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The Impossibility of Crows: Notes on Depth

Sometimes we come up against a problem that's not simply hard to solve but somehow within it includes aspects of us--it seems to know where our limitations lie. We tell someone. He offers a suggestion but his suggestion falls so short of our difficulty that we wonder if he's even heard what the difficulty is. 'Superficial,' we think to ourselves and we know what 'superficial' means. It means 'oblivious.' It means 'irritating.' We feel like ship's officers in the middle of a hard ocean crossing stopped by a well-intentioned passenger wanting to lecture us about a piece of the deck. We're amazed anyone could care more about this plank, this chip, than the ocean itself.

Next to such superficiality a problem like ours seems deep. Like ocean water it's hard to contain inside defining boundaries. It encompasses us; we don't encompass it. It floats us. It makes us wonder. It probes the quality of our strength, the anatomy of our weakness. As a question it goes beyond any response we try to meet it with. A question like ours continues beneath us like water beneath a ship. It calls not for mastery, but for respect.

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These aspects of depth are familiar; we recognize them and recognize too how hard they are to formulate precisely. We tend to let ourselves be led by metaphoric images such as the one of water below a ship. The ocean offers vocabulary we fall into almost helplessly.

But should we allow a metaphor like this such a leading role in our

thinking? Imagery only illustrates something we should be able to say directly. An image isn't a formed idea; an image speaks only when it echoes something a listener is acquainted with. The figure of ocean water is like the face in a picture that reminds us of someone we know and depends on us to decide who.

An investigation is on shaky ground though if it has to rely on listeners like us to judge what echoes they hear. Face it, we're insubstantial, each of us. Each of us is a shifting brew of personal inclinations and we give insight no foundation. You and I can disagree; you can disagree with each other. We're all individuals, turbulent and contentious as crows.

How can *crows* give an investigation a solid basis?

All right, they can't. Asking crows to provide a foundation brings nothing but destruction.

The investigation is faltering now. In trying to speak about 'depth' it has found the topic hard to specify. Imagery seemed the most natural approach; depth's very name is an image. But images depend on listeners no more dependable than crows.

This barrier is blocking our way, so let's stop. We've been stopped by crows, so let's talk about crows. Franz Kafka says this about them: "Crows maintain that a single crow can destroy heaven. This is doubtless, proves nothing however against heaven since heaven is precisely the impossibility of crows."¹

Crows.

Crow-like individuals.

Individuals flock together, giving each other room to talk. They tell stories, make pronouncements, declare what's right and wrong. But each individual is a single person, separate from others, free from their control. An individual can choose anything she wants. What's beyond her need never enter; she can shut out its presence. Destroy its presence.

If I the individual don't believe in God, say, or human decency, I can simply refuse to acknowledge them. To me they make no difference; as far as my life is concerned they don't exist. I have the power to decide because my

freedom puts me in command. No one else can make me listen to what I think are mutterings of superstition.

I know this. You know this.

But Kafka's image includes all I've just said. It gives my militant individuality the sound of a crow. What I reject echoes a crow's rejections and what I'm drawn to will sound now like the bit of bright ribbon or glittery tinfoil one could imagine attracting a crow. In this image of crows I hear myself and the other powerful individuals around me.

In front of me.

But Kafka's image speaks also of a heaven that, in its depth, is the impossibility of crows.

What kind of impossibility might that be? How could one approach it? Because if the investigation could go where crows are impossible, it might not need their rowdy, dubious support for the images it speaks with. The investigation might be able to survive.

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Imagine crows--see them gather and swirl. Imagine them drawn to surfaces like ribbon or foil which gleam in a way the sooty crows don't. The surfaces are bright with a significance the crows don't find in themselves. The colorful objects are solid, enduring. They can be stored in a nest and visited over and over.

There are so many crows. Wings spread, bodies widened in flight, they fill the sky with their darkness and their wind. They offer no radiance, no root.

For a crow to seize the gleaming surface catching its eye, he must be quick. The object may not be available long; it's not joined to the crow like wing or beak. The crow has to reach out and take it. Grip it. Grip it tightly or it may fall and another crow may grab it. In time the crow himself may choose

to drop it in favor of another, more brilliant surface.

Competition is here, conflict--between crows, between surfaces. There is defense, attack, argument, victory and loss. This is the crow's way. The surface a crow holds can be small or big, a bottle cap or the branch of a tree. The surface can dazzle and protect. But even if the surface is not dropped, even if it's held to, or held high like a banner bright as heaven itself, this a crow's heaven. A crow's prize. A crow's badge of value and validity.

And we are considering the region where crows are impossible.

Where there are no crows, there can be no holding. No holding high. No glitter of coveted treasure. No conflict. No need for quickness and force. Nothing needs to be locked into place, secured, as though it might drop out of one's grip. Grip isn't necessary now. There's no need to grasp, and no distraction by different surfaces competing for attention. Confusion disappears.

Moving now beyond surfaces into depth we might be able to hear the wisdom of Rainer Maria Rilke saying, "Don't let yourself be confused by surfaces; in the depths all becomes law."²

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Crows saw a gleam of surfaces they had to reach for outside themselves. When crows become impossible, their reaching toward distant things becomes impossible too. Things can't be distant anymore; instead they're close. They're right here. The sense of 'here' includes a sense of self; 'here' means 'where I am.'

This isn't the sort of self, though, that an individual was. It's smaller, grasps less, yet has a presence not to be taken lightly. Rilke hears that presence in the dignity of a child. He asks, "Why want to exchange a child's wise incomprehension for defensiveness and disdain?"³

"Unless you turn and become like children," another teacher says, "you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."⁴

These images of childhood may be suggestive but they're still only images; they still need listeners to hear the sounds echoing in them. Earlier a listener sounded like an unreliable crow, but what about now? Could the mention of children invite us to wonder whether a listener might be like a child? Less aggressive than a crow? More open?

Children have so little experience though. A child doesn't have the critical intelligence to probe an image the way an adult can. A child is too naive, not smart the way an adult has to be.

But let's consider for a moment what it means to be smart. Smartness is quick, forceful. A smart person reaches out to take control of a complex situation. There's an assertiveness in the smart person's grip on things, something sharp in the way he cuts through problems.

Sharp like a beak?

Crows, we know, are very, very smart.

But we are trying to go where crows are impossible.

So it might be all right for listeners to be inexperienced as children. Not smart at all. Perhaps even dumb.

Fairy tales hint at the possibility here--the youngest brother so dim-witted he can't keep his mind on his mission, who stops to talk with an old woman, or a frog. They help him exactly where his smarter older brothers went wrong. The boy's too simple to know what belongs to his quest and what doesn't. He ends up listening more broadly; he's even willing to let go of what he first took to be his quest. And right there he's given the hints by which he succeeds.

Could a good listener do that? Be not so sure what's important? Be not so quick to rule things out as wrong or irrelevant? Such a person might not know enough to discriminate. Since he doesn't know, all he can do is--listen.

Maybe not a bad trait in a listener.

Listening, one is ready to hear sounds. A sound, if it comes, fills one's

hearing. The sound enters the hearing--enters the one who hears. Hearer and sound meet. The *source* of a sound may be somewhere else, but not the sound itself. A sound is no object with a definite location; its boundaries are nowhere sharply definable. A sound is anywhere someone could hear it. It is anywhere a hearer could be.

The self of the hearer is implicated in the sounds that are heard. The self takes in the sounds, takes care of them; they are what it hears. It might doubt whether a particular sound is real--that is, audible to anyone else--but even as it doubts, it knows it's hearing a sound to doubt and that sound in turn calls forth the self--not some mere idea of what the self must be, but the self actually there hearing something.

Sound and self emerge together.

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What if you were listeners like this? Deep listeners? Then the images used by the investigation would be the particular sound they have for you. In hearing what they sound like--what they remind you of--you would be present.

Giving you images, the investigation would be giving you--yourselves. Right here. The 'here' constituting each of you as the deep self that you are.

The moment the investigation starts depending on this possibility of self in you, it relinquishes any right to be an account standing on its own apart from you--and apart from me. It can't stand apart from us; it needs our listening. However full or solid, an account not listened to is like a book not read and a book no one reads is just a pile of paper. In fact it's not even paper unless identified that way by someone aware of it.

The suggestion that something like paper needs a witness might sound strange. "Paper just is," you might object. "Somebody knowing about it isn't what makes it paper."

And your knowing? That's not essential either?

"What's special about *my* knowing? I'm just another onlooker. Paper doesn't need onlookers declaring what it is. It goes on being paper all by itself. No one has to know about it; no one has to say a word."

How easily you dismiss yourself, as though you're inessential as a dream, as though the reality of paper--or of anything else--is primarily what's there when you're not around. But look at you--you *are* around. You can't escape from yourself, however much you may want to. When you say the paper would be what it is, even if you never knew about it and never said a word, that's convincing, but if you didn't know about it and didn't say anything, what convinced me? What now am I even convinced of?

I don't know.

Do you?

Our real difference seems to be our different views of what a person is. For you a person is outside what she sees. She's another item altogether in the landscape. The item that's seen can't need the item that's seeing--the two are completely separate.

That's as obvious to me as it is to you. So what I've been saying makes no sense if a person is an individual thing separate from some other individual thing she happens to be looking at. But a person, for me, isn't individual in that way. For me a person is the radiating 'here' of a deep self. 'Here' is a place something can be; it's not separate from what *is* here but rather includes it--just as you've included me. Your objections have taken me in; they've set me before questions that make me look harder at your thinking and at mine. Your objections are sounds waking me up.

You're not a competitor, you're here with me. We're both here, each responding to the other, each needing the other as we give each other a focus.

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Perhaps, then, we can return to the way an image acts like a book, needing listeners to hear its sound just as a book needs readers.

A sound enters the self of the one hearing and becomes part of that self; the person himself hears. Hearing, the self of the person rises up to acknowledge the sound. In hearing, the self responds.

This process of hearing, acknowledging, responding begins to sound like people in conversation. But the conversation between images and those receiving them is a primal conversation. Nothing can happen before it since the self that hears doesn't come forward till a sound is heard. Primal hearers are nothing but their hearing, nothing but their acknowledgment of sounds they hear. As the hearers rise up to act on what they hear, they become speakers, but now the self of them exists only in their speaking. There's nothing outside anymore, no surfaces a crow could spy and snatch and depend on. The way of crows is impossible.

Primal conversation takes as its language the imagery its participants hear and utter. The language cannot exist outside the ones speaking. It cannot be reached for and acquired; it's no skill anyone could master. It is not a distinct surface existing beyond speakers that could be observed and classified as French, say, rather than English, Greek rather than Sanskrit. The language of original conversation is the expression of the self who hears and speaks--the sounding work it does simply being itself. The language is always native, never foreign. The surfaces called 'Greek' or 'French' or 'English' are now as impossible as crows. You know I'm speaking English in a way different from the way you know what I'm saying. When you stop to identify what I say as English, you reach for a surface outside me. You're not responding to what I say; we're not in conversation.

But when we are in conversation, we become the confessional language in which we are present. Where we ourselves are present and spoken to, our possibilities and impossibilities arise. We find where we succeed and fail, live and die. The conversation implicates us beyond escape. No shield-surface can

hide where we are.

Exposed like this, we might find in spite of ourselves that we want a shield, some knowledgeable explanatory account we can take shelter behind. The account will face the hard questions we feel unable to face; it will relieve us of responsibility. We trust the account's solidity more than we trust our own; we want its firm ground to stand on. Taking that ground as a goal, we look for a path that will lead us there, a path we need since we're not there already.

Kafka responds. "A goal," he says, "but no path. What looks like a path is hesitation."⁵ He points to the "happiness of realizing that the ground one stands on can never be greater than that being covered by one's own two feet."⁶

Kafka implies that the goal is our own presence, an inalienable responsibility we already have. But is responsibility enough? How do we even know our responsibility if it has no surface we can see? Surfaces are necessary, aren't they? What else do we perceive?

Asking these questions we're confessing that in the broader conversation our lives are part of, we never know what's going to happen and we're nervous. We want some kind of life raft floating at the surface where we can get at it. But as we cling to this raft with both hands, we might notice the surges moving it from underneath, the surging uncertainty it's protecting us from. Our raft floats on depth.

Think of Herodotus' harrowing tales of life's unpredictability. Think of Sophocles' Oedipus, of Euripides' Pentheus in *The Bacchae*.

Now in face of that tumult, think of Plato's serene vision of unchanging truth. What finer appearance--high above us, radiantly visible to all--could one hope for than an *idea*, that ultimate legacy of Plato's work, that dazzling surface beyond our every shortcoming, that ideal formulation which quiets the waters tossing us. Quiets them by making them--shallow. Nietzsche heard this quality in Greek thinkers when he called them "superficial--from depth."⁷

But an idea remains superficial merely from superficiality if it's studied only to see whether it's worth possessing, whether it's shiny enough for

one's nest. Where crows are impossible, we don't acquire things. We don't seize. Working with ideas, we hear them as sounds speaking to us. Which aspects of them make sense, we ask. What question do they seem to answer? What work might they be doing? Probing in this way, we let ideas find us where we can hear them. We let them be present.

Present right now. As surprising and unpredictable as anyone speaking to us in conversation. When we hear a suggestive idea, we don't look it up in that dictionary within us called 'memory' and limit the idea to whatever definition we find there. The idea is for us an image; it has no limited identity we can nail down. Rather it invites us to meet it with aspects of our own experience. As these pieces of ourselves step forward, the image offers them provocative new contexts. Our past experience takes on new colors, new slants and is transformed into an image by the new idea's infectious partnership. We ourselves become the unfolding conversation between old and new, the developing encounter initiated in the present moment by this idea we're listening to--that our *past* is listening to through the contact being made with it.

Hearing is contact--and our past is only one side, only one member of the conversation. The past does not rule. Images sounding in our ears are present *now*. Now is their time; now is their manner. They sound new. They stand on their own, as we stand on our own who hear them. In their newness they surprise us; they catch our attention. We turn toward them and enter into dialogue. With them we move forward to the unforeseen places that make our conversation crucial.

The ever-present possibility of surprise keeps us off balance. We can't stop and collect what we've perceived. There's no time for it; more is happening every moment and we have to keep up. Stopping to hold what we've already found puts us into the mode of possessing and then what we've found changes from a magical Cinderella's coach to a lumpy pumpkin-surface blocking the road. It asserts its separateness then, its foreignness to us. Possessing it, we submit to a foreign influence and emigrate from ourselves. We're not present

now. We don't hear or speak. Conversation ceases.

But when conversation continues, the images keep reverberating. They go on addressing the ones listening. The listeners have to keep listening--for who knows where an image's further suggestions might lead? Farther and farther the self is led, deeper and deeper into what it finds itself able to participate in.

There's darkness now; we can't see the outcome in advance; we can't hold up anywhere and get secure. Everything in this deep conversation is completely insecure. At the same time it's completely sheltering because the images speak to us. Finding us they offer themselves as places we can be.

Still, in all this darkness our movement might seem as undirected as sleepwalking; we might appear unconscious. If we're unconscious, we don't know what we're doing. That's not sheltering. That's not safe. Safe is where we know things. Safe is where things are bright, not dark--where things shine and we can grasp them and the gleam of their outline can instruct us. We can hold onto them then and we can also drop them if they no longer look promising. We've got active control.

These objects we grasp are as far from our own nature as stars. Their distant gleam doesn't depend on us; it's not flawed by our groping confusion. As long as we have the radiant objects to steer by, we don't become victims of our own weakness. The objects protect us and we let them. We follow. We're passive.

We're split now between an active side that controls and a passive side that sees and follows, a part that acts and a part that knows. This split between active and passive gives us an inner core separate from an outer region of knowable events. We're mobile and unencumbered, but at the same time very watchful.

We're conscious.

We're crows.

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Where crows are impossible, no bright objects appear to navigate by; there are only images that swim in shadow, their edges indistinct. Yet we are not lost. The images may be uncertain but they're close. They meet us. Working from what a crow might call our 'unconscious,' we have no purely active hold on what we passively record. Images aren't possessed that way; grasping them completely isn't possible. But in our conversation with them we trade possession's certainty for intimacy's closeness. Our contact with the images unveils us. Following their suggestions we become the ones able to follow; passive merges with active. Truly involved, we truly belong.

In the conversation we belong to, we are not foreign. We're not the rapacious looters we heard before as 'crows,' wandering exiles forced to live by their wits. At depth we are always home. We're not lured this way, then that by alien surfaces separate from us and from one another. We're not confused. Here all becomes law.

The images which implicate us also recede beyond our easy grasp. They seem larger than we are. Their presence seems monumental, and vital. Certain books read at this depth can seem great. Like images they are never fully fathomed and they address us to our very marrow.

We know they do. We know beyond confusion, beyond any ability to seize and manipulate. Everything here is too surprising to get a grip on. All we can do is pay attention. We don't know what all we might be hearing. We don't know what all we're becoming as we take on what we hear; we're like children taking on bit by bit their native language, taking on the life that's *their* life. Fragile and resilient as children, we're creatures of a moment--*this* moment, this 'now' of listening and responding.

The life of ourselves is this work we carry out moment by moment as we absorb the sounds we hear. The images which teach us, create us as we take them up. To say it again, we are a *life*. A work. The work goes on, is going on

at this very moment. Suggestions alive to us in ideas and books also go on: they make up a tradition we think of as our tradition--though of course it is ours only because we hear ourselves addressed by it. Its images are the ones present to us that we respond to.

Going on, the work we do is the work of being ourselves. It's like the work a tree does growing tall, bearing fruit, giving shade to travellers and shelter to birds who would rest on its branches.

Even crows. Crows who would seize those branches and feel elevated merely by holding on.

It's possible too to seize one's own life as a crow would, but that's dangerous. Kafka offers the image of a person at dinner: "He gobbles up the crumbs which have fallen from his own table; from that he becomes for a little while fuller of food than anyone but forgets how to eat up above from the table; from that, however, the crumbs then also cease."⁸

The crumbs fall from the work we do that feeds us. That work may be uncertain, may be tiring, may seem often unsuccessful, but our life demands it of us. And actually it's little effort. We're at the work every moment. Sounds take us by surprise. We notice and our noticing makes us once more who we are. Once more we're able to attend as issues deepen beyond the surfaces they present at the outset. We're not fooled. We're not crows. We keep listening and unfurling in the work our attention accomplishes.

This is why we don't worry when crow-like critics say, "But you change. You're inconsistent. What you have isn't dependable truth." As though steps we take along our way were finished, isolated locations, each claiming to be the journey's final destination. As though the steps could be plotted on the surface of a map. As though a watcher on his perch above could view all the positions simultaneously and set them in conflict with each other. As though 'now' were a point viewable from outside.

This critical crow, of course, has to stand outside. Everything a crow sees is a surface outside him. When he finds one bright enough to hold onto, every other surface invites him to let go of it; other surfaces mean competition.

He's not comfortable till they're out of sight or at least subdued and he needs us to stop suggesting them to him. He wants us to be ruled by *his* surface, the one he holds to, the one whose gleam lights his way. He can't help criticizing us because we're a potential threat he needs to contain.

His worry, though, doesn't reach us. The moment we're in now isn't a surface. It can't be viewed from outside. 'Now' isn't '3:45 PM' or 'three hours after lunch' any more than 'here' is 'the St. John's library' or 'New Mexico.' 'Here' is wherever I am; 'now' is whenever I am. 'Now' is not a moment finished off, distinct from other moments. It's the opening of perception where I join with what I perceive.

At this point another sort of crow critic speaks up, sibling rival or perhaps defiant offspring of the first critic. This is the crow who stands outside too, who sees nothing but surfaces, but who won't admit to being ruled by any one of them. He focuses on the *many* surfaces out there accessible to reaching feet. Looking at all the different available viewpoints, life situations, cultures, historical epochs, texts, languages, he asks how anyone can be so naive as to commit himself to any one of them in particular. He watches us trust the 'now' we find ourselves in and asks how we're so sure it's us. How do we know this 'now' isn't just another outer circumstance imposing on us its own imperatives and methods? An observer needs to keep more distance, he warns; a responsible observer can only note the different surfaces in sight, describe them, ponder the relation between them, collect them in the album of his mind like stamps.

But we're not observers; we're part of what's happening and our 'now' is no outer circumstance. A circumstance becomes 'outer' when it stands outside the one watching it, when it has a position outside that person's responsibility. The person's responsibility then becomes her active side, separate from the passive side bombarded by the outer things happening to her.

But at depth where the division between active and passive dissolves, the division between inner and outer dissolves too. What happens is what we respond to. We respond actively, responsibly; yet we only meet what comes.

However beyond our control the circumstances are--however devastating--it's us in them. It's us suffering or succeeding. We are the ones being addressed and we are the only ones who can answer. For us the circumstances aren't outer fact, they're images that haven't already decided all they might be saying. Any prior decision would exclude us and we're not excluded. We're part of the conversation. We share the work the conversation achieves and the work is done no other time than right now.

This work we do now, like our life, is never finished. However much is done, more remains. The insights which emerge are things we know intimately, but they can't be closed up like a box and put away. The insights are alive. They are perception's work making us who we are. The work of listening, of hearing can't ever be over, because 'now' is a moment that does not end. Has never ended. Nowhere does it draw a boundary that says, 'Stop here; this is far enough.' The 'now' of us keeps us ignorant.

We go on listening because we don't know if we've heard all the sound. Nothing tells us but the sound itself and our own attention. Nothing that's happened so far is sufficient. Pausing to enjoy what we already possess distracts us from listening and when we don't listen, we miss things.

Indeed we're often shown we *have* missed things. What we first heard was followed by more. These further dimensions demand that we change our response, so we do; we make it more appropriate. We're not afraid to do that. We're willing to participate with the sounds, the images, the suggestions we hear; we speak with them in a conversation that takes us somewhere. Submitting to the conversation, we realize we need to ask questions and listen for answers. We don't hold ourselves at a distance from approaching images. We don't jam between them and us rigid surfaces of previously known fact or principle we compel the images to obey. It's a conversation we're having, one that moves, and if we make a false move, we can fix it--or if we can't, we're able to take in our mistake's bitter consequences and be taught.

Why, we ask, does one moment of contact have to be the only one? A single comment in a conversation never solves difficulty once and for all. Why

can't our work be as ongoing as conversation is?

Because for us it is. Sounds expand and contract. They continue.

Their *depth*, in fact, is the way they continue. Asking them to keep telling us all they can, we hear more and more--more insights emerge, more questions, more risk as well as more shelter. What we hear opens toward the sounds we don't hear, sounds that at any moment may surprise us. We listen for those unheard sounds. That's what listening is.

At depth, where nothing can be decided once and for all, our uncertainty is no failure, it's fundamental. It keeps perception's present moment from shallowing to a completed surface bounded by other known surfaces on either side called 'past' and 'future.' To stand back and hold the sequence like a calendar, one needs a crow's encompassing grasp, which, here at depth, is impossible.

At depth moments of time *begin*. Surfaces begin, emerging like fruit from the work of a tree. Without the tree, no fruit. Without the 'now' in which we are present, no past surfaces appear to lure gripping feet, no future surfaces promise themselves as extensions of lines figured on present surfaces. Where there is depth, there is the surprise of origin. Here work begins. And begins. And begins.

All is beginning. Nothing is guaranteed. There can be no pride of possession, only a kind of faith--that faith at the heart of listening which keeps us present, ready to respond. The instant we stop listening and simply *have*, the work stops. Nothing further comes. The crumbs from the dinner table cease and the waiting crows begin, slowly, to starve.

Sadly crows usually don't know they're starving; they're not intimate enough with themselves to recognize the symptoms. Intimacy eludes them because their attention is off outside themselves, out with the shiny objects they're trying to grab. So far away are the objects that possessing them takes strength--strength of talon and will. A crow must overcome the distance between himself and the foreign surfaces he has no native connection to. He needs a grip of great power to keep the bond intact. Controlling strength is

what the crow builds, not self-awareness.

This strength is what keeps the surface near, keeps its brightness illuminating the crow's way. The crow has to maintain the foreign influence over himself with almost military force because the relation isn't natural. Preserving it takes so much effort that fatigue constantly threatens to break it down. The dazzling distant surface--whether a twinkling bauble, a rule, a concept--must be hauled across great distance and *applied* to the crow's life. The surface doesn't natively belong there, so applying it takes unnatural force. A kind of violence.

In the crow's distance lives violence. It's not surprising then when a crow feels a need for still greater outside influence to govern the confusion and violence breaking out wherever he lives. A crow worries about confusion and violence. He has reason to.

But where crows are impossible, distance and the violence in it vanish. Closeness to unfolding issues is assured. We're together with things because for us they're images. Since we don't need to be violent, we don't need rules outside ourselves directing us. We're intimate enough with what's going on to recognize what's natural and necessary. When thirsty, we drink. When cold, we put on a sweater. We don't reach beyond ourselves for what doesn't belong to us; we recognize what's appropriate and what isn't. We can see for ourselves.

At depth, seeing is always--for ourselves.

Perception for us is less the passive registering of an event than the embrace by which the event gathers us in. The event speaks to us when we see it. Sight, like sound, is a presence. A tree I see may be a mile away but the sighting of it takes place right where I'm standing. As a *sight* the tree is as close as the flower beside me I can touch. Sound, sight, touch--in each of them is contact. Each is a version of touch, where active is passive and there's no distance to overcome. What happens, happens *here* where the self arises.

The self arises. It happens too. The self is a work which must be done. It is not complete. It is never complete. As the work penetrates into what

hasn't been done, it enters the same space perception is part of. What is not in awareness, then suddenly is--that's what perception fills with. Perception opens to an absence full with what at any moment could be present. Work moves into that same absence.

The absence reverberates in certain achievements still signalling the work of perception at their origin. Great books--that is, deep books--are never fully present. The surface of the page never tells the full story; readers themselves have to do the work of further listening.

It's new work since work is always new, always needing to be done. Work is never a surface that can end at a boundary fence like a parcel of land. The ground which work is, this work of listening, is too absent ever to be finished. From the ground trees can grow. The trees can invite birds who may take up residence in their branches. Seeds may fall from which new trees can spring.

In perception the work begins, and begins again, making connection upon connection, accomplishing that larger work we know as 'tradition.'

As 'community.'

As 'world.'

But the links we sense as we participate with them include us participating. This is the work of our perceiving self. Where the self still perceives, it can't stop and possess; it's too busy perceiving. It's at work allowing what hasn't arrived to arrive. It's still listening for unheard sounds. Perceiving, the self is always listening, and where the self listens, it does not hear. Since the listened-for sound isn't present, the primal self hearing it can't be present either. At the moment the self, listeningly, perceives, it extends into its own impossibility.

Into its own death.

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At depth crows are impossible. Now it seems that when the deep self does its fundamental work of listening, its life too becomes impossible. Superficial crows sentenced themselves to solitary confinement inside their individuality; the deep self, on the other hand, came together with what it met, in responsiveness to it. Very different, these two lives; yet this investigation's attempt to find depth has brought them both to the same end. Both crow and deep self die, destroyed by the ax of impossibility.

How has the investigation helped then, if here at the end it brings you only the destruction brought by riotous crows at the beginning?

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A great book says this: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."⁹

In this image maybe you can hear depth itself.

If you can't, listen.

Notes

1. Franz Kafka, "Betrachtungen über Sünde, Leid, Hoffnung und den wahren Weg" [Observations on Sin, Suffering, Hope and the True Way] in *Er* [He] (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), #32 [my translation]. The *Betrachtungen* are available in English in Franz Kafka, *The Blue Octavo Notebooks*, trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (Cambridge, 1991).
2. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter* [Letters to a Young Poet] (Leipzig, 1940, p. 25 [my translation].
3. Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, M.D. Herter Norton, trans. (New York, 1934), p. 46.
4. *Gospel According to Matthew*, 18:3; Revised Standard Version (New York, 1973).
5. Kafka, "Betrachtungen ...," #26.
6. Kafka, "Betrachtungen ...," #24.
7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* [The Merry Science]; *Werke in Drei Bänden* (München, 1966), p. 15 [my translation].
8. Kafka, "Betrachtungen ...," #73.
9. *Gospel According to John*, 12: 24; version cited.