

PISCATOR PRESS PRINT RESIDENCY PROPOSAL

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**A BIRD IS IN THE LIBRARY: a three-act performance with birds and books**

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(unpublished)

**ACT I**

Imagine that a bird has entered the library.

The natural order is disturbed in that moment.

No one, including the bird itself, wants or expects it there.

The bird lands and walks. It flies and perches. Its movements are not human. The bird in flight points out that it is bird but also, to the pedestrians below, that they are human. While bird looks down from the top of a stack of books, the humans become aware of their own movement particularities: on their feet (or wheels), carrying heavy loads, weaving between lines of desks and towering shelves; sitting and walking and reaching and reading. In that brief moment when an alien species makes itself known, it makes us known to ourselves in relation to it and potentially, to other alike and different beings.

This then, will be the first letterpress print: "A BIRD IS IN THE LIBRARY". It will be typeset as an announcement, a notice, a warning to humans: initially, to beware of this non-human and its unpredictable movements. But something about the typesetting (perhaps its arcane typeface and/or its multiple positioning in odd places throughout the library) might lead to a secondary response—that these signs are the beginning of an imaginative journey. Whether there really is a bird in the library, or not, the idea of the non-human presence becomes absorbed into moments of human self-reflection such that the scene is set for a further series of intra-species encounters.

**ACT II**

A whole lot of birds, it seems, have now taken up residence in the library.

They are hard to spot: they try to remain undisturbed, finding perching sites not at human eye-level.

Occasionally a ruffling or cooing sound might be heard.

Other signs are going up: BIRD AUDIT IN PROGRESS.

The second typeset notice, "BIRD AUDIT IN PROGRESS", initiates a deeper conceptual relationship between birds and human knowledge by way of that system we must all become proficient in at University: the library catalogue. Library users become citizens of the library catalogue and acknowledge as one of its pioneering navigators, Melvil Dewey (1851–1931). Dewey's Decimal Classification System subliminally determines how humans travel vertically and horizontally through the Fisher Library. The Dewey system is a way to find the birds hiding in the library and learn more about their distribution patterns in human knowledge. A densely typeset two-column print of Dewey Call Numbers and their corresponding Subject Headings will be editioned as a unique GUIDE TO BIRDS IN THE LIBRARY. With the avidity of bird "twitchers", anyone equipped with this guide will be able to chase down these bird items within the library and tick off personal sightings as they are made.

**ACT III**

Having started to actively look for where the birds are hiding in the library—learning about their habits in art, poetry, biology, history, religion, ethics, environmentalism, and more—the humans are now gathering in groups to discuss their findings. Together, they WATCH FOR THE BIRDS.

Now the inward-facing nature of the library's architecture and contents is turned outwards. One of Fisher Library's distinctive architectural features is the rhythmic placement of vertical apertures that provide slivered views of Victoria Park as well as natural light for reading at the carrels. Reminders to shift one's focus from within to without will appear above or at these desks during week three: "WATCH FOR THE BIRDS".

The insertion of the preposition "for" in WATCH FOR THE BIRDS introduces a deliberate dual-purpose imperative, whereby we humans are, by our vigilance, undertaking an act of caring, and are also vigilant for our own safety (for instance, we watch for magpies in Spring in case they swoop us). The birds are not,

in the end, tamed by our gaze. They remain wild. In this third and final publicly-oriented “act” of the project, I would want to enlist a newly formed group of Library-Bird-Watchers to assist in the making of BIRDBOOK HAIKU: three-line, seventeen-syllable texts gleaned from the pages of books previously found with assistance from the GUIDE TO BIRDS IN THE LIBRARY. Applying the techniques of haiku generation that I developed for my *News Haiku* project this “act” is a group action for multiple participants who will find and discuss the poetic potential of otherwise non-poetic sources. It’s a group process I’ve led in many other contexts in Australia and overseas.

I would spend the remainder of the residency setting these haiku, printing and binding them in book form with a typeset page of line citations at the back.

A BIRD IS IN THE LIBRARY would represent for me an exciting coalescence of my creative and technical interests in text-based art, epistemological systems, texts as “readymades”, site-specific practice, performative practice within a context of interspecies encounters, arcane technologies and more. Besides which, I’m as enchanted by the Albion Press as I am by the birds.

### **Postscript**

Another Act was added after ACT I (thus making it four Acts in total). Four small editions were made and posted around the library suggesting the presence of particular bird species (all of them four letters long as though this were part of the species’ taxonomy: *A tern is in the library?*, *A crow is in the library?*, *A hawk is in the library?*, and *A Swan is in the library?*).

The participant-oriented BIRDBOOK HAIKU was not forthcoming. Instead, an artist book titled *Bird Voices* was produced in an edition of 3 plus 1 A.P., with each page a reprinting of the text descriptions of certain bird calls from Slater and Callaby’s *Field Guide to Australian Birds*, (V. 1 Non-passerines in 1970 and V. 2 Passerines in 1974).