3. CORPO-REALITIES

Linnulla on tuskin mitään rintalihaksia.
Sillä on saappaankuviointi höyhenissä
ja se on littana
ja kaksiulotteinen
niin kuin rippikoulukuva.
(Haajanen 1991, 43)

This bird has hardly any pectoral muscles left.
It has a bootprint in its feathers
and it is flat
and two-dimensional
like a first-communion photograph.
(Transl. Emily Jeremiah & Fleur Jeremiah)

In the poem by Timo Haajanen quoted above, it is not explicitly stated that the bird is dead, but from the very first line we get the impression that we are looking at carrion. The pectoral muscles, which give a bird's body its distinctive shape, are flattened and almost gone. The extinction of life is confirmed by the "bootprint" on the feathers: the bird is not fleeing, it is dead and trod underfoot. Haajanen's poem focuses almost exclusively on how flat the dead bird is. The carcass is viewed from above, from a bird's-eye view as it were, and this heightens the two-dimensional impression.

In Haajanen's poem, the bird's death is not documented only through the physical properties of the animal, even though the absence of pectoral muscles – a reference to the shape, power and mobility of a living bird – is a key detail. The trodden bird is compared to a first-communion photograph. The simile identifies the flattened, two-dimensional bird with a two-dimensional photo, but why a first-communion photo in particular? Is it perhaps because first-communion photos tend to be flat and insipid, taken as they are purely for convention's sake, for display in the bookcases of the family and relatives?

In first-communion photos, young people pose with flowers, usually with very similar postures and facial expressions, and for the same purpose. Through this simile, the bird acquires new meaning: it is not only flat, it is insipid. Its body, in its present two-dimensional state, is not only grotesque but also banal, devoid of content. Through the association with a first-communion photo, the bird becomes a trivial emblem of its own death, just as a first-communion photo is a trivial emblem of a milestone in an adolescent's life – at least in the context of the predominantly secular Finnish culture.

Haajanen's poem draws on the symbolism commonly associated with dead birds. Dead birds direct the observer's gaze *towards the earth*, both metaphorically and literally, towards the obvious and hence seemingly trivial grotesquely material and vulnerable nature of the world and the living things in it, towards death and decomposition. There are several layers of symbolic meaning in all this decay apart from the literal and concrete. Firstly, we are dealing with corporeality, carnality, transitoriness and death: how trivial the random corpse of a wild animal can be yet how terrible the realisation is that even human beings will ultimately leave nothing behind except two-dimensional photos. Secondly, we are dealing with the possibility and impossibility of the hereafter: in traditional Finnish bird symbolism, birds are messengers from the hereafter and in some cases even escort human souls across the divide, yet from a modern perspective their animal life and death are emphatically secular. Even if we consider a living bird to be other-earthly, with its own rules and its own world, a dead bird is nothing more than dead matter. Thirdly, the death of a bird and a dead bird are powerful metalyrical symbols. They are the antithesis of everything that is idealist in poetry: a dead bird does not fly and is not free, it does not sing about hidden truths or have a preternaturally beautiful singing voice.

Haajanen's poem about the bird trodden under a boot plays with the tension between meaning and meaninglessness. The bird is depicted "as is", as an irrelevant random carcass on the ground. It becomes more metaphorical when identified with the first-communion photo, but this is nonetheless a very conventional image, or at best a memory of a very typical if unique moment. First-communion photos rarely stand out from a normal bookcase, even though they capture their subject exactly as they were at that particular moment. The dead bird and the first-communion photo are both unique and trivial, both significant and indifferent, both deserving of deeper contemplation and not worthy of a second look. The flatness of the bird carcass is ultimately insipidness that reduces the two-dimensional bird even further into a one dimensional banality. And yet Haajanen took the trouble to write a poem about the carcass.

It is precisely this flatness and staleness, the dead feathers and the bootprint, that creates an excellent context for exploring the issue of the bird's existence and nature from a perspective different than the one discussed in the previous chapter. The dead bird no longer inhabits its world and is therefore not other-earthly, yet it remains an alien creature. A bird that is dead is particularly open to all kinds of symbolic and also quite concrete meanings and desires, such as nutrition in the form of meat for cooking and eating, emotions and hopes projected onto it – the fear of death or longing for the hereafter – or simply a morbid interest in a body that is constructed differently from ours. The surface of the dead bird (whether two-dimensional or three-dimensional) satisfies all these meanings and desires for meanings yet remains stubbornly concrete. We might even go so far as to say that it resists the meanings projected onto it.

To better understand the materiality of animals and the multiple meanings attached to animal bodies as objects, we may turn to arts scholarship. In her study on the history and cultures of taxidermy, Rachel Poliquin writes about "visceral knowledge", which she explains as

> a bodily knowing that occurs in contact with physical things, a knowing that blurs emotion with materiality and may even defy reason, logic, and explanatory language. We have all experienced a powerfully visceral reaction to an unexpected or unidentified object. Within a poetics of strangeness, the thing simultaneously fascinates, looms, provokes, defies, attracts, and repels. (Poliquin 2012, 39)

This idea of a special type of knowing – an affective, incomplete, yet deeply engaged type of knowing – is present in the corporeal avian poetics of Timo Haajanen and Maila Pylkkönen, as we will see.

Arts scholar Ron Broglio has discussed issues of the existence and nature of animals, with specific reference to the artistic dimensions of these issues, through the concept of "surface". In his book *Surface Encounters. Thinking with Animals and Art* (2011), Broglio proposes that Western conceptions of animals share the notion of animals as creatures living on the surface. The animalness of animals and their animal perspective and experience have always interested philosophers and artists alike, but generally speaking animals' capabilities, faculties and very existence are seen as inadequate and limited compared to those of human beings. The reality of an animal of another species is a series of "now moments" which the animal is unable to reflect upon or comprehend as a continuum, never mind a narrative. An animal is incapable of abstract thought or of conceptualising its environment or its relationship to that environment. In other words, animals are considered to lack the 'depth' of human experience and understanding. (Broglio 2011, xvi–xvii.) To be sure, Broglio is here talking about living animals, but an association to Haajanen's two-dimensional, flat bird carcass is difficult to avoid.

However, for all that a surface is a simple and one-dimensional thing, it does incorporate the potential for encounter and interaction, as Haajanen's admittedly brutal image of a bootprint stamped onto feathers indicates. Touching always happens at surfaces. In exploring how animals exist in and experience the world, Broglio understands the surface not only as a metaphor but also as concrete surfaces that allow sharing of things and experiences. The material and optic surfaces of visual artworks, the surfaces of animal and human skin and material and semiotic surfaces of whatever kind are places where our conceptions of animals of other species are motivated and representations built. More philosophically, surfaces are about testing the limits of our thinking: "The supposed poverty of the (animal) surface provides an opportunity for thinking differently. If philosophy is to think the unthought of thought, it will be at such limits, horizons, and surfaces where we meet the Other." (Broglio 2011, xix.) The surface of an alien being – skin or feathers – is a concrete manifestation of our perhaps futile desire to understand and think differently, or, to use Rachel Poliquin's term, to know viscerally.

Haajanen's descriptions of bird carcasses are dominated by a grotesque, bored but simultaneously almost obsessive interest in the bodies of dead animals. In the following poem also by Haajanen, a bird is again under the speaker's boot:

Siivet irti

Haulit eivät kai ole menneet keuhkopusseista
koska lintu on melko rintava mätkäistynäkin.
Likka kitkuttaa siivet irti.
Veri tummuu märille laudoille
ja näkyviin jää vain lyhyt harmaa uloste.
Painelen saappaanpohjalla rintaa.
Nokasta kuuluu tuhahduksia,
jalat oikenevat taaksepäin,
peräsuolesta purskahtaa kolme limapalloa.
Ne ovat kankeita kuin vesipisarat

elävän linnun siivillä joita ne eivät kastele
vaan vierivät pois.

(Haajanen 1991, 41)

Wings Off

Seems the pellets didn't go through the lungs
since the bird's breast is fairly plump even after being thumped.
The lass jerks the wings loose.
Blood darkens on wet planks
and short grey excrement is all that remains to be seen.
I press the sole of my boot against the breast.
Snuffles sound from the beak,
the legs stretch backwards,
three balls of mucus burst out of the rectum.
They are rigid like drops of water

on a live bird's wings they fail to make wet,
instead rolling off.

(Transl. Emily Jeremiah & Fleur Jeremiah)

In this poem, to which I must return later, the bird carcass is three-dimensional and remains functional in some mechanical sense: it exudes air and mucus, and its legs move. Compared with the bird carcass poem with which I opened this chapter, this one focuses on the speaker's (and his friend's) desire to take the bird apart and put it back together again, materially and semiotically. They manipulate the bird and detach its wings, analysing how it died and finally, in the last two lines, comparing its unambiguous and irreversible state of non-living to a live bird. The distinction between and differences of a dead bird and a live one is addressed first physically and then metaphorically, with eloquence.

As I hope to show in this chapter, dead birds in Finnish poetry are rich in meaning and fascinating objects of interest, albeit sometimes grotesque interest. I will be focusing particularly on poems by Timo Haajanen and Maila Pylkkönen where numerous figurative meanings are ascribed to dead birds. Alternatively, the dead birds are stripped of all meaning, which gives us poetry about the meaninglessness and trivial nature of the bird carcass or, more generally, non-human corporeality. It becomes apparent that the corpse of a bird in a poem is always incomplete, a void waiting to be filled with meanings ascribed by humans or a void demonstrating its semantic vacuity. In the latter case, the banal corpse prompts frustration and even existential angst, because a human contemplating a dead bird realises that he himself is made of the same decaying stuff. Either way, dead birds in poetry are always "bodies as voids".

My concept of "body as void" is related to Broglio's "surface" in the sense that both concepts reflect the ability and will of human beings to see all sorts of meanings in animals, most of them (if not all of them) arising out of the human experiences and perspective. A void, however, is empty: empty in the sense of having nothing in it, being incomplete or lacking something. You can look at and poke around a dead bird all you like, but it will tell you nothing about how birds exist or satisfy our desire to know what birds really are. Only a living bird is other-earthly, and the other-earthliness of a living bird does not define the dead body of a bird in any way except in a very narrow anatomic sense. Any and all human-originated and human-centred meanings can be projected onto the dead body of a bird because it is devoid of the meanings of the bird world.

However, this chapter is not just about carrion. I will discuss not only poems about dead birds but also poems about living birds that are reduced to symbols of their corporeality and its banality or meaninglessness. In these poems – all of them by Haajanen – the effectiveness of birds is connected to their corporeality in one way or another or, to be more exact, to their materiality. Although the perspective in the poems discussed in this chapter is emphatically anthropocentric, it also illustrates the disturbing non-human materiality associated with the ineffable other-earthliness of birds. As cut-up carcasses, as ringed but unread objects of research or as stuffed exhibits, birds may be physically close to human beings yet remain alien and other.

BODY AS VOID

In her début collection *Klassilliset tunteet* (1957), Maila Pylkkönen writes about birds in a tradition-conscious and critical way. She alludes to the conventional meanings of birds as symbols of freedom, artistry, the soul and immortality and evaluates these meanings from the perspective of the animals and how they are represented. In the following, untitled poem, the speaker contemplates a dead goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*). At first, the mourning is detached, but emotion quickly takes the speaker closer to the bird:

> Enkö yhtä hyvin itkisi sinulle, pieni lintu,
>   hippiäinen,
> joka olit rakosesta lentänyt pimeään vajaan,
> kuollut, nälkäänkö vai lentänyt pään pahki, en tiedä,
> lintu joka et ennenkään ole tajunnut ihmisen sanoja,
>   sinulle minä itken,
> piilotan ruumiisi haaskaeläimiltä syvälle turpeen alle,

tämän vielä tuoreen ruumiin joka ei enää kannata
matalaa päätä,
ei avaa kapeaa mustaa nokkaa, ei levitä raitaisia
siipiä;
pieni hippiäinen, näitä puhtaita hienoja jalkoja en
voi antaa maahan,
minä leikkaan,
leikkaan mustat kiiltävät jalat siitä missä ne
paljastuvat höyhenistä,
leikkaan nilkkanivelestä, jänne laukeaa, näen
soukkien varpaiden liikkeen.
Sydäntäni viiltää.
Hippiäinen, et sinä tunne mitään.

(Pylkkönen 1957, 7)

Should I not weep for you just as well, little bird,
goldcrest,
you flew through a chink into a dark shed,
now dead, did you starve or smash your head in flight, I do not know,
a bird that never did understand human words.
I weep for you,
I bury your body deep underground away from scavengers,
your still warm body that no longer supports
the low head,
nor opens the narrow, black beak, nor spreads the striped
wings,
little goldcrest, I cannot let these clean, fine feet
committed to the earth,
I sever the black, shiny legs where they
emerge from feathers,
I cut at the ankle joint, a tendon is released, I see
the motion of slender toes.
My heart is slashed with pain.
Goldcrest, you feel nothing.

(Transl. Fleur Jeremiah)

The poem highlights the presence of a grieving human. The colloquial, repetitive idiom and the consecutive, complementary, comma-separated descriptions of the bird's body conjure up an intense impression of the presence of both a human and a non-human creature. Yet the language and emotion delineate an unbridgeable gap between the two species, human and bird. The speaker admits "a bird that never did understand human words" and then confesses: "I weep for you." Once the speaker has cut off the bird's feet, she says: "My heart is slashed with pain / Goldcrest, you feel nothing." Here, human feelings of sadness and pity, "heart [...] pain", are equated with the bird's senses, the dead bird no longer feeling the pain slashing across its legs. A bird's sensory abilities are a bodily function, while human feelings are emotions. Human feelings are particularly in focus at the beginning and the end of the poem. The first line, "Should I not weep for you just as well, little bird," asks whether a human could not pour out her grief to a bird. In the last but one line, the speaker reveals her heart is aching, linking her grief more directly to the death of the bird.

Finnish poetry scholar Katja Seutu, who has studied Pylkkänen's poetry, describes this compassionate attitude to the bird as the "poetics of identifying". The poetics of identifying – commonly associated with the experiences of various easily marginalised groups in society such as the elderly, children, the mentally ill, and more generally women – extends also to plants and animals in Pylkkönen's poetry. (Seutu 2009, 44–51) Seutu wrote the following excellent summary of contact-seeking reaching out to otherness, as in Pylkkönen's bird poetry, in defining the poetics of identifying:

> Identifying in Pylkkönen's works is not just about an empathic attitude, even though that is the basis for meaningful identifying. Identifying is also a reaction to the confusion that something strange or indescribable prompts in the observer and a way of approaching and exploring alien territory [...] On the other hand, identifying is a means for entering strange territory unattainable through language. (Seutu 2009, 46)

Approaching the cause of confusion and wishing to understand it, as described by Seutu, is what I consider that Pylkkönen's poem quoted above is all about. In the course of the poem, the sense of empathy does not diminish, but I feel that its one-sidedness becomes increasingly apparent. The phrasing of the last line, "you feel nothing", seems like a statement made to the bird but is more probably a statement made by the speaker to herself ("the goldcrest feels nothing") and indicates – in my interpretation – that the speaker has ceased to envision a connection across the species boundary and across the boundary of life and death. And indeed it is impossible to weep for one's sorrows to a dead goldcrest, in the sense that the bird would understand and respond, never mind achieving mutual empathy for the death of the bird being addressed.

Indeed, the speaker's grief at the death of the bird is only one side of the poem. What is even more conspicuous than the compassion and the melancholy is what the speaker does to the bird carcass. She focuses on the bird's legs, which she considers so "clean" that they cannot be "committed to the earth", given over to death – so she must cut them off. The bird's legs defy decay and destruction not only by being apparently indestructible but also by appearing to move: "I cut at the ankle joint, a tendon is released, I see / the motion of slender toes." Small birds have tendons in their feet that allow them to grip a branch tightly. The feet of the dead bird in the poem remain in a clenched position that is released when the speaker cuts the tendon. So the bird's legs move even after death – albeit purely mechanically. The reality of death unfolds as a series of negations concerning the body. All bodily movement has ceased, only the mechanism of the legs still works. However, the speaker never claims the movements of the head, beak or wings to have been voluntary. She states that it was the *body* that held up the head, opened the beak and spread the wings when the bird was still alive. Human beings can only observe externals in the life of birds: bodily characteristics, reactions and behaviour.

The image of the dead bird in Pylkkönen's poem may be seen as objectified. There are two syntactically parallel passages in the poem that are thematically linked, emphasising the objectified nature of the bird. The first of these, which I analysed above, repeats descriptions of the absence of movement in the bird's body – "no longer supports", "nor opens", "nor spreads": "your still warm body that no longer supports / the low head, / nor opens the narrow, black beak, nor spreads the striped / wings".

In the second passage, the speaker removes the bird's "clean feet". This action is depicted with consecutive active verbs contrasting with the negative third-person phrases in the first passage – "I sever", "I cut", "I see": "I sever the black, shiny legs where they / emerge from feathers, / I cut at the ankle joint, a tendon is released, I see / the motion of slender toes."

These passages create a new kind of contrast between the bird and the speaker. This is no longer about the distinction between physical sensations and mental feelings but about the difference between dead matter and a living actor. Cutting off the legs represents the final embracing of the bird's body and of its death. The speaker moves the bird's legs after the animal itself is dead. Not only does the speaker control the legs materially, there is also symbolic control involved. The description of the legs in the poem lends them a figurative aspect: "I cannot let these clean, fine feet / be committed to the earth". The soiling, decaying influence of death cannot touch the bird's legs, according to the speaker, and hence they must be cut off – saved.

Pylkkönen's dead goldcrest renders tangible several aspects of non-human otherness and the surface and void of animals. The lack of a common language points to otherness: "a bird that never did understand human words", one of the most widely established means for distinguishing humans from other animals. The conception here is that humans are the only species to have a recursive language, a system where a limited number of meaning-units can yield, through a system of rules, an infinite number of new meanings. Ron Broglio (2011, xxiv) notes that the relationship between human and animal is a relationship without relation, a communication whose language is constantly "under erasure". Alongside issues of language and communication, the dead goldcrest is a material mystery whose body seemed like an automaton even when alive and, on the other hand, continues to move when dead. By automaton, I refer to the speaker's notion that the bird's body is what moves the head, the beak and the wings – a notion affirmed by the post-mortem motion of the legs.

The tendon-clenched toes are a concrete manifestation of the otherness of a living perching bird: how naturally it moves around and balances on branches. The same toes on a dead bird are a void that is easily filled with various metaphorical and symbolic meanings. The feet are clean, fine, beautiful and shiny – they are immortal things. At the same time, they retain their anatomical strangeness, which easily expands to symbolise any and all differences between birds and humans. The dead bird itself, a decaying body about to return to the earth, fills up with all the experiences of grief, confusion and frustration that are familiar from any encounter with death.

In Pylkkönen's poem, the bird is cut up in a way that stresses its potential objectification. We may recall the same theme in Timo Haajanen's poem "Wings Off", where it is the wings rather than the legs that are cut off the dead bird (see above, pp. 100–101).

As with Pylkkönen's poem about a dead goldcrest, Haajanen's poem begins with speculation about the bird's death: "Seems the pellets didn't go through the lungs / since the bird's breast is fairly plump even after being thumped." The poem continues with a sickeningly detailed description of the carcass, in stark contrast to Pylkkönen's poem, where the focus is on the characteristic body parts of the goldcrest and the bird's death is described indirectly, through negative verbs illustrating the movements that the dead bird no longer makes. Haajanen's poem does not specify the species of the bird but instead concentrates graphically on the filth ejected from the carcass. Yet in both poems the bird moves as the result of human manipulation. Haajanen describes puffs of air escaping from the beak when the breast is depressed, and at the same time the legs extend backwards. Moving and cutting up limbs is a grotesque subject for a poem, but not entirely unfamiliar to the reader, we may assume. Children, artists, scientists and indeed anyone interested in birds and their anatomy will lay their hands on birds to learn more about them.

Ron Broglio writes about this phenomenon in connection with the art of Damien Hirst, tracing the human penchant for cutting living things up to the natural philosophy of Bacon and Heracleitos, where the veiled, hidden nature is exposed by opening up an animal (Broglio 2011, 3–6; see also Poliquin 2012, 32–36). With reference to Simon Lumsden's elaboration on the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, Broglio notes that the existence of an animal is seamlessly linked to being observed and known, and therefore by observing an animal from the outside and the inside we render its existence real. What is significant here is that an animal's existence is specifically dependent on *human* observation and knowledge of this non-human creature. (Broglio 2011, 6–14) This idea of the necessity of a human observer is close to what object-oriented philosophers have criticised as correlationism, i.e. the belief in the necessary link between being and (human) thought (Bryant 2011a, 36–38; Bogost 2012, 4–5). Broglio develops the idea of giving meaning to the animal:

> In the human demand for intelligible presence, the vacuous nature of holes and corners becomes objects of scrutiny to be filled or penetrated – or, better yet, turned inside out and so made into easily reachable surfaces and nonvacuous objects (Broglio 2011, 6).

Broglio writes here not only about surface but also about void, which in my view demands conceptual or metaphorical filling in order to make it whole.

Haajanen's poem contains no expressively clear imagery, but in interpreting the poem it is difficult to overlook the removing of the wings, which is even referenced in the poem's title. A quick reading may give the impression that "Wings Off" alludes to freedom from restraints. But as we find on the third line, it means that the wings are literally being ripped off of the bird. Instead of freedom, the loose wings mean death and thus the impossibility of flying free. The wings make another appearance, interestingly, in the final simile where the mucus exiting the dead bird's body is compared to waterdrops on the wing of a living bird. Waterdrops roll off the wings of a living, healthy bird, because the feathers are protected by a layer of tallow. The difference between the dirty, damp, dead bird and the dry, living one is thus heightened. The dead bird drips with blood and mucus, while clean waterdrops roll down the wings of the live bird – the parallel of blood and water alludes to the symbolism not only of freedom but also of death.

There is thus imagery of freedom and death identifiable in Haajanen's poem, but a more general context for unambigiously interpreting these meanings cannot be found in it. The poem is about a bird's carcass and examining its details; there is nothing in the poem to indicate that the carcass is being seen as a metaphor for any thing or idea in human life. The loss of freedom and death are banal facts in Haajanen's poem, and they have to do with birds, not human beings. Even the severing of the bird's wings serves a mundane purpose: they are being recovered for scientific purposes. The banality of the bird's death is emphasised by the grotesquery and colloquial language of the poem's first stanza. The bird is described as being "thumped", and its wings are jerked off. The bird is trodden under a boot, but the speaker must also be bending down towards it, because he can detect the puffs of air exiting its beak. The darkening blood, faeces and mucus are things that are observed, like the reflex actions of the dead body, distasteful and perhaps trivial features of the situation described in the poem. Nothing that is mentioned in the first stanza is later expanded into a universal thought with more profound meaning.

However, the banal reality of the bird's death does morph into something more complex in the second stanza. At that point, there is a change in the style of the poem and the object of its description. The speaker equates the carcass with a living bird, albeit the latter is not described in the same detail as the carcass: "They are rigid like drops of water // on a live bird's wings they fail to make wet, / instead rolling off." The waterdrops are first compared to the mucus spurting from the body, but in the next line we suddenly find a living bird from whose wings all kinds of drops "roll off". The "they" in "they fail to make wet" may mean either water or mucus. Water cannot make a living bird wet, but neither is a living bird soiled by the filth from a dead bird's body. The final lines may be read in a number of ways, but the distinction between the dead and the living bird, the dirty and the clean, remains constant.

The empty space between the first stanza of the poem and the last two lines gives an impression of distance in space, which is also thematically motivated. The parallel of the dead and living bird in the final lines highlights the distance between them. The dead bird is present in the poem, under the speaker's boot and in the hands of the "lass", so near in fact that we can hear the "snuffles" of air from its beak. The living bird remains distant: its body is only referred to obliquely through the waterdrops rolling off, heightening the impression of an untouchable and unattainable living animal. That the mention of a living bird is so brief implies that there are no living birds currently visible to the speaker and the "lass". Life is here seen as an abstraction, as a capability or force fighting against external threats. The tallow brushed by a bird onto its wings is the very essence of life: protecting oneself against destructive forces.

Dead people are often described as being gone. In Pylkkönen's and Haajanen's poems above, dead birds are also described as being absent. In Pylkkönen's poem, the theme of absence is underlined by the repeated negative verb forms: the bird's body no longer supports the head, nor opens the beak, nor spreads the wings. In Haajanen's poem too, death is the ceasing of movement and the end of the bodily functions that protect the bird. A living bird is clean and healthy within the feathers it grooms and is capable of fleeing, while the body of the dead bird exudes filth and acquiesces to the removal of its wings, which used to be the very thing facilitating its fleeing. In both poems, that which made the living animal alive is gone. It is customary to think that when a human dies, a soul or spirit departs the body, something discrete and immaterial that makes that human being an individual. People in the Western world rarely believe animals to have a similar immaterial essence. Animals are simply matter animated by a force that may be reduced to something material.

Considering the material nature of animals, it is hardly surprising that the dead birds have such a strong presence in both Pylkkönen's and Haajanen's poems. Indeed, in both poems their legs move as the result of manipulation of the body! In Pylkkönen's poem, the goldcrest's toes twitch as a tendon is severed, while in Haajanen's poem both the bird's legs and its orifices still operate. In animals, matter moves matter: the network of joints and tendons in a bird's body is like a piece of fine machinery that may be controlled not only by the bird's nervous system but also by an external manipulator, including a human being. In this sense, the poems are interestingly linked to Descartes' notion of animals being simply very complicated machines. In Pylkkönen's and Haajanen's poems, the presence of the dead birds is also highlighted by the dominance of the description of their bodies. In both poems, the details of the dead body completely capture the speaker's attention. Even though life has departed from the birds, the body in all its fascinating and repulsive details is still there. When a bird is dead, it may be examined, studied and cut up. But can its true essence be discovered?

According to the logic of presence, the essence of a bird is in its physical presence, in its strange and flexible limbs and in its other physical characteristics and features. Yet the speakers in both Pylkkönen's and Haajanen's poem do not seem satisfied with the material nature of the birds' existence: a living bird has something extra that a carcass does not have (or has no longer). And, on the other hand, carcasses have additional characteristics, strange processes and ancillary meanings that sustain the curiosity of the observers. As we may recall from the poems in the previous chapter, the extraneousness of a bird's being or existence is found in living birds too, in their other-earthliness and unique birdness. Instead of the logic of presence or a correlationist approach that lean heavily on the connection between existence and being observed, we might try thinking about the being and existence of birds by considering that there is always something more and something else in a bird's existence than a human can perceive.

In object-oriented philosophy, which emphasises independent and self-sufficient existence of beings and things, a being is understood to be split. Although the terminology varies from one writer to another, the fundamental notion is to distinguish how a being manifests itself to others from what the being in itself is. Timothy Morton writes about "essence" and "appearance", while Levi Bryant uses the terms "virtual proper being" and "local manifestations". Although we perceive a bird – alive or dead – through multiple senses, we can never either perceive or comprehend it *as it actually is.* Various characteristics such as colour and smell may change according to circumstances; the brightness and colour of light and ambient temperature make a bird appear different, even though it is the same bird all the time. This uniqueness and permanence was known in Aristotelian philosophy as "substance" and in Medieval scholasticism as *haecceitas*, or "this-ness". Beings perceive each other as being changeable, yet they never perceive the core of another being, the permanence from which all of the being's characteristics derive. Because of this, object-oriented philosophy holds that beings are always "withdrawn". Ultimately, a being remains unknown even to itself. (Bryant 2011a, 88–94; Bogost 2012, 26–29; Morton 2013, 150–154.)

However, beings and things (or, in a word, objects) are not isolated and individual particles in some all-encompassing space, never encountering one another. On the contrary, objects interact with one another in many ways all the time, and this interaction is total in the sense that there is no environment, space or world outside objects. Indeed, Timothy Morton (2013) and Levi Bryant (2011a) deny the very existence of nature or the "world", respectively: reality consists of atoms, molecules, organisms, things and all kinds of units or substances of existence, small and large, nested within one another. There is nothing all-encompassing above or below them. (Morton 2009, 204; 2013, 42–48; Bryant 2011a, 271) What we call time is in fact a process of slower or faster interaction between objects: the decomposition of a dead bird's body by microbes or the process whereby cells, oxygen and energy create new life inside a bird's egg. Causality is defined broadly in object-oriented philosophy as the impact of all objects on each other. Morton also mentions "translating" and "tuning" (Morton 2013, 81–88, 199–200).

In the context of such an ontology, the concept of the other-earthliness of birds becomes more readily comprehensible. Other-earthliness involves not only species-specific characteristics of animals that make them different in many ways from humans but also the individual-level uniqueness and originality. Other-earthliness is related to the concept of withdrawal in the case of individual beings or, as Ron Broglio writes:

> Withdrawal or invisibility is an essential part of the being of beings: animals withdraw beyond the horizon of our world and our understanding (Broglio 2011, 23).

The idea of the withdrawal of objects also underlies Timothy Morton's concepts of "strange strangers" and "mesh". All beings are strange strangers to one another, yet as they impact one another and communicate with one another, they exist in a shared mesh.

The hiddenness of the essence of live and dead birds allows space for all kinds of more or less human-oriented meanings. Pylkkönen's poem thematises the difference between human and bird, the impossibility of mutual understanding. Haajanen, on the other hand, describes an abstract life force as the antithesis of death, to which all living things must succumb in the end. In both poems, the thematic content is supported by the contrast between presence and absence. In Pylkkönen's poem, the bird is never present for a human being, because a bird cannot understand a human's speech or grief. Haajanen's poem refers to the presence of life, which can only be described using imagery contrary to the concreteness of death. Yet the bodies of the birds are present, and examining them opens a pathway to contemplating the essence of birds. In both poems, birds are seen as alien creatures of which one can only speak with any certainty by describing their bodies. Yet neither poem restricts itself to an objective listing of details, even though at first glance they may appear to do so. The "bodies as voids" demand to be filled.

In addition to the opposition of presence and absence, the birds' bodies in Pylkkönen's and Haajanen's poems are given meaning through the opposition of clean and unclean. Pylkkönen's speaker defines that clean ends and unclean begins where the feathers end. The legs are contrasted with the disorganised feathers and the decomposing, soft body: they are clean, nice and shiny. Perhaps the legs, being hard and shiny, will not decay like the rest of the body and can therefore be cut off and preserved? In Pylkkönen's poem, the speaker's sorrow and desire to make contact with the bird produce an interesting result: the speaker feels compelled to take the cleanest, most pure part of the bird as a souvenir. In Haajanen's poem too, dirt is associated with death. The bodily fluids of the dead bird would not soil the feathers of a live bird. The poem points to the inviolability of a living bird also in its structure: the final two lines describing a living bird are separated into a stanza of their own.

We have already seen that in Finnish bird poetry the death of a bird and a dead bird may acquire many very different meanings. One of the strangest motifs is the stuffed bird, whose other-earthly animalness constantly threatens to be mixed up with or obscured by the object-like withdrawal of a man-made artefact.

MEANINGFUL/MEANINGLESS

Täytetty laulurastas

Mitä varten ei oikea täytetty laulurastas ole
parempi
kuin runo jonka siitä kirjoitan?
Olen sen vain löytänyt ja vienyt täytettäväksi.
Kun se kuluu, on mahdollista saada toinen!
Se on ymmärrettävissä ilman minua ja ilman
mitään runoa,
kun se on puunkalikkaoksallaan ja suuntaa nokan
metsänlatvojen yli.
Täytetty pelastus.
Se on lintu joka ei koskaan kuole.
Kun laulurastas putoaa puusta, en osaa tehdä
uutta tilalle,
en osaa tehdä edes matoa, nivelrenkaista
kastematoa jonka kylki on niinkuin
kammanlappeella viivoitettu,
en osaa tehdä kirppuakaan.
Mutta tämän täytetyn laulurastaan joka minulla
on voisin heittää
menemään.
Eikä se kuolisi.

(Pylkkönen 1972, 20)

A Stuffed Song Thrush

Why isn't a real stuffed song thrush
better
than a poem I write about it?
All I did was find it and take it to be stuffed.
When it wears out, you can get another one!
It can be understood without me and without
any poem,
when it sits on its wooden stick of a branch and directs its beak
beyond forest crowns.
Stuffed salvation.
It's a bird that never dies.
When a song thrush falls off a tree, I can't make
a new one in its place,
I can't even make a worm, an earth worm with its rings
its side scored as if marked
with the face of a comb,
I can't even make a flea.
But this stuffed song thrush that I have
I could throw
away.
And it wouldn't die.

(Transl. Emily Jeremiah & Fleur Jeremiah)

Maila Pylkkönen's poem "A Stuffed Song Thrush" from her collection *Muistista* [From Memory] (1972) is, as the title states, a description of a stuffed song thrush (*Turdus philomelos*). The poem is obviously metalyrical, contemplating the relationship between the representation and the represented. The metalyrical focus is on the stuffed bird, the very opposite of weightless, ideal, unreachable birds. The choice of species – the song thrush – may also be regarded as a reference to poetry. Finnish national poet J. L. Runeberg wrote several poems on song thrushes, for instance. In this poem by Pylkkönen, the song thrush has become a material, tangible object. It also acquires meaning as the antithesis of immortality symbolism. A stuffed bird is *immortal* simply because it is already dead: "But this stuffed song thrush that I have / I could throw / away. / And it wouldn't die." Also, a stuffed bird demonstrates how the representation can be better than the object it represents: "It can be understood without me and without / any poem."

The authenticity and immortality of the bird-object and its self-evident meaning inspire the speaker of the poem, but the mood changes in the second stanza as she begins to consider the stuffed bird in relation to living animals. A bird-object, an artefact constructed by a human being, is not the same thing as a living, vulnerable bird. Although it is always possible to replace a shabby stuffed bird with a new one, the speaker is unable to create a living bird: "When a song thrush falls off a tree, I can't make / a new one in its place." The poem also mentions lower animals – worms and fleas – that the speaker is equally unable to create. The uniqueness of a living animal is something that a human cannot copy, even if he were to reconstruct it materially by having it stuffed or conceptually by writing a poem about it. The poem embodies a hierarchy of representations of nature, at the top of which is the original, genuine bird. The material copy of the bird – an image of the bird – may be ranked second, and lowest in the hierarchy is the poem about a bird, which requires interpretation. However, the poem compares well with the stuffed bird in the question of which is the better copy, because both ultimately are about depicting a living song thrush through human means.

As an aside, we may note that Pylkkönen also wrote a longer poem about stuffed birds, combining verse with prose, entitled "Erään lehtokurpan siipi" [The Wing of a Woodcock], published in the collection *Marjamiesnaisen muistiinpanoja* [The Notebook of a Berrypicking Woman] (1975). This is a far more complex and multi-layered text, associating the stuffed bird with a variety of meanings associated with art and creation. I enclose an extract in which the speaker has just checked that the angels surrounding the Sistine Madonna have "wings the colour of a real bird", this explaining why she likes stuffed birds:

> Ei ehkä ole mikään ihme, että aina tahdon kotiini täytettyä laulurastasta, lehtokurpan siipeä ja vaikka pulunkin jonka vielä kerran saan, kun näyttää siltä että ihmisten ateljeissa on sellainen ollut kautta aikojen.
>
> (Pylkkönen 1975, 79)
>
> No wonder, perhaps, that I'm always wanting a stuffed song thrush for my home, a woodcock wing and even a pigeon, which I will yet get, since it seems there's been one in people's studios through the ages.
>
> (Transl. Emily Jeremiah & Fleur Jeremiah)

Nor is Pylkkönen the only Finnish poet to write about stuffed birds. Matti Paavilainen's collection *Sukukartta* [Family Map] (1964) contains an extensive prose poem described as "suurten rakkauksien kronikka" [Chronicle of Great Loves] that refers to Eichendorff's nightingales and stuffed birds. These serve as metaphors for the speaker's early experimentations in poetry, i.e. a metalyrical image for poetry whose form was classical but whose content was stagnant, dead. The same problem of poetic representation is also referred to in a poem about a stuffed European robin by Pertti Nieminen, published in his collection *Yöt lentävä lintu lennä* [Bird that Flies by Night, Fly] (1986). The speaker of the poem suddenly recalls where he has previously seen the robin: "lauluton lasisilmälintu / runoilijan kirjahyllyssä, / lahja toiselta runoilijalta" [a song-less glass-eyed bird / in a poet's bookcase, / a gift from another poet] (Nieminen 1986, 37). Gracefully alliterated in the original Finnish, "lauluton lasisilmälintu" must refer to a stuffed bird, as taxidermists generally use glass eyes in stuffed animals. However, being a gift from another poet and placed in a bookcase, it might also be a metaphor for a poetry book. There is constant vacillation and uncertainty between a real bird and its various representations – whether verbal or fashioned from the bird's body itself.

In her book *The Breathless Zoo* (2012), Rachel Poliquin traces the diverse meanings of and motivations behind taxidermy in museums, science and art. For her, the creation of taxidermy is always impelled by "narratives of longing" which include seven particular motives (expressed here in italics): taxidermy evokes *wonder* and a sense of *beauty*, it establishes an *order* on nature and endows its objects a *narrative* form, it presents nature as a *spectacle* and as an *allegory*, and finally, it allows humans a tool for *remembrance* (Poliquin 2012, 7). As Pylkkönen's poem about the stuffed song thrush implies, the question of realness and representation is always present in the human-made animal object (Poliquin 2012, 38–42, 107–108).

In Pylkkönen's poem "A Stuffed Song Thrush", the hierarchy of the real animal, the stuffed animal and the poem about the animal is relative in many ways. The real live bird is unambiguously superior in the sense that a human being can never make a real bird. Yet a real bird is corporeal and therefore mortal: its being will eventually decompose. A human being, on the other hand, is able to modify and preserve a bird's body so as to halt the process of decay. The result is "stuffed salvation", "a bird that never dies". You can throw the bird away, but you cannot kill it. You do not need another human being or a poem to understand a stuffed bird: it is unambiguously itself, a meaningful part of the material world. But as part of the material world, a stuffed bird too is subject to slow decay, wear and tear, as the speaker admits. It can be replaced, but the replacement is no longer the same object. A poem, on the other hand, is not subject to decay like objects, and it cannot die like living animals. Yet the strength of a poem about a song thrush is also its weakness: being a poem, it must be read and understood. Ultimately, the hierarchy of the bird, the bird-object and the bird-poem depends on whether we focus on creation, re-creation or representation. A human being cannot create a unique, living bird, but he can re-create the bird in a way that halts the biological processes of death. But only a linguistic representation of the bird is free of the physical laws of the material world.

The symbolism of absence and presence that appears in Haajanen's poem "Wings Off" and Pylkkönen's poem "Should I not weep for you just as well" also underlies "A Stuffed Song Thrush". In the latter poem, the issue of presence is associated with the idea of replacement. Which of the birds is immortal and thus ever-present: the real bird, the stuffed bird or the poem-bird? Although the real bird is the highest in the representation hierarchy (being the *sine qua non* of all representations and their model), it is the least valuable in terms of presence. The speaker in the poem refers to the mortality of the song thrush and its living environment that remains inaccessible to humans: "When a song thrush falls off a tree, I can't make / a new one in its place". A stuffed song thrush, on the other hand, "sits on its wooden stick of a branch and directs its beak / beyond forest crowns". The "stick of a branch" implies a man-made perch that can be placed for instance on a window sill and turned so that the beak of the stuffed bird points out of its living environment, over the forest. The poem returns to the notion of the immortality of the stuffed bird. Even if the speaker were to throw it away, it would not die. The presence of a stuffed bird is the presence of an object, a presence subject to the will of a human being. (See Poliquin 2012, 203–205.)

Absence and presence are defined in more object-oriented terms in "A Stuffed Song Thrush" than in the poems by Haajanen and Pylkkönen analysed earlier. The stuffed thrush and the poem about it are man-made artefacts. Instead of the clean–dirty opposition, for instance, birds are given meaning by evaluating how genuine they are. The issue of genuineness has to do with representation, and according to this logic the real bird is genuine and original and the stuffed bird is more genuine than the poem-bird, because a stuffed bird can be understood "without any poem". However, this metalyrical poem contains one further aspect that questions the ideal of genuineness. The ideas about real and stuffed birds and poems about them are seen through the lens of this individual poem, and the issue of value, genuineness and immortality remains unresolved in the poem. Even though the poem would not exist without the real and the stuffed song thrush, in the context of this poem the existence of the real and the stuffed song thrush is dependent on the poem itself.

Haajanen and Pylkkönen's poems about dead birds are conceptual analyses of non-human life, materialness and death. The symbolic pairs of clean–unclean, present–absent and real–unreal may reflect how we understand non-human life, or life more generally. Perhaps these oppositions arose as tools for organising the confusing and disturbing material complexity of life? Cleanness has to do with life and a living being's ability to keep its body in shape; dirt emerges and takes over the body after death. The opposition of presence and absence is about how a material body does not guarantee existence, even though the material body is our only way to contact and connect with other beings. The issue of real vs. unreal is linked to the distinction between things that have emerged naturally and things that have been made or modified by human beings: the creation of real life is not something that is subject to human will.

It would thus seem that conceptual pairs like the above organise our thinking and mitigate the distress caused by the sight of the body of a dead animal (or human). In bird poetry, these oppositions show how human beings tend to translate the world into human terms. The observations of Timothy Morton, which I referred to in connection with anthropomorphism in the previous chapter, are apt in this context too: grief for a dead goldcrest or seeing a stuffed song thrush as stuffed salvation are reactions to different birds, but they are *human* reactions, and as such they are always more about the human reacting than the non-human object to which the human reacts, however interesting and strange that object may be.

Above and in the previous chapter, I have written much about the birdness of birds, the discourses of talking about birds and the symbolic meanings ascribed to birds. I have repeatedly noted that birds are other-earthly and what this actually means for talking or writing about birds: the essence of the bird withdraws, and the meaning of the bird remains and must be left unclear, if the point is to represent the bird *as a bird.* A poem that represents a bird as a bird always balances between two opposing tendencies. On the one hand, we must consider the bird with regard to its physical characteristics and possibly its behaviour – i.e. we must understand and represent the bird *as is*, without any cultural frames of reference. On the other hand, any kind of understanding and representation require conceptual analysis, i.e. an interpretation of what a bird actually is. It is impossible to represent a bird without using any linguistic and symbolic elements or discourses, and this inevitably places the bird in the context of cultural meanings. This tension between things that are "outside culture" and "inside culture" affects all our thinking concerning non-human beings, and as such it is a fundamental characteristic of nature-themed poetry – but one that is surprisingly rarely addressed in literary criticism of poetry.

So how does one represent a bird *as a bird* – bring it up as meaningful yet leave it without any particular meaning? In the following poem by Timo Haajanen, we see a hen harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) in the sky. In addition to the living bird, there is a dead bird just as in the poem "Wings Off":

Ja kevyt kuin paperi
(Circus cyaneus)

Sinisuohaukka
nousee isona kevyesti
lahdelle.
Aurinkoa vasten

se on musta
ja kevyt

kuin paperi. Yläperä
valkea täplä
hiiltyneessä palassa.
Ruoho kasteesta kostea

ja kirkas,
yli yön verkkoihin

unohdettu lintu
on nokittu tarkkaan.

(Haajanen 1991, 38)

And Light as Paper
(Circus cyaneus)

A hen harrier,
large, rises lightly
over the bay.
Against the sun

it is black
and light

as paper. Its rump
a white spot
in a charred lump.
The grass damp with dew

and bright,
a bird forgotten

in nets overnight
has been pecked clean.

(Transl. Emily Jeremiah & Fleur Jeremiah)

In a poem, as in any artwork, there is always something that is in the foreground. The central element in Haajanen's poem is the hen harrier, whose effortless soaring in the sky across the sun is closely followed by the speaker. Scientific language is reflected in the use of the bird's common name and scientific name, and the technical term for a bird's lower back over the tail, "rump". The bay, the sun, the sky and the grass damp with morning dew paint the background for the impressive bird in the sky – and it is not until the very end that we see the dead bird caught in the net, raising questions about the connection between the living and dead birds.

Timothy Morton, who has studied the poetics of nature-themed poetry, considers the distinction between foreground and background to be the most fundamental characteristic of nature-themed poetry. In *Ecology without Nature* (2007), Morton presents his theory of nature-themed art as ecomimesis. Various branches of the arts – visual arts, music, literature – produce experiences of nature as a surrounding totality when describing the natural environment. Morton thus sees nature as a thoroughly ideological thing: nature consists of the experiences, concepts and ideas that we associate with the physical environment, its phenomena and processes and non-human life forms. Ecomimesis appears as specific artistic devices that Morton collectively refers to as the "poetics of ambience". These devices, which I will be discussing in more detail in the following chapters, have to do with how artworks create spatial, rhythmic and variously material impressions and with how artworks seem to present themselves to the recipient whole and complete, like a surrounding landscape. Because the sensations of being surrounded or embedded in a landscape are key elements in ecomimesis, Morton (2009, 47–52) identifies the re-mark as a key device in the poetics of ambience. This is a concept borrowed from Jacques Derrida (1981), conceptualising the articulation of meaning in text through the re-mark. For Derrida, the re-mark is a prerequisite for meaningfulness – the principle according to which signs in a text acquire meaning and are distinguished as meaningful. The re-mark creates a space between signs and relates them to one another. (Derrida 1981, 222, 252–253)

Morton (2009, 48) also describes the re-mark as a special sign (or series of signs) that makes us aware of the presence of meaningful elements. It is always minimalist and vague, and sometimes so subtle as to remain unnoticed by the recipient, as for instance when a museum cleaner clears out a spatial artwork consisting of paint tins and paintbrushes (Morton 2009, 51). I noted above that in Haajanen's poem "And Light as Paper (*Circus cyaneus*)" the hen harrier occupies the foreground, but where exactly would we place the re-mark? I would be tempted to locate it in the lines where the hen harrier almost gains metaphorical meaning:

> [...]
> Against the sun
>
> it is black
> and light
>
> as paper. Its rump
> a white spot
> in a charred lump.
> [...]

The bird looks black and light like paper against the sun, but then the colouring of the bird's back is described in more detail: the white rump is clearly discernible against the coal-black back. "Charred" is a vivid description of the blue-grey colouring of the bird's back, but it carries a metaphorical meaning too. The lightness of paper associated with a bird matches the effortless soaring of the hen harrier, which is a very good flier; the black colour matches the appearance of the bird against the bright sky. Describing the bird's colour as "charred" also reinforces the connection to paper: the hen harrier looks almost like paper charred black by the sun.

The analogy of bird and paper brings a poetic idiom alongside the scientific discourse, and at the same time the bird emerges not only from the poetic landscape but from the content of the poem as something that has special meaning. It is almost like a symbol, but of what? And on the other hand, can the hen harrier really be that special if the speaker can in a flash transfer his attention to the landscape and another bird (and a dead one at that).

Since the hen harrier appears at once in the foreground and the background in the poem, it remains aloof from the assigning of any symbolic and anthropomorphic meanings – or at least that is what the poetics of ambience leads us to think. According to Morton, the impression that the re-mark creates of the foreground merging into the background and the distinction between the significant and insignificant being blurred are actually nothing more than illusions created by the poetics of ambience. The re-mark is never gradual: the separation of foreground and background is complete (Morton 2009, 50). Just as in music a group of notes takes shape as a melody and rhythm or in a visual artwork a shape begins to resemble a human being, in poetry too a specific image will acquire a specific meaning. In bird poetry, the distinction of the foreground represents a sort of endpoint or closure for depicting non-human beings, and as such it assigns the bird one specific meaning. The hen harrier is reduced to an aesthetic object, a piece of sun-charred paper floating in the sky.

As far as the ecomimetic representation of nature is concerned, the re-mark should not be understood merely as a poetic device within a text. It is thus not the same as foregrounding, which in structuralist linguistics and literary criticism means giving prominence to particular linguistic elements in a text (see Mukařovský 1964, 19–24; Leech 1969, 56–69). Morton expands the domain of the concept of the re-mark to our more concrete relationships to non-human beings, which implies that the either–or distinction imposed by the re-mark means either including the non-human in the sphere of things significant and meaningful for humans – or, which is what we mostly do now, excluding them from it. Morton writes:

> *Margin* (French *marge*) denotes a border or an edge, hence 'seashore'. Indeed, if current industrial policies remain unchecked, these very spaces, such as coral reefs, and liminal species (Latin, *limen*, boundary) such as amphibians, will be increasingly at risk of being wiped out. But because of the logic of the re-mark, such spaces, whether they are outside or inside our heads, embody what is, at bottom, illusory. I mean here to support these margins. As a matter of urgency, we just *cannot* go on thinking of them as "in between". We must choose to include them on this side of human social practices, to factor them in to our political and ethical decisions. As Bruno Latour states, "Political philosophy … finds itself confronted with the obligation to internalize the environment that it had viewed up to now as another world." (Morton 2009, 51, italics in the original)

By coral reefs and amphibians, Morton means species of living beings that are in some way "in between" or exist at boundaries. Coral reefs are mineral formations made up of the remains of millions of tiny animals living in symbiosis with certain types of algae, which are plants rather than animals. Amphibians live part of their lives in the water and part on land (their name comes from the Latin *amphi*, both sides, and *bios*, life). Our habit of classifying these beings as borderline cases is linked in Morton's argumentation to our inability to view non-human otherness as an ethically and politically significant otherness (on the distinction between otherness and difference, see Morton 2009, 151). As Morton notes, pointing to Latour's *Politics of Nature* (2004), resolving environmental problems requires us to embrace the disappearing coral reefs as part of our reality, our problems. In other words, policies and practices in the future require the consideration of non-human outsiders as both meaningful *and* non-human. (Morton 2009, 204–205)

Morton argues that the re-mark is always present whenever we think about nature, about the environment or about non-human beings and when we create art based on their existence. In artworks, the re-mark plays on representation and non-representation, which results in a bird, for instance, seeming to emerge as something significant but not signified – as a bird, but specifically and only as a bird. As Morton notes, and as I have argued with the poems I have analysed so far, there is usually a particular discourse, image or other element in the poem that crystallises the bird's meaning into something specific. The birds in the poems in this chapter are "only bodies", and yet (ultimately?) some sort of symbolic representations of death or the materiality of life. On the other hand, beyond art in the realms of politics and ethics, we should be able to "lock down" the meaning of non-human creatures so as to make their lives our common concern. At the end of the day, the concept of the re-mark is about there being no such thing as a boundary between the inside and the outside. Morton concludes his chapter on the re-mark thus:

> None of this is to claim that inside and outside "really" exist. In fact, understanding the re-mark means radically questioning the genuine existence of these categories. (Morton 2009, 54; see also 78)

Like Morton, I believe that the issue of (cultural) inside and outside is crucial for bird poetry, and I will return to this in the context of language and in the context of living environment in the following chapters.

ANXIETY, CORPO-REALITIES AND THE QUESTION OF ESSENTIALISM

In this and the preceding chapter, I have discussed issues of the essence and existence of birds and of ascribing meaning to them, emphasising the other-earthliness of birds as related to withdrawn otherness on the one hand and the same shared world on the other. Yet sometimes birds seem to lose their meaning altogether, or perhaps their otherness is just too much *other*. Sometimes thinking about birds too much is fatiguing, rendering them almost irrelevant. Timo Haajanen, who has worked much with birds and written a lot about them, addressed these feelings in a poem:

Naurulokkeja täysin summaton parvi.

Ehkä yhdellä identifiointinumero renkaassa
(mutta ei se mitään). Eivätkä ne ole

hajoitettavissa eivätkä yhteenajettavissa
niin kuin ihmiset, eivät ole
kerta kaikkiaan
paljon paskaakaan.

(Haajanen 1991, 45)

A flock of black-headed gulls, countless.

Maybe one of them has an identification number on a ring
(but no matter). And they cannot be

dispersed or herded together
like people,
all in all
they don't amount to shit.

(Transl. Emily Jeremiah & Fleur Jeremiah)

The speaker refers to countless individuals of the species black-headed gull (*Larus ridibundus*). One of them may have an identification ring, which would allow picking that individual out of the crowd. The phrase in parentheses "(but no matter)" as related to the identification number means that finding one gull is irrelevant considering how large and unknown the flock is. The parentheses also belittle the speaker's thought of the irrelevance of the identification number. The issue of the meaning of the gulls emerges from the tension between identification and non-identification of an individual. For a human being, the simplest – and most often used – way of telling virtually identical birds apart is to ring them. But even ringing cannot help identify all the members of a *countless* flock.

The poem features Haajanen's typical enjambement: "(but no matter). And they cannot be // dispersed or herded together". In the original, the reader's attention is caught by the frequent use of negative verb forms. These are the linguistic units used to describe the gulls. The birds are described on the basis of what they are not. The properties of being dispersable or herdable include not only the meanings of forming/augmenting a group and dispersing/reducing a group, but also the connotation of herd mentality. The gulls are compared to humans, who unlike birds can be dispersed or herded. People behave like herd animals, even though gulls fly in enormous flocks. The poem concludes with a seemingly disparaging thought: "all in all / they don't amount to shit". In interpreting the poem, it is possible to rise above the colloquial deprecation of the ending. Perhaps the countless flock cannot be dispersed or herded, but it also does not amount to "shit"? The gulls rise above everything that is negative, unlike human beings, who are individually named but herd animals.

The meaning of the gulls in the poem ultimately remains an open question. The identification number does not help in comprehending a flock of birds, but the comparison to humans also does not satisfy the speaker. What is important is that the birds capture the speaker's attention and lead him to contemplate their meaning. Perhaps the poem reflects the kind of frustration that comes from thinking about something to which there is no correct and final solution. For birds, there is no meaning generated from themselves that would be meaningful for humans (Poliquin 2012, 38–39).

In the following poem, the speaker seems unable to avoid drifting off his topic, the birds to be ringed:

> Kun mikä tahansa lintu identifioidaan
> kahdeksannumeroisella luvulla
> ja alumiinirengas puristetaan jalkaan,
> se ei tunne eikä tajua
> sen enempää kuin kilpa-ajaja
> joka räjähtää koneen mukana.
> Olen kauppamatkalla.
> Sitä samaa.
> Paitsi että tällä kertaa viimein suolaa.
> Suolaa tai ei.
>
> (Haajanen 1991, 50)

> When any bird is identified
> with an eight-digit figure
> and an aluminium ring is clamped to its foot,
> it does not feel or sense
> any more than a racing driver
> who blows up along with his engine.
> I am going to the shops.
> Same old, same old.
> Except this time, finally some salt.
> Some salt or not.
>
> (Transl. Emily Jeremiah & Fleur Jeremiah)

At the beginning of the poem, the speaker wonders whether the bird understands it is being ringed. The phrase "any bird" emphasises the similarity of the animals; not one bird can understand what the ringer is actually doing. The eight-digit identification figure and the interests of knowledge and research practices associated with it are far beyond an animals' comprehension. The speaker compares the bird to a racing driver who dies when his car blows up. Neither feels or senses what happens. Of a racing driver, however, we might say that he *did not have time* to sense or understand the explosion before dying. Thus, the mind of a bird is equated with the mind of a human dying a sudden death. Unlike a human, a bird is constantly in an arrested state of mind, according to the speaker: it is as if it were dead, with no understanding and no feeling.

After the parallel of the bird's mind and the death of the racing driver, there is a surprising change of footing. The speaker suddenly announces that he is going to the shop and plans to buy some salt. The poem drifts into the colloquial, as going to the shop is something thoroughly mundane and mechanically repetitive. There is one special purpose, however: "Except this time, finally some salt." Yet the final line renders even this uncertain: "Some salt or not." The word "not" is repeated in the fourth and final lines of the poem, creating a connection of meaning between feeling, sensing and buying salt. It is as if the person doing the shopping also does not really know what he wants or intends. The change of footing remains unexplained, leaving the reader somewhat uncomfortable. The poem yields an astounding impression of being empty and even superfluous. This cannot be explained by the mundane nature of going to the shop or buying salt alone. One angle to the poem is that its perspective is that of a ringer, for whom ringing is a routine procedure. There may be hundreds of birds to be processed in any given day, and it is entirely plausible that a ringer's mind may drift to racing cars or shopping lists. Yet the issue of the bird's experience dwells on the mind of the reader. As in the poem about the flock of black-headed gulls, the description of the bird seems significant, but its motivation and the meaning of the animal remain unclear.

Haajanen's idiosyncratic poems that mix frustration and interest may betray some level of existential angst. Timothy Morton writes about this feature of objects, referring – naturally – to Martin Heidegger:

> In anxiety, the world becomes flat and meaningless. Objects seem to lose their significance for us: they have "nothing more to 'say' to us", in Heidegger's telling phrase. That is, it is as if we are able to catch an impossible glimpse of their secretiveness. (Morton 2013, 204)

The withdrawal of objects is at once exciting and frustrating:

> because of withdrawal, an object never exhausts itself in its appearances – this means that there is always something left over, as it were, an excess that might be experienced as a distortion, gap, or void (Morton 2013, 113).

Here, Morton uses the same term I have used for dead birds: they are voids. As Haajanen's poems about living *and* dead birds show, the body of a bird is never the key to understanding the real bird, no matter how much one observes or touches it, or even if it were turned inside out.

The wonderment (or angst) felt in contemplating a bird and its corporeality shows just how significant bodies and matter are. The title of this chapter, "corpo-realities", is a blanket term for all the factors highlighted by the corporeality of living and dead birds. The birdness of a bird is in its living body and in the multiple connections of that body to its environment, but human beings do not and cannot have access to this birdness or other-earthliness. A dead bird, by contrast, is a void that a human being is free to fill with any meanings – or alternatively a void provoking frustration or anguish in the face of inert matter. Finally, referring to Morton's concept of the re-mark and its political-aesthetic potential: because a bird is always encountered as a body, whether living or dead, every bird must be regarded as a unique and meaningful being complete in itself.

Accordingly, my thinking is that birds have an essence of their own but that this essence cannot be defined by anyone, cannot be identified by any means of observation and cannot be represented by any means of discourse. The concept of a unique essence is in my view a feasible ontological and ethical starting point for any and all contemplation of birds, because it automatically anchors the discussion to individual, concrete beings and relationships between a being and its environment. The reason I wish to spell this out is that many scholars engaged in post-humanities, animal philosophy and new materialism have openly criticised essentialism on ethical or ontological grounds (e.g. Haraway 1997; 2008; Deleuze & Guattari 1988; see also Aaltola 2013b) Without entering into this debate in greater depth, I should note that I do share their concern for instance for the links between essentialism and speciesism, and I am aware of the philosophical problems of biological essentialism (see Barker 2010). In the following chapters, I will move on from the essence of birds to languages and environments, because these are (in spite of all our conceptions underlining the differences between human and non-human beings) the things that we share with birds – partially in semiotic terms but more completely in material terms.