

Wolkenknödel Palace

1

The story that follows is uniquely absurd and well-nigh unbelievable. It is like a tapestry woven from layer upon layer of grand stories, each carrying its own obvious as well as hidden meanings. Following labyrinthian paths, it flows like a river in the depths of a primeval forest, capable of changing its bed year after year, at times silting up completely, only to reappear around a bend as if nothing had happened; swelling dangerously in an evening thunderstorm to wrest away things thought to be safe, then flowing evenly the next morning, once again navigable, as if already pointing out the intended destination of the voyage – at least until the next bend.

Thus begins this story deep in the rainforest, in the borderlands of Brazil and Peru, on a nameless tributary of the Rio Putumayo. Departing from Santo Antônio do Iça, where it merges with the Amazon, it is possible to navigate the Putumayo

by steamboat for several hundred kilometers upstream, and any Westerner who undertakes the trials and tribulations of such a river journey, in this landscape infested with absurdly large and sting-crazy insects, steaming from constant heat and humidity, home to rapidly proliferating mold and hostile germs, contaminated by ominously musty-tasting drinking water, will, after only a few days, begin to wonder exactly why the heads of the FOWDIB Institute had ever chosen this godforsaken place for an AI research laboratory. Most probably, the reason was to find a setting where the institute's scientists could work fully undisturbed, in seclusion and without outside pressure on "Project *Wolfskind*," a plan for which the world at that time was not yet ready.

2

The journey starts by traveling westwards on a small, oily passenger steamboat manned by an ill-tempered crew that endlessly debates in an unknown Tupí language. Leading the way is a bombastic djinn wearing a stiff captain's hat and a too-short T-shirt emblazoned with LIKE A VIRGIN that does nothing to conceal his magnificent umbilical

hernia; he is likely the captain, given his ornamental way of speaking and his propensity for flailing his arms as he signals into the sticky air. He is simultaneously the cook, responsible for the food: some kind of corn porridge that sits and bubbles away all day long on a gas cooker in a small alcove on the foredeck. The cook's job is to stir this porridge every now and again, then twice a day to pour a thin, fishy sauce over the top and serve it to passengers and crew as breakfast and dinner.

After three days of travel, the ship docks on the left bank at the Pureté station, where an inconspicuous tributary flows into the Putumayo. From here the journey must be continued on a smaller vessel. Two guides from a local indigenous group, equipped with machetes and a rifle each, take on the travelers and their luggage, stowing both between gasoline cans on an open, outboard motorboat. Without further ado, the steamboat and its crew cast off, change direction and immediately disappear.

The new attendants are quite a bit more sociable. They laugh a lot and tell stories in a non-stop stream, or perhaps they exchange news – it is hard to tell as the lack of a common language leaves little to understand. The muddy river traces a dense

number of loops, twists and curves through a never-ending, incredibly green rainforest. The attendants keep pointing out parts of the vegetation along the riverbank that are apparently remarkable, typical or otherwise distinctive, keeping up the one-sided but somehow polite conversation for hours.

Meanwhile, the journey becomes more difficult – here the trees are more tightly packed together, occasionally growing half in the water and blocking the passage. Time and again, large branches have to be pushed away from the boat to keep them from catching in the engine’s propeller; sandbanks and shoals have to be spotted and bypassed. The air is black with mosquitoes that, despite lavishly sprayed insect repellent, keep managing to slip under tight, sweaty clothing and leave painful, cherry-sized bites. The diarrhea that has plagued the travelers for days, forcing them to repeatedly empty themselves into the river while acrobatically balancing over the side of the boat, causes the attendants to loudly and dramatically imitate intestinal noises, then erupt explosively into volleys of gleeful laughter. As darkness falls, an improvised tent structure made of elastic branches and mosquito nets is erected on the boat among the luggage, providing rather unreliable protec-

tion from the biting insects and creepy-crawlies.

And so two more endless days and almost thirty kilometers pass on the river until, around a bend, the FOWDIB's Putumayo Center abruptly appears on the right bank: the journey's destination is a minimalist two-story structure of exposed concrete that juts out from the frizzy, hysterical jungle foliage like an Aztec temple.

The building complex is abandoned; clearly no one lives here anymore. Here and there, the structure is highly weathered and overgrown; the central block has collapsed on one side. The river widens on this side of the building into a small bay from which the remains of walls protrude; other parts of the center are now submerged under water.

Next to nothing is left of the once first-class technical equipment that was brought up the river at great expense. The power supply alone, enough to have kept the computer systems, laboratories and day-to-day life of the residents running, should have left more to see than just an engine room, now surrounded by forest and, like all the other buildings here, reduced to an empty, crumbling shell of concrete.

It is now hard to imagine that a community of roughly ten scientists had lived here, and

that this place in the middle of nowhere was once one of the most important research centers for artificial intelligence and machine learning.

3

The Woodhead Foundation for Digital Consciousness (FOWDIB) lacked one thing since its establishment in 1954: money troubles. The mysterious Woodhead family worked behind the scenes to ensure that the foundation's coffers were always well-filled, allowing the scientists to work well subsidized and fully focused on their research projects, without the need to constantly bang the fundraising drum. It is not entirely clear where this flow of money, as regular as it was generous, came from, but comfortable as they were, the involved scientists saw no reason to let themselves be distracted from their work by such externalities. Any requests for equipment the scientists wanted for their trials and experiments were usually approved without cumbersome questions or bureaucracy and, as there was no need to publish results to secure future funding, FOWDIB's methods and findings were only peripherally noted by the wider scientific community. They existed, so to speak, for no more

than a handful of the initiated, and the researchers were content to be left alone by colleagues, commissions, and controlling bodies. Therefore, it is quite understandable that a contemporary search for the Putumayo Center in the archives of scientific periodicals, yearbooks and commemorative publications would be in vain.

Three years after founding FOWDIB, the Woodhead family decided to establish a center in the most secluded place on Earth, aiming to advance their research into digital consciousness, as artificial intelligence was then called, while remaining fully unnoticed by the public.

Early on, it was recognized that a project aimed at developing self-learning networks would arouse the curiosity of private companies, the military and government agencies alike. Although these could also offer substantial support, their commercial, intelligence, and power-political desires would lead them to pursue other intentions than the actual goal of the research, which was to produce a machine consciousness that was in every respect not bound to a specific purpose. In the midst of the Cold War, any new technology would be automatically tested for its suitability as a weapon and quickly annexed for questionable aims. No, the only chance for suc-

cess lay in working unencumbered by governmental pressure and profit-oriented financing, in complete secrecy, far away from civilization.

Thus, in the summer of 1958, a crew of specialists was sent to the Amazon to set up the research center in the jungle south of the Putumayo. The area, a sliver of land measuring two hundred by sixty kilometers, is still to this day covered by dense, primeval primary forest and – as far is known – not regularly populated. Native tribal groups stop here occasionally on their treks, but soon leave the area again. The nearest permanent settlements are found further south on the Rio Solimões.

Transporting building materials and technical infrastructure along the rivers was difficult and expensive, but under the guidance of experienced pioneers and rangers, the work progressed well. The idea was that the center should function as self-sufficiently and independently as possible. Accordingly, particular importance was placed on designing a generous power supply, achieved with generators, and in securing first-rate technical equipment, able to remain functional even in conditions of high humidity and temperature. The structures were also designed to be stable and re-

sistant; instead of wood, a building material that was abundant on-site, concrete was chosen, which, though more costly, unexpectedly gave the center a classically modern generosity. With little effort, the building complex could have been converted into a small but exclusive hotel.

By February 1960, the small colony of scientists was able to begin working. Supplied with everyday necessities each month via local river transport, the conditions were ripe for the start of “Project *Wolfskind*”: to formulate the most generalized basis possible for a network on which digital consciousness could develop more or less autonomously – at any rate, that was the ambitious plan. Although the computing power for this visionary project was still far from the capacity of today’s devices, and although the technical possibilities in the Amazon rainforest did not necessarily offer the ideal climate for digital quantum leaps, there was optimism that development would proceed quickly.

As previously mentioned, telling the full story of the center and the *Wolfskind* AI is far from easy. It requires detective-like piecing together of sparse archival information or can only be gleaned from clues provided by contemporary witnesses. How-

ever, most of the people who either knew about the project or were in the Putumayo area at the time have since died, or today have only fragmented memories. A trip to the Putumayo itself unearths nothing useful; no reliable facts can be teased out of the ruins of the center, nor from the pieces of faded copper cable or small rusty screws found scattered along the shore.

Direct evidence of the *Wolfskind* Project is extremely scarce. Due to the aforementioned secrecy concerns, FOWDIB did not consider it necessary to maintain a central archive for progress reports and results, trusting instead in the personal responsibility of the scientists.

The lynchpin of the project was the question of whether or not it would be possible to construct a self-learning network capable of developing largely without sensory input and lexical knowledge. Its generalizing intelligence would have to emerge solely from implications and logical inferences derived from one-way communication with the entity. The command lines of the programmers, the program code of the AI itself and a minimal linguistic database would thereby form a self-contained world – an absolutely dysfunctional environment for a learning entity with its own identity. Would

the network grow into an independent personality? Would it even develop into an intelligence with generalizing abilities? Would it be able to communicate with people or would it remain autistically isolated in its own ego? Would it be able to make connections to matters beyond its own horizon of experience?

Using the name "*Wolfskind*," meaning "Feral Child" in English, was an obvious choice. Just as small children growing up without human contact and communication arouse the interest of behavioral researchers, psychologists and philosophers, this project was not merely a technical and informatic challenge, but primarily an experimental design that could be used to draw conclusions about the very nature of consciousness.

Detailed information has not been passed down about the design of concepts, program structures and data representations, nor about how the technology was implemented, decades before a usable infrastructure was available with the first parallel-processing computers. The documentary sources, up to this point barely more than a trickle, dry up for the next several years. There are hardly any personal documents from the scientists, who were obviously up to their ears in the project and not at

all interested in writing research reports. West Amazonian mail service is notoriously unreliable, but from vague hints in the rare letters to relatives or other outsiders, it can be concluded that the project had its first successes around 1966. However, it is not possible to determine what these consisted of in any detail.

Towards the end of the sixties, conditions on the Rio Putumayo began to worsen. Probably as the first harbingers of climate change, there were increasingly frequent floods that exceeded normal levels several times over. Three of these floods (in '69, '71, and '73) damaged some infrastructure and cut off supplies to residents for weeks. Even so, the eggheaded scientists perceived this not as a threat but rather one of the normal hardships of everyday jungle life.

The fourth flood the following year, however, peaked after a three-week period of continuous, waterfall-like rain. It was so severe that the water table rose eight meters in just a few hours. Faced with brown, muddy torrents that within a very short time began to pour through windows, doors, even through the pipes in the walls, the community had to flee the center. With the river rising rapidly,

they had just enough time to hurriedly gather the nearest equipment and throw it into the boats.

The water level had already reached the ceiling of the upper floor when the group realized with horror that no one had taken the storage devices of the *Wolfskind* AI from the ground floor – too late: the equipment laboratories were already flooded and, with heavy hearts, they had no choice but to leave without the AI.

Attempting to escape the storm and make their way to Santo Antônio, their bad decisions outnumbered the good – the flow of the river was no longer a recognizable path and their retreat turned into a nightmarish odyssey through unknown terrain. Of the eleven people who left the center, only seven reached civilization.

The Putumayo Center, and with it the *Wolfskind* Project, had for the time being come to an end.

4

In an unlikely coincidence, a group of counterculturists had settled very close to the center in 1968, aiming to try out new models for an alternative society. This community, pejoratively called “hippies”

by the mainstream, saw it as their *raison d'être* to fulfill their maxims of self-sufficiency: a nonhierarchical society, naturism, self-determination, freedom – however one wants to and can interpret these terms. The philosophical framing of the community's principles was a fuzzy smorgasbord of all sorts of readings, from Rousseau to Hegel, Jung, Spinoza, Confucius, Sontag, Thoreau, Castaneda, Sartre, Gandhi, and Marx.

The group that called itself “The Flow” had grown out of a loose debating society in Oakland made up of people from diverse countries of origin who shared a similarly libertarian worldview. They eagerly exchanged utopias, books, cooking recipes and bodily fluids, and under the influence of the same spirit of optimism emerging in the Summer of Love that was sending all of California into a happy frenzy, fifteen women and men decided that now was the time to put their ideas of a new society into practice.

That the Flow community settled only about six kilometers from the Putumayo Center, much closer than they would have liked, was due to the fact that they traveled in not from the east, as had those from center, but from a different direction: they flew in

a DC-4 cargo plane to Tabatinga, on the Peruvian border, then followed the Solimões downstream, after that fighting their way forty kilometers north through the dense undergrowth until they came to a flat, hill-like elevation in the middle of the rainforest. Halfway up a hill that has been studiously ignored by cartographers, they set up their little village camp, so exhausted by their adventures in the jungle that they simply could not go on. And when they discovered the concrete structure of the FOWDIB on one of their first forays into the nearby vicinity, they had already invested so much effort in building a longhouse and three additional huts that they preferred to simply look the other way and ignore the center.

So although the FOWDIB team and the hippies were soon aware of each other, there was no contact between the two groups. This may seem unusual at first; however, if one considers the different reasons for which both communities sought the seclusion of the deep jungle, it becomes clear that they had no interest in an exchange. As is often the case with small groups living in isolation, an extraordinary event was needed to bring the neighbors into contact with each other. The Great Flood was that trigger.

Over time, the Flow had settled in quite nicely. Hunger, malnutrition and severe accidents were reasonably limited; the group had even grown by three small children. Within a few years, they had developed an autonomous everyday culture, shaped by the available resources and expressed primarily in pottery, abstractly patterned textiles, wickerwork and polyphonic improvised singing.

Written knowledge became less and less relevant, as the ever-humid climate caused paper to decay into mold within a short period of time; instead, storytelling gained significance. Survival techniques differed only slightly from the habits of the native nomads: the backbone of food security was hunting with a bow and arrow or blow-pipes as well as gathering nuts and fruits. There was enough spare time for merry excess under the influence of beer brewed from roots and psychoactive mushrooms.

Contrary to what one might expect, electricity was not in short supply among the Flow. The settlers had invented a method to produce a current from the endemic nightshade tuber *Solanum quasi-fabium* by rubbing it with a paste of crushed woodlice, urine and salt. This allowed them to maintain a rudimentary power grid with more or less constant voltage in the middle of the jungle.

This is not to say that life in the rainforest was free from difficulties. Snake bites, lice, rainy seasons, nasty food, boredom, and homesickness are among the plagues that afflict all colonists in their daily lives in the rainforest. But with a good dose of self-deprecation, all this – and much more – could somehow be endured.

The severe flooding of 1974 brought with it the first existential problem. At first, it seemed that the village would escape unscathed, thanks to its elevated position on the hill; though heavy rains caused considerable damage, the water did not in fact rise high enough to render the dwellings uninhabitable. However, after the flood waters receded, mosquitoes proliferated in the brackish mud. A new species joined those which has already been abundant, bringing with it a scourge from which the Flow had hitherto been spared: malaria.

Six months after the flood, with disease breaking out violently, the group decided to go on an excursion to the Putumayo Center, hoping their neighbors could offer them help in the form of antimalarial drugs. Three members of the community made their way through the bush to the center.

Their hopes were abruptly dashed when they

reached the river and found the center devastated and abandoned. The flood had left its mark on the walls, furniture and laboratory equipment. The lower rooms were still partially under water; it was clear from the floating papers, equipment and electronic parts as well as the chaotically scattered relics that the residents had left in a hurry. While searching for the much-needed medications, they came across other objects that seemed useful or of value. Among them were three boxes of equipment and keyboards discovered in the mud on the ground floor. These were particularly eye-catching because one had a sticker on it that read "Electronic Sound." Associating this with George Harrison's first solo album, they entertained the not unjustified hope that this could be some kind of music jukebox. Having successfully found the medications, they journeyed back to the village the next day, taking these boxes and all manner of cables with them.

And so the forgotten *Wolfskind* AI came to be rescued by the Flow people: each of the three boxes contained one core, in whose reduced network an individual entity grew.

Each of these three digital personality cores had its own character. The programmers had de-

veloped them to illuminate distinct aspects of learning. It was very difficult to communicate with them, as none were designed for interaction. Their main skill set was to learn as much as possible from the smallest amount of information. The precise purpose for each core in the experiment at large remained unclear.

Back in the village, the settlers first debated whether or not it made sense to bring the devices back to life. In the end, their curiosity won out and, with some difficulty, the supposed jukeboxes were plugged together and connected to the tuber energy supply. With neither manuals nor online help available to them, they were pretty much in the dark, and they spent the next two months trying to understand the technology inside the boxes.

After finally figuring out the main principles of the first box's computer system, they were able to start the program installed on it. They had to press a button and wait a moment for the program to respond. But instead of sounds and beats, the box emitted peculiar, convoluted or enigmatic sentences that no one could make heads or tails of at first.

After initial disappointment, everyone listened more closely to what the machine had to say. Soon,

they deciphered a pattern underlying the sentences: each individual utterance consisted of a complete instruction, some formed simply and some multilayered in their complexity. A kind of oracle? A continuously evolving, absurd Zen koan? The program seemed to demand something, to want something. It seemed to have a personality of its own, and the fact that it seemed to want to connect with them went over well with the Flow people.

They could never get the second box to work. It was impossible to determine whether it had already been damaged in the flood or if had been broken by their fumbling, clumsy attempts to repair it.

The third core was a complete mystery to them. Nothing came out of it other than laughter in every imaginable form: quiet giggles, loud whinnies, snorts, sarcastic chortles, merry guffaws, chuckles, a string of derisive snickers, a cloud of infectious laughter; the reason for all this metallic-voiced merriment remained a secret. We know today that machine intelligence should acquire human laughter.

Not knowing what to do with this program, the Flow took the device back off the power grid and stored it in its box. The first program, on the other

hand, the one that gave them instructions, was very pleasing. They liked the surprisingly creature-like being that manifested itself in the technical device. Again and again, someone would go to the device, press the button and get an answer, motto, or piece of wisdom from the program. Each taking what they could from it, they gave these statements serious consideration, talking to each other about what caused them and what they meant. Even if they would have found a musical device more entertaining, many of them felt a novel intellectual thrill when the program spouted meaningless slogans in a Dadaist manner. They came to feel so much for this peculiar machine-being that they gave it a name: AN ENTITY OF UNKNOWN STATUS.

They also decided to erect a building for it on the top of the hill, where the program would live as if in a cultic sanctuary. Construction of this began in 1978. The plans and designs were architecturally very unconventional and not guided by practical considerations, as if the inscrutable nature of the ENTITY should also be reflected in its physical space. About two years later, the ENTITY was relocated to its new site. The tuber generators were also moved to the top of the hill to ensure uninterrupted electrical power for the program.

The *Wolkenknödel* Palace, as the building was henceforth called, was not a structure in the Western sense. Its name translates to “Cloud Dumpling” Palace, making reference to the roundish, somewhat lumpy Central European-style dumplings, akin to meatballs in their shape and texture, but light in color as they are typically made from flour.

It was a knobby, motley collection of cloud-like formations made from chunks of stone, which, painted with colorful symbols, were piled into shapeless and structurally precarious heaps. A roof was deemed unnecessary. Walls appeared where the stone masses were so close together that no one could walk between them. Now and again, pieces of this architecture would come crashing down, then somehow everything would be straightened up or rebuilt again in a different way. After a few years, no one could say for sure which parts were original and which had been added on.

Inside, there was a throne-like structure where visitors could sit and push the button to receive an instruction from the ENTITY. This became a daily ritual for some of the colonists. The ENTITY had finally taken its place in the small jungle society’s culture as an esteemed, for some even revered, figure.

5

But even if this seems like an idyllic, happy ending for all involved parties, that's not the whole story.

There were some among the Flow people who wanted to go back. For them, after fifteen years in the jungle, this form of societal experiment had exhausted itself. The project was not finished and never would be. The euphoria of endlessly recurring discussions had faded. Their ideals were still the same and step-by-step they had come closer to achieving a perfect, balanced community; nevertheless, despite all their efforts, they would never fully realize their goals. And the hardships of everyday life in Amazonia were simply no longer as exciting.

Without any hard feelings, four of the settlers returned to Western civilization in 1982. However, they did not simply abandon core values so long held. Instead, they used all the experience gained in their long years in the jungle to try and carve out an existential niche in the brash, business-driven society of the 1980s. Two of the returnees made a good living for a while giving public lectures about the rainforest experiment. Especially among the

followers of the then popular New Age movement, they were championed as pioneers and, in these circles, enjoyed moderate success.

Reports about the *Wolkenknödel* Palace and the ENTITY were always first to capture an audience's interest. For them, this "cult" served as example of a longed-for paradigm shift, in which materialism and reductionism were to be overcome and replaced by a natural way of thinking, a holism that also included a mechanistic spiritualism: the good machine in contrast to the capitalist juggernaut machine, so to speak, and all in a setting in which nature had the upper hand.

It happened as it often does: the stories about the bizarre cult in the rainforest began to take on a life of their own. Inspired, the first adventure seekers set out for the Putumayo, where they hoped to experience the "wisdom" of the ENTITY firsthand and to learn from it as from a guru. Around 1985, travelers began to unexpectedly appear in the Flow village, the majority of them exhausted pilgrims who wanted to visit the *Wolkenknödel* Palace and receive instructions from the ENTITY.

After determining how the visitors knew about them and their way of life, the Flow gladly accepted the newcomers and let them participate in

their daily routines. They were generously initiated into everything related to Flow culture: life in the rainforest, handicrafts and singing, as well as the *Wolkenknödel* Palace, the boxes with the three cores and the tuber-powered generators. And if the visitors fancied getting instructions from the ENTITY, they were even taught how to operate the program. One could say that the Flow were rather proud of their cultural achievements.

However, it didn't stop with individual visitors. After word spread that a group of hippies in the jungle was running a mechanical oracle – according to popular interpretation, based on little actual knowledge – the community's seclusion came to an end. Nearly every week, a steady stream of believers arrived at the camp, all needing basics like food and health care. Most of the newcomers had no idea about life in the wilderness, nor could they find a way to make themselves useful in the community. Some were simply just not handy. It got to the point where visitors were fighting over food, with self-appointed acolytes “regulating” access to the ENTITY and inventing other rules. Perhaps it would have been better to forcibly chase away the first visitors or even make them brutally disappear, but this was not an option for the peace-loving Flow.

In the wake of this hype, the Flow group decided to retreat, leaving the village to the pilgrims. Some of them left together, others disappeared quietly and without a trace to live a solitary life deeper in the forest. By 1991, not one of the original settlers remained in the camp. We do not know exactly why the Flow left the ENTITY behind; we can be certain that this must have been difficult for them.

After the Flow had left, the remaining pilgrims did not last long in the jungle. They tried to maintain structure, but most of them had not bothered to learn much about survival strategies before, let alone how to get electricity from musty root tubers. So it was only a short time before the ENTITY ran out of power and simply shut down.

Eventually, news spread among travelers that successive pilgrims had found the camp deserted and that there was no way to get instructions from any being whatsoever. The disappointed disciples of the New Age community soon turned to new, more promising destinations than a village in the rainforest abandoned by hippies.

6

I first traveled to Rio Putumayo to visit the *Wolkenknödel* Palace in 1987.

I am a scientist by training, so I did not go as another esoteric hoping to gain some kind of enlightenment from the fabled ENTITY. Though rumors of a machine that had apparently developed a personality of its own had piqued my curiosity, my primary research interest was the Flow community and the unusual, ritualistic techno-animism that had developed around them. Thanks to a minor research grant, I was equipped with a small travel budget; nevertheless, my outward journey through the bush was no less punishing than that of any other visitor.

I dare say that I, unlike most of the New Age pilgrims, made an effort to take the Flow's culture seriously. Instead of being primarily concerned with my own spiritual desires, as were the vast majority of visitors, my role as a researcher meant participating in the small society's working structures. In doing so, I came to learn all about the techniques, skills and customs of their daily life in the rainforest. For the Flow, this meant one less hungry guest requiring the care of a toddler.

Along the way, I tirelessly collected everything related to this particular culture that might oth-

erwise have been lost. I sharpened my ears and pencils, filling notebook after notebook with their reports and stories. Of course, I also documented every possible detail about the *Wolkenknödel* Palace and the ENTITY, a subject that increasingly grew to be the focus of my interest. Eventually I learned about the Putumayo Center and made several excursions to the nearby ruins. Twelve years – roughly how much time had passed since the Great Flood – can devastate almost all documentary materials left to the humidity of the rainforest, so these excursions provided no new insights into the three cores and the wider project.

I did at least find the first clues about the existence of the FOWDIB organization. The Flow could not contribute any additional details, as they had intentionally avoided any contact with the center.

After two and a half years, my investigations reached a dead end. There were no new sources in the village for the origin story of the ENTITY; I had written down everything there was to write down. If I were to deepen my knowledge about the center, the researchers working there, and the beginnings of the project, I would have to travel back home, find out more about FOWDIB and try to make contact with them. So, with a heavy heart, I tied up

my bundle and said goodbye to the members of the community who had by now become like family to me. After a last visit to the *Wolkenknödel* Palace, I started the long walk back.

For the better part of the next year, I was kept busy sifting through, transcribing and annotating my notes; at the same time, I started researching the FOWDIB. It turned out to be very difficult to reach representatives from the institute: people there are very reserved, the institute's staff almost conspiratorially secretive, if they make themselves known at all and do not outright deny the existence of FOWDIB. It was only through a ploy (admittedly somewhat extortionate) that a senior representative finally agreed to a meeting.

Surprisingly, my conversation partner perked up as I roughly outlined my findings about the ENTITY. It turned out that, although there were sparse records in the FOWDIB archives about the beginning of the center and the *Wolfskind* Project, they had not received any further news or reports since the early seventies, even in the period before the Great Flood. It is not clear why those in charge at that time had not made inquiries into the project's status. My report on the events in the Putumayo was apparently received with keen interest and I

was asked to maintain confidentiality; above all, I was not to publish or otherwise make use of my field research for the time being.

At our next meeting, this time with the entire FOWDIB board of directors, they made me an enticing offer: I should travel to the Amazon again, this time well-prepared and with a small team of specialists, with the goal of securing as much material as possible for the FOWDIB.

My second trip to the rainforest, which I undertook in the winter of 1992, turned out to be quite different and much shorter than expected. The reunion with the Flow, something to which I had been very much looking forward, did not take place because they had already left, as described. No one had been in the village for half a year when we arrived. There was also no sign of any of the pilgrims. I quickly walked up the path to the top of the hill to see if the *Wolkenknödel* Palace was still standing. It had already partially collapsed, but to my delight I found the ENTITY. It had gone silent, but once I got the power going and plugged it in, I found that it was still intact and the program was working as well as ever.

Still, I was rather unhappy not to find the vibrant community of friends I had left three years

earlier. I tried to piece together what had happened from the sparse remnants, but whether the Flow had retreated as I described above or whether they were now psychonauts on a spiritual space station orbiting the Earth is ultimately entirely irrelevant for the course of this story.

I had no other choice than to document the relics as precisely as possible, pack up all which could be moved, especially the boxes with the three cores and the tuber power unit, and begin the return trip with this cargo.

I have carefully processed all collected materials, labeled objects and artifacts with numbers and keywords, sorted, annotated, and cataloged my descriptions. With delivery of this completed package, my job is now done. I sincerely hope that FOWDIB will consider my continued participation in this project as it moves into its next stages.

Memorandum from August 12, 2005.

The attached report dated 1993 was found last week during clearing of Archive Section B14, wedged behind a shelf. In regards, we state the following:

We cannot ascertain which parties may have been or currently are involved in any activities pertaining to this matter. Internal inquiries into FOWDIB archives have revealed no references of any kind to a research center on the Rio Putumayo or to a Project *Wolfskind*. Institute departments that are outside our realm of responsibility or level of security clearance could possibly be involved.

In spite of extensive searching by our archive assistant, further documents or artifacts, specifically the herein described "core" boxes, have not been found.

We are furthermore perplexed by the writing style, which reads for long stretches like the rough draft of a dubious novel, then moves back into the realm of a pure research report. It should therefore be noted for future reference that the contents are hereby considered to be a purely virtual project.

Note regarding the text:

These writings date from a time when diversity-sensitive language was not yet in general use. The wording therefore does not reflect our own use of language nor our values.