Conversation Between Bodies.

"Nowhere else in the world is there a higher concentration of competence and experience in technology related to paper and pulp than in Värmland."

I read this on the website of Region Värmland. It continues: "One in six paper containers for liquids in the world is produced at Skoghall Mill." I don't know if this is objectively true or rather an example of what I like to call Värmland truth. Värmland is home not only to generations of knowledge about papermaking, but also to generations of storytellers with little regard for the truth. We make no claims to this vast body of knowledge, but in this book we present seven sheets of handmade art works from our home at Hildelund in Värmland, all made using materials found in the vicinity of our cottage. The book project comprises a totality of 91 sheets of handmade paper, each with its own unique stories and facts, properties and tactility.

Each book also contains eight pages of paper manufactured at neighboring Gruvön Mill and comes in a box made from cardboard made at Skogall Mill. It contains several generations of knowledge needed to produce high quality paper for a competitive market. The stories printed on this paper are written by Sara Rönnbäck and Daniel Slåttnes. Translations by Fredrik Rönnbäck.

More works at:
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August 24, 2016
We arranged for a local guy to come look at our trees and give us a quotation for the cost of cutting them down. He looked at the trees, tapped on them with a sledgehammer and listened to them before taking a step back.

After a while he concluded that the continuous digging of a ditch right behind the trees must have been stressful for them. He pointed to the willow brackets attacking the trees, noting that they only appear on trees that are already severely ill. It's an aggressive species that breaks down the tree from the inside out. He pointed out that hornets had used the cavity to build a nest. A bird flying by also took advantage of the situation, a decomposing tree makes for a perfect home for many species of bugs. We stood around in our yard, talking about the trees for 40 minutes. I had never before talked to anyone with so much to say about trees, and with such passion.

September 15, 2016
Yesterday we got help cutting down the trees. Three majestic trees fell to the ground with a thud, or rather a prolonged, graceful crash. My body was tense all day. Terror, excitement, relief, sorrow, joy, all mixed together into one mood rushing through my body.

Afterwards I had to go lie down.

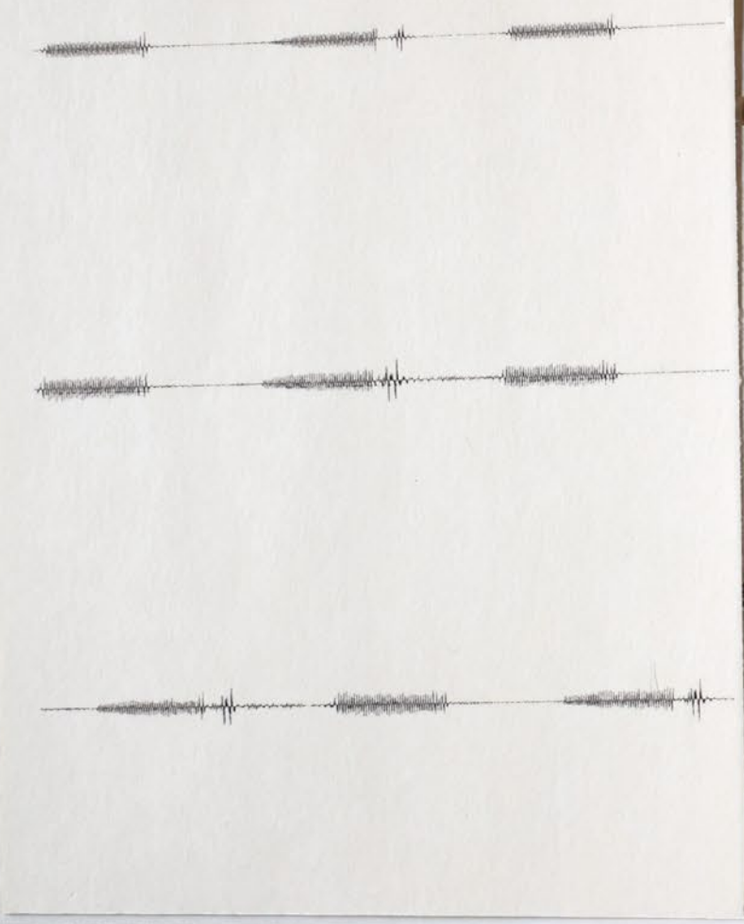
Today, they're just lying there like giant corpses waiting to be cleared away/used/transformed. They will be put to use: firewood in the winter, building material, food. I've brought some pieces into my studio.

Shedding Trees

It feels as if I am shaving off bits of skin as I'm whittling the tree trunks. Veins of darker wood appear and then suddenly disappear in the next shaving. Black, brown, red veins meander through the logs... Birthmarks here and there.

It reminds me of something I read, that only the outermost layer of the tree inside the bark is actually alive, between the wood and the bark. The rest is like skin and bones.

It appears as though birches shed their bark in the winter. We can scratch and pull off large sheets without harming the trees. The part of birch bark that is commonly used is the outer layer, dead cells known as cork. We later learn that the bast is what keeps the cambium, the phloem, alive. Trees are like immobile crustaceans with their body trapped between their skeleton and their skin.



A Conversation Between Trees

Using my tablet I made an oscilloscope. The audio port receives electric currents from electrical signals that run through the cambium of trees just as they run through our bodies. In the living part of the tree nutrients are transported and cells divide.

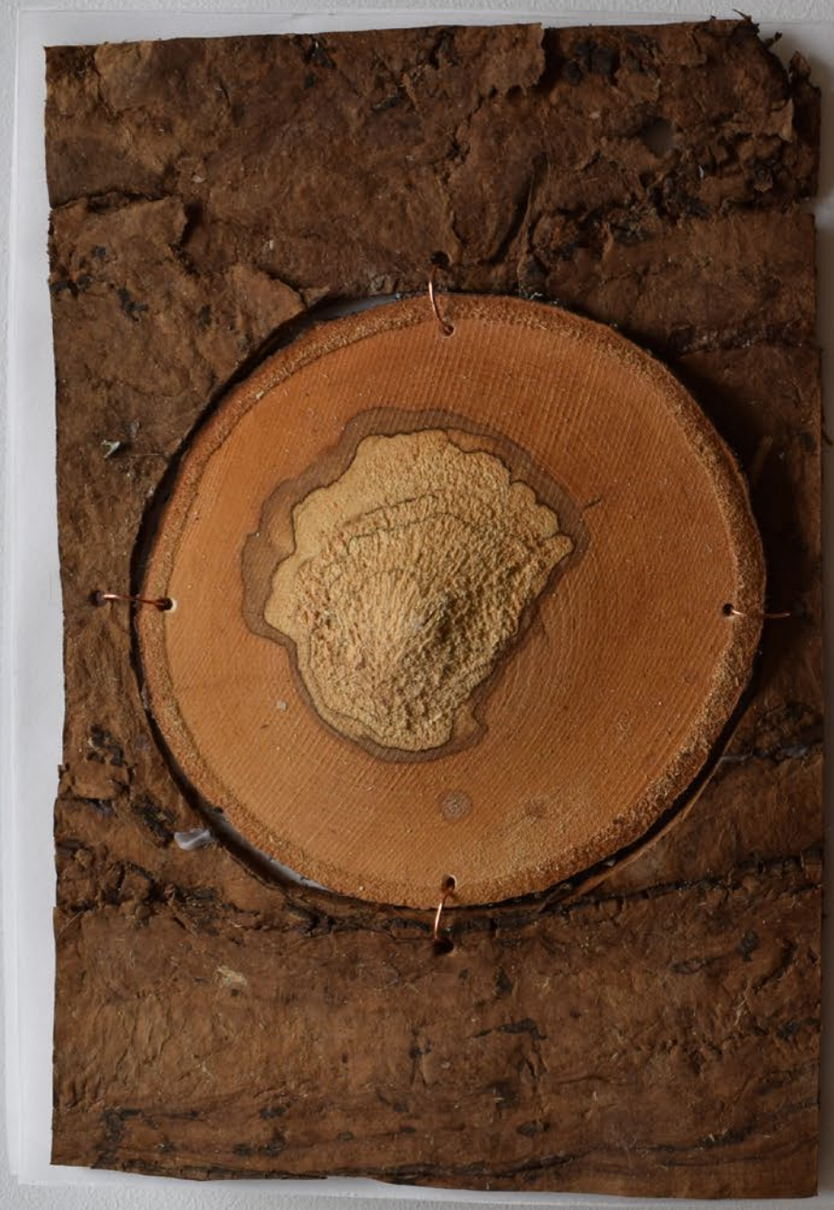
Over 100 millivolts run through the different parts of the tree's body and are transmitted to other trees close by with messages about nutrients and the weather. Whispering in a voice of only a few millivolts, the tree awaits the sun. In high waves of water, sun and darkness over the course of the day, the tree speaks to itself and to other inhabitants of the forest. In waves of more than 20 millivolts, as if shouting that the day has finally arrived, as if cheering for the rain that falls.

Loudspeaker for a Tree

The amplifier is a circuit that I found on the Internet, which looked like it could be suitable for listening to trees. I found it on the website of Scott W. Harden, engineer/chemist/dentist/neurologist. He is my age. I think I'd like him. I've made some slight modifications to the circuit, but it's essentially a simple chip that amplifies signals by 112 decibels and sends them to a piezo speaker.

The electrodes that pick up the signals from the trees are made from silver thread covered in silver chloride in a potassium chloride solution of approximately 4 moles per liter.

Stick the needles through bark and into the cambium of the tree that you want to listen to. The cambium of birch trees is at a depth of approximately 5 millimeters. Remove the paper from the battery in order to close the circuit. Take a moment to listen to the tree's singing.



"A good tinder maker could pound 2 kilos of amadou in a day," I hear my own voice repeat as my muscles pulsate and the blisters on the palms of my hands ache. I can count to five blisters and three cuts from the knife. In two days, I've pounded 364 grams, four days if I count the carving.

Amadou comes from willow brackets, the same fungus that attacked the trees in our yard. Before treatment, the layer between the cap and the pores has a rubbery consistency. After 24 hours in potash and then being pounded it now resembles chamois leather. Throughout history amadou has been used for handicraft and clothes, but mainly for tinder. Before matches, tinder and birch bark were important trade goods.

It's a strange feeling to carve a bracket fungus and think about its being alive, or at least having been alive. I find it difficult to understand when it passes from living to dead.

When I tan a rabbit hide I know that the rabbit is dead. Just knowing that it was once alive makes me uncomfortable.

When I'm sawing I don't even consider the fact that the wood was once alive. It feels like the most natural thing in the world to slice it up into little disks. So much of it is not suitable for firewood. Using it for art gives it meaning, purpose. It feels respectful. A marbled surface appears, it's a symptom of the tree's illness but also enchantingly beautiful. Like a flower it spreads out from the center of the branch to its edges, disrupting the otherwise insistently circular form.

February 5, 2017
I enjoy physical work with materials, feeling the material against my hands, the resistance against my hands. Like when dad, Kurt and I were chopping wood. Dad lent me a pair of gloves since it was cold out, but although they fit me I enjoyed taking them off. I put them in my pocket together with my rings so that I could feel the birch bark against my bare hands as I pulled it from the logs. I had to work with my whole body, my abdominals, my upper body. In many ways it reminded me of when we skinned the rabbits and scraped the hides. We scraped the outside of the bark the same way that we scraped the inside of the rabbits.

Birch bark has a double nature. It can be used to light a fire, but also to make a bowl in which to boil water over the same fire. My relation to birch bark is also double: I want to both keep it and burn it. It's so beautiful; the shifting nuances are reminiscent of mother of pearl, a lake sunset, a meadow. It makes me think of old handicraft. Dad's birch bark box and flask, those old backpacks you see in museums, the pots depicted in the Junior Woodchucks' Guidebook.

On the other hand it's the easiest way for me to get the fire started in my studio, the fire that allows me to work. With its porous consistency it burns incredibly well.

We took in one of the rabbits for observation. This means that I can no longer keep my materials on the floor. It so happens that we have similar tastes, the rabbit and I. With the exception that it wants to eat and I want to weave.

"Incidentally, neither grass nor young trees like it very much when cattle or deer munch on them. Whether it is a Wolf ripping apart a wild boar or a deer eating an oak seedling, in both cases there is pain and death."

It's strange to scrape the inside of the same hide that you once petted. Sitting there with the remains of a being that you've cared for since the day it was born.

It's strange to think how fast you distance yourself and start thinking about function.

My brother said something about the need for warm light in Scandinavia, as opposed to the cold fluorescent lights in Italy. The North calls for artificial warmth, the South for cool. Here in the North we prefer wood and fur to stone and shells. Perhaps we even have moose antlers on the wall.

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