

THE SQUARE ROOT OF PLUS OR MINUS ONE IS LITTLE  $i$

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Jaki Irvine: Assembled Works 1993-2008

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# FOREWORD

Central to this monograph on Jaki Irvine’s work is an ambitious multi-screen video installation



This work developed out of the Model’s invitation to Jaki for her to be the inaugural Model Fellow.



The key resource offered is year-long access to the *Model’s* residency studio and a small stipend,



IN A WORLD LIKE THIS which was shown at the *Model Arts* and *Niland Gallery* in 2006 and the *Chisenhale Gallery*, London in 2007.



The Fellowship operates on the simple premise of offering artists time and space with few conditions attached.



both offered with the main objective of providing artists with research and thinking time away from their day-to-day.



Fortunately for the *Model*, Jaki responded enthusiastically to this invitation



and on a personal level I was delighted that her acceptance of the fellowship



gave me the opportunity to work with an artist whose work I had admired and respected for many years.



Whilst exploring Sligo, Jaki discovered *Eagles Flying*, *The Irish Raptor Research Centre*,



one of the county's lesser known but most intriguing attractions. Whilst open to the public for flying demonstrations,



*Eagles Flying* is primarily a research led sanctuary for birds of prey and owls.



Some of the birds have been damaged through misuse at other holdings, and have grown overly aggressive or are physically damaged



as a result. Others arrived at the centre having been found with broken wings or other injuries.



The birds are brought back to health through the great care and patience of the family who run the sanctuary



— the three humans portrayed in the work.



From an initial curiosity sparked by the sight of the birds of prey perched calmly in a domestic garden setting,



a major new work developed that is at once located in County Sligo and in its own distinct reality.



During the summer of 2006 Jaki carefully observed the day to day running of *Eagles Flying* and the resulting nine screen video



installation traces the delicate relationship between the birds and their handlers. A series of intimate portraits of birds and handlers quietly



portrays the intense physicality, synergy and fragility of the ties between these wild yet contained birds and the scientists. These are not



birds constrained as the zoo-based animals seen in some of her other works are – their wildness and freedom underlies all the films, particularly



the flying sequences, synched across four screens to demonstrate the physical scope of their flight path, but yet they are operating to



the rules of their handlers. Ultimately In a World Like This is concerned with the question of how we might best proceed in circumstances



which are not perfect but are possibly the best they're ever likely to be. Tracing the sometimes-hesitant flights and landings of



the different birds to and from their handlers, the fragile lines between damage, beauty and trust slowly reveal themselves.



As Michael Newman observes in his thorough and illuminating essay for this book, this portrayal of 'strangeness', the balance between



sameness and difference and the blurring of boundaries between different realities are concerns that run throughout Jaki's career.



Her films and videos create elusive yet absorbing narratives that explore human interaction with the natural world, with the built environment



and with other humans. Using a combination of image, sound and voice-over her films suggest fragments of larger untold narratives and



evoke a place where the boundaries between realities and dreams, past and present and animal and human become fluid and permeable.



Bringing this work together for the first time, this book provides a unique experience of the depth and strength of her work to date.



Throughout her practice the use of text has been an driving feature of Jaki's work. With this in mind a selection of scripts and



other writings are included in order to complement the images and to give those new to Jaki's work a fuller understanding of her practice.



As a collaboration between Jaki and designer Will Holder, this book should be seen as a printed equivalent of Jaki's work.



The Model is therefore delighted to continue our relationship with Jaki by publishing this important and timely monograph on her work.

*(continued on page 159)*

**JAKI IRVINE**

**IN A WORLD  
LIKE THIS**

**2006–2007**



...I am regarding my inability to enter  
my neighbour's mind as something like  
an inability to enter his garden;

only as it were , it is a permanent inability,  
the garden is sealed or charmed out of reach.

.... it was paved over.... flagstones.... something heavy anyway that  
took over so much space and now.. they're up ...and what's  
there?...well you can imagine...but, well no.. I don't want to put  
anything there... no, I don't know what might grow there now...

It will need so much time, effort, energy... what? Yes- of  
course...and hope...and of course... it hurts... I want to leave it like  
that for now...I'll come back every now and then...see if ...ahh...

....For that analogy captures the impression  
that I am sealed out;

but it fails to capture the impression (or fact)  
of the way in which he is sealed in.

He is not in a position to walk in that garden as  
he pleases, notice the blooms when he chooses:  
he is impaled upon his knowledge.

I'm invited to do a fellowship at the Model Arts  
and Niland Gallery in Sligo.

The process is simple: in the beginning every-  
thing is relevant.

Yve Lomax referred to the “listening eye”.  
I think it means listening in two directions at  
once - inside and outside...

a kind of relaxed alertness, so that a connection  
can be made—

a leap that will look inevitable in hindsight,

but is as yet unforeseeable from this position.

It's dark.

We go visiting some people and I hear  
about a boy who could see no reason  
to get up in the morning

but now he's on the road at six every day  
because he has started working with falcons.

I think I'll go and visit the falconry,  
but I'm told there's a different one... closer...  
and so I set off to take a look.



The garden is in front of the house,  
laid out for display,  
expansive and yet somehow shielded,



protected, set back,  
from the house, from the strangers  
who will pass in front of both.



The guests are expected,  
factored in to the equation as it were,



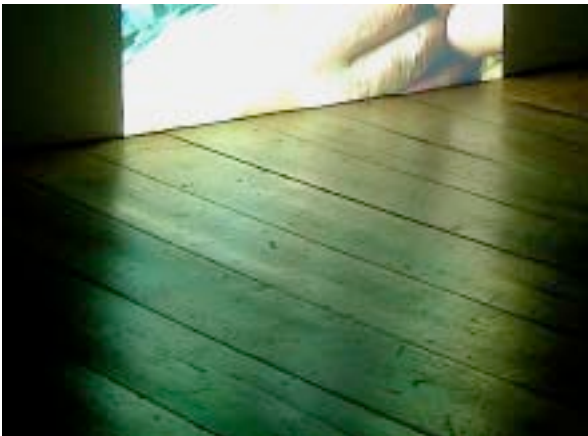
but always they will be slightly removed  
from the scene that has been set out  
and will unfold for their benefit.



And the birds are there...  
Some of them are small, fast,  
originally bred by Arabian horsemen for speed.



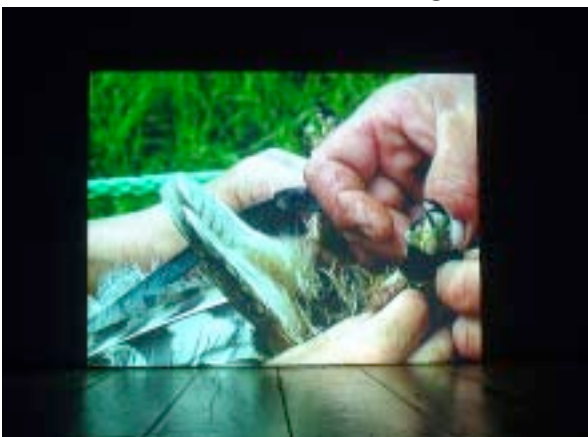
Others are large, majestic and powerful.  
Talons and beaks combine razor sharpness  
with vice-grip strength.



Some months later a small image is projected low down, in a corner of the Model & Niland galleries,



back behind the scenes as it were.



The footage reveals the slow painstaking process of attaching new leather jesses to a small bird.



The bird is hidden, squeaking and chuntering under a towel, while a pliers is being used to perform the operation.



The bird's foot is somehow raw and fragile.  
The man and woman working on it  
are both firm and careful until,



New shoes



with a flurry, a little owl emerges slightly dazed  
from its confines, flapping and fluttering  
as it gets soothed back down .

says the woman, to no-one in particular,  
as she walks away smiling  
at the bird on her arm.

GALLERY VISITOR 1

But portraits are something else, the sitters presenting themselves for an unseen public...agreeing not so much to be seen as to show something of themselves...the fascination of the portrait has always seemed to me to be exactly what is hinted at but not seen...

GALLERY VISITOR 2

And who ultimately controls this? The sitter? The artist?

On two nearby screens the same man and woman occupy a separate but similar space in the garden,



They each hold a different bird. The woman, Regina, holds a large eagle owl—

set against thick foliage that rustles occasionally in the wind.



one of the birds she calls to her and feeds and runs from and calls again in a public display.



But for now they sit—a double portrait—both similarly at ease and distracted by what is unseen, beyond the frame of the camera.



The owl seems settled and almost tame, knowable, until it flaps its wings and its sheer scale alone points to something else,



while Regina's watchfulness  
and pervasive calm also subtly hint  
at an awareness of its nature....



as something knowable but ultimately unknown,  
the very silence of which is masked  
by bells attached to its legs.



Footage of the man, Lothar,  
is projected nearby.



He holds a baby barn owl in his hands, relaxed  
but attentive—as lovingly as others might hold  
a can of beer, where every drop counts.



Despite the number of such birds he has held,  
Lothar's hand is still and steady  
as the tiny creature exerts



its own peculiar fascination,  
weaving and bobbing as it hisses  
and glares threats at things it cannot see.

And then there's this relation to stillness...

They're standing  
in front of the final double portrait,



Here a young man, Alex,  
stands holding an American bald eagle.

set slightly apart.



They're standing  
in what seems to be an open space.



In the distance, treetops wave in the wind  
and a goat worries at its tether.



Alex is looking off to the right at something,  
so that he is, for a while,



seen in profile—eyes shaded by brows, clean features and a couple of tufts of hair spiking up above his head.



Something about this is echoed by the eagle’s similar attention to whatever has caught its eye.



It too presents its profile:



clean strong features, bright yellow beak, and a forehead that overshadows piercing eyes.

GALLERY VISITOR 1

Hmm, I don't know what it is... maybe it's me projecting, but there's some sort of odd connection going on here... a kindof doubling up or overlapping of something....

GALLERY VISITOR 2

Yeah... there's some sort of mirroring or...

Alex shifts his gaze down, and the eagle follows... then it turns its head to one side, trying to figure out the unseen mechanism that is recording it

and he, smiling, does the same, on and on in a subtle interplay of glances and shifts of focus and attention between them,



until abruptly, the eagle throws its head up and sends out a long piercing series of calls that mark and distance any cosy anthropomorphism,



realigning it with a worldview that is unavailable, for all her apparent acquiescence, held in front of a still camera and yet, somehow not seen.

#### GALLERY VISITOR 1

What's this? I don't know- scaffolding, struts... it looks like we've been at the back of something... like a crate or a set for...

#### GALLERY VISITOR 2

Ahh, whistles and flapping and jingling...the main space is through here...

§ Tell me about the central space.... the flights... they're ordinarily done at the Raptor Research Centre for a paying public aren't they?

- Yeah, as a way of funding their activities.

§ But here... it seems as if even though an audience is anticipated, something is blocked or withheld?

- Well, there are five birds flying here... but the flights are split across four screens, so I suppose that's what you're picking up on...

§ Yes- they move across a screen, from a tree to a perch, but this interruption by black is slightly disorienting or disruptive, so that I find myself having to relocate myself in the space between the screens, on the one hand, while facing towards a blank space for a split second that may or may not be where the bird will land....

- Ah yeah...I wanted to leave space for maybe something between anxiety and desire...

§ And then there's that hesitation... a hanging on too long, when the bird is called but it doesn't move. It happens with nearly all of them- a slight but definite resistance.

- Yeah, I wanted to let the editing be paced by the birds themselves, that even when they are staged for an audience, performing, they are also to some extent, not entirely tame as it were. Lothar, who runs the centre, tells how some of them were damaged before they got to the centre and even though they're healed they won't attain their full speed again to the point where they can successfully survive for long away from the centre, although every now and again they do take off, because they can... and sometimes, they're simply in the wrong place- the wrong species, and won't be able to survive beyond the centre for long. But something about that registers for me as kind of blind spots in what we see of them- gaps where they might disappear for a fraction of time, before coming back into view

§ On the tree or perch or on the arm of one of the trainers?

- Yeah... but that slight uncertainty

maybe allows a chink of space to become aware of ourselves... our own shadows caught that can be shifted, our own way of negotiating and anticipating the world, even by way of projection.... or that we might block something out by approaching it in the wrong way.

§                                Something like how we only see what we  
imagine to be there and the world confirms our own version of it,  
catching ourselves in the act of imagining?

- Mmm...maybe... or maybe that's too strong  
a way of putting it.



In the large projection of the final darkened space, the birds sit out on the lawn on perches.



The camera slowly drifts, following a pair of turkeys that wander incongruously through the scene,



past the raptors that look like creatures of an entirely different order, before switching from one bird and then another...



a peregrine falcon,



a tawny eagle,



a black chested eagle,



a bald headed eagle...



over the course of the exhibition grown familiar, but still somehow alien.



Here the edits co-incide with the end of a movement or the turn of a head, picking up on the various attentions of the birds themselves.



Continuously alert and watchful, time breaks down into an infinite flow of minutiae: blinks, flutters, picking at feathers, jangles of jesses,



tugging at bells that have been attached to their legs, crows flying overhead, sheep bleating, fragile compromises between damage and free-



dom, struck and held for a moment or two longer than one might have imagined possible.



# **SELECTED WRITING 1993–2008**



# LEAVES AND PAPERS NO. 4

0.34	jingle	11.37	fast flutter	19.42	flight to perch
0.40	wind	11.50	flutter	19.57	jangle
0.53	old sheep (deep/loud)	12.08	clanking off perch	20.06	perch/flap
1.00	lamb	12.36	bell	20.33	sheep
1.43	jingle	12.45	big wing beat	21.08	cheeping
1.50	Alex whistle	12.50	lamb	21.23	flutter cheep
2.07	donkey braying (long)	12.55	flutter	21.37	flutter
3.00	lamb	13.14	tweet	21.50	overhead traffic
3.30	tweet	13.33	tawny eagle call		
3.53	blackched eagle cry	14.05	bell		
4.20	jingle	14.18	peregrine falcon call		]]
4.34	flap	14.20	clank bell	22.30	twitteringjingle (faint)
4.50	jingle	14.49	flap... perch	22.56	footsteps on gravel
5.01	bells (at foot)	14.57	flap	23.08	flutter jangle
5.44	flapping	15.07	flap-perch		
5.53	crows & geese	15.30	tawny eagle calling	.....	wind
6.17	geese	15.52	lamb		
6.55	jingle	16.10	lamb		]]
7.14	lamb	16.18	lamb		
7.44	flutter	16.44	geese		
8.04	silence	17.46	wind	27.51	bucket banging
8.44	call	18.09	tawny eagle call	28.00	flapping
8.50	jingle	18.13	footsteps	29.30	fast light flap
8.55	flutter / perch?	18.27	lamb	29.56	dog panting
9.00	bald headed eagle	18.47	lamb	30.06	panting pawsteps
9.20	muttering	18.55	flutter	30.56	tawny eagle grumbling
9.30	dog growling	19.00	sheep	31.24	jingling
9.40	Alex whistle	19.12	owl chuntering	31.50	twittering
9.50	dog bark (alsatian)	19.19	long slow flapping	33.16	flapping (persistent)
10.20	tawny eagle call distant	19.20	bell flutter	33.42	bees humming
10.34	jangle	19.31	jingle		
11.10	wing flutter				
11.20	tawny eagle				
11.24	jangle				

34.00	bees	42.18	whistle	tweet
35.26	crows (long)	42.31	hup	1:01:10
35.30	crows	42.50	cockcrow	wind
35.47	cock crowing	43.00	cockcrow	1:1:20
36.26	cock crowing	43.43	footsteps	tweet
	closer		jingle	1:01:39
	crows cawing	44.05	mutter	jangle
36.49	crows in	44.11	flutter	1:01:49
	flight	44.24	twitter	geese
	soft flutter	44.43	traffic	1:01:56
37.21	sheep		tawny eagle	dog
37.31	bell		calls	1:01:59
37.39	cock crow		-far away	geese
37.44	bell	45.29	bees	1:02.10
38.01	wind & cock-	45.50	flutter	wind
	crow	45.56	flutter at	01:31:02
38.24	crows		bark	Alex call,
38.31	flutter	46.33	bees	whistle
38.38		48.08	wind	01:31:14
	crows/flappi		small falcon	soft flap-
	ng/flutter		chuntering	pings, wind-
39.00	twitter	49.00	flutter	no bell
	cheap	49.20	flutter	01:31:26
39.40	eagle call	50.00	rustle	tree atmos &
		56.22	jangle of	crows
40.16	car engine		ties	01:31:54
	overhead	56.55	crow	hawk eating
	plane	58.29	crows	01:32.03
		58'35"		flight jin-
			chuntering	gle
	]]	58'53"		01:32.47
			bees	small flap-
		59'00"		pings, flurry
40.27	flap		bark	01:33.02
40.30	flap / perch		cockcrow	slow flap
40.43	cockcrow	59'33"		01:33.07
40.53	flapping-		jangle on	rustle...
	long		perch	preen
	slow	59'46"	cockcrow	
41.08	flapping	59'54"		
	cockcrow		dog bark	
41.27	slow flap	1:00.36		
41.41	flapping		jingle	
	cockcrow	1:00.37		
41.56	geese		dog barking	
	donkey	1:00.55		

## SILENT JAPANESE HORROR

Outside there was a sound that nearly wasn't one at all loud and completely muffled at the same time.

The sound was being made by a Japanese woman who was staring into her bag with her hand over her mouth. The bag was staring right back at her like a street comedian with a wide open mouth and no sound at all coming out.

The woman wasn't laughing. She was looking shocked.

Three other Japanese women were standing around looking worried, Their eyes shifting backwards and forwards from their friend's misery to a man in a dirty tracksuit and back again.

He was trying to convince them of something.

One woman stuck her hand into his trouser pocket but it came out again empty.

Their friend kept on trying to shout or cry but no tears would come out. Her voice was still only some heavy breaths left over from a bad movie with the sound turned right down.

He very deliberately took off his shoes, turning them upside-down like a magician. He shook one first and then the other, saying loudly 'Look, I don't have anything of yours... "Look- here's my bag... take it here's my wallet'

The woman's mouth was still opening and closing and she had started trying to faint and not faint at the same time, holding onto a nearby pillar in a way that made her look like a forgotten Japanese actress who just couldn't make the move into sound. Once, they said, she had the makings of a star, but that was before...

The man was still talking loudly trying to not enjoy himself:

'I'll go with you, he was saying to one of the women I'll go with you...now, IT go with you"

The women stared from him to their friend and back again like they couldn't believe what was happening. By this time a crowd had gathered attracted by the silent moans.

Nobody knew what to do. They just stood frozen to the spot and watched how the women didn't want to let this man go even though they couldn't bear to spend another second with him. And the sound of their friend's muffled moans went on and on, washing over them all so that they felt cold and sick and a long way from home.

### A SHORT RED SCARF (!)

Three large freckles sit on the face of an old Chinese man  
like a joke.

The waitresses smile as if they've heard it before  
and sit him down behind a plate of beans.

The punchline is a short red scarf

### BAT SMILE

Darwin was rushing through some trees  
with his coat-tails flapping and his mouth full of insects.

He passed by a young girl with a look on her face  
that could have been a pet bat.

It was moving about awkwardly,  
trying to get some sleep.

Darwin mumbled something  
and a blue-bottle flew out of his mouth.

The bat yawned and stretched its wings like a smile.

1. ANOTHER DIFFICULT SUNSET

a.

SHE (o. s. )

Tigers-ah tigers! I MUCH prefer them to lions.  
(laughing) My living room is full of them.

SHE (o. s. )

If a lion could talk we wouldn't understand.

HE (o. s. )

Not only that, but if we could understand it we'd be so distracted  
by the fact of it talking at all that we wouldn't care what it was  
saying. So it's better off roaring. Especially if it's in discom-  
fort. "

b. MALE (V.O. Irish Accent)  
Pauline had gotten me thinking about the tigers. I sat there and thought about them... how they and killed ate my parents I was going to school, I was nine years old and having trouble with arithmetic.  
One morning the tigers came in while we were eating breakfast. And before my father could grab a weapon, they killed him and they killed my mother. My parents didn't even have time to say anything before they were dead.  
I was still holding the spoon from the mush I was eating.  
"Don't be afraid." One of the tigers said. "We're not going to hurt you. We don't hurt children. Just sit there where you are (er) and we'll tell you a story."  
One of the tigers started eating my mother. he bit her arm off and started chewing on it. "What kind of story would you like to hear?"  
"I know a good story about a rabbit.."  
"Don't want to hear a story." I said.  
"Okay." the tiger said and he took a bite out of my father.  
I sat there for a long time with the spoon in my hand, and then I put it down.

Those were my folks, I said finally.  
"We're sorry." one of the tigers said. "We really are."  
"Yeah." The other tiger said. "We wouldn't do this if we didn't have to. If we weren't absolutely forced to. But this is the only way we can keep alive."  
"We're just like you," the other tiger said. "We speak the same language you do. We think the same thoughts, but we're tigers."

"You could help me with my arithmetic."  
"What's that?" One of the tigers said.  
"My arithmetic."  
"Oh, your arithmetic."  
"Yeah."

"What do you want to know?" One of the tigers said.  
"What's nine times nine?"  
"Eighty-one." The tiger said.

"What's eight times eight?"  
"Fifty-six." The tiger said.  
I asked him half a dozen other questions... six times six, seven times four eccetera  
I was having a lot of trouble with arithmetic.

Finally the tigers got bored with my questions and told me to go away.

"Okay," I said, "I'll go outside."

"Don't go too far." One of the tigers said. "We don't want anyone to come up here and kill us."

"Okay."

They both went back to eating my parents. I went outside and sat down by the river.

"I'm an orphan." I said.

[mind the doors please. mind the doors]

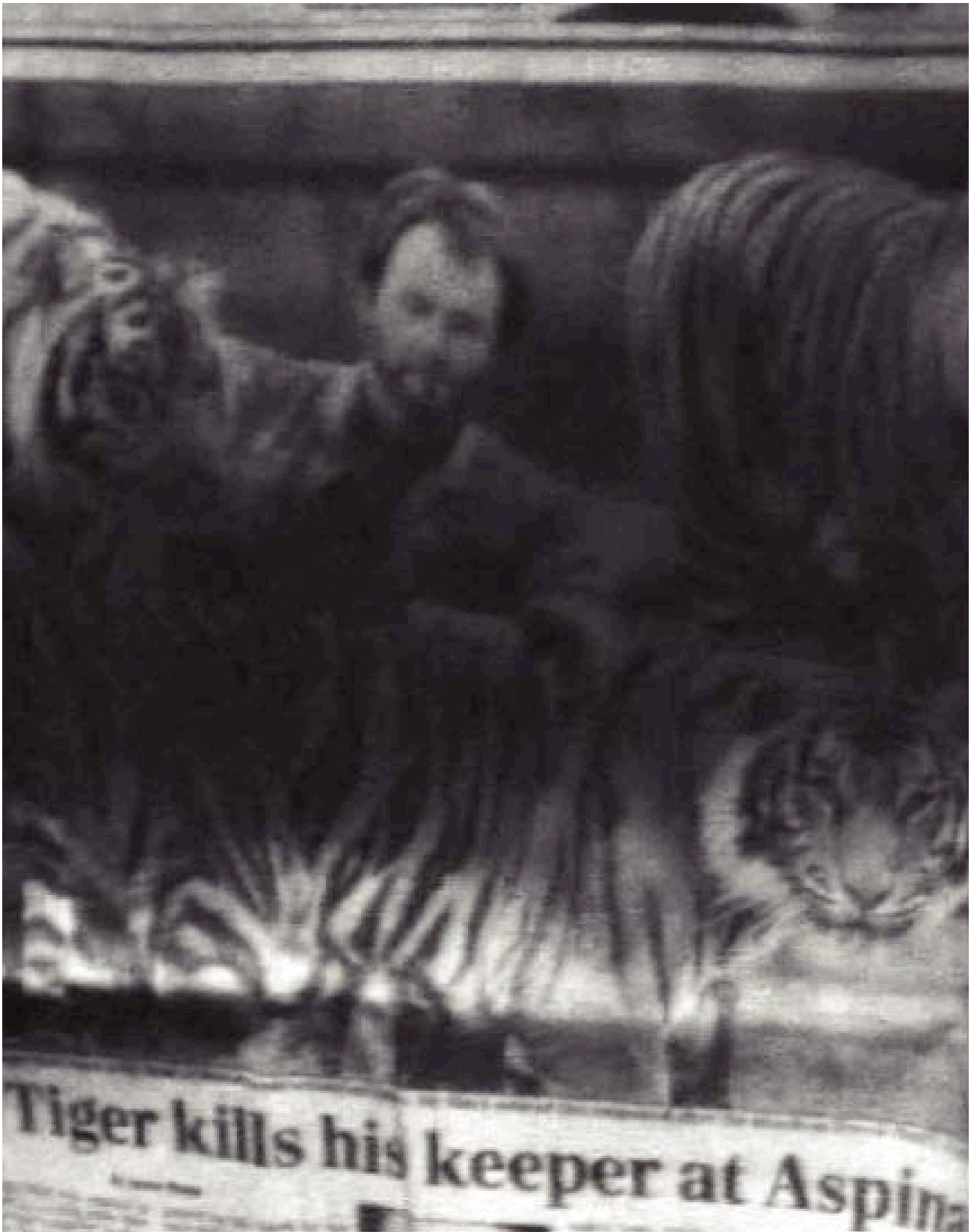


[mind the gap.  
mind the gap]  
transcribe sound?



SHE (O.S. Italian accent)  
You can't tell everyone everything. But sometimes, if you are going to speak at all, there are some things that you just have to say.

HER (O.S. Italian accent)  
Yes. And we have to talk to dogs about biting if we are going to talk to them at all.





Oh please try and stay upright.  
Tiger cub! Tiger cub!

2. INTRODUCTION TO THE SONIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE  
DEPTS OF MUSICOLOGY, CONSERVATION AND RECONSTRUCTION.

Sometime in the early 70's as far as we can tell , Dr. K. Heinrich's research began to gain critical attention. It was, to be specific, his findings that acoustics might be amenable to certain isolating treatments that heralded a new era.

It would appear that the enthusiasm with which his proposals were greeted was a product of an increasing concern with what was considered "noise pollution".

Meanwhile in the popularization of some of his methods, Dr. Heinrich's warning that, "sensational failure may occur in the field from time to time", was forgotten in the excitement provoked by his experiments in time space and sound waves. Or perhaps simply misunderstood.

As mentioned, Dr. Heinrich developed a technique to remove what he termed acoustical defects from a given sound field. The doctor himself argued with a growing sense of alarm that the methods employed to determine what might usefully be classified as noise, should be as sensitive as possible. However, it has been argued that the chink in his methods which allowed an opening of the floodgates, was his assertion that in the final analysis, the listener is always right.

In the subsequent period of often heated debate and general misunderstandings and confusion as to where the line lay between sound and noise, it was agreed at governmental level that all sound above a certain decibel level, which was not clearly and purposefully organised, fell within what was becoming an ever-expanding field of noise and should be removed from the audible register.

Despite Dr. Heinrich's insistence that the sound field in a real physical space is so complicated that it is not open to exact mathematical treatment, the inherent dangers and possible risks were considered worth taking.

There then followed a period of what was termed vibrational sweeping - a wide spread radical condensing and simplification of sound fields with the purpose of controlling or eliminating random elements.

Where these random sound elements do still crop up, the impression is of sonic weeds or erratic ornaments in a vast perfectly manicured (and muted) aural terrace. Noting his own melancholic fascination in later years with these acoustic outcroppings, Dr. Heinrich suggested that while this 'lack of uniformity' (which is its main characteristic), is responsible for many of its difficulties, it also accounts for the continuous power of attraction these random sound elements exert on a growing number of acousticians.

At the time of writing, one must now contend with the widespread blanket of oppressive silence which followed in the wake of an almost total elimination of random sounds.

While the young researcher may lament the sparse information remaining from the printed sound files of the time, it should be borne in mind that what survives is due to a process performed in extremis, when a small number of independent practitioners were beginning to sense the potentially disastrous impact of vib-sweeping on the sonic landscape. The difficulty of reconstruction is compounded by what has been perceived as an apparent reluctance in literature and scores of the time to adequately account for these sounds. This must be understood in the context of a world view that experienced most unstructured sound as noise.

Given the above, while the work of retrieval and reconstitution is certainly one of the most time-consuming fields, it is also one of the most creatively challenging research areas of our generation.

TRANSCRIPT OF SESSION NO. 4

SOUND OF JUNGLE BIRD, THEN SHOT OF NOTES BEING MOVED ON A DESKTOP  
SCORING PROGRAMME  
MORE BIRD SONGS AND SOUND EFFECTS... LONG SOUND OF WATER  
SHOT FROM BEHIND OF C AT COMPUTER

A (in Chinese with subtitles)  
You've got the sound of water...

I haven't been here before. (no subtitles here)

C  
No, well... it's a bit of an oasis here in the Centre.

A  
So.... what have you found?

C  
hang on a minute, I'll adjust the levels...

PULLS DOWN LEVEL ON SCREEN  
SILENCE...

C (GESTICULATING)  
...so if the volume on this goes down

A  
And I tend to mumble... So my voice often drops off the register.  
...what have you found?

C  
Well ,I think they're flights of birds... but it'sso crude... it's  
written in wav. But I found some other  
scribbles attached to it.

C LOOKS TOWARDS THE SCREEN AS A COMBINATION OF MUSIC AND CROW  
CALLS ARE HEARD OVER SOME FOOTAGE AS YET NOT PROPERLY SEEN

C  
It's not really how it sounds. The scribbles say/show something  
but this isn't really how it sounds.

A  
of course...

CLOSE UP OF FOOTAGE OF CROW BEING PREPARED BY TAXIDERMIST  
SOUNDS OF PIANO MUSIC, VIOLIN, CROW CALLING, SOME OTHER BIRD CALLS  
CAMERA WANDERS AROUND STUDIO ONCE MORE

C

ok so...

I think well... you were talking about this idea of sitting  
down to write piece of music

A

Yes- for the violin

C

...and there was a certain kind of sound world attached to  
the violin....?

A

Yes- that was part of Dr. Heinrich's original theory... that a  
room could be constructed like an instrument, like a violin for  
example.

CAMERA WANDERS TOWARDS AN OPEN BOOK SHOWING IMAGE OF A REVERBERA-  
TION CHAMBER...THE TEXT BENEATH REFERRING TO ERRORS OF SOME SORT

C

Well that's not really what I meant.

What I meant was, there are certain ways you can describe how  
they might make sounds using an instrument.

A

Yes- you mean the score?

C

Yes... yes.

CAMERA WANDERS, CUT TO C IN B&W, FLICKER & GRAIN.

C

(VOICEOVER ON HER OWN IMAGE AS SHE LOOKS DOWN AT SCORE, DESCRIBES  
IT, PLAYS NOTES ON PIANO...)

Well, I never encountered scores before I came to the institute. I  
was really intrigued by the notion of learning musical notation  
and scoring stuff. But I became disenchanted really quickly  
because I realized that practically none of the sound that I had  
imagined had survived in written form.

A

No, all of the old texts presume that you have no need of that,

that you know what everything sounds like. That's taken for granted.

C

If the score is the same set of instructions then... why?  
We don't know why one musician plays it better than another.

A

Yes- certain musicians did do it better, but it's hard to say what that was...when it was essentially the same piece of music.  
We think that there must have been a tiny amount of space and some people moved in that space a bit better than others.

C

So there's a little bit of space in between. Em, it's a kind of space where people can move a little bit more freely, where they have a little bit more space to play around with it...in the gaps... and that's where they make it their own.

THE PIANO MUSIC GRADUALLY INCLUDES A BLOWING ELEMENT.  
A LOOKS AT THE WAV FILE AND HIS ATTENTION SLOWLY SHIFTS TO AN OLD PRINT SHOWING A LARGE WIND INSTRUMENT.

C

Now all I see are gaps and silences.

A LOOKS UP AT C, THEN BACK DOWN AT SOMETHING IN HIS HAND. C TURNS HER ATTENTION BACK TO THE SCREEN. THE CROW IS NOW BEING STITCHED UP

A

Well, there were other attempts ... there was an electronic group .... and they spoke between themselves.... making shapes in the air... talking about the sounds being like a cube or a square or something... developing their own language to describe the sound world they were thinking about.

SHOT OF CROWS IN A FIELD.

C

Yeah... an air language- so, like an invisible world alongside the visible, and we're in the middle of it somehow.

C (STANDING AT DOOR LOOKING OUT THROUGH

A STRAW)

So when we try to look at something so vast, When we try to reconstruct it, with such primitive means..... well , it's like looking at the world through a straw.

SHOT OF FIELD OF CROWS, LAYERED AND SHIFTING. C FRAMED BY A CLOSING IN CIRCLE, HERSELF LOOKED AT THROUGH A STRAW AS SHE LOOKS UNTIL SCREEN CLOSES IN TO THE SOUND OF CROWS CALLING.



1.26 He is sitting behind a desk.

1.40 He's reading about a woman.

1.55 Suddenly, he turns to his friend.

2.03 "Listen, " he says. "This woman's fifty-six inch bust is a tax asset. "

2.20 His friend looks at him.

3.18 Then, his amazement turns to excitement.  
"Imagine, " he said. "Imagine if she fell. "

## POMPEII DINNER

She stopped eating her dinner so suddenly that it look as if it belonged in Pompeii next to some chess players who haven't got very long left.

'Hey, did you hear that?' "No, what?" "Oh, never mind.., it's probably nothing. "your move"

She looked down at what had been her dinner just a split second ago. There was a kind of bewildered expression on her face. "I don't know" , she said, "I don't know what it is... 1 just can't eat another mouthful".

## NOODLES

He's like a letter from a thousand years ago, sitting on a bench in a bright wooden restaurant.

It was written in some kind of old fashioned style that must have taken a lot of time and a quiet mastery of the ways of small flourishes and spikes. Whoever wrote it really knew a few things about ink.

The letter is full of earthquakes and dinosaurs and women with faded faces.

"Noodles", he says

Heading North

All the girls take off their shoes and sit on the bus as if they're sitting on sofasa great herd of sofas galloping north.

## ERIC'S SUIT

He's so comfortable in his suit that it makes people nervous.

"This suit" he says, "some people just can't get over it they just can't - for them there's no way around it." Then he laughs good and loud, "But I say to myself Why should I change?"

Fish

He tells her how he's been to a place where the fish swim right up to you "all sizes and coloursred... orange... striped

Then he lifts his hand and a fish swims over and brushes off her face.

## 56 INCH FANTASY

He is sitting behind a desk reading a newspaper.

Suddenly he turns to his friend.

"Listen", he says, "This woman's fifty-six inch bust is a tax asset" His friend looks at him. Then his amazement turns to excitement. "Imagine", he says, "Imagine, If she fell..."

The lift arrives and I get in. The woman continues falling slowly in his imagination.

DIEGO

Dear Chris,

It's a long time since I've visited this place, but when you asked about sculpture parks this is the one I return to in my mind's eye. The road to it is long and dusty, like a film running backwards, splitting off the main road and then again, getting smaller and more fragile and worn with time as it makes its way further and further into the faded sun-baked mountains. A sharp turn splits off, leading down to two rubbish bins.

Trees and bushes sit behind the bins. A river runs nearby out of sight. Despite the dead heat, the ground deep down is still not so hard on account of being near the river. There are no houses or people, but a dirt trail shows where someone was used to going past the bins, disappearing in through the foliage.

In there, surrounded by trees, dark red leatherette chairs and sofas, formica tables, dark brown ashtrays and stiff newspapers sit around ready for business, like a pub catering for some invisible long lost clientele. The light filtering through the leaves lends the place a kind of muted underwater feeling. Every now and then something rustles quickly through dead leaves.

A small trail leads off through the trees.

We're at the end of that trail, by the water. It's cold even in this dead heat-wide and shallow with deep brown pools scattered with boulders and rocks and stones. I'm distracted by something that looks like black puddles of heavy oil near the water's edge. Hunkering down, the spillage turns into squirming masses of tadpoles, filling all the shallower parts of the bank.

Nearby somebody has hung a metal mobile with many parts out over the river. Altogether it gives the impression of a bit of three-dimensional bar-room banter... The river's winning hands down making the sculpture look a bit foolish and inarticulate. The water is saying many profound things about life and change and transience, stopping for a sip every now and then, before continuing on in a simple and elegant manner while the sculpture hangs about awkwardly trying to say something smart and sculptural about reflections. Beads of rust are already beginning to break out along its surfaces.

Together though the relationship between the complicated sculpture

and the water seems to perfectly reflect something else. I look down to where my girlfriend sits on a rock. She's silent and appears to grow further away at every passing second, flickering in and out of focus. She turns her face towards me, then gazes off, back up at the mountains that climb steeply from the floor of the valley.

Something's gone and it won't be coming back. Not now, not ever.

We both know it although it is going to take a while for things to crystallize. Right now, all we know is that we have found the right place.

We have buried Diego further back up the trail. He is wrapped in a blanket. We had to go pretty deep to keep animals from digging him up in the night. Then we scattered leaves and dry earth. We did such a good job that the leaves and twigs have become statues of themselves and it will be hard to find the next time we visit, even tho' we know exactly where he is.

When we walk back to the car the sound of dogs howling follows us.

I think we buried something else there as well although we only came to know that later and by then it was too late to do anything about it. It has grown as dark as the ground around it now and all but disappeared.

(originally published in "Magnetic Promenade and Other Sculpture Parks", ed. Chris Evans, Studio Voltaire 2006)

## SPACE 2

Finally I clear two hours in the day and I sit looking at them. They look back at me like aliens, small and unblinking. What do you do with two free hours?

## ELVISES

She's thinking about Elvises, Sixteen Elvises walking down the street in suits made especially to fit Elvises of any shape or size. The Elvises are waiting for something. They've stopped and are just chatting to one another when an old man passes by. He'd love to see someone kill all of those Elvises. "Stupid bastards", he says. One of the Elvises laughs. "Ha ha ha". Stupid bastards.

Something flickered

It may have been a secret, not  
a foreign body,  
active still  
long after its forcible entrance

*She smiled dryly*

A foreign body does not enter into any relation  
with the layers of tissue that surround it  
But it may modify them and provoke

*An inflamed reaction ?*

In fact it does not behave like a foreign body,  
but far more like  
an infiltrate

Ripples of tension crawled through the muscles across his shoulders  
*and longer and more lovingly as they reached his throat*

He swallowed hard  
like someone suffering  
from hydrophobia

*But there the caress fixed itself*

*It was a long time ago, he began uneasily*

*She watched the vein pulsating in his neck*

*It was in the summer during a period of intense heat  
I was suffering very badly from  
thirst*

*She licked her curiously dry lips,  
aware of the slight tremor in his voice*

*For without being able to account for it in any way,  
I suddenly found it impossible to drink*

(The removal of a foreign body  
from living tissue... It will not be cleanly extirpated

*His throat tightened*

*Sometimes there came a sensation as if a hand was drawn softly  
Along my cheek and neck*

She was aware of being slightly distracted by the thin slit of chest  
with its splay of hair revealed in the opened shirt

For a fleeting moment he had the distinct feeling that she was

absent

He laughed nervously  
(a shallow sound that was only a quick rush of air)

*I would take up the glass of water I longed for  
and as soon as it touched my lips  
I would push it away*

A faint smile played about her lips

(The boundary between the two is fixed purely conventionally ...Now at one point ...now at  
another ...It passes over in every direction  
*Again I lifted the glass to my lips*

...And in some places  
It cannot be laid down at all

*They were cold and stiff now and seemed no more a part of me than the glass*

And things  
fragmented and orderless  
floated to the surface

It can become increasingly alien  
she remarked, continuing in a similar vein

Panic lurched convulsively in his throat  
leaving gaps unfilled and riddles unanswered

.....

Seconds became minutes became hours  
and poured off his face in a  
cold dripping sweat

Later...

She put the glass to my lips and drank a great quantity

TOWARDS A POLAR SEA  
(2005) SCENES 1-6

The Portrait

You are not here

If the Earth

(V.O.) FEMALE 1  
(approx. mid-forties,  
ish Kentis  
accent. Speaks slowly,  
and c ately)

It was in, erm,  
nineteen ninety  
five, er, I invit-  
ed Craigie  
Horsfield to do an  
exhibition here at  
the gallery.

One of the works  
which we showed in  
the front room of  
the gallery was a  
portrait of the  
woman called Mary  
Machinska.

[nb "Mary" is pro-  
nounced with the  
same intonation as  
"Mary" but with the  
"a" of Marry.]

The portrait was a  
very beautiful  
black and white  
image of a woman...  
I'm not sure  
whether she  
was sitting  
or standing.

(V.O.) FEMALE 2  
(approx. mid-twenties,  
English Kentish/ Sussex  
accent. Speaks deliber-  
ately)

Every morning I  
awake to find your  
ghost self has  
wrapped its arms  
around me in the  
night.

Slowly I undo its  
cold fingers and  
put them down.

Sometimes your  
ghost self wakes up  
and watches as I  
leave.

All I know is that  
one day I will wake  
up and forget that  
you are not here.

SOUND OF TYPING ON COM-  
PUTER KEYBOARDS. (V.O.)  
FEMALE 3 (approx. mid-  
twenties, English  
Kentish/ Sussex accent.  
Speaks deliberately)

Such  
water. So barren a  
country. Dreadful.

(V.O.) MALE 1 (approx.  
mid-twe  
Glaswegian accent.  
Speaks fast)

If the earth opens  
and swallows me up,  
  
this doesn't prove  
that my trust in it  
was misplaced.

What better place  
for my trust could  
there be?

Blind Building

The Sound of your  
Wings

Whenever the Ices  
Shift

(V.O.) FEMALE 1

Two crows were  
killed. A gloom  
spread.

(V.O.) FEMALE 4

(V.O.) FEMALE 4

One man cannot bear  
to be left alone.

He looks wild,  
ghastly.  
Surprised us by  
getting up and  
walking.

You have taken  
me to a place  
I'd only ever heard  
of.

Sir Mandred laid  
down,

October 19th  
Patched snowshoes  
for the journey.  
Packed journals.  
Charts.  
Documents.  
Letters.

died before day-  
light

A sent out to examine  
the water.

Lost his way.

Erm rather sad, her  
head was sort of (V.O.) FEMALE 1  
bent down slight- 0109 Showers of snow  
ly... erm very frag- fell throughout the  
ile frail-like- night.  
like a little spar-  
row. And it was a  
very very beauti-  
ful portrait.

And, erm, I think (V.O.) FEMALE 2  
it on a Saturday I Everything hurts. The  
was working in the trees. The sky. The  
gallery on my own, air. And you're not  
and I became aware here.  
that there were  
various people  
standing outside  
the gallery in the  
street, looking  
in, looking at this  
portrait. After a  
few minutes the  
doorbell rang and  
three men came in,  
and just stood  
looking at the por-  
trait for a long  
time, sort of whis-  
pering to them-  
selves.

-----

-----

I am lying on the  
floor, inside this  
building.  
Listening to it  
creak and shuffle  
about in the dark.

And now that you're gone,  
I walk through this dead land  
watching the skies  
for the sound of  
your wings.

There was not one single passage. Rather the intricate maze of islands and shoals provided a number of potential passages, whenever the ice shifted to open the door.

A light will change  
nothing.

Ice- perfectly smooth-  
Slipped at every step-  
Blown down by the wind.

One man lost all hope.  
All arguments failed.

-----

The party is reduced to  
four persons.

F could go no further,  
overwhelmed with grief.

Antonio Fontano was an  
Italian.

-----

Then they walked  
around the  
gallery... didn't  
really... they  
weren't really  
interested in the  
other work, and  
then came back to  
the portrait and  
kept looking.

And they told me  
the story that,  
erm, the three men  
who'd come into the  
gallery had known  
Mary. And one of  
the... men... who'd  
seen the portrait  
had actually lived  
here in the house.  
And Mary had come  
to the house on  
several occasions  
to meet him, so it  
was rather extra-  
ordinary that Mary  
from this portrait  
had been to this  
house. And many  
many many years  
later there she was  
again in the house,  
but as a portrait.

-----

The whole party shed  
tears.

Dear me, If we are  
spared to return, I  
wonder if we shall ever  
recover our understand-  
ing.

-----

## THE COMPANY OF INTERNATIONAL CHEESES

She was wearing a white coat when he arrived, as if she was starring as a famous cheese surgeon in a play whose only other characters were lesser known but well thought of international cheeses. The cheeses had come from all corners of the globe after many long hours of experimentation in countless small laboratories. Each one was the very special brain-child of long hours and sleepless nights. The cheeses were sitting around in small groups when he came in. One or two of them were humming something that had nothing to do with dancing.

"This cheese", he said, taking a small cheese out of his bag, "There's something not right about it. "

She turned around as if she had been concentrating very hard on something that was nearly not there and now it was gone. Damn!

"What?", she said. And it was not a happy question.

In fact it had a lot in common with a large block of cheese that stuck off a shelf close to his head.

"What?", she said again, using a voice that had been coated in a thin layer of green wax.

"It's like, emm,ahem... it's just not right.

She pushed her glasses up her nose and took a well refrigerated look at him.

"You don't understand", she said, "this mould is it's skin... look ... here... and here..."

and she took up one of her prodigies and then another, tracing her finger along the various black and blue veins running through them... Finally, gently, with two hands completely at odds with the look on her face, she removed the cheese from his hands and placed it on a nearby shelf, in a way which caused him to question the value of spending long hours with international cheeses as your only companions.

"You simply don't understand", she slowly repeated.

And it was true. He didn't. But he was beginning to get the picture.

## LOST QUOTATIONS

Outside the National Poetry Library  
there's a notice-board labelled "Lost Quotations".  
People go there to ask if anyone can help them to find a poem.  
The board is full of lost pieces of poetry.  
Some of them have a neglected air,  
like the leg of a stuffed dog  
left in an old cardboard box in the attic.

Humpty Dumpty went out for a walk  
Armed with only a knife and fork.  
"Learnt around 1910" was written under this.  
That's 88 years or more.  
"Author?Source?Title??"  
88 years.  
You could get well and truly lost in that kind of time.

Others linger on like the desolate ghost of a little known actor,  
returning every now and then to find itself recognised by nothing  
and nobody.

"I have lost my way,  
This is the wrong city  
and the wrong midnight"

The man who works at the poetry library  
wears the kind of smile  
you'd give to a stray dog along with a piece of bread.  
He believes that these lines, having somehow gotten themselves  
disconnected from the original poems,  
have been misremembered...  
slowly deforming in the minds of the people who lost them  
until they bear little or no resemblance  
to the poems they once came from.

All the same, he carefully types them up  
and sticks them on the board.

Somene's torn the curtain,  
I think it must be me.

I wish I were a bigly hole  
And bigly hole were me.

\_\_\_\_\_

but it's arrived.

we all look at our watches with dull bewildered expressions

to perfect a look of mild surprise



Two thousand slow years later there's no quarrel with that...

## THE SMELL OF CHICKEN SANDWICHES

Every time I go into the travel agents  
I am reminded that the smell of chicken sandwiches  
has gotten there before me.

I've been going in there regularly  
and I know it's not connected to any one person,  
like someone's favourite lunch that they just can't do without,  
not even for one day,  
Absolutely not!

It's been hanging around there so long  
that I think someone must have hired it  
tho I can't figure out what the boss had in mind.

"So what can you do?"

". . . . .!"

"Ah, very good, you're hired".

Maybe there's been new market research  
that shows how people find themselves  
more in the mood for long distance holidays  
if accompanied by the smell of chicken sandwiches.

All the other staff have changed  
but the smell of chicken sandwiches  
is working towards its pension.



**MICHAEL  
NEWMAN**

**WHAT MAKES IT  
HOLD TOGETHER:**

**JAKI IRVINE'S  
ACKNOWLEDGE-  
MENTS**

# PART I



From the toothless girl in SWEETTOOTH (1993-94),



to the interactions between humans and animals in  
IN A WORLD LIKE THIS (2006)

Jaki Irvine's art has to do with the acknowledgment  
of strangeness.

How odd other people are.

How the world seems full of coincidences and signs  
meant just for me one moment,  
and utterly meaningless the next.

How everything seems coherent, and then suddenly falls apart.

How animals can seem like us, and we like them, yet at the same time we know that they have a perception of a world that we can never inhabit.

Irvine’s work explores not only the extremes of passion, of love and hate, of possession and loss—

to the point at which these emotions touch on the limits of representation—



but also the mundane and the everyday, the things that occur on a walk to the park,

or a trip on the underground, where people pass each other by, and encounters are missed yet something happens.

In Irvine’s work our link with the world, with others, and with animals is always in question.



This happens as early as the black-and-white 8mm film STAR, where a man and woman meet in a pub, but don’t connect:



In MARCO, ONE AFTERNOON, the first film of the installation of five short 16mm films shot during 1998-99

Paths may cross without meeting, connections mis-fire, yet this very clinamen, this swerve, is what creates the work.



Hey, handicap, would you like another vodka? she repeats three times, and falls down to the ground.



collectively titled THE HOTTEST SUN, THE DARKEST HOUR,

a man recounts meeting another 15 years older who looks like he himself will look in fifteen years time;

but if they are, in this narcissistic sense, the “same”, did they ever really encounter each other? .

Or, on the other hand, is this very sameness the condition for their encounter?

Even face to face in a room together,  
two people can pass each other by,  
as we see in EYELASHES (1996),

where a man, obsessed with another woman’s eye-  
lashes, seems to be failing to relate to the woman that  
he is talking to.



Affect is discharged in compulsive, involuntary micro-gestures, like the twitching of his feet and the tapping of her hand.



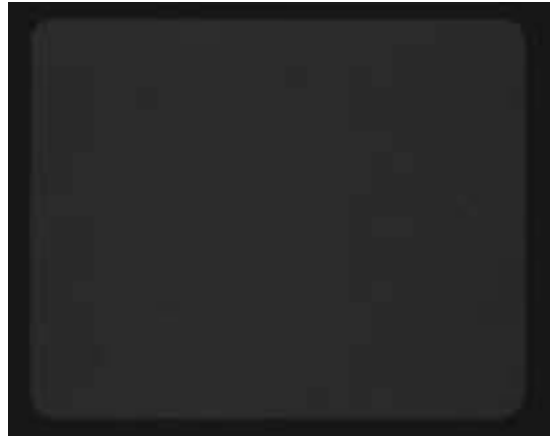
The relation to the other is not something that is benign or easy.



It involves putting oneself at risk.

To acknowledge the other person also means exposing oneself.

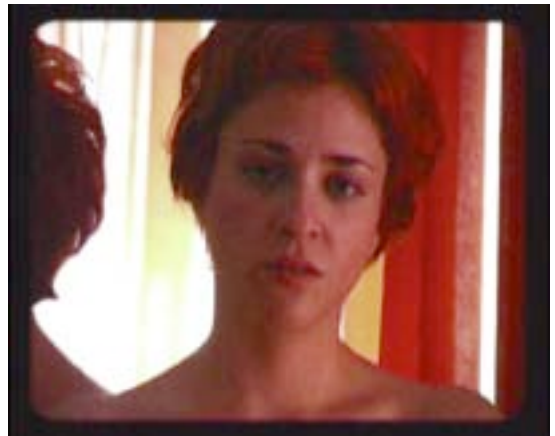
## PART II



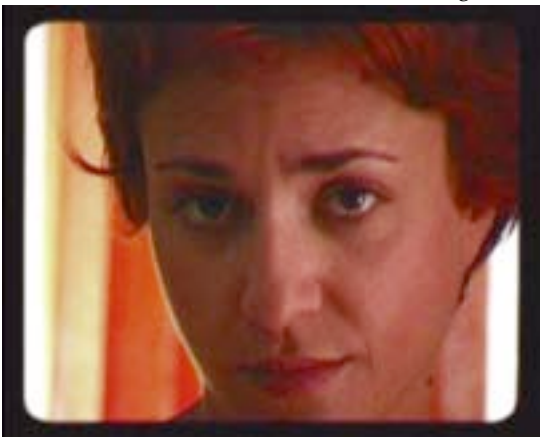
Shame is the negative side of the presence to others that is the condition for acknowledgment.



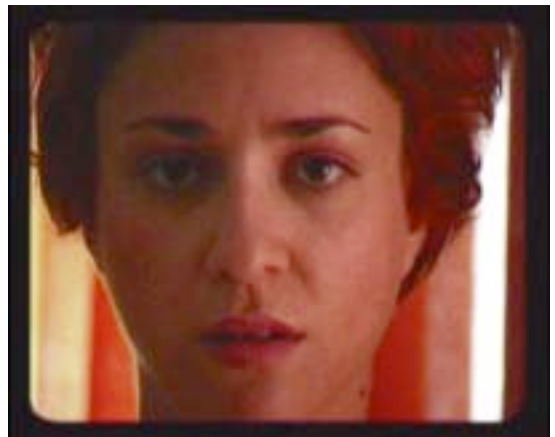
THE ACTRESS (2003) begins with a head-and-shoulders shot of a woman with dyed red hair, dark at the roots, shown in front of an orange curtain.



She nods to the camera and says *ok*.



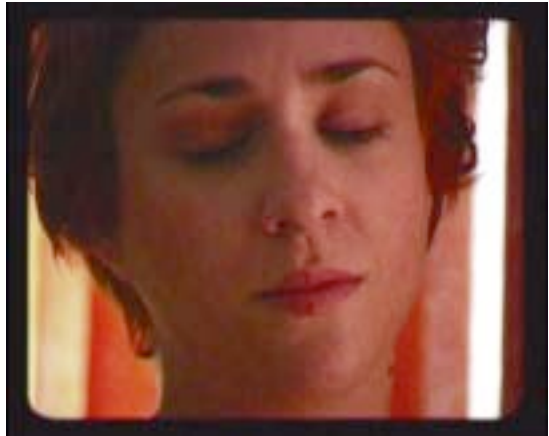
The screen goes blank, and a heavily accented Italian woman's voice—narrating in the third person,



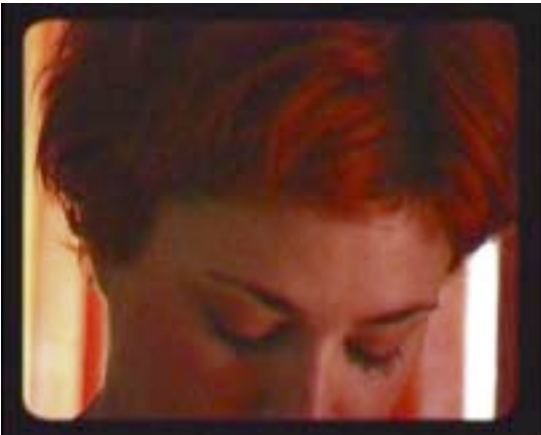
yet it could be the voice of the woman we see—says that she always wanted to be an actress.



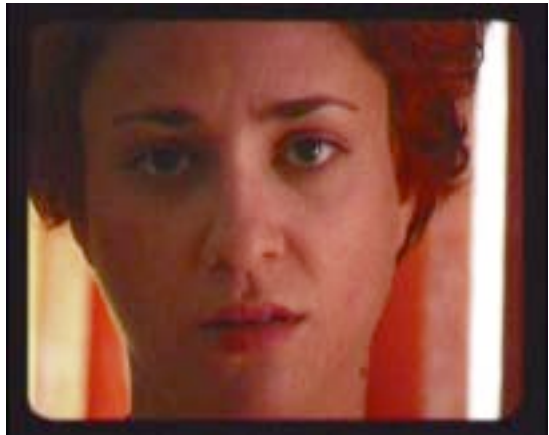
Then there are a series of shorter shots—each of which fades to black, as if a different take—with the woman seeming not quite settled into a role.



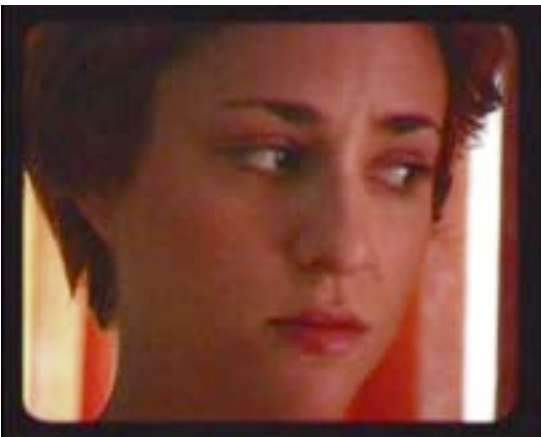
Is she performing for the camera, or for herself in front of a mirror? .



After years of hard work, she finally landed a small part in a film....



At this point a mirror is behind her, so we see both her face and shoulders from the front, and her head from behind.



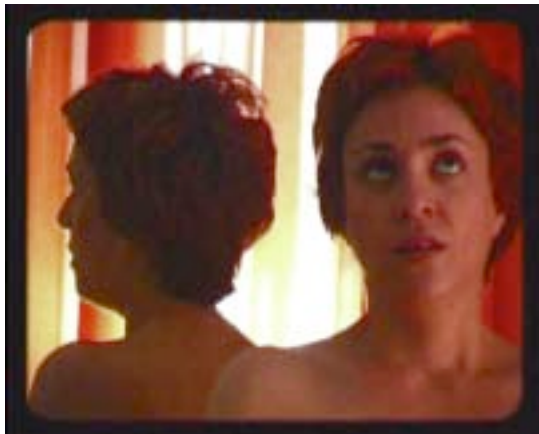
She sighs, grimaces, looks towards the camera and then away.



We are told that her father, the mayor of a small town, booked a hall and arranged for a copy of the film to be sent from Rome.



Now, in relation to this paternal authority figure.



Is he the other for whom she is performing, who makes her discontented with herself? .



Finally, the whole town was gathered, waiting. .



Her extended posing has put the viewer, too into the position of the townspeople who are waiting.



At last she looks directly at the camera, and makes what appears to be a resigned confession:.



I have ugly breasts.

Who is experiencing shame here, and why? .  
Stanley Cavell—who writes that .

it is one of the inconveniences of shame,  
that it is generally inaccurate, attaches to  
the wrong thing<sup>1</sup>

—discusses Gloucester’s shame about his son in  
KING LEAR:

...if the failure to recognize others is a  
failure to let others recognize you, a  
fear of what is revealed to them, an  
avoidance of their eyes, then it is  
exactly shame which is the cause of  
his withholding of recognition.[...]

For shame is the specific discomfort  
produced by the sense of being  
looked at, the avoidance of the sight  
of others is the reflex it produces.[...] Under shame, what must be covered  
up is not your deed, but yourself.  
It is a more primitive emotion than  
guilt, as inescapable as the possession  
of a body, the first object of shame.<sup>2</sup>

He continues:

“Shame [...] is the emotion whose effect is most precipitate and out of proportion to its cause [...] what mortifies one person seems wholly unimportant to another [...]. Shame [...] is also the most primitive of social responses.

With the discovery of the individual, whether in Paradise or in the Renaissance, there is the simultaneous discovery of the isolation of the individual; his presence to himself, but simultaneously to others.<sup>3</sup>

To anticipate that the proud moment of the woman in THE ACTRESS will be precisely a *performance* of shame .

is to undercut the authority of the paternal projection.

Is she performing or rehearsing? .

Is she practicing her part, this side of a performance, or is she already performing for an other? .

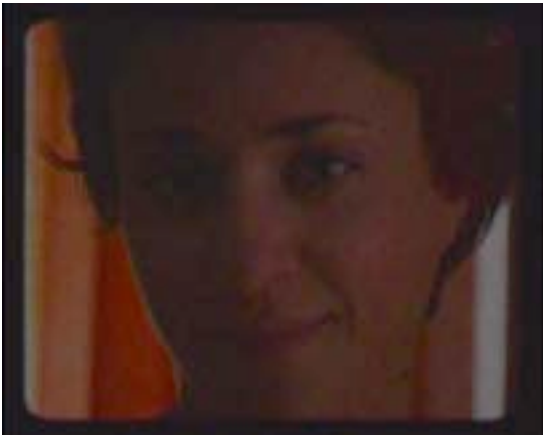
Is she looking at herself, or directing her gaze towards the father who will see the film, causing him to be ashamed? .

The position of the viewer as addressee oscillates between being that of the actress performing to herself in the mirror,

and the artist or filmmaker behind the camera: each of the positions gives rise to a different interpretation of the act.<sup>4</sup>

which is also collusion.

the father in the narrative who will have been watching the film,



The woman ends the film with a snort and a little smile, suggesting the hint of a distance from her self-relation before the other, and a mocking defiance

It is left open whether her statement “I have ugly breasts” is a comment on herself, or her line for the small part in the film, and that the whole thing we

have seen is her rehearsal for it, where she tries to put herself in the position of a woman saying that line, while telling the story in her own voice.

Or she could be an actress acting the actress acting—or rehearsing, or acting rehearsing.

This work could be taken as an extended portrait of the actress,

and indeed many of Irvine’s works could be understood as portraits,



from the black-and-white 8mm film SWEET TOOTH—the indirect portrait of a woman who had all her teeth removed—



to IN A WORLD LIKE THIS (2006)—a series of double portraits of humans and birds occupying the same world, yet different.



An explicit reference to the idea of the portrait occurs at the beginning of TOWARDS A POLAR SEA (2005), in which the director of the Frith Street



Gallery, Jane Hamlyn, offers the story of three men who once came into the gallery and on seeing a photographic portrait of a woman by the artist Craigie



Horsfield one of the men said he had lived in that very house, and that the woman in the portrait had visited him there.



The film largely takes the form of a close-up representation of Hamlyn herself—in black and white, like Horsfield's photograph—as she turns her head to a



three-quarters profile, and looks down; she moves thus while in the voice-over simultaneously describes how a portrait became something real in the very

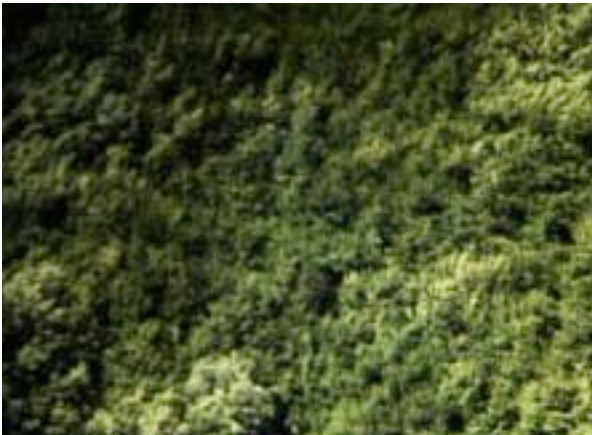


space where she sits.

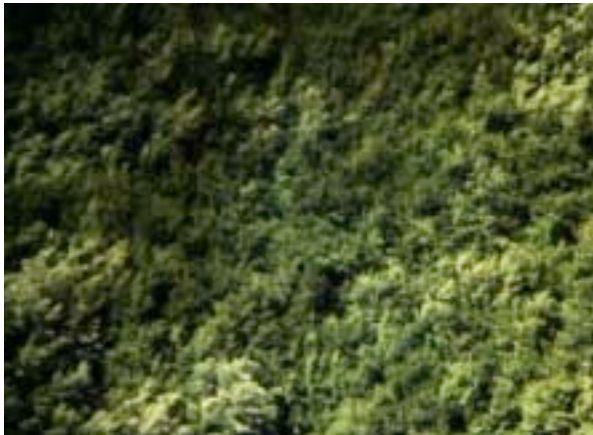
PART III

Often, Irvine’s work will combine the intense focus on a detail, to the point of fixation,.

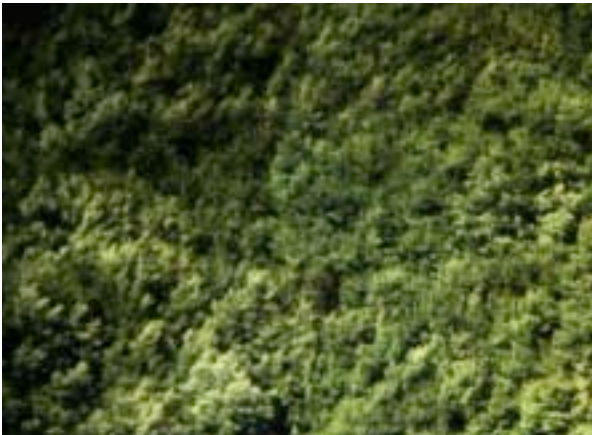
with an expansion of the expression of passion outwards into the natural world.



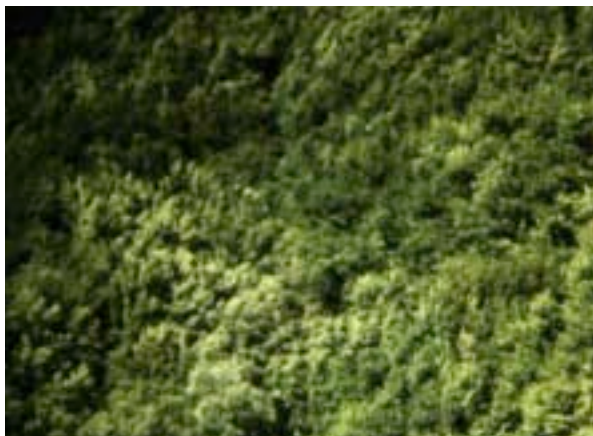
In MOUNTAIN WIND (2006), the screen is filled by a hillside of trees which undulate in waves as the wind blows through them.



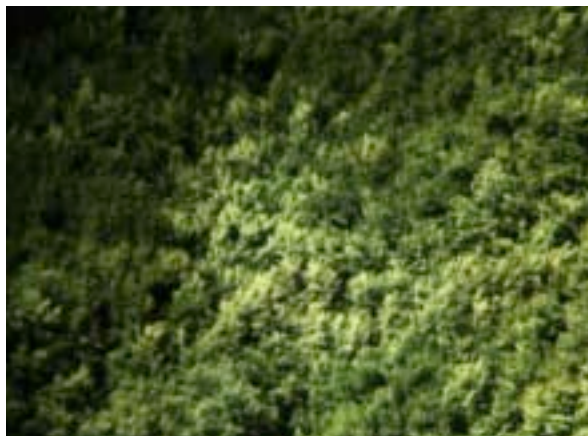
This is accompanied by a song in Italian in which a woman addresses a lover who is asleep, singing that she hates no one more than this person.



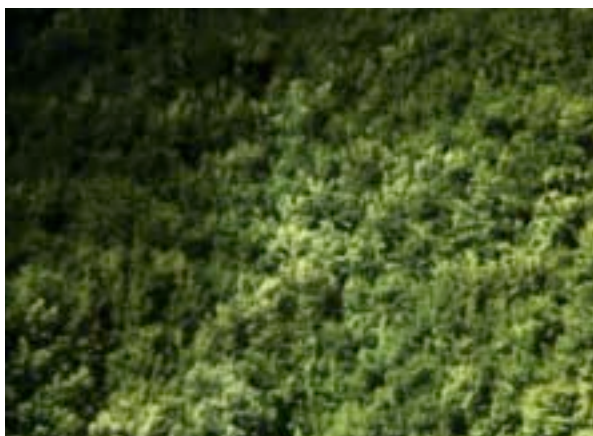
When the lover wakes up, she says, “I’m here/ my love, I love you”.



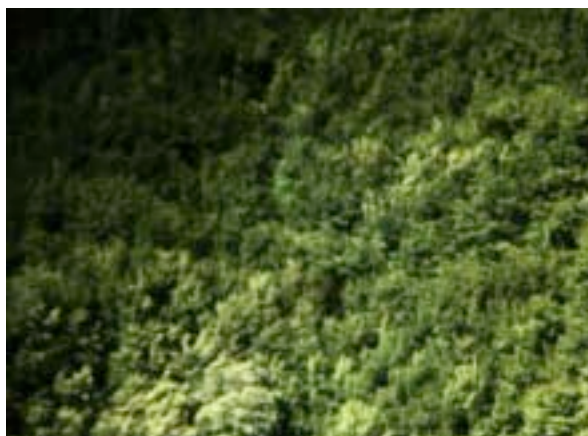
The song also includes the words



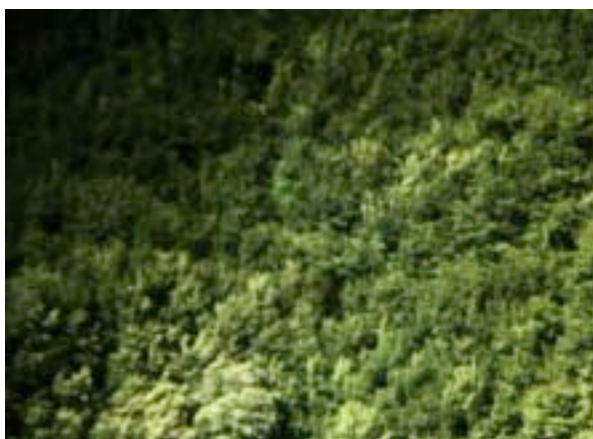
I look at the eyes you have  
the eyelashes you have



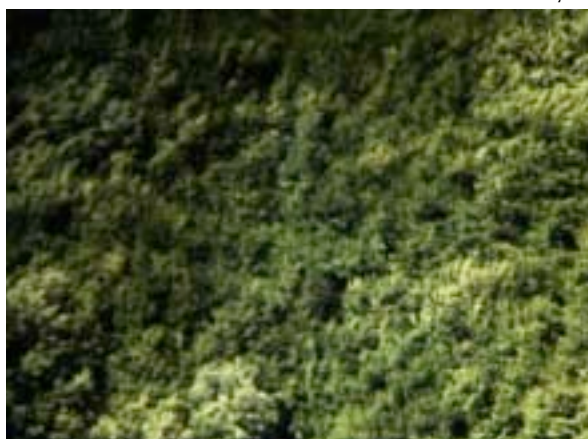
long eyelashes where  
I found myself imprisoned.<sup>5</sup>



The lover is captivated in an ambivalent relationship  
with the other, mingling love and hate, reflected in the  
to-and-fro movement of the trees, which is the only



indication of wind.



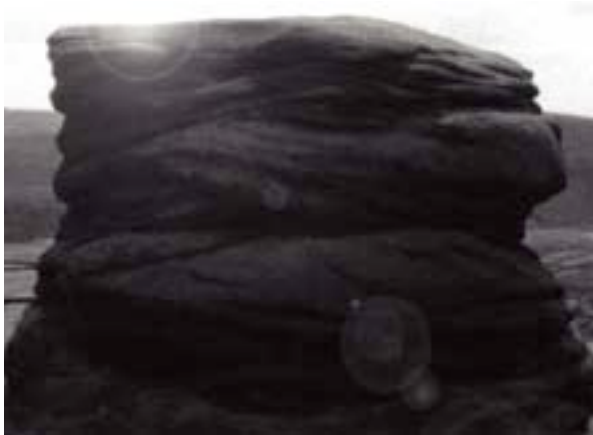
The film creates an equivalent for emotion and does  
so with a hint of exaggeration,

so that the viewer is at once carried along  
.

by this concurrence of image and soundtrack,  
and aware of the process.

Cliché is redeemed so that passion may be shared.

In the film THREE FORMS OF SUDDEN DEATH (2005), instead of song we hear the sound of the wind like whipping cloth.



Three giant Yorkshire rock formations—



shot on black-and-white Super-8 film to convey in its slight juddering a sense of time—



successively fill the field of vision.



This work is accompanied by a text on *bezours*,



certain deer, when bitten by  
venomous serpents, swam into  
rivers and remained submerged



until they felt the effect of  
the venom to subside.



At this point they shed a large  
tear that solidified upon the  
deer leaving the water.<sup>6</sup>



The term bezoar also applies to solid objects  
found in the stomach, including accretions of hair that  
has been compulsively swallowed,

to which some societies attribute curative properties.<sup>7</sup>

The “bezoar” is a *pharmakon*, the poison that is also a remedy.<sup>8</sup>



by the contrast with the jiggery movements of the film and the sound of the wind over the moor.

Body and soul are invaded by something alien, but the bezoar is the remains of a process of healing by externalization, an outside on the inside that is expelled.



In THREE FORMS OF SUDDEN DEATH, the rocks confront the viewer with their massive indifference, the near-timelessness of which is emphasized



Just as when, having fallen in love, you are obsessed with someone, or mired in anguish at separation, and can think of nothing else, so these rocks fill the view-



er's field of vision like a grief that blocks out the world.



This blocking out of the world  
by the giant rock formations



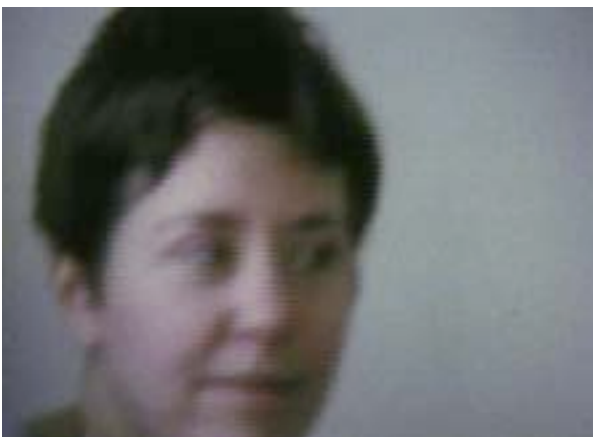
in THREE FORMS OF SUDDEN DEATH.



is reminiscent of the way the eyelashes take over the  
young man's imagination in EYELASHES, so that  
he gets stuck there.



The voice-over, by a woman with a German accent,  
begins:



He was having difficulty with a  
woman...'It's her eyelashes', he  
said. .



We are first shown his feet, in disintegrating woolly slippers, twitching, and then his smile,



suggesting a discrepancy between his agitation and the way he shows himself to the woman across the table.



Is she a friend in whom he is confiding, or the woman to whom he refers? .



He is attractive, but so locked into his obsession that he appears narcissistic and self-absorbed.



His addressee seems a little skeptical and detached; her outstretched hand is shown tapping on a shelf and for a moment she smiles,

but is maybe a little irritated.

Because we only hear the third-person account of the voice-over,  
not what the two are saying to each other,

we are left with a greater degree of uncertainty about their relationship.

The possible gap between what we see and what we hear opens up a space for interpretation,

and the viewer becomes conscious of his or her rôle in figuring out what is passing between the man and the woman.

What does it mean that the man is described as obsessed with the woman's eyelashes? .

This fixation is reinforced by the repeating of sequences in the editing of the film.



The eyelashes seem to become something like a gateway to her interiority or otherness that he can't get beyond, yet can't get away from either.



As that at which he halts in advance of the encounter with something that might threaten him as a subject—



the return, perhaps, of the look (there is one moment when the woman in the film glances at the camera)—the eyelashes function like a fetish.



Impersonal, apt to detach themselves, they also have something of the object about them. Elliptically, the film runs the gamut of love and obsession.



In the last shot in the room, the two have moved closer to each other: does this signal a change in their relationship?



Through his obsession the man has created a solipsistic position for himself: by fixating on a part of a woman—



a part-object, a detachable excrescence—we could say that he relieves himself of the obligation to acknowledge her, to recognize that she exists as other,



as unrelated to his point of view. This is also reflected in the impression that he is talking *at* his confidant, rather than conversing with her..



Finally, instead of facing each other, separated by the table, they are standing beside each other, looking in the same direction.



Does this hint at the possibility of acknowledgment and a shared perspective?



The film ends as it began, with a shot of the rooftop and the sun disappearing behind passing clouds, with the heavy cello

of the string-quartet accompaniment: two moments evoking the sublime frame the account in the voiceover of the abject eyelashes.

Julia Kristeva writes that.

the abject is edged with the sublime

The abject is the pre-object that opens up the space of separation that is the condition for the subject to be,

as the sublime is the dissolution of the constituted subject in the vast or powerful: the two sides of overwhelming passion:<sup>9</sup>

The time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth.

Jouissance, in short... One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it [on en jouit]. Violently and painfully. A passion.<sup>10</sup>

Equally, the movement of the camera to the exterior shot at the end of Irvine's film marks an expansion,

a shift from the interior and its micro-focus on the fix-  
ations,

repetitions and misfirings of desire,

to the time of nature, the movement of the clouds,  
the revolving of the planet as day turns to night.

This mundane domestic exchange, which is equally  
a non-encounter between the man and the woman,  
in which the man appears to be subject  
to critical scrutiny by the camera as well as by the



woman in the film, takes place between the two limits  
of the abject and the sublime.

If EYELASHES shows movement becoming repeti-  
tion in the twitching gestures,

THREE FORMS OF SUDDEN DEATH  
contains a hint that the very production  
of a work about stasis reintroduces movement.



Is the sun, which glimmers over the top of the rock,  
setting or rising? .



The bezoar, solidified tear and accretion of grief,



is also a metaphor for the work of art itself,



as a cure for the very malady that it expresses.



## PART IV



In SWEETTOOTH, as the camera wanders around a stone-carver's yard full of fragments of sculpture, a woman's voice speaks of loss



in a surprisingly chirpy way: a girl of nineteen had a serious sweet tooth that led her to the dentist one sunny day, where



all her teeth were pulled out.<sup>11</sup>

She says she feels freer without them:

Then, whoever she was talking to would be slightly disturbed at this, and she'd give them a big smile, the strangest smile a 19 year old girl had ever given them. But they wouldn't know how to take that either, and would try to leave that smile just there, exactly in the place where her teeth should have been.

Not to see the absence of the teeth for the smile  
Is a this a way of avoiding noticing absence,

to put something—even if as fleeting as a smile—in its place? This description in the work also describes the viewer's relation to it.

We don't know how to take this humour applied to loss. If the narrator is taken as a stand-in for the viewer, the girl could be a figure of the artist:



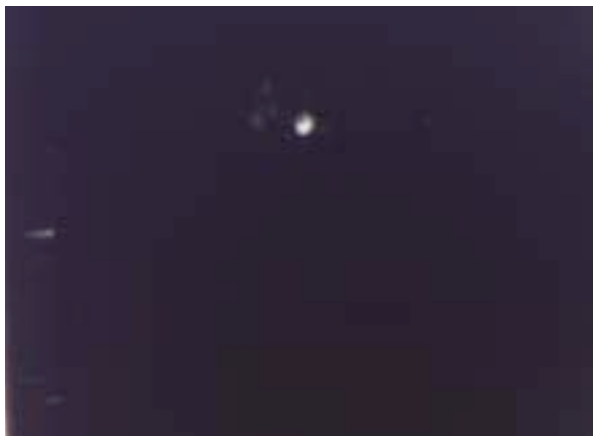
took root and began to grow in my imagination.  
The teeth blossom all the more effectively in their



her teeth like statues of teeth,  
like the dragon's teeth sewn by Cadmus,  
mythic founder of Thebes,



absence, as, according to Mallarmé, the word creates  
the oblivion of the disappearance of the thing, out of  
which arises  
the very idea in its mellowness; in other words,  
what is absent from every bouquet.<sup>12</sup>



THE HOTTEST SUN, THE DARKEST  
HOOR enacts love and loss in five parts:  
 meeting, ecstasy, otherness, departure, memory..



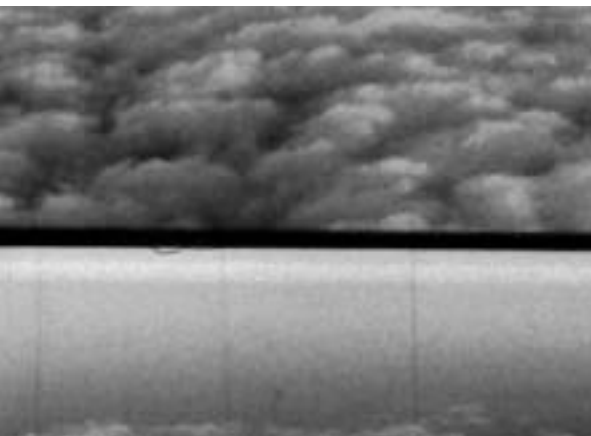
a woman sings in Italian to a dog about the fear of  
 being alone—in translation,



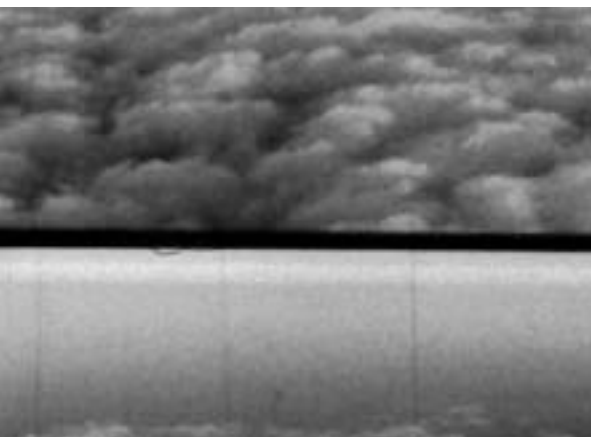
the view from the window of a plane taking off,  
 set to a song titled I' ll live without you;



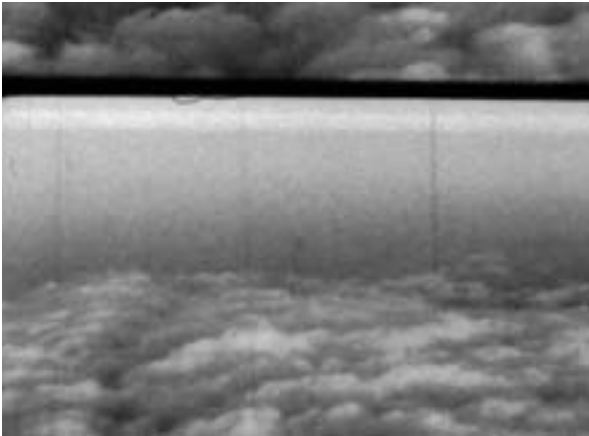
A man meets an older man who looks like him;  
 a film of fireflies, as if an unrepresentable flash of  
 ecstasy;



even when you are sleeping  
 beside me, we don't dream the  
 same dream;



then we look down towards the face of the woman,  
 who smokes, makes kisses,  
 and flirts with the camera.



This scene has a retrospective feel,  
as if the photograph's temporality of absent pastness .



breaks through the flowing presence of the moving  
image, and we are looking at an old movie remem-  
bering how it was..

The title suggests the ambiguity of pleasure and pain:

the sun can warm but it can also burn,

the darkest hour can be a time of lassitude and  
dreams, but it can also be a time of separation and  
despair.

PART V

. We tell stories to make the unbearable bearable.

And sometimes humour is a way of dealing with grief.

In the short story *The Facts behind the Helsinki Roccamatios* by Yann Martel, the narrator, inspired by Boccaccio's *Decameron*,

helps his friend Paul who is dying of AIDS  
by playing a game in which they set out  
to write a history of the 20th century

by each supplying a single episode  
from alternate years.

The night before his death, Paul leaves behind  
a fictional episode for the year 2001:

the writing of history as a sequence of stories  
becomes a way of coping with the unbearable,  
at once confronting and denying death.<sup>13</sup>

Does a story—or any work of art—have to do with  
what it represents, whether fictional or true, or what it  
enables us to endure?

Martel’s novel the *Life of Pi*, is narrated from the  
point of view of the son of a zoo-keeper from  
Pondicherry, India,

who loses his parents in the wreck of the Japanese  
cargo ship on which they are emigrating to Canada,  
and ends up on a life-boat with a tiger

(tigers will feature in works by Irvine as well).

After he lands in Mexico, and the tiger has disappeared, Pi Patel offers the investigators from the Japanese ministry of transport,

who don't believe the story of the tiger, an alternative story without animals, and says to them,

So tell me, since it makes no factual difference to you and you can't prove the question either way, which story do you prefer? Which is the better story, the story with animals or the story without animals?<sup>14</sup>

In ANOTHER DIFFICULT SUNSET (1996) Irvine has a voice-over to a sequence of a man in a London Underground train repeat the vignette

from Richard Brautigan's book *In Watermelon Sugar* in which the narrator describes how tigers killed and ate his parents.

Interrupting their meal, this exchange takes place:

"We're just like you," the other tiger said. "We speak the same language you do. We think the same thoughts, but we're tigers."

"You could help me with my arithmetic."

"What's that?" One of the tigers said.

"My arithmetic."

"Oh, your arithmetic."

"Yeah."

"What do you want to know?" One of the tigers said.

"What's nine times nine?"

"Eighty-one." The tiger said.

"What's eight times eight?"

"Fifty-six." The tiger said.

Not only can tigers do their times tables, they make mistakes too. They're just like us—but then they're not. A little later,

They both went back to eating my parents.

I went outside and sat down by the river.

"I'm an orphan." I said.<sup>15</sup>

Brautigan’s tale appears to refute Ludwig  
Wittgenstein’s claim that

If a lion could talk,  
we could not understand him.<sup>16</sup>

But does it? Stanley Cavell’s gloss—  
quoted by Irvine in ANOTHER DIFFICULT  
SUNSET—on Wittgenstein’s dictum goes as follows:

Whatever one may wish to imagine  
about what a lion might, as it were, say if  
he talked, I take Wittgenstein’s statement  
to mean that it is part of our understanding of  
human beings that (without exception) they  
talk and part of our understanding of lions that  
(without exception) they do not, so that a lion’s  
talking rather than roaring would not clarify  
for us, for example, why the lion is in discom-  
fort.(It would, to say the least, perplex us in the  
extreme; in any case it would prevent our car-  
ing about his or her suffering then and there.)<sup>17</sup>

It’s not just that a talking lion  
would no longer be a lion.



For a lion—or tiger—  
to talk and for us to understand them



would mean that their world is the same or similar to  
ours.



The point is not whether or not animals can talk,  
but rather, that if they did,



we wouldn't understand what they were saying.



But, to a degree, is that not the case with any  
exchange of words?



Isn't there always an irreducible element of opacity, or  
of worlds not shared even if we live together?



In Irvine's video SWIMMERS AND SEAGULLS (2003) footage of bathing-capped humans participating in the annual swim in Dublin's Liffey River



are superimposed with footage of seagulls landing, bobbing on the water, and taking off.



The water becomes the place where the birds who inhabit the air and the humans who walk on the land, meet,

and on this uncommon common ground it is the humans more than the birds who become strange creatures.

Irvine's work is about just that, the encroachments of strangeness.

Sometimes despite this a commonality is achieved, sometimes not.

# PART VI

Anne Tallentire writes  
of ANOTHER DIFFICULT SUNSET that

the clever logic of this work reveals itself  
by drawing us towards a belief in that  
which appears meaningful but which  
at the same time dissolves into that  
which is meaningless.<sup>18</sup>

What do we want from meaning?  
What is at stake in meaninglessness?

How does this oscillation function in Irvine's work?



The various looped video sequences in  
ANOTHER DIFFICULT SUNSET in which a  
man and woman pass each other repeatedly without



encountering each other are linked by references to  
animals: a conversation about what would be the  
case if lions could talk;



a newspaper story about a tiger that killed a keeper "who showed it nothing but love" at Aspinall's zoo;



the tiger story from Brautigan's *In Watermelon Sugar* referred to above;



and sequences with a dog, and in front of the tiger enclosure at The London Zoo.



These repeated animal references, especially those to tigers, cause the world depicted to teeter into fable.



Instead of looking at the world, we start to look for meaning.



The seeding of the videos with animal and tiger references provokes us to look for connections: however.



Meaning does not come as something that is present, as fulfillment, but rather the videos show *missed* encounters.



What is missed? Or, better, what is it to miss?

Stanislaw Lem's book *A Perfect Vacuum* is a collection of book reviews of nonexistent works of literature, one of which is titled *Rien du tout, or la*

*conséquence* [Nothing, or the Consequence] by Mme Solange Marriot—that her first name evokes the image of a fortune-teller is perhaps no coincidence.

According to the reviewer this—her first book—is also the first novel ever to have reached the limit of what writing can do:

It promised to communicate nothing,  
to tell of nothing, to signify not a thing,  
but merely to be, as a cloud is, a table, a tree.  
Fine in theory. It failed, however [...].  
What decides the defeat is the issue of  
contexts: on them—on that which is  
completely inexpressible—depends  
the sense of what we say.<sup>19</sup>

A solution might be to writing nothing:

It was necessary, then—and herein is  
the consequence—to write nothing.  
But can such a task make sense?  
To write *nothing*—is it not the same  
as to write *nothing*? What then?...<sup>20</sup>

How then to write *nothing* (italicized,  
as if “nothing” can be substantive,  
which of course it cannot) without writing nothing—

that is, without ceasing to write?  
Would negation be a way?

The first sentence of *Rien du tout,*  
*or la conséquence* reads, “The train did  
not arrive”; in the next sentence we find  
“He did not come.”<sup>21</sup>

Although the sentence affirms nothing existentially,  
for the reader,

there is conjured up involuntarily in his imagination a scene taking place at some railway station, a scene of waiting for someone who has not arrived, and since he knows the sex of he author (authoress), the waiting for the nonarrival immediately carries the anticipation of an erotic encounter. What of this? Everything! Because the whole responsibility for these conjectures, from the very first words, falls on the reader.<sup>22</sup>

And the reviewer goes on:

The reader therefore is constantly thrown back on himself, but that is the problem of his own anticipations, conjectures, his hypotheses ad hoc.<sup>23</sup>

The reader is no longer the one who “sees through” the fiction as if it were illusion masking a reality, in case because of the negation nothing illusory is posited.

Rather, by being drawn into the interpretation of *nothing*,

the basis of the illusoriness of fiction as such, the reader is exposed to his or her own nothingness.



The train's not there...and he hasn't arrived says the fortune teller in IVANA'S ANSWERS,



which begins with a train leaving a station at night, and a woman's arms embracing a column of the building—



evoking the condition Cyril Connolly called *angoisse de gare*, also to be found in the nighttime station paintings by the Belgian artist Paul Delvaux.



But, we will be induced to ask, when exactly does this scene take place in relation to the other parts of the work?



Indeed, does it take place at all? The film cuts to the examination, through a loupe, of insects,



followed by the interpretation of tea leaves in a cup— a reflection of its own specular activity and that of the viewer.



IVANA' S ANSWERS is a work about time,  
about seeing and being seen,  
interpreting the world and being a part of a story.



so when we then see Ivana looking at the insects  
through a loupe, we are aware that she is also being  
looked at by the camera.



"No sorry...I'm mistaken.



The magnifier through which the tendrils  
on the insects leg are seen doubles the camera  
as a viewing instrument,



Mariela Tasseli, the reader, points out in the tea leaves  
birds sitting on a branch like  
question marks but then negates this—



They're not question marks,  
they're answers...answers to  
your questions.



What questions? asks Ivana.



Exactly. . well done! says the reader.



Ivana is looking at the tea leaves, but she needs to put herself in the picture—



the tea leaves rhyme with the insects,



and we see a shot from above, with slides of insects all over the floor so that Ivana is surrounded by them.



This is followed by a shot of the tea-leaf reader, with a framed picture of a feather on the wall.



Later we will see Ivana watching birds in an aviary, but first the scene shifts to a view of a park, and while she says



I have the sensation that if I'm distracted for a second things fall apart,



someone sitting on a bench just below the centre of the picture disappears—



as if the world's holding together, indeed its very being, depends on her perception.



But is it her perception? Shortly afterwards we see her looking into an aviary of falcons through a slot in the wall;



the camera observes the side of her face as she is doing this, and she appears unaware of it.



As she looks at the falcons, we look at her, but then are we not also in her position, looking while unaware of being looked at?



Isn't this an analog of cinema? So, if Ivana is being watched by us, what gaze are we under?

In describing the gaze, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan tells the story of a fishing expedition he went on in Brittany,

a “romantic” spot where conditions were harsh for the fisherman who lived there, and many died of tuberculosis.

One of the fishermen on the boat, Petit-Jean (“Little John”), who had already died of TB by the time of the telling,

points out to the young Parisian intellectual a floating can,

witness to the canning industry which we, in  
fact, were supposed to supply [...]  
It glittered in the sun.  
And Petit-Jean said to me—*You see that can?*  
*Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!*

But for Lacan,

if what Petit-Jean said to me, namely, that the  
can did not see me, had any meaning, it was  
because in a sense, it was looking at me, all the  
same.

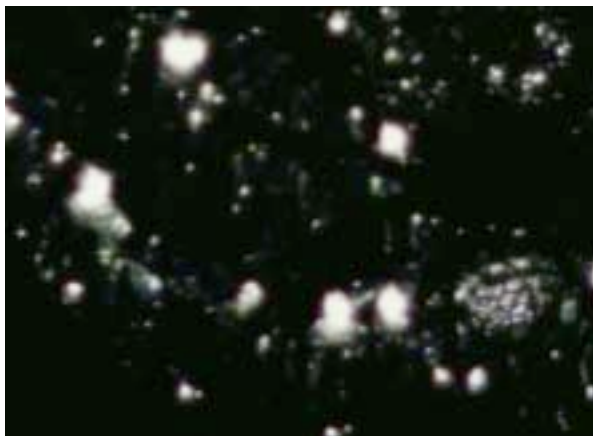
It was looking at me at the level of the point of  
light, the point at which everything that looks  
at me is situated—and I am not speaking  
metaphorically.<sup>24</sup>

A condition for Lacan being able to see the sardine  
can is that he is himself also in the visible world,  
which for him means under the gaze of the Other.

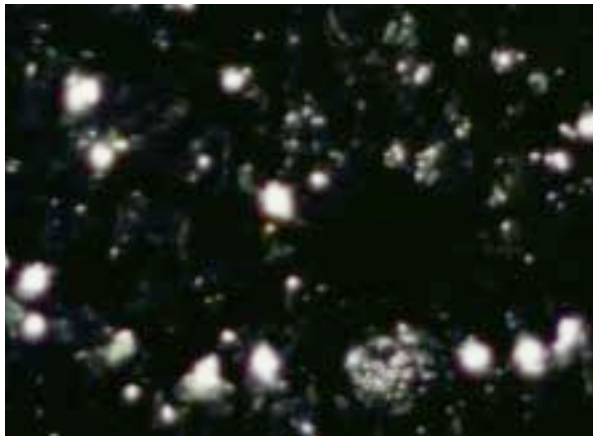
It is from the point of view of this gaze that we  
observers are ourselves “in the picture”.

For the psychoanalyst this place of the gaze is Other  
as the unconscious, and therefore not a position  
that we can occupy as consciousnesses:

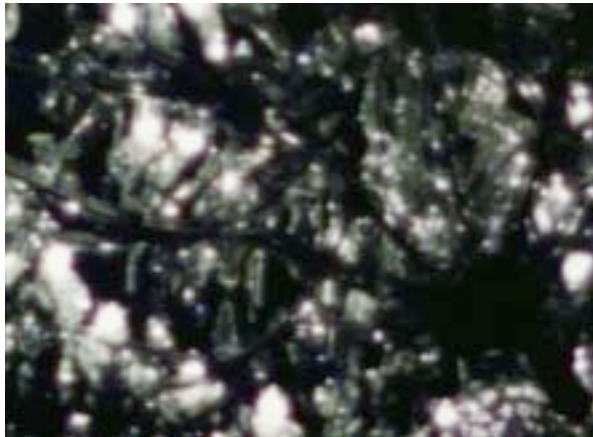
if this gaze appears *within* the field of vision,  
it is as a blinding glint or glimmer,



the flash of light emanating from the can  
(it can also manifest as a stain, as Lacan describes in  
his analysis of Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors*).

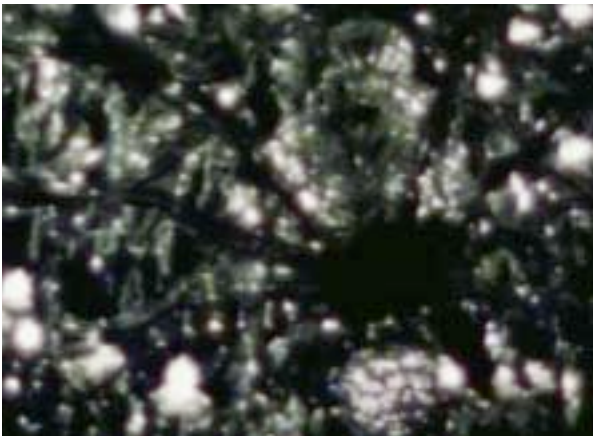


while the voice-over tells a dry story  
with a lot of vodka about a man and  
a drunk woman sitting at opposite sides of the bar.

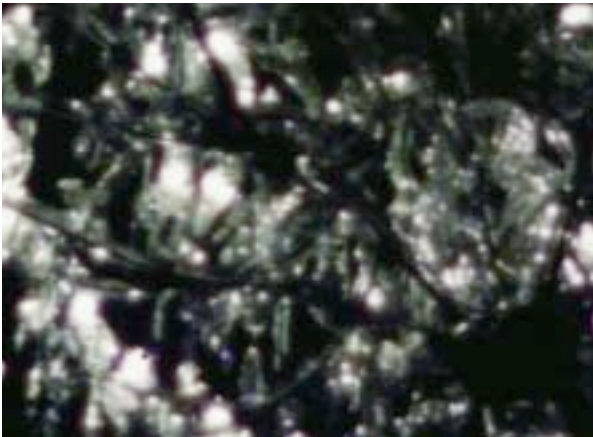


The scenario concerns the relation between distance  
and desire (they sit at opposite sides of the bar).

Irvine's early work STAR (1994) presents this  
gaze in a super-8 film that captures the glitter of light  
emanating from the crystals of a chandelier,



Hey, handicap, would you like to  
have another vodka?  
she repeats three times.



His refusal to join her is implied, and drunk,  
she becomes a falling star.

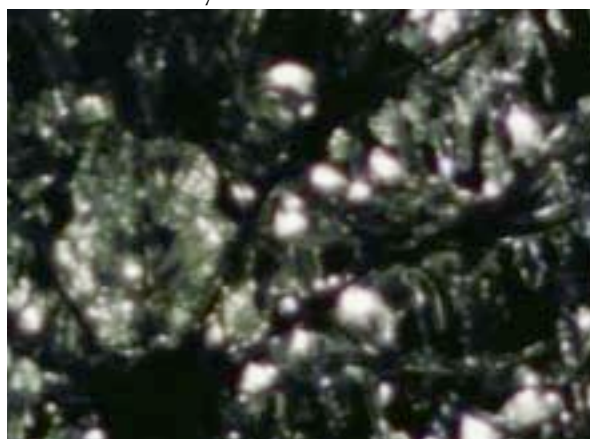
We might also consider that what holds things together for Ivana is not, as she thinks, her own consciousness as a centre of perception,



but rather the place from which she is looked at, which is, in the end, not that of the viewer of the film, but rather of the gaze, the point of light

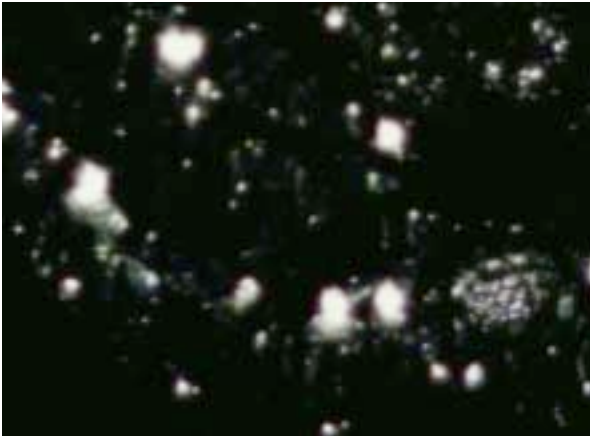
from which everything is situated.  
If this source of consistency is not thought of in solely visual terms, other objects—

such as that button that holds it all together in another work—  
could also embody it.



What we see is not a representation of the story—not an illustration—

but something that broaches the limit of representation, like the glitter from a crystal chandelier.



While Lacan tells a story that shows us something about the gaze, Irvine shows us something of the gaze that touches on that which is unnarratable in the story.



This also occurs in THE HOTTEST SUN, THE DARKEST HOUR, where the narration—



to a black and white 16mm film of a man sitting at a bar looking up and down a street in Rome—of the encounter of a young man



with an older one, is accompanied by another projection which comprises an almost unreadable film of fireflies, like scratches on the celluloid.

In IVANA'S ANSWERS, from a shot of live bluebottles, we return to the two women surrounded by specimens, looking into the tea cup.

Ivana asks, Is there anything else?

Yes, there's a bat, the reader replies,  
but that's got nothing to do  
with you.

Bats will appear in another work,  
but in the meantime,  
the sense we take away from this remark

is that neither Ivana nor the viewer  
is the centre of the world—  
it is not her consciousness that holds the world together.

Fortune-telling reveals coincidences  
and connections that are beyond intentionality.

The references to another work of literature, and to  
other works by Irvine, suggest that for the artist art-  
works themselves do something rather like that.

Insofar as these works use the mediums of film and video,  
the events they stage are also non-events; arrivals,  
watched again and again, are equally departures.



In the installation LOSING DORIS (1996) we are shown two separate life-size projections of images together with a single voice-over told by a



woman with a German accent accompanied by music: one projection is of a woman in an armchair in a sitting room; the other is of a woman outdoors.



She recounts a meeting between a young man and woman. She is telling him about fish swimming around in a cave who have lost their sight



and wondering how it happened:  
He blinks and blinks and tries to smile.



The woman looks very far away and strange to him, as his hands move about, restless.



In one of the projections, she moves her head, and blinks.



The other screen shows a picture of a woman in a street; she is holding out a hat in her hand, which becomes like a strange blob or stain.



The voice-over describes, a man who stares at a glass with two ice cubes inside melting,



and then is distracted by a small empty space a few feet away from him which had once belonged to a young woman.



He addresses the space—in other words, he addresses an absence—which begins to become a presence: It moved a little closer and



began to look vaguely familiar.



He smiled. In relation to the sensation of being trapped, absence and loss, here, could also be the conditions for freedom.

## PART VII



To a piano and violin accompaniment, the film HOLDING IT ALL TOGETHER (2002) begins by showing an old photograph of a man



and a woman on each side of an older woman. Maybe from the 1930s or 40s? They could be a family.



The man has his eyes closed; women are both looking at the camera.



Then the man fades, leaving the older woman looking at the camera and the younger one looking up at the sky.



The younger one's arm is over the shoulder of the older woman, who holds her hand.

Irvine uses the photograph, either made to move or with the illusion of movement, to explore loss and the abyss that opens up when things fall apart, as well as

ways of holding the world together through its interpenetration by memory, and certain otherwise insignificant objects that take on a special rôle.

A woman's voice with an Irish accent says:

Then he disappears from the picture.

He's got both hands stuffed inside the pockets of his pinstripe jacket...It's raining heavy wet stuff...Standing there, soaking wet, staring at something in his head, one button holds it all together.

The voiceover doesn't quite match the image—it is not a description of what we are seeing—and this opens up a gap.

The suggestion is that the disappearance of the man **staring at something in his head** is connected with the loss of the button.

Sometimes something can be so used and worn,  
so threadbare, that there is only one little thing  
that stops it from falling apart.

But the rôle of the button here seems to be connected  
not just with the jacket, but with the consistency and  
coherence of the world as such.

Whether the sense of holding it all together relates to  
his experience, or ours as viewers, is ambiguous.

He disappears for the viewer,  
but maybe it is also the case that his existence  
for himself is linked to his relation to the button,

that it is the object that for him holds it all together,  
that keeps him from “fading”, as he does in the film.

The situation is analogous to the moment in  
IVANA ' S ANSWERS when Ivana says “I have the  
sensation that if I’m distracted for a second things fall

apart” and in the film the person on the bench disappears.

Many of Irvine’s works pose the question of what it is that holds the world together, and what does it mean for this “thing” to be lost.

Again and again her works pose themselves on that edge between consistency and disintegration.



FOR ALL THE LIVES WE' LL NEVER LIVE (2004).

Disappearance is also enacted in



At the archive of the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds, Irvine found photographs of a woman doctor who was a friend of the sculptor Betty Rea (1904-65).



To the music of *Spiegel im Spiegel* by Arvo Pärt, the image draws back from a grainy detail, which seems to resemble a skull, to reveal the face and then body



ing only a curtain, which disappears in its turn. It is as if Irvine wants to resurrect this woman by animating the photograph,



This interplay between still and moving image, between photograph and film, between return and loss, is reminiscent of Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962),



the trousered woman sitting in a window, holding a china cup of tea, looking towards the camera. In a second image she turns her head away, then fades, leav-



but she cannot be brought back, and we are reminded that her's was a life we cannot share.



where the protagonist returns to the past through his memory to find a woman who, in the only moving sequence of this film of stills, blinks as she awakens.



Another work dealing with loss, TOWARDS A POLAR SEA, takes as its starting point the memory of a building, the house in Frith Street in which the



The voiceovers are spoken by the people who work in the gallery. The ghosts of the past haunt the present, traces of absence.



they may see themselves acting—acting themselves, as well as the figures in the narrative of Franklin's disappearance.



work was first shown, and in which the explorer Sir John Franklin lived for a time before he disappeared on his final polar exploration.



The participants become fictions of themselves who live a private fantasy within the reality of their semi-public workspace, in which, through Irvine's film,



So in expressing their feelings about his absence, they are also leading a double life, as private and public figures, speaking of the absence of their own intimacy.

PART VIII

In Jorge Luis Borges’ tale “The Garden of the Forking Paths”, a Chinese spy for Germany during the First World War, finds a way to make known from England

to his boss in Berlin where the new British artillery park has been established.

This spy has an ancestor, Ts’ui Pên, who wrote a mysterious novel, and was supposed to have built a labyrinth, only no-one had ever found it.

He believed in an infinite series of times, in a dizzily growing, ever spreading network of diverging, converging and parallel times. This web of time—the strands of which approach one another, bifurcate, intersect or ignore each other through the centuries—embraces every possibility. We do not exist in most of them. In some you exist and not I, while in others I do, and you do not, and in yet others both of us exist.<sup>25</sup>

He visits a sinologist, Stephen Albert, and learns that the key to the labyrinth is the only word prohibited in the novel—“time”:

Time itself is the labyrinth, and the latter is the key to the structure of time.



including those that never existed and never will, is part of a possible world and mirrors that world.

Borges is echoing the philosopher Leibniz's idea that there are an infinite number of possible individuals, and that each possible individual,

How can something both occur and not occur, such that incompatible events may coincide?

Would that not be to deny truth, a condition for which is non-contradiction?

Leibniz avoids contradiction by saying that these contrary possibilities occupy worlds that are impossible.

Deleuze refers to Borges' story to argue that the labyrinth of time is

the line which forks and keeps on forking, passing through *impossible presents*, returning to *not-necessarily true pasts*.



Cinematic time—as a form of virtual memory—allows for the co-existence of the impossible, the paths not taken with the one taken,



If truth requires non-contradiction, then the condition for the

simultaneity of impossible presents, or the co-existence of non-necessarily true pasts is the power of the false

that is inherent in cinematic time of the *time-image*.<sup>26</sup>

all equally real even if only one becomes actual. In this way, revisiting the past may open up the present itself to heterogenous futures.



In EXHIBITION OF 1957 RE- VISITED  
(2004) Irvine takes two photographs from  
the *Looking at People* exhibition

objects around to make nine images.  
Irvine thus creates paths which may or may not have  
been followed; connections between people that



incompatible with one another—incompatible.  
Of the two men and three women,  
we follow in particular a woman with glasses,

at the Pushkin Museum, Moscow—they are again  
from the Betty Rea archive and include a sculpture by  
her—and manipulates them by moving people and



may or may not have been made;  
and, when we see that one image is a “flipped”  
version of another, spaces that are “impossible”,

because she is looking away from the works of art,  
suggesting that the exhibition space is one  
full of erotic possibility.



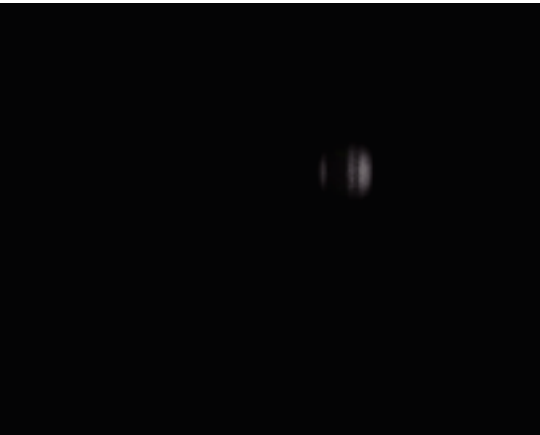
The very act of revisiting makes it otherwise, opening virtual paths and connections between people that are created by trying to re-enter a space that no longer exists.



Subject to the “power of the false”, the archive is turned into a place not just of recollection but also of rearrangement and potential.



Elsewhere Borges writes of his mythic land Tlön, which has its own philosophy, language, geometry and literature, that all things both duplicate themselves and tend to become effaced and lose their details when they are forgotten. A classic example is the doorway which survived so long as it was visited by a beggar and disappeared at this death. At times some birds, a horse, have saved the ruins of an amphitheatre.<sup>27</sup>



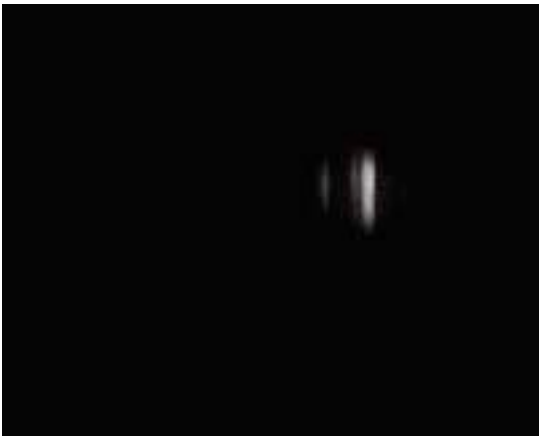
In Irvine’s video NIGHTINGALE (2004), as if produced by the song of a bird, parts of a folly from the Villa Borghese in Rome emerge out of the blackness.



If the bird sings the building into being,  
so the appearing and disappearing of the folly seems  
like a materialization of the song.<sup>28</sup>



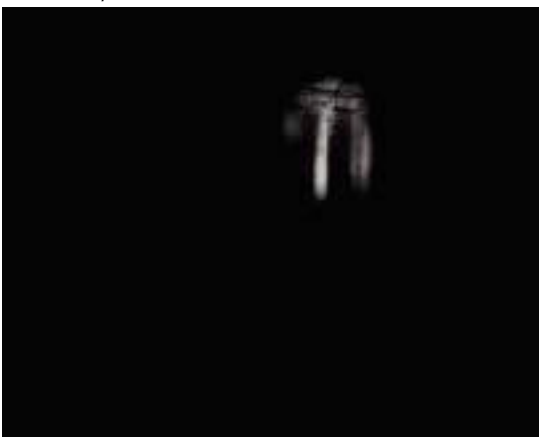
The appearance is momentary,  
and we never see the whole thing at once.



We are reminded that disappearance is intrinsic  
to manifestation, and that the being of the world  
is not only for us,



not something that we humans control exclusively,  
but is conjured up by many different beings,  
including animals.



The world is the co-existence of impossibles,  
the different worlds of humans and animals  
conjured in time,



as well as the coincidence of different times in space.

# PART IX



THE SILVER BRIDGE (2003) begins with starlings swarming to the sound of their shrill cries against the blue sky,



at first separate then flocking together like a single being.



As we stare at them, they become increasingly alien and a little sinister.



In another video we see a man pacing in a field as if he is waiting for someone; he eventually sits down under a tree



that has been blown into a sideways curve by the wind.



The viewpoint is quite low, from the bushes—  
is it a human, or an animal, that is watching him?



Another film shows a forest in which stags walk  
and graze between freestanding white doors—



in a gesture towards an episode from the Irish tale  
*The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne*.



The white doors create the effect of something at  
once surreal and staged.



In a fourth film a woman enters the bat house  
of a zoo, and becomes an onlooker to a diorama  
recreation of the bats' world—



we see a close-up of two bats interacting.



After a while, a man, who looks like the man who was waiting by the tree but is coming from the opposite direction looks at her in passing, and leaves.



One of the bats follows the other, and is pushed away—it is as if the bats express what doesn't happen between the humans.



Another film of the bats shows them hanging from a wire ceiling, flying, and stretching their membranaceous wings.



In a sixth film, we see a woman in a natural history museum slowly blinking her heavily made up eyes, like the specimens around her,



filmed using a slow motion technique familiar to nature films, to show what animals are really doing; but the mode of observation changes the observed,



and, slowed down, her eyelids seem to grow heavier, harder to lift, a metamorphosis accompanied by the cries of seagulls.



We also see her from above,  
amid the display of taxidermied and skeletal animals  
—we are reminded of the relation of humans,



via primaeval life forms,  
to the starlings flocking in the first film.



The cast-iron walkways of the natural history museum,  
as well as the skeleton hanging from its ceiling,  
are recalled by the skeleton of the bridge in the next film,



across which a woman crawls on her stomach  
away from us towards an arched doorway,  
accompanied by loud bird sounds—



rather than walking,  
she is forced by the structure of the bridge  
to revert to a form of locomotion, crawling,



reminiscent of a reptile,  
as if in a regression to an earlier evolutionary stage.



But the fact that she gets nowhere throws such notions of progress into question, as well as the idea of the human as a separate and



“higher” life form—the birds seem far away and strange, but we are related to them.



Finally, we see two women hanging from a disused bridge by their feet—like bats—performing acrobatics together, embracing each other, over water, their long



hair and identical clothing making them look almost like doubles, until one drops down, leaving the other, legs folded, hanging by one hand from the bridge.



Why, in THE SILVER BRIDGE, is it specifically bats that reappear, and seem to provide the model for the relationship between the two



women at the end? Humans behaving like bats inevitably recall the figure of the vampire.

The vampire reproduces as a species not by giving birth, but by infecting human beings to whom he—or she—is drawn.



another girl is left to recover from a carriage accident outside the feudal house to which her father had retired.

The narrator in J. Sheridan LeFanu's *Carmilla*, originally published as a short story in 1872, tells of what happened when, as a girl,

This languid girl, who disappears from her room at night, and exactly resembles a girl in a painting from 1698, seems to draw the narrator to her: Her soft cheek was glowing against mine. 'Darling, darling,' she murmured, 'I live in you; and you would die for me, I love you so.' I started from her. She was gazing on me with eyes from which all fire, all meaning had flown, and a face colorless and apathetic.<sup>29</sup>

The vampire crosses not only the boundaries between human and animal, but also between sexualities.

The vampire is prone to be fascinated with an engrossing vehemence, resembling the passion of love, by particular persons and in certain cases

seems to yearn for something like sympathy and consent.

It multiplies itself outside the lines of filiation of the patriarchal law:  
It is the nature of vampires to increase

and multiply, but according to an ascertained and ghostly law.<sup>30</sup>

Irvine matches the alienness of the animal world with the strangeness of others.

Others, and animals, are not entirely inaccessible to us, in so far as we recognize that we are strangers to ourselves.

Henceforth, we know that we are foreigners to ourselves, and it is with the help of that sole support that we can attempt to live with others.

writes Julia Kristeva.<sup>31</sup>

Or, as Giorgio Agamben puts it, it is not a matter of the difference between humans and animals, but the division of life within us, between organic and relational life:

The division of life into vegetal and relational, organic and animal, animal and human, therefore passes first of all as a mobile border within living man, and without this intimate caesura the very decision of what is human and what is not would probably not be possible. It is possible to oppose man to other living things, and at the same time to organize the complex—and not always edifying—economy of relations between men and animals, only because something like an animal life has been separated within man, only because his distance and proximity to the animal have been measured and recognized first of all in the closest and most intimate place.<sup>32</sup>

Only insofar as we recognize that we are other to ourselves are we able to acknowledge the other, the stranger.

And only out of our intimacy  
with the caesura  
within us between the human and the non-human

are we able to relate to the worlds of other beings.

As Irvine shows so well in her work, the world of the other  
and other worlds are not to be encompassed by coloniz-  
ing them, or making them conform with our desires.

Rather, among the missed encounters and failed  
connections, there is a hint that some kind of co-  
existence with others might be attained

through the acknowledgment of differences  
across an abyss of ignorance,  
the recognition of worlds we may share

with other people,  
and with animals,  
without really ever knowing them.



IN A WORLD LIKE THIS (2006)  
recreates a space within the world where the world  
of the human family meets that of the birds, and,



This coming together of the human and the bird is  
anticipated in IVANA' S ANSWERS, although  
there Ivana watched falcons in an aviary through a slit,

despite their utter difference, these creatures come to  
resemble one another.

separated from them not only by the wall but also by  
seeing her world in terms of perception, with her as  
the centre and perceiver.

The position of the later work is indicated by two  
words of the title, IN and THIS : humans and ani-  
mals are *in* a world together, a garden or sanctuary,

and the world shown is *this* world—  
at once this-worldly and a world in a world,  
almost utopian, yet not nowhere but somewhere.

In IVANA' S ANSWERS

the reader sees in the tea-leaves  
someone whose body is made up of falcons.

They're sitting on a branch like question marks,  
and you're there too.

The same could apply to the viewer  
of Jaki Irvine's works.



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Notes:

1. Stanley Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love" in *Must we mean what we say?*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976 (1st ed. 1969), p.276.
2. Cavell, *Must we mean what we say?*, op.cit., pp. 277-8.
3. Cavell, *Must we mean what we say?*, op.cit., p. 286.
4. Irvine's THE ACTRESS could in part be considered as a reworking of Jacques Lacan's account of the "mirror stage", where the infant identifies with its image in a mirror, which goes on to form the ideal with which, as a body in bits and pieces, it does not correspond (see Jacques Lacan, "The mirror stage as formative

of the function of the I as revealed through psychoanalytic experience", in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: W. W. Norton, 1977, pp. 1–7), with regard to the woman's agency as an actress, at once performing and detached from the performance (for this aspect of acting, see Denis Diderot, *The Paradox of Acting*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1957).

5. "Thoughtless Liar" from Mina, *Minantologia*, 1969.
6. Quoted from F. Gonzalez-Crussi, *Three Forms of Sudden Death and other reflections on the grandeur and misery of the body*, London, Pan, 1987, p. 199, note 4, in Jaki Irvine, *Plans for Forgotten Works*, ex. cat., Leeds, Henry Moore Institute, 2005, p. 25, and as a text on a photograph, p. 26.
7. See Gonzalez-Crussi, op.cit., p.91-2
8. See Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, pp.63-171, esp. Pp.71-2.
9. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.,
10. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.9.
11. People who could not afford dental treatment would have all their teeth extracted and replaced with dentures.
12. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Crisis of Verse" in *Divagations*, trans. Barbara Johnson, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, p.210.
13. Yann Martel, *The Facts behind the Helsinki Roccamatios*, Toronto, Vintage, 2003 (orig. publ. 1993), pp.3-72.
14. Yann Martel, *Life of Pi*, Canada, Vintage, 2002, p. 352.
15. Richard Brautigan, *In Watermelon Sugar*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin/ Seymour Lawrence, 1989 (originally published 1969), p. 34.
16. *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, second edition (1958)., II, xi., p. 223.

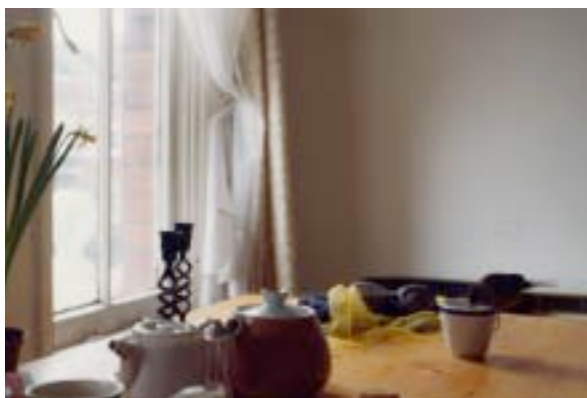
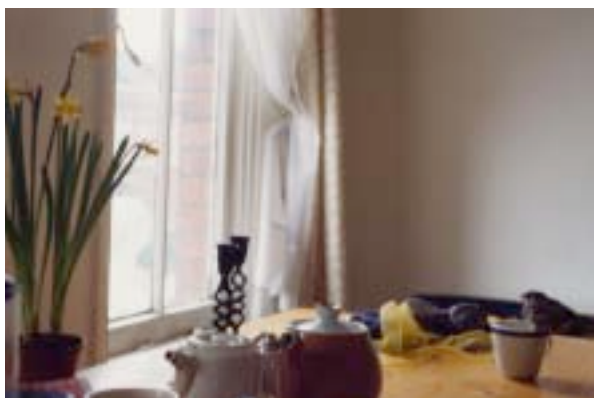
17. *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988, p.69.
18. "The Trouble with Speaking" in *Art from Ireland: Jaki Irvine/Alistair MacLennan* (ex.cat. The Venice Biennale, The Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland, 1997), n.p.
19. Stanislaw Lem, *A Perfect Vacuum*, trans Michael Kandel, Chicago, Northwestern University Press, 1999, p. 70.
20. Lem, *A Perfect Vacuum*, op. cit., p. 71.
21. Lem, *A Perfect Vacuum*, op. cit. p.75.
22. Lem, *A Perfect Vacuum*, op. cit. p. 75.
23. Lem, *A Perfect Vacuum*, op. cit. p. 76.
24. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, London, Penguin, 1977, p. 95
25. Jorge Luis Borges, *Fictions*, trans. Anthony Kerrigan, London, Calder, 1985, p.91.
26. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, London: The Athlone Press, 1989, p.131.
27. Jorge Luis Borges, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" in *Labyrinths*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1970, p. 39.
28. NIGHTINGALE is produced using a computer program that layers black over the image, and allows the user to "rub out" the blackness.
29. J. Sheridan LeFanu, *Carmilla*, Aegypan Press, p. 60.
30. LeFanu, *Carmilla*, op. cit., p. 145, 147.
31. Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves, Strangers to Ourselves*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991, p. 170.
32. Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, Stanford, Cal., Stanford University Press, 2004, pp. 15-16.



TALES FROM A NERVOUS SYSTEM



BREATHING MADE EASY,  
PRACTICAL SOLUTION NO. 1



A CUP OF COFFEE



MARGARET AGAIN

INDEX AND CATALOGUE OF WORKS

1991

TALES FROM A NERVOUS SYSTEM

Tape/slide, sound, Super-8 &  
light boxes installation

1992

Ouch: A Setting for a Jewel  
A State of Great Terror  
Sonsbeek '93 Project  
(With Blue Funk)

BREATHING MADE EASY,  
PRACTICAL SOLUTION NO. 1  
Tape/Slide installation

1993

FOREIGN BODY : A LOVE STORY  
Tape/Slide, sound & Super-8  
installation

SAD MAN

2min 30sec super-8 trans-  
ferred to video

SWEETTOOTH

3min Super 8 film transferred  
to 16mm film

. . . . . p. xx

STAR

3 min Super-8 film trans-  
ferred to 16mm film

. . . . . p. xx

1994

A CUP OF COFFEE

2 colour prints

HOW I FLEW AROUND THE WORLD

WITH MRS. VICTOR BRUCE

Tape/Answerphone installa-  
tion

MARGARET AGAIN

5 screen S-VHS video instal-  
lation

UNTITLED (CHEMICALS)

7 Foot x 7 foot photograph,  
hung on glass sheet.



UNTITLED (CHEMICALS)



THE FEELING  
THAT SOMETHING 'S WRONG

1996

ANOTHER DIFFICULT SUNSET

5 screen Super-8 transferred  
to video installation  
. . . . . p. xx

EYELASHES

6 min Super-8 transferred to  
video  
. . . . . p. xx

LOSING DORIS

2-screen video installation  
. . . . . p. xx

THE FEELING

THAT SOMETHING'S WRONG

Photograph & text work  
. . . . . p. xx

1997

ELVISES

3feet x5feet  
B&W photograph

LATER STILL

2x B&W photographs.

SPAGHETTI CATS

4 x B&W photographs

1998

THE HOTTEST SUN,

THE DARKEST HOUR

5X 16mm B&W films  
2xB&W photographs  
. . . . . p. xx

2001

IVANA'S ANSWERS

Single screen video  
10 min 50 secs  
. . . . . p. xx

2003

THE SILVER BRIDGE

8 screen video installation  
. . . . . p. xx

HOLDING IT ALL TOGETHER

Single screen Video  
. . . . . p. xx

THE ACTRESS

Single Screen Video  
3 min 56 secs  
. . . . . p. xx

SHADOW OF A WOMAN

black & white prints

2004

SWIMMERS & SEAGULLS

Single screen dvd continuous  
loop, 9 mins  
. . . . . p. xx

FOR ALL THE LIVES

WE'LL NEVER LIVE

(part of "Plans for Forgotten  
Works" series)  
Single screen dvd continuous  
loop, 2 mins 30 secs  
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THREE FORMS OF SUDDEN DEATH

3 screen video installation  
. . . . . p. xx

EXHIBITION OF 1957 RE-VISITED

8 B&W photographs  
. . . . . p. xx

MOUNTAIN WIND

. . . . . p. xx



ELVISES



10 SECONDS ON  
A BARE MOUNTAIN



SPAGHETTI CATS



INSTANCES OF  
DEFERRED SADNESS



OLD CONDITIONS FOR NEW LOVE



DESERT VULTURES

BAT- SMILE

Colour photowork

NIGHTINGALE

Single screen video

10mins 9 secs

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10 SECONDS ON A BARE MOUNTAIN

Colour photowork

WORM DRAWING

Single Screen video

5 mins

CLEVER SMILE

Single screen video

1 min 56 sec

TOWARDS A POLAR SEA

6 screen video installation

Towards a Polar Sea book  
project

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2006

IN A WORLD LIKE THIS

9- screen video installation

. . . . . p. xx

MAN LOOKING AT DRIBBLE

ink on paper drawing

2007

56" FANTASY

Single Screen video

5 min 26 secs

INSTANCES OF DEFERRED SADNESS

1.5x 10 metre ink on paper  
drawing

2008

DESERT VULTURES

Colour Photograph

OLD CONDITIONS FOR NEW LOVE

Colour Photograph

IN THE DARK FORESTS

OF OUR HEARTS

ink on paper drawing

CONSEQUENCES

ink on paper drawing

HUNT US DOWN

ink on paper drawing

ROOM ACOUSTICS RE- VISITED

Single Screen Video

11min 5 secs



Edited by Jaki Irvine  
and Will Holder

Designed by Will Holder

Co-ordinated by Emer McGarry  
of The Model Arts and Niland

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*(continued from page 10)*

Born in Ireland, where she lives and works  
Jaki Irvine's career spans time spent in London  
and Italy, and she has exhibited extensively interna-  
tionally. Although she spent a large amount  
of time living and working away from Ireland  
her work has always been central to contemporary  
practice in Ireland.

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tunity to survey Jaki's career to date should also  
be seen as part of an ever evolving and enquiring  
practice and Jaki's contribution to the book is part  
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Sarah Glennie

Director

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