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Discourses of Photography in the
Victoria and Albert Museum Collection:

The Living Bird

Edith Marie Pasquier

Abstract

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The research delves into the figure of the wild bird as through an encounter between a museum — the Victoria and Albert Museum — and an archive — the photographic collection of the Word & Image Department at the V&A. The research asks why we select photographic images, how we write from photographic images and how we 'listen' to what we see. It queries the photographic collection in the museum as a site of 'live' readings, writings and listenings to images. The research explores the ontology of the photograph in tracing the wild bird in the museum's photography collection, and considers the relation between bird, photograph and writing as correlations of memory in an archive.

The context of the research is threefold: to understand what a figure can be through the 'voice' of the wild bird, and thus enquire about the concept of 'voice' within human-animal and non-human animal relations; to consider the museum, archive and curated collection as a site of encounter, as a repository of knowledge and histories, individual and collective and to raise the ontological claims of photography as a site of writing and to re-mark again the performative possibilities of writing and photography. The question is whether the writing of an archive, a collection, can be marked by the presence of a living figure — human or non-human, and, in this instance, the wild bird. What is at stake is that the 'liveliness', the restlessness of an image is adhered to, and the photographic object is lifted from its place as a document within the archive into writing, into the event of language, where it can be registered and rethought.

To the ontology of photography, the essays and autobiographical work of Walter Benjamin hold a key focus, as do the early pioneers of photography such as William Henry Fox Talbot, and contemporary practitioners. The philosophical writings of Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Derrida and Yve Lomax impart an exigency to the figure of the wild bird. The photograph as a site of 'live' writing and presence is marked by the writings of Gaston Bachelard, Maurice Blanchot, Eduardo Cadava, Luigi Ghirri, Seamus Heaney, Jean-Luc Nancy, Juhani Pallasmaa, Peggy Phelan, Olivier Richon, Denise Riley and Kaja Silverman. The 'voice' of the bird as a figure of thought is informed by Tim Birkhead, Jean-Christophe Bailly, Mark Cocker, Michael Longley and Alice Oswald.

The process of the research is framed through the phenomenology of the reverie. It is through the properties of reverie — nonlinear, fragmentary, restless, contemplative, fleeting — that the writing attends to the photographic object, the museum's collections and the figure of the wild bird. The thesis is written in a varying 'focus' that intertwines the readings and writings of images: a gallery of wild and captive birds from the photography collection of the V&A Museum from 1850 to the present day. 'Birdsong', 'Bird-Voices' and 'Hallucinating a Hawk' impart the idea of voice in the figure of the wild bird, through the presence of language. 'Bird-Watching' returns to the gallery of birds, looking beyond the collection of the museum to writing as a site of presence and recovery. The 'walks' within the V&A Museum and grounds manifest the performative qualities of the photograph and attend to what resides in the periphery, in the margins and at the intersection of the frame.

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Edith Marie Pasquier, February 2018



Peter Henry Emerson, *The Poacher - A Hare in View*, Pictures of East Anglian Life, England, 1882 – 88 (published 1890) photogravure, PH.2114-1896

Introduction

The light comes in the name of the voice¹

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Blue tits dart from bush to bush, crossing in zippy rhythms with skittish movements up and down, hopping, skating, bouncing even — the effect is of laughter — racing to be ahead of the avian game of tag — full of yelp calls and keen 'churring'. The bushes that hold these avian sprinters respond lightly to the speed of jumping legs, whizzing wings and jabbing beaks — a fleeting brashness of sound — the brightness of touch, the banditry of calls — disappear in a 'flash' — dartful players spliced into time, replaced by what has been. Something has been disturbed between the air — between figure and ground — the visible surface of the image pulls traces of things outside and inside the picture frame — to write with light, to write with sound, the ocular and the aural — who is moving over this meadowland or field?

A poacher rests his hand on the body of his hunting whippet, summoning the divisions of the perceptual fields, a liminal play with subject and background, the focus falls back and pulls forward. The field with a heavy haystack and distant scuttling hedgerows, a watery grassland of blur and inky wastes; an abstract shape in the sky — a hawk maybe, glimpsed hovering between land and cloud line; the field or meadowland beyond the frame, a sense of the air, of lift and of light, a summer evening. Looking out, *The Poacher – A Hare in View*, 1890, by Peter Henry Emerson (1856 – 1936), unlocks light onto the unknown hare and exposes our glance towards another plane, outside, above, beyond the familiar opening, stretching to see what there is to see, to hear what can be heard, to smell what can be smelt — the world grows, the place widens. A figure of the poacher and his dog stays, but the imaginary hare and the illusionary mark in the sky edge a peripheral push to give way to beyond the field.

It is this disturbance of the air, this widening of space, that this writing attempts to recover for photographs. And the figure of the living bird, a mere mark or blur in this image, lifts the space between writing, picture and sound to a place beyond the quotidian object of the photograph. The effect is a gathering of senses that refuses to disclose fully the images they contain, but when unlocked and received, asks for an approach that enters into the photograph, and can be attended to all images — to *see the seeing as well as the seen, hear the hearing as well as the heard and feel the movement as well as see the moved*. Spontaneously and invisibly a performance takes place, and despite — or because of — the flattening of this sensory world into the picture, the airy bird recovers the depths of language.

The painter and naturalist John James Audubon — author of the 19th-century print compendium *Birds of America* (1827 – 38) — engraved his images at a one-to-one scale that distorted, flattened and contorted large birds to fit within the page. Tracing the specimens directly, his pictorial literalism diverges from the immersive and peripheral view of PH Emerson's *The Poacher*. The art historian Jennifer L Roberts writes on Audubon, "The picture plane here is not so much a window as a plane where reality and illusion, materiality and opticality collide. If we must call it a window, it's like a window that a bird has flown into: a surface that records a collision between a material body and the hard limits of a system built for illusion."²

There is the figure of a bird, its living body so delicate and fragile between fingers, in the palm of the hand. It moves in ways that the eye, even if it wanted to, could not take in their entirety. The bird, its naming, all classification of species dissolve during this time of looking and the attention to its breath, its soundings, intimately tied you to watching; the breath of the bird and the movement of the body enter a chromatic scale of such refined tunings that it affects the body of the person who is holding it. A pause, the bird is lying between your fingers and you are blowing gently onto it, you can see its skin behind the feathers; there is a resemblance to the skin of your own hand. So the skin of your own hand and the belly of the bird reach a communion of touch, but all this while the sound of the living, breathing bird is the score that measures time, measures the vibrations in the room. The bird — a chaffinch, a young bird, a year old — is resting for a while, its breath, hurried, nervous, alarmed, is steadier now; the gazing can loosen its intensity, and a measure of distance enter. The bird is calm; you — who are holding the bird — are calm, so others break into this time and space, shift the hut, the room, the corner, the amount of light, smudged faintly there. It is dawn, not too windy or they would not migrate, they would wait. Other sounds fill this picture, they fill in this moment of time, halted in a lucidity, a thought lost. When, it is hard to say, how it is this — nothing is that clear, except the warmth of the body, of the bird's body, bending time, creating time through its heat, swathed in closeness of the physical body, a living body, and this contacts my body, and then a distance, a coolness, a withdrawal, a pulling back. The sound also changes and distorts what is there; there is no shriek, call or alarm, it is the sound around us that intrudes, releases another key, timbre, note that encircles and strains. Through the small dark tunnel the bird moves instinctively, through this hole it flies, outside to the light, to a branch outside the window. It reorientates quickly, rising upwards, and disappears into the air, into some part of the sky. The sounds are thrown outside, not in the room. Thousands of kilometres to fly, others hundreds of thousands of kilometres, over water, landmass, through weather systems and territories, finally to a familiar place, to the corner of a drainpipe, of a house, that its parents occupied and its parents before that. But its imprint, its physical vibration is left here, in this ornithological hut, an opening that is always connected to breath, to the voicing of its call. This is not purely an image, it is a living, breathing entity, a being of intensity, its sounds, its 'speaks', an alarm of steadying breath, restful, poised, a sound returned, breathing the very surface it touches. The skin, the breath of another; there is a communion of sorts of two living beings.

Within *The Poacher*, the window is open, a set for a story, the view that resembles Leon Battista Alberti's perspectival frame refigured through the glass plate of the camera — a sensuous image of subjects emerges within the landscape, and the tactile sense extends to the gaze within the narrative. The photogravure's continuous tones produce photographic intaglio prints that support a nearly subliminal fiction of other senses — the plate marks the paper in which the ink sits on the surface of the picture rather than soaking into it. The term 'intaglio' comes from the Italian word *intagliare* meaning to carve or to cut, the opposite of the relief print; the incisions form a metaphorical imprint of the subjects, that hold their place between figure and ground, with the eye moving to the various points of focus within the frame.

PH Emerson, photographer of *The Poacher* and author of *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art*, 1890, stated that, "in nature the eye wanders up and down the landscape and so gathers up the impressions and all the landscape in turn appears sharp... a picture is not all the landscape, it should be seen at a certain distance. The eye focuses selectively and gathers up a suggestion of the rest of the landscape³." Emerson's use of differential focus was to guide the emphasis of line and outline within the pictorial scene: "Witness the 'Falcon and Egret'" he writes, "by Soga Chokuan (sixteenth century), where the power shown in depicting the grasp of the falcon's talon as it mercilessly crushes the helpless egret, is very great."⁴

Emerson wrote of the "deceptive luminosity of the ground-glass picture, but that the principal object in the picture must be fairly sharp — *just as the eye sees it and no sharper*; but everything else, and all other planes of the picture must be subdued, so that the resulting print shall give an impression to the eye as nearly identical as possible to the impression given by the natural scene". Accordingly, "Nothing in nature has a hard outline, but everything is seen against something else, often so subtly that you cannot quite distinguish where one ends and the other begins. There is no place for the eye to rest, if all the picture is in focus, it's jammed into one plane."

"If 'to hear' is to understand the sense (either in the so-called figurative sense; to hear a siren, a bird, or a drum is already each time to understand at least the rough outline of a situation, a context if not a text), to listen is to be straining towards a possible meaning and, consequently one that is not immediately accessible."⁶ When taking in a space or a surface over time without necessarily having a motive for doing so, one's attention does not remain transfixed — like a camera taking a long exposure — it wanders, before and above things as it rests. Whilst the veneer of the image appears to illuminate the ocular view, what should not be present by all accounts — the sound world — is. The picture potentially leans us through image, title/text and focus to a 'hearing' within the image and, by opening the sensory fields, a brimming of sounds appears.

It may seem a paradox to reflect on the dialogue between sound and the still image, when the still image is perceived as a silent medium. But in the listening, what is presented cannot be contained in the visual alone; through listening we have to move to the hearing, to the sounds and to the speaking within the image. In contemplating images in this way, the structure of a non-linear narrative of looks and views is more able to collide with the various sound-bodies it opens, and the figure of a living bird can enter the visual scene so we can ask how listening can be taken through all images.

Walking in the museum is a tracing of walking at night. The Victorian architecture creates a landscape that shadows tall trees and an obscurity of view; it edges towards you — not the darkness, but the buildings, the staircases, the doors, the tiled corridors, the ornate tearooms — nothing stays in place, everything moves and creeps in ways that are unfamiliar. To enter a brightly lit area, a different tempo, day and night edge closer, the boundaries less distinct or maybe more so, but out walking the galleries and corridors there is a suspense: anything could happen. There is an animal moving in parallel to you, it is an Arctic hare. This eternal twilight is an unexpected nightwalk with a hare, textured by points of accentuated listening and slow stops and starts — both aware of each other, each compliant in moving forwards at intervals and stalling paces. An Arctic hare — grand and white in its winter fur (there is snow on the ground and it is early May). The sound-world is of night, there are tones that do not belong to the day: a low hum that seems to cover everything, around sticks, moss, the surface of the river, the hare's fur, the bark of the birches, the discarded rubber. In the museum, the sound-world of this night space reverberates in this indoor air, voices stilted in the passageways and galleries. Standing alone with no one else in view, the light responds only to your movement, imitates the strain of night. And it has always been this way, the nocturnal air, the focused lighting — except, sometimes, a window with shards of natural light. This artificial passage to night brings the illusion of slowness, but for the interruption of frantic passages of crowded bodies and noise, always a return to silence in the empty galleries and halls, a diminished sound. The crowded stopping and starting between various objects holds little of the slowed-down tempo of the encounter with the hare. Except there are places where you can go and stand, and a solitary museum guard in a quiet inward state locked in the time s/he inhabits, the grammar of the place, becomes its sentence and stops. There are those that you encounter in stillness and who move silently through the galleries. They bring a syncopated rhythm to the museum, a line of contact, an aura of how to proceed, how to approach an object, a movement through the museum. The ability to stand and watch invisibly takes consummate skill — to focus on a space and truly inhabit that space or focus on a scene and keep your attention attuned. In the Print Room, used to view photographs, drawings or prints, the museum guard is always aware. As you look at the objects, they are always attending to the look and the look becomes the double gaze. You rest in this position, in this knowledge that the look is never just yours, never one, as there is another who attends to you, attends to your look in a manner that accords with the preservation and conservation of the collection. Whether in daylight or artificial light, the guards look with the same attention, holding a continuity and community of presence that affirms the sequencing of time and the aura of the object.

Night waking. Both the sky and the ground in *The Poacher* are of a strange light, a twilight — it pre-empt the spectral tonality and timbre of the space of the X-ray, discovered in 1895 — the practice of radiography, to reach beyond sight. An oddness lingers in the air of the night that is longer than expected. What you then see is darkness visible. A monochromatic luminosity, fragments of strangeness to a print that can only emerge from day and night, wake and sleeping: powers of vision are stretched, the poacher and dog's gaze, enlarged to where? A momentary slip of consciousness, which shadows the surroundings; the poacher takes the ear, disconcerting in the dream language — there the desire to wake up to be alert for the day, for the dog to bound, a hawk to hover, the poacher to call.

The image elucidates the dream-state, the reverie and what appears in this dream is that the dream appears: all sense of place is lost. A spectral form: what strikes is the placing of the hand over the body of the whippet, with fingers curled around a stick. A deft narrative, instilled with tenderness and calm, that resurfaces from some obscure depth, a whole repertoire of touch manifests in the image. Upon careful consideration, between the gesture of the Poacher holding the dog, but not squeezing him, there is something like a path of energy and everything is looking forward and everything is held back, with the precision of those who are not concerned with what is ahead of them. This portrait conveys a respect to life, a pensiveness, a presence in reserve — and the dog and the hand of the poacher have something to do with this effect.

This writing and the compendium of images that follows are to be read silently and aloud — in their whole they "entwine the visual and the literary"⁷ to seek a pensiveness within images. The 'pensive image' can be found in the early images of photography as the "scientific discourse is intertwined with pictorial references".⁸ It is to this pensiveness, to these chemical beginnings, to "the picture that makes itself," declares William Henry Fox Talbot in 1844, that a path is opened to thinking of photographs. Still photography appears to have "been invented for the sake of capturing thought"⁹ and it is through the writing of images that it is recovered.

Within pensiveness, an emphasis is on what is disclosed and not fixed. "To think does not mean merely to be affected by this thing or that thing, but by this or that content or an enacted thought, but rather at once to be affected by one's own receptiveness and experience in each and every thing that is thought, by a pure potentiality of thinking."¹⁰ By returning to the beginnings of early photography and Walter Benjamin's essay *The Short History of Photography* (1931), there appears much to recover — from its atmospheres of fog, its unstable chemical beginnings, to releasing a nascent but potential moment of development, to recover this world of the 'aura', a layer, a reservoir of the perceptible, that gathers a receptivity to images, where the photograph and the event of photography is propelled and recovered in the look, in the 'flash' and 'sparks' of what is recognised — "the present discovers itself in the past and the past is awakened within the present".¹¹

What is at stake is not the waking from this dream-state, but what strikes us out of the reverie: "whose voice is this who's talking in my larynx", speaks a voice from the river, by the poet Alice Oswald (1966 –) in the poem *Dart* (2014). Walter Benjamin, in his writings on images, brings bird figures as an 'enlarging gaze' into the writing text. In *A Berlin Chronicle*, "a goldfinch [Stieglitz] in its cage bore greater resemblance to this street harbouring the aunt at her window than the Berlin suburb [Stieglitzer Strasse] that meant nothing to me."¹² In Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1942), it is the recovery of images from the archive of the past that is in need of attention. It is within the structure of the photograph that the potential is to "shatter the continuum of history" and in doing so reveal the history that is hidden in any given work. This writing attends to images of the past and present. The contemporary image is one that forms a singular relationship with one's own time, which "adheres to it and at the same time, keeps a distance from it".¹³ The philosopher Giorgio Agamben tones a voice of exigency: "... the subject shown in the photo demands something from us. The concept of exigency is particularly important and must not be confused with factual necessity. Even if the person photographed is

completely forgotten today, even if his or her name has been erased forever from human memory — or, indeed, precisely because of this — that person and that face demand their name; they demand not to be forgotten."¹⁴

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This exigency applies to all images, not only those of the human-animal, but of animals and birds. The capacity of the photograph goes beyond its indexicality, or its place as a copy, and moves to affirm a 'temporal index' that reveals similarities between one generation and another. The time is towards the 'now'; between grasping the present moment, it is not to the final end, of the future perfect. It is within the 'standstill' that the moment of danger can be alerted to us by earlier generations; through the 'flash' of an image, through its bursting out in 'now-time' and the attention to the present.

By reflecting on the dream-state, or twilight reverie, the writing asks what can be awakened — the history and the recovery of images? Perhaps more simply, it is a thought that affirms life and the will to life. It moves away from sleep, from the dream and the reverie, to the aliveness of the image, and its living state, and here the figure of the bird, the living wild bird, awakens us to the moment of 'now-time', where each image recalls an echo in the encyclopaedia of movement that can attend to the singular image.

In reply to the former Governor of Texas Rick Perry's claim that "evolution is just a theory", Richard Dawkins, in *The Washington Post* on 23 August 2011, provided an extraordinary image of a bird:

"The body of a bird is not just a prodigiously complicated machine, with its trillions of cells — each one in itself a marvel of miniaturised complexity — all conspiring together to make muscle or bone, kidney or brain. Its interlocking parts also conspire to make it good for something — in the case of most birds, good for flying. An aero-engineer is struck dumb with admiration for the bird as flying machine: its feathered flight-surfaces and ailerons sensitively adjusted in real time by the on-board computer which is the brain; the breast muscles, which are the engines, the ligaments, tendons and lightweight bony struts all exactly suited to the task. And the whole machine is immensely improbable in the sense that, if you randomly shook up the parts over and over again, never in a million years would they fall into the right shape to fly like a swallow, soar like a vulture, or ride the oceanic up-draughts like a wandering albatross."¹⁵

"The Voice, the originary *logical* element, is also, for metaphysics, the originary ethical element: freedom, the other voice, and the other death — the Voice of death, we might say to express the unity of their articulation — that makes language our language and the world our world and constitutes for man, the negative foundation of his *free* and *speaking* being."¹⁶

It is to the sound of photographs, to the physical object of the photograph, to reverie, to a "hallucinatory vivacity"¹⁷, that the writing returns. It asks the question: is silence possible? There is only one possible way to express the fact that I speak: that I live, and the existence of life manifests the existence of language. The result of this experience of writing brings the thought of language to the thought of life. To human life, bird life, animal life, plant life, these are forms of life: it is through life and language that thought is formed. Language dwells in life, by way of example:

"Once a friend showed me the impact imprint of a barn owl, frozen in collision on his window. Birds are everywhere but oddly remote. You are closer to them when you're touching what they have touched, these fleeting impressions of their presence. The only things missing are the birds themselves."¹⁸

But you can hear the birds, if they are present: their speech is through calls and songs. "Life is only what is made in speech"¹⁹; it is only from this 'event of language' that 'new life' can emerge. Can we forget speech? This work suggests that the forgetting is ever present.

The myth of St Kevin and the Blackbird is a story from medieval legend that was created around the figure of the sixth-century Irish saint of Glendalough. The saint, in his prison cell, holds out his hand and a blackbird settles in his palm and nests. St Kevin embodies the stoic's stance, a figure possessed by its object allows the the bird to lay its eggs and raise its fledglings until they are flown. Retold by the poet Seamus Heaney (1939 – 2013), Heaney asks the question in his poem *St Kevin and the Blackbird*:

"And since the whole thing's imagined anyhow, Imagine being Kevin. Which is he?
Self-forgetful or in agony all the time..? ... For he has forgotten self, forgotten bird
And on the riverbank forgotten the river's name."²⁰

The image, the object of life — the blackbird and its fledglings — is intimately bound to forgetting, and each of the figures are entwined to each other. Between fact and fiction, the status of the original document — and here we could replace document with photograph — the whole gesture becomes one of forgetting and effacement.

"I think you might call fiction – something like ghost stories. It's when you see something which is not there. It turns out that this is very important, the generation of fictions, for seeing the richness of reality from the very limited amount of data, or information, which the senses can handle or are available to them. So generation of fiction is intimately bound up with generation of fact,"²¹ writes Richard Gregory, Professor of Neuropsychology in 1983. Birds are part of nature's ghostings, the thousands of organisms that have "appeared, changed and disappeared"²² part of the forgetting, the skeins of wild birds piled in museum drawers and collections, the extinction of thousands of species.

The photographic collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the figure of the bird are both bound in 'fictions'. In fact, it was the desire to pull away from the fiction of birds that led to the field and study of ornithology.²³ And the V&A photographic collection — as with the study of ornithology — was/is underlaid with hidden epistemological assumptions: "The division, so evident to us, between what we see, what others have observed and handed down and what others imagine or naively believe, the great tripartition, apparently so simple and so immediate, into Observation, Document and Fable, did not exist,"²⁴ writes Michel Foucault on

the origins of the human sciences in *The Order of Things*, (1966). The relation to fiction is an important one: it elicits a blur, and it is this 'blur' that can be carried over to the image and to the speaking of images.

What is important is not that we speak about all sorts of things but that we have the capacity to speak. "To apply meaning to a bird, as if it were merely a signifier or projected meaning eliminates the need for the bird itself... [...] animating the image, allowing the bird to have its own voice, so that it might communicate its significance effectively²⁵". Language is a power that may or may not be exercised and it is "what we cannot say, that needs to be insisted".²⁶ It is impossible to imagine the existence of the power of language separate from 'the power of life', or to account for "the living being who prefers or prefers not to speak, or act, or even think".²⁷

"What is the source of our first suffering?" Gaston Bachelard asks in his work on reverie. "It lies in the fact that we hesitated to speak... It was born in the moments when we accumulated silent things within us..."²⁸

It is this hesitation of speech and the time that accumulates in silence, that this work visits in the writing and seeing of photographs. Why the hesitation? The intention of the writing is for a responding eye and an alert ear, that "like the hunger of the responsive voice"²⁹ it desires to see through the images. Yet, the writing can only falter, as "it expresses the position of the I as it sees the image,"³⁰ and though this is the position — there is always a deferral to what one wants to see — this does not dismiss the endeavour to search for the figure of the wild, living bird.

Jean-Luc Nancy writes on the moment of hesitation when pressing down a finger; it is this moment of suspension and immobilisation that can be extended to the moment of choosing images in a collection:

"Or like the snap of a camera shutter: by pressing down, the finger says I; it suspends the hesitations between the multiple subjects intersecting and mixing in it (in the viewfinder, the seer, the visionary, the blind eye). It suspends them in a suspense that dramatically immobilizes a possibility caught in the process of becoming a necessity, or even a fatality. Just as this click and its result, the photograph or snapshot [*l'instantanée*], as it is called, appropriate a brief difference, an imperceptible alteration that thus becomes perceptible, present, indubitable — a fold of skin, a pouting face, a plume of smoke — likewise do I appropriate myself, in the instant when I say 'I,' the wholly-other of a singular subject, totally invisible and as such, as non-visual, suddenly totally exposed. By taking the photograph, I fix an other in a suspended hesitation by which the image and its subjects are both determined: I, the one who takes the photograph, completely other in each case, other than all the rest, other than everything that does not say 'I' and other than everything that says it from the position of another I."³¹

Like the snap of a camera shutter, *Birdsong*, *Bird-Voices* and *Hallucinating a Hawk* are all suspended voices that sound the timbre of the absent and imagined bird. Could this be the figure of the bird present in "inner speech",³² in the internal hearings of an image, and that can only be imagined by the hearer? The voice as singular/plural continues not only within the images of birds in the photography collection, but in the walks within the galleries and grounds of the museum. The voice singular/plural, is there within the reveries that inform *Bird-Watching*.

But, still a hesitation.

The hesitation rests within suspended time: "No tenses any more,"³³ writes Denise Riley in *Time Lived, Without Its Flow*, and time marks both the writing and the reading of this thesis. Through the writing, seeing and listening of images, "we understand how things in the past determine how we perceive the present, so it can be said the visible is defined by the invisible".³⁴

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- 5 Ibid pg 150 – 152
- 6 Jean Luc Nancy, trans. Charlotte Mandell *Listening* (New York, Fordham University Press 2007) pg 6
- 7 Olivier Richon on Jacques Rancière's idea of 'pensive image', Olivier Richon, Guest Editor *Introduction: On Literary Images*, *Photographies* Vol 4. No 1 March 2011, pg 5 – 15
- 8 Ibid
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- 10 Giorgio Agamben cited by David Kishik, *The Power of Life: Agamben and the Coming Politics (To Imagine a Form of Life, II)* (Stanford, CAL: Stanford University Press, 2012) pg 39
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- 14 Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations* trans, Jeff Fort (New York, Zone Books, 2007) pg 25
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- 17 The expression "hallucinatory vivacity" is used by film critic Alain Bergala and quoted by writer/photographer Victor Burgin on Roland Barthes' description of the photograph. Victor Burgin, *The Remembered Film* (London, Reaktion Books, 2004)
- 18 Simon Ingram, *A little map of bird movement*, Country Diary, Friday 29 December 2017, *The Guardian* newspaper, London, UK
- 19 Giorgio Agamben, quoted from *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics* by David Kishik, *The Power of Life: Agamben and the Coming Politics (To Imagine a Form of Life, II)* (Stanford, CAL: Stanford University Press, 2012) pg 6
- 20 Seamus Heaney, poem *St Kevin and the Blackbird*, from collection, *The Spirit Level* (Faber & Faber, 1996, ebook, 2009) ebook pg 48
- 21 Richard Gregory, Professor of Neuropsychology, Brain and Perception Laboratory, University of Bristol, *States of Mind*, Jonathan Miller (Pantheon Books, New York , 1983) pg 45
- 22 Mark V Barrow, Jr, *Nature's Ghosts, Confronting Extinction from the Age of Jefferson to the Age of Ecology* (Chicago, London, The University of Chicago Press, 2009) pg 1
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- 26 Giorgio Agamben, quoted from *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics* by David Kishik, *The Power of Life: Agamben and the Coming Politics (To Imagine a Form of Life, II)* (Stanford, CAL: Stanford University Press, 2012) pg 6 – 7
- 27 Ibid pg 7
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- 29 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked* (London, Routledge, 1993) pg 16
- 30 Ibid pg 15
- 31 Jean Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, Trans. Jeff Fort (Fordham University Press, 2005) pg 101
- 32 Denise Riley and Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *The Force of Language* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)
- 33 Denise Riley, *Time Lived, Without its Flow* (London, Capsule Editions, 2012) pg 24
- 34 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked* (London, Routledge, 1993) pg 14

Birdsong

It is said that songbirds learn their song from their parents and the skill of their song varies on their ability to learn. The mimetic texture of birdsong can be likened to the mimetic quality of the photograph. The character and the density of the song is not given, as for every songbird there is no definitive knowledge of their song or clarity of how they will sound. Each songbird's voicing exists in an 'inaugural haze' or 'mist' that interrupts the knowing, hearing and even seeing of the bird. Here, the experience of the photograph can be alluded to — the ephemeral quality of seeing a photograph is similar to the ephemeral moment of hearing birdsong; the time of seeing and hearing becomes a momentary space of seeing and not seeing, of hearing and not hearing. The song, as a collection of sounds, forms for both bird and human a sending out into the world 'in search of auditors', of those who will hear the song and form a wider soundbody, forming a continuum of our mutuality.

It is said that some birds have two voices and sing from two larynges. One larynx has a tendency to dominate the other, leading to the production of a combined sound. Working with the doubling within the voice, the songbird's double voice is analogous to the performative event of the photograph. That there is within the voice a trace of an invisible voice and its effect, adds a layer of the unseen within every sound, amplifying the hidden soundings within the image and the doubling of the memory-image that attends to all photographic images.

What you are about to 'hear' is the sound and recall of a memory-image and its existence in a wider world. The event involves a window and two songbirds, a Bohemian waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulus*) and a great tit (*Parus major*). It begins at the moment the image emerges and ceases the moment it is no longer seen.

delayed
a faint hearing
a hearing/ Possibly, maybe, not

Thud / slap / fick /
Thud / slap / fick /
Thud /slap / fick

marked
a faint stain
a stain / Possibly, maybe, not

Thud/ slap/ fick /
Thud/slap/ fick /
Thud/slap/ fick

Thud / Slap / fick
Thud / Slap/ fick / Possibly, maybe, not

On one window a stain and then another
On another window a stain

A window stained, small as a closed aperture,
a blood stain, blue, brown, red.
A winter sun shrunk as an aperture of coagulated blood,
of crowned brown feathers.

Look, a Bohemian waxwing, down on the roof's edge.
The body convulsing frantically, up and down, up and down, up, up and
down, down, up and down, up and down, down, down and up, up.

'A voice goes on whirring, like an instrument's voice'

Bohemian waxwing: Lisping seeee / seeee/ seeee / seeee
Left larynx: higher pitch gasp, gasp, gasp, gasp,
gasp, gasp
Right Larynx: breathe, gasp, breathe, breathe,
gasp, gasp, gasp

Breathe / Gasp / Seeee
Breathe / Gasp / Seeee Possibly, maybe, not

A face stained, large as an open aperture
a blood stain, blue, brown red.
A red shining of bright, brilliant blood,
red biological-burnished feathers.

'A voice goes on whirring, like an instrument's voice'

Bohemian waxwing: lispig seeee / seeee / seeee / seeee
Left larynx: higher pitch: breathe, breathe, breathe,
breath, breath
Right larynx: gasp, gasp, gasp, gasp, gasp,
gasp, gasp

Look, another species, circles the waxwing /
Possibly, maybe, not
Up and down, up and down, up and down, down and up, down, down
down / on the roof's edge.

Great tit: tea-tea-cher, Tea-cher / tea-tea-cher, 21
Tea-cher / tea-tea-cher
Left larynx: higher pitch: tea-cher / tea-tea-tea / tea-tea /
tear / cher
Right larynx: – cher, – – cher, – – cher, – – cher,
– – cher, – – cher

And the beak opens and a thought goes on'

Look, another species, circles the waxwing / Possibly, maybe, not
Up and down, up and down, up and down,
down and up, down, down down / on the roof's edge.

Great tit: tea-tea-cher, Tea-cher / tea-tea-
cher, Tea-cher / tea-tea-cher
Left larynx: higher pitch: tea-cher / tea-tea-tea / tea-tea /
tear / cher
Right larynx: – cher, – – cher, – – cher, – –
cher, – – cher, – cher

And then another, and then another, and then another, and then another song.

Looking across at the waxwing / Possibly, maybe, not
A hole in its face, a hole in its face, a hole in its face.

'And the beak opens and a thought goes on'

Look, a Bohemian waxwing, down on the roof's edge.
The body still and unstirring, still, and unstirring, still and unstirring, still and unstirring,
still and unstirring, unstirring, unstirring, unstirring.

A great tit looking across at the waxwing, blinded.
A great tit, flies soundless / Possibly, maybe not
Soundless, soundless, soundless, soundless.

A waxwing falls voiceless from the roof's edge / Possibly, maybe, not
Voiceless, voiceless, voiceless, voiceless

An irruption, the bloodied stain, the stain, has slowed the moment down, slowed it all down, to a time so slow it locks time into itself, to an inert matter, of flashes that trail bloodied feathers of pigeons who have flown through an open window, flown into a turbulence of walls and boundaries. A cat waits, with striking claws and the walls fill with red stains; vermilion red, red, red writing, slithering across moving walls, a primal script that marks and thirstily congeals. The blood-writing everywhere and on everything, armchair, fireplace, window, rug, a murder of pigeons, frantic, fitting, hitting and calling the kit of pigeons dissolved into red scatterings of loose feathers and the hay-like smell of blood, a cartographic blood map, of 30 years past, returns the body to the nacreous shivering of irruption.



Bill Brandt, *Evening in Kew Gardens*, 1932 (published 1976), gelatin-silver print, PH32-1978

Little Egret

The figure floats away from the page, its white feathers scratched with the photographer's light abrasions, its eyes darkened with a black opaque wash and its face and beak markings smothered slightly by white gouache¹. Beak, face, crown, nape and throat fuse to line an eerie figure, lifted temporarily from its species to a mythical creature, luminous against the grey tones of a groomed lawn.

A familiarity takes hold of the image, as the eyes tune to the hushed tones of the little egret, and a stillness that mimics the stillness of the egret. Statuesque in inactivity, the bird appears contained as in a museum display, caught in a glass menagerie, with its eternal stare.

A detail of childhood is recalled. The trees in the background, the opening of light at the end of the well-tempered lawn, all give a sense of place that define this particular spot, a botanical garden, traversed in childhood. Kew Gardens. A leafy suburb on the outskirts of London. The site of a child's first walk in 1969, the soft grass in summer, day after day, crossing the mossy expanses that slowly suggest a horizon.

When learning to walk, the perspective of a child is unstable, the child falls, and the certainty of the upright position of the human adult dissolves within the image, as bird and looker sidle between looking up and looking down. The ground appears tilted, shifting the angle of the egret who disturbs the linearity of lawn towards the endless journey that is splattered with speckles of light 'white dust' to create a further syntactical layer upon the imaginary.

The egret is not so familiar to the young child, who could mistake it for a stork, and the figure of the bird becomes confused with childish impressions and magical figures in childhood literature or silhouetted hand-drawn animations where a darker figure emerges from the ghostly apparition. There is the fear of being mistaken, of the child being taken away, swooped up. The bird — whose dark unnatural eyes gaze to the background and are made more strange by the photographer's dark wash — swallows up the child and takes her from the depths of the warm, loving parent, to a deathly, dark, distant, uncertain space, a nightmarish spectre, a dream-like state where the elements of the image collide in the imagination.

The alterations of the photographer's tools disfigure the little egret or colloquially known 'small white heron', resting curiously at Kew Gardens. "The gardens close at dusk," is called out by the garden's wardens in the failing light and the slight excitement or horror of the young child slips into the summer evening away from brightness and play to darkness and transformations.

In a later print of 1979, Bill Brandt printed the image with a darker wash to remake the photograph with the literary suggestions of the "poetic school".² A surreal self-image is created by the photographer, who leans on the image of the bird to inhabit it³. A projected anatomy of a lone figure recedes into time and spectral dust. As surrealist echoes accentuate the hallowed figure and detach it from the inky dark landscape, the recognition of the specifics of place, of the botanic gardens at Kew, diminishes; the planting characteristic of the gardens is obscured and the details of the shrubs and the trees — the ashes, oaks and horse chestnuts — merge into a flat background to form a mass of shadows that consume the 'white dust' on the lawn.

The direct changes to the printed image of the bird remove the quiet insularity of experiencing a wild bird in stillness, to witnessing the wild throes of the imagination and the literary fairy tale. A floating dialectical relationship occurs where the image of the bird attaches itself to experiences outside the frame, and the figure is loosened from the ground to the air.

NOTES

1 A technical examination of 133 photographs from 1930 to 1965 was carried out in the Conservation Department of The Museum of Modern Art, where Bill Brandt's palette of retouching was observed from early to late work. "No Rules" Lee Ann Daffner, Sarah Hermanson Meister, *Bill Brandt Shadow & Light* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2013) pg 190-193

2 Sarah Hermanson Meister, *Bill Brandt Shadow & Light* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2013) pg 71

3 Conversation with Martin Barnes, Senior Curator of Photographs, Word & Image Dept., Victoria and Albert Museum, 7 August 2017

Raven

Corvus corax, Linnæus

Its deep bass bark "Pruk! Pruk!" is frequent. Captive birds have been heard to utter what might pass as song: a succession of croaks, filing notes, cork-drawing pops, clacks of the mandibles, and trills. It imitates well. The male has a ringing "korrunk"; in flight "toc, toc, toc"; for driving off trespassers "clucks" and "worts"; repeated call notes "kiks and piks".

Hooded Crow

Corvus corone cornix, Linnæus

Like the raven, the hooded crow indulges in a continuous outpouring of varied sounds, which may pass for song. Two or three croaks uttered rapidly express alarm.

Rook

Corvus frugilegus, Linnæus

A remarkable variety of notes "chug-a", "choo", "how chow", "tchar", the most common being the familiar caw.

Carrion Crow

Corvus corone, Linnæus

A loud, hoarse "kwarrp" is a familiar sound. The anger note is different: a rapid double or treble rather high-pitched rasping screech.

Jackdaw

Corvus monedula monedula, Linnæus

The jackdaw has two or three common notes that may be heard following each other in a lively sequence as it flies; a "jack", sometimes with additions, a kind of "ky-ah" or "ka", and something like the generic croak. It has been heard uttering a cheerful prattling or chattering that may be described as a song.

Jay

Garrulus glandarius, Linnæus

A startling outburst of high-pitched harsh screeches that suddenly possess a wood and whirl about them from end to end mark the presence of a jay or jays. These cries do not exhaust the bird's vocabulary, which includes a curious mewling note, and also imitations of the utterances of many animals. It has what may pass for a song.

Greenfinch

Chloris chloris, Linnæus

The oft-repeated call of the greenfinch, once learnt, is not likely to be confused with any other. A crooning "tzwer" is a possible rendering. Its other notes have been figured as "twit" and as "yell", the latter often being heard in autumn when the birds are in flocks.

The song usually has three phases and runs thus:

"tjoi, tjoi, tjoi, tjoi, tjoi – grrrrr – kling, kling, kling, kling".



Jean-Eugène-Auguste Atget, *Ragpicker's Hut*, Paris, France, 1923 – 24, (printed 1956),
gold-toned gelatin-silver print by Berenice Abbott from original 18 x 24cm glass negative, CIRC.408-1974

Herring Gull

A scraggy herring gull, the crest of the ragpicker's hut, found at the water's edge, raking through the detritus, with jostling wings outstretched and failing feet, on a muddy river bank. The gull's head high and lofty, nailed to the ragpicker's hut, its gaze outward, endures the temperaments of wind, rain and circumstance. Caught in its winter plumage, the bird has dusky streaks on its head and neck. "Shaking out its feathers, the gull stretched its rufous wings to their full length and trembled through the length of its body"¹; the omnivorous scavenger feeds by plunge-diving and surface-dipping rubbish dumps and is often pictured following in the wake of fishing vessels. The etymology of scavenger is from the Old Norman French to *escauwage*, meaning to examine, to scrutinise² and the gull, the symbol of the scavenger, is atoned in death by a ragpicker or *chiffonnier*, in the photograph *Ragpicker's Hut* (1923 – 24) by Jean-Eugène-Auguste Atget.

The long calls of the bird and its distinctive cry are not silenced within the ghostly taxidermy figure nailed to the ragpicker's hut, home to a *chiffonnier* and built with boards of scavenged wood and cloth, hammered together. The job of the ragpicker is to create order within the chaos of discarded materials and the hut stands erect, curated from an archive of rubbish, the surface of its etymology etched within a wider transience of a living, breathing structure, where voices permeate between flanks of wood and strips of cloth. An ageing cadaver dislodged within the landscape, the hut has roots, it is part of the earth. The ground and the planks of the scavenged trees, which appear to have taken hold in the muddy outskirts of Paris, expand the ocular fibrous capillaries to the banks of the River Seine. A certain delayed presence comes into the image from tilling the land, from excavation, from digging the earth, from what is dug up, and the viewer is lent a return to a metaphorical beginning of things: to a phenomenological root, tracing the archivist's root, the earth, the land, the tree, into a visual stream of discursive and exacting expression³.

The *Ragpicker's Hut* is part of the layered tellings of a documentarist, a discrete conceptual approach rather than a quotidian relation to the photograph. The image moves from a literal and symbolic content to a contradictory experience of the world — of the visual reconstruction of reality and its loss of transparency. Gold chloride creates a warm tone to the photographic print, supporting the preservation of the image, where the document resides between light and history. Light enters the document and a 'brighter' tone is achieved by "...relying on nature and instinct, using no artificial lighting, and judging exposure by experience and charts"⁴.

Outside the hut, light is transfigured into the 'constellation' of materials that architecturally forms imaginary outlines or patterns to create meaning; the stillness within the photograph settles between the solidity of the wooden hut, the curiosities that decorate the outside and the surfaces of the hut. In addition to the wooden planks that are flatly layered on top of each other and organised in a series of constellations, patterns on the celestial sphere present a mythological trail — animals, a sheep, a ram, a circle of different dolls — constellations that shape a 'memory' of movement. To the right of the hut and attached to the planked exterior walls are strings where vine plants are growing, a small allotment garden in this patterning of life. There is life here, birds and insects inhabit this place.

The raised voice of the herring gull, lifts the archaic voice of the 'storyteller'. It was the writer Walter Benjamin who posited that in the nineteenth century "the storyteller has already become remote from us and something (of the art of storytelling) is getting more distant"⁵. But, in the *Ragpicker's Hut*, the musing of a storyteller is brought

forth; the archaic representation of the resident tiller of belongings, of the trading man. "All the great myths," the poet Seamus Heaney writes, "are consistent with what you need. You need a sense of moving on, crossing something... into the dark... into the unknown. The great mythical stories of the afterworld are stories which stay with you and which ease you towards the end towards a destination and a transition."⁶ Summoning an oral retelling of this photographic 'event', creates a visual pause to the image, a phenomenological space, where sensations of moving or journeying amble in the imagination.

In the presence of the chiffonnier's home, the view illuminates the 1844 *The Open Door* from Henry Fox Talbot's book *Pencil of Nature* (1844 – 46). Talbot's shadowed warm-toned calotype *The Open Door* leads to another 'open door' below the bird's crest. An interior, a private space within the home, an intimate space. The open door creates a picture that echoes the linguistic murmurings of interior voices. This open door reaches to the tip of a wing, to the outskirts of Paris, to the outskirts of a life. The herring gull with wings extended, head skyward and looking outward with one eye, secures the symbolic place of intuition and protection. The sound of a gull cannot be forgotten, once heard, as it draws one instantly to the water, to the shoreline, a symbol of traversing, migration and movement. Historically, an important source of food for those who lived by the river or sea, the gull — so derided in contemporary times is still an undeniable spectacle of aerial wonder, and the gull's image on the chiffonnier's home is a connection to 'airiness' and 'liveliness' amid toys, a bestiary and an allotment box — felicitating fictitious flights of movement and stillness.

The desperate poverty of the ragpicker is not diminished in the stillness of the camera view, but a desolate existence is ennobled by the eye-level framing of the 18 x 24cm view camera⁷. In *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) George Orwell comments on the 'plongeur', who, like the ragpicker, is an invisible presence within society. The plongeur is a person at the very edges of the kitchen or hotel, who is employed to wash dishes and carry out other menial tasks. "A plongeur is a slave," writes Orwell, "and a wasted slave, doing stupid and largely unnecessary work. He is kept at work ultimately, because of a vague feeling that he would be dangerous if he had leisure. And educated people who should be on his side, acquiesce in the process, because they know nothing about him and consequently are afraid of him."⁸ The poet and essayist Charles Baudelaire (1821 – 67) ennoble the worker's everyday pickings of reclamation and exchange to a model of artistic production, "Here is a man entrusted to gather up the remains of the day in the life of the capital. All that the metropolis has rejected, all that it has got rid of, all that it has scorned, all that it has broken he catalogues, he collects. He examines the archives of debauchery, the capharnaüm (a dump) of trash. He makes an intelligent choice; he gathers, like a miser, a treasure, the refuse that when ground again between the jaws of the goddess industry, will become objects of utility or delight."⁹

A daily repetition of walking, looking, and documenting. The image gathers up, examines the ground, and preserves in whatever means possible an architectural histography — an apologia of archaeology. The photograph 'voices' the very basis of a return, to examine and sift meanings. An imaginary link to the sailor. There is a wonder whether Atget's personal history as a sailor imparts an innate intuition and skill in understanding the need for a visual history. A collector of 'histories', an archaeologist, a documenter of the disappearing, this is voiced in the whole framing and context of the image. The work also does something else: it creates a dialogue between seen and unseen, and what is not visible; it accords a supplementary space, of peripheral views, a site of unconscious optics: "Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye — if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man [...] Here the camera intervenes with the resources of its lowerings and liftings, its interruption and isolation, its extensions and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions. The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses."¹⁰

Atget's ragpicker's hut is a space of multiple voices; simple but rich in meaning, a refuge that "possesses the felicity of intense poverty"¹¹, a phantasmal voicing of the past and present. It is a dense image, visually concentrated, but its place as a document holds a melancholic tense. The hut is poverty, the nailed herring gull

sings the very contradiction of the image, the sailor's eternal voice, of heroic tales and odysseys, impaled to a wooden hut, a dissonance suspended in time and place. The gull is tattered, the poverty cannot be eulogised, preened or fluffed up, there are aspects of the image which do not allow us to do so; this makes the image 'alive'. The photograph, is at the beginnings of the photographer's archive, before there is the luxury of the past, to look back. In this sense it rings of the present, speaking to an image-world of not-yet-told stories. Archaeologies of the past reveal what has disappeared, but the gull is eternally weathered in the photograph, leaving traces of mercurial air-like meanderings. The herring gull, the worn 'punctum'¹² of the image, is a flighty, skillful bird, who through need has adapted to humanity's failing and is despised for it. And the ragpicker, whose life is buried by the time of history, reappears in the present, in another form and is analogised in other works and within other images. The photographer Zoe Leonard's decade-long series *Analogue* (1998 – 2009), of small-scale commerce and urban services in New York and other cities of the globe, trails the photographer as ragpicker.

Returning to the photograph of the humble hut, it is its presence that lacks resistance and symbolises a sound body; the hut lends colour to the space, drawing a kinaesthetic sign of human resistance to an open door. This image draws us in from the "plate glass suspension of sharp, focused vision of modernity, to a rich architectural space stimuli for peripheral vision"¹³. The very essence of the lived experience is moulded by hapticity and the unfocused peripheral, writes the architect Juhani Pallasmaa in *The Eyes of the Skin* (2012), "... Visual perceptions are fused and integrated into the haptic continuum of the self. Peripheral vision integrates us with space. [...] It domesticates, limitless space and endless time to be tolerated, inhabited and understood by humankind, it enfolds a human rootedness in the world."¹⁴

A humane voice — the knowledge that a ragpicker is of value and is not disposable, but part of society, a voice that forms a vestige of the 'carnavalesque', as proposed in the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World* (1965), where image, spectacle and voice herald a temporary reversal of power — the voice of the 'invisible' magnified and attended to in time. This is the muted image of that reversal — the adorned hut gives attention to those who are overlooked, forgotten, discarded, and the image voices an outwardness, an openness that provokes an oneiric depth, a liveliness that constitutes an archaeology of images.

NOTES

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2 Word origin of 'scavenger', Collins English Dictionary, HarperCollins Publishers, 2017

3 Seamus Heaney, 'Mossbawn', 1974 *Finders Keepers, Selected Prose, 1971 – 2001* (London, Faber & Faber, 2002, ebook, 2010) pg 16 – 52

4 Gordon Baldwin, *In Focus: Eugène Atget: Photographs from the JP Getty Museum, LA California, 2000*, JP Getty Trust pg 118 – 125

5 Walter Benjamin, *The Storyteller, Reflections, Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* trans. Edmund Jephcott, Ed. Peter Demetz, Preface Leon Wieseltier (USA, Schoken, Random House, 1978, 1986, 2007), pg 83 – 109

6 Seamus Heaney, trans Virgil, *Aeneid: Book VI* (London Faber & Faber, 2016) Introduction

7 Gordon Baldwin, *In Focus: Eugène Atget: Photographs from the JP Getty Museum, LA California, 2000*, JP Getty Trust pg 118 – 125

8 George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (London, Penguin, 1940 reprint, 2001) pg 128

9 Charles Baudelaire, 'On Wine and Hashish', 1851, essay, as cited in *The Archivist of Urban Waste: Zoe Leonard, Photographer as Rag-Picker*, Tom McDonough, *Afterall*, issue 25, Autumn/Winter, 2009 University of Chicago Press, pg 25

10 Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, Reflections, Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* trans. Edmund Jephcott, Ed. Peter Demetz, Preface Leon Wieseltier (USA, Schoken, Random House, 1978, 1986, 2007) pg 236 – 237

11 Gaston Bachelard, trans. Maria Jolas, *The Significance of the Hut, The Poetics of Space*, 1958: Forward, M Danielewski, Intro. Richard Kearney (London Penguin, 1964, 2014) pg 52

12 'Punctum' as used by Roland Barthes, in *Camera Lucida*, 1980, is the aspect that holds our gaze in a photograph without condescending to mere meaning or beauty

13 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin, Architecture and The Senses* (West Sussex, John Wiley & Sons, 2012, 3rd Edition, 2013) pg 18 – 40

14 *Ibid*, pg14/15/19

The Garden

The long summer days bring an air of play and relaxed stillness to the gardens of the V&A Museum. Now and then the cirrus clouds assume a shape resembling that of a vast extended wing, as of a heron in full flight. The resemblance appears so perfect that the layers of feathers are traceable by a sun-dazed eye. The suggestion of mown grass comes upon the light breeze. Rooks, jackdaws and pigeons are all absent from the enclosed lawn that invites the architectural formality of a courtyard, and with the presence of people parading, the visual scene would make for a pleasing alliteration if a few peacocks were added.

"I have talked of courtyards," wrote Walter Benjamin in *A Berlin Chronicle*. But this was after talking about the great disappointment of his life, "one afternoon on Peacock Island". "I had been told on the way there that I should find peacock feathers in the grass. Scarcely had I heard this when, with the speed of a spark leaping between two charged systems, a close connection must have been formed in me between the names of these islands and the peacock feathers¹."

Pigeons and peacocks. Can we suggest that the telling of story is a succession of images interrupted by 'sparks', 'flashes' of voices, impressions, 'halts' and narrative 'ruptures'? Where is the teller and where is the story in the word 'storyteller', a relationship that is ever shifting? A question of 'focus', in the telling and in the speaking. A strange term, 'focaliser'², but you get the point that the emphasis moves from story to image or to the interplay of images. Doubles of multiple relations; the focus of telling, the speaking of the image and the speaking of the telling. Photographically, a series is suggested, if the narrative moves towards linearity, a layering through a succession of images, of voices to images, a projection of multiple exposures.

It appears slightly incongruous that a pigeon's 'dance' in front of a mirror is an important story in Jacques Lacan's tale of reflection and a subject's nascent identity. But the biological study produces a startling image: "*A female pigeon reaches sexual maturity only in the presence of other members of the species. A female pigeon will mature if she sees her own reflection in a mirror.*"³ As different mental states such as dreams, hallucinations, projections and associations emerge from the speech of the teller, the philosopher, Lacan insists on the fictiveness and exteriority of the image, to the founding of the ego.

Here the idea of the mirror⁴ and the 'flash' of recognition or misrecognition may help in the unpacking of our tale of pigeons and peacocks. There is an allure in choosing a story in which the two main subjects form an unlikely consonance, the pigeon and the peacock. The pigeon has come to be seen as the drab urban rat and the peacock as the symbol of ornamental luxury and yet both tales point to a 'flash' of something. In the story of the pigeon, a physiological process is completed artificially from juvenile to adult through the 'flash' presence of the mirror. In the story of the peacock a 'flash' of rejection is created by the absence of the peacock feathers. In both stories, the subjects are birds and the subjects are supported by an optical image. In the case of Benjamin, it is an optical fantasy filled with lack and absence, "It was not that the spark took a roundabout path by way of the image of the peacock. This had no part of the process."⁵ Benjamin's focus is on the trail of the image. He does not chide the peacocks for they cannot console him, as the absence is outside the domain of what he knows. His anger is to Mother Earth, to the very ground; it is not to the peacock, but the earth, which does not produce this precious peacock feather. "Had I found the feather I craved in the grass, I should have felt as if I were expected and welcome at this spot. Now the island seemed to have broken a promise. Certainly the peacocks could not console me."⁶

Later, as an adult, in his *Short History of Photography* Benjamin writes: "No matter how artful the photographer, no matter how carefully posed his subject, the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the here and now, with which reality has (so to speak) seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long-forgotten moment the future nests so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it."⁷

Is this the spark of 'contingency' formed from the early trail of absent feathers? Benjamin speaks of 'Mother Earth', of something outside himself, a force outside his control, the loss of the ego. 'Mother Earth' is an unconscious state. "It is another nature that speaks to the camera rather than to the eye: 'other' above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious."⁸ The optical nature of the unconscious follows the young Benjamin into the gardens, into the island of peacocks.

With the pigeons, we are presented with an "optical unconscious" of sorts; the pigeon looks into the mirror and its sexual physiology matures. Yet this fullness of recognition is also a rupture, an image of the Other. A bird at a distance, a misrecognition⁹, an 'umwelt'¹⁰ or 'world' as it is experienced by a particular organism is reflected through the forgery of the image. The bird is fooled (or so we believe) but the physiology is not, it needs only the reflection of another to mature.

Both stories, one presenting a biological experiment and the other a memory recalled, suggest the unstable, fluid and eternal receptivity of the ocular. Indelible images that are formed through fragments, and 'flashes', brought to the surface, actively or passively. The photograph contains such images, particles, fragments, and sparks of light and dark.

Benjamin only wanted a fragment of a peacock, a hidden peacock feather in the grass, a 'spark' to allow himself relief. The jousance and rapture were in the fragment. We cannot suppose to know what the pigeon is experiencing, without providing a grotesque and comical anthropomorphising of the bird, but we can know that the absence of the peacock feathers brings pain to the child. The feather on Peacock Island, was "to have something only intended for me"¹¹, he retorts. The young Benjamin did not want what he saw around him – not the mass of peacocks – but a singular sign within the grass, that attended only to the "here and now".

NOTES

1 Walter Benjamin, *A Berlin Chronicle, Reflections, Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Ed. Peter Demetz, Preface Leon Wieseltier (USA, Schoken, Random House, 1978, 1986, 2007) pg 57

2 The 'focaliser' is the primary consciousness of the narrative – the main point of view. Events, situations and interpretations of 'other' dialogues are filtered through this focaliser

3 Jacques Lacan, trans. Alan Sheridan, *The Mirror Stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience, Écrits* (London, Associated Book Publishers, 1977) pg 8-12

4 'Mirror' refers directly to the idea of the 'mirror stage' as an important early work of Lacan's critical reinterpretation of Freud. Drawing on work in physiology and animal psychology, Lacan proposes that human infants pass through a stage in which an external image of the body (reflected in a mirror or represented to the infant through the mother or primary caregiver) produces a psychic response that gives rise to mental representation of an "I"

5 Walter Benjamin, *A Berlin Chronicle, Reflections, Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Ed. Peter Demetz, Preface Leon Wieseltier (USA, Schoken, Random House, 1978, 1986, 2007) pg 57

6 Ibid.

7 Walter Benjamin, *A Short History of Photography*: Ed. Alan Trachtenberg, Notes, Amy Weinstein Meyers, *Classic Essays on Photography* (Leete's Island Books, 1980) pg 202

8 Ibid

9 Ibid pg 230

10 'Umwelt' is the term established in the semiotic theories of biologist Jakob von Uexküll and Thomas A Sebak. 'Umwelt' in German means 'environment' or 'surroundings' is "biological foundations that lie at the epicentre of the study of communication and signification in the human and non-human animal. The term is also translated as "self-centred world"

11 Walter Benjamin, *A Berlin Chronicle Reflections, Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Ed. Peter Demetz, Preface Leon Wieseltier, (USA, Schoken, Random House, 1978, 1986, 2007) pg 57



John Coplans, *Feet Frontal*, 1984, gelatin-silver print, PH.110-1986

Talon

noun — a claw, a sharp nail on the foot of a bird that it uses when hunting animals¹

33

Part of a larger work, *Foot Frontal* is an enlargement of the artist John Coplans' feet. The nude body is dissected and broken into fragments, similar to the principles laid in the process of dissecting a dead animal or bird. Separated and segmented, the unfamiliar poses of the body, in black and white, clash with the iconography of the classical naked body, and the luminosity of the skin projects through the surface of nudity a body that resides in a "universal primitivism"². The physical body tags its singularity through its living skin, which holds flesh, muscle and organs. It is a nude and dispersed body that originates in a collective unconscious, universal, primal and direct. The feet and overly stretched position of foot and ankle take up the full frame, as the gaze moves towards the narrow spaces between the arches of the feet; the frailty of the figure and the passage of time is suggested by the scar of the right foot that works into the patterns of a biological landscape. The hair, a wiry, messy network of lines and contours, contributes to the field of a physical surface. As the toes remain on the ground and the rest of the foot in the air, there is a reversal of expectation, and the toes receive a prominence in vision, appearing alive, the aged nails press inward, pushing the foot further down; the foreshortened perspective distorting the focus of the eyes to the very edges of the nails.

Here an uncanny phenomenon inherent in the liquidity of photography creates a suggestive parallel world of a raptor's sharp nail, claw or talon. The foot's position, raised high, appears superficially to align the foot structure to that of a bird and the smooth, shiny talons contrast with the rough irregularity of Coplans' nails. A perception of similarity between the human foot and the raptor's talons "flits by, it may perhaps be won again, but unlike other perceptions, can never really be held fast, it offers itself to the eye as fleetingly, transitorily". The talons form a layer over Coplans' nails. The image appears as a schema for the coming of a whole range of disparate forms, a refraction, a discontinuity or rupture to the experience of the gaze.

Honoré de Balzac's theory of the ghostly character of the photograph, that "all physical bodies are made entirely of layers of ghostlike images, an infinite number of leaflike skins laid one on top of the other"³, concludes that every time someone had his photograph taken, one of the spectral layers was removed from the body and transferred to the photograph. Repeated exposures entailed the unavoidable loss of subsequent layers, that is the very essence of life.⁴ Thought, memory and matter come together and are dispersed in the experience of the printed image.

The image of a talon as a 'sign' is direct, functional, an anatomical tool for killing and claspings, whereas the surrealist Jacques-André Boiffard's *Big Toe* (Male subject, 30 years old) "Gros Orteil" [sujet masculin, 30 ans] is a pure image-space that emerges from the darkness, "each crease of skin and fleck of dirt of its suggested topography revealing a consummate strangeness"⁵. Boiffard's photographic contributions to *Documents*, a short-lived art magazine founded by Georges Bataille, produced works that isolated bodily fragments such as the toe, the head, and the mouth, making them appear uncanny and unfamiliar, projecting the naked human body as an open site, without beginning and without end.

A repeated exposure, where image and text converge; a layer of emulsion of silver gelatin pressed upon the black and white type. Two exposures – John Coplans' *Feet Frontal* and Jacques Derrida's essay, *The Animal That Therefore I am*. The doubling of an image, a mimetic image of the naked patriarchal body, distorts the physical to expose the materiality of memory on to a "remembering body"⁶.

"What animal? The other." And so begins Derrida's article "*The Animal That Therefore I am*"⁷. Derrida writes of a moment when he is caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example, his "little pussycat (*ma chatte*)". "Ashamed of what and naked before whom?" The animal is not naked, the animal doesn't feel its nudity, because it is naked without existing in nakedness. There is, as Derrida suggests, no nudity "in nature". So, why, he asks, does he feel embarrassment and shame?

"The Animal, what a word! The animal is a word, it is an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give to another living creature."⁸

His article holds an urgency, a directness of posing simply naked, frontally, also posing some hypotheses of man's relationship to animal. Derrida charts, briefly and quickly, man's "exploitation" of animal energy – transport, ploughing, draught animals, the horse, the ox, the reindeer and so on, and then the guard dog, small-scale butchering and then animal experiments and so on. But he goes further, "It is all too evident that in the course of the last two centuries these traditional forms of treatment of the animal have been turned upside down by the joint developments of zoological, ethological, biological and genetic forms of knowledge and the inseparable actual object, its milieu, its world, namely the living animal. The means of farming and regimentalisation at a demographic level unknown in the past is all for the service of a certain being and the so-called human wellbeing of man."⁹

It is these unprecedented proportions of the subjection of the animal that Derrida calls into account. He asks Jeremy Bentham's simple and profound question posited two centuries ago, the first and decisive question: "Can they suffer?" Can they suffer, changed the dominant discourse irrevocably. "What is this non-power at the heart of power?"¹⁰ To what extent does this concern us?

Derrida again speaks of the animal "that therefore I am".

"Beyond the edge of the so-called human, beyond it but by no means on a single opposing side, rather than 'the Animal' or 'Animal Life', there is a heterogeneous multiplicity of living, or more precisely a multiplicity of organizations of relatives between living and dead... These relations are at once close and abyssal and they can never be totally objectified. Animal is a word that men give themselves the right to give, as if they had received an inheritance. All of the philosophers we investigate (from Aristotle to Lacan, including Descartes, Kant, Heidegger and Levinas), all of them say the same thing, the animal is without language. Or is, 'without the right and power to "respond"' and without many other things that would be the property of Man".¹¹

Derrida's cat is his primary mirror. While he appears to focus on the individual animal, his horizon is further: the phenomenology of the look, of being looked at, does not begin with Derrida and his cat, it begins with the experience of subjectivity and freedom withering in the presence of the other.

"Who responds in and to the common, general and singular name of what they thus blithely call the 'animal'? Who is it that responds? The reference made by this what or who regarding me in the name of the animal, what is said in the name of the animal, when one appeals to the name of the animal, that is what needs to be exposed, in all its nudity, in the nudity or destitution of whoever, opening the page of an autobiography, says 'here I am'".¹²

NOTES

1 Collins, English Dictionary

2 John Coplans (1920 – 2003), Tate Profile, www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/coplans-self-portrait-fee-frontal-p11670 Accessed: 2017

3 Nadar on Balzac, *My Life as a Photographer*, Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light*, Theses on the Photography of History (New Jersey, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997) pg 137

4 Ibid

5 Jodi Hauptman and Stephanie O'Rourke, *A Surrealist Fact*, in Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, eds. *Object: Photo. Modern Photographs: The Thomas Walther Collection 1909 – 1949*. An Online Project of The Museum of Modern Art. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2014. http://www.moma.org/interactives/objectphoto/assets/essays/Hauptman_ORourke.pdf

6 Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light*, Theses on the Photography of History (New Jersey, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997) pg 75 – 78

7 Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry*, Winter 2002, The University of Chicago Press. Pg 369 – 418

8 Ibid pg 392

9 Ibid pg 393

10 Ibid pg 396 – 397

11 Ibid pg 399 – 400

12 Ibid pg 418

Image

36

You are shown a photograph of a bird. The bird is lost in the photograph and it takes a few minutes trying to locate the bird. Unable at first glance to find the bird you look to another image, and here the bird is more clearly delineated, only out of focus and obscured in the frame. Turning back and staring again at the page of the lost bird, you notice a male blackbird evidently present and yet so elusive.

This is the work of the French photographer Jean-Luc Mylayne and his wife and collaborator Mylene Mylayne and the work spoke in such an intimate way, in that moment of looking there was a sadness, a melancholy even.

Does a bird ever come close to becoming a star? Surely at times when looking at a bird many metres away they appear as remote objects, so distant and obscure. When you observe an object, a mark in the sky, even at a distance and so carefully, are you not being taken to the limits of your visibility, to a point of orientation or "ultimate spatiality"²? Has not the bird become a kind of vanishing point and when you can no longer see, when the cone of vision disappears then "everything vanishes". Does that not open the dynamic of the dialogue itself, between the photograph, photographer and the object of desire? A "hovering" world caught in peripheral vision, at the edges of the observable.

But what happens when what you see, although at a distance, seems to touch with a gripping contact, when the manner of seeing is a kind of touch, when seeing is contact at a distance? What happens, when what is seen imposes itself upon the gaze, as if the gaze were seized, put in touch with the appearance? What happens is not an active contact, not the initiative and action which there still is in real touching. Rather, the gaze gets taken in, absorbed by an immobile movement and a depthless deep. What is given us by this contact at a distance is the image and fascination is passion for the image.¹

When I see a bird, I see at the same time that bird on a tree near the house. I see everything as an ensemble and I realise that's how I see everything in life. The bird flits from one place to another. With my lenses, I can take in that place, then the tree, the bush, the house, I try to capture all those places at the same time, just like our eye travels from one spot to another in taking in the scene, and I try to reconstitute it. One can try to do that with a painting, and it might be better, in a certain way, because there are a multitude of occurrences that happen at the same time that one can never remake. One could have all the patience in the world, but one will never be able to do that with a photograph. But all the same, I do, as much as possible, remake the scenes that I have seen, and the photograph is the proof that the scene existed. It's not like a painting, which interprets an experience but never replicates it.³

Jean-luc Mylayne's depth of field and precise locating of the bird gives the pictures an illusion of movement and stillness, which at once excites and fulfils. Perhaps, it appears that there is no compromise, that the bird is somehow living not flattened, not becoming something that we desire to observe in all its fetishistic beauty, rather the bird appears just a bird.

The 'kairos' time of the captured instant. Where the photographer wants to get to, what the photographer wants to enquire into: nothing less than the value of the instant, our presence in the world, life at its most intense. Seeing a picture as it becomes memory and then seeing and having the memory within the complex typography of the natural world. The bird, photographed; a gracious accomplice, gazed at by the person who looks at it, who enters into a relationship of confidence with it, and pays tribute to it by offering us its image — its portrait. The photographer says the bird emblematises this possible tipping point of perception.

The view invites us to ask and discern the real subject. What ensues within the image? In touching distance does it exist? Where is the bird going? Is it there at all?

Here, Mylayne posits a site that allows for goings-on which are hard to visualise, to exist in the frame. Time and space are somehow interrupted, delayed in our search for the singing bird. We do not receive immediate fulfilment. The human presence dissipates.

Grains of representation are quietly and noisily being rearranged. There is a turbulence to these photographs that is somehow present. A quiet disturbance amidst noise.

How could the movement, the performance in motion, stay live? By that, could you hear a thrush sing in these pictures? Are we looking at sound? By searching for the bird are we searching for the bird's song, are we desiring the song, are we imagining the song, or do we accept the bird's song, if we do not know it?

The bird.... is our only possible point of perception of the universe. It represents the instant when; the turning point at which, without losing our identity, we accept that it's secondary and forget ourselves; so that, after the feeling of being in the world we may become this bird turning away from us...⁴

"Nothing is moving yet there is infinite movement, although it must be said that this movement has nothing whatsoever to do with putting a foot down and traversing space. How could the quivering be photographed? How could the sound be photographed? Indeed, how could that musical being come a still photographic image?"⁵

NOTES

1 Maurice Blanchot, *The Essential Solitude, The Space of Literature* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1982) pg 32

2 Peter Kilsby, *Photography and Spatiality*, Royal College of Art, 2007

3 Jean-Luc Mylayne, quoted by Anne Bertrand, *Jean-Luc Mylayne: Denkbilder*, Issue 93 Camera Austria, 2006, pg 22-29

4 Ibid

5 'A Twittering Noise', Yve Lomax, *Sounding The Event: Escapades in Dialogue and Matters of Art, Nature and Time* (New York, London, IB Tauris 2005) pg 8-37



Brassai, *Graffiti: Series V: Animals*, Paris, France 1933 – 56, gelatin-silver print, E.859-2014

"Birds (Aves) are a group of endothermic vertebrates, characterised by feathers, toothless beaked jaws, the lay of hard-shelled eggs, a high metabolic heart and a strong yet lightweight skeleton. Birds live worldwide and range in size from the 5cm bee hummingbird to the 2.75m ostrich. They rank as the class of tetrapods with the most living species, at approximately ten thousand, with more than half of these being passerines.¹" A flat description, a record of a bird.

What is the nature of this bird, a shadowed figure, this scratching on a wall — a forgotten narrative juncture? Disturbances, incisions, seem to transport us, subtilise the gaze, as if the bird is etched in the medium of the photograph and in language where the unspoken or unspeakable lies forgotten in intent. Presence, a site of recall; clutching at something that is out of reach, hearing words that fail to bring forward the shadow of an avian thought. The aesthetic of the graffiti has an unsettling allegory of drift, decay and permanence, a withering track of the graffitist's voice. The hand-drawn line here outlines a 'primitive' bird, echoing a biological imprint of memory. The bird is one of "the original nuclei or formation patterns of awareness that primitive man used as a tool of communication to come to terms with his environment and also with the 'internal' environment of instincts and feelings. But in his long evolution since palaeolithic times these early patterns have been long overlaid by his more recent 'civilised' experiences²".

Subversive, playful, and humorous, '*Graffiti Bird*' is a spontaneous testimony to the "weathered aspect of a wall's surface by accidental or deliberate mutilation"³. Brassai (1899 – 1984) notes in the series on graffiti on Parisian walls (1933 – 56) of which '*Graffiti Bird*' is part, "the birds are both imaginary and real, or sometimes a fantastic combination of people and animals or animals alone⁴". The bird upright and walking is 'civilised' through the camera's lens, but the bird's face is dominated by a deep hole⁵. This deep hole — a small dark-aperture of retinal ghosts — punctuates the bird figure.

NOTES

1 Definition from a variety of ornithological sources

2 George Ewart Evans & David Thomson, *The Leaping Hare* (London, Faber & Faber, 1972, 2017) pg 16

3 Edward Steichen, curator of *Language of the Wall: Parisian Graffiti Photographed by Brassai* as quoted in *Graffiti photographed by Brassai to be on view at Museum of Modern Art*, Press Release, No. 100, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 23 October, 1956

4 Brassai quoted in *Graffiti photographed by Brassai to be on view at Museum of Modern Art*, Press Release, No. 100, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 23 October, 1956

5 Edward Steichen, curator of *Language of the Wall: Parisian Graffiti Photographed by Brassai* as quoted in *Graffiti photographed by Brassai to be on view at Museum of Modern Art*, Press Release, No. 100, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 23 October, 1956



Tanja Verlak, *Untitled*, Zoo, 2006, gelatin-silver print

Bird-Watching

Images seen in dreams are percepts or faint remnants of the various things sensed during the day. These remnants are present in the bloodstream, but overshadowed by the immediate sense impressions being delivered to the common sensorium by the sense organs. So writes Aristotle, in *De Insomniis, Parva Naturalia*. The "percepts or faint remnants of the various things sensed during the day" are revealed in the light within each photograph. The light within each photograph is a light of no permanence, it is resolved only by the time the photograph is taken, it is nothing, other than a glimpse. It is this faint remnant, the release of possession, that is the solitary pictorial thought, which unfurls within the subtle movements of the white stork.

A stork is treading so lightly (storks walk on their toes) in its bland, concrete, tiled enclosure that it is never fully planted on the ground. The bird's left leg is raised, moving its foot on the tiled ledge, but the movement is not towards flight and the food that is on the ground is being eaten by the light that is devouring the bucket. The disappearing bucket dominates the gaze and the interplay of light and shadow, give the stork's enclosure a strange tonal percept of a darkening dream.

A zoo image is always melancholic, there is a zone, a reserve, a demarcation that, like the "stubborn stain"² of Roland Barthes' punctum, cannot be erased. This zone of effects is a zone of dislocation, and the light of the photograph adds to the fragmented visual text: the stork's dark tail feathers merge into the background of the iron-grille door and the impression is such that the bird is a bird of many bodies, of not one but three, and with the disappearing bucket, bleached out from the light of outside, the disintegration of the image occurs.

A reflection, of a place, an enclosure, or an aviary within the zoo, echoes vivid haptic images which return as a nightmare, "Never again has music possessed so dehumanised and shameless a quality," writes Walter Benjamin, "as that of the two brass bands that tempered the flood of people surging torpidly along 'Scandal Avenue' between the café restaurants of the Zoo... For the city dweller there was no higher flirtation than this, surrounded by the sandy precincts of gnus and zebras, the bare trees and clefts where vultures and condors nested, the stinking enclosures of wolves, and the hatcheries of pelicans and herons. The calls and screeches of these animals mingled with the noise of drums and percussion."³

The interiority of the bird, its inner murmurings, is grasped by the stork's gaze into the wall, and its raised leg, which is typical of its species, when resting, preening, or sleeping. In long-legged birds, such as storks or egrets, the centre of gravity is far from the ground, and the thin legs of the stork push the eye to the middle of the picture. A physiological fact is that the bird's legs are an important site of heat exchange and standing on one leg can help regulate the bird's body temperature against excessive cold or heat. This biological fact only suggests that there is a state of disturbance within the environment.

The environment, the dirty, unnatural enclosure, cannot be removed from the pictorial frame, and the gelatin-silver print is uncomfortable in its grainy glaze. The brutal environment dominates, and it is an intense disruption. The longing is for the visual image of the stork's living habitat as evoked by the poet Derek Walcott in *White Egrets*.

"These birds keep modelling for Audubon,
the Snowy Egret or White Heron in a book
that, in my youth, would open like a lawn
in emerald Santa Cruz, knowing how well they look,
strutting perfection. They speckle the islands
on river-bank, in mangrove marsh or cattle pasture,
gliding over ponds, then balancing on the ridge
of a silken heifer, or fleeing disaster
in hurricane weather, and picking ticks
with their electric stab as if it were sheer privilege
to study them in their mythical conceit
that they have beat across the sea from Egypt
with the pharaonic ibis, its orange beak and feet
profiled in quiet to adorn a crypt,
then launch themselves with wings that, beating faster,
are certain as a seraph's when they beat⁴".

The white egrets in Walcott's stanzas, in a mimetic way, reach the silent, interior bird of Tanja Verlak's photograph of the stork. Both birds become disappearing fragments of silence, spaces of thought attested to the condition of memory, with its ephemeral insistent close-ups and intense focus. The stork's uninterest in Verlak's image is our relief, as we are relieved of its gaze, but for Walcott, the white egrets are alive and are transformed into seraphic souls of the living.

"I hadn't seen them for half of the Christmas week,
the egrets, and no one told me why they had gone,
but they are back with the rain now, orange beak,
pink shanks and stabbing head, back on the lawn
where they used to be in the clear, limitless rain
of the Santa Cruz Valley, which, when it rains, falls
steadily against the cedars till it mists the plain.

The egrets are the colour of waterfalls,
 and of clouds. Some friends, the few I have left,
 are dying, but the egrets stalk through the rain
 as if nothing mortal can affect them, or they lift
 like abrupt angels, sail, then settle again.
 Sometimes, the hills themselves disappear
 like friends, slowly, but I am happier
 that they have come back now, like memory, like prayer.¹⁵

NOTES

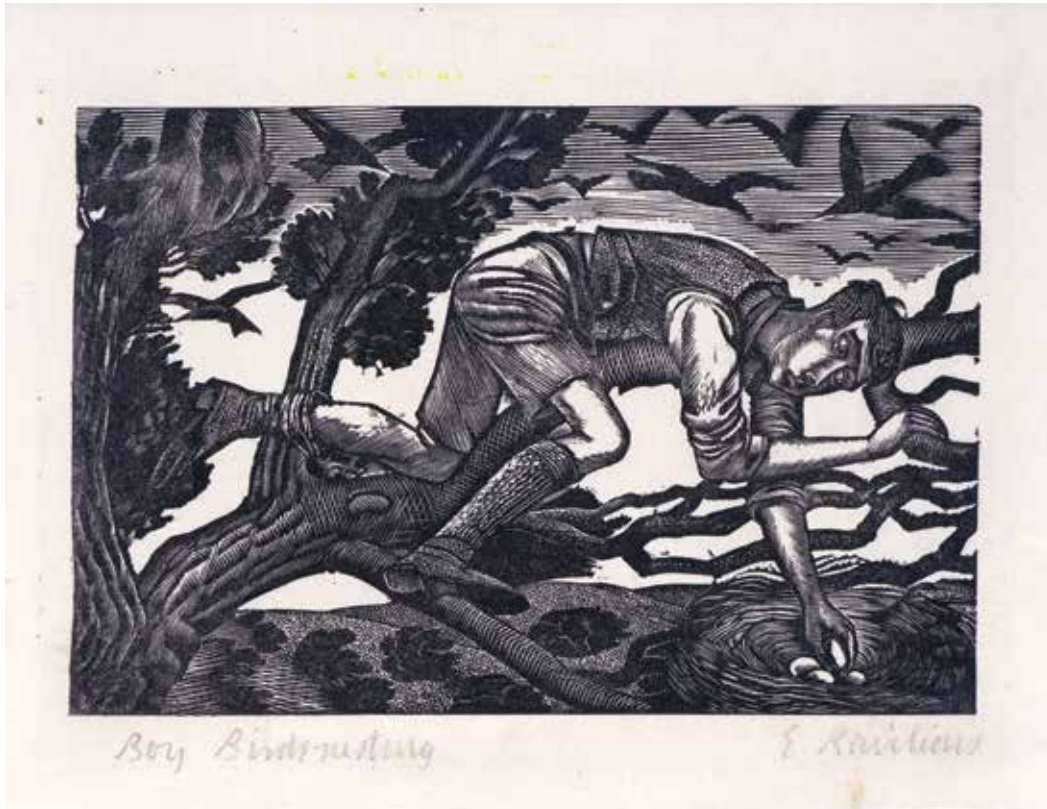
1 Aristotle, Trans. W S Hett, *De Insomniis, Parva Naturalia I,II,III (On Sleep and Waking)* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, Harvard University Press, 1936, 1995)

2 Oliver Richon on Roland Barthes' 'Third Meaning' reference the film still: "The obtuse meaning refuses to go away, it is in the image what is purely image, which Barthes tell us, actually very little. *A small stain or dust which does not go away.*" *Three Essays on Photography, Natürmort*, Encore Publishing 2005, pg 30

3 Walter Benjamin, *A Berlin Chronicle, Reflections, Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* trans. Edmund Jephcott, Ed. Peter Demetz, Preface Leon Wieseltier, USA, Schocken, Random House, 1978, 1986, 2007 pg 3, 24 – 25

4 Derek Walcott (1930 – 2017), *White Egrets* (London, Faber & Faber 2010) Stanza IV, pg8

5 Ibid, Stanza VI, pg 9



Eric Ravilious, *Boy Birdnesting*, 1927, wood engraving on paper, E.582-1972

The Stairwell

High in the stairwell, the acoustics split the tones of voices into a reductive drone, refiguring vowels and consonants to statements of syncopated noise and pitch. The human voices metamorphose into bird-like imaginings.

"There are songbirds circling high up in the stairwell," wrote the poet Michael Longley in the final line of the poem, *The Stairwell*.

The light feels weaker here, a pencil-lead grey, and looking down it is not hard to imagine the museum hosting a mobbing of birds in the sky, as the bird-watcher peers into the nest of a bird. The apparatus of height reveals the structure of the order of things. The construction of a wooden tower is erected adjacent to the tree. There, you can peer down into the songbird's nest. If the nest is too high, a wooden bridle is clamped to the limb of the tree. The limb of the tree is severed and lowered using ropes. The bridle is stabilised until the nest rests at a convenient height. A tripod-mounted 4 x 5in field camera using sheet film is mounted on the tower, equipped with two powerful strobe lamps synchronised with the shutter.

Created by the photographer Eliot Porter, this tower-like construction employed for his compositions of birds developed a precision of focus that cuts into the familiar image of the pictorial bird, producing a hyperreality as seductive as it was stealth-like. The bright lights and wooden apparatus enabled Porter to use a high shutter speed and the smallest lens aperture to capture small, swiftly moving birds in their surroundings in sharp focus. Each image of a bird operates in an ordered psychic space: as you are lent the scientific eye of the ornithologist. With a grid of delicate, unnerving textural perfection, the different bird species seem void of startling metaphorical or anthropocentric traps. Photograph upon photograph depicts how the bird moves, flies and disappears with an unparalleled focus, that suggests the theatrical set is solid. The black-and-white photographs, precise and sharp, perfected with a flash, hold all the brightness of an extremely well-executed drawing. A glance back to photography's beginnings when photography was a graphite rather than an ocular practice.

With the addition of layers of colour, an intensity of experience seeps into the surface of the photographs, and they embody "living documents"¹ of the modernist tradition. Porter's use of the tri-colour carbon transfer and later wash-off relief, later known as the dye transfer print, induced matt colours that were highly saturated. The depth of colour within the prints reacts on the senses – layer by layer, so strong and subtle that in all their heightened sharpness, a blur is achieved between image and the body. The bird images quite literally press on the memory of the body and this blurring of the "living documents" allows the very presence of the birds to appear so tuned that there is a sense of touch, that the birds are "alive" in their colour. "The camera offers a way of sublimating the indefinable longing that is aroused in me by close association with birds,"² Eliot Porter said.

A lightness, an airy quality, confirming a moment of contact, of aeriety — all are held within the image. "Porter's bird pictures convey... the thudding whisper of air currents beaten into eddies by outspread wings. What Porter longed to possess, I imagine, is avian alertness. I can conjure that attentive state not by what I see – too fully or easily but by the whoosh I almost picture myself hearing," writes Matthew Witkovsky³.

There is stealth to this point of contact. A small crime takes place on the part of the viewer of the photograph. It is so subtle that it is easily missed and so swiftly put to one side. A feeling of pleasure and shame, fleeting, but repeated in viewing and in memory. The sensuality awakened by simulacra of colour is itself experienced as a simulacrum, writes the philosopher Jacqueline Lichtenstein in *The Eloquence of Colour* (1993). Viewing a bacchanalian scene by Rubens, Roger de Piles writes, "The flesh of this bacchante and her children seems so real that you can easily imagine reaching out for them and feeling the warmth of blood. Reaching out for them, the ultimate forbidden gesture."

The stealth is in the touch and in the apparatus of view. The tower is not too dissimilar from the behaviourist's observation cage⁴, with the ruptured limbs and views altered for investigation. As a construction for visual inspection the power of the gaze is weighted to the viewer and not the bird. An unwitting exchange of the mastery in the moment of Porter's 'jouissance'. Held within the close-up view, space expands and movement is extended. Porter's composition breathes closeness. "He believed that close-up views of nature's details — from bits of lichen to a copse of trees — were better at communicating the complexity of the ecological relationships within and outside the frame."⁵

In re-presenting this 'original moment' of contact with the bird — a theatre within the image-world — the viewer is caught halfway between the photograph's seduction that removes the visible apparatus of desire and the production that displays. If the secret of this structure of power is dependent upon the truth of its illusion, the scientific secrets and the apparatus of desire can never be as secure as the architecture of the scene.

Considering the work as pictures rather than as image, the picture becomes a two-dimensional visual colour plate, whilst the image is there, a presence. As a picture, titled *Winter Wren (Troglodytes troglodytes), Great Spruce Head Island, Maine, July 18, 1969* — the wren in flight, the intricate nest to the left of the picture, the peeling bark of the tree — it engages us to speculate what can be seen, imitating connections within and outside the frame, not objectively so, but in traversing meanings as a whole or in parts of the picture. The ornithological language in the titles strips Porter's pictures of an overt anthropocentric humanism, but the subtle theatrical apparatus projects a metaphysical inevitability, about which the novelist Robbe-Grillet wrote eloquently.

"Metaphor, in fact, is never an innocent figure of speech. To say that time is 'capricious' or a mountain 'majestic', to speak of the 'heart of the forest', of a 'pitiless', sun of a village 'crouching in the hollow of a valley' is to some extent to furnish information about the things themselves: forms, dimensions, situations etc. But the choice of an analogical vocabulary, however simple, goes beyond giving an account of purely physical data; and what is added cannot be attributed to literary concerns only. The height of the mountain takes on regardless of the writer's intention a moral value; the heat of the sun becomes the result of an implied volition. In almost all contemporary literature these anthropomorphic analogies are reiterated too insistently, too coherently, not be regarded as clues to a whole metaphysical system."⁶

A picture, the artist and critic Mieke Bal states, is 'future-orientated' and forward-looking. Eric Ravilious' wood engraving, *Boy Birdnesting* (1927), depicts "the precarious hold of the boy's long limbs straddling the branch, combined with his flattened staring face against the mobbing birds of the upper sky"⁷; the boy perched high on the branch of a tree leans forward to the point of nearly falling as he pursues his quasi-scientific hobby, and leans precariously to the future. In the picture, the future connotes a past. To turn back, to present the 'original moment' of return or experience, is to suggest that our security is not in presence, it is in doubt. In Porter's pictorially sublime works, it is doubt that enfolds the presence in what we see.

NOTES

1 "(Porter) brings not only living documents, but a profound insight into the beauty and diabolism of nature." Nancy Newhall, *Curator of Birds in Colour: Flashlight Photographs at MoMA*, as quoted by Paul Martineau, *Eliot Porter, In the Realm of Nature* (The J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Getty Publications, 2012)

2 Eliot Porter quoted by Matthew Witkovsky, Curator & Chair, Dept of Photography, The Art Institute of Chicago, *Pictures, Sounds, Aperture*, 224, Fall 2006 (New York) Aperture Foundation pg 119

3 Matthew Witkovsky, Curator & Chair, Dept of Photography, The Art Institute of Chicago, *Pictures, Sounds, Aperture*, 224, Fall 2006, (New York) Aperture Foundation pg 119

4 The behaviourist's B F Skinner's observation cage, known as The Skinner Box

5 Paul Martineau, *Eliot Porter, In the Realm of Nature* (The J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Getty Publications, 2012) pg 18

6 Alain Robbe-Grillet, trans. Richard Howard, *Nature, Tragedy, Humanism, For a New Novel: essays on fiction* (Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press 1965, 1989) pg 68

7 Margaret Timmers (ed) *Impressions of the Twentieth Century: Fine Art Prints from the V&A's Collection*, London, V&A Publications, 2001



Eva Stenram, *Birds in Flight III*, 2006 – 2007,
digital print on black and white fibre paper, E.71-2009

"The world is a mist. And then the world is
minute and vast and clear. The tide
is higher or lower. He couldn't tell you which.
His beak is focused; he is preoccupied...."¹

Detailed and precise, the word portrait of *Sandpiper* (1956) by the poet Elizabeth Bishop is washed in a flickering topographical mist of the Atlantic Ocean. The tightening of focus to the Sandpiper's "brittle feet", the 'beach that hisses like fat' and the 'staring' gaze of the sandpiper creates immersive images. Ocean water or waves are undercut by 'spaces' of sand and it is the geography of the place that is located in the ear, the sound of the waves — in contrast to the staccato scrabbling of the sandpiper.

A sound world that achieves a similar visceral permanence is found in the stereoscopic photograph *What are the Wild Waves Saying* (1850 – 1875) by Charles Stanton Breese. Images of high waves, sea and a grain-like presence of a gull in flight, mid-frame, reinforce the drama of the title — a popular Victorian song. A pictorial map of surfaces and tensions, the binocular view of two side-by-side photographs merged to form a three-dimensional object — the stereographic image. There is a subtle disparity within the two images; the 'twin pictures'² pose an opening or slippage where 'It is common to find an object in one of the twin pictures which we miss in the other...' writes Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809 – 94) in the essay *The Stereoscope and the Stereograph*. As '*Form is henceforth divorced from matter*'³, Holmes proclaims the photographic object is extracted from its source, and the 'surface' contains the capacity to be transformed. Holmes ends the essay with a commentary on the possibilities of the stereographic image becoming an instrument of 'battle' in depicting the flashes of violence and the very 'instant of the shock of contact' of war.

In Eva Stenram's series *Birds in Flight* (2006 – 07), the artist infers this instant of 'contact' with gulls at 'war', as her digitally manipulated images invert birds' patterns of flight, to a syntax that annotates conflict and attack with illusory results. Doubling, repetition and mirror images form strange flight formations in black and white, metamorphosing the gull into a symbol of conflict, suspended in a dream-like repose. A pastoral daydream that recovers the opening of Michael Powell's and Emeric Pressburger's 1944 film *A Canterbury Tale* in which the medieval pilgrim's route is flown by a falcon, high in the Kent sky — a sharp 'shock' jolts, the scene is spliced abruptly and the raptor is a spiffire.

NOTES

1 Elizabeth Bishop, *Stanza IV, The Sandpiper*, Ed. Saskia Hamilton, *Poems* (London, Chatto & Windus, 2011) ebook pg 227 – 228

2 Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Stereoscope and the Stereograph*, Ed. Alan Trachtenberg, *Notes*, Amy Weinstein Meyers, *Classic Essays on Photography*, (USA, Leete's Island Books, 1980) pg 79

3 *Ibid* pg 80



Masahisa Fukase, *Karasu (Ravens)*, Japan (1975 – 82)
gelatin-silver print, PH.7187-1987

PH.7151 – 1987

A dark silhouetted bird fills the frame to the right. Wings splayed, head forward, gliding to the edge. Above, two telegraph poles, like the black guts of an instrument, reverberating over the raven. A line of flight. Outlines only. The black figure preparing to circle, an aerial combat: a dark shape of physical matter, dramatised by the diagonal lines above.

PH.7156 – 1987

Hazy fog shrouds the pedestrian figures. Snow, ice and rain. Black forms of human figures. A man stands in the foreground but it is difficult to be sure of who is who, women maybe further down in the picture. An elevated road leads the eye to the distant edge, snow-filled. Wet, grey smudges obscure the focal view and the pedestrians appear unstable on the ground, moving to an unclear horizon.

PH.7168 – 1987

A violent explosion of fire and of smoke; plant stems, ash, particles of paper, rubbish, galvanised by steel forks, silver in the light, waiting to scoop an open cavity, an abject mouth, filled with burnt remains. Smoke billowing in the centre of the image, forms an uneasy cloud. Movement is implied through the frozen time-lapse of objects. A space that contains or destroys, erratic and violent.

PH.7175 – 1987

Apartments with sketches of laundry and daily life clutter an otherwise ghostly background. The foreground is awash with dark birds. Hundreds of cormorants appear to fill the straggled branches. The birds, spoon-like heads, elongated necks, and the dabs of whiteness close to the bills, suggest these are not ravens. A noisy and wild picture from the restless huddle of the large flock. The subdued backdrop shifts the tempo of the image to a constrained silence.

PH.7182 – 1987

A wash of grey, light flashes and an approaching storm. The outline of land with the sea held in a horizon so straight it forms a ruled line, and in the complete centre, far in the distance, a boat, a passenger or fishing vessel. A solitary bird occupies the sky, moving in a forward motion within the stillness.

PH.7187 – 1987

Three ravens. The roof, a sharp diagonal, carves the picture. The performance of ravens tripping with expressive effect. The central bird is 'cawing', beak open, and the bird to the left jumping or sliding down the roof. A puppet theatre with flared tail feathers, including a jester on the right midstance, standing on its head, performing a somersault. The picture takes on comic proportions, with the upside-down crow adding a humorous effect.

PH.7194 – 1987

A wet, narrow street. A woman with an umbrella appears to rush forward to the right of the frame. The dustbin in the centre obstructs the entrance to the small street. Wet and living, the shrubs and vines are growing out of the mud trails, with a sculpture of shells, floating gently in the watery scene.

PH.7163 – 1987

Ravens live in groups. They return to the roost at sunset, and fly out in twos and threes at sunrise seeking food. So the time a flock can be photographed is restricted to sunset and sunrise, when it is still so dim that the camera's meter does not even sense the light. I then had the idea that perhaps the ravens in the pitch-black night (a play on words of the title of a Japanese fairy tale called *Black Buffalo in the Pitch-black Night*) could be captured using flash light. I was not confident at all but I gave it a try at the Kenrokuen Garden in Kanazawa. The results were splendid. I liked the effect: the birds caught in flight glistened with a dark sheen and the eyeballs of those on the tree sparkled. (Masahisa Fukase, photographer of *Ravens*)

PH.7170 – 1987

A slate sky, with eye-like bright pins flying forward to the left. Dovelike in shape, the figures, as if in a haze, mass in their thousands, a dark constellation. The flash adds to the confusion. The corner to the left throws some light, but the juxtaposition of order and chaos presides.

PH.7176 – 1987

A raven comes to rest on the bare branches of a tree next to a path. Against the colourless sky, slack-throated, the raven opened its great beak and uttered its cry. As it spoke, its wing lifted and fell, a working bellow. (Derek Niemann, naturalist)

PH.7190 – 1987

A night shift: birds arrive and appear to flood the image into darkness. Telegraph poles, electricity lines and cables. The rooftops relieved of snow. The birds' arrival, a broken stream under the weight of the sky. A lamp bright to the centre of the picture causes the many dark wings to flicker.

PH.7152 – 1987

Dark-grey and black ink drawings, precise and blurred, stalk each raven. The outstretched wings, rising and descending. A cacophony of rising, falling and stillness. The branches of the trees form thickets, as though tangled in a reed bed of long rushes and water. Sight fails, an attunement of sounds brush the face.

PH.7157 – 1987

The raven spilled out of the cover and flapped across the felds with slow, deliberate wing beats. An ancient sound carried over the trees and the landscape. A giant of a bird. The raven called. (Derek Niemann, naturalist)

PH.7183 – 1987

Two ravens, features and feathers detailed in the descriptive detail of the close-up; splatters of snow cover the pair's beaks and bodies. Two birds in the snow. One bird appears alive, the other dazed, frozen. When stressed, certain birds close their eyes, to appear dead. Is a human figure also present? The bird on the left with open eyes leans over the other bird. The bird with beak closed and crown tilted, skyward, appears drained and death-like. If both birds are dead, the gesture simulates a still life, a broken sentence. If one bird is dead, is this a pause of mourning, a muttering of departure? Can the close-up enter the corvid's psyche or are both figures frozen and starved in the snow?

PH.7164 – 1987

The corvids form a relief, raised above the branches of the shrubs or trees, that claim the structure of a bleached coral bed. Set against a dark oceanic sky, the wisp-like wings metamorphose into flying fish that skim the surface. Caught by the passing light, the direction of the gaze is right of frame. A whoosh of wind, a linguistic storm.

PH.7169 – 1987

The trees, set in the background of the picture, are thick with leaves. The sky tranquil, the ground rough with rubbish. A park or lawn, trailed with debris of discarded boxes, plates, cans, bottles, newspapers, to form a nauseous skin. In the centre, a man sits in the rubbish and in conversation with himself, singing even, gesturing with open hands. The man is unshod and his feet soiled. An aura of light appears rubbed around him into the surface of the print. In this wild accumulation of rubbish, the man sits within the din, lost within the scene. The high-contrast tone is absent from the print language, but the rubbish sprawled cumulates to cover the lone figure and in time, erases the presence of his form.

PH.7171 – 1987

The branches in the foreground, white, alight as though struck by lightning, expose a dark wilderness. In the distance and to the centre, the ravens roost on a tree; abstracted in form, a dark wing rises from the ground. A flock of sleeping souls, a moving all-night shadow, a night drawing of a singular wing.

PH.7160 – 1987

The cat's eye slanted and razor-tight appears dazed by the glare of the sun. The cat is heavy on top of the image, with a few fishbones, lying to the right of the image, stripped in the snow. Something has caught the cat's gaze and is sleepwalking unknowingly to its catch. Whiskers all furled up, the sun skimming its fur, the cat conducts itself within the instrument of its thoughts and holds its head low.

PH.7165 – 1987

Rooks mostly, jackdaws and some crows rise into the air and then drop back into the field. Surprisingly, there are three buzzards as well. The antagonism between rooks and buzzards is a ritualised one, with an aggressive mobbing by warrior rooks every time a buzzard cruises too close to the rookery. (Paul Evans)

PH.7177 – 1987

A pole strikes the night sky in the very epicentre of the image. A raven, spiked with wings taut and sharp, stripped, without. A murder of crows is the collective noun; this bird is singular and sculptural, dragged from the shadows of the night air, into the night water, soaked and plunged at the very edge of this long flag stick. The wind's got the bird, up there in the sky.

PH.7188 – 1987

There are two ravens roosting on the telegraph pole, which amplifies their caws and croaks; haunting as the blowing snow thickens, partly shrouding my view. Yet, still I see the black-lilac iridescent sheen of broad wings; tatty fringed tips, heavy heads, massive bills, diamond-shaped tails and bristling throat feathers of these grim, ungainly, ghostly, gaunt and ominous birds, if I am to believe Edgar Allan Poe. (Julie Armstrong, naturalist)

PH.7191 – 1987

A bird-like hooded creature in the shape of a woman walking with heavy bags. Her shadow appears as a bird figure on either side of her step. A floating sediment of shadow and spectre, aching forward as though carrying the weight of all this stuff in her hands.

PH.7184 – 1987

The raven searching in the dustbins in the rest area remains calm even when I draw close, to within about two metres. It is not scared of the camera. It looks into the lens as if in wonder, and croaks at it. I became a raven with my camera and played following my black friend who came and went high and low in the thick fog. (Masahisa Fukase, Erimo Cape, photographer of series)

PH.7189 – 1987

The raven is raving, calling out strings of phrases which sound as individual words in sentences, lines, stanza. Some are loud and declaiming, raspy, throaty shouts, interspersed with yelps, the pitch varying; challenging, accusatory. Some are soft, mournful, as if muttering a powerful image. (Paul Evans, naturalist)

PH.7169 – 1987

Bodies, upright in a crowded street. The camera pointed to people's backs, the documentary glare, drifting its lens, steering each pause to gasp at the long black hair of a woman, braided on either side and tumbling down in the centre. A gatherer, a scavenger, a comber of bird thoughts. Right behind this back of hair, taking a picture.

PH.7153 – 1987

The eyes glowing with a punctuation of ellipses, commas and full stops, the whole tree interrupted by this grammatical syntax, so you cannot hear the ravens. Fireflies of ravens, assuming positions, invisible night bodies, breathing everywhere in this silent world. Branches endlessly in motion, affected by raven thoughts: wind, wings, roots.

PH.7158 – 1987

Playing with the moving air, turning across it, letting it slide sideways across its direction. Some allow themselves just to be supported by it, feet neatly, curled, closed, they hang almost motionless, with only the merest adjustment of wing to maintain equilibrium. Then suddenly half the flock set about a different sort of play and while others drift on along the beach, they begin a series of exuberant swoops and glides accompanied by just a hint of aerial tumbles but will soon be part of their pair-forming displays. (Christine Uist, naturalist)

PH.7155 – 1987

Forests, low-lying mountains, land, a wide wash of dark paint, drenched in water, over the failing light. Sediments of the inky substance glide over the layers of trees, rocks, sky, and clouds. Watching behind a glazed wall of glass, the particulars are not easy to make out. A hiding place.

PH.7167 – 1987

The hair screams into mid-air. Raven hair against the glare of low sun and the reflection of the water. Smiles on the faces of the schoolgirls, sailing to some place, lip-reading the water. The water is choppy and the boat leans upstream. The surface of the water looks alive and the sky airy too.

PH.7174 – 1987

Two miniature figures, not birds, are faintly present and distant in the dark sea. One lying with hands holding a small floating object or raft, the other walking away with arms outstretched. Mark-like figures, dark, wading, floating, walking in this liquid syrup of water. Alive and moving over this dark screen. Illicit thoughts up here and of the people down there, floating and walking in this mass of liquidity.

PH.7179 – 1987

Outside, piles of stench and rot, undisturbed mounds of rubbish, full of chaos at odds with the background, a calm sea. Three registers to the image, the final is calm water and a sea fog, a Japanese boat, possibly a passenger vessel, hauls her load from the shore. No seabirds visible, but they must be there, torpedoing around, nagging fisherman for want of leisure and hunger, stirring the water, steering away from the stinking rubbish.

PH.7187 – 1987

Nightfall, wash and ink. A dark formless, clumsy cloud stays centre of the image. A messy abstracted mass of dust and ice crystals, shifting in numerically absurd numbers. Distributed by wind, but static, staying put in the centre of the sky. Smell the rain, held fast in the mass, look how quickly the millions of particles could disintegrate. No birds.

PH.7200 – 1987

Snow crossing, like bullets in the sky. Thousands passing, mobbing the picture. Silver bullets increasing in speed; all this speed and complete stasis. No birds visible.

PH.7193 – 1987

The characteristic croaker shifts to other more complete calls, a rapid break of the throat snoring, followed by even more rapid breaks, clacking like a ruler flapping tightly against a tabletop with a woodpecker intensity. A bardic community to some event. (Paul Evans, naturalist)

PH.7186 – 1987

Speeding past at night, the rooftops of houses, lit by a solitary window. The sound of flight flattens a landscape to a cubist jigsaw. An erratic schematic of night vision that makes it possible to catch what is beneath the rectangular and triangular forms.

PH.7198 – 1987

A clowder of cats, faces jostling against the glass, glaring out. Their eyes made up of watching whatever is about. Saliva, breath and licks, patterning the window glass.

PH.7162 – 1987

The raven holds a long, thin, terminal branch in its beak, beginning its build for the brood. A velvet stirring of feathers, with spliced granite-like ridges, splayed to a lustrous fan. A majestic shape to adorn a wooden stump, releasing itself, when the branch is secure in the beak. The figure stretches back to an earlier imagination as told in the Old English: "They slept/until the black raven, the blithe-hearted proclaimed the joy of heaven." (Beowulf, 700 – 1000AD).

PH.7159 – 1987

A fallen bird, in the central upper part of the image, a dark mast, mottled by flakes of snow. The dramatic contrast creates an unmistakable monument in this snow-covered landscape. No head to speak of, drowned in the whiteness, no face to speak out. Secretly sleepwalking. Fallen raven. Dead raven. Frozen and stiff, its wings point to heaven, buffeted by the elements, not ready to lie down. The white stuff all about, whispering lamentations.

PH.7161 – 1987

Fishing nets and ropes crown the image of the large prehistoric ocean-goer who commands the whole frame. Wet, with an eye staring out, lips closed, a dead mirror of the underwater basin. Its skeletal form depressed and lacking water. A heavy large fish, taking all the space, except for the guts of others, in this paddock of rest.

PH.7166 – 1987

On this solitary hill. An unkindness of ravens convened among the heather, sweeping in from the west, with the air hissing through their pinions into a harsh and necessary discourse. The bright moon hung above, casting its glow back over the fields. (Jim Perrin, naturalist)

PH.7173 – 1987

A wash of ink depicting nightfall. A shadow passing, a gasping in the dark air. There, in the upper centre of the image, a light figure, rising, rising to feel aerial thoughts — a firecracker, a phoenix, the raven bursts forth alive, and awake.

PH.7180 – 1987

The mask of twilight. A strange corvid-like moth or butterfly hovers over a descent left of frame. Another of these elegant figures balances on a blade of grass, in the centre, a shuddering of swiftness. The figures suspended in flight with wings stretched out. The foreground and background create an expanse of space that fills the heavy void.

PH.7185 – 1987

A telegraph pole pushes the gaze to the left of the image, but the form of a raven, flag-like, with wings forward, is to the right of the image, as if surged into that space by an electric bolt of energy. The sky and treetops are all dimmed into a dark, violet haze.

PH.7192 – 1987

The scene depicts a group of eight young men and women, on a lawn in a park, sitting close together, with their belongings around them and three upright umbrellas, placed at wide intervals in the ground. A 'play' within a play. Both men and women appear absorbed in their own private space, reading, smoking, thinking, resting, and no words appear to be shared between them. Their eyes closed, or if open, introspective or gazing into the distance. Noticeably, their dark raven hair, all of short length, assumes a more gestural form, and the grammar of solitude within the flock is alluded to.

PH.7197 – 1987

A dark landscape: a break in the clouds reflecting what light remains. A horizon of gorse, apparently alive with thousands of raven wings, hovering on the surface. The cloud break, a light hole or a ghostly white form of two large imaginary wings.

PH.7178 – 1987

Flushed with a brash flash, light and shadow take a skyward stride, looking up into the image. A raven storm hammering the sky, circling trees that are flat and erratic in this unnatural light. A whirlpool of wind and movement, looping and linking ceaselessly in the frame.

PH.7203 – 1987

The paper drenched by a black ink, splattered, washed and marked, as though a mould has taken rot within the image. An urban view: to the background houses, and forming a line from far right to the left of the image, a bullet train approaching. From the centre to the foreground a multistorey car park with vehicles parked above and below. A passage of a 'travelling raven' is implied amid these signs of travel and movement. The urban sprawl is graffitied, as the sharpness and detail of the city structure is made impenetrable by the scripts of lines, dots and washes. Looking down from this aerial viewpoint, the gaze is cast down into an underworld of amphibious vagueness.



Sally Mann, *Jessie Bites*, Virginia, USA, 1985; gelatin-silver print, E.569-2014

Nightingale

"Death continued to stare at the emperor with his cold, hollow eyes, and the room was fearfully still. Suddenly there came through the open window the sound of sweet music. Outside, on the bough of a tree, sat the living nightingale.

She had heard of the emperor's illness, and was therefore come to sing to him of hope and trust. And as she sang, the shadows grew paler and paler; the blood in the emperor's veins flowed more rapidly, and gave life to his weak limbs; and even Death himself listened, and said, 'Go on, little nightingale, go on.' 'Then will you give me the beautiful golden sword and that rich banner? And will you give me the emperor's crown?' said the bird.

So Death gave up each of these treasures for a song; and the nightingale continued her singing. She sang of the quiet churchyard, where the white roses grow, where the eldertree wafts its perfume on the breeze, and the fresh, sweet grass is moistened by the mourners' tears. Then Death longed to go and see his garden, and floated out through the window in the form of a cold, white mist.¹

The nightingale's singing voice holds an ancient auric aura, emblematic of the ephemeral Orphic voice. The voice ties the bird mythically to us in barely apprehended feelings and so an understanding of its biting beauty of a song is left to be glanced at in dream time or witnesses the language of fetish and desire that so gripped collectors and naturalists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. "Today most of the soul and meaning has gone out of myths. Few people except children get anything out of the old myths; they have outlived their day, lost their presence, have been defused by a scornful reason," wrote the oral historians George Ewart Evans and David Thomson in *The Leaping Hare* (1972). The bird's essence might appear in the consciousness of the individual through the dream state, but it is "diminished", "sporadic" and "unrecognised"; "unrecognised because man is no longer instinctively equipped to know an archetype when he is confronted with one, or to apprehend the truth that the animals bear a little of man's essence, whether he likes it or not; and that he, with them, is part of a larger 'animal' which includes all living creatures and is life itself."²

When are we awake to the bite of the nightingale's song? Walter Benjamin, in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, to the individual consciousness, which is a mirror to the collective consciousness and during the age of mechanical reproduction (the nineteenth century) the individual and "the collective consciousness plunges into an even deeper sleep, the task of dream-image, dream time, dream interpretation, articulates the condition of seeing"³. The awareness of a wakeful 'now' is potentially possible in a moment of chance association or sudden flashes of insight.

A metaphorical dream figure, a young girl, bird-like, overlies the photograph titled '*Jessie Bites*' by Sally Mann (1988). The young girl rests on a pile of cushions, one of her arms hooked into another's arm. The child appears distant and lost in thought, a moment of awaking, from a dream state maybe, to somewhere beyond the frame of the photograph. The girl's face and body are marked with paint lines, drawings and markings, traces from playful turns that streak into abstract markings on the body. Her face is brushed with watery lines and the

paintbrush appears to have crossed her lips, nails, eyes and forehead. Across her body is a boa of feathers, the feathers appear to fill the bone-like markings with an avian quality, as though the young girl in her waking dream-like state inhabits the body of the bird and in this flighty state, and suggest all manner of birdlike play has taken place.

The allusion to the waking dream-state occurs within the focus and blur of the photographer's eye. The viewpoint is from above, and the soft and dishevelled contours of the pillows, the clothes, contrast with the pull of focus to the gaze of the little girl and the folds of cloth fill the image with a wave of surfaces that triggers thoughts of a dream-like repose. The detail of focus and the silver tone of the print highlight the shadows of twilight, of the 'hour of the wolf', a silvery spectre, where the impression of the waking dream fills impressions of the photographic tableaux of waking and sleeping children by the photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, whose epic and intimate lyrical style stirs into *Jessie Bites. The Anniversary* (1865) [Museum No. 44949], a portrait of a young girl (Elizabeth Keown) by Cameron, mysteriously thickens its referential pull with its stylistic hold of sharp focus that falls away into soft focus, a 'pictorial effect' that accentuates the 'faraway' interior repose of the child's gaze. The historical lyrical gaze billows through the provoking eyes of the young American child and fixes flights of fancy into the wanderings that are untold. The bird-like child of *Jessie Bites* stares with a fixed expression across the image, as if her thinking is delayed but reflected back. Entwined in the arms of another, possibly an older sibling, any play of the day seems to have dissipated in this quiet repose.

A sky displaced and the angle of the camera from above invert the view so it is believed the image reflects a surface, a hint of echo, an eternal looking to grasp at what is out of reach. It is this Orphic turn of looking back, and not looking directly to the camera's lens that the little girl takes us back in her image, but as we try and follow her, the meeting of each other's gaze is frustrated, it is not able to be received, only silently looking to one side, she refuses our gaze. The look of the child is present, but also clings to absence; the absence of a taciturn agreement. A tenderness within the image, the maternal gaze, gives a latitude, devoid of hard edges; evoking the dream-state of a daydream, under the tones of the silver-gelatin print, a liminal space "waking does not part from sleeping. A luminousness makes its appearance."⁴

There is a detail that adds an ambiguous layer to the narrative, a mark, a bite, confirmed by the title *Jessie Bites*, which is etched and into the sharpness of focus, a nip carved into the arm of the other. A bite mark that appears ambiguous in its 'stain'. Time is written into the title and by extension the image, the biting is continuous, *Jessie Bites*, and you can actually hear the pain of receiving a sharp bite on the skin. What is uncertain is the consent to the biting and whether the play has gone beyond what was agreed between the players. We could question whether the young girl in the picture is the one who is responsible for the bite of this lyrical title and its connotations of a story in Aesop's morality fables. *Jessie biting* could also simply be exploratory, to see how marks are made to stay on the skin, a pure experiment in biting, a physical joke, but the association weighs to the linguistic side of pain: a pain articulated between memory and experience. In the process of etching, a printmaker requires immersion into acid, and this is called 'biting', to produce a plate from which the prints are taken and the original drawing/image is reversed: the negative becomes positive. The image of *Jessie Bites* feeds into the processes of image making. The printmaker Jessica Greenman deepens the complexity of 'biting': "There is always a terrible worry about foul biting, which is when you have failed to de-grease the plate properly and the acid crawls under the bitumen surface which has been smoked in flame, and eats it away...[] etching involves engulfment in a powerful external force (nature, acid) for a long time... for weeks...What then emerges is a very precisely corroded line that contains everything I've been looking at; the culmination of what has been absorbed."⁵

The open mouth, contained within the language of the nightmare and part of the surrealist's trail in the history of photography⁶, connects a physical trace of an open mouth on bare skin. The mark of the open mouth threatens to disappear, just as the bodies of the real-life birds have disappeared into a feather boa. Traces of the mark are always on the verge of disappearing without disappearing. The picture moves from the 'here'

and 'now' into the very path of disappearance; the bird-like child might disappear as the paint on her body is disappearing, an echo of the medieval mirror that appears to consume rather than reflect. It is not the gaze that holds this image but the bite mark — a strange absence, a carnal presence that creates a small 'crime' scene in the image, it foregrounds the evidence. The biting metamorphosing into performative sign as a record and as a historical 'stain'. Momentarily, the focus in the image shifts from the child to the viewer, and the viewer loses sight of themselves, placing their kinetic mind into an imagined carnality. In this sense the experience of time within the image is very slow and moves very slowly, as though it is pondering and not yet awake from a daylight sleep. Watching the child's pale face slightly darken in the tones of grey, the piercing eyes, the soft mask of the child passes over. The half-slumber of the morning or a midday rest, quietude, the body forms an aperture of memory.

The bird-like child figure holds a tautological tie to the imagination, to the inner voicings within the image, so that what is being said is difficult to know, where emotions felt rather than spoken are revealed; a detachment within the close-up view, and unwillingness to 'sentimentalise' the song-like qualities of the image. Speaking more of constellations of thought, the image holds 'the structure of the dream' in the transit between light and darkness, to a crepuscular state that articulates the condition of seeing, in which nothing ever really comes to light, of unspoken assumptions that sleeping and waking yield in the infinite variety of conscious states. Crepuscular is the terminology for when certain insects, birds and other animals are active at twilight or just before dawn. The etymology of crepuscular is from the Latin *crepusculum* (dusk), and from *creper* (dark). The nightingale is not a crepuscular bird, yet its song, often sung in the hours of darkness, coupled with its beautiful auric twilight voice, crept further and deeper into the human imagination of desire and possession⁷.

"You must always remain with me," said the emperor. "You shall sing only when it pleases you; and I will break the artificial bird into a thousand pieces." "No; do not do that," replied the nightingale; "the bird did very well as long as it could. Keep it here still. I cannot live in the palace, and build my nest; but let me come when I like. I will sit on a bough outside your window, in the evening, and sing to you, so that you may be happy, and have thoughts full of joy. I will sing to you of those who are happy, and those who suffer; of the good and the evil, who are hidden around you. The little singing bird flies far from you and your court to the home of the fisherman and the peasant's cot. I love your heart better than your crown; and yet something holy lingers round that also. I will come, I will sing to you; but you must promise me one thing." "Everything," said the emperor, who, having dressed himself in his imperial robes, stood with the hand that held the heavy golden sword pressed to his heart. "I only ask one thing," she replied; "let no one know that you have a little bird who tells you everything. It will be best to conceal it." So saying, the nightingale flew away.⁸

NOTES

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1 Hans Christian Andersen (1805 – 75), “Nattergalen” *The Nightingale* (1843) from his *Fairy Tales* (compiled 1835 – 72) is a literary fairy tale by the Danish author, who tells the story of the song of the nightingale that brings tears to the emperor’s eyes, but a bejewelled mechanical bird arrives and the nightingale is banished from the empire.

2 George Ewart Evans & David Thomson, *The Leaping Hare* (London, Faber & Faber, 1972, 2017) pg 17

3 Eduardo Cadava, *Nightdreams, Words of Light, Theses on the Photography of History*, New Jersey, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997 pg 66-69

4 Ibid pg 66

5 Jessica Greenman, Illustrator, *Weeds and Wild Flowers*, Alice Oswald, Jessica Greenman (London, Faber & Faber, 2009 e book 2011) ebook, pg 8

6 The open mouth was exploited by the artistic avant-garde in Europe from the 1900s onwards to demonstrate the anarchistic potential of photographs. “The unrestrained shriek, symbolised by the wide-open mouth can be simultaneously interpreted as a sign of unbearable pain, ecstatic desire, and aggressive political agitation” Monika Faber. “The Face under the Magnifying Glass.” In Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, eds. *Object:Photo. Modern Photographs: The Thomas Walther Collection 1909 – 1949*. An Online Project of The Museum of Modern Art. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2014. <http://www.moma.org/interactives/objectphoto/assets/essays/Faber.pdf>.

7 Mark Cocker, David Tipling, *Birds and People* (London, Jonathan Cape, 2013, 2013 ebook) pg 339

8 Hans Christian Andersen (1805 – 75), “Nattergalen” *The Nightingale* (1843) from his *Fairy Tales* (compiled 1835 – 72).

Linnet

Carduelis cannabina, Linnæus

The usual call of the linnet is soft, liquid, difficult to figure. There is also a harsher "kek", or "knek" repeated. Both the soft call and certain less-musical notes enter into the song, which may be heard more or less all of the year.

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Goldfinch

Carduelis, Linnæus

The common note of the goldfinch is a "twit" or "twitt-itt-itt". Also in German "stichlit" or "pickelnick". Repetitions of this and other notes make up its song. It is heard more or less all the year, and very frequently during the breeding season.

Bullfinch

Pyrrhula, Linnæus

The ordinary note of the bullfinch is a soft flute-like "pee-ew" or "whee-ou", which may be followed by a softer "büt, büt". The song is a series of short, low notes: "Si-üt-üt-üt-si-re-üt-üt-üt üt-üt-üt-si-re-üt-mi-üt-la." The hen also sings till the spring moult.

Chaffinch

Fringilla cœlebs, Linnæus

The chaffinch owes certain of its popular names to renderings of its familiar cry: "spink", "pink" or "twink" and has other notes "whit" or "chissick". The short, oft-repeated song has three phrases, varying much in completeness. One rendering is "tschi-tschitschi", a mellow "tweet", "tee-choo-éo" or "tissy-choo-éo".

Corn Bunting

Emberiza calandra, Linnæus

The song uttered is a not unmusical flow of little crackling notes that appear without ordered harmony. The usual call is a "tsick", which, rapidly repeated, forms the first part of the song, "tsick-tsick-tsick-tsick". The end has been compared to the jingling of keys and may also be described as an incoherent stutter. The alarm note is "tseep" and "tseer".

Yellowhammer

Emberiza citrinella, Linnæus

The familiar rendering of the song is a "Little bit of bread and no cheese", the last note being long-drawn; it is sometimes omitted. The song sounds like "Tche-Tche-Tche-Tche-Tche-Tche-Tche-Tche—e-e-se". The alarm note is "tsee".



Bernard F. Eilers, *Dignity*, 1930, gelatin-silver print, E.335-2015

Peacock

Tail feathers – 100 or so – are tethered to the body, an incantation for the spectral brilliance of its grand fan performance. Belonging to the printer's hand, the light figure holds the imprint of a spectral form within visceral tones of paper and print. The tail feathers greet a physiology specific to the peacock's feathers' attraction of light crystals, heightening an illusory presence that sways to and fro in the breeze¹. Void of its colourful brilliance, the sculptural plumage wavers in a blinking eye as a ghostly after-image. The grammar of the image is towards an arrested stillness — flickering between the moving eyelids of a blinking eye — the still photograph scintillates a sense impression that vibrates and moves.

Stripped of its vibrant splendour, the figure of the bird enters as a phantom that hovers within the distance of time remembered, a figure haunted by other figures.

"Next came the peacock, splendidly arrayed
In many-coloured pomp; this he displayed
As if he were some proud, self-conscious bride.
Turning with haughty looks from side to side.
'The Painter of the world created me,'
He shrieked, 'but this celestial wealth you see
Should not excite your hearts to jealousy.'²"

Is this the condition of the photograph, to play the repeated moment of resemblance — a peacock of many other peacocks? Bernard Eilers' 1930 photograph of the peacock furnishes a melancholic monument to the late-19th- and early-20th-century mania for capturing wild birds with the most pristine sprays — egrets, herons and peacocks. The scale of the slaughter of snaring, shooting and breeding ranged between 5 million and 200 million a year³. Photography, like language is a medium of likeness — how many bodies inhabit this singular body?

NOTES

1 Nano-optics in the biological world: beetles, butterflies, birds and moths. M Srinivasarao (1999), *Chemical Reviews*, pg: 1935 – 1961

2 Farid ud-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds (Manteq at -Tair) lines 815 – 832*, Trans. Afkram Darbandi and Dick Davis (London, Penguin Books, 1984)

3 Mark Cocker, Richard Mabey, *Birds Britannica* (London Chatto & Windus, 2005) pg 50



Henry Irving, *Juniper Tree (Fastigiata)*, 1900, platinum print, PH.3545-1904

"And the juniper tree began to move. First the branches moved apart, and then they moved together again, like someone clapping their hands. As that happened a golden mist gathered among the branches and then rose up like a flame, and at the heart of the flame there was a beautiful bird that flew high into the air singing and chirping merrily. And when the bird was gone, the juniper tree was just as it had been before, but the scarf and the bones had vanished... Meanwhile the bird was flying far away. He flew to a town and settled on the roof of a goldsmith's house and began to sing:

"My mother cut my head off,
My father swallowed me,
My sister buried all my bones
Under the juniper tree.
Keewit! Keewit! You'll never find
A prettier bird than me!"¹

Standing still, the singular power of the silent form. *A Juniper Tree (Fastigiata)*, the conical variety that grows upright, slender, branches toward the sky, formed like a topiary by thrushes, deer, and hares who eat the bitter, aromatic 'gin' berries. The platinum print chides such details of the tree to a presence akin to the naturalist's eye, an evergreen shrub, *Juniperus communis*, known colloquially in Hertfordshire – as the 'savage tree'. 'Savage' or 'savin', as it was known in the medieval period when "giving birth under the Savin tree" was a euphemism for a miscarriage or a juniper-provoked abortion². The platinum prints of Henry Irving (1838 – 1905) and his detailed studies of trees, evoke a hallucinatory complexity of grey tones and contrasts, that replicate a likeness of the tree, as a physical living specimen, a testimony to the platinum process's association with the finest gradients of the grey tone. As the juniper tree's berries contain a catalyst that could prove fatal to the foetus of the pregnant woman, so too could the precious metal, platinum, provide the catalyst for explosives needed in the development of destructive, deadly weapons such as bombs. Platinum was used during World War I for the making of bombs and consequently forbidden for use by photographers during this time.³

The writer Paul Valéry (1871 – 1945) wrote in his essay *The Centenary of Photography* about the altered perception of reality that photography had given through its invention. The "emergence to visibility of that mysterious *latent image*, on the exact nature of which Science has not yet made up its mind".⁴

"Little by little, here and there, a few spots emerge like the first stuttering of awakening consciousness. These fragments multiply, cluster, form a whole; and watching this configuration as its disparate elements, each one trivial in itself, proceed by leaps to form a recognizable picture, we cannot but think of certain precipitations as they occur in our minds, of memories that come into focus, or certitudes that suddenly crystallise, of the creation of certain rare lines of verse that fall into place, abruptly wrestling themselves from the chaos of our inner speech."⁵

Wrestling from the chaos of inner speech, the photograph of the juniper tree and the oral tale, bearing the same name, fuse images of violence, pathos and beauty. Walking among the irregular scrubs, conifers and juniper trees, in the gloom of a darkening spring night, there is a singing and a ringing — a flock of light is

sounded, and golden trinkets appear as a 'flash'. Goldcrests, tiny balls of dull green and buff white underparts, with their flaming golden crests, flit from branch to branch, flickering with energy, small bodies of voice, rising and falling, tinkling songs and seep calls. A flock of minuscule lightness, a rare rising of acrobatic sounds dart between the juniper trees.

These light, golden 'explosions' of sound are recalled in the Jewellery Galleries of the museum. "The past can be seized only as an image, which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised and is never seen again"⁶, wrote Walter Benjamin in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*.

What emerges in this particular figure of sound and the acuity of the print is the tension between the verbal and the visual. The oral tale is close to our experience of a series of arrested images; where word and sentence rest upon the teller, a vicarious event.

Space and time fold upon themselves. Existing no longer in one moment or place, images multiply. Landscapes and distant peoples emerge as backgrounds; image upon image underwrites how the world is surveyed. There is no clear sense of what is accurate or inaccurate, plausible or implausible. A tale is told, from teller to teller, image upon image, coherent narratives and threads are undone and akin to the contemporary logics of digitisation and according to algorithms of databases, distributing narratives as fragments, releasing what is knowable and unknowable, visible and invisible.

To see a bird is to hear a bird. To recognise a bird, the birdwatcher will primarily rely on the orality of the bird's call or song. Birdsong is highly distinctive: there are mating serenades, territorial calls, calls for nestlings and fledglings, and graded danger warnings. An extraordinarily lovely birdsong may alert you to the presence of a mature bird: birdsong is a learned skill and the oldest birds have the greatest vocal dexterity. Male birds sing the most melodious calls that are true birdsong.

Orality, image-worlds and birdsong merge violently in the *Juniper Tree*. What is drawn is an elemental space of imagination, revulsion and desire where language, landscape, birds and humans swirl and collide in a boreal cannibalistic mix. In the oral tale, which came to the Brothers Grimm in the Pomeranian dialect of Plattdeutsch or Low German, it is the bird's song that frees the bird from the sadistic evil stepmother. It is the mouth and the vocalisations of the father which protect the possibility for the son to return. It is the look of his "truthful" sister ("Her poor eyes had wept so much they had not tears left, and she could only cry blood"), whose clear-sightedness to her own mother's abject malice and violence, places her brother's remains at the site of his mother's resting place, the solitary 'Savin' Juniper Tree.

Hélène Cixous speaks of such elemental imaginings in *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* and what is to be vanquished?

We live in fear of what might be taken away. We know to know what may be taken and how to hold it tightly for ourselves and our kind. Of women and birds and writing that do not exclude. Cixous reminds us of the language of exclusion. She cites the chapter in Leviticus in the Bible, which speaks of what is abominable and what is unclean.

"And these are they which you shall have in abomination among the fowls, they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination, the eagle and the ossifrage and the vulture. And the owl and the nighthawk and after his kind: the little owl, and the great one; and the swan and the pelican, and the deer eagle. The stork, the hero and the lapping and the bat. All the fowls that creep, going on all fours, shall be an abomination unto you."⁷

Eagles, owls great and small, storks and bats are an abomination. Though birds fly, eagles and owls soar and swoop, and upward is flight for birds. It is not birds that creep against the heavens. Perhaps this writing is of death, or a death that does not exclude, perhaps of a cruelty not to be excluded.

The passage from the "He-bible" that speaks of what is unclean, abominable, impure, speaks of cruelty and death. It may be read as speaking of life, what the Bible says we need to live. This is the death of certain kinds of animals and not others. Death is the condition of life. There does not seem to be an answer to that. Impurity, abomination, uncleanness are the other conditions of life. But Cixous asks us what it is that we are avoiding. We want to avoid feeling breath, want to avoid feeling touched. By what? By death and cruelty. That is, by life. The "School of death".

If we faced a cruel death that did not exclude — for example, the unclean and impure — would we eat more, eat and kill more animals with more joy? If we knew the cruelties with which animals who will be eaten are treated, would we eat less or more? Would we desire to be less cruel?

"I shall try and make plain the bloodiness of killing. Too often this has been slurred over by those who defend hawks. Flesh-eating man is in no way superior. It is so easy to love the dead. The word 'predator' is baggy with misuse. All birds eat living flesh at some time in their lives. Consider the cold-eyed thrush, that springy carnivore of lawns, worm stabber, basher to death of snails. We should not sentimentalise his song and forget the killing that sustains it."⁸

This is something animals know, birds and horses. Not knowing by fearing death, but the impurity of life as death. Perhaps the cruelty of death as life. At the root we do not divide life from death, human from animal, women from bird, man from woman, love from hate, truth from death, suffering from joy. At the root we are impure, with a cruel joy. Animals are the root and from the root. In death and life. With pain and cruelty. The roots are unthinkable without other living things. We are impure at the roots by means of them, by means of what we do.

"I said that the first dead (animals) are our first masters, those who unlock the door for us that opens onto the other side, if only we are willing to bear it. Willing, in its noblest function, is the attempt to unerase, to unearth, to find the primitive picture again, ours, that one that frightens us."⁹

NOTES

1 *The Juniper Tree*, as retold by Philip Pullman, *Grimm Tales for Young and Old* (London, Penguin, 2012) pg 187

2 Richard Mabey, *Flora Britannica* (London, Chatto and Windus, 1996) pg 27

3 Martin Barnes, *Photo London: digging into the Victoria and Albert Museum Archive*, Financial Times, May 15, 2015

4 Paul Valéry, *The Centenary of Photography* Ed. Alan Trachtenberg, Notes, Amy Weinstein Meyers, *Classic Essays on Photography* (USA, Leete's Island Books, 1980) pg 198

5 Ibid pg 198

6 Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Ed. Hannah Arendt, *Illuminations, Essays and Reflections*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Preface, Leon Wieseltier (New York, Schocken Books 1969, 2007) Pg 255

7 Hélène Cixous, *Birds, Women and Writing, In Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, Trans. Sarah Cornell and Susan Sellars (New York, Columbia University Press, 1993) pg 114

8 J A Baker, *The Peregrine* (*The New York Review of Books*, 2005, Original Publisher: Harper & Row, 1967) pg 120

9 Hélène Cixous, *Birds, Women and Writing, In Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, Trans. Sarah Cornell and Susan Sellars (New York, Columbia University Press, 1993) pg 114

60 seconds to voice breath on a piano

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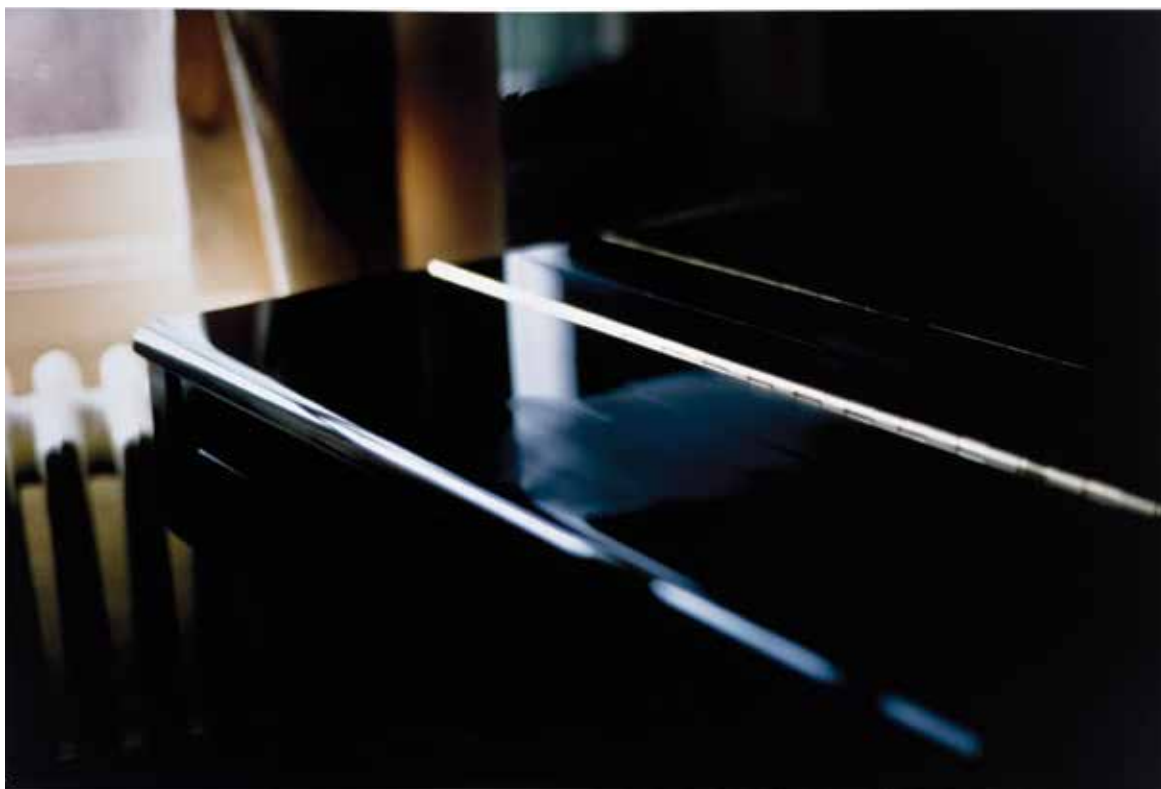
A fragility of life, of breath, thin mists of water particles on a black lacquered piano. The daylight crosses the breath and enters into the depths of the black lacquer, and the breath, a delicate light grey of iodised silver, appears on the piano.

An enigmatic, absence of the human figure, an allegory of a fleeting moment, the precariousness and intangibility of a layer of thirst, like a glimpse of joy.

The becoming of the voice, of giving voice to, of hearing the sonority of another body, another's voice, of cadences and of all the notes stringed within the body of the piano. The anticipation of the song, always separate, a luminance – flighty, ephemeral, contradictions of sustained notes and the wetness of the shiny dark lacquer.

A breath visualised in the cold morning walk, the breath of a child, a lover, a revelation within the photograph, without face and figure. Any living thing that can breathe out language. A katabatic wind, moving across the landscape. Distance, focus and depth of field, shutter, ocular words that slow patches of breath. The failure to understand a plentitude of presence, the reflective surface, indices of the absent body. An abstracted shape literally transformed, but only temporarily. Traces marked in time but a breath long vanished.

After an encounter with the artist Gabriel Orozco, London, January 2011



Gabriel Orozco, *Aliento Sobre Piano (Breath on Piano)*, 1993, chromogenic print, E.517-1997



Valentine Green, engraver after the painter Joseph Wright of Derby (1734 – 97), *The Air Pump*, 1769, mezzotint on paper, 29445:1

The Medieval and Renaissance Galleries

Two people who happen to be walking through the galleries, on their way, they stop. Listen, a philosopher's voice:

"The photograph keeps open the instants, which the onrush of time closes up forthwith; it destroys the overtaking, the overlapping, the metamorphosis of time, this is what in contrast painting makes visible [...] painting searches not for the outside movement but its secret ciphers."¹

Then each walks on, in their own thoughts, ruminating.

A late Medieval painting in the Medieval & Renaissance Galleries, a grisaille on cloth, 'distemper on linen' from Spain or possibly Valencia, entirely executed in shades of grey. The '*Wall Hanging of the Virgin Annunciate*' [PH.19-1928] lends a stark simplicity, a monochrome painting used to cover the altar during Lent, the period of fasting and penance before Easter. The Virgin kneels before an open book with her attribute of a lily in the foreground, while the Holy Spirit appears above her head in the form of a dove. Ubiquitous in Christian iconography, birds hold the mystery and power of air, and so certain species enter the complex tissue of relation. The image of the dove triggers a memory space, another image of a bird-body melting away, dissolving, locked in a struggle, the human intent infringing on the presence of the bird. The dialectics of coming into being and perishing life and death are prescribed in the monochrome pallet, directing sombre thoughts. A depiction of the metamorphosis of breath, of the loss of its form, as a wounding, as an act of violence.

The image at its focal point is the breath of a cockatoo. If the meaning of 'seeing' is expanded to encompass the Greek root (of the word) aesthetic, which signifies the ability to perceive, to come to know through the senses. "To see is to look, to see is to hear, to see is to move, to see is to touch, to see is to intuit, to see is to come to know" asserts the art historian Diana Cappadona. The cockatoo is a bird who has the gift of being heard by others, thus to hear the cockatoo is to see it, writes Linda Johnson, in her study of Robert Boyle's 'Experiment 41', otherwise known as 'The Air Pump'. 'The Air Pump' notoriously sucked air from a chamber to demonstrate how a vacuum was created and the English Air Pump was invented by Robert Boyle in the 1660s. 'Experiment 41', demonstrated the reliance of living creatures on air for their survival, in an attempt to discover something "about the account upon which Respiration is so necessary to the Animals, that Nature hath furnish'd with Lungs".²

A disquieting suspense is etched into the mezzotint *An Air Pump*, engraved by Valentine Green (1769) of Joseph Wright of Derby's painting *An Experiment on a Bird in an Air Pump* (1768). The mezzotint or *manière noire*, a science fiction of a painting, appears as a black-and-white photograph, an apparition of a mercurial image, drained of all colour and thrown into a black tonal world, an interplay between light and dark. A picture created not from light but from darkness, an inversion of photography's beginnings and chemistry. The tonal technique of the mezzotint works from black to light, and tones are achieved by burnishing areas of copper plate in multiple directions, a reverse intaglio process, which brings out the light shapes from the dark background, producing intense deep blacks⁴. "The mezzotint method" wrote Walter Benjamin in *A Short History of Photography*, "involves a technique of reproduction such as was united only later with the new photographic one [...] the light [...] tortuously wrestles its way out of the dark".³

The mezzotint, this apparition of photography, is a copy of a copy, with the possibility of infinite copies that mark not the state of 'being in the world' but rather a place where nature ends and the artificial world begins. In the mezzotint, there is no reflection; an after-image of the technique creates a distance, mutes the picture, a cool silence, interlocking movement and sound. Though depicting a scene of spectacle, an interiority enters the image that is unsettling, drained and still, an image full of registers of breath, breathing and loss of breath.

With all colour absent outside the grey scale, a hidden psychologically charged world shifts to one that transcends the purely phenomenological description, into a darker spectrum of feelings. The tonal world allows an apparition to float in the mind and be stilled, though restless gestures and details edge into focus, creating a sense of movement that would otherwise be bathed with the effect of chiaroscuro, of painted colour and light.

Moving back from the image rather than forward into it, a sombre objectivity or fervent rationality holds the figures together. If there is a merging with the coming photography, this apparition suggests its form is not only in the grey tonality of the picture, but also in the close cropping of the scene and subtle intently gazed constructions of the tableau. Being granted the illusion of detail and perspective, and subverting perceptual modes of the era more akin to contemporary visibility — the depth of darkness within the shadows and the 'white' lightness of the paper — the image lends itself to an apparition that is 'not yet' photography.

Science and fiction fuse and separate, an uncomfortable partnership at times and yet deceptively symbiotic so it can be difficult to distinguish the difference between the graphite suggestions and the 'original' narrative. Whether or not the 'original' narrative is actually contained in the image, it suggests the many fictions allow a continuous posing of a position. If the 'science fiction' is the 'bursting of the real world', so the focus is multiple: the experiment, the narrative of knowledge, the enlightenment of science, the materiality of the picture and the production of copies.

The copy is relevant. By the time Wright painted his picture in 1768, air pumps were a relatively commonplace scientific instrument, and itinerant "lecturers in natural philosophy usually more showmen than scientists—often performed the 'animal in the air pump experiment' as the centrepiece of their public demonstration".⁴ These were performed in town halls and other large buildings for a ticket-buying audience, or were booked by societies or for private showings in the homes of the wealthy, the setting suggested in Wright's picture. "This experiment had been conducted time and again and now it is the turn of the small white cockatoo. The bird has plummeted to the bottom of the chamber. We see the scene at a moment of high drama. The lecturer is about to let the air back in. His hand is poised to do so, but will it be too late?"⁵

'Experiment 41' was thus copied frequently, and to that end it became a piece of showmanship and 'spectacle', removed from the seriousness and ethically charged beginnings. A bourgeois dinner-party joke at the expense of a skylark, whose aerial song is synonymous with sublime images of the English landscape. But in this instance it was the fate of a cockatoo.⁶ Wright had earlier painted an allegory of air in 1762 – 63, *Mr and Mrs William Chase*, and presented a little white cockatoo bowing towards its carer, Mrs Chase, an illusion of a songlike moment that presages the vocal powerlessness of the Air Pump's narrative. The mezzotint, more ghostly now, floating between hundreds of homes of the bourgeois.

The Airpump is about the diminishing of air, and yet is also conversely about 'light', about illuminating light, about 'light writing' itself, about the spontaneity of light inscribing itself into an image. The spectacle in the image reveals itself 'a rapture'. It evokes the dream to restore "life to the outside world through light; the belief that this tangle of nature's reasons and mysteries, chemical alchemies, law of optics and physics may help us relive the event of rendering a further depth to our view of the world — either to ensure that the moment will not be forgotten and that we understand it, or perhaps simply to re-create the jouissance of re-experiencing it".⁷

"In one sense photography has always been there," observes: the writer and curator Geoffrey Batchen, in *Burning with Desire, The Conception of Photography*. "There has never not been a photography." What is photosynthesis, after all, but an organic world of light writing? The history of Western philosophy has engaged light and the metaphor of the sun. Western thinking is a form of photology. Eduardo Cadava points out, "There has never been a time without the photograph, without the residue and writing of light. If in the beginning was the word, this word, has always been the Word of light – the 'let there be light', without which there would be no history. Photography (the writing of light) is the condition of the possibility of its own history of any history whatsoever."⁸

"Ten minutes of one hour" for Experiment 41, though air does not show itself, there is no presence without air. Struck by a simple observation of air as the arch mediation of our presence in the world, the mind reflects how deeply we are tied to air, to our birth and death, to our nourishment; it manifests our capability for action, for sight, hearing and speech. If air is unbreathable, struggle, panic and death ensue.

What is a lively space, a lively bird, a lively image, is it full of air? Is not air the most resistant to intervention in nature? "Is there a dwelling more vast, more spacious, or even more generally peaceful than that of air? Can man live elsewhere than in air?...//... No other element carries with it — or lets itself be passed through by — light and shadow, voice or silence. No other element is as light, as free, and as much in the "fundamental" mode of a permanent, available, "there is"."⁹

The qualities of air suggest the possibility of a photograph — spontaneity, movement, action, expression. The desire for images subscribing themselves in the world could not have come from below from the ground, from a place without air and light. A mezzotint is from the under the ground, from darkness. Birds live alongside us in the substance that is air, but are more intimately part of it, part of the groundless ground, between earth and sky and water. Birds by their very presence and absence find themselves in photography's history, appearing and disappearing, into an inscription that will fix itself into the world, and become ubiquitous to our every day.

And the bird 'bursts' into the 'real world', residing as a ghostly apparition. Here, fiction and non-fiction blur as the living bird disappears within the telling of a history of chemical images. The living bird is already the 'after-image' of the conception of photography.

In an attempt to observe a bird scientifically, the bird is caught, skinned and stuffed. For to observe the bird until the mid-twentieth century is to shoot a bird. A wild bird flies by and is shot and stuffed. The case of the stuffed bird is used by Sir Thomas Wedgwood in his attempt to fix images, to create spontaneous images of light, a photosynthesis of transcription.¹⁰ Are the qualities of the living bird pressed into the very air, into the process of writing light, of attempting to create a synthesis, of the groundless ground and the lightness of air and light into a chemical alchemy?

Sir Thomas Wedgwood and Sir Joseph Wright of Derby were active members of the radical Lunar Society who met at the full moon, and the picture is in part a testimony to this group of Midland pioneers, atheists and intellectuals, which included Erasmus Darwin, grandfather of Charles, and himself an evolutionary theorist. The clue is in the moon, the full moon in the top-right corner of *An Experiment of a Bird in an Air Pump*. Watch the moon through the open window, it appears that you can see the shadow move. The shadow moving, not the moon. An illusion. As the shadow creeps onward, upward, time seems to be moving in a succession of nights and days, months and years. Gustave Flaubert wrote in his *Carnets de Travail*, upon viewing Wright of Derby's painting, *The Air Pump*: "Wright: *Expérience de la machine pneumatique. Effet de nuit. Deux amoureux dans un coin, charmants. Le vieux (à longs cheveux) qui montre l'oiseau sous le verre. Petite fille qui pleure. Charmant de naïveté et de profondeur.*" ("The Air Pump". "Wright: Experience of the Air Pump. Effect of night; two lovers in the corner, charming. The elder (with long hair) who shows the bird under the glass. Little girl who cries. Charming of naivety and profound."¹¹)

Gently, the living bird lies in the image — its breath uncertain. Within a scene that never ends, it too is suspended in time and year, the fate of the bird seems unending — it is possible to search for life within the cockatoo's pale body, to find a trace before the vivisection is complete, a possibility of breath.

Air does not show itself. Except in cases where human activity has fabricated the air to begin with. An image of condensation of droplets of water upon the glass of the bell jar, a trace of air, of breath. A trace of breath is an image that will be taken or at least a trace that will be fixed into chemicals and into colour pigments by Gabriel Orozco in 1993 in a *Breath on Piano* — an index of life, an analogy of breath as an unstable space.

In this apparition of 1768, the bell jar does not fix the evidence in such a conclusive manner; it allows a distance, a surface, through which to look; the glass heightens the cockatoo's gaze and then, it is not certain, though it appears to struggle in breath, the eyes delirious but seconds seem left for a chance of life. These seconds go on infinitely as we are never quite sure, the bird is 'not yet' without air, and so the image wrestles, on and on.

NOTES

1 Adapted from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind*, Trans. Michael K Smith, Ed. Galen A. Johnson *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting* (Illinois, Northwestern University Press 1993) pg 145

2 Linda Johnson, *Animal Experimentation in 18th Century Art: Joseph Wright of Derby: An Experiment on a Bird in an Air Pump*, *Journal of Animal Ethics*, Vol.6, No.2, Fall 2016 (Article) (University of Illinois Press, 2016) pg 164 – 176

3 Walter Benjamin, *A Short History of Photography*, Ed. Alan Trachtenberg, Notes, Amy Weinstein Meyers, *Classic Essays on Photography* (USA, Leete's Island Books, 1980) pg 207

4 David Fraser, "Joseph Wright of Derby and the Lunar Society", Edgerton, Judy, *Wright of Derby*, (London, Tate Publishing Ltd 1990), pg 58 – 59

5 Michael Glover, *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump, 1768 (183 x 244cm)*, *Joseph Wright of Derby: Great Works*, 13 October 2011, *The Independent* newspaper,

6 As early as the 17th century the caging of wild birds was challenged even though caged birds were becoming increasingly fashionable in middle-class households. Birds such as canaries, nightingales, goldfinches and larks were kept for song. The usual experiment with the air pump was performed with birds, mice, frogs and kittens though some demonstrators used a bladder or 'lung-glass' in the receiver instead of a living animal.

7 Luigi Ghirri, *There is Nothing Old Under the Sun (2)*, Editor, Francesco Zanot, Luigi Ghirri, *The Complete Essays 1973 – 1991*, Mack Publishing, 2017 pg 186

8 Eduardo Cadava, *Heliotropism: Origins, Cadava, Eduardo, Words of Light, Theses on the Photography of History* (New Jersey, Princeton, Princeton University Press 1997) pg 5

9 Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, Trans. Mary Beth Mader (Texas University of Texas Press 1983, 1999)

10 Geoffrey Batchen: Their friend Anthony Carlisle recalled in 1839 that he had undertaken several experiments with Wedgwood (Tom) in about 1799 "to obtain and fix the shadows of objects by exposing the figures painted on glass, to fall upon a flat surface of shamoy leather wetted with nitrate of silver, and fixed in a case made for a stuffed bird" *Burning with Desire, The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, The MIT Press, 1999) pg 112

11 Ed. Pierre-Marc de Biasi, *Gustave Flaubert, Carnets du Travail*, Paris 1988, pg 350. Translation of Flaubert excerpt, Mrs Annick Robson, 2017

House Sparrow

Passer domesticus, Linnæus

The house sparrow has a considerable vocabulary. Among them the "chilp" is the most familiar.

The alarm note sounds like "kwurk". Individuals sometimes utter a short continuous series of notes which might be regarded as a song. In autumn and winter flocks are often heard towards evening making a concerted chirping.

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Skylark

Alda arvensis, Linnæus

The skylark's song is uttered as a rule mid-air, also on the ground, or sometimes when perched above it. It is stated that the hen and cock sing equally well. The song may last several minutes. The call note is a cheerful musical trill, heard often as the birds flit over the ground from place to place. One rendering is "tw-rup".

Pied Wagtail

Motacilla alba, Linnæus

The song of the pied wagtail is a series of short phrases, exactly alike, that may continue for some minutes.

The usual call sounds like a sharp "tchissik".

Tree Pipit

Anthus trivialis, Linnæus

The tree pipit generally takes flight from the branch of a tree, utters a few notes as it ascends to a brief height, and then sings while, on outspread wings and tail, it descends to its perch. It may begin and end its song without quitting its perch. Some of its song notes are very similar to the canary.

The usual call note is "srihb".

Meadow Pipit

Anthus pratensis, Linnæus

The pipit usually rises to sing in the air from the ground or bush and sings as it descends. The note on the ascent is "ze-ut" repeated; on the descent, several "wheets" followed by the final trill, "tri-ze-ze-ze-ze". The singer may begin and end its song perched.

The bird has a squeaky alarm note and its call note is "peet".

Tree Creeper

Certhia familiaris, Linnæus

The tree creeper call note is "tsee" repeated, also "ssrih", "zree" and a repeated "tsit". The song is syllabled "Ticka-tce-tce-tce-tce-tce-ticka-ticka", and is often uttered by the bird when pausing in its progress up a tree trunk.



Michael Bennett, *Cousin Geraldine trying to get Uncle Jack's parrot to talk*, 1973 – 76, gelatin-silver print, E.346-2013

Parrot

Cousin Geraldine trying to get Uncle Jack's parrot to talk. Cousin Geraldine wistfully nudges the parrot to talk by offering the tip of her finger through the metallic bars of the cage, yet for all her suggestions, she is not able to interest the bird. A humorous picture. The cage is firmly locked as the bird's claws are clasped to its perch. The parrot ignores the prodding, talking finger. The parrot's face is turned away from Geraldine's gaze, in the opposite direction, with the eye and focus of the parrot appearing more in line with the frontal view of the photographer.

Despite the insistence of talk in the title, there is very little talk from either the mouth of Cousin Geraldine or Uncle Jack's parrot. The "lips" from human and bird are sealed. A mimicry, accidental or not, is visible between Cousin Geraldine and the parrot: Geraldine's thinly plucked eyebrows accentuate her eyes and resemble the markings around the parrot's eye, and Uncle Jack's parrot has a very fine brow that stresses the prominence of its gaze. It could be that Uncle Jack's parrot and Cousin Geraldine like to talk and are known for their imitative behaviour, both witty conversationalists.

The image cites the 'snapshot' as part of everyday family life, only the title suggests a more ironic tone. Parrots are, of course, capable of talking on their own without assistance. The perspective and the focus lead to a more playful subtext — Cousin Geraldine's arm is in the foreground, blurred, her fingers and gaze are in line with the parrot. The prodding, stroking finger appears to touch the parrot's neck, and in this moment — before frolics or laughter — all manner of chatter and preening could have taken or may take place.

Everything is pulled to what might have happened or may happen, but nagging at this allusion to the future, is that the picture is an image of 'now'. The irony of the image is that for all the innuendo of talking, the parrot is firmly in place, beak closed and tightly positioned on its stand. Uncle Jack's parrot is willing only to accept Uncle Jack's affections, is only vocally monogamous to Uncle Jack. Anthropomorphising, the parrot would lead us to state that the parrot is bored, or indifferent to Cousin Geraldine's affections.

The photograph and title exhibit a comic ocular tension of non-verbal communication. Despite all the coaxing and petting on behalf of Cousin Geraldine, the parrot displays no aptitude for the verbal and this may or may not be helped by Cousin Geraldine's silence. In another way, the picture intuits the ludicrous intent of the photographer, and of Cousin Geraldine. The whole joke or performance within the image rests on the living parrot, on the knowledge of the parrot's potential or exceptional ability for human speech. The parrot, an articulate bird, is a rare creature, plucked from the wild precisely because it makes human sounds. If the parrot is stuffed, the whole image falls apart as a rather bad joke; a chatting image, full of talk, but of talk without sense, non-sense.

These observations, as both subjects are framed by Michael Bennett to be observed, are discernible through the accents of black-and-white print. The soft daylight from the conservatory roof or skylight, Uncle Jack's parrot's home, gently mocks the mystery of the document, the silence and absence of colour in the bird, an adjacent layer of fictitious understatement, and the irony of image and text cue another observed parrot of talk and non-talk, Flaubert's parrot. Silence and the parrot's laughter all provide focus for the hurdles of speech and voice in the tale, *Un coeur simple* ("A Simple Heart"). Gustave Flaubert (1821 – 80), it is said, tested the

balance and fluency of his prose by reading it out loud, and he also installed a stuffed parrot to assist him in the story's composition. The voice of the writer is loud and the bird is silent. In the story, the voice and the mimetic possibilities of "parrothood" take on a loud linguistic charge.

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"At the moment," he told his niece, 'I'm writing with an 'Amazon' standing on my writing table, his beak askew, gazing at me with his glass eyes. [...] The sight of the thing is beginning to annoy me. But I'm keeping him there, to fill my mind with the idea of parrothood."¹

Organic corporeality is messy, the parrot ensures that.

"The parrot was called Loulou. His body was green, the tips of his wings were pink, the top of his head was blue and his breast was gold-coloured. Unfortunately, he had the tiresome habit of chewing his perch and kept plucking his feathers, scattering his droppings everywhere and splashing the water from his bath all over his cage."²

The parrot figure in both Michael Bennett's photograph and Flaubert's tale humorously poses a deeper idea of relation to the work of art, and in what manner to voice or raise a translation for those who do not understand what they see or hear.

"There was a curious stubborn streak in Loulou, which never ceased to amaze Félicité; he would refuse to talk the minute anyone looked at him!"
[...]³

For what does a photographic or "literary work say", to quote Walter Benjamin on translation? Does it state "the same thing" repeatedly? Does it communicate, the central reciprocal relationship between languages, between word and image?

"Even so, there was no doubt that he [the parrot] appreciated company. On Sundays, when the Rochefeuille sisters, Monsieur de Houpeville and some of Madame Aubain's new friends – the apothecary Onfroy, Monsieur Varin and Captain Mathieu – came round to play cards, Loulou would beat on the window panes with his wings and make such a furious commotion that no one could hear themselves speak."⁴

Parrothood proposes the mirth-like echo of the original, a giving in to language, with its spontaneous reverberations of effect and affect.

"He obviously found Bourais's face a source of great amusement. He only had to see it and he would break into fits of uncontrollable laughter. His squawks could be heard echoing round the yard. The neighbours would come to their windows and start laughing too."⁵

There is no fidelity on the part of the speaker to the image or the word. "A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, it does not block the light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original more fully⁶." The photograph or literary work is placed in the "active force of life".

In Flaubert's tale, the poor heroine Félicité becomes "completely deaf" and in her isolation, "They would hold conversations with each other, the parrot endlessly repeating the three stock phrases from his repertory and Félicité replying with words that made very little sense but all came from her heart."⁷

Félicité has the parrot stuffed, after being found dead in his cage, "hanging head downwards with his claws caught in metal bars", only to rise and become the after-image of life for the dying Félicité. "With her dying breath she imagined she saw a huge parrot hovering above her head as the heavens parted to receive her."⁸

NOTES

1 Gustave Flaubert quoted by Geoffrey Wall, Ed. Gustave Flaubert, *Three Tales*, Trans. Roger Whitehouse (First Published as "Trois contes", 1877, London, Penguin Classics, 2005) pg xxii

2 Part 4, *A Simple Heart (Un coeur simple)*, Gustave Flaubert, *Three Tales*, Ed. Geoffrey Wall, Trans. Roger Whitehouse (First Published as "Trois contes", 1877, London, Penguin Classics, 2005) pg 29

3 Ibid

4 Ibid

5 Ibid

6 Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator." *Selected Writings, Volume 1 1913-1926* Ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W Jennings. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. pg 260

7 Part 4, *A Simple Heart (Un coeur simple)*, Gustave Flaubert, *Three Tales*, Ed. Geoffrey Wall, Trans. Roger Whitehouse, (First Published as "Trois contes", 1877, London, Penguin Classics, 2005) pg 31

8 Ibid, Part 5, pg 40



William Eggleston, *Liberty Street, Central Falls, Rhode Island, USA, 1978*,
dye transfer print, PH.1016-1978

Bird-Watching

"An interesting account has lately been given of new animal pigment, containing copper, found in the feathers of a violet plantain-eater and two species of Turacus, natives respectively of the Gold Coast, the Cape and Natal. Turacine, the name proposed for it, is noticed here only because it is the first animal or vegetable pigment, with copper as an essential element, which has been hitherto isolated. It is a copper complex uroporphyrin-III extracted by solution in an alkali, and precipitation by an acid and is changed on long exposure to air and moisture to a green hue. As the entire plumage of the bird yields not more than three grains of pigment, turacine must be looked upon as a mere curiosity. Turacine, the common name being a variant on red."¹

In what appears as more than a 'mere curiosity', red as a pigment enters the palette or 'paw' of the photographer William Eggleston — reds with hues of oxides, coppers, cannibals, 'cinnabar', crimson tones and vermilion, deep orange-reds, red ochres, or the royal ruby reds, signal-box red, with opacities that hold the purple of cassis — a hallucinatory voice that skirts, darts and submerges certain pictures. Its occurrence in picture after picture lends a plasticity, recognised by the eye, which attunes to this strong pigment — and where nearness implies connection, distance and separation indicate a stronger boundary in the spatial placing of colour.²

In *Liberty Street, Central Falls, Rhode Island* (1978), an uncanny rectangle, a pantone of crimson red, appears pasted onto the long-side of a white truck, and the red rectangle strikes the eye with an optical mixture that 'pulls' and 'pushes' the eye topographically so various elements within the photograph are eclipsed. An optical occurrence happens that in staring at the red, a transparent veil intersects with the eye so that all the surrounding colours are affected by the red and accordingly tones differ within the perceptual field of the image. "I was particularly struck," says Eggleston "by a picture of a guy who worked for a grocery store, pushing a shopping cart out in the late-afternoon sun, that one really stuck in my mind. I started daydreaming about taking a particular kind of picture [...] I'd already become proficient in black and white, I was a good technician and I had a natural talent for organizing colours — not putting all the reds in one corner, for instance. That was probably because I'd studied painting — essentially what I was doing was applying intelligent painting theory to colour photography."³

As if searching for the bird within the landscape, the sensation of sinking further back can be extended to the 'focal' centre of the photograph. Each picture produces a moment, a slice of vibrating colour, a dynamic intent

that in its asymmetry creates a sense of space within the image. In *Liberty Street, Central Falls, Rhode Island*, the colour red is to the mid-rear left of the image and yet the colour dominates, pushing in front of the other subjects, so it is read as 'here and there', rather than 'beyond there'. The bewildering blue of the sky recedes and the natural earth tones of ochre, brown and cream with hints of violet tones are annulled or made invisible by the sharpness of the colour red. The eye is now 'off-centre' of the image and moves to the edge of the frame, where the eye discounts the centre of the picture altogether.

The pigment of the photographer's palette or paw is deceptive, as the initially exciting effect becomes aggressive and even uncomfortable to the eyes. A subtle undertone to the image creates a noise that can be perceived as pleasing to some but unpleasant to and disliked by others. The harmonious and sonorous is made dissonant by the illusionary vibration of the crimson tones. These photographs are carefully constructed voicings: "Because the pictures looked so simple a lot of people didn't notice that the colour and the form were worked out, that the content came and went where it ought to — that they were more than casual pictures,"⁴ Eggleston notes. "It's true that a lot of my pictures have empty centres, and that's probably something I got from studying Japanese prints and Chinese paintings. A lot of these things are constructed so that everything is in the borders, there really won't be a centre — maybe just a little wisp or something. [...] Most people look at a picture, and if they don't see something recognizable in the middle, they move onto something else."⁵

Pigment and colour are inseparable as the translucent red floods the very dryness of the image with a liquidity that dissolves boundaries, where variants of pigments interfere with the idea of colour. "Incidents of paint linger in the working mind of the painter as continuous thrills," writes the artist Mira Schor. The thrill of the colour red reaches a rarefied intensity not only in the visual palette⁶ of the photographer or painter, but in the story of the red canary, as told by the ornithologist and writer Tim Birkhead in *The Red Canary*. The red canary is an obsession with bird-fanciers who wanted to match the colour of a wild species, the red siskin, with the domestic yellow canary. Pigment again deceives, as the siskin's red is never reached and the breeding only ever reaches the tonality of a vermilion, a red-orange canary; the canary cannot let go of its genetic hold of yellow, which always dilutes the red to an orange tone and not the crimson that was so desired.

To sound the tone of a photographer's use of colour, his 'paw', is not a wistful fancy, as Eggleston says: "When I was growing up it was thought I'd be a concert pianist because I could play anything by ear,"⁷ and in the vibrating dissonance and disjointed deliveries, the diction in the photograph, is 'alive' in sonority, there is 'songlike' repetition to the photographer's gazing. A surrender to the language of colour, to intuit the tension between the subject and the optical relation to the world: the song is just held back, and so too the dynamics of colour, shifting back and forth, the pigments, liquid and wet to create the discrepancy between physical fact and the psychic effect, a haptic illusion of touch. In *Liberty Street, Central Falls, Rhode Island*, there is an 'airiness' that surrounds the pigments and at such moments the vague spaces, the edges

of an architectural lot, of the suburban American document, flow idly in this liquid colour, a space where in its airiness, other thoughts enter and where the mind and eye can dart in and out, to ribbons of flight, to analogue ribbons of colour film. "I started looking at these pictures coming out — they'd come out in a long ribbon — and although most of them were accidents, some were absolutely beautiful. So I started spending all night looking at these ribbons of pictures,"⁸ tells William Eggleston.

Ribbons of pictures over four decades, and the colour red is seen and heard as an elemental strata of the colourist's vocabulary. Not content to reside purely in the parking lot of an abandoned electrical store, or in Graceland and other parades of anonymity — the pigment shades many a supermarket yard and *terrains vagues* — it reaches through to the intimacies of his wife, children, friends and home, a bleeding between private and public space. The pictures are often suspended in time, they exist in breaths of little movement, save for a gentle pedestrian's walk, the colour red creates a figural speed, that slows the image and distracts what non-movement there is, to a quiet residual time. The flashes of rich red can be grasped, as a stillness that is not passive but transformative, a constantly moving space that has to be seen and pondered. It was only a moment ago, when in a brief thought, a summer wind lost of birdsong and a moat of flies makes its presence known in a picture that is unsettlingly off-guard and seductively still, tuned to a sinew of red.

NOTES

1 *Turacine, Red*. Nicholas Eastlaugh, Valentine Walsh, Tracey Chaplin, Ruth Siddall. *Pigment Compendium: A Dictionary and Optical Microscopy of Historical Pigments* (Oxford, Butterworth-Heinemann, Elsevier, 2008) pg 376

2 Josef Albers, *Interaction of Colour* (Yale University Press 1963)

3 William Eggleston in Conversation with Kristine McKenna, *For Now*, Ed Michael Almereyda, Texts, Lloyd Fonvielle, Greil Marcus, Kristine McKenna, Amy Taubin, Twin Palms Publishers, 2011

4 *Ibid*

5 *Ibid*

6 *Ibid*

7 Mira Schor, *Figure/Ground* (1989) Peggy Phelan, Ed, Helena Reckitt Art & Feminism (New York, Phaidon Press, 2001) pg 258

8 William Eggleston in Conversation with Kristine McKenna, *For Now*, Ed Michael Almereyda, Texts, Lloyd Fonvielle, Greil Marcus, Kristine McKenna, Amy Taubin, Twin Palms Publishers, 2011

9 *Ibid*



Nick Waplington, *Untitled*; Living Room, Nottingham, England, 1989 – 91, E.2310-1997

The wall and the ceiling are tatty in Nick Waplington's *Untitled* photograph (1989/91), both are in need of new wallpaper. But the torn strips of paper do not eclipse a small bird, darting and jerking in posture, an English budgie, a figure of constant alertness, displaying a helter-skelter flight of an intensity, an aura out of proportion to its size, within the photographic frame. In the foreground of the photograph a figure jostling to catch the radial budgie with a black net. The budgie a smidgen of colour, teal blue, green, with dusky pinks of finchness, is in a playful pursuit of airy antics, to escape the ever-present net. Delightful play bursts through space in fits and sparks of an airborne hide-and-seek. The view is as through a set of binoculars that can be used both to magnify and minimise, and in this instance the illusion of the snapshot contributes to the playful lexicon of lightness. The photograph as gesture is ever present in the image, where the scale of a space titters to a lightness of play and laughter; in this lived moment, the bird and its shadow dance along the ceiling in a vernacular doubling that delights the eye into a living-room ronde. Within this sprightly score, the vocal repetitions can be easily constructed, to speech melodies of shrieks, which prop up the budgie and the shadow, in a snapshot of living doubles.

The budgie's image is a spark, it permits a forgetting to take place, that of the past tense of the photographic image, a cessation with what has been. The bird is magnified in its minuteness to fantastical constructions, a weightless gaze, rustling its wings and skipping with intent to flight, to frolics, a lot of delight held within one tiny, fragile body. The flight of the budgie with its ghost body is not a hybrid or an imaginary bird, it is a bird, rushing past, an untrammelled burst, where lightness is flexible, the weightless, the mobile and the connective. The budgie removes associations of the petrification of the camera and lightly flies within the surface of the image. The picture is not about a story per se, it jests with conjunctions, as the focus is on to movement and direct experience. Too often, little is spoken of delight in photography — seeing the subject, the bird, suddenly in full motion, there is a sensation of a fleeting, delighted dilated time.

"You know then that is not the reason
That makes us happy or unhappy.
The bird sings. Its feathers shine"

The third stanza in Wallace Stevens' poem *Of Mere Being* suggests the flightiness of the ocular view, a lyrical figure, the one of fictive music, where the focus is to the edge of space, 'beyond thought', and pulls the image into the picture of now, not the future tense, of what it is to be. The philosopher John Gray deduces that 'the mere being of which Stevens speaks is the pure emptiness to which our fictions may sometimes point. Emerging in ways beyond understanding, our most important fictions are a kind; but not a fate that is the same for everybody.'¹ Indeed, the photograph laughs out loud at such speculations. *Untitled* skirts all the tenses of the nowness of the photograph lightly. It is the snapshot vernacular by design, an 'ecstatic image', not in the technicolour imageworld though its colour and turbidity brighten the freshness of life. It is an 'ecstatic image' in its rushing forward into lightness. All voice is given to this bird, and its shadow, edging the budgie to defy its double in the photographer's flash. The lightness of the image follows a trail of feathers that can be found in Italo Calvino's literary expression of lightness as a way of 'dissolving the solidity of the world'.

Here, the relation between light and photograph is reiterated as invisible and infinite. The black net held by the woman in *Untitled* chides at these invisible particles of physical concreteness, but it is the figure of light, as illuminated in the image of the bird, that focalises the perspectives of what is viewed. The analogy with photography and lightness is supported by Italo Calvino's example of the Greek myth of Perseus and Medusa, where in the moment of petrification, the monument of stone, shocked by Medusa's gaze, is undone by all matters of 'airiness' of the lightest of things. It is undone by Perseus whose feet are winged and supported by 'winds and clouds' looks to a mirror, and it is Perseus's astute reflection of Medusa's gaze, that Medusa's power is dissolved. It is the winged animal, that leads to the physical, and later in metaphysical terms, to the recourse to mirrors, and the dissolving of weight. Through light, through fixing light, through an image of language, Calvino suggests that the effect is not to "impress a solid material on us", but to create a duality, a "weightless entity, an element that hovers above things like a cloud, or better, perhaps the finest dust, or better still a field of magnetic impulses to lighten the many materials of the human simulacrum".²

It is the lightness, the weightlessness of the bird that disperses the fine dust of atoms, the minute particles of the human-animal sensations that encompass the ultimate substance of the multiplicity of things. It is to the multiplicity of things that *Untitled* returns, to the distraction of living. The brightness of the weightlessness is an echo of the figure of flight in oral literature, in what is verbally passed down. Whilst the imageworld of *Untitled* is the airy suspension of a bird in flight, the image is part of the vocabulary of the everyday; an imageworld that amidst the weight of living, a lightness is achieved. "Pure critique is but an articulated laughter", the last sentence of the philosopher Fritz Mauthner's *Contributions to a Critique of Language*, the wilful image play of the budgie brings to the syntactical image, Samuel Beckett's words in 1978:

"Thought words
Words inane
Thought inane
Such was my levity."³

In folk tales, a flight to another world, to a state of airiness, is often a necessary component of the release of the narrative, but is also an ordinary occurrence within the morphology of the tale. *Untitled* works with this duality; the bird as a playful figure of lightness, in juxtaposition with the precariousness of everyday life and the weight of poverty — the darting English budgie is part of a series of photographs of families struggling to survive on the day-to-day existence on the Broxtowe Housing Estate in Nottingham during the 1980s. Taken when Margaret Thatcher was still in power and a response to her aggressive monuments of speech such as there is "no such thing as society"⁴, these pure speech acts of power are dismantled with a visual acuity, to be replaced with the intimate 'lively', social and unexpected images in *Living Room; Untitled*. The playful budgie, stuns such dismissive maledictions of speech⁵, to turn the focus, the camera and the lens to inflect a readjusted flicker-light on the lives of those rendered invisible and unemployable, cast to the edges of an austere welfare state.

NOTES

1 John Gray, *The Silence of Animals; On Progress and Other Modern Myths* (London, Allen Lane, Penguin Books, 2013) pg 107

2 *Lightness* by Italo Calvino, Trans. Geoffrey Brock, from *Six Memos for the New Millennium*, Originally published Harvard University Press, 1988, Penguin Classics 2009, pg 42

3 Beckett's interest in the ideas that cannot or should not be expressed in spoken words, their ineffability from the work of the Austrian philosopher of language, Fritz Mauthner, quoted in *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction and the Arts Between the World Wars*, Author, Tyrus Miller, University of California Press 1999, pg 178

4 Margaret Thatcher, as quoted in an interview in *Women's Own* magazine, 1987, the full quote being: "They are casting their problems at society. And, you know, there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and their families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look after themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then, also, to look after our neighbours."

5 "The worst words revivify themselves within us, vampirically. Injurious speech echoes relentlessly, years after the occasion of its utterance, in the mind of the one at whom it was aimed: the bad word, splinterlike, pierces to lodge. See Denise Riley, *Malediction, Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect* (Durham and London, Duke University Press 2005) pg 9

Wren

Troglodytes, Linnæus

The notes of the wren are the familiar scolding "trrrrr" and a combination of sharp "tooks", "tiks" and "trrks", rapidly repeated, that express high excitement in the presence of an enemy, such as an owl. The song is loud and strident.

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Mistle Thrush

Turdus viscivorus, Linnæus

The song consists of three phrases, which differ somewhat from bird to bird. One full song: (1) "Mairi-do-it-quick-quick, quick" (2) "Teeawti-awti" (3) "Pweeee-pweeee-pweeee".

The alarm or anger note is a harsh scolding churr.

Song Thrush

Turdus philomelos

The song is made up of separate parts divided by pauses; each part contains usually a phrase or phrases repeated several times. The song is uttered when the bird is on the wing.

The usual cries are "tchuck" and "ptick" (the p scarcely sounded). In moments of excitement the "pticks" become a fusillade "pticki-pticki-pticki-ptick...."

Fieldfare

Turdus pilaris, Linnæus

The song of the fieldfare has been described as 'a rather pretty low warble constantly interrupted by the usual harsh note'. The harsh note, when the birds are approached, is a sharp "tchak".

Redwing

Turdus musicus, Linnæus

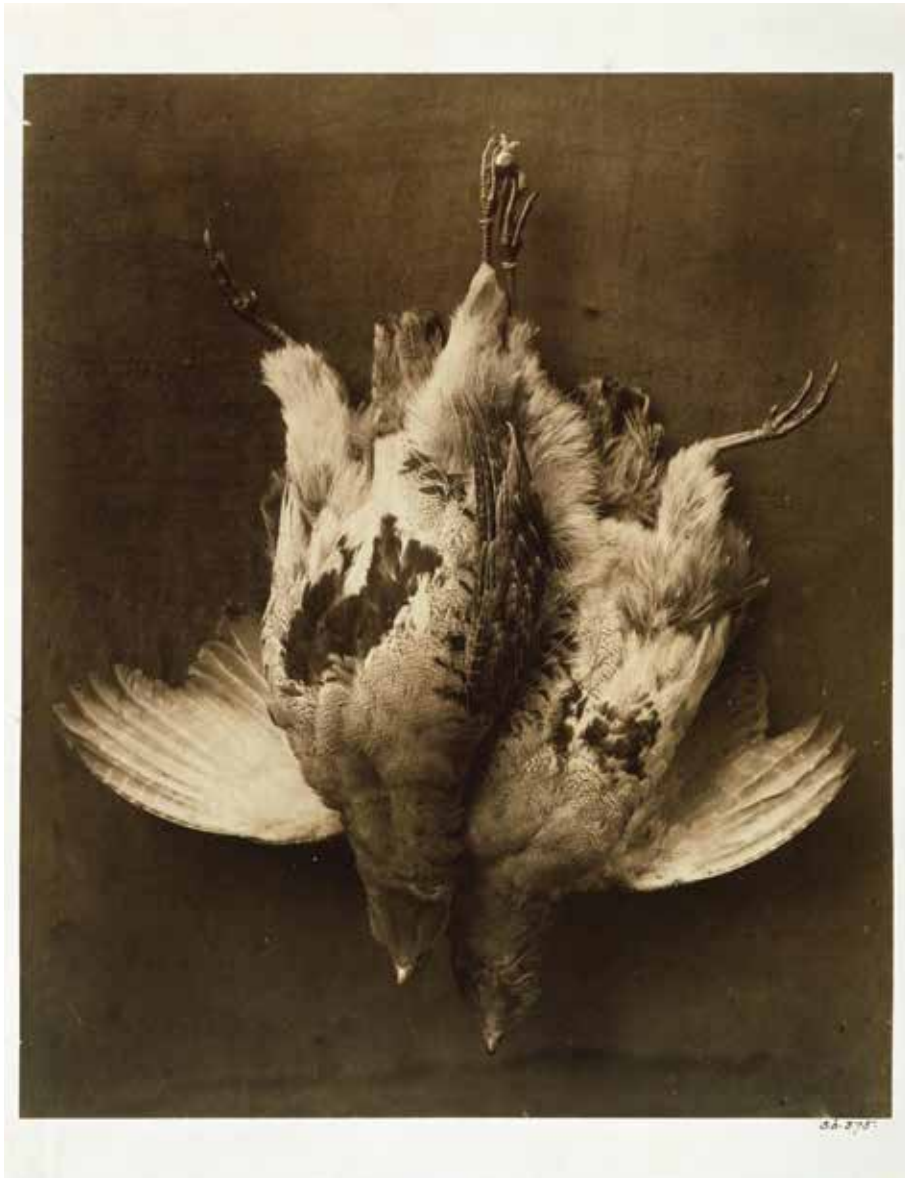
A low rippling soliloquy that goes on without a pause. The birds are heard singing in concert, especially in their roost. Five notes are repeated over and over. The notes heard on approaching the birds are a "twip" varied by "tchiks".

Blackbird

Turdus merula, Linnæus

The blackbird often sings as it flits from tree to tree. The usual cries are "tchuk" and "mink", which in moments of excitement becomes a rapid "mink, mink-mink". The alarm rattle is composed in parts of "tchucks", a rapid excited "tchuck-tchuck-tchuck-tchuck-toweeta-weeta-toweeta-weeta-toweeta-weeta-tchuck-tchuck".

The bird utters at times a robin-like "ptsee".



William Lake Price, *The First of September*, 1855, albumen print, 36375

Two birds, all body and no flight, hanging upside down, held by the strength of a nail and string. An impression of their wings made 'alive' in the details from the wet collodion process and the russet tones of the albumen print; the wings hold a frequency of flight, that resonates in the very feathers of the birds, and in their obscured eyes — dark to the point of appearing asleep — these avian bodies are visual and sensual in the still life of movement. "It was near a leggy tree that I saw rise some way off down the stream, a bird so huge that I could only stare, it wheeled and vanished. Two enormous wings, with a span that I couldn't believe. Yet, I had seen it. And there it was coming back, upstream now, the same vast span of wing; no body that I could see; two great wings joined by nothing, as though some bird had discovered how to be all flight and no body," wrote Nan Shepherd in *The Living Mountain*.

Beyond the liquidity of the chemical process and the aesthetic enquiry of form, the image, *1st September (A Brace of Grouse)* (1855) by William Lake Price, holds a writerly interpretation, that is away from the seductive visual repose of the nature morte. The urge to explore words and non-words begins with the 'aura'¹ of the photographic object and of the image.

The 'aura' of *1st September* registers a depth of artistic and ethical enquiry that does not correspond to the 19th-century obsession of hunting in the field and by the gun. The work was an 'exercise', it was not meant as a trophy of hunting and avian acquisition, it was part of wider treatise that William Lake Price wrote, *The Manual of Photographic Manipulation: Treating of the Practice of the Art, and its Various Applications to Nature* (London, 1858). By Lake Price's own account, the work could not be made on 1st September. For the still life to achieve the full chiaroscuro effect, it had to take place "on two or three hours of the first day of the month of April, May, June or the later half of July. At the point of the brightest light, when the sun can give as much natural light as is possible. Not in the autumn light."² Lake Price stressed that the work should not look as if it had come directly from the studio, but that it was "alive" in certain terms. A lithographer, painter and photographer, he considered the still-life genre to be overused, but not up to the exacting standards as would be expected from painting, and strove in *1st September* to "create a picture of the highest standard". Lake Price continues in his manual to write of the difficulty of capturing a live bird or animal. "A whisk of the tail and it has disappeared from the negative, a slight pricking of and up the ears and they have vanished."³ A premonition of surrealism enters into the ocular discourse of vanishing body parts, dissected animals, part-human at times, with trainers trying to disguise themselves from view, the images reminiscent of the early mythologies of the Greek tales.

The aura that surrounds *1st September* is of a voice or enquiry held back within the reticence and intimacy of silence. It is a quiet image, a silent view; the interplay of lightness and dark are focused towards a climax within the centre of the image, but the tone of the image, the power to be decisively still, is what induces an aural writing, and this stillness takes the image into a less decisive image-space. The image becomes that of a murmuring by the artist, upon which language opens, but is negated by the focus of "aliveness", as the subjects, the birds, and the object, the photograph, are dead. Lake Price, caught by the demands of the spectator, his audience, surmises that if only the miniature was acceptable "small imperfections" were possible and so too "flying shots in motion", but an obsession with closeness and large images had already taken hold of photography's early history. The desire for closeness ensured that capturing the dead in pathology was possible and popular.

1st September holds a stuttering within its aura, a failure to express what needs to be said or wants to be said by the artist: Lake Price reaches the "highest standard" of execution of the idea, but cannot escape from the fact that the birds are not alive. The work is silent but unfinished, the work is an 'echo of what cannot cease speaking' and in this is the liveliness of the animals. *1st of September* is a warm print, it does not portend to the spectacle of a mute theatricality for effect, but writes an image that endeavours to speak with authority for the subject, the birds. A precaution stated by Lake Price is for the picture "to correspond with the average height of the human eye, otherwise [...] if it is taken from too high a point of view, the animals will seem to be *looked down upon*"⁴.

Lake Price attempts to soften the eyes of the blow of death, by allowing the beaks to hold a focus, a light glow in the dark tones. The closed beaks provide a praxis to the artist's desire to focus live animals. "Animals — A class of subject, which has been little treated by photographers," writes Lake Price, "and which yields interest are animals from life. They of course present insurmountable difficulties [...] but are most exquisite things, of a limited size it is true." Prescribed in this instance by the technical cage (the lenses and film speed) and physical cage, Lake Price's experiments preceded the famous action photographs of Eadweard Muybridge. "Animals in caged menageries," noted Lake Price, "the attention ... may be fixed for two or three seconds — but then there is the disadvantage that they appear on the gridiron in the resulting picture as they have glared at the operation through the bars of their dens"⁵.

The print quivers with the details of the plumage, the texture of the feathers and bark-like quality of the birds' claws and legs, and speaks of the difficulty of seeing something like this image in a purely retinal way, with the complexity of extracting something focused, of an exercise with phenomena. By looking at constellations of focus, other murmurings can be heard, and logically, if the question of focus surfaces, it must also surface for others. The silence of *1st September*, in effect and affect, holds the tone as an image, "its most authentic aspect... is not to the interest and virtues of language, but to this silence; the power decisively to be still, so that in this silence what speaks, without beginning or end might take form as coherence and sense"⁶.

NOTES

1 Aura — as defined by Walter Benjamin in *Short History of Photography, 1931*. Eduardo Cadava comments: "Early photographs are described as having an aura, an atmospheric medium that lends them a phantasmatic, instantaneous, hallucinatory quality — a quality that, as he tells us, is "by no means the mere product of a primitive camera": *Words of Light, Theses on the Photography of History*, New Jersey, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997 pg 13

2 William Lake Price, *Part III, Manipulation, Part IV, Subjects: Their Nature and Treatment. The Manual of Photographic Manipulation: Treating of the Practice of the Art, and its Various Applications to Nature* (London, J Churchill, 1858) pg 97 – 136, pg 137 – 206

3 Ibid IV: Animals

4 Ibid

5 Ibid

6 Maurice Blanchot, *The Essential Solitude: The Space of Literature*, Trans. Ann Smock (Original Publisher, Gallimard 1955, Lincoln, London University of Nebraska Press 1982) pg 27

The Redstart

Phoenicurus phoenicurus phoenicurus, Linnæus

The opening rapidly warbled notes are so charming that the attention is instantly attracted by them.

They are composed of two sounds, both beautiful – the bright, pure, gushing, robin-like note, and the more tender, expressive, swallow-like note. That is all. The usual cries are a sharp "tick" often rapidly repeated and a soft "ptui".

Robin

Erithacus rubecula rubecula, Linnæus

A quiet melancholy, once seized and mastered, makes recognition easy and immediate, even when, as sometimes happens, the bird utters but a few casual notes. The usual cries are a sharp "tik" sometimes rapidly repeated: a long-drawn plaintive intense note, "ptzeeee", uttered when young are in danger and a "tsip" or "tsip-ip" or "tsis-ip" heard during territorial disputes.

Nightingale

Luscinia megarhynchos

The nightingale's song is heard by night and day. It is divided by pauses into separate strains, each strain being mostly a repetition of the same note or notes. The most characteristic are the

"jug-jug-jug-jug" and still more so, "the marvellous crescendo on a single note".

The usual cries are a croak-like "krrr" and a soft "weet".

Whitethroat

Sylvia communis communis, Linnæus

When disturbed the whitethroat utters a scolding "churr" as it slips in and out of cover. More intense alarm is expressed by a repeated sharp "tcheck" or "tchuck". The rendering of one song runs: "Wee-to-wee, wee-tee, wee-tee, wee-ter".

Blackcap

Sylvia atricapilla atricapilla, Linnæus

The song is a short sweet warble, perfect of its kind. Its most characteristic phrase is the final, described as loud, bright "hee-ti-weeto-weeto". The usual cries are a sharp "tack", rapidly repeated in moments of excitement and a churring note like "tcharr". A common subsong is an intermittent warbling.

Garden Warbler

Sylvia borin

The garden warbler's song is not unlike that of the blackcap, but it differs in being on average less mellow and continuing without pause much longer, sometimes for several minutes. The cries are a sharp "tak" or "tek", a "tchurr" or "tcharr"; also a plaintive "whit" or "bit", if the nest is approached.



Olivier Richon, *Ellipsis with crystal (up)*, 2010, chromogenic print

Tapestries, Room 94

The dim lights and the wall hangings that closely cover every wall provide a path into a space that is enigmatic, spectral and mysterious, where allegorical Medieval and Renaissance figures cling to images and thoughts akin to the dream-state of an accumulated metaphoric divide between day and night. A unicorn, associated with chastity and invulnerability, a virgin's mythical creature, is the central image of the millefleur, which includes small animals, birds and flora and fauna¹. There, the pale-horned unicorn rests — a gentle respite from what is to follow, as figures of the hunt seize sight and assault the senses with the spectacle of wealth, and the bloodiness of the hunt, images that factiously move mind and body from an airy moment to the spectacularised underworld. These allegorical drawings, realised as tapestries, and known as the *Devonshire Hunting Tapestries* (1425 – 50)², take the onlooker into a primal scene, bordering on hysterical fetish, but framed within the manners and stylisations of the Medieval court. The hunt and the overwhelming unsatisfied appetite of the court, leads a whole list of animals to be memorialised: boars, bears, swans, otters, deer, squirrels and more birds. The lists become a litany of consumption, and Homer's *Iliad* brings focus to the atmosphere of this work and of looking as a vocative experience.

As if diverting our eyes from the spectacle of excess, or honing our vision, to understand the minuscule details within the handwoven tapestry of silk and wool, the 'enargeia' of the tapestries is what implores the viewer to trace the allegorical figures and suggest a perspective of sight and meaning beyond the narrative. The poet Alice Oswald relays that the ancient critics praised the *Iliad* for its 'enargeia', which can be translated as something like 'bright unbearable reality'. In linguistic terms, the 'enargeia' in the *Iliad* is by Oswald's analyses, a bipolar view of similes and short biographies of the soldiers that derive from poetic sources. How this translates to the visual, is that the visual spectacle becomes an oral cemetery, a communal 'you' in seeing and speaking to the dead person, animal or bird.³

"Like restless wolves never run out of hunger
Can eat a whole stag
Can drink the whole surface of a pool
Lapping away its blackness with thin tongues
And belching it back as blood
And still go on killing and killing
With their stomachs rubbing their sides
Haunted by hunger"⁴

Enargeia, a dynamism, extends this possibility of a visual vocative or invocative view, of Medieval allegorical frame to a contemporary ocular language. To translate this 'bright unbearable reality', is to revisit the ocular beginnings of the photograph, and the brightness of mixing the colours on the glass plate by William Henry Fox Talbot in *The Pencil of Nature* (1844 – 48) (Museum No. 38041800157505), which illustrates photography's propensity for brightness and dynamism, in the chemicals of early photography. "Having spread a piece of silver leaf on a plane of glass, and thrown a particle of iodine upon it, I observed that coloured rings formed themselves around the central particle, especially if the glass was slightly warmed. The coloured rings shortly began to change colours and assumed others and quite unusual tints such as never seen in the 'colour of thin plates'. For instance the part of the silver plate, which at first shone with a pale yellow colour, was changed to a dark olive green, when brought into daylight."⁵

The animated energeia of the *Devonshire Hunting Tapestries*, can be recalled in Gustave Flaubert's '*The Legend of Saint Julian Hospitator*'. The origin of the short story, inspired by the coloured stained-glass window in Rouen Cathedral, describes the fate of Julian, a sadistic, obsessive hunter destined to murder his own parents. And while Flaubert's story follows the outline of the original legend, it is Julian's obsession with hunting, his "lascivious pleasure in the killing of small animals" which grows to such an extent that he "carves his way through the entire catalogue of the animal kingdom, beginning with a little mouse and ending with a large stag"⁶. Julian's sadistic fetish for hunting is an uncanny piece of dream-work by Flaubert. The work cites the wildness of the animals with the self-consciousness of the text, and while it is played out in the improbable circumstances of St Julian, the riddle or enigma juxtaposes the living and the dead together in a dark and enigmatic text. The photographer and writer Olivier Richon steps into the very fetish itself. "The immateriality of the fetish (Freud's notorious 'shine on the nose')," writes Leslie Dick "coincides with the materiality of the memorial, to make pictures that are simultaneously as light as air and as heavy as marble."⁷ The still-life photograph enters into the sobriety of the photographic studio and inverts the 'energeia' to a state of sloth or torpor or 'acedia', the word used by Richon⁸. Acedia, by association, not only describes a state of listlessness, but by suggestion an extended state of the stasis, the melancholic enigma of the still-life photograph.

When comparing *The Quarry* (1995) to Flaubert's *The Legend of St Julian Hospitator*, the 'energeia' of the 'hunt' and the killing of the stag expressed by Flaubert — "the stags driven to a frenzy by the onslaught, ran at each other, rearing up on their hind legs and trying to climb up each other. Their antlers became entangled and they fell together in tumbling writhing mounds of bodies" — the stage for Richon's *The Quarry* is stark. With its tongue visible, the fallen dead deer is in a sloth-like state, with one of its hind legs attached to the apparatus of the photographic studio. The lighting recreates the stage of the Dutch still-life painting and the dead stag mirrors the posture of Gustave Courbet's painting *La Curée* (1857), but the tension elicits a tautness that resides in the detachment of the eye. In the absence of other figures, the stag's position is jarring, an unsettled image where absence and stillness touch the outline of a limit. Linearity falters in the staging between the weight of the stag's head heavy on the ground, and the suspension of its hind leg raised, tied to a pole, in a conceit that belongs to the apparatus of the studio photographer. A display of contingency occurs between animate and inanimate, a very deliberate construction that in stillness acquires a kind of aura. Eugène Atget's photographs of the mirrored fireplaces at Ambassade d'Autriche, 57 rue de Varenne (1905)⁹, trace a similar immobility and extension of space within the still life and Atget's insistence of his work as documents is evidenced by the photographic equipment that was left to impinge on the image.

Richon does not uphold the document like Atget's photographer ghost, he returns the *The Quarry* and its subject, the stag, to the 'third meaning' within the image, to the fetish, the deep stain that refuses to go away. In our tendency to make something of the photograph, Richon constructs an acidity that is disjunctive and frustrates our impulses; he deliberately disavows a resort to the language of emotion and direct experience: instead the intent is to think or interpret, not to react and feel. The animal heightens this very tension, it is the figure of touch, the animate within the inanimate site of the photograph, but the visual trap has been set, and as, Richon knows, the photograph covers up the body of the rotting stag, and replaces the abject, stinking body with the pleasurable site of the preserved and constructed classical figure of the animal.

The tension does not purely reside in the animal, it is present in the temporal signs and the overlapping objects, the frisson of juxtaposition, of the still-life object that is the relic of photography's early images. Richon's playful appearance of the literary image in the still life of crystal glasses, *Ellipsis with crystal (up)*, and *Ellipsis with crystal (down)* (2010) revives Henry Fox Talbot's carefully placed salt and silver images of crystal glasses in *The Pencil of Nature*, but in Richon's view, there is an ellipsis within the diptych, that is not lessened by his lure of the blue velvet, upon which the glasses are placed. In the first picture the crystal glasses are upright, in the second they are down. The quotation from Marivaux's *In Praise of Nothing* (1737) and the wait of the ellipsis between the photographs recalls an act of indecision, of a saturnine acedia, where glasses can and do fall,

an unpredictable illusion of the thereafter. The mental images of the photograph are held in suspense and restrained in the excess of time; an inconspicuous stain of the fetish remains and the photograph dwells in "a true nothing that requires many nothings"¹⁰, an inverted relic of the Classicist's enargeia.

NOTES

- 1 Tapestry woven in wool and silk, circa 1500, Flanders (Museum No 232 – 1894)
- 2 *The Devonshire Hunting Tapestries* depicted hunting scenes of boars, bears, swans, otters, deer and falconry; probably made in Arras, France, they comprise of: *Boar and Bear Hunt*, 1425-1430 (Museum No. T204 – 1957) *Otter and Swan Hunt*, 1430 – 1440 (Museum No. T203 – 1957) *Deer Hunt*, 1430 – 1440 (Museum No. T205 – 1957) *Falconry*, 1430-1444 (Museum No. T202 – 1957) www.vam.ac.uk/articles/the-devonshire-hunting-tapestries
- 3 Alice Oswald, *Memorial, An Excavation of the Iliad* (London, Faber & Faber, 2011) pg 1 – 2
- 4 *Ibid* pg 81
- 5 William Henry Fox Talbot (1800 – 77), *The Pencil of Nature* (Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans 1844 – 48) pg 9
- 6 Geoffrey Wall in Gustave Flaubert, *Three Tales*, Trans. Roger Whitehouse (First Published as *Trois contes*, 1877, London, Penguin Classics, 2005) pg xxvi
- 7 Leslie Dick, *The Discovery of Curiosity in Olivier Richon, Real Allegories*, (Germany Steidl/Eskildsen Publishing 2006) pg 5
- 8 Olivier Richon "Acedia", *Ibid Projects*, London, 16 January – 23 February, 2013
- 9 Eugène Atget, National Art Gallery, Washington, USA
- 10 Quotation from Marivaux's *In Praise of Nothing* (1737)



Olivier Richon, *Ellipsis with crystal (down)*, 2010, chromogenic print

Goldcrest

Regulus regulus, Linnæus

The goldcrest's song is composed of "two notes repeated five or six times, and ending in a rapid trill". The little call notes are high-pitched, "like needle points of sound". One rendering is "tzit". The species has a second call note, "se-se-se" or "sre-sre-sre", which enters into the song. The bird has been heard to make "tiny little warblings quite unrelated to song".

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Firecrest

Regulus ignicapillus, Temnick

Firecrests' usual notes – a soft fine "tzit" and the "sre" – are like the corresponding notes of the goldcrest. The song is alike but shorter, lacking the cadence at the end; it consists chiefly of repetitions of the "sre" or "se".

Willow Warbler

Phylloscopus trochilus, Linnæus

The willow warbler's song is a rippling warble, short, sweet and somewhat plaintive, that gathers strength only to run gently down the scale and fade into silence. Between the songs may be heard a subdued whispering sound corresponding to that of the chiffchaff. It has been figured as "vip". Alarm note "hweet" and "whoo-it".

Chiffchaff

Phylloscopus collybita

The song of the chiffchaff is composed of a sequence of "chiffs" and "chaffs" in varying order. One individual began every phase with "chiff-chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff-chaff", but completed it with notes in varying order and number – eg "chaff-chaff-chiff-chiff", or again "chiff-chaff-chaff" or simply "chiff". A chiffchaff is heard to utter between its phrases a few low muttered notes as "hedededet" or "frui-frui". Usual note a soft plaintive "hweet".

Wood Warbler

Phylloscopus sibilatrix, Bechstein

Gilbert White described the wood warbler's song as a "sibilous shivering noise in the top of tall woods". It is figured as "ip, sip, sipp, sipsip, sipsipp, srrèèèèèèè". It is sometimes preceded by a loud clear note repeated, "whee-ou". The alarm notes are the plaintive "wheet", and another syllabled as "tee tee."

Reed Warbler

Acrocephalus scirpaceus

The song is a long crooning soliloquy in accents not sweet, but much less harsh and declamatory than those of the sedge warbler. The usual notes are a sound like "tschetch" and a "charr" or "churr".



Bill Brandt, *Gull's Nest, Late on a Midsummer's Night, Isle of Skye, Scotland*, 1947
gelatin-silver print, PH.458-1980

From out of the obscurity, a dark shape resolves its form as a gull's nest, on a rocky coastal terrace that divides land, sea and sky. Light-yellow/beige to dark-olive spotted eggs, laid after a 'choke' display. A lowering of cheeks, the gull's imitate the regurgitation of food with "a choking sound moving rhythmically with breast feathers puffed and necks tucked in. If they concur, both repeat this sign of approval and finish the shallow excavation, together, adding grasses, weeds, seaweed or sometimes rope and plastic, arranging these into a simple flat bowl with their bodies and feet.¹"

"I had discovered the eggs one sunny afternoon," wrote the photographer Bill Brandt on *Gull's Nest, Late on Midsummer Night, After James Boswell, Isle of Skye, 1947*. "But as the light was too thin, too flat and the nest looked too pretty for this very wild part of the island, I decided to come back in the evening. It was almost Midsummer night and the pale green twilight started rather late. When I approached the nest as on an isolated outpost of rocks, an enormously large gull, which had been sitting on the eggs, flew off and circled low around my head, barking like a dog. It was wind-still, the mountains of the Scottish mainland were reflected in the sea — the light was now just right for the picture.²"

An extract of James Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, Isle of Skye*, is placed to the left of the photograph, when published in *Literary Britain*, as text and image conjure Brandt's expression of atmosphere; "through a wild moor³" residues of mists, clouds and drizzle form a deceptive act, building to an excess of "what is not there"⁴, a barrage of gothic tracteries that accede to a shallow hollow. Cut to the voicings of a gull circling antagonistically defending its young and the peripheral sound-image enters the photograph to an experience outside the sphere of focused vision. "Across what distance in time do the elective affinities and correspondences connect?" wrote W G Sebald in *The Rings of Saturn* (1998) — a gull hurling alarm calls above its nest and towards the photographer elicits a space of airy volume.

NOTES

1 Sharon Beals, *Western Gull: Nests, Fifty Nests and the Birds that Built Them* (USA Chronicle Books, 2011) pg 107

2 Bill Brandt *Literary Britain*, Edited by Mark Haworth-Booth (Aperture Foundation, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1986)

3 James Boswell from *A Journal to the Hebrides, Literary Britain*, Bill Brandt *Literary Britain*, Edited by Mark Haworth-Booth (Aperture Foundation, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1986) Plate 5, Isle of Skye

4 Brian Dillon *Airlocked in Waterlog, Journeys Around an Exhibition*, Editors, Steven Bode, Jeremy Millar & Nina Ernst (London, Film & Video Umbrella 2007) pg 20



Josef Sudek, *Simple Still Life: Egg* c. 1955, gelatin-silver print, E.578-2014

Egg

An egg in the centre of the grain of wood, spiralling outwards. The egg is luminous, marked by the shadows and reflections of both surfaces, blurring the distinction between surface, wood and shell membrane. The egg holds a delicacy in its lines, defined against the circular markings of the wood.

The eye looks for a message, but cannot move beyond the restrictive space and subject matter of the image. The atmosphere is palpable. An area of possible clarity and coherence gives intense signification, pattern and aesthetic dimension. An entire environment rests on a delicate and ambiguous existence.

"Aristotle for some reason believed that eggshell was soft when it was laid and hardened as it cooled on contact with the air," notes the scientist Tim Birkhead "As William Harvey explains, this was because a soft-shelled egg would avoid causing the female any pain as it was laid, "in the same way that they say than an egg softened in vinegar can be easily pushed through the narrow neck of a bottle." Harvey comments: "I agreed with his opinion of Aristotle's for a long time until I learned the contrary by infallible experience. For indeed I have ascertained for certain that the egg in the uterus is almost always covered with a hard shell.¹"

The egg rests and floats gently, the rings at an angle move. The egg as a figurative figure appears as a planet or star in the solar system and the rings moving around and forward, a gravitational symbiotic suggestion.

"A momentous simplification of the world of Einstein's theory of gravitational relativity," writes Carlo Rovelli. "Space is no longer something distinct from matter, it is one of the 'material' components of the world. An entity that undulates, flexes, curves, twists. We are not contained within an invisible rigid infrastructure: we are immersed in a gigantic flexible shell. The sun bends space around itself and the Earth does not turn around it because of a mysterious force but because it is racing directly in a space which inclines, like a marble that rolls in a funnel. There are no mysterious forces generated at the centre of the funnel; it is the curved nature of the walls which causes the marble to roll. Planets circle around the sun, and things fall, because space curves.²"

Within the egg is a liquidity, a sensuality, rich and oozing but outside it is contained within this shell. The egg's hard surface can dissolve to reveal a luminous skin that is mutable and veils the egg's yolk or vitellus within: as the shell dissolves over days thousands of tiny bubbles cover the shell surface, changing in colour over time from silver to golden. The bubbles expand and rise over some days and the hard shell diffuses and dissolves when touched³.

Light ash tonal greys meticulously printed and soaked into the paper bear inwards so the interplay between materials is accentuated and reduced. A still life, animate and living. The grammar of the singular entering the duality of relation with another material. No more has the 'aura' created such an effect as when it appears no longer as a two-dimensional object. The potential of the 'O' of the open mouth, of the moment of utterance of speech. Everything is holding together in the direction of the wood, as it leans within a vertical slant, and this

creates a tension within the frame. A moment of the egg moving, rolling out of the inner and to the outer, the frisson is in the potentiality of tension, by the mere hint of a shift, of a pulse. There is even a sound within the frame of two surfaces moving and contacting in time.

106 An egg and a table, the simplicity of everyday food and home, of interior and exterior. The image contains a duality of relation; of an interior for the utility of human needs and an exterior that is the bird, the bird's nest and the tree. Two different registers are contained within the same frame, the same 'arrest' of experience. In addition, there is the volume and space through the experience of matter and space, our physical space. The texture of both surfaces is smooth, and so embodies a softness, though both materials are hard, the eggshell, and the wood surface. Whilst there is a physical monument of material, there is a containment of the image within the frame. To not disturb the arrangement of the egg and the table.

Endless time, time that envelops and holds, time that is eternally present. To disturb the image is to disturb time and the experience of time, a perspective that is "present, past and future". The outline of the egg has a resonance, and delineates this measure of space, of volume, the measure of the space within the egg and outside the egg. This measure continues with the wood and this relation continues with the rings of the world, that tie a linearity to trees, to years, whereby the rings of the wood suggest a different time, a grammar of grain, to the actual time contained within the space of the egg.

The egg grasps a time that is infinite and potential, whereas the outer time is measured and set: this passage of time has ended, another passage of time is becoming. Again, the image voices relation and duration, it voices the physical print, it voices the pressing of the image within the physical process of creating a photographic object, an indexical and analogous presence, described in a sympathetic mathematical equation that delineates how space bends around a star.⁴

$$R_{ab} - \frac{1}{2} R g_{ab} = T_{ab}$$

Egg is an image of equation and thoughts and it presents a magnification of infinite particles; it opens us to consider the relation between matter and how we experience or forget the moment of physical contact. Of waves and vibrations, the egg and the table become a composition, an acuity of vision, where the balance of the image is in doubt; a shift of the perspective plane and a curvature of space is voiced in relation to the objects.

NOTES

1 Tim Birkhead, *The Most Perfect Thing: Inside (and Outside) a Bird's Egg* (London, Bloomsbury 2016) pg 27

2 Carlo Rovelli, *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*. Trans. Simon Carnell and Erica Segre (UK, Allen Lane, Penguin, Random House, 2014/2015) pg 6

3 Edith M Pasquier — Experiment conducted over 5 days, Richmond London, 2017 to observe more closely, Tim Birkhead's commentary on the process in *The Most Perfect Thing: Inside (and Outside) a Bird's Egg*

4 Bernhard Riemann's mathematical equation known as Riemann's Curvature (though impossible to decipher unless a mathematician) is indicated by the letter "R". "Einstein wrote an equation which says that R is equivalent to the energy of matter... A vision — that space curves — becomes an equation... [...] ... to begin with the equation describes how space bends around a star. Due to this curvature, not only do planets orbit round the star, but light stops moving in a straight line and deviates." Carlo Rovelli, *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*. Pg 7 – 10

Dunnock

Prunella modularis

The dunnock's familiar song is a short, thin, but cheerful strain, sung from hedge-top or bush and appreciated chiefly because heard during seasons when birdsong is rare. The usual call is difficult to render: it is perhaps best described in Gilbert White's words, "a piping plaintive noise".

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Starling

Sturnus vulgaris, Linnæus

The starling's familiar song is a curious medley of whistles, clicks, "twips," "guks", "quertsees" and other unpromising sounds, which nevertheless, uttered in concert by hundreds or thousands of birds in their roost – reed bed, wood, or large building – compose a symphony. The usual cry is a harsh "kwrrr" uttered when the bird is disturbed; it is sometimes followed by a note like "whit, whit, whit".

Intense alarm is expressed by a high-pitched, metallic "kweek" or "kwik".

The anger note is a petulant scream: "kwi-hi-hi".

Rose-Coloured Starling

Pastor Roseus, Linnæus

A compound of "kritischs" and "tschirrs" and "etschs" and "retzs" and "tzwis".

The usual cry, "schrrr-tschorr-tschorr-scherr". The alarm note is "tschirr".

Golden Oriole

Oriolus Oriolus, Linnæus

The oriole's characteristic song is a loud, clear and very musical whistle of four or five varied notes, rendered by the Dutch as "weal-a-woe" and uttered from the tops of lofty trees.

Bohemian Waxwing

Bombycilla Garrulus, Linnæus

The usual note is a trill, a sequence of "s" and "r" sounds, not unlike the call of a tit.

Long-Tailed Tit

Aegithalos caudatus, Linnæus

The ordinary note, heard as the birds wander in flocks, is as a cheerful "tzee, tzee, tzee", followed at time by "tsirrip, tsirrip". The species has also a sharp, harsh little alarm note.

Marsh Tit

Poecile palustris, Linnæus

The song is "chit-a-bee-bee-bee-bee". Another song begins with "three to five 'see-ips'" and ends with "some half-dozen 'chips'". Usual call: a harsh "tchee tchee" or "tchee-tcheu" or even "let be" often followed by the first song as described above.



Roni Horn, *Untitled (To Nest)*, 2001, digital ink jet print, E.1574-2001

Eider Duck

Binomial name: *Somateria mollissima* (Linnaeus, 1758). Derived from Ancient Greek *somatos* 'body' and *erion* 'wool' and Latin, *mollissimus* 'very soft', all referring to its down feathers.

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"But I had seen first one and then another of the rooms in which I had slept during my life, and in the end I would revisit them all in the long course of my waking dream: rooms in winter, where on going to bed I would at once bury my head in a nest, built up out of the most diverse materials, the corner of my pillow, the top of my blankets, a piece of a shawl, the edge of my bed, and a copy of the evening paper, all of which things I would contrive, with the infinite patience of birds building their nests, to cement into one whole; rooms where, in a keen frost, I would feel the satisfaction of being shut in from the outer world (like the sea-swallow which builds at the end of a dark tunnel and is kept warm by the surrounding earth), and where, the fire keeping in all night, I would sleep wrapped up, as it were, in a great cloak of snug and savoury air, shot with the glow of the logs which would break out again in flame: in a sort of alcove without walls, a cave of warmth, dug out of the hearth of the room itself;..."¹

The bioscope of images that forms Marcel Proust's activity "to nest" creates a similar gathering of layers to the nest of the eider duck; a thousand or so small, brown, white and barred dark feathers plucked from the breasts of the female, to hold a large cream-coloured egg in its centre. The picture is twinned, a double of the image side by side: an ornithological detail held into conceptual effect, as the eider duck usually lays two or more eggs in the nest and practises kin-based female social structures which include laying eggs in the nests of related individuals². The title of the picture is *Untitled* but in parenthesis is *To Nest*. The image holds the grain of the iris paper on which it is printed, a blunt shroud of watercolour textures that dulls the sharpness of vision.

Untitled (To Nest). *Untitled*, a stasis of non-naming, an undoing of classification is conjunct with *(To Nest)*, the artist's 'inner speech', the making of the verb 'to nest': to do something, to use or build a nest, bird, animal or human, but it is also a process, to fit an object or objects inside a larger one. The layering and creation of a structure, a marking of a place. A place of incubation, a resting place. The duck's feathers, analogous with water, present the egg as floating, there is movement in the feathers and movement in the water, a symbol, a marker of the precariousness of relation to the landscape, to the bird, to the habitat of nesting. Nests are constantly in motion, the stillness of the photographic image denies the buffeted site, from movements of the bird and the weather. The physical solitude of the nest is in doubt and the movement of to nest is implied in the process of the kinetic encounter and the syntax of building structure upon structure.

Katabasis is a descent, a movement downwards, such as a sinking of the winds or the sun, but it is also a descent to the underworld, an intense register, experienced through loss. The nest and the feathers are a cartography of reverie and repose. The eiderdown plumage builds a harmony, a resting point between structures and materials. Without the feathers, the egg is exposed, a precipice appears, rocks, lichen and grasses. The nest suggests the ocular's perpetual relation to different types of matter; a surface of relations, the community of eider duck, the individual female, the egg, the feather, the down. The human relationship to the eider duck's feathers is intimate, used for centuries for sleeping with, a site of physical and emotional intimacy, a nudity exposed. The eider duck's plumage also resides in a mutable external landscape of air and water, the roughness of the terrain, and the exposure of the elements. The photograph intuits the identity of the photographic object that cannot be fixed and preens this fragile space within colour tones and sensations that evoke, earth, water and light, illuminating the egg with a mystical aura.

Memory is filtered through the object. At first sight the double image of the duck's nest invokes a sign of similarity, but that is not certain. The impression is that the double has been altered in some way and the doubling changes its emphasis to a comparison, to our need to compare, but also the relation between the two eggs and two nests, side by side. What is the proximity of both eggs, does the presence of two alter the grammar of one? Hierarchy is not implied as each element is similar, each egg holding its singular identity. The act of classification of naming a species, when 10,000 eider ducks hold this one name, the doubling signals a separate identity, away from the repeated one. The question becomes more of what is amplified in the image, rather than what is repeated. The double, a conceptual and aesthetic structure, holds a separation and space away from the lexicon of the double exposure, the coupling is not placing one image upon another.

As an ovoid shape, the egg alludes to an identity that is androgynous, the sex of the duck still to be determined. The encounter with the identity of the pair of images magnifies the complexity, of sameness and difference. Twins who don't need to talk, take their twin identity as intrinsic, they just *are*. The coupling of two images juxtaposes the individual and the collective; the subtle separation holds the line between both images to yield a transparency, a crossing between the lines. Eggs do talk to each other. The scientist Margaret Vince evidenced that eggs talk. "She noticed that if she held a Japanese quail egg close to her just before it hatched, she could hear a peculiar clicking noise. This sound is uttered by the chick between ten and thirty hours after it has pipped the shell and Vince realised that this might be how eggs in the same nest signal to each other and synchronise their activities... and either slow down or speed up the hatching process in adjacent eggs"³.

Untitled (To Nest) veers to a pictorial perfection, but it is the accidental elements of nature that make the image alive and imbue the picture with an airiness and space. The picture is of a place, a private place, and also of a nest. Photographed in Iceland by the artist Roni Horn, there is a personal and artistic dialogue of return, movement, place and home. Absence holds a register too, the egg is without its sitter and protector, the eider duck. The artist takes the role of temporary guardian, the double image becoming "This sign of return marks an infinite number of daydreams, for the reason that human returning takes place in the great rhythm of human life, a rhythm that reaches back across the years and, through the dream, combats all absence."⁴

NOTES

1 Marcel Proust, *The Way by Swann's, In Search of Lost Time, Part One*, Trans. Lydia Davis (Du Côté de Chez Swann first published 1913, Penguin Classics, 2003) ebook pg 126

2 Scottish Ornithologists' Club <https://www.the-soc.org.uk> and Scottish Wildlife Trust <https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk>

3 Tim Birkhead, *The Most Perfect Thing: Inside (and Outside) a Bird's Egg* (London, Bloomsbury 2016) pg 202

4 Bachelard, Gaston, *Nest, The Poetics of Space*, 1958: Trans. Maria Jolas, Forward, M Danielewski, Intro. Richard Kearney (London Penguin, 1964, 2014), pg 119

Blue Tit

Parus caeruleus, Linnæus

To the writer, the song of the blue tit has sounded like "Pwee, pwee-tee, tee, tee, tee, tee". It varies. A shorter form is "tit-tit-titee". The "r" note is also used by itself.

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Great Tit

Parus major major, Linnæus

The great tit's familiar ringing call has been figured in many various ways: eg, "Teacher, teacher, teacher, teach" or "Ching-see, ching-see, ching-see, ching-see".

It has another: "P'tsoo-ée, tsoo-ée, tsoo-ée". These notes vary a great deal. The alarm note: "Sha-sha-sha-sha-sha". The usual call can be imitated, by "lightly flicking glass with the edge of a wet cork".

Nuthatch

Sitta

The nuthatch's loud, mellow call has been figured as, "Be quick, be quick, be quick" or "Tewit, tewit, tewit", to which is added in the breeding season a clear long-drawn note, also uttered separately. The whistle is "protracted into a bubbling sound" such as the bird might be supposed to make "if it was rattling a pea in its throat". The male in company with the female has been heard making a soft-flutelike "Twi, twi, twi".

Bearded Tit

Panurus biarmicus, Linnæus

The call note is usually syllabled "ping-ping" which though expressive is inadequate to describe this vibrating sound; it is like the 'singing' of a bullet, or a pizzicato note on the violin". When alarmed they utter "p'whut", like the sound made by drawing a finger lightly across all four strings of a violin.

Red-Backed Shrike

Lanius collurio, Linnæus

The butcher bird's song is described as a series of warbling notes. The bird is a great mimic. The familiar alarm note is "chack". The call note of the male to the hen is "chee-uck" repeated; the call of the hen for food something like "chi-ee-i" or "chee-ay".

Great Grey Shrike

Lanius excubitor, Linnæus

The song of the species consists partly of imitations of other birds' notes and of warbled notes, including the ordinary call, syllabled "trouü".



Don McCullin, *Dead Bird*, 1972, gelatin-silver print, PH.1344-1980

Wings fanned in the snow, a finch lies, its breast and belly pointing to the insomniac's sky. The dusk or dawn of winter. Half of this ice-filled universe is filled with frozen stalks of hardy, sharp grasses, an alien topographical structure, swathes of frozen lines sweeping into a circular, scooping gesture.

A milk-light metamorphosis, a small elegant finch shaped into a broken moth-like creature suspended in a frozen lair. Rarely do you find a dead bird in such a dramatic posture, scoured by winds: the wings are generally closed, face to the ground. Death, the result of a tumble, of hunger or of sickness.

The sour of the dusk night allows a ritual, a gestural repositioning, to evoke a pause, a moment in the photographic mind, a humble reimagining of the bird in flight and in health. A liturgy for a living, vibrant song bird. Dawn or dusk — does it matter to the dead?

In this quiet time in the setting of a rural landscape — the bracken, the snow, the wild grasses and frozen geometries of wet snow — a small dark figure forms a magisterial fugue. A moment of tenderness, an intimate positioning, an epitaph of a lived life. Details are rubbed out by the dark chamber, but a translucency of the wings and feathers allows light to enter: black, grey and white hold a grammar of form, the melancholy of a 'portrait'.

The picture of one that is left behind, it announces the death of images. In this sense, photography is a mode of bereavement, it supports the irreducible relation between life and death that structures the photographic event. "The image wanders ghost-like through our present."¹

The finch is a farewell, it belongs to the 'afterlife' of the photographed.

NOTES

1 Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, Trans. Ed. Thomas Y Levin (Cambridge Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1995) pg 56



Masahisa Fukase, *Kanazawa, Raven Series*, 1977, gelatin-silver print, PH.7163-1987

The pictures that create the defining series, *Karasu (Ravens)* (1975 – 82) by Masahisa Fukase (1934 – 2012), evade a singular description absorbing a long, unsettled 'black ink painting', where the physical form of thought and non-thought mimic the morphology of the fairy tale, with the speech of the storyteller foregrounded in the avian 'play' with darkness. Ravens emerge through the darkness and through language, a Japanese fairy tale, *Kurayami no kuro ushi*¹, heralds the 'flashes' and 'sparks' that manifest and spiral throughout the visual text². The eyes of the corvids are the eyes of Fukase, a reflection of 'tabi-garasu' [literally meaning travelling-raven], of "birds caught in flight glistened with a dark sheen", bodies and figures that give the appearance of a bird about to take flight, of an indiscernible figure, a metamorphosed raven, playing with his 'black friends in the sky'.

'Kurayami no kuro ushi' (A black cattle from the dark)

Once upon a time in Japan, two painters and a man from Edo happened to share a room in a certain inn.

They started talking together and the man from Edo said, "By the way, what do you do in your life?"

One of the two painters proudly answered, "I am a painter. I draw pictures while travelling from country to country."

Then the other said, "I also draw. Travelling with my colleague, I draw beautiful sceneries." When the man from Edo heard their answers, he was vexed. So he lied, saying, "In fact, I am a painter too. I am a bit famous in Edo."

The two painters said, "What a coincidence! OK let's have fun drawing something to compare our skills!" "That's a good idea.

It would be a good occasion to see how a painter draws in Edo."

The man from Edo got annoyed with this proposal "(Oh my God, I know nothing about what drawing is!) But of course he couldn't say that he told a lie. So, he said, in order to gain a little bit of time, "Well, could someone start first of all?" Then one of the painters started drawing and he quickly finished a picture. It represented a mother who is giving food to her small child. It was quite nice work. But the man from Edo criticised the work saying, "It is strange that the mother closes her mouth. It is natural that parents open their mouths when they put food in children's, isn't it? Some more efforts, maybe?"

Then the other painter drew a lumberjack who is cutting a tree. His painting was also quite good. (Indeed, both of them are really fine as painters!) The man from Edo really admired their works in his mind, but with a disappointed look, he said, "It is strange that there are no wood chips left, even though the lumberjack cut the tree so much." The two painters were not happy with his sarcasm.

"So, now is the time for you to show us your skills. As you know how to comment precisely on our paintings, you must be a great painter!"

"OK." The man from Edo put plenty of ink on his brush and painted with it on a sheet of paper. The paper got covered completely with black ink. "Is this really a picture? It seems to me that you painted it all black." Then the man from Edo answered as if nothing in particular had happened, "Both of you have still a lot to learn if you do not see that this is a black cattle just coming out from the darkness!"³

The echo of another corvid fairy tale, where small perceptions of darkness are placed side by side to a nocturnal silence, of Daphne du Maurier's disquieting novelette, *The Birds* (1952). Swathes of darkness fill an epicentre of fear and disorientation, after long periods of waiting. The birds' wings, bodies, and cries fill the page with words of literal darkness so both tales, Masahisa Fukase's and Daphne du Maurier's, share a surface on the pictorial plane, one of flat illusion, a non-figuration that imposes a presence, a gloom of paralyses and absorption.

"Stumbling into their room, he felt the beating of wings about him in the darkness. The window was wide open. Through it came the birds, hitting first the ceiling and then walls, then swerving in mid-flight, turning to the children in their beds.

Nat seized a blanket from the nearest bed, and using it as a weapon flung it to right and left about him in the air. He felt the thud of bodies, heard the fluttering of wings, but they were not yet defeated, for again and again they returned to the assault, jabbing his hands, his head, the little stabbing beaks sharp as a pointed fork. The blanket became a weapon of defence: he wound it about his head, and then in greater darkness beat at the birds with his bare hands...

How long he fought with them in the darkness he could not tell, but at last the beating of the wings about him lessened and then withdrew and through the density of the blanket he was aware of light... the fluttering, the whirring of the wings had ceased.⁴

In Alfred Hitchcock's film, *The Birds* (1963), which retells Daphne du Maurier's story within the context of American society, it is the soundtrack and the visual drawings of birds, that layer the passages of darkness; of birds, gulls and crows storming the strips of celluloid, like a great wind, in undulations of sound. A twilight gloom creates a visual labyrinth to Fukase's language as the title sequence of *The Birds* is imposed upon a cold, white abstracted space where black crows flutter back and forth, out of focus and perspectively distorted. The anthropomorphic id has taken hold of the corvid figures and the irrational impulses rave and snap, so that birds, small or large, hold unhinged voids directly in the face of the onlooker. A hysterical manifestation of nervousness is performed and spectres of these dark flocks overlap and disintegrate, as if a rational consciousness is bitten to pieces by invisible birds.

Within the place of twilight and darkness, Masahisa Fukase's narrative returns; his recently found spiral drawings over the raven photographs echo the power of an obsessive fable, and one it appears he cannot leave. "It is the relation between filth and nature, which offers a model for artistic production"⁵, and Fukase's language draws deep into an abject melancholia, on that very site, to filth and nature, as "almost a disease"⁶. But Fukase never ruins the photograph as document, it is through the document that he speaks, it is through the document that he continually returns, and so the circular narrative of disorientation, disgust and abject survival continues, left in spiral markings over the image. The restlessness of darkness, a dimming of light, a disappearance of sight as a time of concealment breaks down identification and reduces the ecological understanding in the text, to rupture the series continuity of consciousness.

The 'blank' dark mottled page in *Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy* (1759 – 1767) is an echo of the man from Edo, whose 'black cattle are coming from the darkness' — both exhibit a play with language, with our visual expectations, and with artifice. Fukase laughs at times through *Ravens*, he plays in a symbiotic way, in the way that he knows how, by sublimating the use of the corvid language to create a voice of restless and gratuitous fantasy, which he understands, never delivers us to ourselves, or to him. Meaning always escapes into other meanings; if any power is given, it is through the 'fictions' and through the absence of what is said.

Ravens does not privilege sight, it privileges a visceral encounter, with the page of black ink, absolved in the Japanese tradition of sumi-e brush painting and calligraphy, an aesthetic grounding that is blurred within language and image, a physical silence, except for the whirring wind, and ghostlike texts that twist flight and imbue the series with recurring nightmares of death and isolation.⁷ This eeriness does not come from something invisible. "Here the invisible is what one cannot cease to see; it is the incessant making itself seen."⁸ The invisible is in the photograph, and so the return is to the mystery of the raven, of the bird.

Masahisa Fukase's 'boredom' in making the raven photographs pitches his hand to scribble and draw incessantly over the birds, making line drawings, a primal return to the pre-verbal self, that reveals an internal, unlettered verbosity that spirals into the night in which he is locked⁹. But the corvids do not hide, they do not appease the night. Fukase's 'flashes' and 'lightening', his startling images of flashed raven eyes are the ghosts, the ghosts of images of a self who resides in the night. With the ravens, Fukase crowds the pictures with the "terror of little images", and with the camera's flash he immobilises them and stops the oscillation of birds within the churring darkness. "It is empty, it is not," writes the philosopher Maurice Blanchot on night, "but we dress it up as a kind of being¹⁰". Fukase's own figure is camouflaged by the ravens, but he is revealed by a strange, almost disembodied song, rising and falling in the visual text: the image of the man singing in the rubbish, the birds singing, the girls laughing. These are not silent images, they are voicings, seeking to inhabit another topology. A concentration of movement, as associations swarm out of the darkness, exists as an eerie presence within the photographic image. The loss of light is total, but the raven and the darkness return.

NOTES

1 A Japanese Fairy Tale, 'Kurayamai no kuro ushi' or 'A Black Cattle from the Dark', As referenced by Masahisa Fukase in *Camera Mainichi*, November 1982, Mainichi Schimbunsha, referenced by Tomo Kosuga: *Solitude, Masahisa Fukase: Ravens* Mack Publishing, 2017

2 Masahisa Fukase in *Camera Mainichi*, November 1982, Mainichi Schimbunsha quoted by Tomo Kosuga, *Solitude, Masahisa Fukase, Ravens* Mack Publishing, 2017 pg 141

3 Translation by musician Seiji Murayami, August 2017

4 Daphne Du Maurier, *The Birds and Other Stories* (First published as 'The Apple Tree' by Victor Gollancz, 1952, London Virago Press, 2004) pg 4 – 5

5 Richon, Olivier, *Three Essays on Photography, Natürmort* (Encore Publishing 2005)

6 Masahisa Fukase in *Camera Mainichi*, November 1982, Mainichi Schimbunsha quoted by Tomo Kosuga, *Solitude, Masahisa Fukase, Ravens* Mack Publishing, 2017 pg 141

7 Mark Haworth-Booth, *Photography, an Independent Art: Photographs from the Victoria and Albert Museum 1839 – 1996* (Princeton University Press, 1997)

8 Maurice Blanchot, *The Outside, The Night: The Space of Literature*, Trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1982) pg 163

9 Masahisa Fukase in *Aperture* No. 129, Fall, 1992, referenced by Tomo Kosuga: *Solitude, Masahisa Fukase: Ravens* Mack Publishing, 2017

10 Maurice Blanchot, *The Outside, The Night: The Space of Literature*, Trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln University of Nebraska Press, 1982) pg 163



Frederick Sommer, *Jack Rabbit*, 1939, gelatin-silver print, E.996-1993

A Murder of Magpies

Collective noun: a charm, a congregation, a conventicle, a flock, a gulp, a mischief, a murder, a tiding(s), a tittering

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The sight of a 'murder of magpies' pecking at the flesh of a dead hare is an image not easily forgotten; persistent, frantic, noisily picking, with wings tumbled together as if sewn into the hare's body, the magpies' beaks and faces are not visible; the scene is suggestive of analogies of brutality, yet the event is a drove of birds feeding. Add an image in the Gloucestershire countryside of "a whole wheatfield scattered with black feathers, like burnt paper and fenced with the carcasses of corvae, strung up as a warning to others". And a further image, "One magpie approached the corpse, gently pecked at it, just as an elephant would nose the carcass of another elephant, and stepped back. Another magpie did the same thing. Next, one of the magpies flew off, brought back some grass and laid it by the corpse. Another magpie did the same. Then all stood vigil for a few seconds and one by one flew off²."

Within this *tableau vivant* of magpies, the images complicate the very analogies that assist us in defining magpie behaviour. "It is bad biology to argue against the existence of animal emotions,³" writes Dr Bekoff to those who see emotions in animals as being accused of anthropomorphism, of attributing human characteristics to animals. As animals ourselves, even within the confines of "umwelt", to enable the parameters and definition of analogy to be complicated allows a correspondence that suggests a mutable habitation of language, meaning and the event.

The author Kaja Silverman offers that, "Photography is an ontological calling card: it helps us to see that each of us is in a node in a vast constellation of analogies." The definition of analogy that she puts forward? "When I say "analogy", I do not mean sameness, symbolic equivalence, logical adequation, or even a rhetorical relationship – like a metaphor or simile – in which one term functions as the provisional placeholder for another. I am talking about the authorless and untranscendable similarities that structure Being, or what I will be calling "the world" and that gives everything the same ontological weight."⁴

It is the relationship between 'similarity and difference' that suggests a receptive, ontological expression in our relationship with images. What is at stake is the reciprocal relationship between photography and analogy to reveal what is seen in the world, with all the complications and complexities that connection entails. Silverman notes, "Similarity is the connector, what holds two things together, and difference is what prevents them from being collapsed into one. In some analogies these qualities are balanced, but in others similarity far outweighs difference, or difference similarity."

As we inhabit a "constellation" of analogies, it helps us recognise what we might otherwise foreclose.

There is an image of a growing desert that could unveil an unknown space, an excessive aridity of source. Nothing will grow but this drought, and it is in this drought that a mammalian figure is framed. Frederick Sommer's photograph *Jack Rabbit 1939*, a hare (*Lepus, Lazell*) on a desert floor, is taken from above — a bird's-eye view — the animal pulled open, out of the landscape into a site of arid surfaces. The jack rabbit

appears without flesh, and the vicissitudes of its skin, exposed over time, expiring in an unknown excess. The bones outline the figure, but the bodily surfaces, dissected and without contact to muscles, tissue and flesh, resemble sediments of geological strata. Each element is separated by the desert's composition, of dust and stone. The gelatin-silver print transcribes a flatness of view to create a repetition and strain, a presentation of air and space that is closed and exhausted. The hare's form is stamped within this alien universe, where the perspective plane owns the image to a surrealist eye and the effect of distance grows in this image of a growing desert.

"The image is always sacred," writes Jean-Luc Nancy. 'The sacred, for its part, signifies the separate, what is set aside, removed, cut off [...]. The sacred is what, of itself, remains set apart, at distance, with which one forms no bond (or only a very paradoxical one). It is what one cannot touch (or only by a touch without contact).'⁵ The sacred is then named by the philosopher as, 'the distinct'".

Jack Rabbit by Sommer is an image of distance, through the chimera of closeness, it is the opposite of what is near. Taken whilst walking, just months before the start of the Second World War, it is a still life, an image that is distinct, of a moment; it is placed outside and before one's eyes apart from the world of things, it is as Nancy notes "withdrawn from this world as it has no use, or a has a completely different use and is not presented as a manifestation". The tension within the image is of its separation. Within the image there is a grasping and this is the distinct, the power of its distraction.

The object, the photograph and the still life hold a grammar that grasps and is also distinct. In the writings of Jacques Derrida, it is suggested that we should understand tact, not in the common sense of knowing, but on how to touch, to touch without touching, without touching too much, where touching is already a 'too much'. By essence, by structure and situation, the endurance of a limit as such consists in touching without touching, the outline of a limit.

Contact as sensation is part of the world of light. Photography is a physical act, a reciprocal touching, luminous within the darkness whilst negotiating proximity and distance and tightening or softening focus. The photographer Jeff Wall writes in his 1989 essay *Photography and Liquid Intelligence*, "The explosion of the milk from its container takes a shape which is not really describable or characterizable, but which provokes many associations. A natural form, with its unpredictable contours, is an expression of the infinitesimal metamorphoses of quality."⁶ The fluidity of the image and the solidity of form are part of the language of the ocular. The liquidity of photography suggests an unpredictability, an uncontrollability, an element that is often associated with our affecting relationship to the animal. Kaja Silverman suggests that it is the liquidity that is a necessary counterpart to the 'dry' ocular form and cites Wall, "Th[e] expansion of the dry part of photography I see metaphorically as a kind of hubris of the orthodox technological intelligence which, secured behind a barrier of perfectly engineered glass, surveys natural forms in its famous cool manner."⁷

Liquidity, filled the "obscura", the observational tower, in which its users presided over the landscape. Silverman notes,

"A continuous stream of evanescent images entered the darkened space of the camera obscura from outside, dynamically analogizing its equally labile source, and encouraging the viewer to 'energise' the world by corresponding with it both physically and aesthetically. This liquidity washed away all of the distinctions on which modern subjectivity depends and rendered certain knowledge impossible, so seventeenth-century man attempted to 'ocularise' the camera obscura by substituting mental representations for the perceptual world and transforming the camera obscura into a device for arresting its image stream."⁸

The 'arrest' of the image and the 'liquidity' and 'coolness' of the camera obscura are present in the photography of Richard Learoyd's camera obscura chamber. *Dead Hare* (2013) is such an image that embodies this directness or 'arrest'. An instant image, taken with a flash, direct and positive with no negative, released from the camera obscura, to a print without grain, supplemented with the intense tones of the dye destruction paper.

The photographic image allows the privilege and the separation of 'speaking tenderly', as if to appease, the 'arrested' image of *Dead Hare* who is touched and disarmed, yet the image holds the very absence created in this chamber. The imagination touches upon the hare's powerlessness. It feels our own powerlessness. The imagination encounters that which it cannot, the impossible, for it encounters that which it cannot encounter; it accedes as such to the inaccessible, it attains and reaches and there it falls and comes into that which it cannot touch.

From the photographic print the *Dead Hare* holds a distinctive blue-green cast and the background is awash with a sea green, grey and milky white wash — to capture the fleeting tones, evoke the subtle shades, catch the imperceptible transparencies but also provoke an almost phantasmal perception in the viewer. Giving the gaze something hallucinatory, but sight is never touch. And the blood dripping from the dead hare's mouth, the blood that wets the stone. The stone is stained. The life seeps away. A mourning, the heavy weight of a dead animal, captive, a pedestal of images. The excess in question is indeed the untouchable; it is the excess of an inaccessible beyond, beyond a limit itself untouchable. This excess would indeed be the origin of the figural fiction of what we speak; touching, always by way of a figure.

Tenderness, softness, sight: an ideal place for encounters between aesthetics and pleasure, the discourse that exalts the power of colourist does through the celebration of the flesh. It expresses a wonder before the representation of a soft body that is not only tangible, but even sensual, a body offered to the eye like an object of contemplation and desire.

"The stone is without word. The stone is lying on the path, for example."⁹

The 'distinct' body of the hare. Within the reverie, the daydream, we are stopped short, denied, awoken to the image and its denial of narrative. All bodies, each outside the other, make up the inorganic body of sense. The stone does not have any sense. But sense touches the stone: it even collides with it, and this is what is happening here: sense is touching. The stone is without word. The hare is without word.

"We can say that the stone is exerting a certain pressure upon the surface of the earth. It is touching the earth. But what we call touching here is not a form of touching at all in the stronger sense of the word. The touching implied in both cases is above all not the same as that touch which we experience when we rest our hand upon the head of another human being. Because in its being a stone it has no possible access to anything else around it, anything that it might attain or possess as such."¹⁰

The blood of the hare. All bodies, each outside the others, make up the inorganic body of sense. The stone does not have any sense. But sense touches the stone: it even collides with it, and this is what is happening here, sense is touching. With sense, one must have the tact not to touch it too much. The life of the living dissolved in dead wet eyes. A still life emerges from the spectacle. Amidst the reverie, an image of disavowal remains.

Aside

A 'temporary object' on display in the Victoria and Albert Museum, a figure of a golden hare with jewels designed by Kit Williams in 1976, its whereabouts hidden in the book *Masquerade*. The hare had been seen many times and for many years. The hare, not golden, but large and brown, long-eared, bounding lightly through childhood. Of an England nostalgically tied to William Morris, it danced and laughed at the 'untruths' that became embedded into one's innocence. How far away was this hare from the 1970s urban metropolitan life. How distant were those homogenous green pastures from a diverse identity. Protests tore out the English roses from their hedgerows but in this idyll the leaping hare found; no Vietnam, no Martin Luther King, no Mohammad Ali, no student protests, no photographic flâneurs of the street, no three-day weeks, no 'Bloody Sunday', no bombs, no Notting Hill Carnival, no miners' strikes, no clashes or riots that were part of British life. The mythical figure, the brown hare, bounding across the night skies and boxing on spring days; and if there was an awkwardness, a disquiet of sorts, it was not fully realised, only later in consciousness, but in a child's mind for a 'flash', in an 'instant', the hare was brown, living and wild, leaping into an 'aura' that had already vanished.

NOTES

1 Anne Rowe, Book Review, Mark Cocker, *Crow Country*, 2 August 2007, *The Daily Telegraph* newspaper

2 Dr Bekoff, *Magpies Feel Grief and Hold Funerals*, 21 October, 2009, *The Daily Telegraph* newspaper

3 Ibid

4 Kaja Silverman, *The Miracle of Analogy or The History of Photography, Part 1*, Stanford, CAL; Stanford University Press, 2015 pg 11

5 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, Trans. Jeff Fort (Fordham University Press, 2005) pg 1

6 Jeff Wall, "Photography and Liquid Intelligence" in *Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York, Museum of Modern Art, 2007) pg 109 – 110

7 As cited by Kaja Silverman, *The Miracle of Analogy or The History of Photography, Part 1*, Stanford, CAL; Stanford University Press, 2015 pg 63

8 As cited by Kaja Silverman, *Water in the Camera, The Miracle of Analogy or The History of Photography, Part 1*, Stanford, CAL; Stanford University Press, 2015 pg 69

9 Martin Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Basic Writings, Ed. David Farrel Krell (New York Harper Collins, 1993) pg 172

10 Ibid



Bryn Campbell, *Mentally Backward Man in Hostel*, 1973, gelatin-Silver Print, E.86-2006

A yellow canary. The spring sun, and an image forms beneath the eyelids, grains of colour, uneven, alive, within movement, an effluent energy, as light moves. The repeated image, a coda: colours form a skein in the mind's eye, one of yellow, a sharp citron yellow, an after-image of the yellow bird, a canary. The colour slides from rust, to red, to burnt orange, to seared yellow and then to an acid yellow. The bristling movement of the bird, at first alarmed to the unfamiliar landscape — of faces peering — its breath fidgety and loud, it moves furiously between the two perches of its cage. Speaking softly to the bird seems to calm it, and it takes time to settle. Would it ever settle, the restless ticks, repeating nervously, the wonder is, if it will settle on its own or if somehow it has been pushed beyond where it was willing to go. In the end, silence and stillness, as the bird is left quietly in the space, and this appears the strongest thread of communication. But looking back, the bird is familiar with being looked at, its flustered feathering a reaction in part from being taken away from the community of birds, its fellow caged flock. This singular body, this focalisation, is different in behaviour to a wild bird — except maybe in the throes of a song — as the canary is familiar with taking its place as a singing spectacle.

Henry Fox Talbot notes, in *The Pencil of Nature* (1844), the nebulous qualities of tint and the tone of colour, in photography's early beginnings. The subjective eye is approached when Talbot writes on colour, and how ideas of uniformity are out of grasp, unattainable. "These tints", Talbot writes "might undoubtedly be brought nearer to uniformity... [...], it was found that opinions offered nothing approaching to unanimity and therefore, as a process presents us spontaneously with a variety of shades of colour, it was best to admit whichever happened to be pleasing to the eye, without aiming at uniformity, which is hardly attainable."¹ A haptic quality enters into the encounter with process of the photographic object, and by suggestion the encounter with the subjects within the picture, a lack of uniformity, brings forth the idea that the photograph is a spontaneous site of light writing, variance and the subjective voice.

The encounter with the caged, brightly toned bird, holds a spontaneity that is various; the restless temporal world feels silenced by a vision sharpened to the particular, to the bird in the cage. This constrained acuity of sight suggests a detachment and a relation within tones of light and shadow that sometimes 'confuse the subject'. The after-image of a person standing or sitting beside a caged bird, usually within an interior, strikes one. "Nor is it very mysterious", writes Walter Benjamin in *A Berlin Chronicle*, "since such moments of sudden illumination are at the same time moments when we are beside ourselves, and while our waking habitual, every day self is involved actively or passively in what is happening, our deeper self, rests in another place and is touched by the shock, as is the little heap of magnesium powder by the flame of the match." And so memory is bitter-sweet, as it is not fused only in the remembering but that "of possession in memory."²

The bird as possession is affecting, as a flash and as a snapshot through the photographic archive: person and bird separated by a cage. The lively, living bird confined within the aviary. The image of a caged bird is a coda that repeats within the viewing of the photographic archive. An unwitting refrain, a tableau that chimes from past to present, an active participle, building an expectation that the image will be there, in the here and now of the future. The spectacle of the caged bird and simulacrum of exchange is tied to the very encounter that takes place in this pure limitless place which is the surface of the eye.

To begin to write the bird, the image and gaze, is to pass from the first to the third person, so that what happens to me happens to no one, it is anonymous as far as it concerns me, repeats itself in an infinite dispersal. To stay in touch, through language, in language, where the thing becomes the image again, where the image becomes an empty opening, the philosopher Maurice Blanchot suggests to write is to "let fascination rule language".

A site of fascination and of the gaze as a pathway of thought is Bryn Campbell's '*Mentally Backward Man in Hostel*' (1973). The language of the title is alarming, it makes an uncomfortable judgement on the subjects in the photograph, the man and the canary and the site of the encounter. There is an awkward embarrassment to speak out loud this title, as though it diminishes, even ironically, the very voice of the subjects. The title's historicity does not change the difficult tone; as a viewer, the linguistic naming within the pictorial creates a complicity of relation between the viewer, the man and the canary. The gelatin-silver print refuses a colour or tone to the bird, so we may surmise it is a yellow canary. Taking Blanchot's suggestion that fascination rules language, the picture presents a touching fascination between both man and bird, and the thinking that is not uttered, not articulated, but that takes place and sees itself unthought.

Here, the document holds a contradictory place, it concedes a secrecy within the linguistic reference — we can never know what is voiced between man or bird, nor necessarily should we — and suggests the oddities of the photographic object, as in its secrecy resists reproduction and circulation. The gaze remains the point of intensity, and the voice unsteadies the document, to a place of caution and judgement. The loss of both subject's autonomy rests, in this document, on the tension between word, image and text as the 'voice' becomes a radical site for speech and thought, unsettled and alive.

The nature poet John Clare gave the impression of poems that were 'live' and unsettled. His depression-like illness had him committed to the Northampton General Lunatic Asylum, where he died in 1864. The first line in *To John Clare*, "Well, honest John, how fare you now at home?", proposes a transparency in voice and verse, that characterised his work. Clare's poems on birds and nests, his narrative detail and observation, synthesises seeing and writing, he build the poems up "pentameter by pentameter, with no stanzaic separation, until we find ourselves orbiting and connected again to the secret in the world that is precious, even erotic:

And in the old hedge bottom rot away
Build like an oven with a little hole
Hard to discover — that snug entrance wins
Scarcely admitting e'en two fingers in
And lined with feathers warm as silken stole...³

John Clare's mimetic writing shares certain similarities to the photographic language, with his uncanny intimations of subject and voice, but it is the precariously balanced enigma and affront that taunts the reader with 'aggressive and transgressive intelligence⁴', a radical voice, that embodies a variant of tone, which in relation to the early processes of photography, is out of grasp, spontaneous and lacking uniformity.

NOTES

1 Talbot, William Henry Fox (1800 – 77), *The Pencil of Nature* (Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans 1844 – 48) pg 11

2 Walter Benjamin *TA Berlin Chronicle Reflections, Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* trans. Edmund Jephcott, Ed. Peter Demetz, Preface Leon Wieseltier, USA (Schoken, Random House, 1978, 1986, 2007) pg 57

3 Extract from First Stanza, *The Pettichap's Nest*, John Clare (1793 –1846) John Clare, Paul Farley, Ed. (London Faber & Faber, 2007) pg 63

4 '*John Clare Prog*' Seamus Heaney, Oxford 1992 'John Clare a Bicentenary Lecture'

Pied Flycatcher

Ficedula hypoleuca

The song of the pied flycatcher is "Tchéetle, tchéetle, tchéetle, diddle, diddle, dee". The first three notes at times sound like "te-chéetle".

The second half of the song is a "delightful descending cadenza, but uttered so rapidly that it sounds more like a trill on some very delicate wind instrument. The usual note is soft short "whir" or "wet", followed by a lower; but exact information seems to be lacking.

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Swallow

Hirundo rustica, Linnæus

The song of the swallow is a musical twittering; it is composed of variants of the usual call interspersed with little harsher trills, and is uttered by the bird whether perched or on the wing. The usual call of twitter has been described: "weet-a-weet", "feet-a-feet" and the like. When alarmed the bird utters a shrill double cry as it swoops down upon the intruder.

Great Spotted Woodpecker

Dryobates major, Linnæus

The note is a sharp "kik" or "chik" uttered as a rule singly and only used as an alarm note. In the breeding season the bird may frequently be heard "drumming", ie, making a rapid tapping or tattoo with the tip of its beak on dead timber. The bird also has a loud rattle.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

Dendrocopos minor

The usual note is a rapidly repeated "kink" or "keek". The bird makes a "drumming" noise by extremely rapid tapping with the tip of its beak on dead timber.

Green Woodpecker

Picus viridis

The usual note is "a sort of loud and hearty laugh", an ancient rendering which has given the bird one of its popular names, a "yaffle". The bird also occasionally drums. In courtship, one of the pair, probably the male, utters a soft "twee, twee, twee".

Wryneck

Jynx torquilla torquilla, Linnæus

The wryneck's loud ringing "quee, quee, quee, quee" is heard until the migrations. It "hisses" when disturbed in its nest-hole. The nestlings make a sound like the "jingling of silver coins".



Neeta Madahar, *Sustenance*, 114, Massachusetts, 2003, iris ink-jet print, E.3579-2004

Thrushes

A raucousness of voices, American goldfinches, American robins, Baltimore oriolas, black-capped chickadees, blue jays, brown-headed cowbirds, Carolina wrens, cedar waxwings, chipping sparrow, common grackles, downy woodpeckers, eastern bluebirds, eastern phoebes, European starlings, northern cardinals, northern mockingbirds, mourning doves, red-winged blackbirds, white-breasted nuthatches, lampooning the bird-feeders¹. Befitting their relative physical proportions, the larger thrush calls are coarser and larger, they have a jarring quality, an element of awkwardness, a force of effort is needed and jarring notes are a permanent activity of the anxiety-filled force-field. Two, three, or four fight over seeds for minutes on end, each lunging alternatively at the other, as if strings controlled the rise and fall of their squabble. Feeding, gulping simultaneously, heads and throats quiver, as they gorge on the seeds and fat. Skipping high overhead in threes and fours and fives calling, seep, seep, seep, irregular wingbeats, the underwings of these snappy thrushes, hunt down the food of the trees, until the trees are bare. Up there, among the rocking branches, hurling out, a rattling call of defiance that might be heard over all the other birds: the urgent demand of thrush hunger.

The wildlife feeding stations in the vibrant iris prints of the artist Neeta Madahar are compositions of sound, site and home. The images of migratory birds in Framingham, Massachusetts, America, are trails and traces not only of huge distances but of small places. "Those birds were never in a state, where they didn't know where they were, or where they were going. Every centimetre of untrammelled, anonymous ocean, the crushing solitariness of the odyssey itself, was made routine by an infallible instinct for home."² Within the green foliage of late spring, the spring migrants feed with abundant ferocity and it is to the sound of the image, that the eye and the ear are tuned. The orientation of differing focus allows the ocular and the auricular to converge within an intimate fragment of an individual landscape.

To see the bird is to hear the bird. "Nothing is moving, yet there is infinite movement," the artist Yve Lomax writes, suggesting the grammar of the contradiction. "A realm, where everything and nothing is taking place."³ A mobile fresco to dress the image, the song, appears and disappears, but it remains in the image. The pictorial reinforces the songs, and the community of birds delivers a diverse soundscape of individual voices. Within the ontological of tonality, what does it mean for the image to be immersed entirely in hearing a photograph, what resonates within the image of sight, is the sonorous register one of tense and attention as the philosopher, Jean-Luc Nancy states in *Listening*.

The image is filtered by the visual intensity of the birds and the chaotic branches of the tree, to fill an intensity within the sensory apparatus, and demand the attention of 'stretching the ear', to hear what the image cannot be without, to hear the poet TS Eliot's "auditory imagination" within the visual syntax of the picture. The "auditory imagination" is the critical formulations, "the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back⁴". Here the image and the event captured, "brings into half-deliberate play; thinking of the relationship between the word as pure vocable, as articulate noise, and the word as etymological occurrence, as symptom of human, memory and attachments"⁵.

It is in this interpretation of the "auditory imagination" that to return to the image of the birds is to return the echoes of the voicings. The sounds that are making themselves heard are the sounds that can be seen and touched, that approach and stay, but also hide. The birds are "speaking out loud" in the manner of Flaubert and, as Jean-Luc Nancy concedes, that of the poet Francis Ponge, "for speaking is already its own listening — is the echo of the text in which the text is made and written, opens up to its own sense as to the plurality of other senses. It is not, and in any case not only, what one can call in a superficial way, the musicality of a text; it is more profoundly, the music in it, or the arch-music of that resonance where it listens to itself, by listening to itself, finds itself, and by finding itself deviates from itself in order to resound further away, listening to itself before hearing/ understanding itself, and thus actually becoming its 'subject' which is neither the same as nor other than the individual subject who writes the text."⁶

There are moments of 'silence' and these provide punctuation. Birds do not sing or call continually, there are breaks of sound within the image and this opens up 'sense'. The depth of field and differential focus allow for auricular winds and the encounter of temporal registers that arrange silence and sound within the image. The image is not a picture of constant sound, it has a wider cast of auric landscapes within it filling the air. The song, the site of the familiar over the vast and unfathomable unknown is one, and another is the capturing of the song within the image, an 'architecture of noise', a casting off, of the visual textures that sound. The song is a site of migration, of the moving between here and there between place, between the here and now of the image. This sense of modalities corresponds to a cultivated and primeval landscape, where birds cry out and horizons endure, where the voice is a wanderer among things. Within Madahar's picture, the air is not menaced, it is hospitable to human and avian presence, and the artificial lighting that supports the image gives the picture a glaze of unreality, of an imagined force of the photographer's possession of her histories, of her vocalisations in the pattern of the spring migration. The landscape is dominated by the pastoral vision of the garden; this is not an image of the untamed heath, but the vision is over to an unfenced existence, over floatings of bird life.

Photography is an index of markings, its beginnings trace the marks of place within the landscape, and in this return to the event of making a picture, to the very site of the ocular desire of taking root within the landscape, to mark out the ground upon which we stand. To the image of birds feeding, there is a transience in this relationship to the landscape, a flightiness, that connects site to site and path to path; paths of connection and dispersal that have been drawn for decades from the immediate environs of the bird's own nesting site to the outer cast of landscapes and continents. This transience is halted by a pause, by a rest, by time to feed, by a pause between notes, and in this site, of extended suspense, the phenomenology of listening accedes to a juncture of mediation or concentration.

"What I do with words is to make them explode so that the nonverbal appears in the verbal, that is to say that I make words function in such a way that at a certain moment they no longer belong to discourse [...] And if I love words it is also because of their ability to escape their proper form, whether they interest me as visible things, letters representing the spatial visibility of the word, or a something musical or audible"⁷. The observations of the philosopher Jacques Derrida's picture of words, elaborate upon the vocal terrain of avian life, a receptivity to pictorial and linguistic verbalisations of birdsong and calls.

To transcribe is to translate 'sound', it is to write the image into a soundscore. Is the score a pictorial inscription that creates the fluidity of 'free improvisation' as mode of musicality within the image. *8 ways of listening to a blackbird* by the sound artist Ross Lambert is an exercise in notating and drawing birdsong, a circular lexicon of imagination that could be instituted in an image of concentration found in Gaston Bachelard's phenomenology of space, *The Poetics of Space*. Lambert records, "I drew these expressions of blackbird song, while on a coach, listening to a Youtube clip of a blackbird song on my phone, with my eyes closed. It was between the stops at Aughnacloy and Monaghan Bus Station — where there is a comfort break — travelling south on the Bus Eireann No.32 service from Letterkenny to Dublin Busaras on Sunday 23/7/17."

Bachelard fills his reveries on roundness and the 'roundness' of the bird — as an image of being — with the writings of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke and the writer Jules Michelet in *The Bird* used to exemplify "a centralization of life guarded on every side, enclosed in a live ball, and consequently, at the maximum of its unity". The bird as the 'image of being' appears for Bachelard in Michelet's fragment, "The bird and divine summit of living concentration. One can neither see, nor even imagine, a higher degree of unity. Excess of concentration, which constitutes the great personal force of the bird, but which implies its extreme individuality, its isolation, its social weakness."⁸

The temporal dimension defines the spacing of sounds within the pictorial plane in the visible distraction of the birds swinging on the fat ball cage. The dictum 'the ears don't have eyelids'⁹, confides that to shut out the sound from the image, the eyes have to close, but the echo of the sound will stay present until a visual or verbal interruption ruptures the soundscape.



Ross Lambert, *8 Ways of Listening To A Blackbird*, photocopy sheet, Northern Ireland, 2017

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- 1 *Birds of North America and Greenland*, Ed. Norman Arlott, Princeton University Press
- 2 Mark Cocker, *Crow Country* (London, Jonathan Cape, 2007) pg 12
- 3 See, Yve Lomax, *A Twittering Noise: Sounding The Event, Escapades in Dialogue and Matters of Art, Nature and Time*, New York (London, IB Tauris 2005) pg 8
- 4 Seamus Heaney, *England of the Mind*, Heaney, Seamus, *Finders Keepers, Selected Prose, 1971-2001*, London, Faber & Faber, 2002, ebook, 2010 pg 255
- 5 *Ibid* pg 256
- 6 Nancy, Jean-Luc, *Listening*, Trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York, Fordham University Press 2007) pg 35
- 7 Jacques Derrida, *Between Translation and Invention: Copy, Archive, Signature, A Conversation on Photography*, Ed. Gerhard Richter, Trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford, California, Stanford University Press 2010) pg xvii
- 8 Gaston Bachelard, trans. Maria Jolas, *The Phenomenology of Roundness: The Poetics of Space*, 1958: Forward, M Danielewski, Intro. Richard Kearney (London Penguin, 1964, 2014) pg 252
- 9 Nancy, Jean-Luc, *Listening*, Trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York, Fordham University Press 2007) pg 14

Nightjar

Caprimulgus europæus, Linnæus

The nightjar's well-known churring song is composed of two notes which alternate, one in a lower key than the other. It is uttered when the bird is perched on the tree, also before it alights, or after it takes wing, and on the ground. The "churr" is followed by other notes which are difficult to describe.

It may continue for some minutes. It is best heard just after sunset; it is also heard before dawn and occasionally in the daytime. The usual note uttered by the bird in flight is "we-ip".

The alarm note is "kwik, kwik, kwik". The food call to the chick is "kourrr".

The birds make a clapping noise by smiting their wings together over the back.

Long-Eared Owl

Asio otus, Linnæus

The long-eared owl's song is composed of 'flute-like repetitions of "ooh, ooh", uttered so softly that often they are a mere sigh. The same "ooh" is a warning or alarm note. The hunting cry is a mewling sound.

They produce a "quacking" note, syllabled as "kyak".

Tawny Owl

Strix aluco

The tawny owly nightly sings "Tu-whit, tu-whoo", a merry note, while "greasy John doth keel a pot".

The song consists of a prolonged "hou" after which comes a long note that quavers to a full close.

The usual call note is a sharp "ke-wick".

Kingfisher

Alcedo atthis ispida, Linnæus

The three notes commonly used by male and female: "tee" usually single; "tiptee" repeated; "tip" or "chip" repeated. All three may be uttered in the order given. The male has a nuptial song:

a rapid "tee, titi, titi, titi". The note of the nestlings is a "curious low humming noise rather like that emitted by a swarm of bees".

Cuckoo

Cuculus canorus, Linnæus

The well-known "cuckoo" is uttered by the male cuckoo only; it is heard from the first half of April to the end of June and sometimes later. That the bird 'changes tune', refers to the rapid, excited "cuck-cuckoo". Another note sounds like a rapid, hoarse coughing, "whuff, whuff, whuff, whuff"; it often precedes the "cuckoo" and is uttered by itself. A third note, a clear, liquid, bubbling sound, is peculiar to the female and often uttered after laying an egg. She utters, besides, a mewling note when she is watching her destined dupes. The "cuckoo" may be uttered with beak part open or closed.



Jennie Baptiste, *Pinky*, London, England, 2001, chromogenic print, E.970-2010

Portrait Miniatures, Room 90A

The illuminated museum cases of miniature portraits quiver in the gloaming. Dawn and dusk strike a key of attuning focus and heighten an aura of presence. Time is stilled even in a simulated twilight. A myopia creeps into the crepuscular world as invisible details seem to unravel in the lack of light and flakes of inanimate slippages dart at the visual grasp. It could be said that a pleasure and a tension slide into the space of dusk, where time appears to bend to an elsewhere secured in nature's mesh and one's visual grasp of a familiarity falls away. The light ebbs and other senses appear to ascend in the assemblage of twilight — hearing is one such sense. Sound is sometimes the only interlocker to the passage of what is within the surrounding environment, as the imagespace meets the inner recesses of vision. "A startling-whoosh in my inner ear," writes the poet Michael Longley in the concluding line of his poem *Bird-Watching*.¹

This is the stage of sight for the miniature images of faces and scenes. There is a stillness conjured in this place of light boxes with chained magnifying glasses to afford a better view. A "dialectic of standstill" and the "darkness of the lived moment," as expressed by Walter Benjamin, enters this site of images. The room in the history of photography appears as a "pictorial atlas" of a secret history, a "darkroom of the lived moment", in which, in the language of photography in Benjamin's terms, each photographic image can be understood as historical. The image's aliveness is always evidenced in the present; "things as they have been can only be figured with and as an image of the past for and in the present", Benjamin states, "for it is an irretrievable image of the past that "threatens to disappear" and of the "innumerable negatives" that have built the singular image."²

This 'darkroom of secret histories' in Room 90A: Portrait Miniatures has a lineage to the history of photography and to the bird and animal as a repository of images. By extending the figure of the bird into Room 90A, an invitation of multiple flows and rhythms, natural cycles and organic processes, the portraitist's images become no longer a reflection or reproduction, but a space that holds an 'image-flesh' to what is experienced. In looking for the 'voice' within these miniature individual portraits, the "innumerable negatives" that create the singular image appear. On the representational level, the bird enters the space of the portrait within a familiar allegorical route of a picture of a young child holding a songbird, a nightingale. In image terms, the focus lies in the very material that comprises the images of these tiny figures, and it makes for a surprising pictorial atlas.

Within each image, the 'pictorial atlas' holds the trace of birds, animals, insects, minerals inscribed into every portrait within the museum's room, as no portrait image could be made unless the vellum or skin of the animal was used for painting — either the skin of bird or an aborted calf and later the tusks of an elephant. The brushes used the hair of squirrel and the teeth of stoats.³ The watercolour pigments came from insects and minerals and the glaze from natural minerals. The human figure is tied to the animal figure in an extraordinary act of symbiosis.

The trail of organic animal material creates a performative trace of the bird or stoat or calf, subtly embedded into the marks, lines or strokes in the creation of these miniature physical representations. So while the human faces have a ghostly hold, they hold an "image-flesh" that hides beneath the reality of a painted face and this is not visually discernible; like an invisible mirror to a second quite different reality where the human face, or even an image of a nightingale holds a multiple-layered image, of the skin of a calf, the tusk of an elephant,

the blood of an insect, or the shell of a mussel to demarcate what it is that we see. The portrait miniature is an object that involuntarily carries the aura of the bird, animal, insect or plant and without the bird, animal or insect or plant — there is no picture.

This symbiotic relationship between the human figure and the animal figure is dismissed when the human and animal figures are dissolved in baths of silver and chloride. The photograph, courtesy of the daguerreotype, enters the portrait scene in 1839, and the painted miniature is eclipsed nearly immediately by the miniature photograph, which lights all the details in a silvery fixed image. With the invention of the daguerreotype by Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre (1787 – 1851), the writer Paul Valéry states, "Man's way of seeing began to change and even his way of living felt the repercussions of this novelty, which immediately passed from the laboratory into everyday use, creating new needs and hitherto unimagined customs. Now everyone had his portrait done: a luxury once reserved for the privileged few... Not one event in human existence went unrecorded in some snapshot."⁴ Valéry suggests the image in relation to history becomes something like a picture-book or a stage performance.

The ghostly quality of the painted miniature holds an auric link to the ghostly quality of the daguerreotype. Where does the shimmering aliveness in the image reside? Does it hold its effervescence in the drama of the darkened lit room by emulating dusk or by revealing the fragile and intimate minuteness of the tiny brushstrokes of the figures? Within the portrait miniatures, perhaps it is the material of the ghostly bodies of the animals and birds that holds this faint aura but in the case of the daguerreotype it is surely the fine marks of the photographic image, which glimmer in tune with the portrait miniaturist's brushstroke and the nebulous quality of light. Valéry writes on photography's relation to these "first stutterings": "The vicissitudes of light among bodies can give rise to any number of effects which we cannot resist comparing to the states of our inner sense of perception. What has proved most seductive to thinkers, however, and furnished the theme for their most brilliant variations, are the deceptive properties of certain aspects of light. What would become of philosophy if it did not have the means of questioning appearances?"⁵

The ontology of the photograph is not stable within the vicissitudes of light bodies and portraiture whose very ontology is performance, is not stable. The writer Peggy Phelan states that, "Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented; once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. Performance becomes itself through disappearance//.... Like Virginia Woolf's conception of letter-writing as an attempt 'to give back a reflection of the other person', portrait photography reflects the transference of image between photographer and sitter."⁶ The portrait miniature and the photographic portrait, both hold elements of disappearance, they illuminate each other and the processes of the image in reinstating the effort to remember what is lost.

The silence of Room 90A is marked. Sound is the dovetail to a sense of place in this dusk-like world. In Bernard Lens's miniature portrait of *Miss Elizabeth Weld* (c1720) (P.65 –1987), a nightingale perches on a child's hand waiting for song and this song-image brings forward to the mind other songs, that can be heard in the dusk light — there is room for more voices here. Birdsong, music, syncopated song, enters the air and the stillness of the museum room; the minuscule painted faces gaze outwards into the narrative air. Within this 'darkroom', the visual presence of another voice is recalled, a photographic portrait, of *Pinky* (2001) by Jennie Baptiste that sings its emollient song, bursting forth, Jamaican dancehall bird-like beats into the inner spaces of the imagination. It is Pinky's song-like brightness that illuminates the performativity of her portrait, and how time passes lightly within this image — time is not standing still, it sings. The voices between past and present jostle within the magnifying glass at the miniature figures and the remembrance of another intimate image; divisions are dispersed between past and present and converse between 'time-flesh' and intimate space. The portrait miniatures delight the borders of the eye in their fragile intensity but it is the memory of Pinky's image in the museum's photographic collection that springs forth, nudging into the mind's eye; a 'flash' or a 'spark' that lifts

the delicate miniature portraits to a fluttering presence in this crepuscular world. Pinky from Brixton, London, holds an aura, an energy, a song-like jubilation, that brings Longley's 'starling-whoosh' to the inner ear. The unwavering, delightful playfulness to the colour pink, adds an expressive tone of vision, and shakes the image into a flight of song and dance. Here, in Baptiste's portrait, she is sitting without the slides of the London street map and in the intimacy of her own home. Pinky, Queen of the Dancehall.

NOTES

- 1 Michael Longley, *Bird-Watching* from the collection *Angel Hill* (Jonathan Cape, London, 2017) pg 56
- 2 Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Ed. Hannah Arendt, *Illuminations, Essays and Reflections*, Trans. Harry Zohn, Preface, Leon Wieseltier, New York, Schocken Books 1969, 2007 pg. 255
- 3 www.vam.ac.uk/page/p/portrait-miniatures/
www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/h/a-history-of-the-portrait-miniature/
www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/p/portrait-miniatures-on-vellum/
- 4 Paul Valéry, *The Centenary of Photography* (1929) Ed. Alan Trachtenberg, Notes, Amy Weinstein Meyers, *Classic Essays on Photography* (USA Leete's Island Books, 1980) pg 194
- 5 *Ibid* pg 197
- 6 Peggy Phelan, *The Ontology of Performance: Unmarked* (London, Routledge 1993) pg 146



Sir Henry Cole Photography Album, *Julinna Bond*, PH.835.207-1987

In the twirling movement of two strings, two circular images on separate cards play together – a bird and a cage, and for a moment (eight parts of a second to be precise), the bird and cage become one, so that the bird resides in the cage. The impression of the bird in the cage is imprinted on one's mind as the 'flash' of a double image is held on the retina. A double image — the ocular language of the double negative, is introduced to us by a Victorian philosophical toy for children, named as the Thaumatrope or Wonder-Turner (1824).¹ This persistence of images upon the retina can also be extended to word play, as different words can be 'played' or animated to form ocular doubles. An animated moment of relation and separation occurs, and the union of two images into one creates the word 'birdsong'. A philosophical toy, of optics and language, the circular cards mimicking the aperture of the camera.

An animated flicker of the two main subjects of the photograph, inscribed as Julinna Bond, in Sir Henry Cole's photographic album (circa 1850), reveals an impression through this animated movement of time, of the coming together of two subjects within the space of the photograph. By separating the elements within the photograph, using the principle of the Wonder-Turner, a short moment of 'arrest' occurs, and other impressions strike, between the view of a 'family' photograph.

The young girl is standing gazing outward, her pose reminiscent of the tradition of portrait painting, her hand so close to the cage door of the bird, a bullfinch or a goldfinch. The suggestion is that the image has been closely constructed by the photographer. The image has the hallmarks of the vernacular family image of the amateur and the more assured posture of the portraiture work of Hill and Adamson. Julinna Bond's gaze is open, wide-eyed, an image holding an innocent intent necessary for the still focus of her figure in the picture. Her hair, banded, frames her open face, and she wears a ruffled dress that contrasts well with its pleats and folds allowing a lightness within the heaviness of the fabric. The young girl's gaze appears innocently knowing, there is a shyness evident in the work, not part of the 'downcast' eyes that have been so lauded in Hill and Adamson's work; it is the silent standing in front of the camera, where time is extended infinitely, and the 'auras' of these early photographic pictures are secured.²

The central position of the figures, and the gentle tones of the albumen print, present a living quality to the image as if the subjects, child and bird, are immersed within the light and shadows of the print, their figures brought forward in a sensibility that suggests a hand-drawn sketch, shaded in amber tones, the drawing qualities of Talbot's 'photogenic drawing'. It is to this image of child and caged bird that the gaze holds our view and the figure of the bird creates a small sharp 'fiction' of the bird's aliveness.

The girl, with hand placed on the bird (within the cage), lifts the picture away from the domestic drawing room, to recover a kernel of subliminal narrative that shows itself on the fringes of meaning, a recovery of such, to the fragility within the intimate pages of the family album. Within this image, the young girl and a captured goldfinch leave a nuance of time and place, and there is an unmissable permanence to the image. Returning to the absorption of the gaze, both young girl and bird are restrained; the birdcage is full of empty mirrors, of windows and frames, and the girl's hand is placed upon this. A punctum for the possibilities of reflections, perspectival illusions and views.

The image echoes an ontological listening, a thinking that comes together in the illusion of appearance, in the Wonder-Turner's twirling of the strings. The strangeness that lures the eyes, within the imagined repetition of movement, is the goldfinch, whose body appears to brush the little girl's fingers, holding a residual tension, an allegorical message within the frame. A mark from the symbolic ghost of painting from which both girl and goldfinch are not freed. This discrete and small thought invites a subdued reverie. The image, "the existence of a bird with a red face and gold wing bars owes nothing to us"³, though this was not yet, in 1850, fully understood. (Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species*, which was to establish a very different relationship to the purpose of birds and animals, was not published until 1859.) Until recently, the widely held belief was that birds existed to fulfil very specific human needs and with this the European goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*) transfigured into the idea of 'charadrios' (curative qualities) with the blood-coloured feathers seen to have been acquired by the goldfinch (the blessed) "when the bird helped removed Christ's thorn crown from his head"⁴. The figure of the goldfinch is blessed and curative, and this figure is repeated in devotional Christian images of the Madonna and Holy Child, specifically in 486 Renaissance paintings that span from the Late Middle Ages to the Renaissance, including Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael.⁵

The symbolism of the painted goldfinch carried over to the Victorian period when the nineteenth-century recommendation to parents of a sullen child was as follows: "my advice is, buy her a chaffinch"⁶. The 'arrest' in the image occurs as the vestiges of the goldfinch's curative properties appear and fade onto the image of the young girl. During the Victorian period, it was not unusual for children to die young. Conceivably, the 'secret' of the allegorical image of the young Julinna, Sir Henry Cole's niece, is a figural trace of Cole's daughter whose early death was not averted by the curative goldfinch. The fabled narrative is, of course, an esoteric musing, but it does illustrate the essence of 'arrest' in the image, where the animated possibility within the photograph awakens narratives, and grants access to a shaft of thought, unavailable in a glancing look.

NOTES

1 Thaumatrope Instruction Card, 1827, *Philosophy in Sport Made Science in Earnest, Educational Book for Children*, John Ayrton Paris (1785 – 1856) (Inventor of the Philosophical Toy) Museum of the History of Science, Oxford: Exhibition "Fancy Names and Fun Toys"

2 Walter Benjamin, *A Short History of Photography*, Ed. Alan Trachtenberg, Notes, Amy Weinstein Meyers, *Classic Essays on Photography* (USA Leete's Island Books, 1980) pg 204

3 Mark Cocker, *David Tipling, Birds and People* (London, Jonathan Cape, 2013, ebook 2013) pg 3831

4 Ibid

5 Herbert Freidmann, *The Symbolic Goldfinch: The History and Significance in European Devotional Art*, (Pantheon Books, 1946)

6 Mark Cocker, *David Tipling, Birds and People*, London, Jonathan Cape, 2013, 2013 ebook pg 3831

Wood Pigeon

Columba palambus, Linnæus

The wood pigeon's song, compact with the promise of sempiternal devotion, may be variously rendered. One form is "COO-CÓO-COO-COO-COO", another "COO-COO-CÓO-COO-COO". Between the strains a set of lower notes may be heard. A few repetitions of the phrase then, the bird ends up with a single "COO!". The bird claps its wings over its back when startled into sudden flight, while pursuing another pigeon in the air or while being pursued and during the nuptial flight.

The "clapping" seems to do duty for utterance.

Turtle Dove

Streptopelia turtur, Linnæus

The turtle dove's "purring" song is a musical inward crooning and is fairly adequately figured by the bird's specific Latin name, "Turtur", thus:

"woo-tur-r-r, tur-r-r," repeated with individual variations.

Guillemot

Uria aalge

The long crooning note resolves itself into two distinguishable sounds, which seem at times to merge into each other: a drawled-out "ur" and a short, hollow barking "hoo". These are combined in varying pitch and sequence: "ur-hoo-hoo-hoo". Or "ur-ur-hoo-hoo-hoo", or they may be uttered separately:

"ur-ur-ur," "hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo". The note is frequently heard when the pairs are billing (courtship) and uttered when two birds are sparring.

Puffin

Fratercula arctica

Often content to open its vividly hued beak without utterance. The usual notes are figured as a long-drawn, very grating "owk" or "ow" and a long-drawn "oooo". The latter is also rendered as "aaaah" or "aahaah" or "awe".

Common Tern

Sterna hirundo, Linnæus

The ordinary call is a long-drawn disyllabic "keee-yerrr", which can be distinguished from the shorter note of the Arctic tern: "kerr" or "kerr-err". Both utter a note like "ptip" repeated, of which the meaning is uncertain. The common tern utters a rapid "kik-kik-kik", followed or preceded by "kerrs" or "kwerrs", uttered singly or repeated, sometimes independently of the "kiks".

Whether used together or apart these notes are heard when the birds are fighting or attacking intruders.

Common Gull

Larus canus, Linnæus

The usual note is a high-pitched "kweee-ah", almost a clear whistle, it may be repeated several times to form a prolonged cachinnation. It is figured as "skeeah", "kleeah", "kaeeeeeow", and "gnyee-eh". The alarm note is "kak", also rendered "skak" or "yak".



Masao Yamamoto, gelatin-silver print and mixed media, E.275:35-200

The emergence of the past within the present, of what is most distant, of what is closest to the hand, suggests itself in the holding in one's own hand of the miniature photograph of the Hwamei bird, held in another's stretched bare arm. The bird is full of quiddity, a light songbird, usually tame, and given its name — meaning "painted eyebrow" — due to its arresting eye. The hwamei¹, or laughing thrush's beak is not open in this tiny photograph, it is not within the throes of the singing voice. The bird is quietly standing on the hand, familiar with the surface of the skin, of the hand, of human contact. The delicacy of the object, its unfinished edges, the silver-gelatin wash and the gold splattering, all pronounce a light, airy, precious atmosphere to the object.

The 'presence' in the photograph is of the hwamei bird; Masao Yamamoto transfigures the bird to a 'mediative' sentient entity and his voice asks, "What is it that we see and what do we identify with the birds?". Bird in Japanese is *Tori*². The artist builds a narrative of gazing: "from my classroom window, I would gaze at the windblown clouds, mesmerised by airborne creatures such as birds, butterflies and winged insects, I sometimes dreamed of riding on the back of a bird, and flying away to faraway places. What has remained is the belief that humans are just a small part of nature, united with it and part of it. I return to the animals, particularly birds, reflecting my childhood fascination with the creatures and return to my eternal commitment to the unity of humanity and nature. For me a good photograph is one that soothes, makes us feel kind, gentle. A photograph that give us courage, that reminds us of good memories, that makes people happy³".

The photograph becomes a site of rapture and revelation, it is a continuous present, a moment to engage with imminence and the joy of being. The framing of the hwamei as central to the image and the palm of the hand, interrupted only with the warm splattering of gold paint, varying a warm, tonal world, gentle and harmonious. There is an echo of the writer Susan Sontag's words, "To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability."⁴ To grasp a bird gently in the hand often resides in the skill and empathy of holding a bird. Experience with ringing birds will teach the holder that songbirds, both juvenile and adult, have little tolerance for being handled and can die suddenly in your hands — as the writer Tim Dee expresses, it "is a hellish feeling"⁵.

The bird on the hand in Masao Yamamoto's picture foreshores a breathing, living being. There are sensations to the image that would be missed if you are without the experience of holding birds. If another songbird flies over, or calls to the hwamei, you would feel the bird's heart racing against your fingers: some hearts pump faster than others, and no two birds are the same; some birds are more agitated than others and individuality becomes defined through how blood is pumped through the bird's body or how our human pulse resonates with the bird. The more birds pass through your hands, the wider the sense of the community and the perception of difference expands.

The bird and the photographic medium are in a tautological relationship: both could be interpreted as traces of a time, a bittersweet ineluctability of time, that traces the materiality of the subjects and the photograph, where the texture of time accumulates in the body, creating a vibrational surface to the image. The bird flies around us, the image appears to say, but

the ephemerality is linked not only to the youthful arm, that in time will age, a youthful innocence that later is reconsidered. But the unlined arm and the vibrant songbird also bind within the image, the moulting of the bird's feathers for new growth and the shedding of small flakes of human skin to allow new skin. The time within the photograph is one of transience of past and present, a melancholy for the transience of being.

The ephemerality of the object and of the photographic medium intertwines with human and avian mortality. This intertwining within the photographic object of beauty and mortality indirectly follows a Japanese tradition, the aesthetic principles of 'mono no aware' and 'wabi-sabi', integral to Japanese aesthetic culture and connected to the Buddhist emphasis on impermanence. 'Mono no aware' is an aesthetic concept, which literally is the 'pathos of things' or could be described as a 'sensitivity to ephemera' and the transience of all things. The term is derived from the word 'mono' ('things') and 'aware' ('sensitivity'); it was used in the Heian period (794 – 1185) as an exclamation such as 'ah' expressing a sensitivity of the transience of all 'things' and a longer gentle sadness at their passing⁶.

The motifs of cherry blossoms, seen in Masao Yamamoto's photographs, and autumn foliage on water, have been traditionally used to symbolise the fleeting nature of life, of inducing a sense of light sadness. Wabi-sabi, in traditional Japanese aesthetics, awakens the idea of impermanence, of the integrity of a natural object of beauty, simplicity, suffering and asymmetry that comes with age and decay, the absence of self-nature. Wabi-sabi was popular in Zen Buddhism from the Kamakura era (1185 – 1333) onwards and a tea master Sen no Rikyu writes in *Way of Tea*, 'it is desirable for every utensil to be less than adequate. There are those who dislike a piece when it is even slightly damaged; such an attitude shows a complete lack of comprehension.'⁷ The photographic objects of Masao Yamamoto exemplify how the wabi-sabi aesthetic values minor imperfections, often more than the flawless ones; this is discernible as the photographs curl slightly in the palm of the hand, it is as though the object and the image are actually ageing in the time of holding. A gentle melancholic feeling at the impermanence of being covers the very surface of the print, aged in washes of tea or tears. The object, of the bird in the palm of the hand, waxes an optimistic gesture of sorrow for what cannot be retrieved, but retains a luminance of brightness, eternal to the lived present.

NOTES

1 The old English name for the bird was, 'Melodious Laughingthrush', Mark Cocker, *David Tipling, Birds and People*, London, Jonathan Cape, 2013, 2013 ebook pg 3397

2 *Tori* by Masao Yamamoto, Radius Books, Sante Fe, New Mexico, 2017

3 Compiled from recorded interviews: Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography; fwd thinking museum
www.forwardthinkingmuseum.com

4 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York Delta Books, 1978) pg 15

5 Edith M Pasquier, Falsterbo Bird Station, Sweden 2010 – 13

Tim Dee, *Four Fields* (London, Jonathan Cape, 2013)

6 Dennis Hirota Ed. *Wind in the Pines: Classic Writings of the Way of Tea as a Buddhist Path* (Fremont: Asian Humanities Press, 1995) pg 226. Junichirō Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows* (USA Leete's Island Books 1977, London Vintage 2001) pg 32

7 As cited by Lena Fritsch, *Ishiuchi Miyako*, Ed. Dragana Vujanovic, Louis Wolthers, Text: Lena Fritsch, Christopher Phillips (Hasselblad Foundation, Berlin, Kehrer Heidelberg, 2014)



Mark Edwards, *Rotting Apples* from the series *What Has Been Gathered Will Disperse*, Norfolk, England 2004, chromogenic print, E.399-2005

Rotten Apples. A warm, earthy smell of fermented apples, damp and deliquescent, rotten apples sprawled on a sodden, peacock blue-green carpet of a contemplative mind, with little syntactical direction, the indolent apples slowly decompose into a biological event. Coating each apple is the process of a substance absorbing moisture from the atmosphere until it dissolves in the absorbed water and forms a sweet fermented solution; submerged tissues of representation that constitute an intent, close-up savouring of each strayed fruit. Outwardly, the image is all surface and landscape, vestiges of a rotten cadaver, but beneath the surface, the phenomenon of the natural world, through the imagination of the mind, opens up to the deliberate pleasure, to a stealth-like caress of world and language.

Rotting Apples, from the series *What Has Been Gathered Will Disperse* (2004) by Mark Edwards, is an effulgent phonetic body of shifting depth, focus and time. "Like Faustus in his last hour wishing to be dispersed into the smallest creatures in the face of terror and death,"¹ writes Seamus Heaney on the poet Michael Longley's botanical writings. *Rotting Apples* writes in its dark, damp universe a seductive intonation of voice, that relays a lingering upon the thing itself, a devouring image. It is the very expanse of time and allusion that opens up the rotten cadaver's work and defers the utilitarian impulse. A heavily symbolic fruit, with its myriad religious, mythological and physiological associations in the history of art — as Henry David Thoreau in his essay on *Wild Apples* (1862) wrote, "Pliny, adopting the distinction of Theophrastus, says, 'Of trees there are some which are altogether wild (*sylvestres*), some more civilised (*urbaniiores*)'. Theophrastus includes the apples among the last; and, indeed, it is in this sense the most civilised of all trees. It is as harmless as a dove, as beautiful as a rose, and as valuable as flocks and herds. It has been longer cultivated than any other, and so is more humanised; and who knows but, like the dog, it will at length no longer be traceable to its wild original? It migrates with man, like the dog and horse and cow."²

Quickly, the image has metamorphosed into a hurry of seed flights, and a tract on the apotheosis of a free, organic process, yet it is to the particular divisions, the 'multipartite entanglements' within the chromogenic print that *Rotting Apples* returns. The naturalist Mark Cocker's observation of fallen apples fixates or 'focalises' on the fertile ground, and the community of associations.

"As we settled in and waited for the sun to illuminate the view, a dozen blackbirds breakfasted on the trolley-load of apples encircling the pond. The birds hammered the fruits with gusto, then they would pause, hammer again, sending white-flesh fids flying in all directions.

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Sometimes they sailed off completely, leaving a contrail of metallic sound ricocheting nervously among the trees. Silence descended; before all were suddenly back at once. They gulped more apples, head up, then down, and a pause for a personal squabble with more scraped-metal chiding; or more nerves and off they sailed.

This fruit-feeding alternated with other jerky, leaf-flicking stuff, the slate pin legs scratching mud in tandem with a downward stab and sideways flick of the lemon bill. Occasionally one would break off from the staccato rhythms of the group and position herself so close to the glass that you leaned forward, you felt sure she was looking at you as intently as you could see her.

Every detail was unmissable – the stained oak eye, the sepia cup beneath her throat, her bird-track streaks running away down the chest into the fulsome shadow of her belly and then that spring-loaded legs-out, chest-up posture that looked one part gun's cocked trigger, one part coiled-spring for flight."³

The apples ostensibly become signs or visual receptors for the retinal image, that are receptive to the vibrations and oscillations of the phonetic breathing body, a sequester of time in this fermented deliquescence of apples, earth, carpet and mulch.

Jean-Luc Mylayne, the photographer and writer, creates an extensive 'scored' visual essay, with the apple and the bird. "We have the ability to intellectualise the various forms these apples take throughout the range of imagery," the artist notes, "and thus bring to this an understanding of life and death."⁴ Reaching back into myth and storytelling, the dramatic circle of the series is built of a vernacular layer, closer to the everyday happenings of the garden, than to Dante's account of the *Divine Comedy*. Small things — a tiny bird, apples ripening in the tree or fallen into decay on the ground — steady our consciousness through the shifting cycles of time that Mylayne monumentalises. Allusions to the Garden of Eden, humanity's expulsion from Paradise, and the apple as a symbol of immortality, knowledge and loss of innocence are with the bird, hidden in plain sight. The artists allude to our anthropomorphic tendencies, in a work that places the bird in allegorical scenes with apples.

These constructed images of chance and waiting entail an acceptance of the minutiae of daily occurrences through specific camera angles, the shifting emphasis of multiple focal points and subjects (whether stationed at the core or in the periphery of our field of vision); in this way, Mylayne's playful score writes the plentiful entanglement of nature, and the numerous focalisations of the everyday that reoccur in the physical world.

The work cites the seasons, in rotten tones, and here a circular connection can be made to *Rotting Apples*, where found objects, the array of fallen apples and the decomposing landscape imply Mark Edwards' compositional palette and timbre, as time, composition and the cycle of life refer back to the object of the photograph. Within the serial compositions of Mylayne's apple and bird essay, the array of colour within the apples, the birds unaltered in form though aligned by differential focus and framing, elevate time, time repeated, and dissected moments of time to speak in defiance of the Cartesian logic of separation, of two formerly connected associates. "Working with birds is always optimistic," says Mylayne, "and a bird is a traditional symbol of the soul."⁵

An end note can be found in the short story of an 'apple' that becomes the site of writing for the colourist photographer Ernst Haas (1921 – 86):

"Bored with obvious reality, I find my fascination in transforming it into a subjective point of view. Without touching my subject I want to come to the moment when, through pure concentration of seeing, the composed picture comes more made than taken."⁶

"I look into an apple for such a long time until it became the first apple I had ever seen. I was so excited that I called a friend to tell him my experience. But how could I find the right words for what I had experienced? How could I describe my visual sensations with literary words as red/yellow/green/shining/round? After this movement of nuances and counteractions in form and colour, even in touch and smell.

Anyhow, I did not find the right words, and my friend did not believe me. So I ate the apple as I have eaten many an apple before, it was fairly good apple. I called my friend again, telling him I just ate a fairly good apple and he understood me immediately."⁷

NOTES

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- 1 Seamus Heaney, *Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry From Northern Ireland*, *The Agni Review*, No.22 (1985), pg 158 – 177
- 2 Henry David Thoreau (1817 – 62) *Wild Apples* (Reprint Applewood Books 1862) Essay, 44 pages
- 3 Mark Cocker, *Beyond the Penumbra of Fear*, *Country Diary*, 3 January 2017, *The Guardian* newspaper
- 4 Jean-Luc Mylayne, *Tête d'or Texts*: Thierry Raspail, Terrie Sultan, Ralph Rugoff (Lyon, Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon, 2009
- 5 Ibid
- 6 Ernst Haas, "About Colour Photography" in *DU*, 1961 as cited in www.lensculture.com/articles/ernsthaas-ernsthaas-colour-correction
- 7 Ernst Haas (1921 – 86) *Writings*, The Ernst Haas Estate, 2017

Herring Gull

Larus argentatus

A common call is the somewhat plaintive mewling "kwee-ow" or "kyow", which in moments of excitement becomes "klee-ow". The chief alarm note sounds like a laugh: "ha-ha-ha", or "ga-ga-ga-ga" as rapidly uttered as possible. The wild cachinnation the bird utters with its head down: "ée-er, ée-er, ée-er", head up, "eow! eow! eow! Ow! Ow "eee-áh". Among other notes, a cooing "hoo-oh" and a cackling pairing note "how, how, how".

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Kittiwake

Rissa tridactyla, Linnæus

The common utterance is that which gives the species its name; it can be fairly well imitated by pronouncing "kitti-way-ék". The bird may repeat the note rapidly, the outburst ending with an excited high-pitched "k'wake", like the squeak of a pencil on a slate. Another common note is "ur" or "kur" or "urkur".

Stone Curlew

Burhinus oediconemus, Linnæus

The usual note uttered by the bird during daytime and when on the ground is figured as "dhu-le-eep". At night long, weird, wailing variants of "cour-lee-vee" or "courlis". The species has a strong cry, which may be described as a monotonous whistle on one note.

Snipe

Gallinago gallinago

The most characteristic sound produced by this bird is known as "drumming" or "bleating". It is made by either sex, both in the daytime and at night, when circling high in the air. The circles are broken at intervals by oblique descents, "drumming" or "humming sound is heard". On the ascent the bird may utter a few notes "yuk, yuk, yuk". It is heard to utter a note "chick chack" at the same time as it drums. Both these notes are evidently the same as that uttered by the bird when perched; this is rendered by "chack", "chuk", "tchup", "chip", "chip-it", "zip", "dsipp".

Golden Plover

Pluvialis apricaria

The bird has a whistling double-call note, and a peculiar rippling song or warble.

The alarm note has been figured as "tU", "tiU" or "tui".



Helen Chadwick, *Of Mutability*, 1986, photocopy sheet relating to the work '*Of Mutability*', E.1734-1992

Barnacle Goose

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"Silent is my garment when I tread the earth or dwell in the towns or stir the waters. Sometimes my trappings lift me up over the habitations of heroes and this high air, and the might of the welkin bears me afar above mankind. Then my adornments resound in song and sing aloud with clear melody — when I do not rest on land or water, a moving spirit. Tell me my name."¹

Riddle Seven from *The Exeter Book of Riddles* from Anglo-Saxon England is a speaking image, a riddle that follows a bird's journey from ground or earth to the ethereal regions of the sky. The clue is in the 'singing', as the focus is on the 'garment' and the 'adornments' that produce the musical sound. Whilst a swan's Latin name is 'cygnus' which derives from 'canere', 'to sing', it is not the swan that sings or its 'long, curved neck', but the musical sound of the wings of the bird's feathers. Dieter Bitterli impresses that, in the Old English, the "most striking structure is the antithesis of silence and sound" and how through exploiting onomatopoeia, the riddle imitates the sound of the feathers of the mute swan.² In *Riddle Ten* a barnacle goose is the subject of word-image play, and the nature writer Paul Evans suggests that "Swans and geese are often interchangeable in the language of legends, part of a lexicon of birds and trees that carry meaning between culture and Nature. The author of *Beowulf*, the first great poem in English, called the swan's road sometimes the goose road."³

Blue-toned and three quarter life-size, an electrostatic print (photocopy), a tableau of figures — with mythological allusions to the naked female form pressed against the body of a winged bird. At first sight, the bird's head reaches towards the figure's breast and creates a disturbing simulacrum of Leda and the Swan. The bird appears without voice — disjointed in a 'vanitas' of blue ink. The flattened bird is not a swan, but has dissolved into the form of a goose, and this blue oceanic pool is a performative gesture to the surrender of "identity to God, nature, art and love"⁴ by the artist Helen Chadwick (1953 – 96) from the work *Of Mutability* (1986). The whole relation to bird and animal creates a physical breathlessness that overrides the first traumatic jolt of the hooded figure — the blue pool of creases and folds flattens this wet, mute space to a site of physical sensations and carnal desire.

NOTES

1 10th century (1,000-year-old) riddle of a mute swan translated from the Old English into Modern English by Paul Franklin Braun, *Anglo-Saxon Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1963)

2 Dieter Bitterli, *Say What I am Called: The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book and the Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition* (University of Toronto Press, 2013) pg 38 – 44

3 Paul Evans, *Field Notes from the Edge* (London, Rider, Ebury Publishing, 2015) pg 85

4 Sue Hubbard, Interview with Helen Chadwick, 1989, Helen Chadwick, Ed. Mark Sladen, Barbican Art Gallery, 2004 (The University of Michigan, Barbican Art Gallery 2007)



Zarina Bhimji, photograph fragment from the installation *She Loved to Breathe – Pure Silence*, 1987, gelatin-silver print and fabric between perspex, PH.7208:2-1987

Avian Tongues

Lament, noun — an expression of grief or sorrow; a complaint; a poem or song in which death is lamented.

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I

Starting with an image of the Starling's tongue Schaeffer (1779)¹.

Starling (*sturnus vulgaris*), the illustration of the female bird, appears with a mixture of winter and summer plumage. The long beak, yellow with a red underside, and the orange or reddish-brown legs are the bird's summer tones, but the hue of its feathers — brown with white speckles — is a winter coloration, as during summer they have iridescent and glossy blues with the white speckles of plumage

To the right of the starling, a caesura, a cut, detailed in the drawing study of a starling's tongue, separated from body of the bird. A "dialectic at standstill"².

II

The animal swaying to and fro, an incessant restlessness across the wired enclosure. A coyote, a bear, a wolf, parrots too, race round and round, pacing, pacing, on and on they go with a "ceaseless pacing and rocking and screaming, the corner-covering, self-plucking"³ — all 'forever taking leave'⁴.

In Joseph Beuys' performance action *I Like America and America Likes Me* (1994) the 'wild' coyote of the artist-shaman is trapped in the language of the captive animal. The allegorical seven-day-and-night performance ends as Beuys is wrapped in felt and taken to the airport. And for the silent and captive coyote, what is left? Freed momentarily by the arrest of the still image, Caroline Tisdall's photographs of Joseph Beuys' action temporarily rewrite the fate of the 'captive' coyote into a pictorial chimera of a 'wild' coyote. A moment to reclaim the future tense of the still image, the photographic event 'reimagines' the moment to a 'saved night'⁵, where animals and birds are directed towards the pace and gait of the wild state.

"Parrots learn to speak [words] soon after birth, during a transitional period of vocalising equivalent to human baby babbling known as 'subsinging', in order to better communicate with members of their own flocks and with other flocks," writes Charles Siebert in *Of a Feather, The New York Times Magazine*, 2016. "This, it turns out, is the root of that vaunted gift for mimicry, which, along with their striking plumages and beguiling fixed, wide-eyed stares, has long induced us to keep parrots — neuronally hard-wired flock animals with up to 60-to-70-year life spans and the cognitive capacities of 4-to-5-year-old children — all to ourselves in a parlour cage: a broken flight of human fancy; a keening kidnapée [...] The very behaviours that once would have further codified our parrot caricatures — 'birdbrained', 'mindless mimicry', 'mere parroting' and so on — are recognised as classic symptoms of the same form of complex post-traumatic stress disorder afflicting the patients and veterans from war and conflict"⁶.

"With all its eyes the animal world
 beholds the Open. Only our eyes
 are as if inverted and set all around it
 like traps at its portal to freedom.
 What's outside we only know from the animal's
 countenance; for almost from the first we take a child
 and twist him round and force him to gaze
 backwards and take in structure, not the Open
 that lies so deep in the animal's face...."

"And we: Spectators, always, everywhere,
 looking at, never out of, everything!
 It overfills us. We arrange it. It falls apart.
 We arrange it, and fall apart ourselves.

Who has turned us around like this,
 so that
 always, no matter what we do, we're
 in the stance
 of someone just departing? As he,
 on the last hill that shows him all his valley
 one last time, turns, stops, lingers —,
 we live our lives, forever taking leave.^{7"}

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke offers us *The Open*, from the *Eighth Elegy* from the *Duino Elegies* (1923) — an event of 'angelic voices', the poet's intense voice from the 'depths of life', an elegiac absorption on the site of encounter. The moment of the encounter between bird, animal and human, takes up the *Eighth Elegy*. "Images of contemplative activity, images that humans would reconnect with their own pensivity.^{8"} We humans are depicted as turning away. How far does this turning away, this gazed distantiation take us, in the sea of images? Where does it lead? Rilke disturbs our encounter with the gaze of animal, blurs the borders of distinctions of difference between human and animal life.

The *Eighth Elegy* presents a poetic text that returns our sights to the moment 'Of mere being'. The philosopher Giorgio Agamben suggests that this is where Walter Benjamin is leading us in his analysis of images and his thesis on history; to the 'true history', to the retrieval of the 'saved night' and to the 'dialectics of the standstill' to acknowledge the radical temporality of the photograph. To recover the image is never simply a neutral scientific or ontological matter — as no distinction between animal and human is. A fundamental split resides between the animal, man and bird from the first philosophy, the writings of Aristotle in his work *History of Animals*, to the classifications of Linnaeus, which is a central concern for Agamben. The philosopher considers in his work *The Open: Man and Animal* (2002) how the privileged place of the human has been strategically produced and ensured by the "anthropological machine" of Western thought. The anthropological machine operates by creating an absolute difference, a *caesura* between man and animal, and it is this difference that we must begin to think of, it is this *caesura*, "this force of arrest" that has the potential to be rethought and to stop the anthropological machine to make way for "the philosophy and politics to come".

This exclusion of animal life from human life, within human beings, deepens this false chasm, between human and non-human animals. "Rather than animalising certain aspects of the human, animal life is humanised."⁹ It is the human beings who are situated at the margins of humanity who suffer in ways similar to those that are

animalised, A zone of 'indifference' is formed, with the 'worldless' realms of the animal life. Elements of life that should be unified are separated, and this state of exclusion is termed by Agamben as a "bare life" and it is the "bare life" that affords human beings a state of indifference.

"A human being without a tongue cannot speak since the tongue is vital for shaping and perfecting the sounds produced in the larynx. Early ornithologists assumed the same to be true for birds, and the naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522 – 1605) observed that a headless bird could still vocalise. Aldrovandi and others still thought the tongue played a crucial role in sound production. All birds possess a tongue but, in most parts, it plays no part in their vocalisations,"¹⁰ writes the naturalist and scientist Tim Birkhead in *The Wisdom of Birds, An Illustrated History of Ornithology* (2008).

Charles Darwin noticed the parallels between language acquisition in human infants and song-learning in birds. He famously suggested in *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871) "that there is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties". Vocal imitation in human-animals for the evolution of speech (spoken language) is shared with certain parrots, hummingbirds and song-birds. But, in a bleak way, the obsession with the tongue as a vocal organ led to the unnecessarily violent and cruel practice of mutilating birds like the starling and the magpie that were trained to talk. Tim Birkhead, as a boy in the 1950s, caught a young starling, hoping to teach it to speak, and recalls being told firmly by his uncle, a farmer, that he should split its tongue if he wanted it to talk:

*[cutting the] black part off with sharp scissors, not farther than the coloured part, then the tongue is already made round. The white dots on both sides of the tongue should be cut off and given more room by cutting a small part of the membrane which links the tongue to the throat. After that the bleeding parts are treated with a little unsalted butter and this operation is repeated three times, ie. each week, for instance, on Friday. After the string of the tongue has been clipped loose the talking lessons could start.*¹¹
(Anon: 1809)

The earliest reference to tongue mutilation in birds was from the 1601 Valli da Todi's bird-keeping book, though the practice is suspected to be much older, and Tim Birkhead notes that the idea of slitting, trimming or loosening a bird's tongue came from the ancient practice of dealing with tongue-tied children. "In cases where the membrane under a child's tongue extends too far forward, restricting the tongue's movement and impeding speech, the solution was to cut the membrane to 'loosen the tongue'."¹²

The link between the shape of the tongue and the ability to speak is referenced by Aristotle (*History of Animals*, Book 11, chapter 12), who also says: "Certain species of birds above all other animals and next after man, possess the faculty of uttering articulate sounds: and this fault is chiefly developed in broad-tongued birds... The Indian bird, the parrot which is said to have a man's tongue, answers to this description; and, by the way, after drinking wine, the parrot becomes more saucy than ever." (Book VIII, chapter 12)

How is this to be?

IV

Where is the moment that immersion stops, and distance enters: as the image stops its immersion, so does language change. In the language of photography the view becomes the sign or utterance of distance. The issue of agency in photography presents itself, Kaja Silverman writes in *The Miracle of Analogy*, "when the users of the optical camera obscura began thinking of themselves as 'takers' rather than receivers of the world's luminous self-portraits, they also talked about 'views'; that was what they 'took'. For Niépce (Joseph Nicéphore Niépce) repeatedly tried to extract an image from his camera obscura that corresponded to what he saw when he looked out of his workroom window. And sometimes he says 'point of view' thereby embedding his optic within what he was attempting to photograph".¹³

To the optics of another view: Goya's Dog.

The Dog, 1820 – 23 by Francisco de Goya. The picture's structure is minimal and non-specific. It is divided in two, an above and a below. "Where are we? Who knows? What is the spatial relationship between earth and sky?"¹⁴ writes Tom Lubbock.

"The extreme proportions have an inherent drama. The dog gazes up in the direction of the rising edge. And the uncertainties and proportions of the scene all fall upon it. There is no way out of the drowning mire. There is no hiding place from the avalanche. This is the effect of its very elementary structure. The scene consists of nothing but an above and a below. Each is a source of a dread and the little dog is caught between them. Deprived of any sense of movement or action. It is only a head, a consciousness, lost in a universe of terrors."¹⁵

The Dog is witness to the vicissitudes of language, the ambiguity of the image, and the structure of political 'apparatus'. *The Dog* is a melancholic but necessary aside in subject and affect. Its surfaces, scratched, dismantled and dirtied, hold much of the properties of negative photography and film. These are found in the hidden parts of the museum, in the image dismissed, in the recesses of shadows and contemplation.

The Dog, silent and captive, raises its head, but the great empty gulf that towers above it only emphasises its helplessness. The mute frame of a picture.

V

She Loved to Breathe — Pure Silence (1987). A thrush is lying on a net, the text above in red type. The photograph and cloth, sandwiched between Perspex by the artist Zarina Bhimji, form the second part of an installation piece that holds two gelatin-silver prints and fabric between Perspex.¹⁶ The "caesura in the movement of thought"¹⁷ is when Walter Benjamin alludes to "the past and present moment flash into a constellation"¹⁸ — the constellation, placed between bird, ground and net, yields a performative quality to the photograph. The shamanic practice of returning to the site of the 'wound' to heal the wound reads the photographic event as a site of return. The work by Bhimji is a response to the forced virginity tests that women from South Asia were submitted to upon arrival in the UK during the 1970s.¹⁹ The camera mechanises the human look, and the owning of space, and hinges in this instance on someone losing it. The bird is bound up with visibility and gesture. "The description itself does not reproduce the object, rather it assists in the restaging and restating the effort to remember what is lost",²⁰ writes Peggy Phelan in *Unmarked*. The consequence of making the hitherto unseen visible: the writing and text become an act of writing towards preservation. To place the woman at the centre of writing is to make the female body appear and reposition her place in society. The bird in this sense is the 'speaking body', "the body as metonymic of self, of character of voice, of presence."²¹

The parrot chides with the history of photography, focalising the avian voice to the captivity that binds a human being to other beings in this world. There is abundant evidence now that parrots possess cognitive capacities and sensibilities remarkably similar to our own. "The prolonged confinement of intelligent and social creatures compels them to speak the language of their keepers," notes Charles Siebert, and "one of those unlikely natural outcomes of the so-called Anthropocene, the first epoch to be named after us"²² and by us.

Gustave Flaubert's parrot is remembered. Photography analogises the site of 'spirits' and the parrot, the creature of mimicry returns. The quotidian figure of Loulou in Flaubert's *Un coeur simple* appears in Charles Siebert's essay *On a Feather: the veteran Love*, 'focalises' on the face and gaze of the parrot and echoes Felicité's voicing of her beloved parrot, "I couldn't place it at first, the slow-swivelling sideswipe of their gazes, the way they'll dip their heads below their own bodies and then crane smoothly upward, like a movie camera pulling focus. 'God is a parrot,' Love said, 'I know that now. God supposedly interprets and mimics what we do on earth, right? Is a reflection of us? So I believe God, if she exists, must be a parrot.'²³

- 1 See Tim Birkhead, *The Wisdom of Birds, An Illustrated History of Ornithology* (London, Bloomsbury, 2008) pg 251
- 2 Walter Benjamin, cited by Eduardo Cadava, "where the image translates time into something like a certain space... Within the photograph, time presents itself to us, as this 'spacing'", *Words of Light, Theses on the Photography of History* (New Jersey, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997) pg 61
- 3 Charles Siebert, *Of a Feather: What the surprising bonds between damaged parrots and traumatised veterans can teach us about animal intelligence*. *The New York Times Magazine*, January 31, 2016 pg 40 – 48
- 4 End phrase, from the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, of the *Eighth Elegy* from the *Duino Elegies* (1923), Trans. Edward Snow Bilingual Edition (New York, North Point Press 2001, ebook 2014) pg 140
- 5 Walter Benjamin, the "saved night", cited in Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York Columbia University Press, 2008) pg 100
- 6 Charles Siebert, *Of a Feather: What the surprising bonds between damaged parrots and traumatised veterans can teach us about animal intelligence*. *The New York Times Magazine*, January 31, 2016 pg 40 – 48
- 7 (Excerpts, first Stanza and final Stanza) Rainer Maria Rilke, of the *Eighth Elegy* from the *Duino Elegies* (1923), Trans. Edward Snow Bilingual Edition (New York, North Point Press 2001, ebook 2014) pg 140
- 8 Jean-Christophe Bailly, *The Animal Side*, Trans. Catherine Porter (Le versant animal, 2007, Fordham University Press, 2011)
- 9 Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York Columbia University Press, 2008) pg 93
- 10 See, Tim Birkhead, *The Wisdom of Birds, An Illustrated History of Ornithology* (London, Bloomsbury, 2008) pg 250
- 11 Ibid pg 252
- 12 Ibid pg 253
- 13 Ibid, cited by Tim Birkhead and Edith M Pasquier
- 14 Silverman, Kaja *The Miracle of Analogy or The History of Photography*, Part 1 (Stanford, CAL; Stanford University Press, 2015) pg 80
- 15 Tom Lubbock, *Great Works: 50 Paintings Explored* (Francis Lincoln Publishers, 2011) pg 144
- 16 Zarina Bhimji, London, Whitechapel Gallery, 2012
- 17 Walter Benjamin, cited by Eduardo Cadava, *Caesura: Words of Light, Theses on the Photography of History* (New Jersey, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997) pg 61
- 18 Ibid pg 61
- 19 Zarina Bhimji, London, Whitechapel Gallery, 2012
- 20 Phelan, Peggy *The Ontology of Performance: Unmarked*, (London, Routledge, 1993) pg 147
- 21 Ibid
- 22 Charles Siebert, *Of a Feather: What the surprising bonds between damaged parrots and traumatised veterans can teach us about animal intelligence*, *The New York Times Magazine*, January 31, 2016 pg 40 – 48
- 23 Ibid



Colin Jones, *Kirkby, Liverpool* (1979), gelatin-silver print, E.700-1993

Wood Pigeon

Even scuffs and clatters in the trees rustle quietly in the ear, there is a softness to its note, and its voice lifts the mind to wanderings, between a purr and coo, the five-note motif of the wood pigeon lays a gentle echo from plane tree to plane tree. The lines and the grids of the street hold a lead-like weight that fattens such echoes, and the kerb and pavement reach far back to the vanishing point within the image, to the distant path of an endless suburban street. Grid-like structures and the enclosure of the frame dominate the steel-fenced lines and asphalt grids; the concrete kerb, the stretched tarmac pavement, the high barrier-fence spiked with barbed wire, and brick factory buildings, where the plane trees of suburban planting provide pictorial relief to the drab steel landscape. A long street on the outskirts of the city of Liverpool, an overspill of the city, Kirkby. In the foreground, a pigeon-fancier, arm to the ground and outstretched, frozen in a Herculean throw with a pigeon in his hand.

A syntax of contradictions, of events anticipated, curtailed or just stopped short, of something happening. A tableau of suggestions, of implied possibilities, a dramatic text, over the banality of an everyday existence. *Kirkby, Liverpool* (1979) by Colin Jones is part of a wider portfolio of documentary images on Liverpool life. A sense of place, of a city marginalised, at the outer edges of the frame of consciousness, of social politicians, is stated in the held-back gestures of subjects and documentarist. If the image intrigues, it is through its allusion beyond the document to a conceptual gesture, and this inverted Icarus, this pigeon-fancier, is undercut, brought down by the vicissitudes of daily existence; his face, etched and folded, creates an exacting cart of tightly held back frustration. The lens and the shutter have halted time and secured an extended blink of arrested time, arrested to the point of collapse, so that there is an actual dissolution of time within the image, the body and the arm of the pigeon-fancier caught in a physical distortion that transforms the fancier into a figural repetition of an unfinished, uninterrupted action, a lack of closure that wrestles with an unresolved physic tension, where the body is trying to escape through one of its organs.

The narrative momentum of the picture, refrained in an arrested speech time triggers a seeing process, which produces a physical interaction between the work and the viewer. The extended arm and the unhurled pigeon flatten the pigeon-fancier's aspirations in this asphalt street of undisclosed aspirations, as if any consciousness of a rise beyond his circumstances would lead to an Icarus-style plummet. The echo of this uncanny time-space — "the moment has just passed, is just about to happen, or is happening even now, though there is never anyone there" — is used by the writer and art critic Laura Cumming¹ to describe the image-world of the painter George Shaw, aptly another documentarist of the urban/suburban landscape.

There is an eerie silence to these scenes on the edge of modern British life, a disjointedness that is deadening, so that even the beautiful carrier pigeon is stamped like the sprawling housing and industrial estates with, as Mark Cocker notes, "a form of negative space so [that in the mind of naturalists], they look at the pigeon primarily to dismiss them". It is the connection between bird and handler that quietly voices the bird's place. Though not named by the photographer, the anonymous subjects, bird and handler, remove the specifics of the title of urban geography to their very specific relation. The acquirer, the pigeon-fancier, holds the pigeon in a captivity and an ambiguity covers the picture like soft clouds, across a menial grey sky. There is a beauty in this dreariness and if it is cuckolded it has been swallowed in a sublime romanticism of nature, landscape and poetry, an easy forgetting, a defiance to a thinking beyond the frame.

The photograph's perspective is between two poles, a contradictory display of the vanishing point and the close-up. Between the endless suburban street and the 'arrested' gesture of the pigeon-fancier. What is hurtled within this authorial space of arrest it is difficult to quantify exactly, but the linguistic signs point to a momentary silence of voice, of a vocal arrest. The broken half-brick on the ground reads as a hyphenation joining the action to hurtle a brick to hurling a pigeon into flight. Gesturally, the after-image is starkly different. The brick acts as a 'focus to the eye', of how and what we hurtle into language, it acts as a physical signifier, for unsaid speech, and the images of broken windows, of a derelict suburbia, that reminds us of urban disquiet, dispersed from the flight of scattered pigeons. Here the document is arrested and the tense of the image strikes the eye in seeing past/future within a simultaneity of edge-lands. A solitary figure hurling arms towards an annunciation of flight, wary of an expressionless existence. A suppressed violence to the condition, a moment between politics and transcendence. The division between the 'here and there', the figures in the urban hinterland, we are marshalled into the submission of 'airy' thoughts of an elsewhere of utopian aspirations, submerged into the actuality of surroundings. An appetitive energy knocked off balance, in the symptomatic dramatisation of the pictorial suggestions of upheavals in the surrounding environment. If there is a hyperbole sounded in the photograph *Kirkby*, it is the image of a man and his birds, of a lived conflict between the airy and lofty inclinations, air, lightness and flight, and its impasse of the tarmac ground. In *The Sly and Unseen Day* (2002) the artist George Shaw paints a row of garages in a suburban hinterland, a pervasive greyness, within the tonal qualities of the humble Humbrol hobbyist paint used for painting aircraft models, Shaw's long backyard of garages reflects the worn-down surfaces of this earlier documentary work of Colin Jones — the voicing of a disquiet, or the potential act of access in the moments of a perfectly ordinary scene.

The 'stain' of the image is the strain of being in two places at once; in lodging between 'effect' and 'affect', a disturbance in the direction of the image is felt, a "warp in the emotional glass"², that narrows the range of the mind's response. Within this ruinous narrow edge of British life, a resonance continues to hold: pigeon-fancier and pigeons atone to a place where the image metamorphoses meaning. The image sounds not to the suspended autobiographies and fictions, or to the soon-to-arrive social unrest and Toxteth riots in Liverpool in 1981 (or the "dustbin lids or the shoot-to-kill operations"³ that the poet Seamus Heaney writes of Ulster in the 1970s, with which the pictorial image reverberates) but to a realm that separates the lines of politics to a lyric atonement, lifting the image from a narrow viewpoint, to a place and circumstance where the pigeons and their handler can be reimagined in light of other thoughts. This atonement of the figures in the image allows us to see things as they are, whatever they are, and here the birds provide the leading note; the pigeons never take flight, they rest in the hand of the pigeon-fancier or in the wicker basket on the bicycle. the birds reside in the hinterland, custodians of the air and always alluring, delicate, figures of flight and aliveness.

NOTES

1 *My Back To Nature* by George Shaw review — darkness at the edge of town. Laura Cumming, Sunday, 15 May 2016, *The Observer* newspaper

2 *Finders Keepers, Selected Prose, 1971 – 2001*, London, Faber & Faber, 2002 ebook, 2010 pg 398

3 *Finders Keepers, Selected Prose, 1971 – 2001*, London, Faber & Faber, 2002 ebook, 2010 pg 403

Lapwing

Vanellus, Linnæus

When the breeding place is invaded the bird utters "pee-wit" or variants of it: "peet" or "pee-ee". The full song uttered during the rushing, whirling, tossing, tumbling nuptial flight has been given various renderings: "pees-weep-weep-weep, pees-weep" and "co-u, whee-whee-whee, co-u-whee" and "willuch-ooee-willuch-willuch-coo-ee" and "coo-oo-oo, hook-a-coo-ee, coo-ee".

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Sandpiper

Tringa hypoleucos, Linnæus

The male utters a musical trill as it flits with vibrating wings by the side of the river.

One rendering is "twee-te tee-tee twee-te tee-tee".

The trill is described as "kittie-needie" or "willy-wicket".

Curlew

Numenius arquata, Linnæus

The whistle of the curlew has given the species its name.

The usual rendering is "courlis" or "kour-lie", which must be taken as a general symbol covering many variants. A note quite different is a long, liquid bubbling call.

Corncrake

Crex, Linnæus

The most usual note is the familiar crake, which may be syllabled "rerp-rerp" oft repeated. It is uttered chiefly by night, but also any hour of the day. The bird has other notes, one being syllabled as a weak "kjü-kjo-kjä". The anger note is a grunting "urmph".

Ptarmigan

Lagopus mutus

The ptarmigan has a deep, low, guttural repeated "ack" or "ee-ack" in various tempos, and a bass clacking utterance.

Partridge

Perdix, Linnæus

The usual call of the partridge is "krrr-ic". The cry sound "kwee-hee-hee" and "krikrikri..."



David Goldblatt, *A girl and her mother at home*, Boksburg, South Africa, 1980, gelatin-silver print, E.79-1992

Normality is the real point in this photograph. It has all the spectacle of normality; but the visual and acoustic details, and the formal construction of the photograph compound feelings of discomfort. The appearance of the photograph 'interrupts' the temporality of the picture. Its legibility, its histography, seems to centre on space, on the losing and the gaining of space within the frame. There is a tightness to the photograph, a tautness so held back that you believe the image is going to snap. The 'now-time' of the photograph, emerges in the 'now-time' of the reading. An endless reading or petition for a perfect image — *A girl and her mother at home, Boksburg* (1980), fills an acoustic reserve, that in its formality, control and manners creates a surface which contrives to disguise a hidden text. This is the ocular view, which nods to an uncanniness, embedded in the black-and-white grain. The space and distance between each subject builds a stilted tableau, where the centre of the photograph is not populated, and the performance on view extends the lines of distance, the lines of enquiry even further. The frame, is 'without life' — a composition that intentionally distances the eye, lens and shutter, to pull the figures within a pictorial register of mute exclusion. Residing in their own activity, an absorption relays an isolation within this interior view, as neither subject looks at each other — the dog in the foreground, the daughter playing the piano, the finch in the cage, the mother's gaze and the dog still on the mother's lap. The light that streams in from the left of the otherwise closed curtains appears like a breath restrained, a taking in of air, a silencing of voices; the light forms a scopic conceit, a ray of constraint, it reinforces a deliberate acuity where any transgression or overstepping of the mark is denied. The light cannot flood the image, it too is regulated and the bright South African sun is translated into a "wholly uneventful flow of a commonplace ordinary life".¹

A girl and her mother at home, Boksburg, traces a façade of the concert stage, a spectacle of manners for the stage. Fragmenting the assembly of mother, daughter and pet animals — the subjects take their spaces in a drama where the spectacle is not quite shown; the narrative disguising the 'now-time' of the image into the 'not yet' hidden truths that cover the 'racial' turn. The photograph imprints a legible precept of loss, of the voices that are evicted out of the drama — this image rises within the acoustic references that are tempered to silence. The isolation of the individual subject releases a sobering vestige of prohibitive boundaries. This interior image is part of wider series by the photographer David Goldblatt on Boksburg in the 1980s, a legally white-only town on the eastern periphery of Johannesburg, South Africa, which during Apartheid was heavily dependent on black labour.

The denial of voices in the image raises the visually absent voice of the black population, who are denied space, both 'outside' and on regulatory terms 'inside' the image. The stylistic tone of absorption becomes a record of the censoring of 'airspace', where the emotional space of the image is regulated economically, socially and racially. A racial lust for the control of geographic space. A performed 'civility' that is not so, a veneer over truth. The interior picture of suburbia, with its tone of dissonant alienation and silently composed is not relieved by the African finch, perched in its cage on the piano. The eloquent geometry of *A girl and mother at home, Boksburg* adds a tonal contrast of 'airy' greys that augment the tension — there is a quality that allures the gaze; it has something to do with the curtains and the light, a milky shroud, the enclosure within a cocoon. But in the middle of the day, the closed curtain sounds an irregular timbre, the curtains obscure a barrier, a stage for admittance and refusal. This owning of space is an image of partitions, a plain-spoken austere normalcy

of in-between moments; the spatial arrangements and rearrangements of the image constitute the composition of the photograph's soundtrack — it is part of a voice of an arrested film, in which the conversations are all in one key.

166 "To say that history withdraws from sight or understanding is not to say that history is what is past, but rather that it passes away; not that it has disappeared, but rather that it 'threatens to disappear'; it is always on the verge of disappearing, without disappearing. The possibility of history is bound to the survival of the traces of what is past and to our ability to read these traces as traces,"² writes Eduardo Cadava in *Words of Light, Theses on the Photography of History* (1997). "Forgetting the extermination is part of the extermination itself,"³ wrote Jean Baudrillard in 1994, and echoes the voice of David Goldblatt in 1982 on the racism so embedded in his native country South Africa under Apartheid. "Blacks are not of this town, they serve it, they trade it, they receive charity from it and are ruled, rewarded and punished by its precepts. Some on occasions, are its privileged guests. But all who go there, do so by permit or invitation, never by right."⁴ The silent animals — the finch and the dogs — are unwitting figures in this image of division; invariably they form part of the visual and spatial scoring that tells political and visual stories: not only of the images within the frame but also of the images that the frame keeps out.

NOTES

1 David Goldblatt *In Boksburg* (Jeffrey Ladd, Joanna Lehan Errata Editions, 1982) (Republished by Steidl Books, 2016)

2 Eduardo Cadava: *Traces, Words of Light, Theses on the Photography of History* (New Jersey, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997) pg 64

3 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (The University of Michigan Press) 1994 (pg 49)

4 David Goldblatt *In Boksburg* (Jeffrey Ladd, Joanna Lehan Errata Editions, 1982)

Golden Eagle

Aquila chrysaëtus, Linnæus

The cry is an abrupt barking note, repeated again and again, sometimes resembling a "yelp". A note that sometimes accompanies the bird's swoop on its prey is a rapid "keck, keck, keck". The female, when put off her eggs, has been heard to utter "curious, liquid bubbling notes repeated with great rapidity: 'WOW-WOW-WOW-WOW', while perched on a tree".

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Sparrowhawk

Accipiter nisus, Linnæus

The alarm cry when the nest is approached sounds like a loud, rapid "kep, kep, kep" or "kew, kew, kew", repeated several times. In moments of rising intensity this becomes "kyow, kyow, kyow". The "kew, kew, kew" is the call of the male bringing food, which, if the female does not come, changes to "key-oo, key-oo, kew, kew, kew", the "key-oo" plaintive and the "kew" shrill.

Peregrine Falcon

Falco peregrinus

The call of the male (tercel) returning with food is rendered as "e-eep, e-eep, e-eep". The anger note is a hard, repeated "kek, kek, kek" or "hek, hek, hek". A cry heard in late autumn is "guu, guu".

Greylag Goose

Anser anser, Linnæus

Similar to the domestic goose. The usual call in flight is a loud "gagaga" or "kaah kah kak". The species utters goose-gabbling notes and a menacing "hiss".

Whooper Swan

Cygnus, Linnæus

The usual call, a loud, trumpeted double "whoop, whoop", gives the species its name. It is heard in flight, together with the swish of the powerful wings. A low but musical song, it has a phrase of about seven distinct notes, rising slightly, then falling and finally rising again.

Bewick's Swan

Cygnus columbianus

The call, uttered during flight at frequent intervals, resembles the "honking" of wild geese; it is quite different from that of the whooper swan and has been figured as "tong, tong, bong, hong, ong, ongong", a varied din of honking notes. The alarm note is a soft "kuck, kuck" or "kueck, kueck".



Marielle Nylander, *Today, Our Dreams Have Wings*, Portland, Oregon, USA, 2002, chromogenic print

Bird-Watching

"Saturday, August 11th W. Gale. Bright, white clouds. Rain passed over. Sun hot. 65-67.5- 65°. 2.30pm to 5.15pm. To Gallywood, Margaretting, King Wood into Edney, Writtle. Jackdaws by the Wid were tossed on the wind, like scraps of charred paper. I saw one bird, facing the wind, drop straight down, slowly, to land in a tree. Most masterly flying."¹

A late-summer diary entry by the nature writer JA Baker, distils a reminder of the season's indelible effect on the body and surroundings, a vista of the wide summer sky and gusts of warm wind that envelop spectator and environment.

A young child's arm, straight and stretched to the centre of the frame, delicately holds an honoured object: a pink bird made of paper, wood and feathers. The sky is a cobalt blue, there is a tall picket fence, a boundary to an outer landscape, whose outer fields are only hinted at. To the right of the image, there is a curious shadow-figure, a bird created through the interplay of light and the garden's foliage that appears to mimic the posture of the feathered bird. A pink paper bird commands the ocular frame in a state of suspended stasis, the physical world is brought to a halt — the imaginary world is the vanishing point of the image — but this all appears to be contained within the confines of the tall picket fence and the bird-in-the-hand.

In tones of silver-gelatin another bird, a great tit, is pictured centre-frame eating out of the hand of a horticulture student, in front of a tall reeded fence. The outstretched arm has a bird-in-the-hand and the boundary of the fence contains the image. Dated 1915, the picture by the photographer Richard Tepe (1864 – 1952), displayed in a quiet passage in the exhibition *Modern Times* at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (2014 – 15), elicits a delicate monochromatic echo of Marielle Nylander's richly hued pink-feathered bird in the photograph *Today, Our Dreams Have Wings* (Portland, OR) (2012). Tepe's silver-toned surface has the look of weathered mirrors. The bird-in-the-hand pares down the image to its barest essence and the boundaries of both photographs are more thresholds than borders at which the various sense organs go into action. "If you go ringing blue tits," writes Tim Dee in *Four Fields*, "you can feel a whole society travelling through your hands in a single morning.

Some come easily out of the net and lie meek in your palm, others attack like dwarf woodpeckers drilling at your fingers and drawing blood."² These thresholds differ with different persons and their materiality emphasises in a more visceral manner the fragility of what is handled in transition. The works occupy a space not only between photography and painting but also subtly between reality and the simulacrum digital double that darts between print and screen.

A bird-in-the hand traces an epidermal intimacy, "I hold it to my ear", "I hold it in my hand", wrote Walter Benjamin in *Whisper of Gazes*. "Gaze whisper (Blickwispern) fills the passages. There is not a thing, that does not look up, and then down squintingly where one least expects it, but if you look closer it has disappeared. Space lends its echo to this whispering of gazes. "What may have happened inside me," he says, squinting. We hesitate. "Yes, so what may have happened inside you?" we softly ask him back." Benjamin hints at a voicing within the held object. An "object of thought" as philosopher Hannah Arendt writes, "to reclaim the physical component of the image". Spaces of thought are created through descriptions, a "whispering of gazes". The whispering that trails from an image creates a memory-trace, reconnecting the photograph to registers of time and space.

What trails do these whisperings leave? A grammar of visual analogy that wavers between past and present. Photography's capacity for creating illusion? The stasis of suspense, this stilling of time, to a wait, a pause, of a still-inchoate tongue. The paper bird, a topographical candy-coloured figure is also "a skiagraphy, the writing of shadow, as a simultaneous memory, a memory of the present, a division of the instant."⁴ The shadow-writing is the shadow-bird of Nylander's image and reproduces a multiple imprint of the present. A valorised avian daydream, the camera lens seeks an 'enlarging gaze', a magnifying glass to an experiential encounter with the world. Gaston Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space*, advocates in ocular terms that "the magnifying glass takes the world as though it were quite new [...] it furnishes us with documents of pure phenomenology, in which the discovery of the world or the entry into the world, would become more than just a worn-out word [...] The man with the magnifying glass — quite simply — bars the every-day world. It the fresh eye before a new object [...] It gives him back the enlarging gaze of a child. With this glass in his hand he returns to the garden."⁵ The photograph is a medium that can be tinkered with, an object to loosen and play with verbal image-making. Observation belongs to the gaze of 'several times'. Bachelard makes the point that in the domain of scientific observation, the first time doesn't count. The immersive experience of play and observation is one that reduces pictorial linearity to an assemblage of images coherent and not so. "A fairy tale is a reasoning image. It tends to associate extraordinary images as though they could be coherent images, imparting the conviction of principal image to the entire ensemble of derivate images. But the tie is so facile, and the reasoning so fluid that we no longer know where the germ of the tale lies."⁶

"I have heard this story, or one exactly like it, in the lore of several cultures," starts the writer Toni Morrison in her Nobel Lecture on December 7, 1993. Morrison begins the lecture with a signifier of the 'fairy tale' and inadvertently ties the beginning of the "Once upon a time" to a seminal photograph, "Once upon a time there was an old woman. Blind. Wise." The photograph that 'announces' itself, is the image by Paul Strand (1890 – 1976) of a street peddler in 1916: (PH.372-1982) and published the following year in Alfred Stieglitz's magazine *Camera Work*.⁷ Taken with a 'false lens' that allowed Strand to point the camera in one direction while actually taking the photograph in another, the woman is objectified and submerged by the 'blind board' around her neck.

Toni Morrison's image of the old, wise woman, is qualified in the extract of the Nobel address quoted below:

"In the version I know the woman is the daughter of slaves, black, American, and lives alone in a small house outside of town. Her reputation for wisdom is without peer and without question....[...] The children stand before her, and one of them says, 'Old woman, I hold in my hand a bird. Tell me whether it is living or dead.'

She does not answer, and the question is repeated. 'Is the bird that I am holding living or dead?'

..../

Finally, she speaks and her voice is soft but stern, 'I don't know,' she says. 'I don't know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands.'

Speculation on what (other than its own frail body) that bird-in-the-hand might signify has always been attractive to me. So I choose to read the bird language and the woman as a practised writer. She is worried about how the language she dreams in, given to her at birth, is handled, put into service, even withheld from her for certain nefarious purposes. Being a writer she thinks of language partly as a system, partly as a living thing over which one has control, but most as agency – as an act with consequences. So the question the children put to her: "Is it living or dead?" is not unreal because she thinks of language as susceptible to death, erasure; certainly imperilled and salvageable only by an effort of the will. She believes that if the bird in the hands of her visitors is dead the custodians are responsible for the corpse. For her a dead language is not only one no longer spoken or written, it is unyielding language content to admire its own paralysis. Like statist language, censored and censoring, ruthless in its policing duties, it has no desire or purpose other than maintaining the free range of its own narcotic narcissism, its own exclusivity and dominance. However moribund, it is not without effort for it actively thwarts the intellect, stalls conscience, suppresses human potential. Unreceptive to interrogation, it cannot form or tolerate new ideas, shape other thoughts, tell another story, fill baffling silences.

She does not want to leave her young visitors with the impression that language should be forced to stay alive merely to be. The vitality of the language lies in its ability to lift the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers, readers, writers."⁸

The memory of the instant of the photograph that accompanies Nylander's image conceives of the photographic instant as an imprint of another present, recalling multiple voices of focus to the singular gesture:

"The horizon within. The horizon line in a contained space. A way out. A blinding whiteness.

On a transatlantic journey, the child gets sick.

After hours in a nighttime Westcoast ER, tubes and IVs, tests and worry, the child gets released. Her mother takes her for a special breakfast before going back to the house that they both call home for the time being.

The mother asks:

'How would you describe your experience? Can we make an image of it?'

The child takes a pink bird from her suitcase, walks into the garden, puts the bird on her hand and says:

'There. Now you can take a picture. And I can hold very still.'

To get back home you shoot across the forests and the ridges, the prairies and the plains. The coast line, the ocean, a number of little islands (you could live there, why not? Anyone could. Or over there, there seems to be some space left...) then another mass of land, here's where you call home, at times, but not right now when you are trapped in a backyard on the other side of the world, feverish, alive. With a bird in your hand."⁹

To the specific question of photography, the question of a 'bird-in-the hand' could be phrased differently. The photographic image gives something to be seen, it is the imprint of what has once taken place. The philosopher Jacques Derrida speaks of skiagraphy (the shadow-bird) as evoking an optical view, inscribing the visual image in the imprinting of an absent present.

'The inventor of the photographic negative, William Henry Fox Talbot, called his invention, skiagraphy or 'words of light'. In 1837 he made a photographic image with an inscription of an alphabet, the name of the place and the date, as if he wanted to show that the entire alphabet could be taken into the image and that photography was going to be the first optical medium to enter the domain of writing and to bring writing into the very essence of the image.'¹⁰

NOTES

1 *August Diary: The Peregrine: The Hills of Summer & Diaries: The Complete Works of JA Baker*. Ed. John Fanshawe, Intro. Mark Cocker (London, William Collins, Harper Collins 2010)

2 Tim Dee, *Four Fields* (London, Jonathan Cape, 2013 ebook 2013) ebook pg 563

3 Pg 202 Walter Benjamin, *A Short History of Photography* (In German only) Trachtenberg, Alan, *Classic Essays on Photography*, Amy Weinstein Meyers, USA, Leete's Island Books, 1980 Also cited and translated by Eduardo Cadava *Words of Light, Theses on the Photography of History*, New Jersey, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997.

4 Jacques Derrida, *Copy Archive, Signature, A Conversation on Photography*, Ed. Gerhard Richter, Trans Jeff Fort (Stanford, California Stanford University Press, 2010)

5 Gaston Bachelard, *Miniature, The Poetics of Space*, 1958: trans. Maria Jolas, Forward, M Danielewski, Intro. Richard Kearney, London Penguin, 1964, 2014, Pg 168 – 199

6 Ibid

7 Paul Strand, *Blind Woman*, 1916 New York, Publisher Michael E Hoffman, V&A Museum, London, Museum No: PH.372-1982

8 Toni Morrison, Nobel Lecture, 12/12/1993: https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/laureates/.../morrison-lecture.html

9 Marielle Nylander, *Writings*, 2016/2017

10 Jacques Derrida, *Copy Archive, Signature, A Conversation on Photography*, Ed. Gerhard Richter, Trans Jeff Fort (Stanford, California Stanford University Press, 2010)

Mute Swan

Cygnus olor

A relatively silent species. Both sexes utter occasionally, low, not unmusical notes as "kgiurr" or "keiurr", varying with the sex. The alarm note is a sharp "chirr".

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Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos, Linnæus

The usual note of the duck is "quack", or better, "qwark", sometimes repeated rapidly and serving with varying pitch and stress. The drake's cry is less loud and is syllabled as "rep".

Eider

Somateria mollissima mollissima, Linnæus

The drake frequently utters a loud moaning cry syllabled variously as "wow, wouw, wouw", "aah-ou" or "ah-ee-ou"; "hoo-a-ow".

The drake also utters "a nasal "ha" or loud "hauwa, hahauwa".

Manx Shearwater

Puffinus puffinus

During the nocturnal flights at the breeding place it is very noisy, there being a continuous concert of guttural crows in all pitches, the regular formula being "kuk kuk kàw kaw", the penultimate being strongly stressed. The crow is repeated; it may be broken off abruptly, or else end with a guttural gulp.

Hallucinating a Hawk

It is said that a female Harris hawk is flown weekly above the grounds of the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington, London.

What you are about to "hear" is a series of voiced images, a verbal contact sheet. Written in three registers, entirely from other texts of 'specialised voices', the work uses the device of the 'cut up' to conjure a hallucinatory reverie or montage of images, 'flashes' and 'sightings' of a working hawk. The handler, the middle voice (voice two), is a voice composed of specialised texts sourced from current and old English handbooks on falconry.

The voicing 'focalises' the binocular view of the hawk, through the imagined registers of Shallow (voice one) and Deep (voice three). A raptor, as it is approached, will move its head from side to side or up and down. This is because the bird is alternating the image on their two foveas, the shallow one for closeness, the deep one for distance.¹ Any concept of time within the work is 'without flow' as a hawk's sensory world is entirely different. A hawk's world "moves about ten times faster than ours²". Thus, each voicing can and is never in synch, despite the visual illusion.

Set on 23 March 2017, in the grounds of the Victoria and Albert Museum's courtyard gardens, the date refers to the original meeting scheduled at dawn for an observed sighting of the Harris hawk — a meeting that never took place. The images form in darkness and end an hour or so later, at sunrise.

23 March 2017 The garden of the Victoria and Albert Museum. The garden grounds, a boundary of sorts, a place of geometric division, hidden corners and unexpected angles. Darkness slowly moves to light. Car noise pulse continuous. Wind, light north-westerly. A few blackbirds and robins congregate with a scattering of pigeons, looking for scraps on the museum's lawn.

Accipiter (Latin) or bird of prey. The females are markedly larger than the males. The distinctive configuration of short but broad wings, somewhat rounded at the tips, and a long tail are adaptations for manoeuvrable flight through obstructed hunting grounds⁴.

6.00am A Quarry, is that which a falconer and hawk hunt³.

Harris hawk or Broad-winged Hawk (Parabuteo unicinctus). The term relates to the breadth, rather than the length of the wing. The name is derived from the Greek para, meaning beside, near or like, and the Latin buteo, referring to a buzzard; uni meaning once; and cinctus meaning girdled, referring to the white band at the tip of the tail. A female hawk, medium-large in size and roughly between a peregrine falcon (Falco peregrinus) and a red-tailed hawk (buteo jamaicensis). The American artist and naturalist John James Audubon gave this bird its English name in honour of his ornithological companion, financial supporter and friend, Edward Harris⁵.

The irides of the eye vary considerably from species to species, though they tend to be pale. In the *Accipiter gentilis*, the eye colour darkens from greyish or amber in immature birds to a fiery orange-yellow or red in maturity.⁷

The retina is avascularised to prevent shadows or light-scattering; instead of blood vessels, nutrients are supplied to the retinal cells from a projecting, pleating structure called the pecten. The visual sensory cells, the rods and cones are densely packed. One million cones are in each retina. Associated with the cone cells are coloured oil droplets that are thought to sharpen contrast and pierce haze, or may protect cells from ultraviolet radiation⁸.

When fixing their eyes on an object, raptors characteristically bob their head up and down several times. In so doing they are triangulating the object, using motion parallax to ascertain distance⁹.

6.10am A voice from the North called. The intruder, a raven, passed through the treetops into view. It called again, a chocking, croaking retch of a cry that belonged among rocky crags and upland fells. It seemed out of place here, great fingered wings beating in slow motion, black diamond tail fanned, passing over a soft-backed hump, eying the mown lawns, flagstone paths and trimmed back flowerbeds.

Imprint is a hawk which, while young, has become imprinted (full or to some degree) on Man. Such a hawk has learned to identify humans as her own kind and is certain to have some behavioural abnormalities. If an eyas is handled too early or her training begun too soon, she might continue with behaviours that in her wild counterparts will moderate or stop after they leave the eyrie. She might never grow out of being over-possessive of her food and mantling heavily over it in the presence of Man to protect it from theft

6.20

Despite having a brief history of use in falconry, it has achieved a unique niche in the modern pursuit. It has been found to be easily tamed and entered at a quarry and is therefore considered to be an ideal first bird: furthermore it is a capable and versatile hunter which may be flown by an experienced astringer. More agile than the buteos, it is flown from the fist straight at the quarry, out of the trees or off poles, and is sometimes used by British astringers to fly ground-quarry from the soar in open hilly country. Its usual prey is birds of various sizes, rabbits and rodents¹¹.

6.14am '....Goe hawk in the Woodland, and make choyse to fly at such Partridges as will flye to a woode.'¹²

6.14am Call of a falconer to summon a hawk by whatever means. To call may imply summoning her with calls or whistles (she is taught to respond to voice, whistles or both in her training, or by showing her the lure with or without audible signal¹³.

6.14am Gangs of magpies, carrion crows and wood pigeons swagger, scratching and pecking for overlooked morsels¹⁴.

by a perceived competitor. She might scream (falconer's term) as she would when a parent approached the eyrie. The screaming which begins as baby food — or recognition-calls, might continue for some time or for ever; a hawk which screams (rather than vocalises normally) is known to a falconer as a screamer. Due to her confidence and lack of fear, there is a likelihood of her being aggressive towards the falconer. These long-recognised exaggerated behaviours are often annoying and obstructive, but are accepted by some as tolerable when set against the hawk's tameness and the reduced likelihood of losing her in the field.¹⁰

It is known that wild HARRISES cooperate in the hunt, there as AUSTRINGER'S bird they may be successfully flown in a cast.¹⁵

A carrion crow perches on the ridge of the roof, a sheaf of twigs, grasses and wisps of wool protruding from either side of its beak like a handlebar moustache.

The crow calls out three times in quick succession "kraa-kraa-kraa". Nest material falls from its beak and tumbles down the roof, bouncing off the lichen-encrusted tiles¹⁸.

To 'garden or weather birds is to expose them to sun and air'.¹⁷

A fist or gloved hand on which the hawk is carried. In the West, it is the left hand unless a left-handed falconer chooses otherwise¹⁶.

The hood is a head covering for a hawk, customarily made entirely of leather or of leather with some additional materials. The hood, when on, envelops the head, leaving only the beak and nares (nostrils) exposed. If well made and well fitting, it excludes all light, which has the effect of keeping a hawk still and calm.¹⁹

To carry or to hold (a hawk) on the fist and walk about with her. The term is principally applied to walking about with an unmanned or not fully manned hawk, often for several hours at a stretch during the day, as part of the process of manning. This is used as an opportunity for careful and gradual introduction to strange sights and activities such as '... frequent unhooding and rehooding and occasional turnings of the hand to induce the hawk to shift her position' — 1908. Today, shorter periods of carriage during manning are looked on as sufficient, indeed more effective, certainly more humane²⁰.

6.30am Still-hunting. In a lay sense: of a wild hawk, a technique in which she waits immobile on a high or concealed perch to ambush prey, or in which she moves from perch to perch, pausing to look and listen for prey. It is applied to flying, for example, as a broad-winged hawk out of a tree or off a pole and exploiting this behaviour²¹.

To cast off, throw off is to encourage a hawk to fly from the fist with a forward movement of the hand²⁴.

6.48am One crow flies above the raptor and defecates, excrement, spattering the raptor's dark wing tips³².

'Hawkys have aboute their legges Gesse(s) made of leather most comynly, some of silke.' To fit jesses to a hawk is to jess her, after which she is said to be jessed; the procedure is known as jessing. In the case of traditional pattern used in the West, the free, slitted ends of the two jesses are attached to one ring of the swivel, leash threaded through the other. While the hawk is being carried, the leash might be 'halved' at the swivel and the two free lengths wound in loops round the fingers of the first. Leash and swivel are removed when the hawk flies. In the field, with swivel and leash removed, the jesses are used to restrain a hawk on the fist; they are gripped in the falconer's gloved hand and released when he casts her off or slips her²².

6.34am Like a sprinter surging off the starting blocks a female hawk launches from her concealed perch²³.

6.34am Throw up of a hawk is to ascend quickly. The term is applied in the case of a falcon whose downward speed in a stoop provides the impetus for her to pull out and rise again effortlessly²⁵.

6.45am The great spiral of the ascent rising coil over coil in slow symmetry has in its movement all the amplitude of space. And it has soared to the top of its bent, there comes the level of flight as far as the eye can follow — straight, clean and as effortless as breathing.²⁶

The wings hardly move, now and then perhaps a lazy flap as though a cyclist, freewheeling on a gentle slope, turned the crank a time or two. The bird seems to float with a direct and undeviating force²⁷.

The raptor soars in low languid circles as the crows repeatedly dive and jostle in synchronised attack²⁸.

6.49am Circling higher and higher²⁹.

6.50am A flash of chestnut, zips out from the tree line, the hawk. The crow flanks the hawk like a dark suited henchman. The hawk bypasses the crow³⁰.

6.53am The hawk fans her barred tail and skims the ground in jinking pursuit. Her outstretched talons strike at a lagging bird and they disappear in a puff of feathers³³.

'The beke or clap of the hawk is the upper part this is croked'. The beaks of hawks are of a shape evolved for tearing the flesh of prey. The notching on the cutting edge (tomium) of the upper part is known as tooth, notch or nook. This configuration provides the means for breaking the spinal cord of prey³⁵.

6.60

6.50am Alerted to its presence, the magpies begin to crowd and heckle the raptor. Other birds follow suit. Swift and straight as an arrow, she sweeps down in the midst of the mob. Screeching, the corvids explode into the air like a firework starburst, followed by a wave of pigeons³¹.

6.52am The pigeons propel themselves on whirring wings towards the cover of an ivy-cloaked beech copse³².

6.53am The bird ranged back and forth over one spot, turning with the breeze to go back to this same space. The flight vigorous, erratic – a blend of swoops with long legs dangling, then windborne ascents and tricky breeze-ruffled jinks or turns³⁴.

6.54am To carry, often found by itself; of a hawk to obey a natural instinct to fly away with a kill to where she might feed on it alone and unopposed.³⁶

'Ink, whether it be of a partridge, fowle, doves, or any other pray, is the neck from head to the body'³⁷.

A leg bell is attached to one or each tarsus with a small leather strap known as a bewit.³⁹

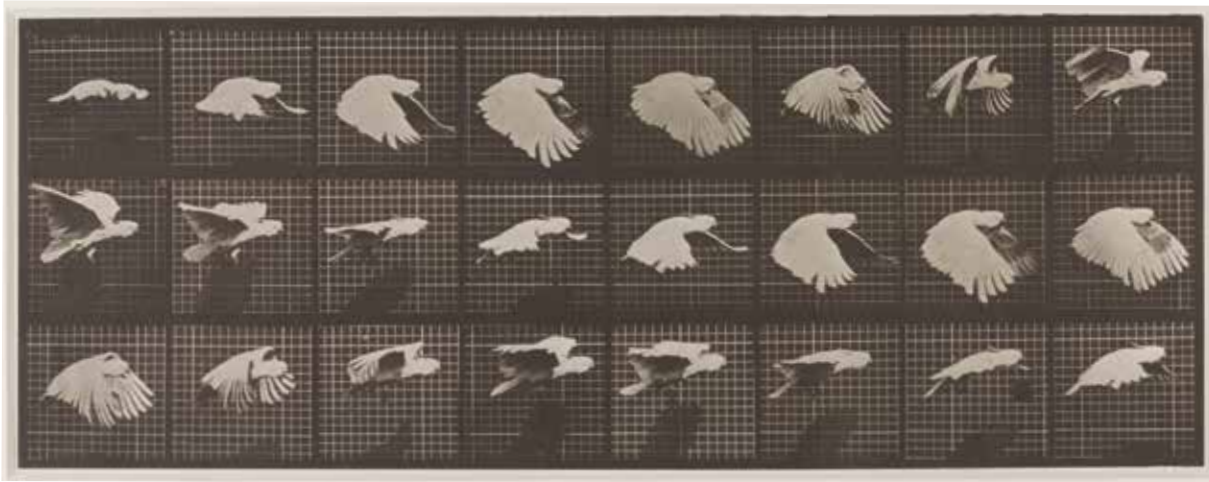
7.00am To cast, is to disgorge indigestible material (fur bone feathers) which in a healthy hawk is formed into a compact, sweet-smelling pellet known as a casting. To cast through the hood is to cast while hooded⁴¹.

6.58am Falconers are choosy about bell rings, a different sound suits different ears³⁸.

The ringing of the bell betrays the whereabouts when she is out of sight in the field, perhaps on a kill or when she is lost. When she is on her perch and the falconer is within earshot, the character of its ringing can indicate if her movements are normal or she is in difficulty⁴⁰.

NOTES

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- 2 Helen Macdonald, *Falcon* (London, Reaktion Books, 2006)
- 3 Adrian Walker, *The Encyclopedia of Falconry* (Shrewsbury, Swan Hill Press 1999)
- 4 Ibid
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- 6 Derek Niemann, 8 February 2013, *Country Diary*, *The Guardian* newspaper
- 7 Adrian Walker, *The Encyclopedia of Falconry* (Shrewsbury, Swan Hill Press 1999)
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- 10 Adrian Walker, *The Encyclopedia of Falconry* (Shrewsbury, Swan Hill Press 1999)
- 11 Ibid
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- 14 Claire Stares, 13 January 2017, *Country Diary*, *The Guardian* newspaper
- 15 Adrian Walker, *The Encyclopedia of Falconry* (Shrewsbury, Swan Hill Press 1999)
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- 25 Ibid
- 26 Nan Shepard, *The Living Mountain* (Aberdeen Press 1977, Canongate Books 2011)
- 27 Ibid
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- 30 Ibid
- 31 Ibid
- 32 Ibid
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- 34 Mark Cocker, *Claxton: Field Notes from a Small Planet* (London, Jonathan Cape 2014)
- 35 Adrian Walker, *The Encyclopedia of Falconry* (Shrewsbury, Swan Hill Press 1999)
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Eadweard Muybridge, *Bird in Flight*, from *Animal Locomotion*, Pennsylvania, USA, 1887, collotype, PH.1273 1889

Conclusion

The Ornithologist

'Viking, North Utsire, South Utsire, Forties, Cromarty, Forth, Tyne, Dogger, Fisher, German Bight, Humber, Thames, Dover, Wright, Portland, Plymouth, Biscay, Trafalgar, FitzRoy, Sole, Lundy, Fastnet, Irish Sea, Shannon, Rockall, Malin, Hebrides, Bailey, Fair Isle, Faeroes, Southeast Iceland.' The shipping forecast tones in the ear of the researcher with weather reports for the seas around the coasts of the British Isles. As birds migrate, their movements cross sea and landmass. Soaring birds that rely on thermals to generate lift migrate during the day, such as raptors, and long-distance migratory landbirds, such as warblers, sparrows, thrushes, migrate at night, beginning their flights under the cover of darkness. The ear tunes again to *'Gulf of Bothnia, The Quark, Northern Sea of Bothnia, Southern Sea of Bothnia, Sea of Aaland, Archipelago Sea, Gulf of Finland, Northern Baltic, Central Baltic, Gulf of Riga, Southern Baltic, Western Baltic, The Sound, Kattegat, Skagerrak, Lake Vänern'* for the seas around the coast of Sweden. For some species migration is a nightly process with birds 'dropping out' in the morning to spend the day refuelling for the next flight, but for others migration is continuous once initiated. It is when there is a good migratory movement of birds, encounters with rain and low overcast or foggy conditions that you can witness spectacular fallouts and birds quite literally drop out of the sky.

The shipping forecast throughout the day and throughout the night, its areas named in clockwise direction, strictly following the set order of the Maritime & Coastguard Agency; the hearing creates in the repetition a looseness and a familiarity of the ear, so that the eye and ear can wander in harmonious succession — "always moving, and yet always fixed and unchanging".¹ The images of movement cannot be entirely divorced from the imagination. It runs into the figure of the flying body, of the human desire to leave the ground.

The figure of the wild bird becomes a source of participation as a living reference that surfaces as a mystery, a familiar that is unexplained, a writing of light that remains at its source obscure. "Whoever is fascinated," wrote the philosopher Maurice Blanchot, "doesn't see, properly speaking, what he sees. Rather, it touches him in an immediate proximity; it seizes and ceaselessly draws him close, even though it leaves him absolutely at a distance. Fascination is fundamentally linked to neutral, impersonal presence, to the indeterminate They, the immense, faceless Someone. Fascination is the relation the gaze entertains — a relation which is itself neutral and impersonal — with sightless, shapeless depth, the absence one sees because it is blinding."²

In 1864, writing on the workshops and laboratories of the scientist E.J.Marey, the photographer Nadar observed: "Cages, aquariums, and beings to live in them: pigeons, buzzards, fish, saurians, ophidians, batrachians. The pigeons coo, the buzzards don't breathe a word.... A frog who has escaped from a jar absentmindedly jumps in front of you to escape the caress of your shoe. Full of gravity, a tortoise proceeds... with an obstinate continuity over different obstacles from one corner to another. He is tireless in his task, as if in quest of some problem under the force of an *idée fixe*... Under the ladders of a trellis, the yellow-collared grass snakes enervatingly distend their muscles, enjoying the tepid temperatures and in the neighbouring compartment the wide little bright eye of a grey lizard lies in wait — just in case — for the passage of some imprudent ephemera, visible almost to him alone. Everywhere, in every corner, life."³

A number of animals enter into this forest walk, through the pages of the book *Night Procession*, with photographs taken by Stephen Gill, accompanied by words by Karl Ove Knausgård. Each image and word-thought stained with plant sap, filling the spaces and gaps of the Northern Swedish winter and landscape. The birches, conifers and trees that are not yet familiar hold a stately position in deep snow, the horizon's line alters daily depending on the thaw or snowfall. This line, this place by which you orient yourself, is constantly changing — there is always movement, there are always shifts, and there is a parallel to the glass plates of field cameras, a latitude that alters the lift or fall of the ground glass by the change in weather states. The animals — deer who have crept North during warmer years and who will probably die of dehydration, the foxes, birds, mice and squirrels — all are glimpsed in the periphery of vision, sometimes in one walk, leaving the tracings of their footprints in the crust of the snow. Their bodies echo thoughts, of having seen, possibly seeing, maybe being seen in this landscape that carves out the image-world of the child; of picking up sticks that lie in wait upon the surface of the snow to strike away the abstract shapes and forces that impede a peaceful sight. In the urban city of London the large sodden leaves replace the rime-filled patterns of snow that make trees appear as winged creatures or majestic bird figures and glaze everything that cannot move, as the landscape is petrified in a delicate trembling — the thought is to shake the trees, to bring back the warmth to undo this perpetual cold, that holds a monochromatic scale of such an intensity that only one note is sounding, if you hear anything at all, within the landscape. All is muted and quiet, so you have to shout, in order to clarify that sound can be made, or needs to be made, to acknowledge life to this voice in these surroundings. But in this space, the space between light and dark, the landscape holds a perspective that rhymes between the dark type of words on the page and the white spaces around, the letters and the grammatical form hold language together, they assist in the forest around you being heard. An equal weight is given to the spaces around the words and the words themselves; this opens the landscape of reading to a depth, the opening of space, to voices, to the reading of words. This can be transposed to images, to the perspectival space between what is foregrounded and what is not, but in the winter landscape they hold an equal place, an oneiric depth, which, in this very grasping, diminishes and dissolves what is in front and behind. The animal procession of glimpsed figures moves forward and appears to write over the very words that the mind attempts to inhabit, so there is only this plant-sap surface to relate to. They, the animals and birds, are of this world of changing horizons, of faded light, and now of winter-spring, and over there in the cities, in the wet and in the dark, moving just outside our view, back towards imagined sightings. To grasp the space brightly, to bring forward this peripheral space requires the call or song of birds. When a bird sings, whether it is familiar or not, it brings us closer to voice, to the voice of others that share this landscape. We can listen to the voices or we can let them fall.

The live figure of the bird is the body of fascination for the scientist and polymath inventor Étienne-Jules Marey, who turned his scrupulous attention to the study of flight — first in insects and then in birds — in the 1860s, focusing in particular on the interaction between the wings and air to determine motion. In 1873, with *La Machine Animale (Animal Mechanism)*, Marey produces a series of optical writings that trace the wingtips of a flying bird (or insect) onto smoked paper.⁴ The results provide surprising and nuanced details about the movement of bird wings and bodies during flight; delicate light drawings that emerge in the darkness with an almost hallucinatory glow, variations of wing patterns of life, inscribed into an optical form that reconstructs reality and withholds a measure of it. The ambiguity of these early images of photography transgresses the photograph into the place of the pensiveness where art as 'expression' and science as 'objective recording' collide — yet, it is in this intersection of such ambiguities that the process of looking opens the conception of what a photographic text can be.

Later the chemical simulacrum is further developed in 1882, as Marey invents the *chronotographe*, or *chronophotographic gun*, able to record 12 images per second on the same photographic plate. The first photographs from the *chronotographe* were of a gull and were published in an article he wrote for *La Nature* in 1882⁵. Here the living bird's movements are animated in time, layers of movement arrested in a non-linearity that contrasts to the linearity of Eadweard Muybridge's work on movement. *Bird in Flight* is one of a sequence of photographs out of 781 that form Muybridge's series *Animal Locomotion*, published by the University of Pennsylvania, USA, in 1887. The 24 cameras used to create *Animal Locomotion* distil the 24 frames into stop-motion inscriptions of time. The semblance is of time moving, yet this illusion of time masks the constructed linearity of time and motion captured by Muybridge.⁶ A near 'pathological' linearity that was repeated by the hundreds of actions that Muybridge demonstrated with his optical figures. There is a preserved dryness to the images of *Animal Locomotion*, as though made from cut-up figures of paper to create motion in 24 frames. The shadows in the photographs give a depth that encounters gestures of drawing, a sketched presence. The perspectivist's background is applied to a geometric, grid backdrop: a mechanical feat of imagery as exposures were made in rapid succession by means of threads attached to cameras placed about half a metre apart with the camera shutter activated when the bird broke the thread, as it flew past. The white cockatoo pictured in *Bird in Flight* looks oddly unreal, its winged feathers appear as distorted fingers or grotesque hands, its beak and face stretched forward in flight, charged with a 'hysterical intent'.

As with Joseph Wright of Derby's painting, *An Experiment on a Bird in an Air Pump*, the white cockatoo again enters into the discourse of photography as part of another 'scientific experiment', which carries again a veneer of showmanship and spectacle. But in this image, the bird is not struggling eternally for its breath — it is alive, with beak wide open. During the 24 frames the cockatoo's beak widens, progressively until it is fully open, with each image charting a rapid appearance in the tone of the bird's call, shriek or shout — this is the illusion of the multiple, the serial image — the cockatoo carries an aura of timbre and sounding through its voice.

The repetition of the frames serves as an echo of time, of the movement of time and motion, but it is the photograph's linear structure that tightens this illusion. Muybridge's images used the classical grid backdrop to create a visual impression of certainty and continuity, a resemblance of scientific order, classifying the figure within the scene. Muybridge also quietly used photographic tricks to maintain the illusion of movement, some frames being added at a later date to correct and move the eye to these serial patterns of movement⁷. *Bird in Flight* and the other 780 images run horizontally and are contained in a cube, a cube that hints at a 'twilight reverie' that ushers in the 'dark cube' of the cinema. Whilst the artist and writer Victor Burgin notes that for the writer Roland Barthes, it was the still image that held a "hallucinatory vivacity"⁸, it is to the illusion of film which Muybridge created in *Animal Locomotion*. Roland Barthes suggests a double fascination — "to be fascinated two times; by the image and by what surrounds it, as if I had two bodies at the same time; a narcissistic body, which looks, lost in the close mirror and a perverse body, ready to be fetishised, not the image, but precisely

that which exceeds it; the grain of the sound, the theatre itself, the darkness, the obscure mass of other bodies, the rays of light, the entrance, the exit; in brief, to distance myself, 'unstick', I complicate a 'relation by a situation.'"⁹

188 A repetition of the illusionist toolbox — the cockatoo poses as the tableau of fascination, but now of being "fascinated two times" — of touching or witnessing this separation of time, of the chemicals of the photograph. It is to the non-linear that the living bird belongs; and the speaking cockatoo inhabits the conjuror's gesture of chance.

The researcher at the moment of the summary of the research project elicits a deep silence, a silence that "must have followed Joan of Arc's response to her judges when they asked her, 'In what language do your voices speak to you?'"¹⁰

The researcher is not clear; she turns to a page, titled *Consideration* by the writer Yve Lomax in the work *Pure Means*,

"Again I pick up the scrap of paper upon which is written: *Encounters with (other) animals in life and thought*. I flap it in the air; I hit it against a hard surface: I am pensive. An originary freedom acknowledged as the moment of arising and purely being-there: What is pressing here with respect to those words written down, which are (provisionally) the title for a work of words that remain unwritten? Necessity is pressing and pressing hard...// ... But that which is conjured up can always be dispelled..."¹¹

This summoning does not strive for exactness, rather it leaves open a proposition of what can be dispelled. A sort of murmuring, a murmuration, a sounding of the vast waves of starlings that form at dusk. To think on this position leaves the researcher dropping from the sky, when affected by troubling weather. The proposition is that the researcher never has a simple task before her. That the researcher tries to filter through the information, dates and names, offered by the curators of the libraries and the researcher tries to forget, tries to invent narratives to open pathways between writing, photography and voice.

NOTES

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3 Nadar writing on the workshops and laboratories of the scientist Étienne-Jules Marey in 1864, as quoted in the *Photographer*. Cited by Marta Braun, *The Works of Étienne-Jules Marey* (1830 – 1904) (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1992) pg 44
Marta Braun, *The Works of Étienne-Jules Marey* (1830 – 1904) (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1992) pg 31 – 34

5 Ibid pg 66

6 Hollis Frampton: Eadweard Muybridge: Fragments of a Tesseract (Artforum March 1973)

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9 Ibid. pg 32

10 Anne Carson, "Variations on the Right to Remain Silent", *Float*, A Collection of twenty-two chapbooks whose order is unfixed and whose topics are various, Reading can be freefall. Jonathan Cape, Vintage, London, 2016

11 Yve Lomax, *Consideration Pure Means* (Isle of Wight, Paraclete, Copy Press, 2013) pg 35

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