

A Fungal Story

Another cup is taken from the pile and filled with coffee. The other members of the group repeat this process and go outside into the storm where the wind knocks one of their cups out of their hand. The coffee spills and the cup spins, spins, spins, carried by the wind into the bushes where it is grabbed by a branch. The cup's adventures are cut short and thus it is destined to observe the natural phenomena in its immediate surroundings for the following years. Its attention is drawn to fungi.

Water fills the earth and leaves it moist after the rain. The wind sees an opportunity and carries some spores into a bush. Germination, and the spores immediately take advantage of the ideal environment, the humidity, the protection from the sun, and spread their roots, the vital mycelium. It feeds on everything around it, converts the fruits of the earth into energy, rearranges molecules without a second thought, all to fulfill the greater plan encoded within its genome. The mycelium spreads rapidly and within a few weeks, a small stalk reaches out, shyly at first but rapidly gathering strength. The stalk grows in size, the cap widens its rim together with its gills already producing spores ready to be sent out through the wind to find new lands, to create new fungi all according to the genetic plan.

A noiseless break and the mushroom is taken into a lab, its spores spread onto a petri dish made sticky with agar, dextrose, and starch. The spores are reminded of the plan and the process restarts in a new environment, the mycelium spreads as if time was no longer necessary for the appropriate energy conversion. Growth, the mycelium fills one, two, and more petri dishes and the opaque white obscures any remainder of the previous contents. With no regard for its natural processes, the mycelium is ripped from the glass box and added to sterilized, humid hemp straw substrates in plastic bags, sealed, mixed, and left to its own devices. It grows even more, forms a network, socializes, and meets new roots all stemming from the same source, mapping the entirety of the space that the bags provide. Various communications occur through these roots all with a single purpose: expansion. Opaque white once again encompasses everything and the mycelium flourishes.

Inconsideration, the bags are opened, their contents emptied into molds resembling cylinders, their walls wider at the top, narrower at the bottom. The molds are pushed into an oven, dried at 40°C, baked solid at 80°C. The genetic plan thus becomes obsolete, it clashes with another's forceful inspiration and hopes. The mycelium stops the growth. A solid material emerges from the oven, separated from the molds it becomes an individual object, printed with a label it becomes a product. It is packaged and delivered in bulk to various facilities hoping to implement essential change and reverse the wrongdoings of the past.

So it happens that another cup is taken from the pile, filled with coffee, together with other members of the group taking the coffee, the cup and its look-alikes are walked out into the fresh air and the wind. Once more, the coffee spills on the ground as the cup is knocked from one of their hands and it spins, spins, and spins only to be pushed by some strange narrative force toward a bush, to get stuck on a branch, to hang next to another, older looking cup made from something else. Its attention is drawn to fungi as well for which it will become food, energy, spawn within a couple months' time whereas the strange, alien cup held by the neighboring branch will stay and wait its turn for years to come, waiting to return to its roots hundreds of meters below the earth's crust.