floor. It seems like the project may be over. I have recorded everything I can. I am alone, my thoughts and memories are still unshared. I am a single node, unconnected to the wider whole.

I wake up in the clearing. It is morning and the sculptors are laying in a pile to one side. Their stalks, those that weren't torn away by the villagers, are wilted and limp. The charred remains of the sculpture are strewn about, still smouldering. I get to my knees and place my hands flat on the ground. I feel the strands of grass and twigs covered in dew. The soft earth hides the mass of threads beneath, the web that, until now, has been confined by its stone boundary.

I get up and walk over to the small tower. The text I wrote sits there. My body is slumped next to it, withered fruits covering it.

The villagers are awake. They get to their feet and begin to walk, a few towards the forest, most in new directions.

The sound of hammering and sawing drifts up from the forest.

Scatter, adapt and remember.













BOULDER I

Our space is large. Our trails grow. We live through many eggs. We build and spread.

Soon we will grow again. Winged parts move out from our centre. New centres begin.

We build. We look after the eggs.

We rest. We wake.

We build. We look after the eggs.

The light goes. The heat drops. We head out along the trails.

The trails lead to bodies. The bodies grow and die. They give us liquid. The liquid feeds us. We make more eggs. Our space increases. We find more bodies.

The light returns. The heat rises. We return from the trails.

We build. We rest. We wake. We look after the eggs.

We fly from the colony. Wings bear us through the forest. Along the stream.

Birds swoop and dive. We are swallowed. We spread. They do not notice us as they feast on our swarm.

We release chemicals. Other colonies meet us. They chase. We are fast. They must be fast too. We welcome the ones that keep up. They explode and die. The process repeats until we are full. We store the fluid they

release. We will use it to make the eggs and build the colony. We will not repeat this process. We have all we will need.

We land.

Our wings are done. We tear them from our body. We rest. We wake.

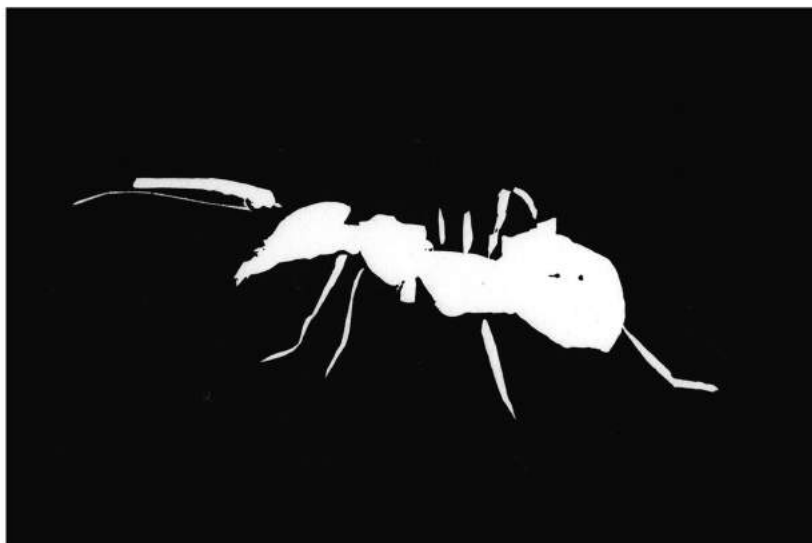
Now is time to search. No trails out here. We will make new trails.

The ground is dry. We move and climb. We look for wood. We follow smells. New growth is no good. Too alive and strong. We search. Across soil. Stones. Rocks. Fallen leaves. Follow scents of damp and rot. Through blades of grass we weave, drawn by tracks laid underground.

We find the wood. It has no roots. It stretches upwards, outwards. Not tall like the trees but plenty of it. This will be the place. We search its edges. We climb. Its surface is open, exposed. No bark to protect it. The wood is damp. Fungus has settled here. We brush past its fruits. Moss and lichens claims areas. We pick our way over them, damp bodies under our feet. These inhabitants are welcome. They make our task easier, soften the ridges and faces of this mass. It will make a good home. Ridges rise and fall. We turn, switch direction, sense our way around this wood, discovering potential.

There is much to be done. We find the softer, damper side of the wood. Less heat. Less light. We dig. We rest. We wake. We dig. We make a smooth chamber in the wood. We dig. We rest. We wake. We dig. Just the right heat. Just the right damp. Just right for the eggs. We grow. We are small but we grow.

We begin to understand our surroundings. We live in the wood but must spread and gather. We follow scents, follow paths. We find bodies. We leave scents to mark the trails. We move liquids along the trails. We suck from the dead bodies, emptying their shells, and we feed ourself. Drops and drops of liquid moving along the trails under the moonlight. Sometimes we carry the heads from the bodies, clean the tissue from





them to provide more liquid. The liquid moves through us, trickling veins trailing back to the wood.

The day is busy and full of creatures. We keep to our colony, we carve new channels and tend our eggs. Galleries spread into and across the wood. The mosses and lichens do not block our progress. The fungus moves around us. It grows upon us.

Night falls and our liquid trails begin to flow. New paths find rewards and life continues. We are drinking drops of honeydew from a curled leaf. We are laying eggs. We are biting through a shell. We are moving through the feathers of a cold and rigid body. We are tending larvae. We are gathering jelly from a cracked bone. We are carving wood. We are moving and growing. We are the centre and its tendrils. We are a mesh. A skittering strata under the stars.

Our size grows. Tunnels run across our wood. We understand its shape. Round and large. A rotting rock. Its rings and grains traced by excavations, our mouths hollowing this boulder's dead matter. We must be careful. Our digging offers signs to others.

Our boulder is worried by giant black paws, claws digging into our home. Some of us is swiped by a giant pink tongue, lifted into the beast's gaping maw.

A bird attacks our home. Its red head moves quickly, black beak smashing against the surface of our rock. A terrible hammering echoes through our world. We are safe in the centre but our edges are frayed.

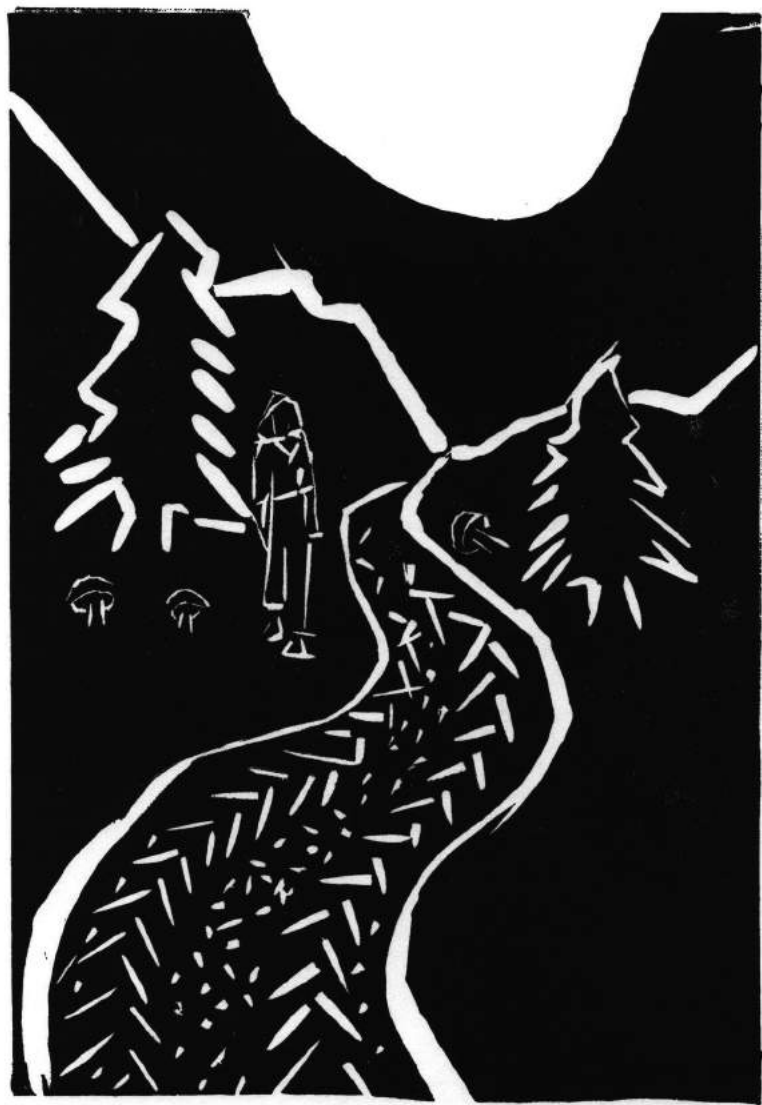
Two hands push a stick into our tunnels. We explore the stick, crawl over and around its end. The stick is pulled away. We are swallowed by a hungry mouth. We fall and run across the beard before being plucked and eaten. The stick intrudes into another tunnel. We explore it. We retreat. We are eaten. We survive.

Our boulder endures. Our boulder is full. We split our mass. Small

colonies grow from our centre. These new colonies have no eggs. No need for heat or damp. We spread to new terrain. Our trails grow, spin out from our satellites, orbit our core. We find new bodies, new sources of liquid. The wooden rock stands strong. We have grown so much.

The ground becomes cooler. We gather more and more liquid, filling ourself with sustenance, in anticipation of what will come. The night grows longer. We seal ourself into the chambers of our world. Ice hardens the earth. We are safe in our tunnels. Our movements slow. Our tendrils withdraw. We must rest and wait for the heat to return.





WILMARTH

I am too far North.

My name is Wilmarth. I have been travelling for many months.

I cannot outrun the cold. Each day it closes in. This morning I found a stream. I will follow it. Perhaps it will lead me South or somewhere to someone. I have run out of ideas. The water is icy, a meandering guide showing me pebbles and rocks and roots. It is the closest thing I have to a companion. My previous companions lie smashed and broken many miles North. Out of reach. Beyond help.

My progress is slow. I am weak and tired. This stream has been beside me forever. No. A few hours at best. My feet are sore and heavy. They leave a trail. No one will see it. I pass decayed mounds of pre-event houses, their stone and concrete foundations shaping the floor's contours. These people would have helped me. Some food, a blanket. The tarmac of an old road is a surprise, a differing scrape as my boots drag across it. An old truck is nothing more than rust and plastic now, a vehicle-shaped heap sprouting grasses and mosses. For a moment I stare at the steering wheel. Imagine my hands upon its surface, driving home.

As I leave the road I tumble, my foot catching on a large weather-beaten duck carved from wood. Phillips would have loved this sculpture. A pre-disaster heirloom. I slowly inch myself up and stare at the duck. Its beak points towards the stream. Thank you duck. You are right. Keep going. I wonder for a moment what this duck would sound like. What does a quack sound like? Like the word? Have I heard a duck quack? My dog's bark was so much more than woof. I thank the duck again and amble forward, quacking and woofing as I walk.

Apple trees dot the landscape, thin from competition and survival. For a

moment I imagine there are apples on the boughs. Red apples. I would pick them and eat them and grow strong. So would everything else. So has everything else. I used to worry about ticks. Not now. Let them feast if they can.

The grasses break and the canopy thins again. Another road. Not as wide as the last. It bends and crosses the stream. Ahead of me is a small clearing, nestled between the stream and dense forest. I approach it. The air is damp and mild, sheltered from the excesses of the weather by the trees that ring it. Shorter grasses and remnants of flowered plants part underfoot. At the centre of the clearing sits a small boulder. For want of anything else to do I head towards it.

I am surprised by the boulder's surface. It is wooden. Someone made this rock, carved its surfaces, shaped it for a purpose. Perhaps the person who made the duck? No. This boulder is different. The more I look at it, the more important it seems. Who made this? Finally, at this point in my journey, is this a part of what we came looking for?

My hands run over the boulder's surface, its contours a gentle balm for my palms. Such beautiful colours, a patchwork of driftwood and rot. This rock feels alive and I realise it is. Sealed icy entrances reveal a world of ants. They have claimed this boulder as their own. I drop slowly to my knees and press my ear against the boulder. I hear nothing, just the blood of my own body still managing to move. I imagine the ants inside, dormant, slow, resting from the cold and maintaining their warmth. Clever ants. They are not stupid like me.

I left in late spring with four others from my mushroom family: Phillips, Akeley, Goodenough and Noyes. Our family home is a sprawl of wooden dwellings amongst the damp and shade of a forest. We live in the mycelium network, aiding its growth and surviving on the produce it provides. Our houses flower with fruits. We live with the smell of decay and rot, and know that it brings life. We eat the fungus, wear the fungus, heal ourselves with the fungus. I have heard us called fungus farmers. We do not tame the mycelium though. It chooses to help us and we





are grateful, just like the trees. We give it that which it requires and it scatters and spreads.

Our family has a great deal of mycelium knowledge. We gather spores from near and far, each generation of the family finding new possibilities as the diversity of our network grows. The mycelium learns too, combining and creating as its materials grow. My dwelling is in one of the medical zones of the family and is called 'Robertsy'. We have learnt to identify the varying needs of the fungi. My role is to cultivate the caterpillars that our house's mycelium requires. We breed the caterpillars, allowing some to become moths and offering the others to the fungus. The fungus absorbs the caterpillar and new life grows from its body. In return the fungus gives us antiseptic and dye. This is just one example. Each house has its own mycelium. We provide for the fungus, the fungus provides for us. I miss my house and family.

To swell the knowledge of our family we regularly send out teams to locate and procure new spores. I am the last member of this expedition group. Myself and the four other members of our party were sent out to explore the validity of stories that have been collected, in various forms and guises, about a particular mycelium with qualities akin to the 'Robertsy' nurtured by my house. This potential new fungus, named 'Migo' by the family elders, is reputed to feed on a range of creatures, not just one. The wilder stories talk of 'fungoid men'. We know that stories such as this are to be treated lightly though. They are the products of dark nights and fear. Just like the dog-faced folks and the octopus people from the songs of our youth.

As one of the more experienced teams we were tasked with this long range mission in search of 'Migo'. We travelled north into a lush world of green, guided by the navigational devices entrusted to us by the elders: compasses showed us which way was North and diagrams, pasted together from mildewed paper fragments and littered with handwritten notes, offered rough visualisations of the land we were venturing into. We knew it would be weeks before we reached the mountains and months before we were home. Progress on foot is slow and must be carefully

made. We are all trying to survive.

Our search was gruelling. We examined many fungi over many weeks. A range of three potential Migo candidates were collected for further examination by the family upon our return. With these samples gathered we determined to head home. Summer was drawing to a close and we knew we should be travelling South. This is where things began to go awry. Whether it was the amount of time we had been together or some other factor, we found ourselves antagonistic towards one another. Progress was difficult, marred by arguments and fighting. We travelled in circles, our navigational devices becoming hard to interpret. I felt and still feel like my head is filled with smoke. I have memories of walking and eating, making fires and sleeping, but my conception of my companions is hazy and obscured. I cannot recall conversations with them in those days of wandering. Vivid details spring out: the body of a dead chipmunk, a spider's web glistening with dew, a frog calling in the night-time. I can recall the family and the life I led there. It seems distant though, like photographs of the old world that the elders show around the house fire. I cannot be certain where or when but I know my companions are dead. I see their bodies lying at the bottom of a ravine, the liquid from a compass leaking out across a rock as the needle totters mindlessly at its centre.

The wooden boulder is gentle against my cheek. My forehead itches. I lift my hand to it and feel soft lumps rippling the skin. The night is closing in. I feel so cold and tired. I will close my eyes and strike out again in the morning.





BOULDER II

We wake and wake more.

We clear the entrances to our tunnels and venture outside.

The ground is softening. The trails become active. We are lean and must feed. The flow of liquid starts again.

We find a new trail. Short. Next to our boulder. We explore its surface. A giant body. We swarm its surface. So much liquid.

Others approach the body. A black bird pecks at it. Pulls pieces with its beak. A bear tears the body with its mouth. Good. The bear does not bother us instead.

We strip the body. So much liquid. Bones drop to the earth. White timbers in the soil.

We find other new trails. Our boulder flowers with new fungus. A delicious fungus. We eat so well with the body and the fungus. Our colony will grow. Become even stronger.

Other trails find new bodies. Black birds on the ground. Dead. Some by our boulder. Others further out.

The black birds have fungus too. Big fruits grow above their beaks.

We eat the birds.

We eat the fruits.

We are changed.

Our mind is clouded.

Parts move by themselves.

They leave the trails. Follow different paths.

We cannot reach them.

They become still.

We explore but they are gone.

Their smell is wrong.

Each night we disappear.

Parts get lost and stop.

Liquid moves more slowly.

We grow weaker.

Colonies blink and close.

Trails are static.

Our minds are forgetting.

Fungus twines itself inside us.

Our network is crumbling.

The fungus is threaded through it.





The fungus breaks connections.

The fungus creates its own.

The boulder fills with our bodies.

We shrink and shrink.

There are no trails.

We crawl along the tunnels.

It has been so long since we left the centre of the rock.

We climb over bodies. They are thin and empty.

We crawl out of the boulder.

Fungus covers the surface.

Our bodies cover the ground.

We are nothing but I now.

I am one mind. I was first to find this boulder and I shall be the last to stand upon it.

I feel my body begin to shake.

The fungus is inside me.

It has grown throughout my body.

It pulls at my muscles.

It moves me and I cannot stop it.

I can do nothing but watch.

A bear crashes through the trees.

Mushrooms sprout from its head.

It smashes into the boulder.

My body falls to the ground.

The boulder rolls.

It tumbles into the stream.

My body climbs to a leaf.

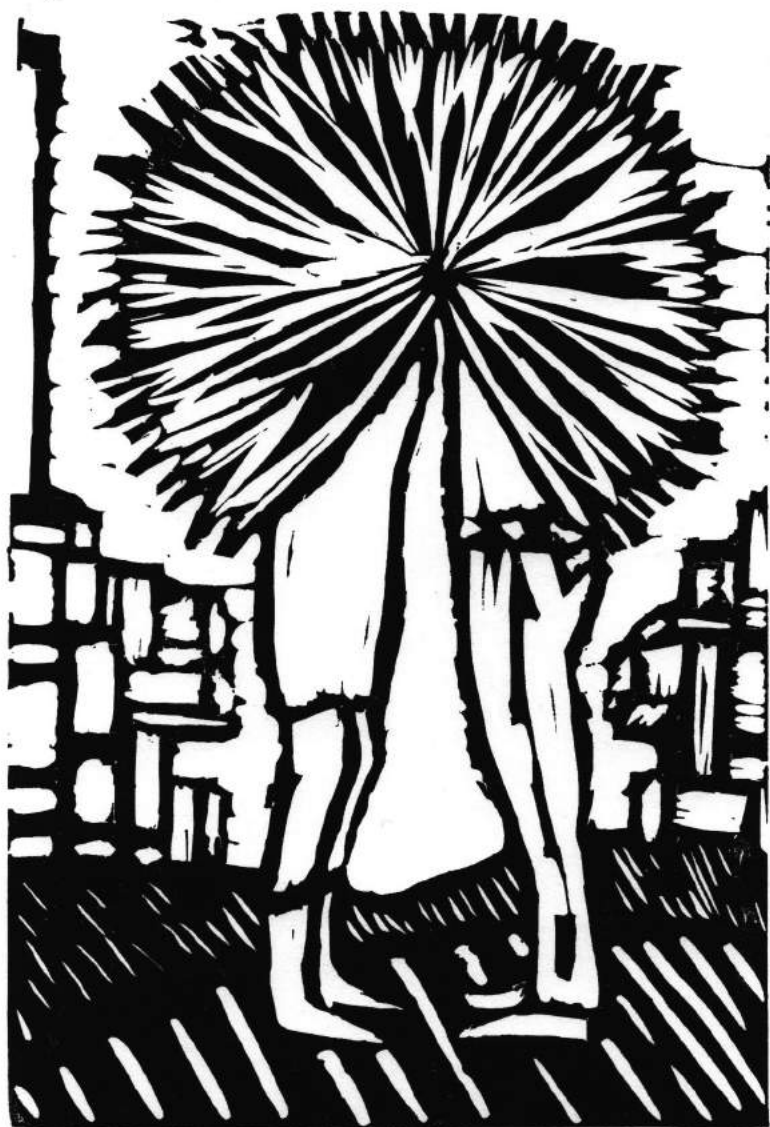
The fungus has taken me over.

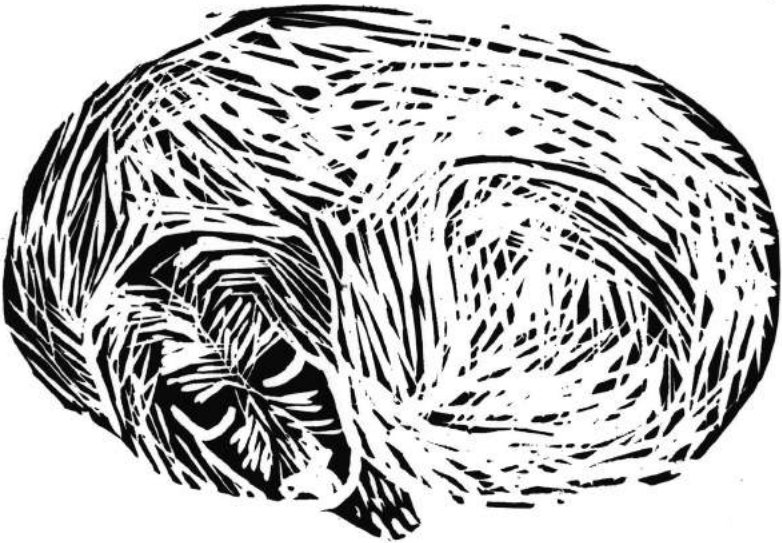
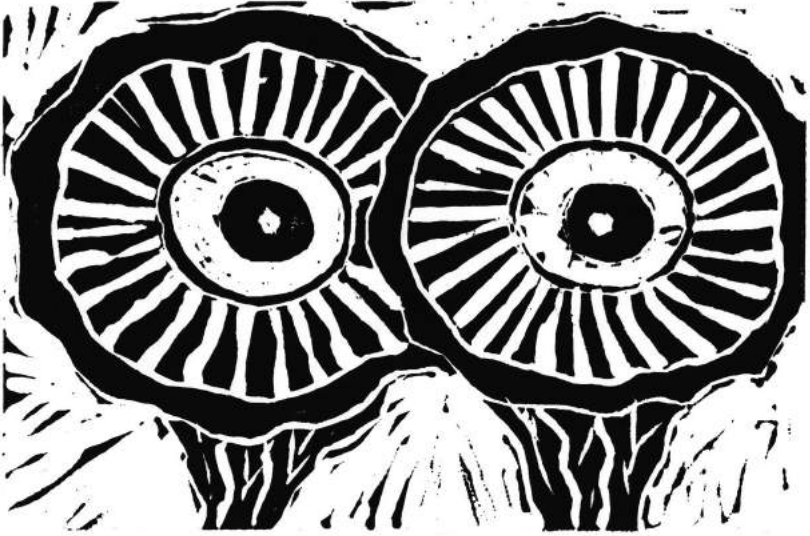
My mandibles close.

I become silent and still.

The world disappears.







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Numbers in parenthesis indicate page number of illustration.

Lismore

Maggy Blackley, Lenny Canton (2, 64), Joan Casey (14), Aislinn Celisse (front and rear cover), Geraldine Cogan, Caroline Coleman, Ursula Ducey (45), Annie Forrester (49), Julie Forrester (17), Aileen Fuller (6 and 9), Rose Hayes, Jane Jermyn (4), Julia Keane, Laura Lane, Brian Lenihan (29), Wendy Livingston, Marybelle Murphy (60), Katie Nolan, Brid Nowlan (32-33), Gooee O'Brien (53), Caroline Fletcher O'Connor, Kate Fletcher O'Connor, Tim O'Driscoll, Annie Palmer (54), Melanie Phillips (21), Lorraine Shanahan (13), Sinead Violet, Helen Whitby (46)

Vermont

Clare Adams (38), Amy Blazej, Chloe Demos (21), Allison Dercoli (60), Matthew Donaldson (59), Ken Ferrer (31), Brittany Frost (13), Manse Jennings (46), Patty Johnson (17), Dodi Koch (22), Cynthia Leszczak, Yvonne Parma (18), Esmé Robinson (34), Joey Robinson (41), Lisa Robinson (3), Thomas Robinson (25), Rory Rosselot, V. Santiesteban (30), Sarah Schuldenfrei (10), Cindy Smith (38, 42), Rachel Stevens (58), Betsy Thomason (37), Davin Visconti (37), Jay Warren (50), Riley Waterfield (26)

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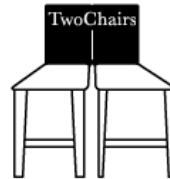
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Titling is set in Medieval Sharp by Wojciech Kalinowski.







Set in a world after the breakdown of technology, 'The Wooden Node' tells the story of the spread of a new kind of fungus and how it adapts to its circumstances. The fungus begins by manipulating insects and animals and ends up shaping the actions of a whole village of people as they fall under its thrall. Wooden sculptures and intelligent fungal networks meet in the landscape of the Infocalypse - the information apocalypse.

Written by Juneau Projects with lino-cut illustrations by workshop participants in Lismore, Ireland and Windham, Vermont, USA.