

MORGEN

VOGEL

REAL

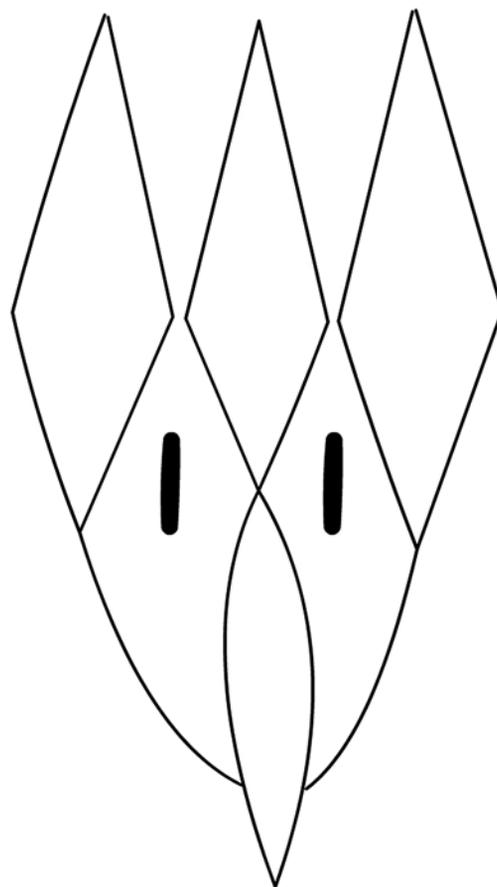
ESTATE



MARIA-LEENA RÄIHÄLÄ  
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# MORGENVOGEL REAL ESTATE

Maria-Leena Rähälä and Manuel Bonik



gegenstalt Press

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## MORGENVOGEL REAL ESTATE

The relationship between birds, architecture and art is the subject of Morgenvogel Real Estate,  
a real estate company in Berlin that enthusiastically brokers birdhouses.

Whether the construction companies admit it or not, the new Berlin architecture is hostile to birds.

Wherever you look, you'll find smooth surfaces where no robin can find a home.

It's legitimate to try and heal the wounds of war and develop the city,  
but not to do it at the expense of our feathered friends.

They established themselves in the diverse facades of Berlin and want to keep doing so,  
since it's become more and more difficult in other places. The countryside – so-called “nature” –  
is coated with monocultures, so if one wants to become a lucky bird, he'd better fly to the city. And adapt!

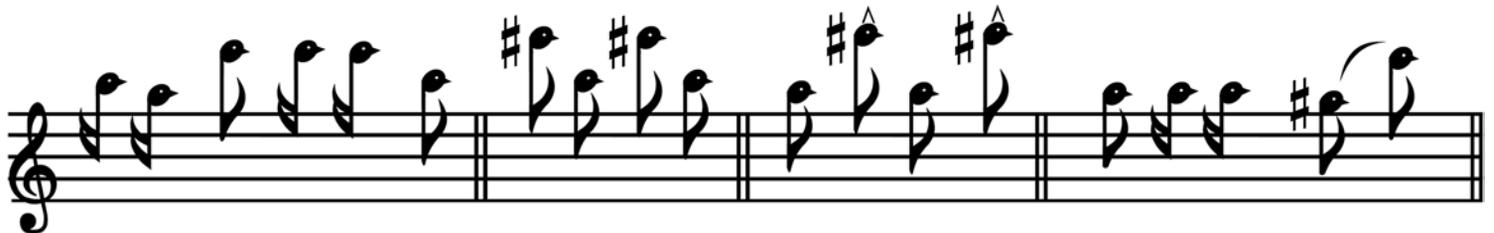
(There are winged singers who are able to imitate ringtones and others  
who can mimic entire building sites!)

Berlin, you can be happy to still be populated with such immigrants!

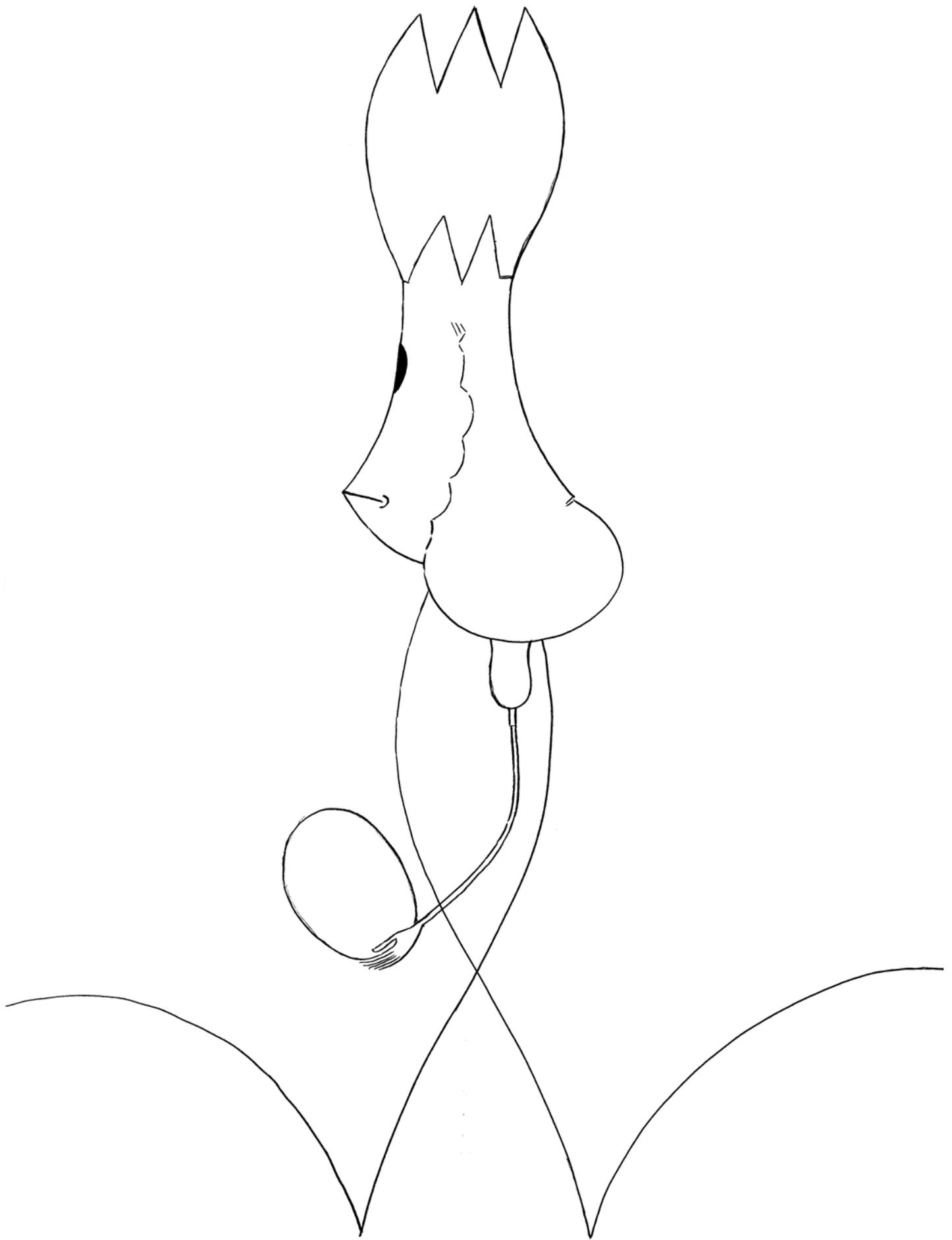
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Naturally, you could tell our story with a completely different twist. For example, it could go something like this: In the beginning was the *Cosmic Egg*. And it was very good. Then came the Morgenvogel (“morning bird”). And then Maria and Manuel gave each other a big fat kiss. The egg that was born therefrom was none other than... Morgenvogel Real Estate!

Or we could speak of the *mauerspechten* (the so-called “wallpeckers” who chipped away the Berlin Wall after the border opened) and congratulate them on their 25th anniversary. Perhaps we could mention the Berlin woodpeckers (the bird family, of course, not a sports team) that have benefited from the trend of installing new insulation on older buildings that has given them something new to peck on (the consequence of which is the creation of living space for other birds). These are our natural allies.

Or perhaps so: Founded in 2007, MVRE has been a bit migratory. It has existed as a shop and art space in Berlin Mitte, as a festival in a local church, as the exhibition *Morgenvogel Uncaged* on tour in galleries and project spaces, and as a virtual nest at [morgenvogel.net](http://morgenvogel.net).

The main product of MVRE is the Morgenvogel birdhouse: handmade of solid wood in a Finnish design; unfinished or painted in white; easy to install in trees, windowsills, and balconies; suitable for sparrows, tits, nuthatches, and pied flycatchers. Upon request, there are also models for starlings and boxes for swifts. An ever-expanding map indicating the current distribution of Morgenvogel houses can be found at [morgenvogel.net/morgenvogel-map.html](http://morgenvogel.net/morgenvogel-map.html).

A bevy of artists, musicians, and scientists has grown around MVRE, many of whom have contributed to the concept in unique ways. A few examples of the results of their work are elucidated in this book. Peter Berz contemplates the relationship between poetry and birdsong. Helmut Höge observes the broad field of birds and architecture. Wolfgang Müller explores Icelandic and Berlin birds, while Axel Roch muses about Maria’s drawings. You will find examples of these drawings throughout, along with some prose by Manuel. As with the visual arts, the topic of birds also inspires music. No surprise, then, that we created *Morgenvogel Uncaged*, a collection of music with an affinity for the ornithological, as well as a performance troupe called *The Birds, Too*.

Birds aren’t the only ones displaced by a developing city. Humans also have a high price to pay. MVRE attempts to ease the burden with |+|, a listing of habitable spaces in Berlin that circumvents the standard tactics of real estate brokers in this booming city. As we all know, artists are usually the ones whose efforts first make a particular street or district especially attractive. Unfortunately, the places become so attractive that they become expensive – too expensive for the artist pioneers, who are then forced to start the game all over again somewhere else. (Keyword: gentrification. More about that later).

Maria’s Morgenvogel concept has had a strong influence on her art, which has been and continues to be expressed in drawings, animations, interventions, and (sound) sculptures. From the beginning, rockets and other things of the air were part of the bigger picture, as you will discover.

Wherever refugees of capitalism and hunters of concrete gold ensure that the cranes of Berlin remain in constant motion – daily destroying the habitats of songbirds – there is continuous need for replenishment. Thus is every day the perfect day to hang a Morgenvogel birdhouse, and not just in the predictable brooding season during the spring. Indeed, even in winter, a roof over the head of a feathered friend goes most appreciated.

In the meantime, we cheerfully spread our wings and wish all of you dear readers a good flight!



## The Morgenvogel Church and the Cosmic Egg

Some birdhouses are bigger than others. But the biggest one that Morgenvogel has ever worked with has been the Zion church (Zionskirche) in Berlin Mitte. Eight events were organized over two weeks. In fact, you might call it a festival – and it would answer to the name of *Morgenvogel Church*. Part of our preparations involved hanging swift bird boxes on the third floor of the church (which is as high as the sixth floor of a regular building), our knees shaking as we scurried around the outer gallery. We hung a number of tit houses near the church, with the support of many bars and restaurants (*Café Kapelle*, *Macke Prinz*, *103, W, Hangi* and especially *Il Santo al Parco*, which also sponsored catering for the artists).

Together with Anja Penner, Maria made field recordings of Berlin blackbirds and nightingales, which became the central soundscape for the church – and with curious effects. The ongoing chirping inside the building, which continued past sundown, inspired the blackbirds living around the Zion church to respond intensely. This, in turn, confused the human visitors, who had to wonder what was recorded and what was coming from a real-time bird. Our chirpy little special friends, the sparrows, couldn't pass up the opportunity to take a peek inside, whereby we were unable to determine whether they enjoyed a cultural or a spiritual experience, or perhaps something else altogether.

The optical/atmospheric and, if you will, theological centerpiece of the exhibition was Maria's *Cosmic Egg*, a gigantic air balloon that dropped down from the ceiling as the *Morgenvogel Church* began at Pentecost, floating down to hang in front of a cross, which was thus obscured. In preparatory discussions, Pastor Lohenner said that a bit of irritation couldn't hurt. Later he wondered about his own boldness in allowing such a massive intervention, which could easily have been interpreted as wholly blasphemous – and

indeed which some perceived as such. But let's not get into the topic of scandals and controversies within protestant parishes in Berlin. Let's just say that this parish tolerated the exhibition to the end. The one compromise was that the *Cosmic Egg* would need to float back up into the dome during Sunday services.

We can speak here only as theological laypeople, but as such we can clearly observe that the Easter egg did not originate in the Bible, but rather from pagan and pre-Christian traditions. Maria's *Cosmic Egg* and her accompanying animation integrated the multifaceted international cosmogonies in which eggs play a role, such as in the Finnish national epic of *Kalevala* (see page 14). To the best of our knowledge, the universality of the *Cosmic Egg* first appeared in Chinese mythology, which suggests that the world originally existed only as an egg-shaped mass together with the cosmic principles of Yin and Yang. From this emerged Pangu, the first living being. The great Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz referred to the Tao in his attempt to understand the world as a binary-mathematical phenomenon – to Yin as 0 and Yang as 1. "According to Leibniz, the omnipotence of divine creation can best be represented by the genesis of the numbers zero and one." (Horst Bredekamp, *Die Fenster der Monade*, Berlin 2004).

For Maria, in any case, the egg at Pentecost was a symbol of the Holy Spirit. And because it was Pentecost at the time, we reached deep into our bag of miracles and pulled out the film *Das Unsagbare sagen (Speaking the Unspeakable)* from Valie Export and Ingrid and Oswald Wiener, a wonderful documentation of types of glossolalia ("speaking in tongues") as found in various shamanic traditions, as well as in American Pentecostal churches and different forms of psychosis.

I won't subject anyone to a long recounting of the entire festival, but a few things need to be mentioned. The performance

by Manami N. was conceived as a Buddhist prayer for the birds affected by the Fukushima reactor catastrophe in Japan. The third *Flying Film Festival* was also presented, this time curated by Kevin Merz and Lars Künstler. And during the tango performance by the duo Timo Valtonen and Valentin Butt, it became difficult – for the purposes of preserving the dignity of the location – to keep the people in their church pews, especially some members of the congregation. Other emotional moments included Holger Steen from Hamburg, well known as *The Singing Tulip*, with his deeply melancholic singing, and the Berlin multimedia artist Heinrich Dubel with his erratic and hilarious (but not necessarily suited for minors) slide show lecture *Örnhölogie*. Spread throughout the entire space, *The Birds, Too* discovered an ideal concert ambiance. (Standard stage concerts in reverberant churches are famous for their overwhelming acoustic challenges). The band chirped and piped – and all of it magically. Lyndsey Cockwell and the *Berlin Pop Choir* sang bird songs, including pieces the choir director composed specifically for *The Morgenvogel Church*.

The funniest part of all (except for those who were subjected to it) was something that the audience itself never even had a chance to experience. We had commissioned a composition from the Canadian composer and pianist John Farah ([johnfarah.com](http://johnfarah.com)),



who one morning found himself diligently rehearsing an avian song with the vocal ensemble *Vox Nostra* ([voxnostra.com](http://voxnostra.com)) – in a large church that was undergoing renovations. Unforgettable! A bunch of baby strollers blocking the altar; from the sacristy the blare of crying babies during a children's service, and through the church windows the recurring blasts of jackhammering. Amidst it all was the valiant John at the organ and the quartet from *Vox Nostra* with their ethereal vocals in a style between Renaissance and minimal music. Even two years later as I write this, I have to laugh. Forgive the feuilleton style, but I must say that the concert that night could move a person to tears. At some point, hopefully, a studio version will be available.

Despite that the *Morgenvogel Church* project didn't manage to establish a new religion, we are still extremely grateful to all of those people who helped us bring it to life. Apart from all the participating artists, we extend our special appreciation to Petra Brüggemann and Oliver Penndorf (finances), Christopher Fröhlich and Kevin Merz (documentation), Andreas Schaale and Micha Schroetter (general practical assistance), and the many motivated ladies (and a few fine gentlemen) from the Zion church parish for their assistance.

General information about *The Morgenvogel Church* at

[morgenvogel.net/morgenvogelkirche.html](http://morgenvogel.net/morgenvogelkirche.html)



### Morgenvogel Church Participants

Chris Beak, Peter Berz, Miles Chalcraft, Lyndsey Cockwell and *The Berlin Pop Choir*, Heinrich Dubel, John Farah and *Vox Nostra*, Andreas Gysin and Dean McNamee, Helmut Höge, Lars Künstler, Kevin Merz, Manami N, Anja Penner, Matthew Ramolo, Lars Scheibner and Mareike Franz, Ravi Srinivasan, Holger Steen, Timo Valtonen and Valentin Butt, Ingrid und Oswald Wiener and Valie Export, *The Birds, Too*.

### Participants of Flying Films Festival 3

Rosane Chamecki, Attila Fias, Christopher Fröhlich, GUP-py, Phil Harder, Tetsuschi Higashino, Michael König, Körner Union, Andrea Lerner, Pleix, Miranda Plusser, Barbara Rosenthal, Charlotte Seidel, Malte Steiner, Ilaria Turba, Hannes Vartiainen, Pekka Veikkolainen, Anthony Vourdox, Carolin Weinert. Trailer: [morgenvogel.net/fff3-trailer.html](http://morgenvogel.net/fff3-trailer.html)



Facing page: Lyndsey Cockwell and *The Berlin Pop Choir*, Photo: Christopher Fröhlich.

Left: *John's Fingers*, Animation by Maria for John Farah's music.

Right up, down: *The Birds, Too*.

## Kalevala

Short the time that passed thereafter,  
Scarce a moment had passed over,  
Ere a beauteous teal came flying  
Lightly hovering o'er the water,  
Seeking for a spot to rest in,  
Searching for a home to dwell in.

Eastward flew she, westward flew she.  
Flew to north-west and to southward,  
But the place she sought she found not,  
Not a spot, however barren,  
Where her nest she could establish,  
Or a resting-place could light on.

Then she hovered, slowly moving,  
And she pondered and reflected,  
"If my nest in wind I 'stablish  
Or should rest it on the billows,  
Then the winds will overturn it,  
Or the waves will drift it from me."

Then the Mother of the Waters,  
Water-Mother, maid aerial,  
From the waves her knee uplifted,  
Raised her shoulder from the billows,  
That the teal her nest might 'stablish,  
And might find a peaceful dwelling.  
Then the teal, the bird so beauteous,  
Hovered slow, and gazed around her,  
And she saw the knee uplifted  
From the blue waves of the ocean,  
And she thought she saw a hillock,  
Freshly green with springing verdure.  
There she flew, and hovered slowly,  
Gently on the knee alighting,  
And her nest she there established,  
And she laid her eggs all golden,  
Six gold eggs she laid within it,  
And a seventh she laid of iron.

O'er her eggs the teal sat brooding,  
And the knee grew warm beneath her;  
And she sat one day, a second,  
Brooded also on the third day;  
Then the Mother of the Waters,  
Water-Mother, maid aerial,  
Felt it hot, and felt it hotter,  
And she felt her skin was heated,  
Till she thought her knee was burning,

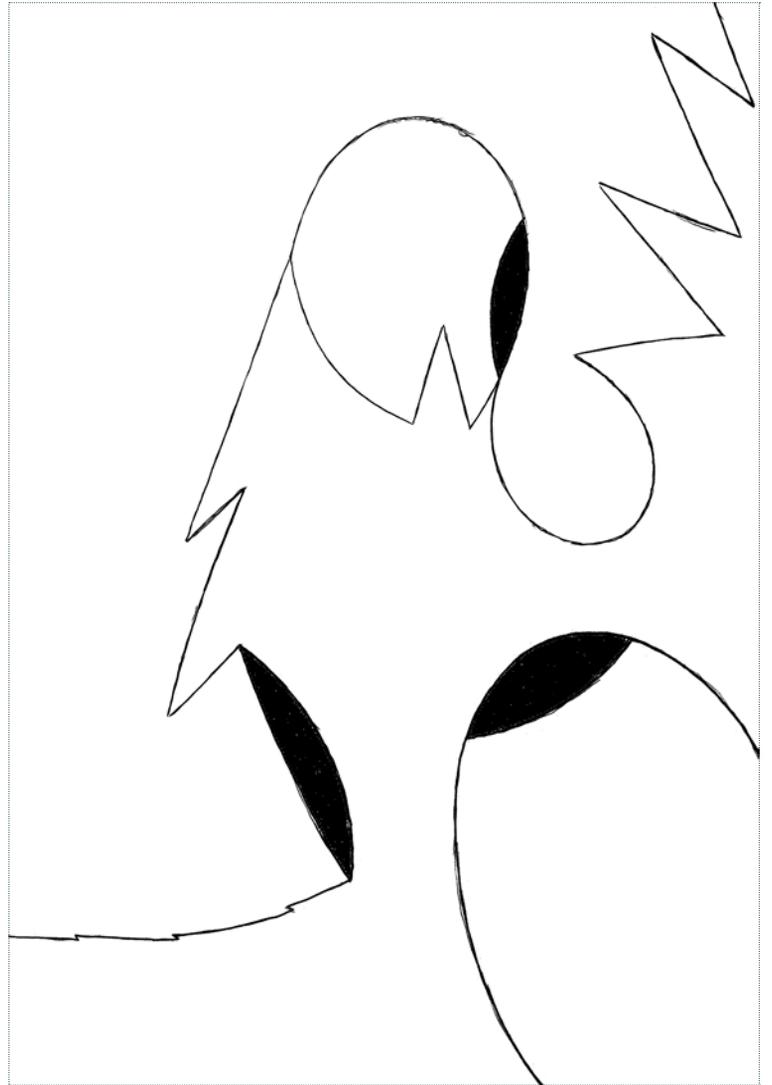
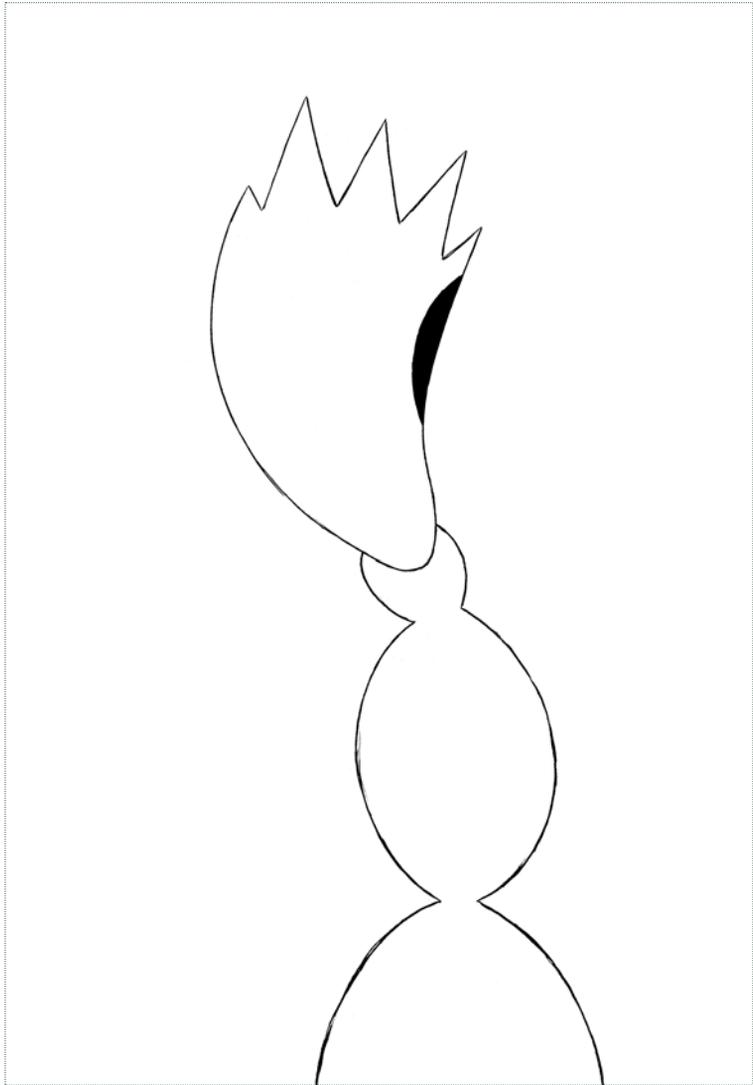
And that all her veins were melting.  
Then she jerked her knee with quickness,  
And her limbs convulsive shaking,  
Rolled the eggs into the water,  
Down amid the waves of ocean,  
And to splinters they were broken,  
And to fragments they were shattered.

In the ooze they were not wasted,  
Nor the fragments in the water,  
But a wondrous change came o'er them,  
And the fragments all grew lovely.  
From the cracked egg's lower fragment,  
Now the solid earth was fashioned,  
From the cracked egg's upper fragment,  
Rose the lofty arch of heaven,  
From the yolk, the upper portion,  
Now became the sun's bright lustre;  
From the white, the upper portion,  
Rose the moon that shines so brightly;  
Whatso in the egg was mottled,  
Now became the stars in heaven,  
Whatso in the egg was blackish,  
In the air as cloudlets floated.

Now the time passed quickly over,  
And the years rolled quickly onward,  
In the new sun's shining lustre,  
In the new moon's softer beaming.  
Still the Water-Mother floated,  
Water-Mother, maid aerial,  
Ever on the peaceful waters,  
On the billows' foamy surface,  
With the moving waves before her,  
And the heaven serene behind her.

When the ninth year had passed over,  
And the summer tenth was passing,  
From the sea her head she lifted,  
And her forehead she uplifted,  
And she then began Creation,  
And she brought the world to order,  
On the open ocean's surface,  
On the far extending waters.

*The Project Gutenberg, Kalevala, Volume 1 (of 2),  
by Anonymous, translated by W. F. Kirby*



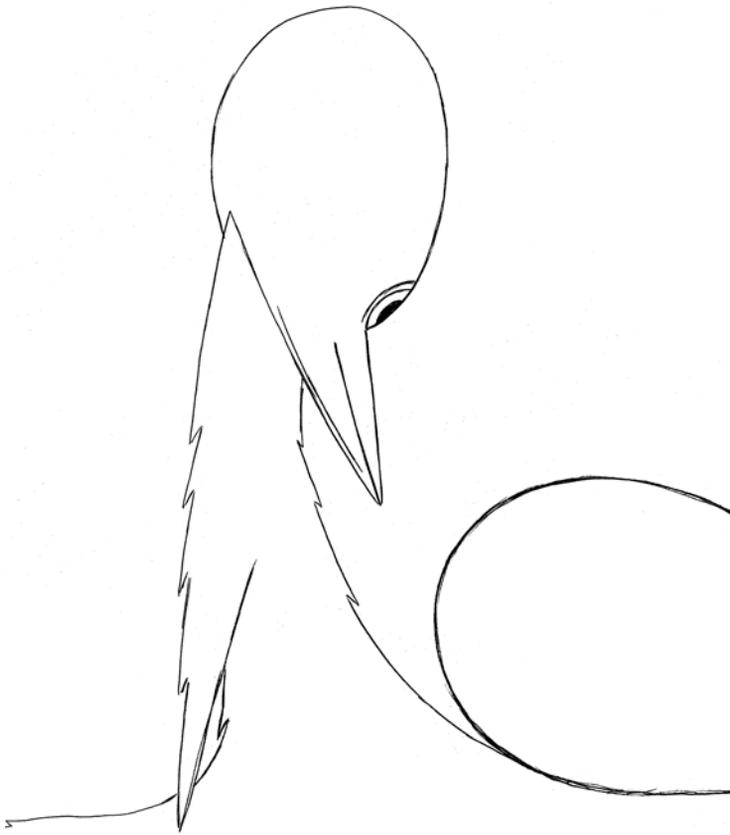
Helmut Höge  
**Birds and Architecture**

“Architecture is both the process and the product of planning, designing, and constructing buildings and other physical structures.”

WIKIPEDIA, *ARCHITECTURE*

“For many birds, nothing could be sexier than building a nest.”

VITUS B. DRÖSCHER



Perhaps we can first speak about the nest boxes that humans consider architecture? – Karl Marx writing in *Capital*, Vol. 1: “A bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this: that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labor process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the laborer at its commencement, thus as an actual idea.”

The East German biologist Matthias Freude published an illustrated volume about *Buildings By Animals* for the Berlin children’s book publisher Berliner Kinderbuchverlag. He defines a building as only “those constructions created by the independent activity of the builder.” He therewith quickly disposes of the Marxist differentiation between nature (instinct or gene) and culture (consciousness).

Still, it is true that a bird’s nest construction and an architect’s house construction are always focused on the same essential elements: roof, wall, floor, door – and then maybe a window and a balcony... Rem Koolhaas, Curator of the Architecture Biennale in Venice, listed a total of only 15 elements. With most bird

nests, the parents provide their young with a roof, but generally speaking, most bird-made structures tend to ignore windows.

Building nests is not something that needs to be learned, as is the case for young orangutans that learn to construct nest beds every evening in the crotches of trees. Rather, it is an ability birds are born with. However, this says nothing about the sheer diversity of their nest constructions. Darwinian biologists would say that the human art of building is individualized, while the bird’s is appropriate to its species. On the other hand, their nests and cavities show consistent variation in relation to location, differences in climate, building materials, neighbors, food sources, enemies, and the like.

In the words of the Munich ecologist Josef Reichholf, “Birds are capable of learning [...] There are species now living in cities that originally lived amongst rocky cliffs, as well as forest and water birds that one would assume would require large open waters.” The tree-breeding birds have the greatest challenge to seek alternatives, due to the lack of old trees full of holes located in cities – an outcome of concerns involving insurance risks.

Some species of songbirds have been known to peck out cavities in the thinly plastered insulation material applied to building exteriors. Japanese crows have recently started to build nests on utility poles using wire clothes hangers. In Mecklenburg, Germany, half of all the ospreys have made high-voltage poles their breeding ground. And near Cologne, peregrine falcons bred on a brown coal excavator that then moved 50 kilometers during the middle of the brooding period. Even more extreme was a male black redstart, who built his nest in the axle bore of a cable lift car using toothpicks from a nearby restaurant and steel wool from the machine room. After the female had laid five eggs and they began to hatch, the season started and the car was put back into service. “At first he flew for a bit alongside, but he soon turned around, noticeably upset.” As the young were hatched, however, he began to feed them – at the lower station. “Then the car swung uphill. But this time he didn’t turn around [...] He flew up with it, constantly circling it. There he fed his hungry family with flies he had picked from restaurant windows. Below at the parking lot for the lower station he could find plenty of insects stuck to the grilles of the parked cars.”

I saw an oystercatcher at the Eider estuary brooding while “protected” by a traffic sign directly next to the highly traveled coastal street. The nest was comprised of a feather-lined hollow. Not far away, countless sea swallows brood on concrete each year, hardly a meter away from onlooking tourists. Their nests are made of quickly gathered refuse washed up by the tide. They only attack the ornithologists (if they allow themselves to be seen at all). Every year they put bands on the young, which the birds perceive as a disturbance if not an outright attack.

The opposite is true for the grey goose. Since they realized that they were relatively protected in the Wadden Sea National Park, they brood on the islands of The Halligen where no fox can reach them. To build their nests, they quickly gather the various objects that have washed up. Unlike the Siberian brent geese, however, their young cannot feed on the salt-laden Hallig grasses, which means the parents are forced to walk them over to the mainland (or swim with them at high tide) as soon as they hatch. They are stalked by countless gulls and cranes, who have their sights on the

newly hatched young. When the survivors finally reach the dike, they are so exhausted that they can barely make it up. Behind that is a highly traveled coastal road, and then only after that a grassland with a large freshwater lake, which is where the parents are generally heading. To help them, the ornithologists meet the tired young geese at the foot of the dike and carry them over to the lake in pails, where they are then reunited with their parents. With each year, the population grows, thanks in part to the bird conservationists.

Regarding the building of their nests, herring gull researcher Nikolaas Tinbergen writes, “If they are truly engaged to be paired, they begin searching for a place to live. They break away from the (singles) club and move into some region within the colony. Here they begin to build their nest. Both collect various materials and carry them to the nesting site. Then they take turns scratching out a shallow cavity and lining it with grass and moss.”

The great crested grebe builds its own little island using reeds and leaves – a kind floating nest. Other types of grebes, according to David Attenborough, don’t build nests at all, choosing instead to secretly distribute their eggs in the nests of ducks – not unlike the female cuckoo. According to Reichholf, cuckoo young are “influenced by the host with which they matured,” while the grebe young are not influenced at all because they leave the host nest immediately upon hatching and go out into world to live alone for the rest of their lives. And unlike the hatched cuckoos, they haven’t pushed the eggs or the young out of the host’s nest. They never get to know any parents.

For building, maintaining, and using the nest, there is great variation in the level of cooperation between the male and the female. For the buttonquail, which is similar to the common quail and sometimes called a “fighting” quail, “the significantly larger female sports her nuptial plumage, performs a courtship display for the male and even practices polyandry,” according to Herbert Wendt, the publisher of *Grzimeks Tierleben*. “The plainly plumed male sits on the ground, making pathetic little sounds. The hen, meanwhile, runs in circles around the cock, cooing and buzzing, whistling and drumming, stomping and scraping its feet until the cock finally yields to her advertisements. After mating she lays several eggs in a natural depression in the ground and leaves the male to brood and care for the offspring. While the cock tends to the eggs, she’s off dancing around another potential mate. In this way, a single buttonquail hen can win three to four males in a row, filling just as many nests with her eggs.”

The tropical jacanas and the north Scandinavian grey and red-necked phalaropes approach things similarly. One mother mates with up to four males, who do everything from building hollows on little raft-like islands using pieces of plants, to raising and feeding the young. According to Dröscher, “they do all the work of the ‘housewife’ while the female never again has any close contact with her children. Only if an enemy approaches and the frightened father calls for help does the mother return immediately to defend her own.”

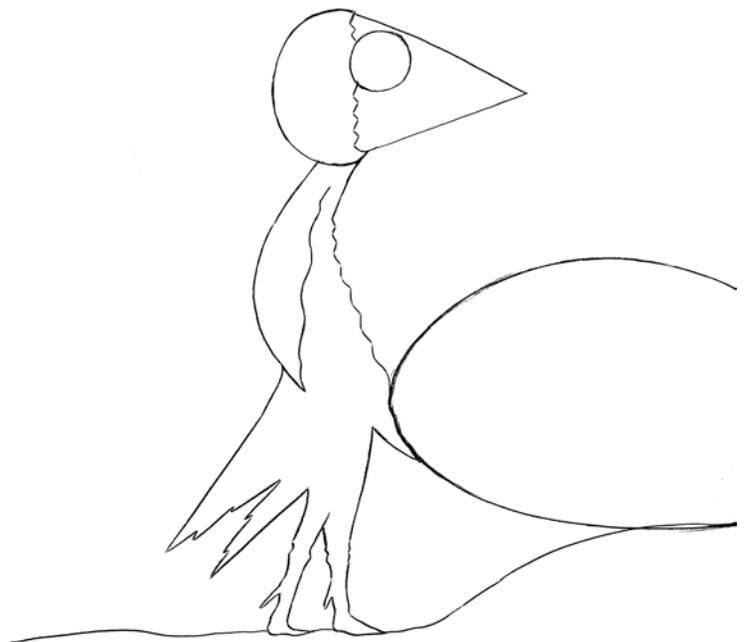
The African pied kingfisher burrows in loamy cliffsides, in which it broods. If one of its male offspring reaches the age of one or two without finding a mate, it will return to its parents’ nest to help rear the brood. Dröscher is of the opinion that this behavior is related to the dearth of females among pied kingfishers. The African terrestrial barbets, on the other hand, suffer a dearth of

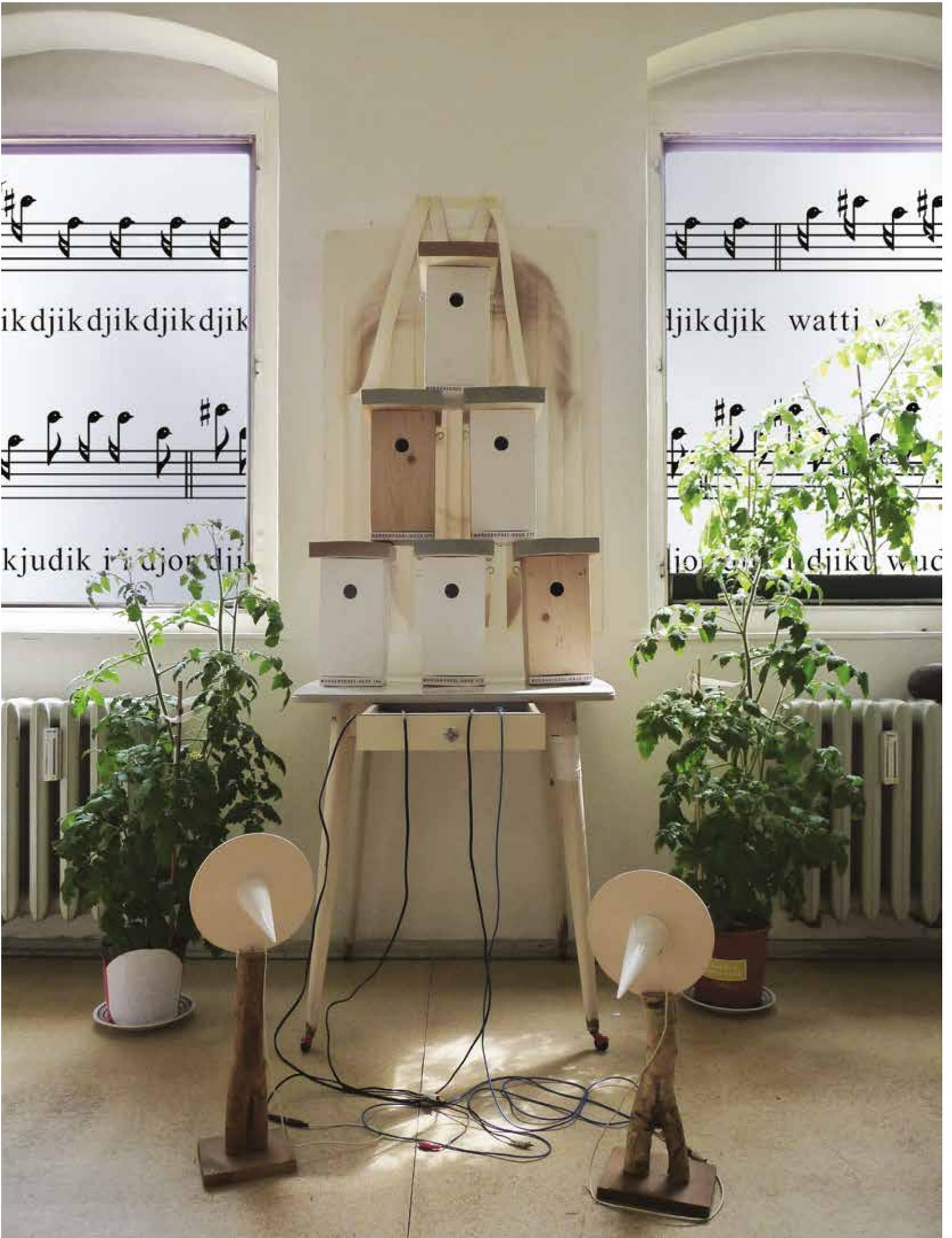
males, which compels the females to return to help the parents. With the Australian laughing kookaburra – another type of kingfisher – unmated sons and daughters both help their parents to rear the young. The reason for this is suspected to be the lack of nesting cavities in old trees.

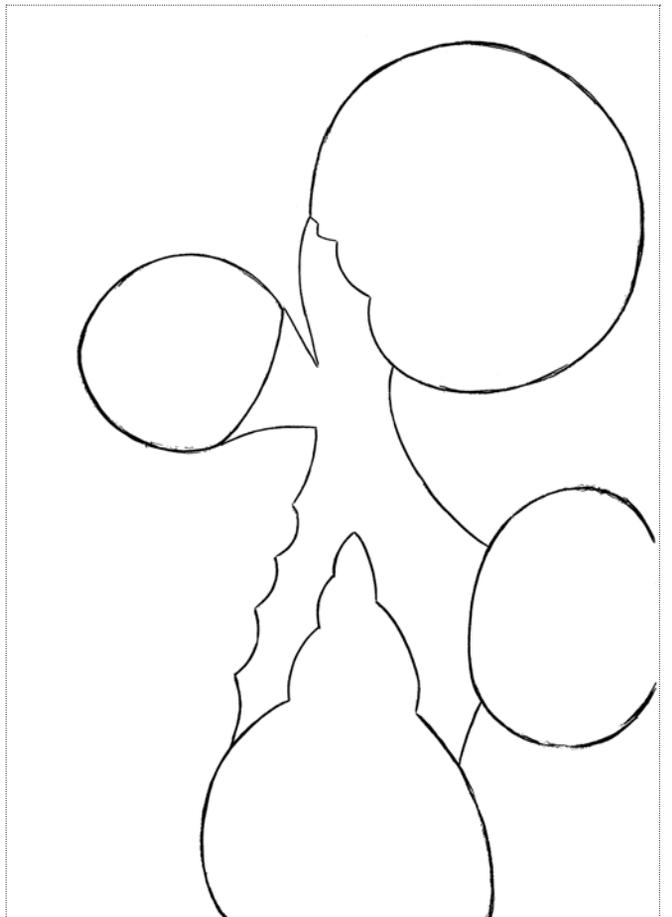
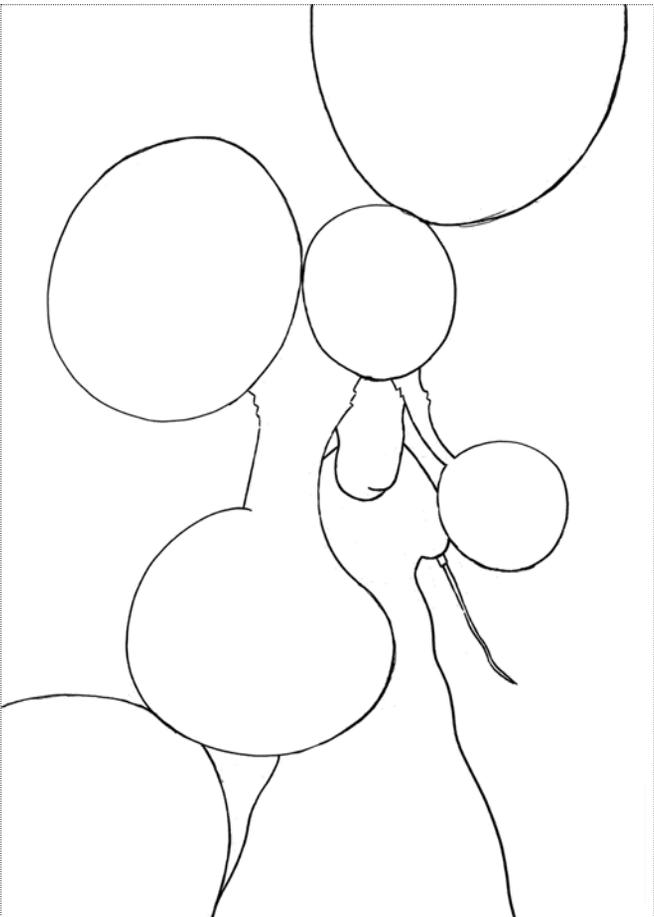
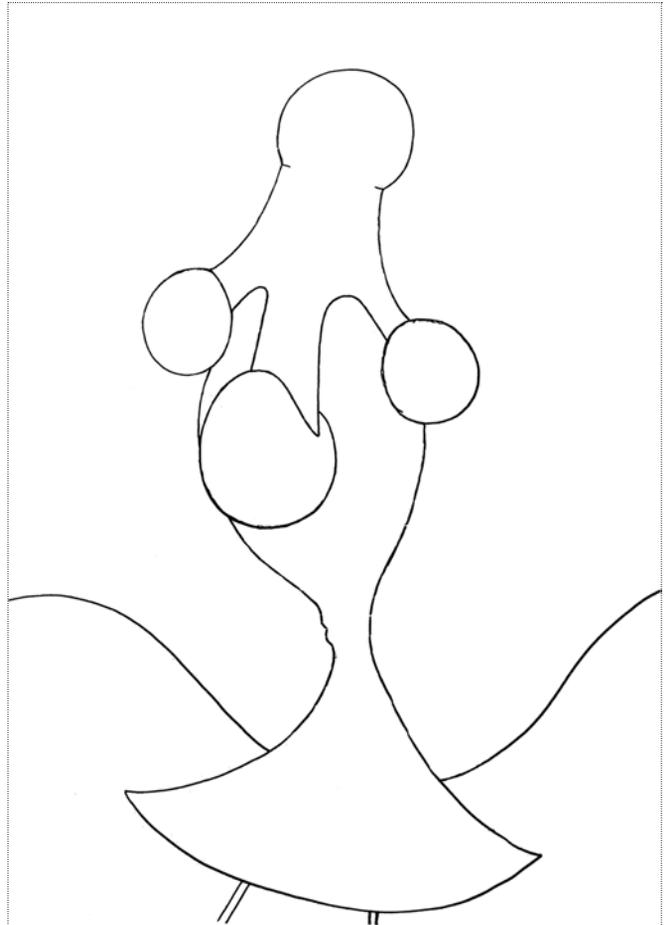
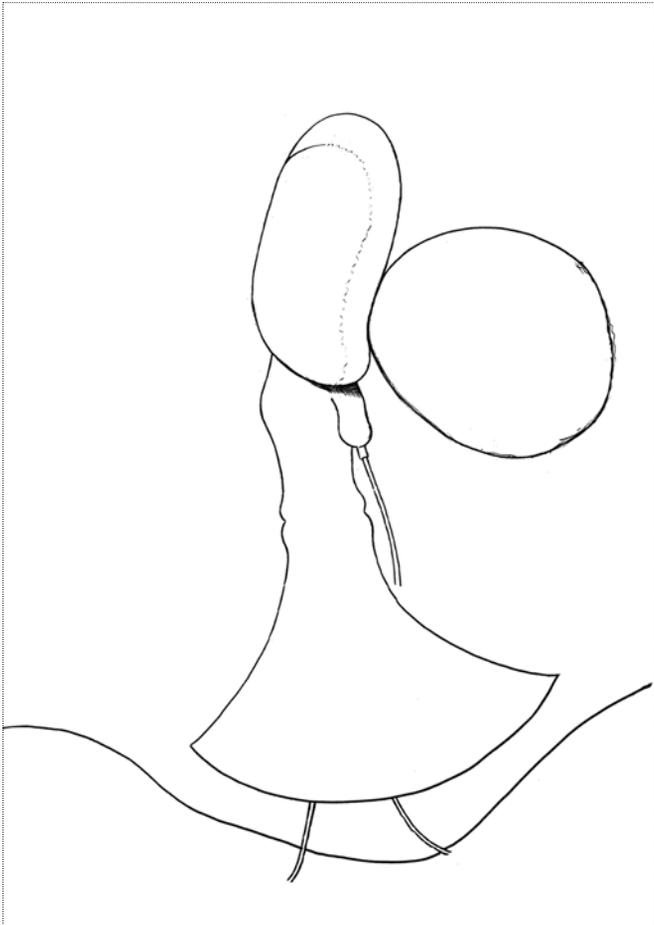
With the African red-billed wood hoopoe, the brooding pairs are helped by up to 14 of their unpaired fellow species. They reside in tree cavities. The females of a flock gather at night in one cavity while the males gather in another. “Females and males sacrifice up to five of their maximum eight-year lifespan to assist other members of their flock before they begin to brood themselves,” writes Dröscher. David and Sandra Ligon, who research these birds, suggest that, “a breeding pair that enjoys the assistance of 14 helpers rears just as many young as a pair that gets no help at all.” The difference has no statistical significance, as Dröscher concludes that, “In the end, the helpers are only helping themselves!” But at the same time he offers the example of the red-billed wood hoopoe: “For animals the creator of all great things is not war, but rather a mutual willingness to help each other.”

In another case, that of the Arabian babbler, pairs also get assistance in nest building and feeding from others of their species. They construct their half-shell shaped nests in dense brush. The Israeli ornithologist Amotz Zahavi interprets their almost classical case of cooperation – these days referred to as altruism – simply as an “egomaniacal behavior” which he then thoroughly explains with a kind of Darwinian business theory logic. “The individuals compete with each other to invest in the interests of the group [...] Higher-ranking animals often keep lower-ranking ones from being able to help.” It’s about “promotion,” “quality of the investor,” and “motivations.” Finally, using an almost micro-Nietzschean reasoning, Zahavi attributes the birds’ desire to help to an egotistical gene, in which individual selection favors “intervention and competition in order to find opportunities to help”. Otherwise, the selection mechanism remains intact.

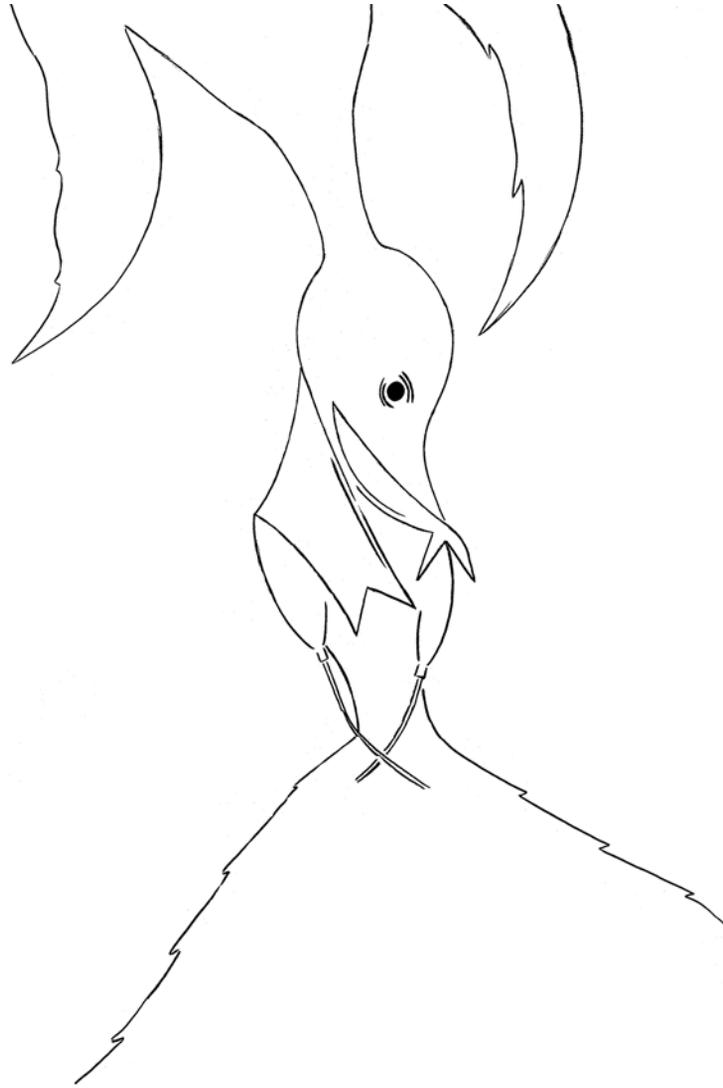
With some species, offspring are already helping in the nest. According to Dröscher, the oldest offspring in the nest of barn







**Marsh and Treetop. A Couple of Birdsongs**



*Orioles in the deep wood, the length of their vowels,  
In tonic verses the singular measure.  
But only once a year it happens,  
that the long duration of nature pours out,  
in the meter of Homer.*

*This day yawns like a caesura,  
From the very early morning silence and heavy long syllables;  
Oxen in the field, a golden idleness,  
Drawing the richness of an entire note from a single reed.*

OSSIP EMILJEWITSCH MANDELSTAM, 1914<sup>1</sup>

**Oriole song (sound recording)**<sup>2</sup>  
[morgenvogel.net/pirol.html](http://morgenvogel.net/pirol.html)

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Please allow me, with this song and this poem, with this poem and this song, to usher you into a different world. Because the world of the crow, of which Helmut Höge just told,<sup>3</sup> is only to a certain extent an acoustic or musical one – a world of calling, hearing, and singing, alone or in groups. The corvids (crow family)

are mostly familiar with calls possessing a sonic overtone spectrum. For the German carrion crow, *Corvus corone*, this transliterates to *krah* or *käh* or *kjorrrrrja ka kjar kjorrrrja ka* or *krrr* or simply, as though Kirkes' weaving loom was at work: *chrk*. It's a bit different for the jackdaws of Konrad Lorenz. Lorenz realized that the sound quality of the young jackdaws that fled from the nest was different than that of those that returned home. One group called *kja* and the other called *kjuh*. Both calls were saying, "Fly with!" but one said, "Fly with, far away" while the other said, "Fly with, back home!" In Lorenz's transliteration of the call, the vowel "a" connotes distance, while the vowel "u" connotes home. A strange coding, a strange alchemy of vowels:<sup>4</sup> "a" for leaving, "u" for returning.

But the sound of the oriole is not a call. As the ornithologists say, it is a song. And it would be interesting to introduce this differentiation between song, call, and invocation to literary studies with the same precision as we find in biology. Like all songbirds, the oriole knows not only songs but also calls. However, they have very different functions and acoustic structures, especially when they are occasionally mixed.

According to the teachings of Friedrich Kittler, song is an event that is only possible through vowel sounds. – Mandelstam:

*Orioles in the deep wood, the length of their vowels,  
In tonic verses the singular measure.*

The Mandelstam poem is a big riddle of vowels and verses from the oriole's song. When we first consider the history of poetry, the "tonic verse" is a verse with accentuation, meaning things are stressed or unstressed. The syllabo-tonic verse, first brought properly into play within Russian lyric by Lomonossov and then Pushkin, follows the peculiarities of the Russian language in that all words strictly have only one possible accentuation.<sup>5</sup> These words are also normally much longer than those in German. If a verse is supposed to be constructed by always following a stressed syllable with an unstressed syllable or vice versa (iambic or trochaic), almost exclusively two-syllable words are able to be used. Lomonossov and Pushkin introduced that the tonic weight, the accentuation, in the 8- or 9-, 10- or 11-syllable verse can also be absent: the well-known half-stress, *poludarenie*, which can be different in every verse.<sup>6</sup> It opened up a new world, in terms of that which was able to be communicated by a poem.<sup>7</sup>

The meter of Homer and the entire Greek epic and lyric, however, knows no accentuation, rather only long and short vowels.<sup>8</sup> Take that part of the *Odyssey*, in which *aíthya* appears – a bird, probably *Mergus serrator*, which in English is called the red-breasted merganser. It is a shorebird that feeds on that which washes up and whose mere appearance announces salvation for the shipwrecked Odysseus, who now knows that the shore cannot be far away. Apart from that, this *Morgenvogel* (morning bird) of impending salvation is the figure of *Leukothea*, a former mortal and thus graced with speech – as a goddess and bird! Now read the verse from Homer aloud:<sup>9</sup>

αἰθυίη δ' εἰκυῖα ποτῆ ἀνεδύσεται λίμνης

or in phonetic transcription (the underline indicates long syllables):

*aithyie d'eikyia pote anedyseto limnes*

– then the hexameter works entirely without accentuation and independent of it.

The question would now be whether the heavy beat of the oriole song (listen to the sound recording) echoes a Greek verse. Or in Mandelstam's Russian:

Есть иволги в лесах и глазных долгота  
в тонических стихах единственная мера

or in transcription (with accents and caesura):

*Jest' ivolgi v lesách ˇ i glásnych dolgotá  
v tonítscheskich stichách ˇ jedínstivenaja méra.*

Even if long and short vowel sounds were to play no role in the Russian verse, one hears the caesura and pauses very distinctly. And you can also hear them in the oriole song, which is presented very sporadically with pauses.<sup>10</sup> For Mandelstam, however, the pause ultimately carries the entire poem. It is a midday poem. Echoes in the midday of nature, of the day, indeed of the year, perhaps even of the times themselves. This poem exists but once, in this moment of the midday. In southern cultures the midday corresponds exactly to our midnight, with all its ghosts and spirits, etc.<sup>11</sup> But where is the midday celebrated here? Among the reed beds, amidst the marsh, with the Greek Pan, with the Roman Faunus. By those who charm the notes and tones from a reed, such as to blow on the Greek aulós or perhaps the pan pipes. Pan, in fact, lives on the line between nature and culture. He always shows up, as the archaeologist Hans Walter describes,<sup>12</sup> in the context of departure, in turning away, at the edge of the wood, if someone has wandered too far from the village.

But now we find a few things in Mandelstam's poem to turn the stomach, even that of an amateur ornithologist like myself. And this despite that Mandelstam attributes an "anti-Darwinistic soul" – akin to his own – to his best friend of later years, the biologist Boris Kusin. How was it that the ornithologically advanced Eckermann expressed his dismay as he strolled with Goethe, who mused fantastical ideas about the life of birds: "Such a great man, a gifted poet, but unfortunately not a clue when it comes to birds."

To begin with, the oriole is not a midday bird. It is definitely a morning bird – a Morgenvogel. "For the oriole, the intensity of the wake-up sound is equivalent to the intensity of the call..." – as they say in Ornithologist-speak.<sup>13</sup> Around a quarter to three in the morning it begins to "play its reveille." Peter Altenberg (see box), a friend of the great Viennese lamarckist and amphibian researcher Paul Kammerer, hears things even more specifically than Mandelstam.<sup>14</sup> By five o'clock in the morning, the oriole has "gone through 25% of its daily calls (totaling 1640 individual calls)." Peak calling until around nine in the evening is at a lower level than in the morning. However, "During midday – 10:30 to 2:30 – the oriole calls little if at all."<sup>15</sup> In 1861, Father Brehm occasionally heard the oriole singing past midnight – during mating season. During the brooding period it sometimes sings all day long. Humid weather in particular excites the bird to sing – shortly before a storm when all the other birds have shut their

beaks. For this reason, some regions refer to the bird as a "rain cat." Perhaps Mandelstam heard an oriole at just such a time, during a caesura, holding the breath shortly before the storm hits. It stops singing and calling at the end of June, but resumes at the beginning of August. Only when captured is it completely out of its environment and its rhythm. "In 1900 Kullmann described an oriole who in captivity began to create poetry around Christmastime and soon thereafter began to make loud calls."

In any case, the oriole certainly does not live among the reeds and amidst the marsh, the environment of Pan. It lives "at great heights amongst the leaf canopies of the forest," such as the cottonwoods. Melde and Melde consider it a "sun bird,"<sup>16</sup> that loves summer and warmth and arrives first in May. But it doesn't show itself much. One is more likely to hear it than see it. This means it sings way up high and "in secret." Unlike the blackbird or starling, it doesn't sing from open perches, from treetops, or the roofs of houses, or on telephone poles or power lines.<sup>17</sup> The frequency in which it sings is lower than its size would suggest. "I [the oriole researcher Feige] can hear it as far as 1.6 km away."<sup>18</sup> It is not considered to be very sociable. However, on June 27, 1963 in Erlangen, Germany, one could hear it singing in a group of up to 20 orioles. It was a kind of singing "that seemed like a small group of roosters entertaining each other."<sup>19</sup> Duets between males and females have also been observed.<sup>20</sup>

But the relationship of a bird song to a human song (alias poem) initially has nothing to do with the question as to which environment the song is sung in. It lies decidedly in the acoustic material itself. Just what is it that makes it a bird song? And what role does it play for us, the learned animals, as opposed to those beings who sing the songs, such as the alluring song of the cock for its hen?<sup>21</sup> For the only animal having a written history, the song of the oriole is there because this animal captured it – as poetry, as acoustic event, as philosophy.

Referring to birds and human language, Aristotle constructed four levels:<sup>22</sup> "Noise (*psóphos*) and voice (*phoné*) are two different things, while a third thing is language (*diálektos*). No other part of the body except the pharynx can vocalize (*phoneín*). Therefore, only those animals with a lung can make sounds (*phténgetei*). Language (*diálektos*) is the articulation (*diárthrosis*) of the voice by the tongue. Vowels (*poneénta*) are thus brought forth by the voice and the larynx; consonants (*áphona*) by the tongue and lips. From these two sources emerges language (*diálektos*)."<sup>23</sup> For human beings, a fourth level is added: *lógos*.

Thus birds have voices, with which they make more than just noises. For Hegel, who as the first philosopher after Aristotle managed to open the doors of philosophy to the animal world, the bird is the ultimate philosophical animal because it doesn't whinny, grunt, purr, or hum – rather, it sings. "The theoretical discourse (Hegel's "Sich-Ergehen") of the bird, which sings, is a higher form of the voice" than the sounds made by a horse, pig, cat, or bee. Where Hegel's famous owl begins its flight at dusk, the singing bird is the morning bird (Morgenvogel), heralding the dawning subjectivity. Thoroughly integrated into its element, milieu, or medium – air – all the way through to the tips of its feathers, "the bird floats freely in its element, separated from the objective gravity of the earth, filling the air with itself and expressing its sense of self in this special element." That is because

the subjectivity exists “in that it trembles,” which happens from a physical perspective in the materiality of sound itself. It “only trembles the air.” It is the “pure process in time.” The tone of the voice disappears or negates itself at the same moment it posits itself. Exactly for this reason the “abstract pure trembling” as voice is also “closest to thought.”<sup>24</sup>

Aristotle went one better: the singing bird is aware not only of its voice, but also the organization and articulation of it. Without this there could be no song. For Aristotle, the song of the bird is not a result of the trembling material of its subject, but rather originates from the tongue. The bird has a long and freely movable tongue, as opposed to many “viviparous four-foots with blood,” whose tongue is hard and thick and constrained. Its tongue enables the bird’s articulation and dialect. But the one with the “freest, widest, and softest tongue of them all” is the *lógos*-animal, the human. He also possesses the softest and most flexible lips of all.<sup>25</sup> Both tongue and lips known not only for speaking ... Ornithological acoustics make a much more simple distinction, although not far from Aristotle, by identifying three classes of sound phenomena: noises, tones, and sounds. Somewhere biologically in between we find the birdcall and bird song.

The tone is a special limited frequency spectrum, something like the sound of a recorder (flute). The sound is a frequency spectrum with all overtone spectra, something like the sound of a violin. The overtone spectra are recognizable as frequency bands. For noise, the frequency bands can barely be recognized because the acoustic activity is spread out across an entire spectrum: click or hiss. The noise can also be created with an instrument, with the beak or wing. “Each vocal expression is connected with exhaling, which excludes instrumental sounds.”<sup>26</sup>

But how does a written account establish the structure of a song or call? The writing down of human songs and its history since Homer and the Greek alphabet<sup>27</sup> is much more familiar to us than the writing down of bird songs. Over time, four different processes have been developed in order to write them down.

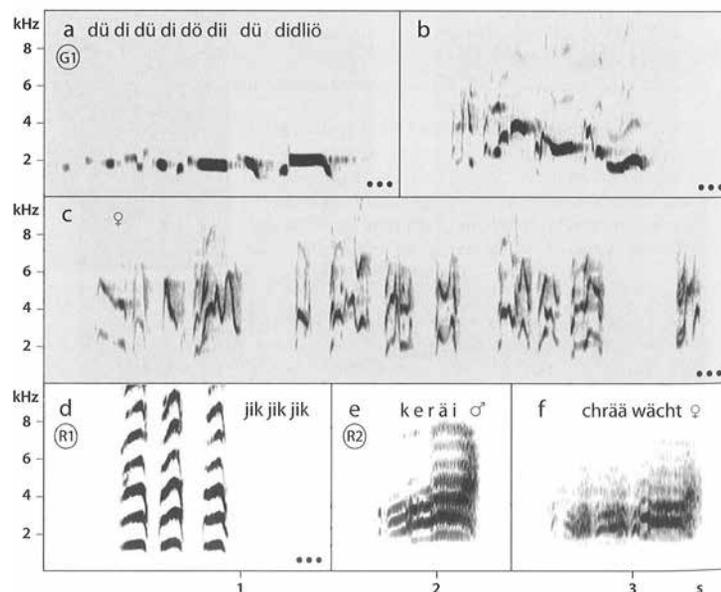
1. The oldest: one selects syllables, vowels, and consonants that correspond to the bird song.

2. The second is a kind of stenography developed in 1894 by the ornithologist Alwin Voigt: dots in various distances from each other and straight lines at various heights for the tone pitches and at various thicknesses for the volumes. In addition, there is an inclining or declining arc for rising or descending pitches of particular passages. The oriole call is then recorded very simply: one line plus three dots and then an inclining arc.<sup>28</sup>

3. The third is musical notation. For bird songs, its limitations are soon reached. For one thing, the tempo of the song is much too fast for transcribing by ear and hand. A bird’s hearing capacity accommodates a much higher temporal resolution than a human can assimilate. It produces infinitely variable sounds that can no longer be notated even by twelve-tone music, the tiniest steps impossible to be captured by the semitones of a well-tempered tuning.

4. The fourth process is technical-acoustic, described as a sonogram. Its history, which still requires some research, begins with the sonograph, a device that records a graphical representation onto a magnetic tape. The bird song only begins to take some kind of discernible form with the use of

magnetic tape. How appropriate that such technology should be discovered in the 1950s, a time when William S. Burroughs introduced magnetic tape to literature, the theory of evolution, and metaphysical speculation – all under a title that would sound good to the *Morgenvogel*: “The Watergate Scandal Happened in the Garden of Eden!”<sup>29</sup>

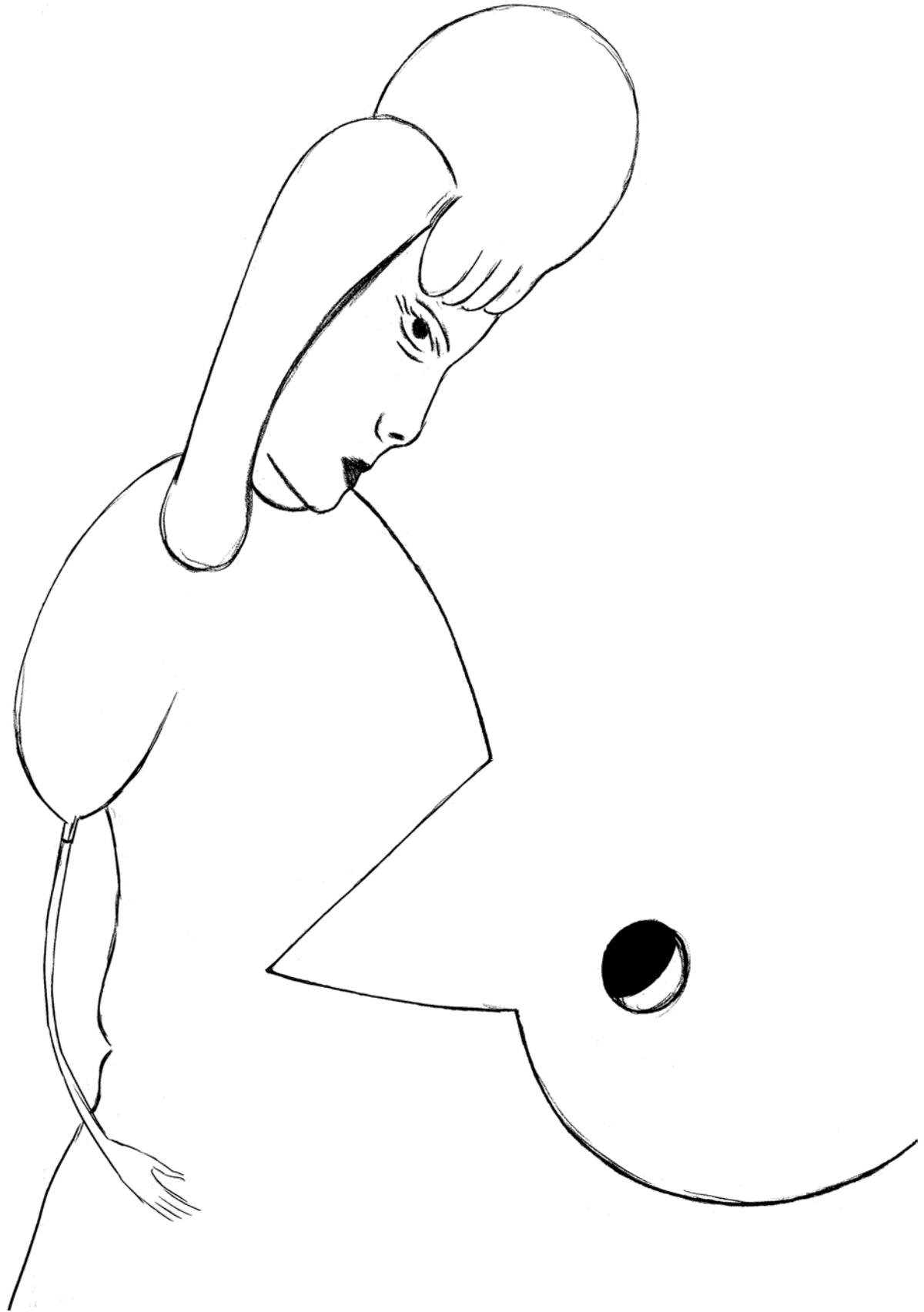


*Sonogram of an oriole*

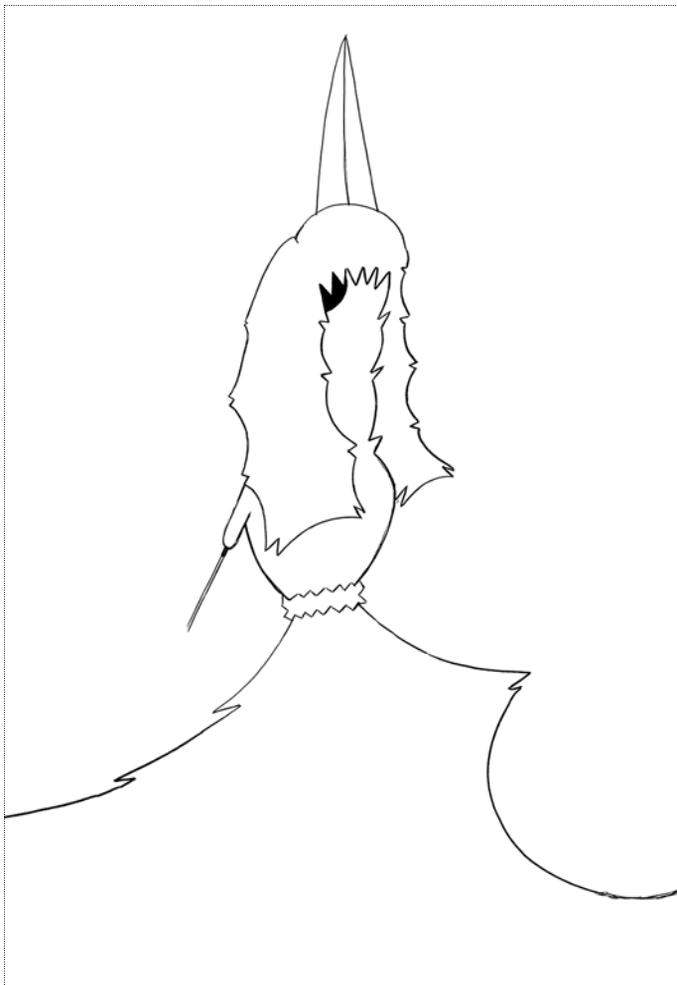
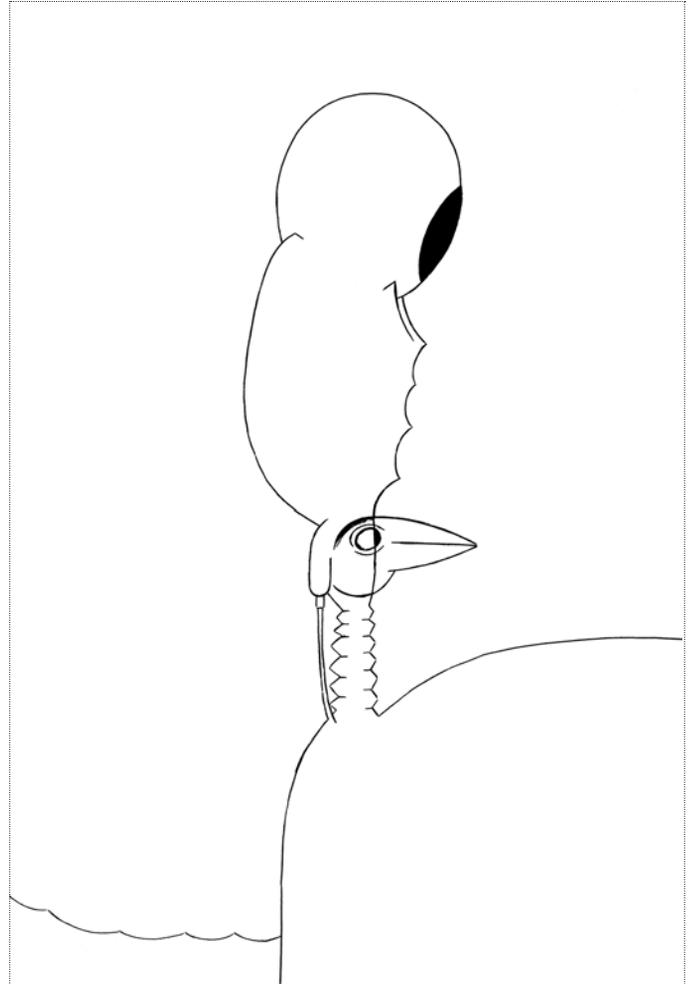
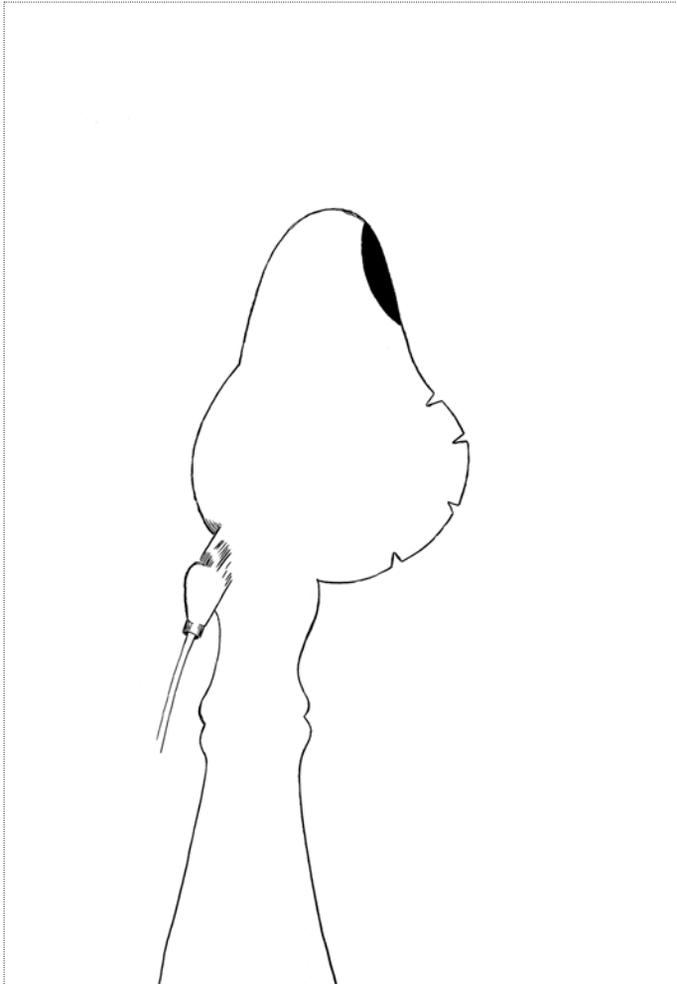
(A sonogram, seen here, presents the temporal progression initially from left to right: the sharper the thin line ascends, the finer (shorter) the temporal resolution of the auditory event. Secondly, it represents the frequency spectrum. A noise (closely: *keräi*) includes almost every frequency within a certain range. It is a strip, visible more or less as a wide, dark bar. In comparison, a pure sinusoidal tone without overtones would be represented as a thin, horizontal line. The song of the oriole is measured at less than 2000 Hertz along a bar that is almost as thin as that of the nightingale).

The sonogram of the oriole song would be the technical-acoustic answer to Mandelstam’s syllabo-tonic poem about the oriole – two versions of the same vocal event. Even the modern and highly technical biology of bird books and ornithological literature hold fast to the syllable. We seek, count, and systematize syllables. The syllable, which was first recognized by the Western World as a means of notating song (around the time of the Cretan-Minoan scripts LINEAR A and B; before the Greek vowel alphabet) is itself an ornithological medium. It establishes the point of intersection between human speech and birdsong. “Syllabic writing does not take account of the level of pitch. For many sounds in our language, the corresponding syllables are completely missing. What’s more, we are shaped by our language and attempt to draw parallels. Anyone who would like to become skilled in imitating birdcalls need only ask a bird expert from a different country to describe the song of a particular type of bird. Even a totally non-musical person would be perturbed at the differences in the ways the two experts would imitate the exact same bird. Yet more obvious would be the difference in comparing the syllabic writing in German and foreign bird books.”<sup>30</sup> Our language and that which we hear from the birds are extremely closely related!





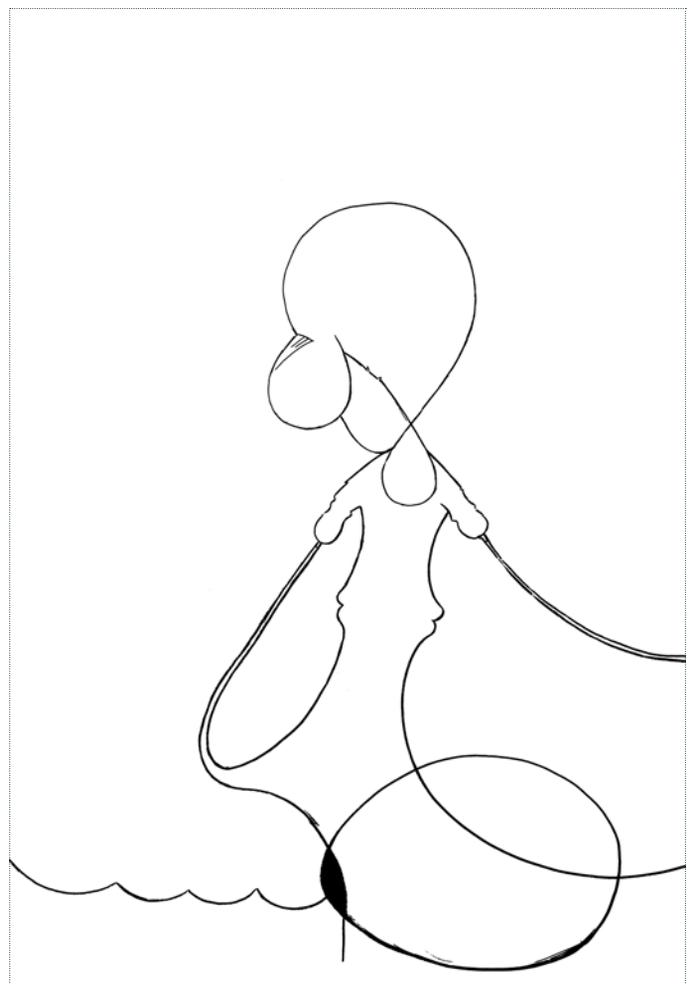
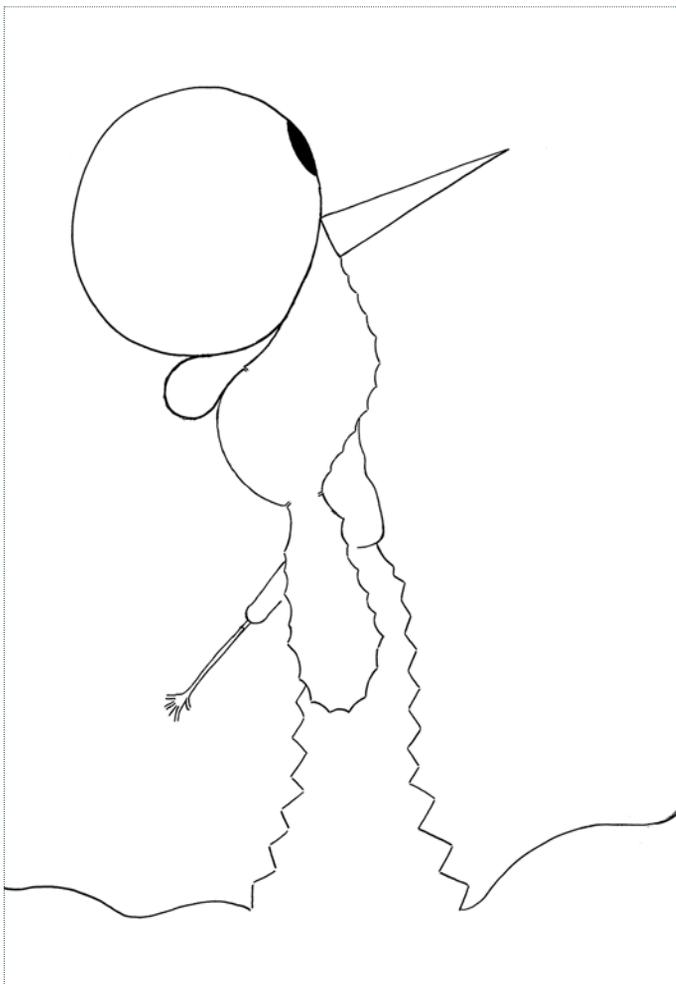
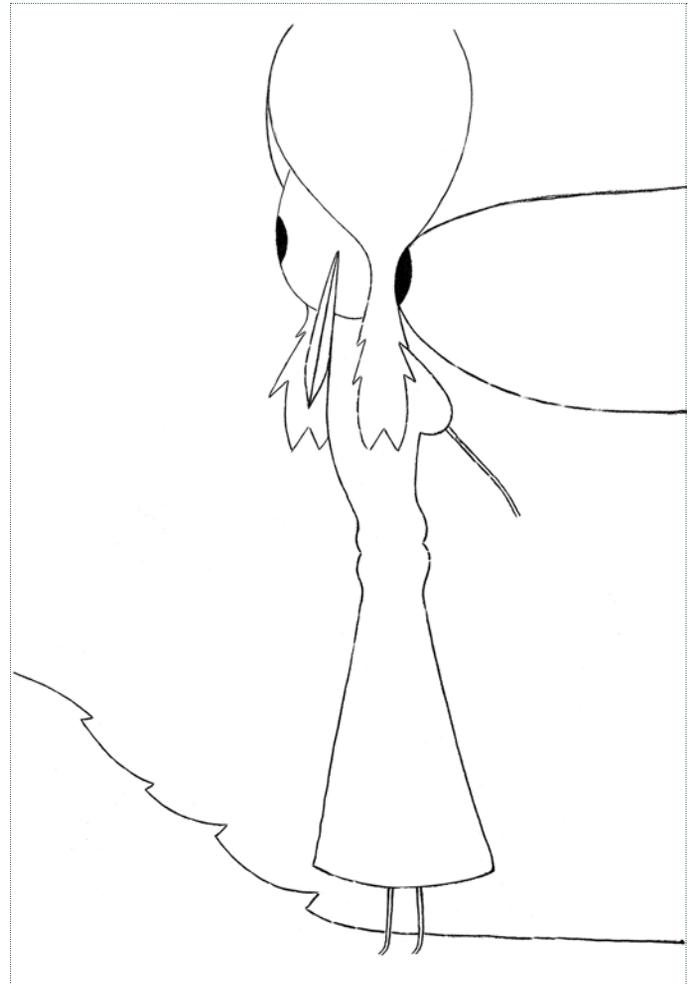
*Leda*, 2012



*Eiermann 2*

Denk ich an Meier, denk ich an Eier.  
Denk ich an Eier, denk ich auch an meine große Liebe.  
Wie macht Meier das?

MB 1996



## A Very Serious Location, Location, Location

Brunnenstraße, Berlin Mitte, 2009/10

If you're looking to be a successful artist in Berlin, or you would just like to make a few birds very happy, you should definitely consider getting yourself to Mitte to embark on a career in real estate. No space has ever been SO temporarily used! Exhibitions, readings, concerts, DJ shows, performances, film festivals, and any number of other tricks, are all used to entice innocent city dwellers into stocking up on Finnish-style birdhouses.

As Maria and I opened our first store on Brunnenstraße in Berlin-Mitte in 2009, my essential contribution was the formulation of the name: *Morgenvogel Real Estate*. At first, it was a funny idea to describe the situation in which we found ourselves – basically just wanting to sell birdhouses in this area where, a few meters away, a whole Berlin Wall was torn down to make room for hostels and townhouses. (Here we would like to explicitly thank Torsten Böcker, who provided us with an extremely affordable temporary use space. His restaurant *Raja Jooseppi* was a few meters closer to the former “death strip” (no man’s land) and derived its name from the northern-most border crossing between Finland and Russia).

We could have called the store *Maria’s Morgenvogel Birdhouse Paradise* or *Titbird Delight* or *Get Your Morgenvogel Birdhouse Here!* or *Take This House and Hang It* or *Tweeting Happens Here!* or *Morgenvogel Twitter Forces* or *Morgenvogel’s Bird Heart* or *Morgenvogel Bird Girl* or *We Can’t Think of a Name for this Morgenvogel Store* or *Last Morgenvogel Birdhouses Before the Border*, be we would have found it all a bit too much in the way of eco-kitsch or pretentious artsy fartsy. No. Just *Morgenvogel Real Estate* – that was *cool business!*

How cool indeed, we always thought, when after a long day during which frustratingly few to no visitors were interested in birdhouses or art – despite Maria’s increasingly refined efforts to entice them – the door would open and in would walk a necktie or a black suit thinking we actually had concrete gold for sale. Oh yeah! And they would be gone just as quickly as they came when they realized we had no “gated community” on the “pulse of the scene” to sell (or whatever other paradoxical marketing approach was being used at the time). Sometimes we were unable to resist the idea that speculation involving actual real estate necessitates a particular mindset, in which neither subtlety nor bird-loving has any place. (There are exceptions, of course).

All the while, the death strip next door on Bernauerstraße ascended into a prime location and every square centimeter of corner property became a source of great jubilation for

investors willing to turn an avian habitat into a boring neighborhood for boring people or simply to put up some luxury lofts into which no one could afford to move.

So here you have it: an artistic and – although the location, location, location is very serious – cheerful attempt at anti-gentrification, at least for the winged ones.

To this day, it has not been the last.





*Fir Tree Rocket M4PL* under construction, 2010. *Left:* Cables are serious, too.



How to build a Morgenvogel rocket: In the beginning there was a performance by **Mimosa Pale**. She erected and climbed an erotic obelisk, up to the sky of **MVRE**. Then she grabbed the golden instrument she once had won in a Finnish musical saw contest, and played music together with **John Blue** on cello and electronics.

The next days **Maria** worked on on the obelisk body, with good advice from **Manuel** and **Bolle**. Material was easily found in the bins on the street. The primordial Morgenvogel house has received a place of honor on the rocket.

Eventually **Martin Kuentz** installed solar-driven electronic devices – in his own words:

“The measurement instrumentation built into the projectile payload consists of a broadband high-frequency receiver for the detection of radio signals and networks for automated course correction during target acquisition. The receiver is able to indicate a high-frequency signal in a dynamic range up to 70 dB  $0 \pm 3$  dB DC in its voltage output. A LED display indicates the dynamic variations in the target area of the rocket for testing purposes.”

And ready to go is “fir tree rocket” **M4PL** (**M**imosa, **M**aria, **M**anuel, **M**artin; **PL** is for **P**eter **L**ang)! It was launched in April 2010 on occasion of the one year anniversary of **Morgenvogel Real Estate**.



*Top:* Mimosa Pale, Photo: Bernhard Ludewig; *top right:* Martin Kuentz, *bottom right:* M4PL. *Facing page:* Micha Schroetter.

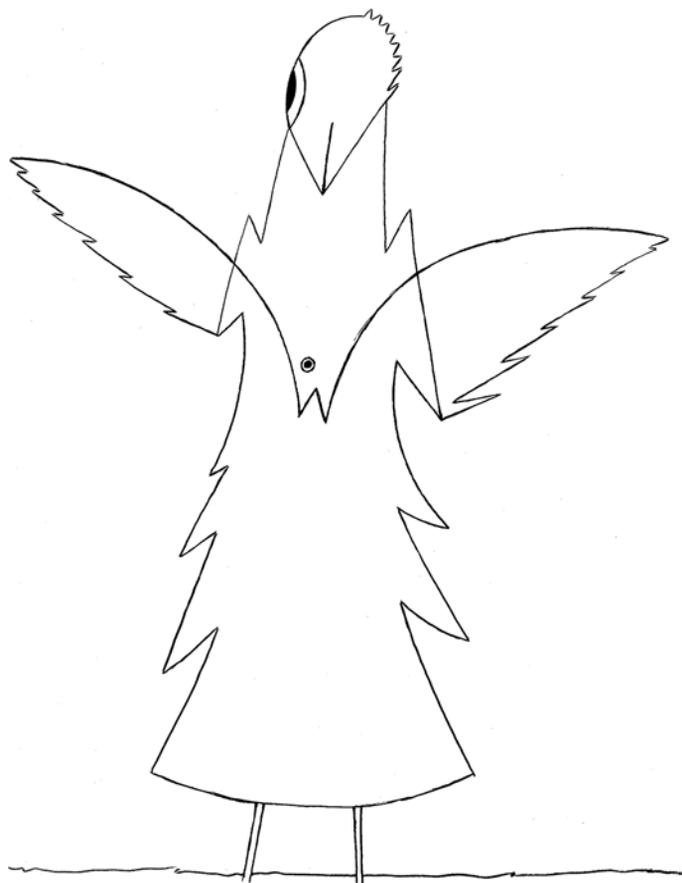


At **Morgenvogel Real Estate** in Brunnenstraße about two dozens events were hosted. **Hans Bramm** was the first to be inspired by the atmosphere of the shop and fixed an audio installation with bird sounds twittering to the ceiling; then **Martin Kuentz** and **Maria** produced solar energy driven sound sculptures which changed their tones with the altitude of the sun; they were accompanied by a performance and a presentation by **Peter Blasser** from Baltimore, a specialist in synthesizers. **The Birds, Too** performed a concert of bird music which made the room vibrate; the *Flying Films Festival*, curated by **Lars Künstler**, presented artists' videos on the subject of flying, among the participants were **Lucio Auri**, **Daniela Butsch**, **Stefan Heinrich Ebener**, **Undine Goldberg**, **Dirk Holzberg**, **Barbara Rosenthal**, **Ira Schneider**, **Philine Sollmann**, and **Markus Wirthmann**. *Schwan-seelig* was the title of lectures on swans by **Peter Berz** (Humboldt University) and **Helmut Höge** (die taz). Curator **Peter Lang** held a slide talk on **Karl Hans Janke**, a 20<sup>th</sup> century psychiatry patient who left blue prints of visionary rocket constructions. Audio sculptures and installations were shown by **Gaby Schaffner** and **Thomas Judisch**, and by the title of *Music for Birds* **Christopher Fröhlich** and **Jörg Pfeiffer** made the space twitter in an electronic way. **Manuel** was the very resident DJ and, together with physicist and management consultant **Andreas Schaale**, held a lecture on Berlin real estate market (for humans) by the name of *Wolkenkuckucksheim* ("cloud-cuckoo-land"). *The Cosmic Egg* was an event with texts on the multifarious cosmogonic notions (like in Finnish national epic *Kalevala*) that earth has developed from an egg; among others **Ana Teixeira Pinto** (Humboldt University) and

**Oliver Kohlmann** (Vestibül Gallery) were involved. Then came another lecture by **Peter Berz** and **Helmut Höge** on the *Metaphysics of Sparrows* and the exhibition *Birdshow* by **Thomas Judisch**. **Heinrich Dubel** held a video lecture *Helicopter Hysterics TWO* about the hidden meanings of helicopters in fiction movies. At Finnish midsummer night **Maria** showed her sculpture *Midsommernachts-Ei-Baum-Traum* ("Midsummer Night's Egg Tree Dream" – see p. 28). Next was **Anselm Weidner's** lecture *The Larks of Brodowin – Learning Voices by Imitation* and **Barbara Rosenthal's** book presentation and screening *Existential Flight*. **Brendan Howell** and **Lars Künstler** showed their praxinoscope machine by the title *The Animation of the Same Soul Quickening the Whole Frame*. Then came another concert by **Mimosa Pale** played on the singing saw. *Flying Films Festival #2*, curated by **Kevin Merz**, featured contributions by **Loimi Brautmann**, **Chris Brandl**, **Fernanda D'Agostino**, **Dominik Eggermann**, **Christopher Fröhlich**, **Undine Goldberg**, **Miriam Jakobs** and **Gerhard Schick**, **Lemeh 42**, **Sabine Linse**, **Birgit Möller**, **Eva Münnich**, **Barbara Rosenthal**, **Maren Strack**, **Björn Ullrich**, **Marcelina Wellmer**, **Tina Willgren**, and **Claudia Zweifel**. MVRE's big finale on September 25<sup>th</sup> 2010 presented **Miles Chalcraft's** rocket performance *BirdBrainBox*.



Wolfgang Müller  
**News from the Misconception Sciences**  
**The Canard as Medium**



*Blue tits at your local delicatessen, On the extinction of the sparrow, and The bittern from Engelbecken*

We live in an age in which ideologies have become obsolete: the Media of late has been quite successful in communicating this particular point of view to humanity. In the post-ideological or neo-individualist age,<sup>1</sup> all that is left is the enlightened, rational individual and a couple of crazies still clinging to an outdated ideology or religion – the deluded, egomaniacs, autistics, the deranged, fanatics, and dreamers. They exist within a Utopian delirium or wallow in sentimental memories. The world is currently touted as wholly void of any alternatives.

This is the point at which nature enters the picture. Because a totally and completely rational and enlightened world – aroused only now and again by the odd bomb attack from an insane terrorist or religious fanatic – would be... well... pretty dismal. One's own death would seem to be the glimmer of hope, the only surprise in a life void of alternatives. The ability to select among one hundred and fifty-seven liquid soaps at the drugstore can hardly be offered to humanity as evidence of an endless cultural diversity and permanent metamorphosis, a satisfying replacement for true meaning. The knowledge of an unfathomable variety of animals, plants, fungi, the whole diversity of creation – whoever or whatever is responsible, be it God, Allah, or Darwin – clearly offers a certain cohesiveness,

lending support in the maelstrom of a neo-individualist age. It is no coincidence that the natural sciences and the arts in this epoch enjoy increasing credibility as compared to politics, economics, and religion, in whose representatives less and less faith is bestowed. And it therefore follows, especially for art – which is considered equally as pushing boundaries and destroying ideologies – that the natural sciences have become an anchor in a sea of arbitrariness and enlightenment. The artist Damien Hirst shot to art superstar with his animal corpses preserved in formaldehyde, akin to the way creatures are conserved in museums of natural history. Gunther von Hagens came from the other direction – science – desiring to enhance the arts with his sculptures made from preserved human cadavers. This sensation of animal and human taxidermy filled magazines and TV events with headlines and exhibition halls with massive audiences. The “real” was staged amidst a fusion of culture and nature.

*Locusts and sharks.* In the age of this neo-individualism, all political parties would be compatible with each other and interchangeable. Only on TV talk shows would their representatives continue to simulate irreconcilable differences between their world views. Indeed, however, even the German city of Hesse's ultraconservative CDU party – considered to be reactionary – and its Green party – considered to be far left – had no problems forming a coalition in 2013. In Berlin the Left party (Linkspartei) and the SPD peacefully governed together for an entire year – while selling off 75,000 state-owned flats. Since then, even the locusts and real estate sharks have given up their fears of communism. This is the point at which the authority of nature enters the picture: sharks and locusts? Irrational forces of nature? Outrageous rent increases, forced evictions, wage cuts, and redistribution from the bottom to the top as the consequences of natural phenomena?

Nature, naturally. On August 28, 2014 in the daily newspaper *Welt*, the 29-year old CDU delegate from Sachsen, Mr. Wendt, used a bird-and-fish analogy to attempt to explain his rejection of gay marriage (an officially registered union of two members of the same gender) as he referred to facts from nature. It went something like this: “The fish cannot fly, and the bird cannot swim. Even if the fish wants to fly, it will never be able to.”<sup>2</sup>

*“Bouvard und Pécuchet.”* The daily *Welt* offer reassurance: “Wendt's perspective is not evil, but rather the expression of a reality of life.” Indeed, the reality of this politician's life is similar to that of Bouvard and Pécuchet, the two retired scribes from Gustave Flaubert's novel – except that Wendt comes from the opposite direction. Only in the practical application of their encyclopedic knowledge, gathered by all their reading, do Flaubert's heroes precisely discover its unexpected gaps, blind spots, and inconsistencies. Their practical understanding unleashes a chain of grandiose failures within every discipline. Here, among the back-benchers from Saxony, Flaubert's dictionary of platitudes and inane idioms<sup>3</sup> simply begins to babble – even before the novel begins. It would be pointless to send the politician a long list of bird species that are good swimmers and that can barely fly, if at all – such as the whole group of penguin and many North Atlantic representatives of the *Alcidae* family. Or should

one speak of flying fish, able to glide several meters at a time? On the basis of three case studies, specifically the breeding blue tit, the great bittern, and the extinction of the house sparrow, I shall explore several misconceptions whose emergence in the media set off a chain of events and eventually established their own realities: the canard is a medium.

### The blue tit

Common parlance suggests that “Nothing is as old as yesterday’s newspaper,” pointing to the forgetfulness inherent in the medium. Some of the most beloved news stories are those about cases of extinction, the rediscovery of a creature long-since extinct (the “Lazarus Effect”), or the detection of a previously undiscovered animal. The medium – itself presently threatened with extinction for numerous reasons – is forced to dispatch one sensation or grotesque opinion after the other on a daily basis in order to secure the constant attention of its readers.

*Canards.* Sensations that eventually prove to be misconceptions, fallacies, or unsupportable ideas are referred to as *canards*. Canards are laid and hatched by human beings. This involves absolutely no risk, as long as it deals exclusively with animals. Which barn owl, which crested newt, or which little owl would think to demand a rebuttal because it had been confused with another type of animal in some publication, or because complete nonsense about its activity was being proliferated? “Contrary to your assertions in the issue from the third of March, I do not lay 16 eggs annually, but rather only three – at the very most.”

In 1994 I had the opportunity to create a canard myself. Daily newspapers such as *FAZ*, *SZ*, *Die Welt* and weeklies such as *Die Zeit* make strict distinctions between obvious satire and serious issues. In contrast, such boundaries are quite unclear in the more left-leaning alternative *taz*. The serious and the satirical, the scientific and the esoteric, appear in a colorful interplay, often on the same pages. The unconventional relationship between reality and satire is the mark of tabloid journalism and an excellent hatchery for canards. The probability increases that the reader takes satire at face value, at the same time it interprets the serious as satire. This phenomenon intensifies as topics are explored with which the readership strongly identifies, such as environmental protection, ecotourism, and organic foods.

### *Blue tits at your local delicatessen*

*Berlin (taz) – The artist Wolfgang Müller (36) has nesting boxes hanging from the windows of his flat on Wiener Straße in Kreuzberg. Across the street is Görlitzer Park. Each spring, blue tit and great tit birds fly to his nest boxes. Müller, however, is no animal lover. On the contrary: just a few weeks after the offspring are hatched, he sells the cute little birds to an upscale Italian delicatessen. Müller says, “They are an essential ingredient in a well-known Italian specialty.” He suffers no misgivings. “I am not capturing wild birds. Instead I am breeding them at the window of my flat. Besides, the birds come to me of their own free will.” The former art student began breeding after his annual student loan subsidy was reduced to 560 marks. The side job brings in around 200 to 300 extra marks each year. A pair of blue tits can produce up to 14 offspring and breed twice a year. “As I completed my studies, I had even less money and desperately had to search for extra work,” says Müller. Next year he wants to put*

*up starling nest boxes. “Starlings weigh twice as much as tits, but the nest boxes only have to be a little bit bigger. Restaurants pay based on weight.” To wit, Müller discovered that starlings – like cranes, magpies, and ravens – are scientifically considered to be belonging to the group of songbirds. Claudia Schandt*

A day after publication, criminal investigators made a visit to the *taz* building. Appalled callers filed criminal complaints. The investigating officer, one Mr. Heinz, demanded that the paper’s culture editor, Harald Fricke, provide written confirmation of the article’s author. I then sent the investigating officer the following fax:

*Berlin, 29 March 1994*

*Mr. Heinz*

*Criminal Investigator*

*Department of Eco-Crimes and Species Conservation*

*Fax 30756889*

*Wolfgang Müller, Wxxxxxxxstraße 48, 10997 Berlin.*

*Dear Mr. Heinz,*

*Mr. Harald Fricke from taz gave me your fax number and informed me that I should contact you immediately.*

*The article “Blue tits at your local delicatessen,” which I penned under the pseudonym Claudia Schandt, was a satirical text. Because tits are territorial and require some distance between nest boxes (several meters), and never breed when crowded, I assumed that any ornithologist would immediately recognize that commercial breeding of tits is totally impossible. I would very much like to interview you, Mr. Heinz, on the topic of species conservation. Would that be possible?*

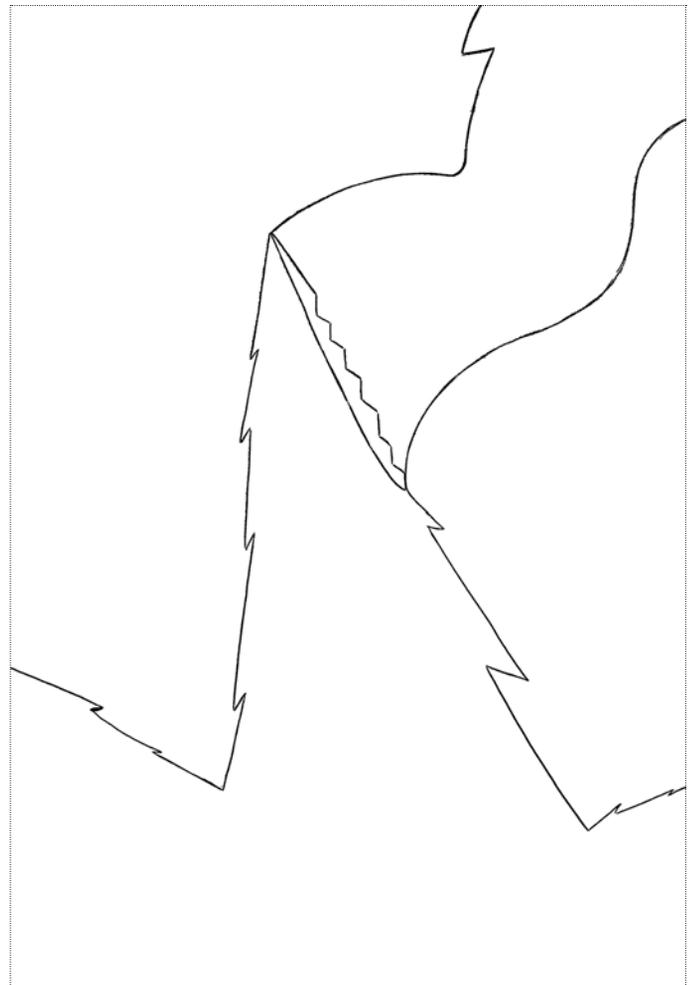
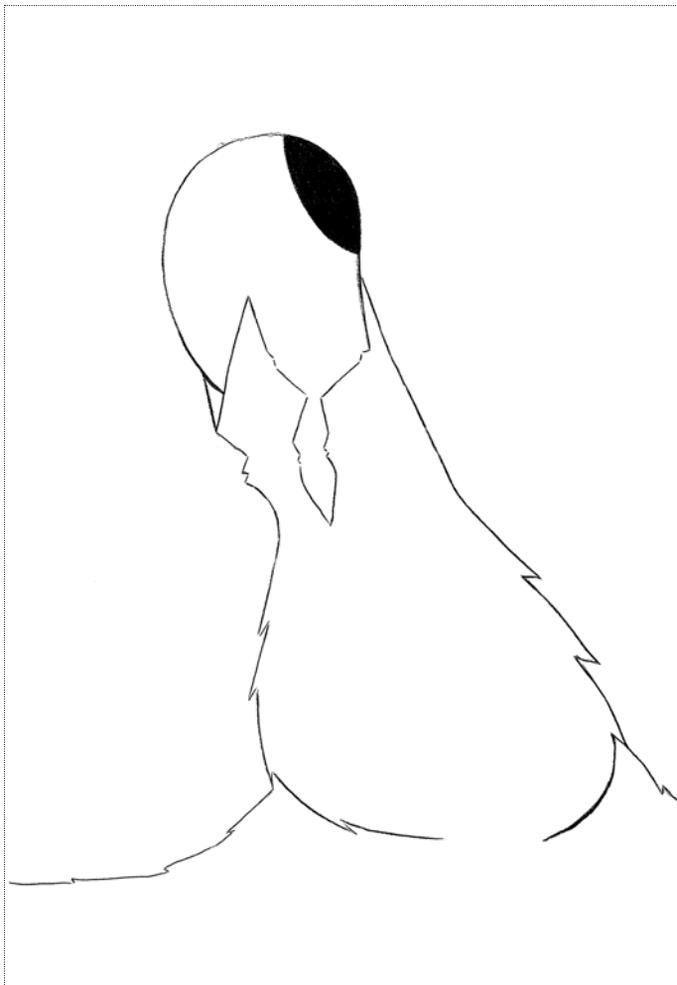
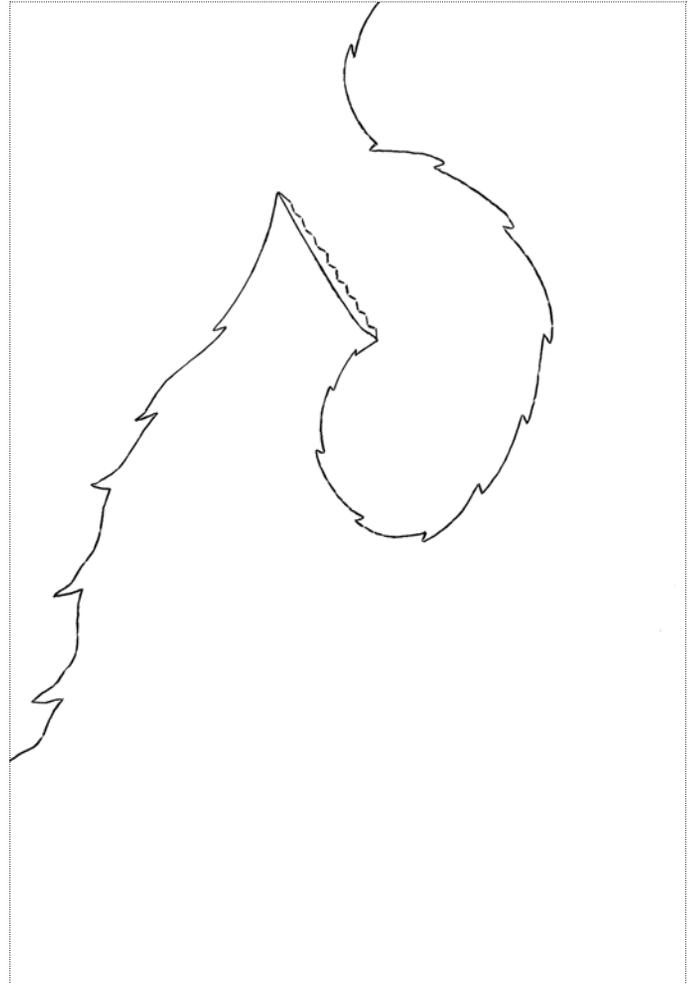
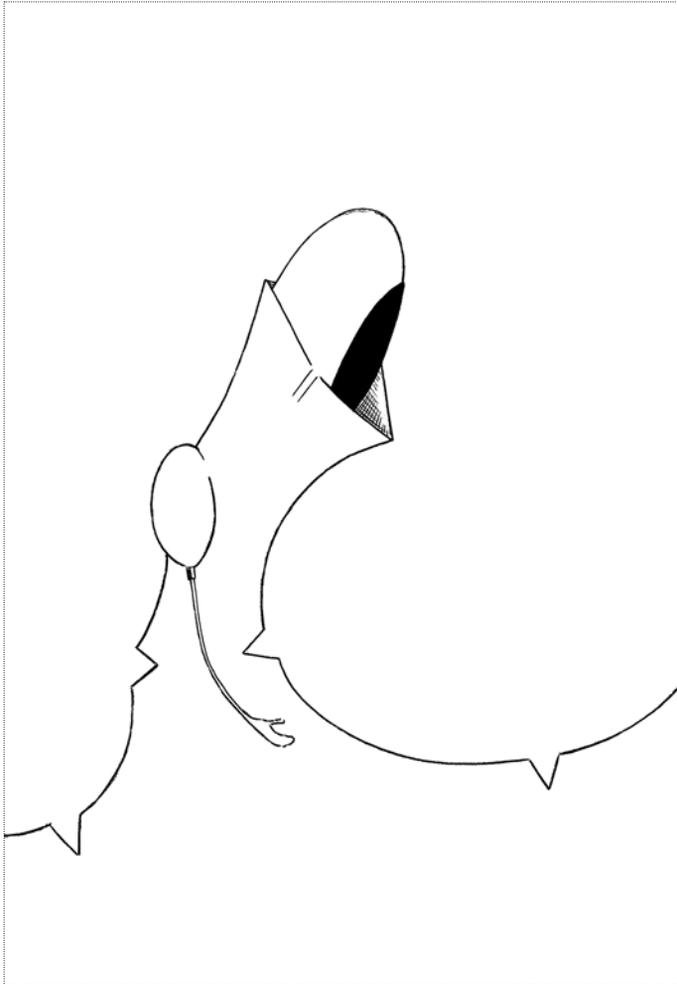
*Sincerely, Wolfgang Müller*

After several weeks I received a message from the Berlin criminal investigation department. The proceedings against me involving a violation of species conservation law had been suspended. My question to Mr. Heinz about an interview remained unanswered. Instead, two years later, the production company for the ARD TV talk show *Fliege* contacted me. The show presented me as a “media victim”: “The Blue Tit Butcher from Kreuzberg.”<sup>4</sup>

### The house sparrow

*Extinction of the house sparrow:* Among the more commonly reoccurring canards are reports of the extinction of the house sparrow. The fact that the second most common bird in Germany with up to an estimated 10 million breeding pairs – 500 million pairs worldwide, and the birds have even started breeding in Iceland – is at best worthy of a headline in the Icelandic papers. For Iceland to be mentioned at all in the local media, the Bardarbunga volcano would need to erupt. Because humans are so fond of the house sparrow – scientists argue this is because of its great population fluctuations – it has managed to become classified as a “near-threatened species”. (Fig. 1)

*Housing shortage:* How do you explain that storks at some point began to prefer chimneys and roofs built by human beings – to trees? Did they feel more comfortable or safer? Will there come a day when a biology book includes the sentence “Around



## The Birds, Too @ MORGENVOGEL STATION

Veteranenstraße, Berlin Mitte, 2006

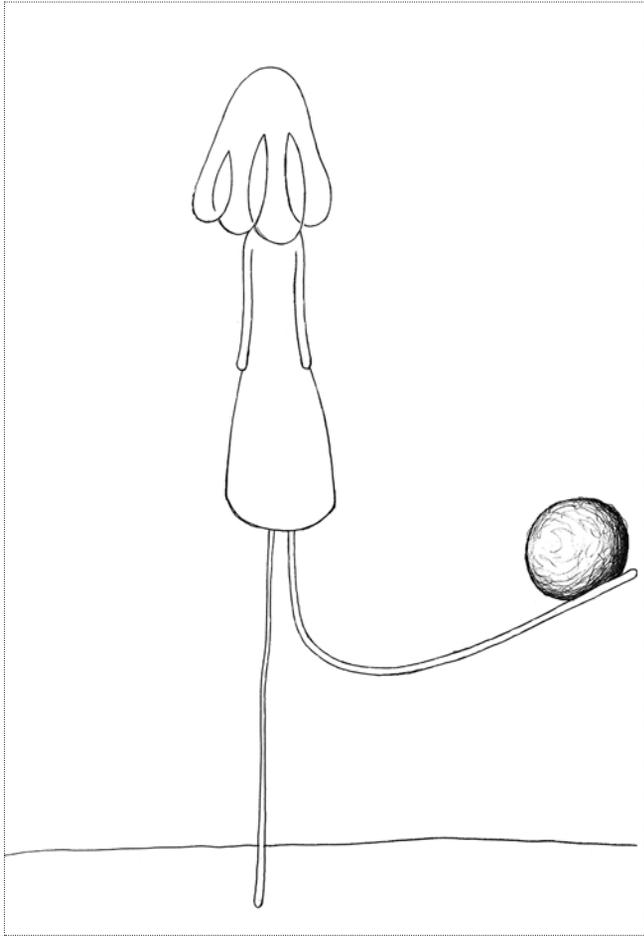
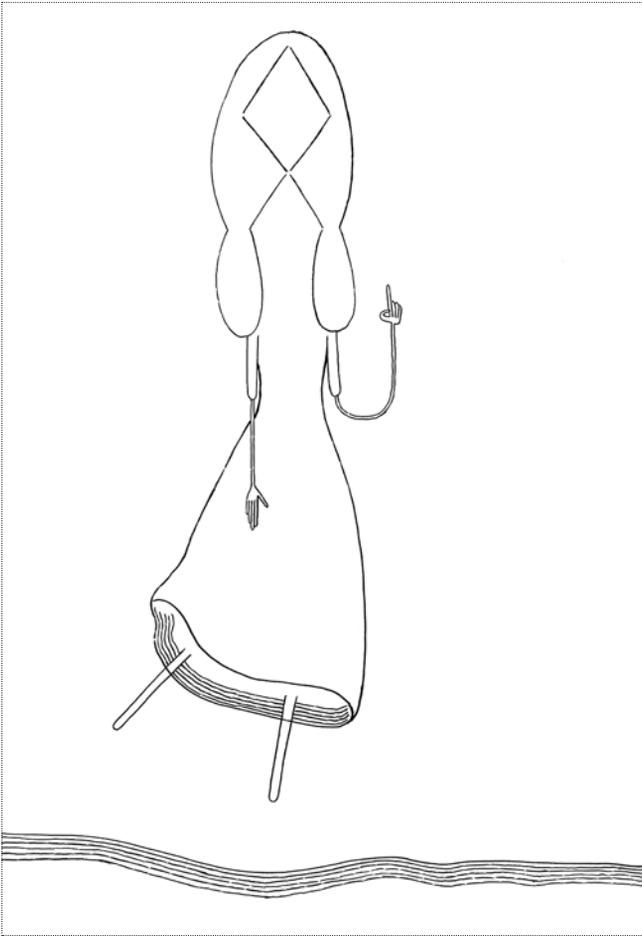
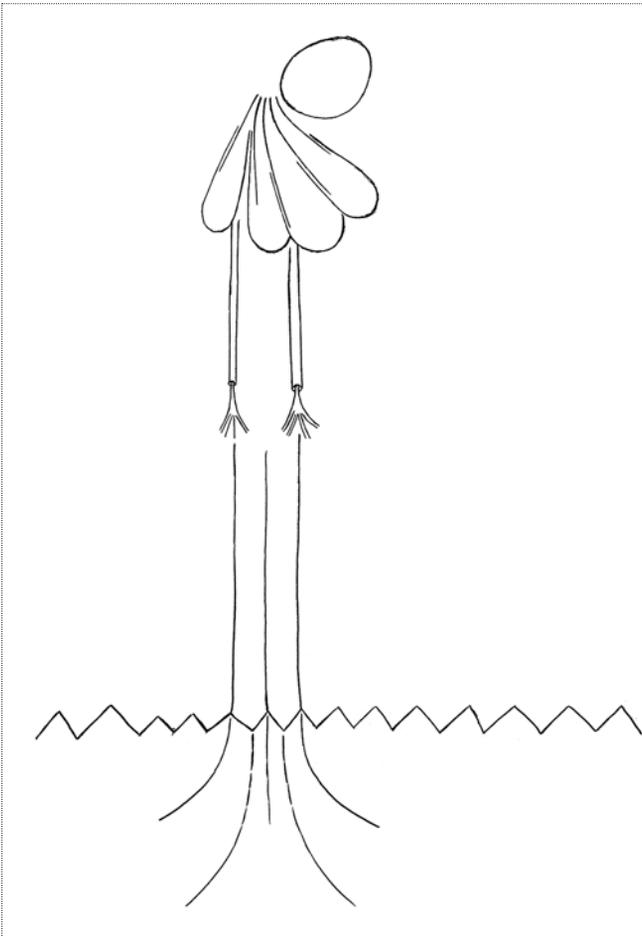


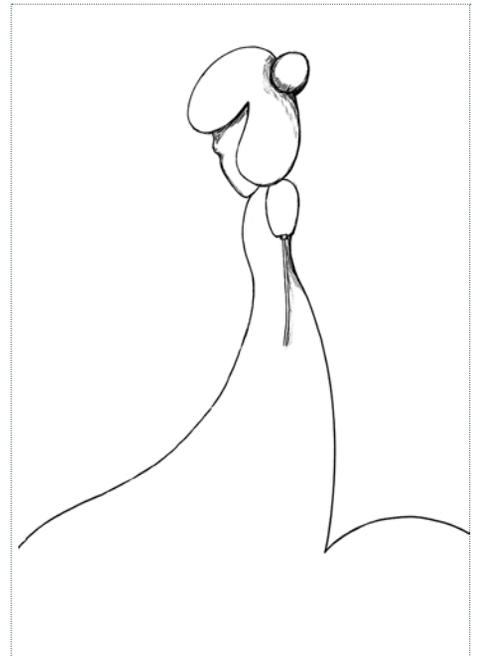
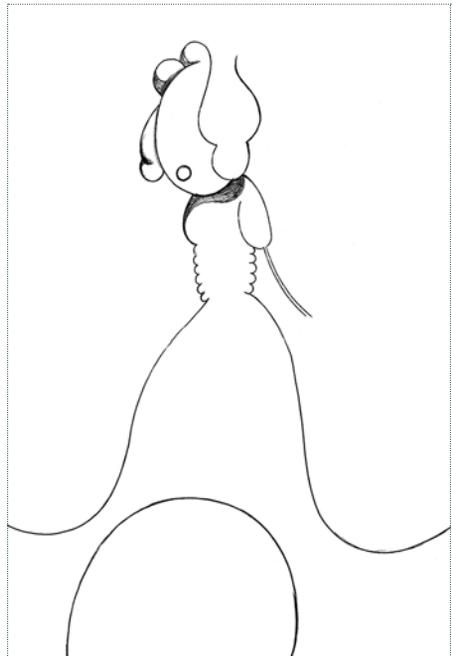
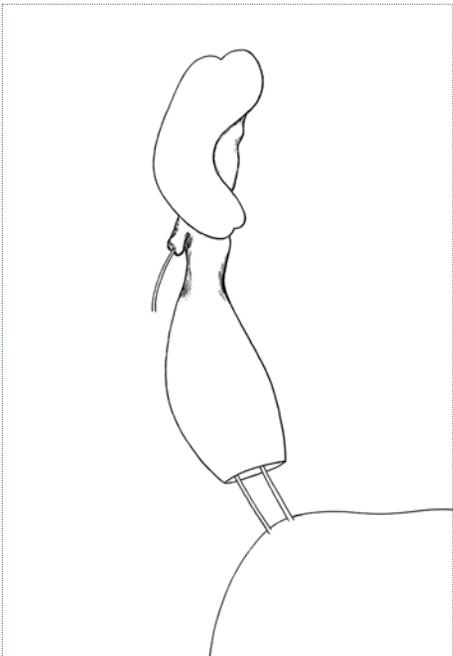
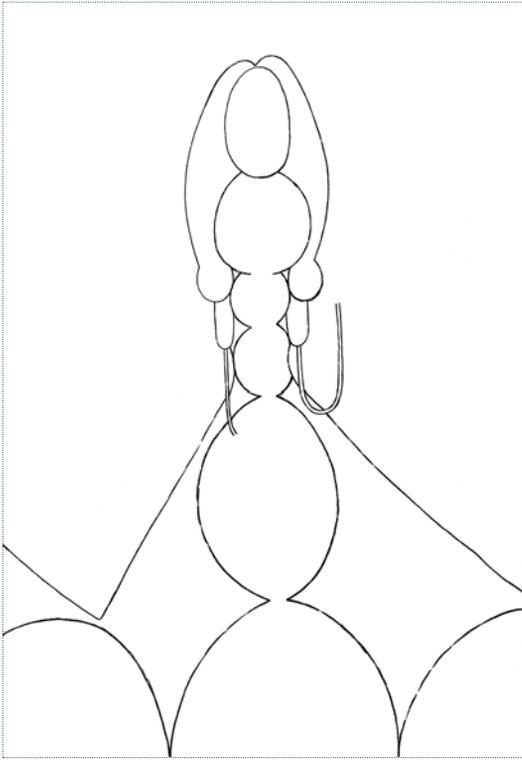
*Morgenvogel Station* was Maria's project room on the first floor of Bay Youm's legendary club *Bergstüb'l* on Veteranenstraße, ambitiously seeking to become a Gesamtkunstwerk. Walls and ceilings were, between other things, covered with scores by Heinz Thiessen, a Berlin composer who in the 30s had tried to notate bird singing in words and scores (see Heinz Thiessen: *Der Gesang der Vögel*, Darmstadt 1978). Birds have taught humankind so much music that we wanted to give something back to them. Support their power of song while in Summer 2006 everybody and everything else was obsessed with the soccer world championship. (We totally ignore the major topic of "birds and soccer stadiums" here, but google "eagle owl soccer Finland" and see what you get!)

And thus we founded our performance troupe *The Birds, Too*. It was equipped with bird masks designed by Maria and with the concept that all musicians would imitate the singing

and/or behavior of birds. The founding members were: Udo Lindemann (woodpecker drums, organ, bird houses), Eric Gradman (violin), Christopher Fröhlich (sampler, tapeboard), Jörg Pfeiffer (records), Micha Schroetter (voice, performance), Mic Mikina (sampler), Maria-Leena Rähälä (masks, video animations) and Manuel Bonik (poetry, flutes, keyboards). Later line-ups saw among others Jörg Janzer (trumpet, mouth harp), Martin Kuentz (electronics), Sean Derrick Cooper Marquardt (accidental guitar, electronics), Anna Staffel (performance), Kerstin Weiberg (performance), Adam Wiener (glass flutes), Marta Zapparoli (electronics).

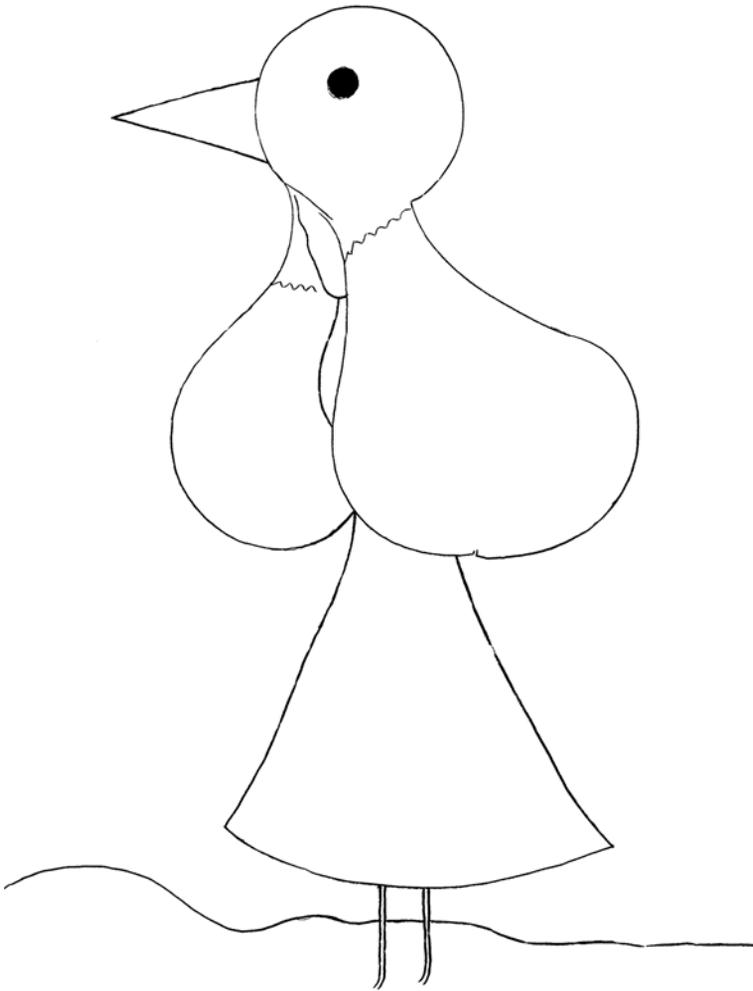
As of 2014, *The Birds, Too* are still developing their special kind of chirping and tweeting. Videos can be found at [vimeo.com](http://vimeo.com) and the *Morgenvogel* website.





Axel Roch  
**No Bachelors, but Birds.**  
**Maria-Leena Rähälä's Drawings**  
**as Poetological Sketches**

*And I'm floating in a most peculiar way  
And the stars look very different today*  
DAVID BOWIE, 1969



One fine day in 1987, in a living room in Berlin's center, Maria-Leena Rähälä – a.k.a. the Morgenvogel – started with her so-called *Flugübungen* (“Flying Exercises”; see page 96). Thousands of drawings and sketches would evolve from them over the following decades. The light, repeating, curved, wavy motions of her arms, hands, and fingers, like flaps of a bird's wings, are in direct tension with the metaphor of new technology and electronic media: the rocket. Maria's *Flugübungen*, as well as her drawings, reposition radical developments and ugly excesses of modernity into a reign of imaginary situations, fantastic motions and encounters, in an area somewhere between heaven and earth. They are space and rocket oddities.<sup>1</sup> With the *Flugübungen*, Maria declares her own qualitative revolution: her *Man-Machine-Revolution*.

At this point in time, the history of literature could already look back on several forms and variations of the popular genre science fiction: novels, magazines, cartoons, even as cyberpunk Sci-Fi is thoroughly established in our media cultures, just like Hi-Fi in cinema and in our living rooms. Marshall McLuhan's first book *Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* was published decades ago, his media theories fashionable since the 1960s. Norbert Wiener's book *Cybernetics or Communication and Control in the Animal and the Machine* was even older, often read, cited and discussed widely in more and more loops. In short: man-machine-communication, man-machine-interaction, high-fidelity-sound immersion, or man and technology in general, in 1987 already were intertwined in many ways; in plenty of laboratories, more or less experimental, and in all sorts of escapades into literary or scientific fantasy. So how is it then possible that – in 1987 – an artist, with a few sweeping movements, can claim or even evoke a revolution? And what's the point of this revolution? Can drawings or imaginary artistic motions be a revolution at all?

The drawings of the Morgenvogel envision to us a different interaction between civilization, culture, technology, man and nature compared to that which dominates us these days: in our technical-administrative world. Our time codifies the relationship to our environment or nature through technology, electronics, science or pure capital, as it is obvious in the societies of real estates and their administration. The revolution proclaimed by Maria, however, is not only a technological one. The poet Charles Baudelaire expressed in a letter from 1856: “I've been saying for a very long time that the poet is supremely intelligent [...] and that imagination is the most scientific of faculties, for it alone can understand the universal analogy, or what a mystic religion calls correspondence. But when I try to publish such statements, I'm told I'm mad.” There are more than codified, striated relationships with our real environments, more than “one-way-”, “two-way-”, “multiple-loop-feedback-communication-channels”. Our world is not only an artificial or codeable environment. You cannot simulate it, other than in parts or in models. „Der Morgenvogel kommt“ (the early bird arrives) is the radical inclusion of poetry in every area of society's progression, while at the same time transforming current technology and administration back into nature qua imagination. The Morgenvogel tweets to us: the artistic imagination's execution, through the flaps of many wings, is the condition of possibility, a possible rescue of our technically dominated world. That is why Maria's revolution is in fact the very oldest revolution, not a bio-technological one, not a genetic one, not scientific – in its entire concept it is a bio-poetic revolution.

A similar revolution in the *Denkungsart* is attributed to art philosopher Gaston Bachelard. It is claimed that he diagnosed and demonstrated a Copernican revolution of the imagination through his study of poetry. The Copernican revolution in physics refers to the object, to objects. The earth revolves around the sun, not the other way around, its own movement being postulated. The Copernican revolution in philosophy is, in analogy, based on the movements of the subject by itself or the subjective synthesis as a condition of any knowledge or experience. Moreover, the



Copernican revolution in art philosophy, after Bachelard, asks for a dynamic and not just an abstract-formal-synthetic imagination as the absolute condition for any possible or imaginable world. As the earth rotates around the sun, as any possible experience is conditioned by a subjective synthesis, so is poetic imagination not just mathematics, technology, or procedure; it is in principle dynamic, in the air, in flight. Such a “revolutionary” imagination is not a revolution of the earth, of the city, of architecture, mathematics, technology, or of machines – it is a revolution of the air, of birds, of dreams. It is oneiric. Bachelard lipreads from poets, specifically William Blake, whom he called a “poet of vertebral dynamics”: the dynamic-imaginary is eventually the absolute, the condition of any possible world – “the priority of dynamic imagination over formal imagination” and “absolute imagination which controls matter, forces, forms, life, thought.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, the poiesis of the Morgenvogel is, in accordance with Bachelard, always between heaven and earth, in verticality.

So then, how is the Morgenvogel about to arrive? Is it announcing itself? Is it already here? There are hints: the Morgenvogel flaps its imaginary wings throughout Maria’s drawings and sketches. She produces, outlines and drafts again and again complex, ambiguous interrelations between man, culture and nature, which propose a different, alternative development of our civilization, which redraw and proclaim a different world. At the same time, it is still our world. One of the essential differences between nature and men, animals and men is that nature does not have the ability to differentiate between models and the world, to design reality. A nest is not architecture, not a house. Since men have memory, they are, more than animals, able to live their dreams, write them down or draw them, and thus they are able to build different, new houses which might be like a nest. Birds can’t build houses, while men can build nest-like houses. In spite of this ability of humans, most media theories of today could hardly make propositions which would draft a poetic relationship between technology and environment – that is to say, a relationship mediated by imagination. Even artists like Marcel Duchamp surrendered in the face of technology

and media. Duchamp’s art is critical and reflective, all in all diagnostic, thus, less imaginative, therefore also less poetic: *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*.<sup>3</sup> Marshall McLuhan’s book *Mechanical Bride* (the title already suggests Duchamp) diagnoses a simple convergence of sex and journalism. Maria’s Morgenvogel, however, in contrast to Duchamp’s imaginary bride, transforms the bride. One could say: “The bride doesn’t get stripped bare by her bachelors, even, the bride unfolds in conjunction with the bird, the cosmic egg, the flowers to flirt with, etc., and moreover, there might be a few bachelors around, from time to time.” Maria, the bride, the girl, der Mensch, unfolds in these drawings, not necessarily harmonic, but in a poetic symbiosis of form between nature and technology.<sup>4</sup> *The Cosmic Egg* – a primordial dwelling – is also a metaphor for an “Ur-Haus”, an original house, a primary techne, in this sense also arche-techne, thus, architecture. Instead of accessing the world in a technical way – which always implies a destruction – these drawings and sketches show dynamical, complex, and multiple metamorphoses. It is – again with Bachelard – the Morgenvogel or poetic imagination that made technology possible in the first place and thus can embrace it again at any given moment. Maria says it straightforwardly: “Birds don’t like rockets!”

After *Flugübungen* the 1990s saw several further drawings and sketches: *Rocketmädel* (1993) designed on Atari with Corel Draw; *Fly Eye* and *Flying Eyes* (1993 and 1994) a series which melted faces and eyes – visual culture, so to speak – with a bird in flight. The Morgenvogel, one might come to think, is directly attacking the face. To draw faces anew, especially one’s own face, is a form of expressing artistic-reflective imagination, a practice similarly seen in Albrecht Dürer’s pillow drawings and landscape-paintings. Of course, Maria’s drawings are speedy experiments. But they also show the nature of prosopopoetic studies, as different elements of Finnish myths and experience of nature meet Maria, her face, as a mask. German etymology derives “das Gesicht” (“the face”) from “das Gesichtete” (“the faced”), meaning “das Geträumte” (the dreamed [of]); the “faced” is the “seen”, seen as in a dream. This is visible in Maria’s

## A Peck of Morgenvogel Picks by Axel Roch

“Birds! whose flight is so high, what were you before being those free songs scattered above our heads? A thought–held slave, perhaps;” Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, 1839.

“The bird brings verticality to spring”, Comtesse de Noailles, 1905.

“Man [...] must be lifted up in order to be transformed”, Jean Paul, 1795.

“The bird lively, graceful, and light, prefers to reflect images of love, youth, sweetness, and purity”, Alphonse Toussenel, 1853.

“Man [...] will become a super-bird which, far from our world, will fly through the infinite space between worlds, transported by ‘aromatic’ forces into his true environment, into an aerial land”, Gaston Bachelard on Alphonse Toussenel’s *“Pteropsychological Transcendence”*, 1943.

“A sylph who is a dreamer finds a place inside an owl, a brown owl, or a screech owl. On the other hand, a sylph who is of a merry disposition and who likes to sing little songs, slips into a nightingale, a warbler, or a canary”, Vigneul de Marville to Rohault – a professor of Cartesian physics, 1691.

“A slight movement of their upraised foot seems to be enough to direct their flight”, Mlle J. Villette on Michelangelo’s angels.

“Where goest thou O thought? to what remote land is thy flight? If thou returnest to the present moment of affliction Wilt thou bring comforts on thy wings. and dews and honey and balm”, William Blake in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, 1793.

“What thou art we know not”, Percy Bysshe Shelley in *To a Skylark*, 1820.

“They say that if a lark is carried in to a sick person, it will look away if he is to die [...] But if he is to get well, the bird will look fixedly at him, and by its gaze, the sickness is relieved”, Leonardo Da Vinci on the medical gaze of birds, undated.

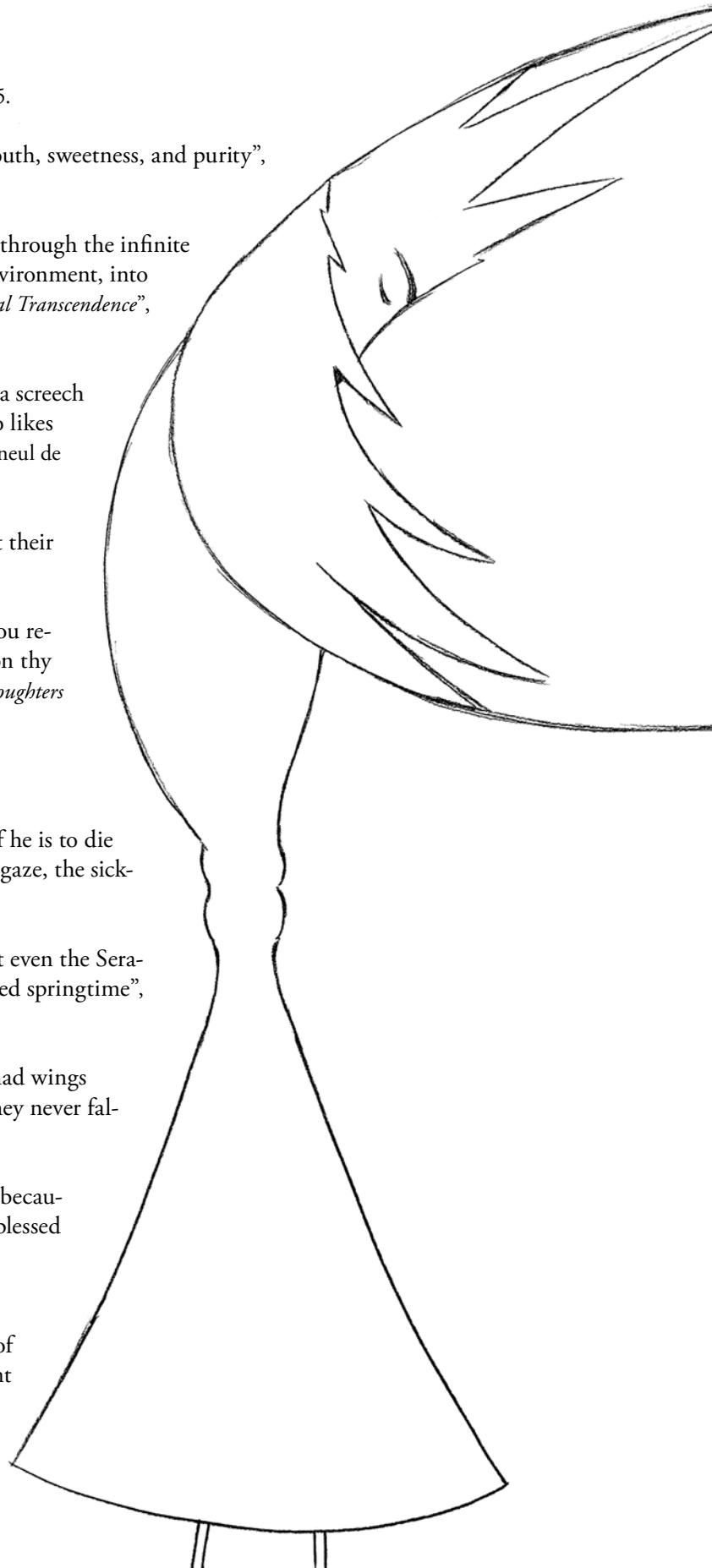
“It was a canticle of wings, a hymn of feathers and quills, so broad that even the Seraphim could not equal them. It was the vesper symphony of all of winged springtime”, Gabriele d’Annunzio, 1912.

Princess Aurora: “Do all the fairy people have wings?” Maleficent: “I had wings once. They were stolen from me. That’s all I wish to say about it [...] They never faltered. I trust them”, *Maleficent*, 2014.

“We envy the birds lot in life, and we attribute wings to what we love, because we instinctively feel that, in the domain of bliss, our bodies will be blessed with the ability to go through space as the bird goes through the air”, Alphonse Toussenel, 1853.

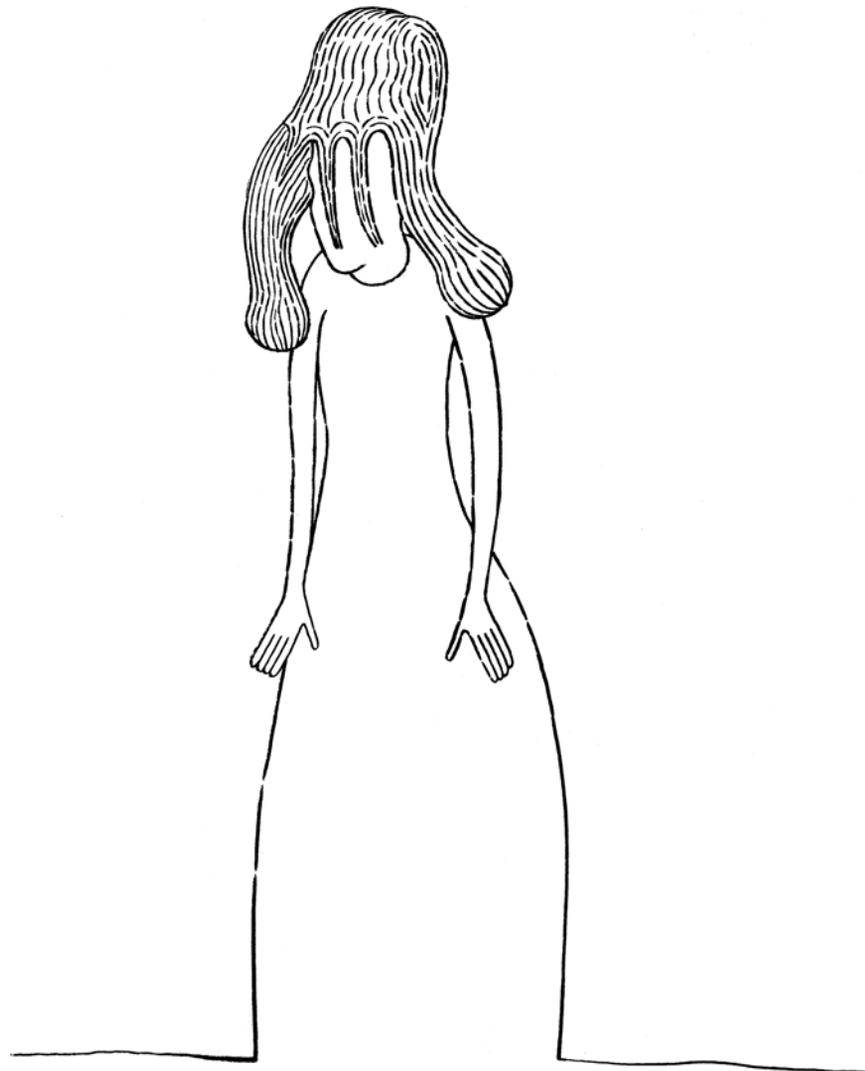
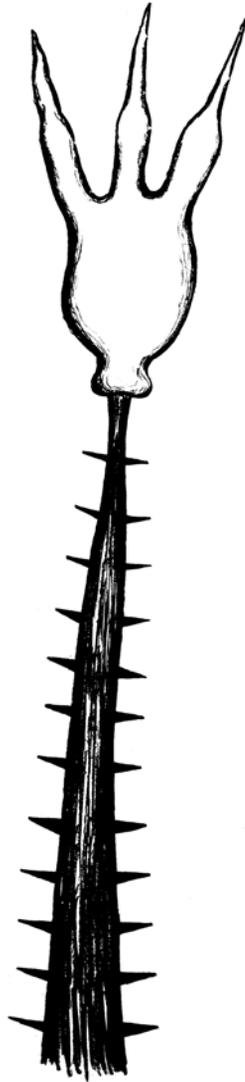
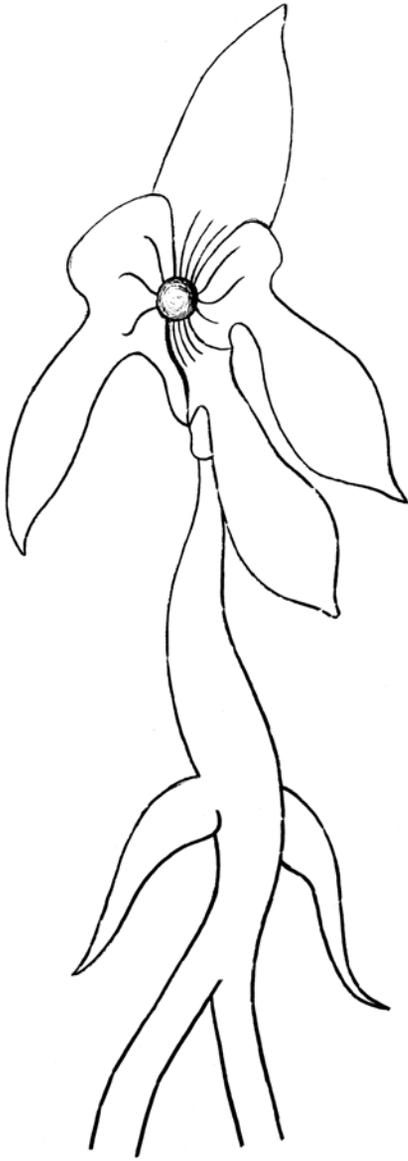
“In a dynamic dream, no bird struck by death ever falls vertically out of the sky, because oneiric flight never ends in a vertical fall. Oneiric flight is a happy phenomenon of sleep, not a tragic one”, Gaston Bachelard on vertical poetry, 1943.

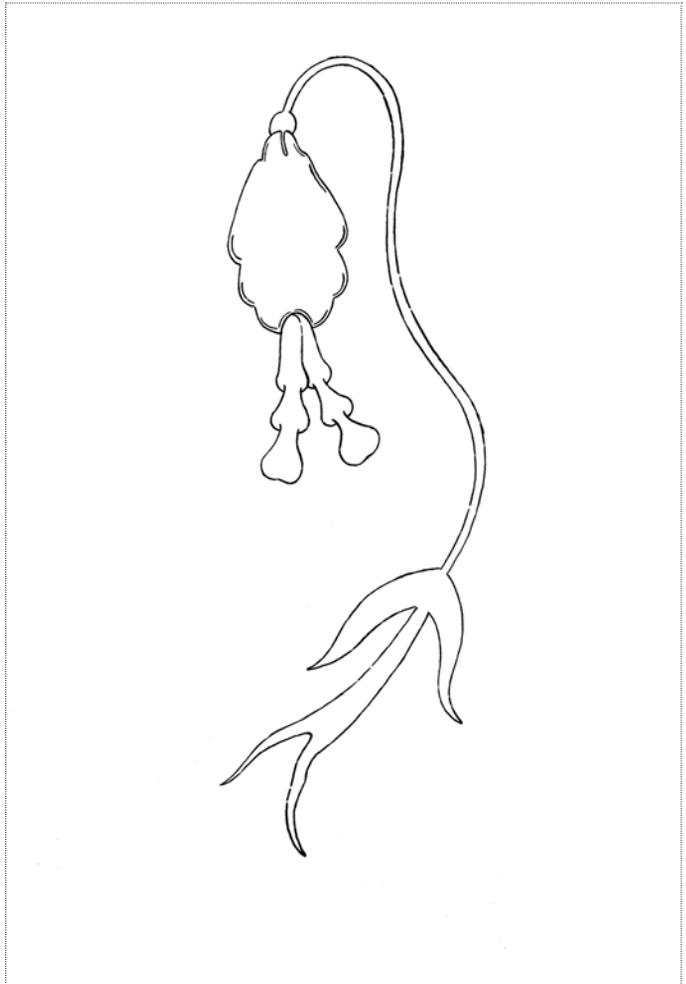
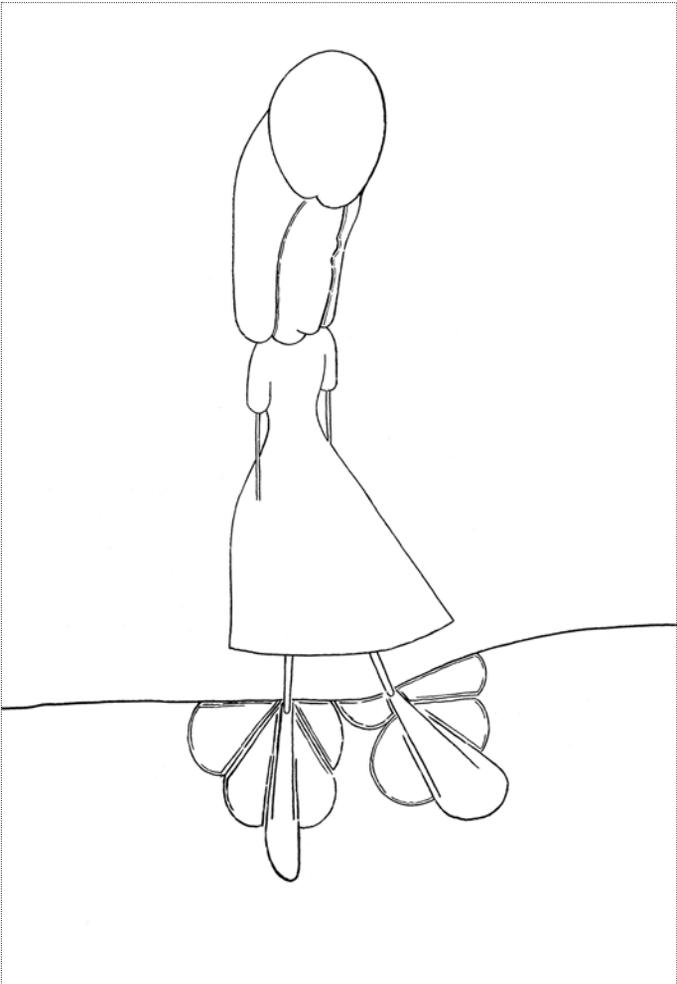
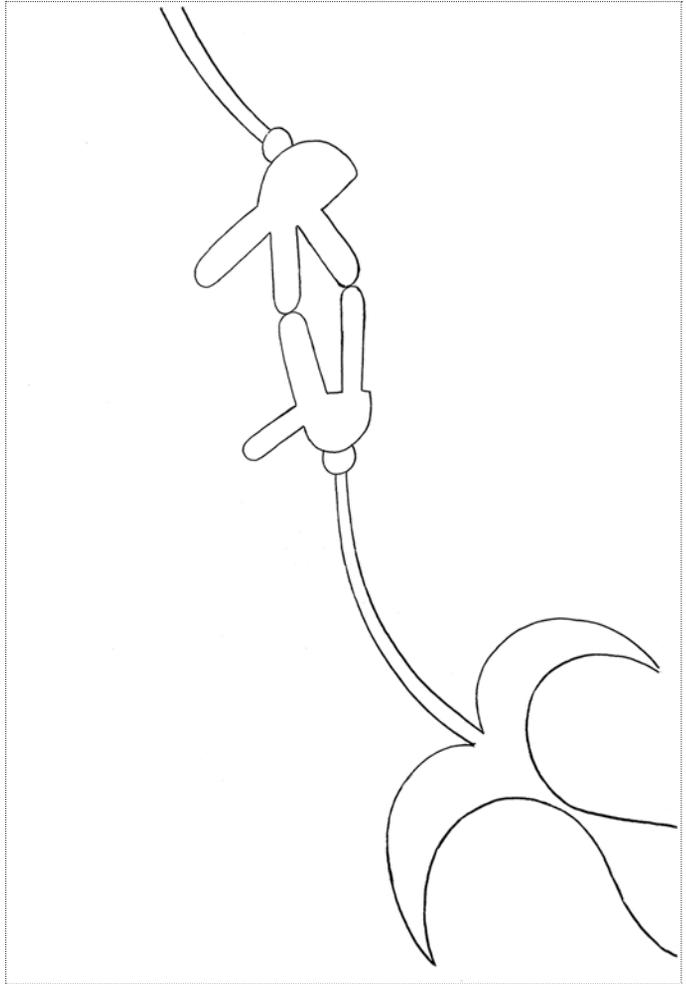
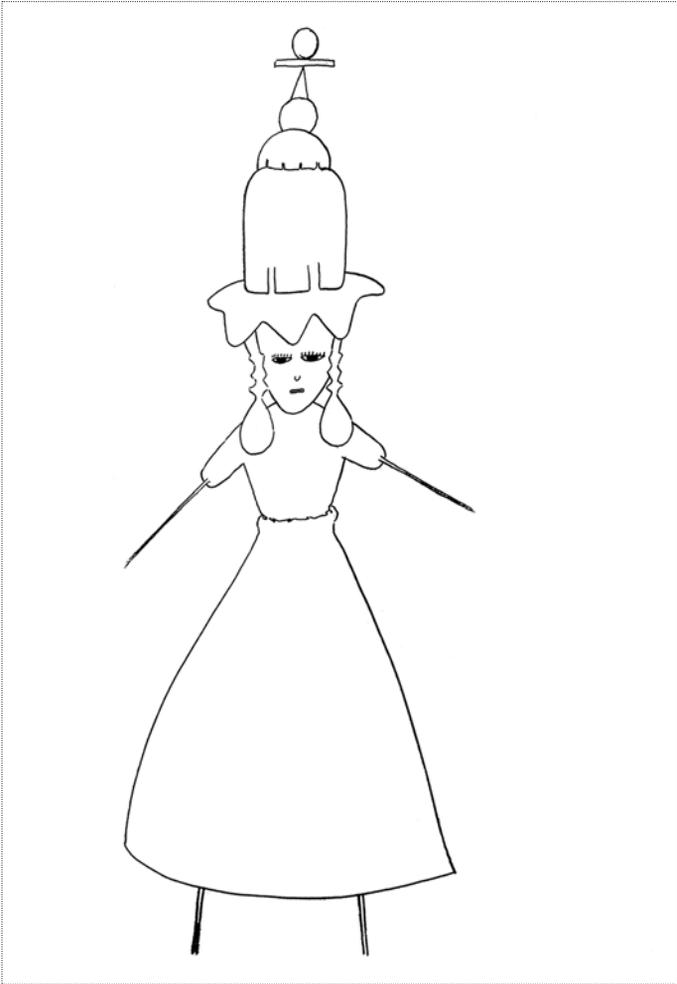
“You sing, therefore you fly”, the “axiom of the lark” (so-called after Bachelard) from *Der Jubelseniör* by Jean Paul, 1797.

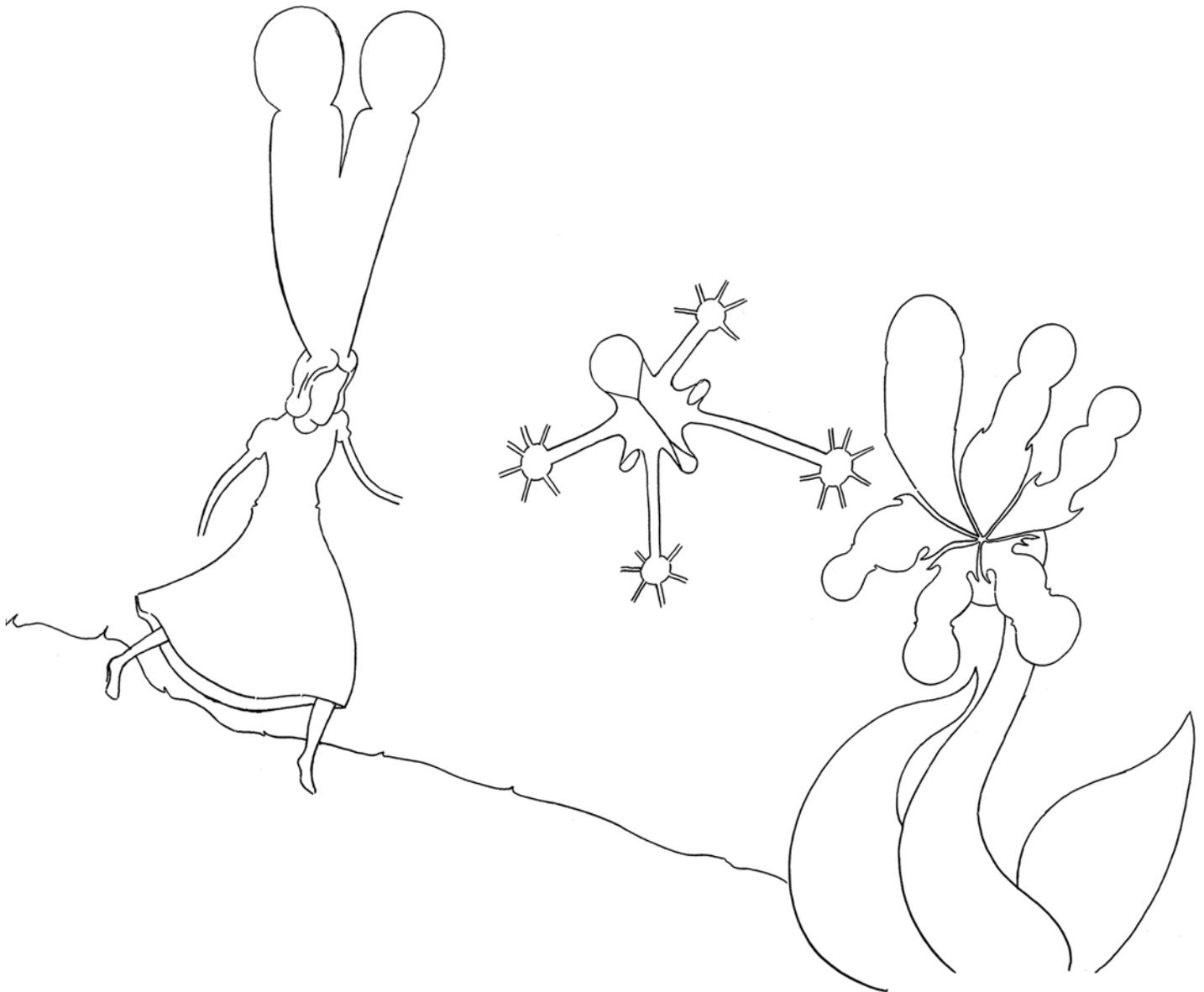


# FLIRTING WITH FLOWERS

2006-2008







*Mariä Empfängnis (Maria's Conception), 2007*

## |+| = REAL REAL ESTATE

Art, music, film, literature – who on Earth would be interested in any of this crap? If you really want to get famous, you need to go into real estate!

The complicated story of art and real estate, especially in post-Wall Berlin, is an endless one, regardless of whether you look at it in terms of construction-related art, interior decoration, or gentrification. To cite but one example, at the end of the 1990s, a painter friend and I were the last inhabitants of a house in Mitte, and the manager of the development company probably considered the two of us as the incarnation of the darker side of evil, as hardcore profit-blocking artists. Summoned to a major negotiation showdown, we waited in the hall at her office only to discover that the walls were covered by paintings created by my friend's former professor. This lady developer turned out to be my friend's greatest collector and supporter. If there's any way to transliterate the Berlin dialect into English, we might say "Dit's de way it ghos in Ballin, ay!"

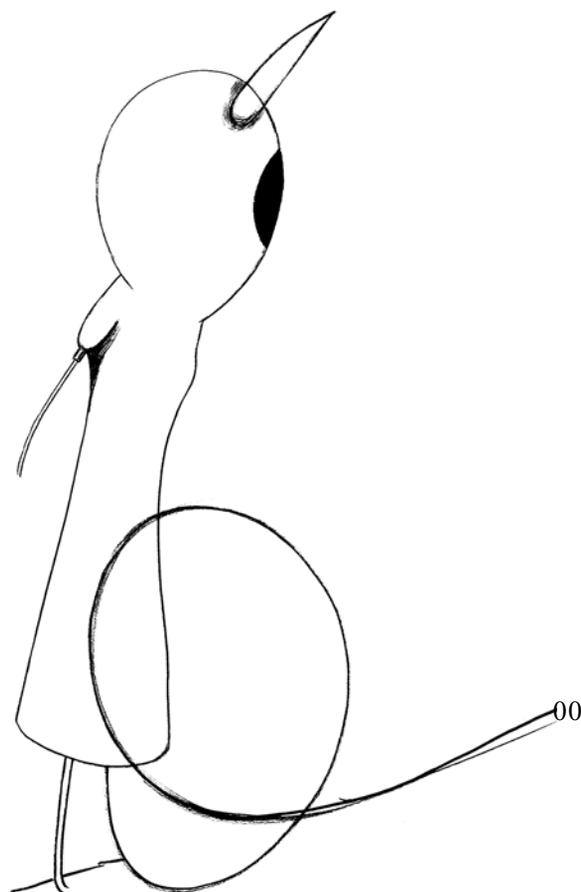
But that's one of the more pleasant stories, and it's getting on in years. Shortly after the fall of the Wall, one of the noticeable challenges was that Berlin's population actually shrunk. It was a strange situation. But suddenly, in the middle of Europe, a not-so-tiny metropolis popped up out of nowhere. What initially hatched as an ugly duckling, whose name was famous around the world, developed into a rather magnificent swan. (And here is where the Morgenvogel-esque and somewhat forced metaphor also falls). In cities like Paris, London, or New York, the rents were going through the roof. Those people who were not willing to accept that the majority of their lives would be spent toiling to make the rent – such as artists – packed up and made their way to what photographer Ira Schneider refers to as "the hole in Brandenburg." It was a huge adventure playground, essentially comprised of a missing wall and a lot of extra space.

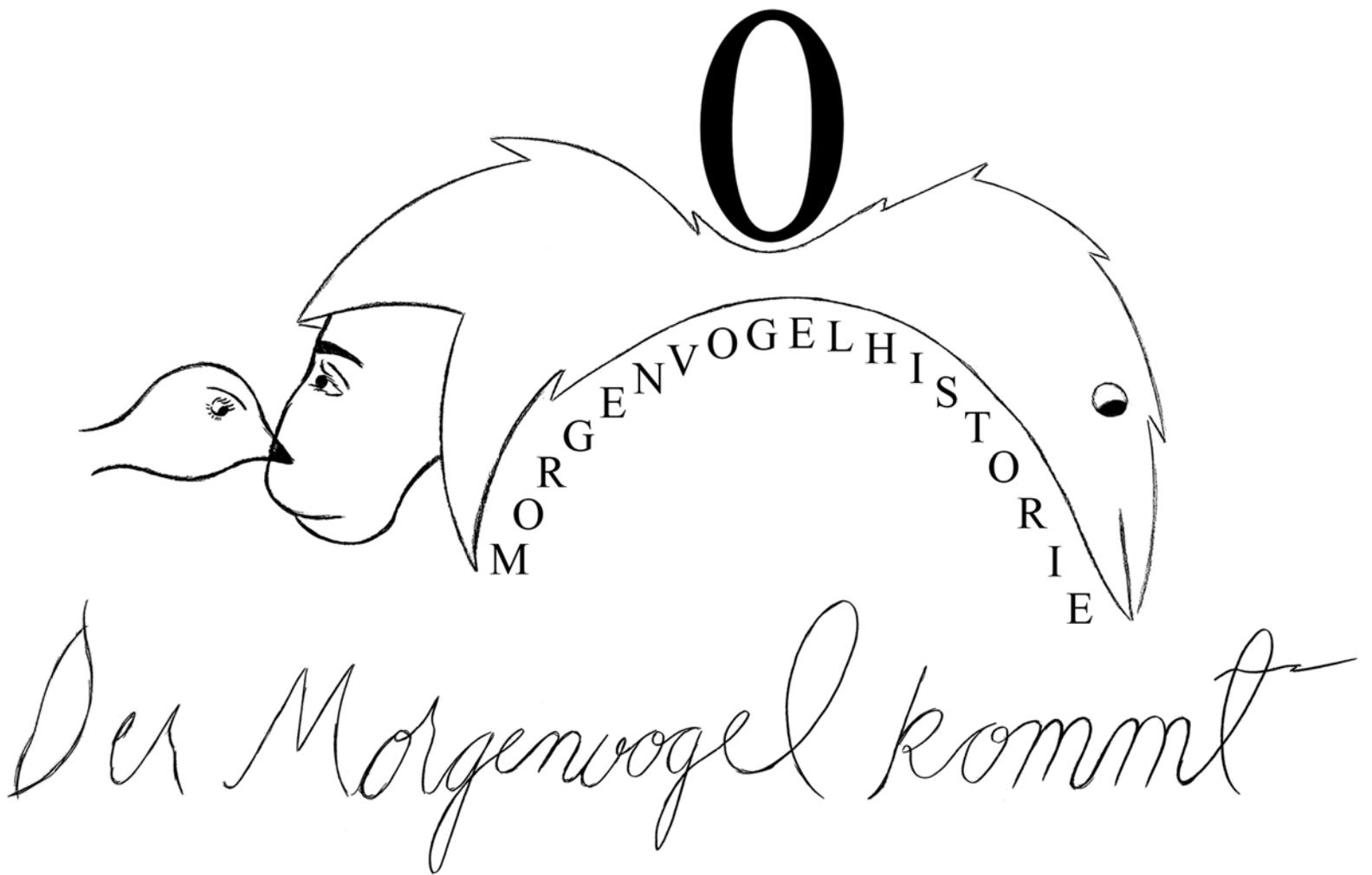
Since then, the location-location-location has changed dramatically. For the past few years, the population of Berlin has been growing and is now in need of new residential construction. But when it comes to housing, there are other special problems. A significant percentage of the population growth is not comprised of families, but rather of singles or part-time Berliners who prefer to live alone. At the same time, international capital is tiring of these low-interest times while Berlin's concrete gold seems to be quite alluring. (This situation, however, may not continue indefinitely, as I once explored with Andreas Schaale, an expert in market cycles and real estate bubbles, in the context of our presentation *Wolkenkuckucksheim* (*Cuckoo House in the Clouds*) at the Morgenvogel Real Estate shop. In the coming years, the trend may see its end, in which case some of the new luxury rentals will be forced to reduce their prices before they implode – a scenario not without its merits for those of us "normal" Berlin residents).

In the meantime, one of the major pastimes of the 2010s is called *The Gentrification Game*, whereby the income classes push

and get pushed around from district to district. That Mitte was once a hip place to hang out is a fact known only by the somewhat more mature boys and girls in town. Neukölln finally got hit. The next likely victim will be Moabit, and sooner or later Marzahn, eventually the districts with names that a born Berliner has only ever heard tell of. But as for residing in the "happening" districts, it is one thing to live anywhere and quite another to be able to afford it. At one time, moving was considered something of an invigorating community sport, but according to many friends, a lot of people are now holding tight to their old rental agreements because moving incurs extraordinary increases in rent. (Sure, for some new Berliners the prices still seem ridiculously low, but they don't likely earn their money in the "creative industry" under Berlin conditions. The prices in these areas don't rise quite as quickly).

He who believes in the principle of supply and demand recognizes the responsibility of a city government to confront rising prices by building more public-owned housing. And wouldn't it be nice if the resources required for such a project weren't gobbled up by corruption scandals and court costs? But then just ask yourself, "Where to build?" and you begin to see the Morgenvogel aspect unfold. War-ravaged structures and vacant corner properties have become a thing of the past. The senate attempted to pinch off a sliver of the huge retired wartime airfield at Tempelhof, but a public referendum recently





In the Eighties I had a logo and a slogan, „Der Morgenvogel kommt“ (Morningbird is coming). There was a rocket in the middle of a female face, for me a symbol of space travelling – the dream of my youth.

Later on there came a lot of other titles and fantasies. But time after time the Morgenvogel came back again, in different forms, like drawings, objects, animations, photos, actions, installations, sound works, performances. The latest extension was Morgenvogel Real Estate, together with Manuel.

In pages 94-99 you can see a small part of historical Morgenvogel highlights, before MVRE. The drawings are mostly made with a thick Edding marker on old East German computer paper – lots of flying eyes in endless series, forms that eventually look like birds.



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## Contents

3 Prelude

5 Preface

8 The Morgenvogel Church and the Cosmic Egg

14 Kalevala (Excerpt)

18 Helmut Höge: Birds and Architecture

26 Morgenvogel Houses

28 Midsummer Night's Egg Tree Dream

30 Peter Berz: Marsh and Treetop. A Couple of Birdsongs

33 Peter Altenberg: Der Vogel Pirol

38 Leda and Eggmachine

40 Breed Miracle

44 A Very Serious Location, Location, Location. Brunnenstraße, Berlin Mitte 2009/10

56 Wolfgang Müller: News from the Misconception Sciences. The Canard as Medium

60 Haamuhuu

64 Morgenvogel Uncaged – a Playlist

66 The Birds, Too @ Morgenvogel Station

68 Schneemanns Lieder

72 Axel Roch: No Bachelors, but Birds. Maria-Leena Räihälä's Drawings as Poetological Sketches

77 A Peck of Morgenvogel Picks by Axel Roch

78 Flirting With Flowers

88 |+| = Real Real Estate

92 Musta maa

94 Morgenvogel History

100 Thanks to Birds

Drawings and photos from Maria-Leena Räihälä and texts from Manuel Bonik

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## MORGENVOGEL REAL ESTATE

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