

Beyond Transposition? Exploring metaphysicality in birdsong and Olivier Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux* through painting practice

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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis interrogates the concept and practice of 'transposition' through exploring experiences of birdsong as an embodied encounter between polysensory experiences in the landscape and the visual in painting practice. From a visual art perspective, I explore the auditory musical methodologies of French composer Olivier Messiaen (1908 – 1992). Through using drawing to explore the metaphysicality of a birdsong encounter, I propose that Messiaen's birdsong transcriptions (*cahiers*) and resulting piano cycle *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (1956 – 1958), demonstrate a transpositional methodology. Through analysis of Messiaen's *cahiers* and *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, I create a methodological framework to explore in painting practice. I question the extent to which transposition operates between the intangible ephemera of an embodied birdsong encounter and tangible material processes in mark-making (drawing and painting). By thinking through mark-making as a site of embodied encounter, I explore the metaphysicality of transposition as embedded in process.

I present the complexity of transposing encounters between birdsong and painted surfaces through material thinking. Painting practice leads my enquiry and is supported largely in part by writing-thinking to explore the nuances of transposing in painted surfaces. I identify moments where transposition occurs when transcribing birdsong in the landscape and creating paintings in response. I explore how using painting practice as a tool, is considered a transpositional vehicle. Departing from visual artist and writer Yve Lomax's theory of transposition as a moving device, I present the case that Messiaen's *cahiers* and *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, and my field notebooks and paintings are transpositional objects. Through painting practice, I provide a way to explore metaphysicality through material inquiry. Aligning with artist researcher Jacqueline Taylor's concept of the 'quasacle', I argue that transposition apprehends metaphysicality through materiality on the peripheries of language. In doing so, this thesis brings the concept of transposition and metaphysicality together as experienced through painting practice. This resulted in new ways of conceiving encounter in the experience and materiality of painting practice.

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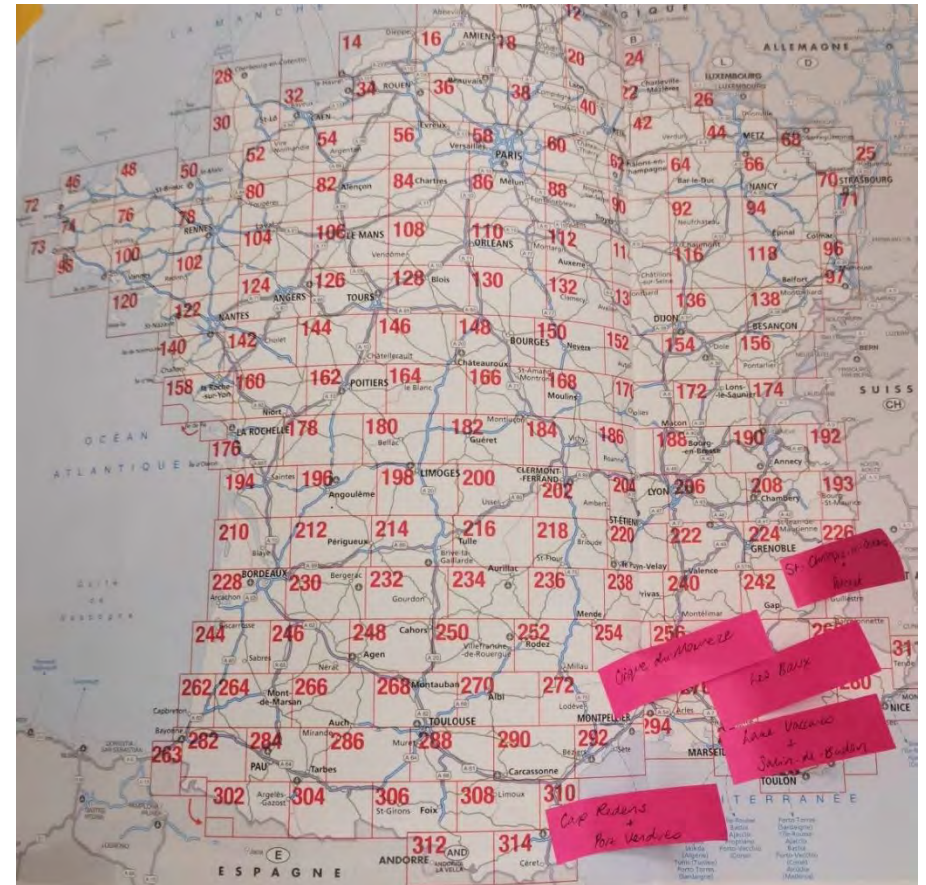
James Fisher, for his continued encouragement in my painting, and joining me to wonder about birds.

Peter and Liz Cowdrey, for teaching me about the relationship between birds, music, and walking.

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This thesis is for my parents – whose energy, enthusiasm, help and full, unwavering confidence in my work, has kept me going.

INTRODUCTION



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Glossary of key terms and translations

Cahier:

Notebook. *Cahiers*, in the context of this thesis, describe the notebooks Messiaen used to transcribe birdsong and the landscape from research in the French landscape, and transcriptions developed from recordings of birdsong in the Swedish Disks. This research includes analysis of Messiaen's transcriptions of birdsong in his notebook. In these cases, I include both his original written annotations in French formally, and then proceed these with English translations. These translations have been conducted by me. Translations by others are indicated as such in the text.

Catalogue d'oiseaux:

Olivier Messiaen's piano cycle, completed in 1958. *Catalogue d'oiseaux* when performed, lasts over two hours. *Catalogue d'oiseaux* is described in this thesis as containing seven 'book's that contain thirteen 'nature portraits'. The 'nature portraits' describe the thirteen individual pieces that make up *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, and the 'books' describe the organisation of the 'nature portraits' in *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. I

refer to the nature portraits within *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, and the piece itself using the French titles.

Colour, music:

Describes the variation between qualities of music

'L'Alouette calandrelle':

Short-toed lark. The eighth nature portrait in *Catalogue d'oiseaux*.

'La Rousserolle effarvatte':

Reed warbler. The fourth nature portrait in *Catalogue d'oiseaux*.

'Le Merle de roche':

Rock thrush. The tenth nature portrait in *Catalogue d'oiseaux*.

Semiotic marker:

Defined in my practice as singling out a transcription in my field notebooks and conceptualising it by naming it as a sign for a signified.

Introduction

This research project interrogates transposition between the auditory and the visual as a polysensory encounter through painting practice. This project is practice-based, whereby paintings and processes therein exploring metaphysicality and transposition form the basis of this thesis's contribution to knowledge.¹

1. Research question, aims, and objectives

This research is centred around the question: To what extent, can transposition enable metaphysicality to be encountered and comprehended in painting processes via an interrogation of birdsong and Olivier Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux*?

This research aims to:

1. Explore the intangible and ephemeral qualities of birdsong as metaphysical.

2. Use Messiaen's transcriptions of birdsong into composition as a methodological framework for painting practice.
3. Reconceptualise transposition through examining the ways in which the intangible, unknown, and irresolute nature of birdsong can be made tangible in the painted surface.
4. Develop new ways of conceiving encounter in painting practice through transposition.

Research objectives:

1. Analyse selected *cahiers* detailing Messiaen's transcriptions and selected nature portraits from Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux* and encountering birds in the French landscape.
2. Establish methods of transcription to incorporate embodied encounter with birdsong from an understanding of Messiaen's musical interpretations of birdsong.

¹ CCS, *Practice Based Research: A Guide. A report with recommendations by Linda Candy for University of Technology, Sydney*,

<[http://www.creativityandcognition.com/resources/PBR Guide-1.1-2006.pdf](http://www.creativityandcognition.com/resources/PBR%20Guide-1.1-2006.pdf)> [accessed 27 February 2022] (pp. 1-19), p. 1

3. Undertake transpositional explorations using material perception and material thinking in embodied encounters.
4. Produce a body of paintings that interrogate metaphysicality as both site and encounter.
5. Develop mutual articulation between painting and written thesis.

This research explores metaphysicality through painting, whereby I consider the painting process as residing on the *peripheries* of language to navigate the unknown, intangible, and irresoluteness of a birdsong encounter. Book Two of this thesis deals with how I define metaphysicality – and not metaphysics – in full.

The impetus for this research enquiry specifically into transposition comes from my problematisation of translation, where I consider the translated ‘thing’ as losing its value in the process. Transposition is explored outside of its traditional musical and mathematical contexts. Instead, building on literary definitions of transposition, it is explored in an art

practice/artistic research context. Whilst the research centres on the examination of Messiaen’s piano cycle *Catalogue d’oiseaux*, which is a transposition of birdsong, it is important to note that musical transposition is not the central facet of enquiry per se. Rather, I approach Messiaen’s music from the lens of an artist-researcher in painting practice. Through drawing and painting practice – understood as allied creative practices – this research considers transposition as a methodology in Messiaen’s musical interpretations of birdsong (in other words, the way he perceived birdsong as music, and transcribed it as such), and crucially, their use in visual art context.

This research project is also not concerned with *translating* birdsong into painting, nor indeed *Catalogue d’oiseaux* into painting, relating to debates on the relationship between painting and music. Connections between painting and music, particularly in the study of rhythm, tone, colour, gesture, arabesque, fugues, and leitmotifs, have been widely explored. This is most notable in comparative analysis of music and painting by art historian Peter Vergo,² and philosopher Theodore Adorno’s

² See Peter Vergo, *The Music of Painting: Music, Modernism and the Visual Arts from the Romantics to John Cage* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2010)

interrogation of temporality and spatiality in painting in music,³ and Maurice Denis's reflections on painting and music from a painter's perspective.⁴ Artists have also directly responded to listening to music⁵ and interrogated the relationship between languages and painting.⁶ There is also notable analysis of the relational composition styles of music composer Anton Webern, and artist Paul Klee.⁷ Cross-modal similarities between painting and music and the perception of sound through drawing are explored by researchers Mats Küssner and Rossana Actis-Grosso et al.⁸ Instead, I explore Messiaen's musical interpretations of birdsong as they are imbricated with the landscape as transpositional methods. I then use these

methods as a framework to explore this transposition in the different, and equally poetic field of painting practice.

This research investigates the multidimensional, meta-layered, and polysensory potential of transposition as both a topic of study and method – indeed as a process and space that emerges as a place in painting. I do so by using my own painting practice to explore embodied encounters with birdsong. Building on my previous MRes research into two different forms of light (cinematic and natural), I explore here two forms of birdsong and musical interpretations of birdsong. Firstly, investigating Olivier Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (1956-8), and secondly natural birdsong in the French and Worcestershire landscape. *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, is a two-hour

³ See Theodore Adorno, 'On Some Relationships between Music and Painting', *Musical Quarterly*, 79.1 (1995), 66-79 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/742517>> [accessed 27 February 2022].

⁴ See Gerard Vaughan (1984) 'Maurice Denis and the Sense of Music', *Oxford Art Journal*, 7.1 (1984), 38-48 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1360064>> [accessed 27 February 2022].

⁵ See Fiona Robinson's exploration of composer Claude Debussy's *L'Après Midi d'un Faune* in her drawings *La Cathédrale engloutie* on her website: <https://fionarobinson.com/>. For Robinson's explanation of how she explores music, see 'Prelude a l'Après Midi d'un Faune by Debussy' on BBC Radio 4, aired on the 18th April 2018 at 21:30pm. See: Fiona Robinson, 'Fiona Robinson: A Line, Drawn', 2022 <<https://fionarobinson.com/>> [accessed 10 February 2022]. See also: Soul Music, 'Prelude a l'Après Midi d'un Faune by Debussy' (BBC Radio 4) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09z5j2m>> [accessed 28th February 2022].

⁶ See Juliet Kac and Rod Paton's painting *Concerto for Two Violins in D Minor* in Juliet Kac and Rod Paton, 'Painted Musical Representation and Mnemonics', *Music Perception*, 21.1 (2003), 155-56 <<https://doi.org/10.1525/mp.2003.21.1.155>> [accessed 27 February 2022].

⁷ See Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, 'In-between Painting and Music-or, Thinking with Paul Klee and Anton Webern', *Research in Phenomenology*, 43. 3 (2013), 419-442 <<https://doi.org/10.1163/15691640-12341268>> [accessed 27 February 2022].

⁸ Mats Küssner, 'Shape, drawing and gesture: Cross-modal mappings of sound and music', (unpublished doctoral thesis, King's College London, 2014). See also Rossana Actis-Grosso et al., Carlotta Lega, Alessandro Zani, Olga Daneyko, Zaira Cattaneo, and Daniele Zavagno, 'Can Music Be Figurative? Exploring the Possibility of Crossmodal Similarities between Music and Visual Arts', *Psihologija*, 50.3, (2017) 285-306 <<https://doi.org/10.2298/PSI1703285A>> [accessed 27 February 2022].

long piano cycle of thirteen nature portraits. Selecting two out of thirteen nature portraits, I identify both Messiaen's relationship with birdsong and my own experiences with birdsong as having a metaphysicality. Furthermore, I propose that Messiaen's transcriptions of birdsong and resulting compositions of *Catalogue d'oiseaux* transposes this metaphysicality. I identify Messiaen's move from transcribing birdsong to musical composition as a transpositional act and use this to create a framework for interrogating transposition in painting practice. Through fieldwork to locations in France where Messiaen transcribed birdsong, I conducted my own transcriptions of birdsong and the surrounding landscape. Then, returning to the painting studio, I explored the metaphysicality of encountering birdsong in the landscape through exploring metaphysicality in transposition of birdsong transcriptions to the construction of painted surfaces.

Though transposition has been explored in art practice,⁹ no study has yet explored embodied encounters

with birdsong as they are experienced and manifest in the landscape and in painting processes as a vehicle to interrogate transposition. This research approaches the painting processes as a thinking tool and site of encounter, which I argue sits on the peripheries of communicable language.

2. Methodology

This research pertains to the overarching umbrella of Practice Research, citing from Midlands4Cities who define it as:

“a process of investigation in order to gain new knowledge and original insights [...] in which creative output can be produced or practice undertaken as an integral part of the research process and which is then disseminated in an appropriate form to the fields who benefit from such knowledge”.¹⁰

I undertake research *through* art practice that involves reflective perception of processes, in the understanding that it

⁹ See Birk Weiberg, 'Speculations on Transpositional Photography', in *Transpositions: Aesthetico-Epistemic Operators in Artistic Research*, ed. by Michael Schwab (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2018), pp. 177-190. See also Esa Kirkkopelto, 'Abandoning Art in the Name of Art: Transpositional Logic in Artistic Research', in *Transpositions: Aesthetico-Epistemic Operators in Artistic*

Research, ed. by Michael Schwab (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2018), pp. 33-40.

¹⁰ Midlands4Cities, *Midlands4Cities Doctoral Training Partnership Scoring Criteria Eligibility*, <<https://www.midlands4cities.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/M4CScoringCriteria.pdf>> [accessed 27 February 2022] 1-8 (p.1).

eludes definition.¹¹ This research seeks to articulate the paradox of exploring things that cannot be formally pinned down, aligning with the nature of art practice as articulating unfinished thinking in and through art.¹²

Painting practice is at the very core of this research which considers painting process and resulting painted surfaces as a site of encounter to interrogate transposition. I have used painting practice as a tool to traverse the unknown and make conceptual discoveries as part of the research that ultimately both addresses my research question and communicates my research in the object. Simply, painting is the methodology and method. Painting tests out the potential of transposition and analysis of painting process, that through analysis of painting process and resulting painted surfaces enables an exploration of the metaphysicality of a material event of encountering birdsong.

I undertake this research using a multi-method-based practice. The multi-method approach pertains to Performative Research, citing from educator Brad Haseman, who defines it as:

¹¹ Henk Borgdorff, 'The Production of Knowledge in Artistic Research', in *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*, ed. by Michael Biggs and Henrik Karlsson (Oxon: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), p. 45.

an alternative to the qualitative and quantitative paradigms by insisting on different approaches to designing, conducting and reporting research.¹³

The varying ways this research conducts and reports findings evades traditional frameworks of qualitative and quantitative research. Research enacts in each method differently. These methods are organised within the methodology as follows:

1. Painting
2. Methods of transcription
3. Writing-thinking
4. Reflective analysis
5. Archival research
6. Fieldwork
7. Listening encounters
8. Transposition

Painting

I use painting practice as a method, which has been pivotal in exploring metaphysicality and its relationship to encounter,

¹² Borgdorff, p. 45.

¹³ Brad Haseman, 'A Manifesto for Performative Research', *Media International Australia*, 118.1 (2006), 98–106 (p. 98).

specifically, the intangible ephemera of birdsong. I focus on painting processes to explore the intangibility of birdsong in the way the sound moves through space and time. Through looking at the moving *process* of making paintings, I investigate the moving spatio-temporality of an embodied encounter with the event of birdsong in the landscape.

I use various approaches to mark-making within painting – transcribing encounters with birdsong in the landscape, printmaking, and constructing painted surfaces. These methods are considered precursory processes to the construction of painted surfaces. I use the term ‘mark-making’ and as an allied creative activity to painting in its use as method as it contains a gestural genesis later practised in painting. I use mark-making to work through aspects of metaphysicality as it relates to birdsong encounters. The processes of mark-making are understood as ‘material events’ that inform the construction of paintings (or their thinking).

I use painting to explore transpositional iterations between encounters with natural birdsong and painting that is

central to my conceptualisation of transposition and knowledge production. Using painting practice as a method is key in exploring the moving, elusive moments via encountering ephemeral qualities of birdsong that this research associates with metaphysicality.

I adopt artist researcher Barbara Bolt’s term ‘material thinking’ to consider working with painting as a method as an epistemological place. The epistemological place is created between materiality and the artist, that Bolt defines as the ‘logic’ in practice, responding in conjunction to the intelligence of materials and processes in practice.¹⁴ Developing thought via material thinking allows the research to be fostered by painting process, specifically operating during the construction of painted surfaces responding to the transcriptions taken during fieldwork. Material thinking is the logic of art practice.

Methods of transcription

I engage with birdsong through exploring encounters with it in the landscape, concentrating on the polysensory experiences

¹⁴ Barbara Bolt, ‘The Magic Is in the Handling’, in *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*2, ed. by Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London: I.B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2010), pp. 27–34, p. 30.

of listening to birdsong, and looking, touching, and smelling the landscape that surrounds it. These encounters are explored through mark-making responding to this polysensory experience. A full inventory of my transcriptions undertaken in this research project can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B. I use thinking through mark-making to lead my enquiry into transposition, birdsong, and metaphysicality.

Writing-thinking

I draw on artist researcher Jacqueline Taylor's 'writing-thinking' method to approach the intangible, incomprehensible moments that took place in the painting (see Figure 0.1).

Taylor uses writing- thinking to articulate the performativity, descriptive, and reflexive nature of her research diary, used to think through the processes that were taking place during her painting research.¹⁵ This written part of the thesis uses writing-thinking to bridge material thinking with definitive prose to attempt to come to understand the intangible moments created by the painting processes. I use writing-thinking to explore both the 'event' of painting¹⁶ and the 'becoming-

knowledge' of painting processes. It explores the meeting between practitioner and materiality in the dynamic state of material thinking in painting processes. 'Writing-thinking' is a process of transposing the praxis and the practice encounter into a written communicative language.

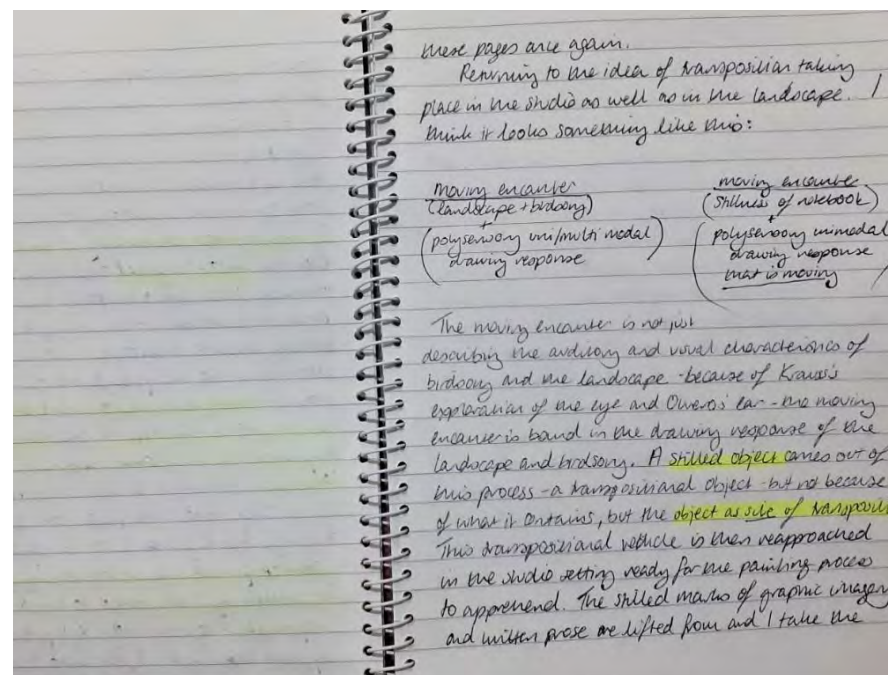


Figure 0.1. My notebook containing writing-thinking (2020).

¹⁵ Jacqueline Erika Taylor, 'Writing//Painting ; l'écriture Féminine and Difference in the Making' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Birmingham City University, 2013), p.94.

¹⁶ Yve Lomax, *Writing the Image* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), p. xiii.

This research is grounded in painting process, with praxis therefore bound in both painting processes and writing-thinking. I punctuate the written text with writing-thinking located on lined pages that can be identified in [this font](#).

Reflective analysis

This written thesis is largely comprised of a reflective review and analysis of key topics that underpin my research enquiry: transposition, metaphysicality, birdsong, and Olivier Messiaen's methodologies of transcribing birdsong. I use my painting practice to frame this reflective analysis, punctuating the written text. This is presented through writing-thinking and images of my initial explorations of transposition, metaphysicality, and birdsong conducted through methods of mark-making in the landscape and printmaking. I use moving between making marks responding to forms of the landscape, sounds, and handwritten prose to elucidate the important role mark-making plays in encountering birdsong through transcription.

Archival research

I use archival research to analyse Messiaen's musical interpretations of birdsong. In 2019, I visited the archives at Bibliothèque nationale de France to examine Messiaen's *cahiers* (field notebooks). I examined microfilms of Messiaen's *cahiers* (the only way to view these priceless documents). Guided to the *cahiers* relevant to *Catalogue d'oiseaux*,¹⁷ I viewed Messiaen's musical notations of birdsong on the staved paper and the accompanying marginalia, detailing the wider sensorial experience Messiaen had at the time of birdsong transcription.

Fieldwork

Catalogue d'oiseaux is the product of many years of fieldwork where Messiaen travelled to various locations across France to transcribe birdsong. To explore the transpositionality of Messiaen's transcription of birdsong, I undertook fieldwork to France. I used the information I gathered during archival research at the Bibliothèque nationale de France in April

¹⁷ See Peter Hill, 'From Réveil des Oiseaux to Catalogue d'oiseaux: Messiaen's Cahiers de Notations Des Chants d'oiseaux, 1952-59', in *Messiaen Perspectives 1*:

Sources and Influences, ed. by Christopher Dingle and Robert Fallon (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), pp. 143-174.

2019 to gather details of Messiaen's transcriptions. I used this information to map out a pilot journey to the French landscape that I could undertake within the constraints of my first year of doctoral research. In July – August 2019, I travelled to sites in the rural French landscape where Messiaen transcribed birdsong material integral to the composition of five of thirteen nature portraits in *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (see Figure 0.2).

Undertaking this fieldwork enabled me to visit the same sites Messiaen visited over sixty years previously and take birdsong transcriptions of my own. I transcribed encounters with birdsong by using different methods of notating the encounters through visual and auditory means, using mark-making, handwritten prose, and taking photographs and audio recordings (see figures 0.3 and 0.4 on page 12).¹⁸

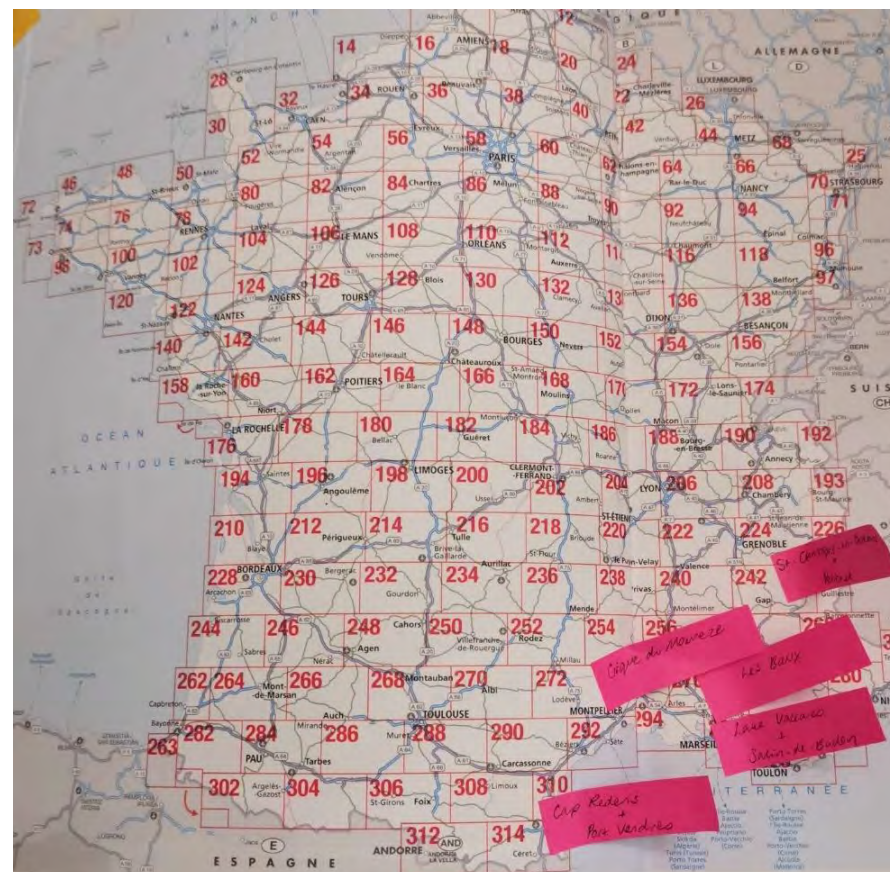


Figure 0.2. Route planning for the fieldwork (2019).

¹⁸ For an example of an audio recording undertaken, see Appendix C. See also my video essay created as part of a research poster, presented at Midlands4Cities Research Festival 2021: Harriet Carter, Recorded material taken at Cirque de Mourèze, online video recording, Learning Toolbox, 4 June 2021,

<<https://my.ltb.io/#/showcase/midlands4cities-digital-research-festival-2021/>> [accessed 28 February 2022].



Figure 0.3. My audio recording equipment at Cirque de Mourèze (2019).

I used a notebook to mirror Messiaen's use of *cahiers*, which enabled me to visually notate polysensory transcriptions. In the scope of this research, I focused on exploring my birdsong transcriptions at the locations that informed three out of thirteen nature portraits in *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. Due to limitations brought by the global pandemic, this was further scaled down to exploring my encounters at sites where

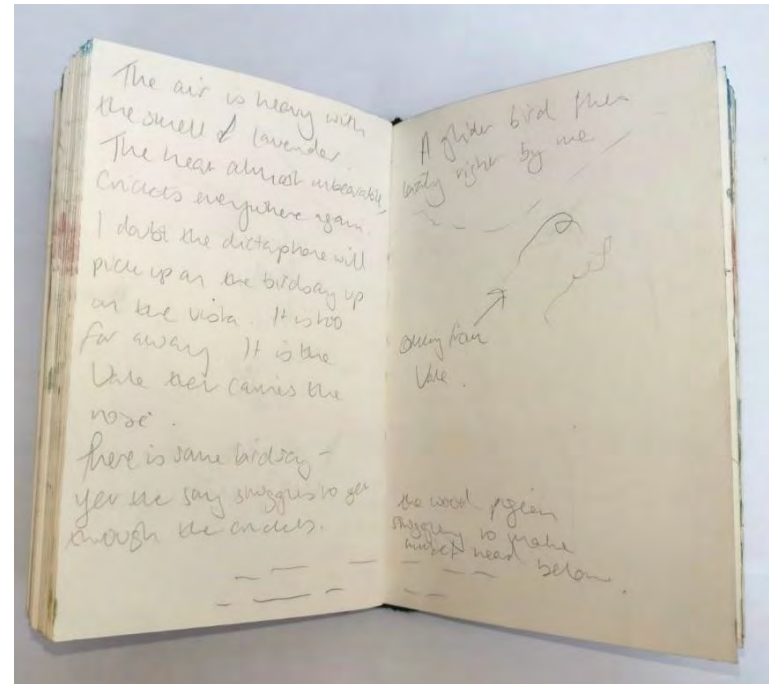


Figure 0.4. Harriet Carter, *Field notebook* (2019).

Messiaen transcribed birdsong that informed 'L'Alouette calandrelle' and 'Le Merle de roche'.

Listening encounters

To explore nature portraits 'L'Alouette Calandrelle' and 'Le Merle de roche' in *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, I conducted what I have termed 'listening encounters' with a recorded

performance.¹⁹ Messiaen very specifically directs the audience to envisage what he experienced through detailed prefaces. Each nature portrait is prefaced with a poetic written account that mirrors the musical interpretation supplied in the score. Messiaen's intention is that the audience picture clearly the scene he has devised for us. It is because of this, that I conducted 'listening encounters' where I read the poetic preface to the piece (translated by Peter Hill) prior to – and often during – listening to the performance. I did this because being directed to imagine a very specific scene whilst listening to a musical interpretation means the nature portraits have been curated for the audience.

I used listening encounters to approach the nature portraits in the same way that one takes in an art exhibition and considers the important factor of how an exhibition is curated. Doing so revealed important correlations between preface, score, and original *cahier* notations. I found the written words in the preface entered into a relationship with the musical notation and sensation of experiencing the

volume, tempo, rhythm, and melody of the nature portraits. Because of this, I was able to explore how Messiaen's musical interpretation correlated with the written description, and in turn, consider how he had composed from his encounters with birdsong in the French landscape and transcriptions. I used listening encounters as a pivotal role in gathering and analysing this information through identifying correspondences between *cahier* transcriptions and music score for 'L'Alouette calandrelle' and 'Le Merle de roche' and using writing to describe how I encountered Messiaen's musical interpretation (explored in more depth in Book Four). This directly informed how I approached my own transcriptions from the French landscape in painting.

Analysis of Messiaen's *cahiers* and music scores

I use comparative analysis of Messiaen's *cahiers* that directly informed 'L'Alouette calandrelle', and 'Le Merle de roche', to distinguish correspondences between Messiaen's transcriptions of birdsong and the two resolved nature

¹⁹ See Olivier Messiaen: *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, Peter Hill (Unicorn- Kanchana Records, RRC3008, 2002).

portraits. Undertaking this analysis identified what Messiaen used from his *cahier* transcriptions of birdsong and written prose of his wider polysensory experience with the landscape, to create the two nature portraits.

Transposition

I use transposition as a method to move between transcribing birdsong in the landscape and printmaking and constructing painted surfaces in the painting studio. Furthermore, transposition is used as a method through conducting writing-thinking and written text, where attempts to explain the slippery processes in painting are transposed between different forms of articulation. The imbrication of transposition in this project is demonstrated in the way these methods operate. The interrogation of transposition through a practice-based approach means that I learn about transposition through *undertaking* transposition. In other words, transposition is undertaken as a method, that through which, new knowledge comes to light *through* transposition and therefore *about* transposition. The creative

artefacts that are produced in this thesis through methods of transposition, are central of this thesis's development of new knowledge to the field of transposition.

Summary

It is notable to further refine the nature of the practice research methodology. Four key approaches that this research resonates with are: Practice-based Research, Performative Research, Thinking through Art, and Artistic Research. This research operates within the discipline of practice-based research as explained at the start of the introduction as cited by Linda Candy as:

an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice.²⁰

All methods encompassed within the practice-based research approach themes in unique ways that aligns the research with Performative Research. The methods enact different aspects of practice whereby knowledge develops through undertaking the methods and from the outcomes that come from doing so.

²⁰ Candy, p1.

In addition, this research relates to the discipline of ‘Thinking through Art’ as cited by Dieter Mersch as: ‘Thought is understood as a practice, as acting *with* material, *in* materials, or *through* materials” [original emphasis].²¹ This is particularly evident in my use of the ‘writing-thinking’ method that further explores the epistemological state of material thinking. Furthermore, the practice-based nature of this research relates to the discipline of Artistic Research as cited by the Vienna Declaration as research through means of artistic practice and reflection; “an epistemic inquiry, directed towards increasing knowledge, insight, understanding and skills”.²² I use painting process as working with materiality in an epistemological place, whereby insight into transposition between the auditory and the visual, metaphysicality and painting processes is produced through undertaking painting practice.

3. Notes on the global pandemic

This research was significantly impacted by the outbreak of Covid-19. As I have listed, methods vital to this research include transcribing birdsong in the landscape, archival research, and constructing painted surfaces in response. I was able to conduct pilot fieldwork in France in 2019 during the first year of study. However, when halfway through my second year of study the research led me to need to return to France, I was prevented from doing so by the pandemic. I needed to return to fieldwork to conduct summative transcriptions in the Sologne marsh region of France to explore nature portrait ‘La Rousserolle effarvate’ – the central piece in the piano cycle. This need emerged through painting processes responding to the initial transcriptions of birdsong notated during the pilot fieldwork in two ways. Firstly, through undertaking Messiaen’s transpositional methodology to explore transcriptions taken for ‘L’Alouette calandrelle’ and ‘Le Merle de roche’ in painting practice. Secondly, through continued engagement with listening encounters of *Catalogue d’oiseaux* and spatio-temporal findings through working with

²¹ Dieter Mersch, *Epistemologies of Aesthetics* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2015) < <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/distributed/E/bo20153682.html>> p. 9.

²² AEC, *The Vienna Declaration on Artistic Research*, 2020 < <https://societyforartisticresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Vienna-Declaration-on-Artistic-Research-Final.pdf>> [accessed 27 February 2022], pp. 1-2.

materiality. These findings created a necessity to collect transcriptions from the Sologne marshes to further investigate 'La Rousserolle effarvatte'.

As I was unable to undertake this second lot of fieldwork due to travel restrictions (lasting the remainder of my study period), I had to significantly rework my methodology, resulting in an open investigation with a body of unfinished research exploring 'La Rousserolle effarvatte'. The vital painting investigations into transpositional methods directed by Messiaen's 'La Rousserolle effarvatte' remain open and inconclusive. The findings that were emerging from investigating 'La Rousserolle effarvatte' are pivotal to this research and has therefore been included as an interlude between my investigations of 'L'Alouette calandrelle' and 'Le Merle de roche', and Book Five.

In addition, due to constraints from the global pandemic, I had limited access to Messiaen's *cahiers* that informed 'Le Merle de roche', so I have built on current research²³ to develop my argument towards Messiaen's

method of polysensory multimodal transposition. Because of the prevention of a return archival research trip to attain missing *cahier* research relevant to 'Le Merle de roche' and summative fieldwork in the Sologne marshes, I have used one avenue of investigation: painting towards 'L'Alouette calandrelle' to largely lead my argument. The body of work exploring 'Le Merle de roche' takes on a smaller, supporting role as paintings exploring Messiaen's transpositional methodology of composing 'Le Merle de roche' consolidated enquiry into Messiaen's transpositional methodology of composing 'L'Alouette calandrelle'.

4. Thesis structure

This research has undertaken enquiry into the metaphysical and transposition through exploring encounters with Messiaen's piano cycle *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (1956 – 1958) and birdsong in painting practice. The research methodology undertakes a mirror-opposite approach to Messiaen's methods of transcribing and composing musical

²³ Sources used: Peter Hill, 'From Réveil Des Oiseaux to Catalogue d'oiseaux: Messiaen's Cahiers de Notations Des Chants d'oiseaux, 1952-59', in *Messiaen Perspectives 1: Sources and Influences*, (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited,

2013), pp. 143-174, and Roderick Chadwick and Peter Hill, *Olivier Messiaen's Catalogue d'oiseaux: From Conception to Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

interpretations of birdsong. Where Messiaen transcribed polysensory encounters with birdsong in the landscape into an auditory medium, I have transcribed polysensory encounters with birdsong into a visual medium. For both Messiaen and I, a journey was undertaken and knowledge uncovered about transcribing birdsong over years. This mirrored approach extends to how this thesis should be encountered. Messiaen organised his 'nature portraits' of *Catalogue d'oiseaux* into numbered 'books'. Whilst the numbered 'books' suggest an order to play the piece, the 'books' are self-contained making it possible to open any 'book' and still perform *Catalogue d'oiseaux* as a cycle.

The mirrored approach in this research has organised this thesis in a similar way. Instead of echoing a cycle, this is contained in a box that curates the journey this research has taken exploring new knowledge of the metaphysicality of birdsong in transposition, in the same way the album sleeve of *Catalogue d'oiseaux* contains Messiaen's learning from the birdsong in a musical journey through the French landscape. The thesis is comprised of a body of practical work and this written thesis, comprising of various multimodal components. Both text-based and practical parts

of this thesis are organised into five numbered books, each with a different narrative, led by an evolving practice. These books are supported with a catalogue of paintings that I invite you to have open as a sort of inventory that you might refer to as you read this thesis.

Whilst each narrative is unique, I invite you to read the books in order, to understand how concepts in my argument build one another. The practical body of work produced through this research will be presented in an exposition at the Birmingham School of Art, UK, between the 25th April and 4th May 2022. The exposition will curate the body of practice that is documented in this written text.

The five 'books' that comprise this written element of the thesis are set out in the following way:

Book One – A Topology of Transposition

Book Two – Metaphysicality

Book Three – Encountering Birdsong

Book Four – Transposition²

Interlude – 'La Rousserolle effarvatte'

Book Five – Not the End

Book One critically interrogates where and how transposition operates across disciplinary fields of this research. As transposition features as both the topic of interrogation and method, Book One focuses on providing the theoretical underpinning of all aspects of the thesis. I compare transposition with translation to build a case for translation as representational and therefore inadequate in exploring metaphysicality of an ephemera situated outside of conventional language systems. Through a brief overview of semiotics, I then position processes within painting away from normative understandings of language and instead, I consider the possibility of painting as residing on the peripheries of a sign system.

Book Two introduces and interrogates ‘metaphysicality’ whereby I examine the nuanced terms of the metaphysical. I define metaphysicality in this research as the overarching umbrella for exploring intangible, unknown, and irresolute experiences. I also explore here Messiaen’s musical and religious relationship with birdsong which I describe as metaphysical, which sets the foundations for exploring his perception of birdsong.

Book Three explores how metaphysicality operates in encounters with birdsong via examples of early attempts at encountering birdsong through drawing. Through exploring encounters with birdsong in the landscape as an event, I also consider how time and space affect drawings, using theory of spatial ontology to consider these drawings as transpositional places. Reintroducing Messiaen’s perception of birdsong, I analyse his *cahiers* (notebooks) that contain his transcriptions of birdsong as a transpositional place. I use this to lay out how painting practice might build on these themes in Book Four.

In Book Four, I present how fieldwork undertaken in France and resulting painting practice, interrogates the transpositional methods I identify between Messiaen’s *cahiers* and *Catalogue d’oiseaux*, focusing on two of the thirteen nature portraits: ‘L’Alouette calandrelle’ and ‘Le Merle de roche’. Birdsong transcriptions in Messiaen’s *cahiers* and the scores to *Catalogue d’oiseaux* are examined to explore Messiaen’s musical interpretations of birdsong and resulting composition as a transpositional methodology. I assess ‘L’Alouette Calandrelle’ and ‘Le Merle de roche’ and claim that the two pieces demonstrate two modes of transposition that I

define as: polysensory unimodal transposition that resulted in 'L'Alouette calandrelle' and polysensory multimodal transposition that resulted in 'Le Merle de roche'. I analyse relevant *cahier* pages to each piece along with the music score and undertake what I term 'listening encounters'.

Following this, I detail my methods of drawing embodied encounters with birdsong in the French landscape and creating painted surfaces in response.

In Interlude – 'La Rousserolle effarvatte', I present early findings from painting investigations as a new definition of transpositional method. This interlude is comprised entirely of pilot fieldwork undertaken at *Étang Vaccares* and *Salin-de-Badon* in Southern France comprising the construction of painted surfaces and writing-thinking.

Book Five concludes the research project by drawing findings from Book Four together with the research aims and objectives. In doing so, it details how through the methods of fieldwork, listening encounters, painting, and writing-thinking, Messiaen's *cahiers*, *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, my field notebook, and painted surfaces operate as transpositional vehicles.

Books One, Two, and Three include writing-thinking alongside the main text. The writing-thinking is on pages

that fold out, accompanied by pictures of my practice. As I have described already, writing-thinking provides means to transpose and articulate the more nuanced and areas of the research that are difficult to pin-down. I invite the reader that when coming across the writing-thinking moments to fold-out the pages so that they can be read alongside the text. Writing- thinking is embedded into the main text in Book Four, and the Interlude is made entirely of writing-thinking. As such, the writing-thinking in Book Four and Interlude are not in fold-out pages. To best enjoy reading about my encounters with birdsong and if its sunny outside, go outdoors and allow birdsong to accompany you as you read this.

5. Citing this thesis

Any material from this thesis should be cited by the Book the material is in, for example: Harriet Carter, 'Book One' in 'Beyond Transposition? Exploring metaphysicality in birdsong and Olivier Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux* through painting practice' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Birmingham City University, 2022). The Catalogue of Paintings contains the formal images of paintings and are so labelled 'plates' – but in the books, the

images are much more in dialogue with the text so are labelled 'figures'. This reflects the two different types of encounter with my artwork – in the exposition and within the making process. The text describes process and encounter with transposition and metaphysicality. The exposition describes the end result of which my control over describing what the paintings did was diminished as an audience encountered the work in person. In Book One, Two, Three, and Four, the images are distinguished by the book they reside in, for example, Book One contains figures that start with '1.', Book Two contains figures that start with '2.', Book Three contains figures that start with '3.', and Book Four contains figures that start with '4.'.

Using examples of each type of image label, citing images in this thesis should be done in the following way:

- An image in the introduction: Harriet Carter, Figure 0.1, *Introduction* in 'Beyond Transposition? Exploring metaphysicality in birdsong and Olivier Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux* through painting practice' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Birmingham City University).
- An image in the Catalogue of Paintings should be cited this way: Harriet Carter, Plate 1, *Catalogue of Paintings* in 'Beyond Transposition? Exploring metaphysicality in birdsong and Olivier Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux*

through painting practice' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Birmingham City University).

- An image in a Book: Harriet Carter, Figure 1.1, *Book One* in 'Beyond Transposition? Exploring metaphysicality in birdsong and Olivier Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux* through painting practice' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Birmingham City University).
- An image in the Interlude: Harriet Carter, Figure i., *Interlude* in 'Beyond Transposition? Exploring metaphysicality in birdsong and Olivier Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux* through painting practice' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Birmingham City University).
- An image in the Appendices: Harriet Carter, Figure a.1., *Appendices* in 'Beyond Transposition? Exploring metaphysicality in birdsong and Olivier Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux* through painting practice' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Birmingham City University).

6. Research contributions

By approaching musical interpretations of birdsong through the lens of visual research, this research contributes to the study of transposition between the

auditory and the visual painting practice. It provides a critique of translation in painting practice through engagement with the concept of metaphysicality.

This research offers new ways for the metaphysical to be encountered through an interrogation of encounter with the intangible, irresoluteness, and unknown of birdsong, in painting. In doing so, through exploring these metaphysical qualities in painting, I encounter metaphysical qualities within transposition: embedded within embodied encounters with birdsong by 'thinking on the metaphysical'. As well as claiming the term 'thinking on the metaphysical', this project provides original research into transposition and metaphysicality by bringing the two concepts together. Furthermore, this research reconceptualises the term 'material perception' to define it as perceiving an embodied encounter through mark-making.

My research also creates new theories of Messiaen's musical interpretation of birdsong. Through analysing Messiaen's birdsong transcriptions in the French landscape and resulting compositions of *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, I make case that Messiaen undertakes different methods of transposition. Through exploration of two nature portraits 'L'Alouette calandrelle' and 'Le Merle de roche', I claim the methods Messiaen used to compose these two pieces are termed

'Polysensory unimodal transposition' (referring to 'L'Alouette calandrelle') and 'Polysensory multimodal transposition' (referring to 'Le Merle de roche'). Furthermore, I apply my defined term 'thinking on the metaphysical' to Messiaen's processes in transcribing and composing with birdsong. Through using the term 'polysensory' to describe transcribing an embodied encounter with birdsong in painting practice, this research expands the definition of this term, making it applicable for use in exploring transposition between the auditory and the visual in painting practice.

This research offers new ways to explore painting practice using different 'voices' in research of the auditory and visual. This is demonstrated through material thinking, writing- thinking, and listening encounters. This research also builds on artistic researcher Michael Schwab's definition of 'becoming-knowledge', demonstrated through an incorporation into painting practice.

This research will be useful to those studying *Catalogue d'oiseaux* and not limited to the visual arts, as the methods of transposition I identify in this research can be made useful in exploring Messiaen's methods in music. This research will also be useful for those studying the metaphysical in painting practice.

Catalogue of paintings

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Plate 8. Harriet Carter, *Untitled*, (2019). Monoprint, 32 x 23cm.

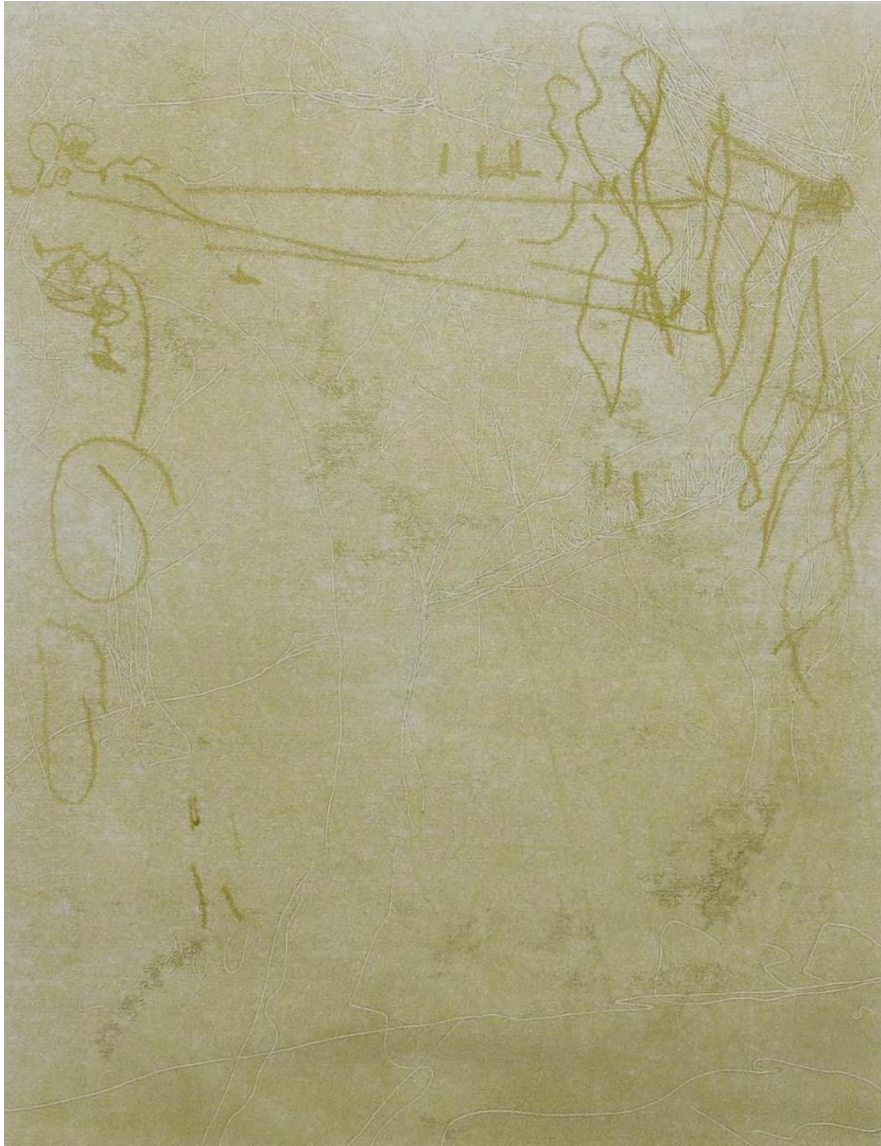


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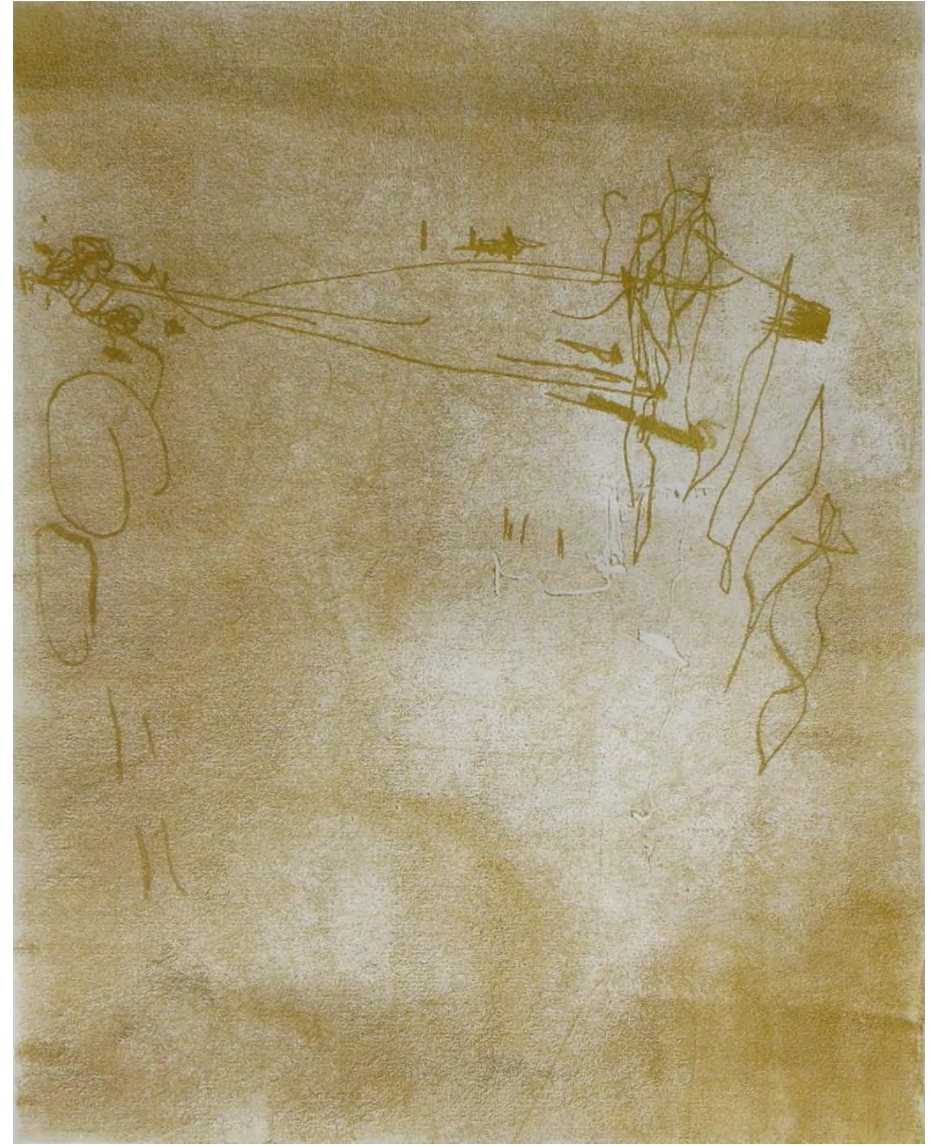


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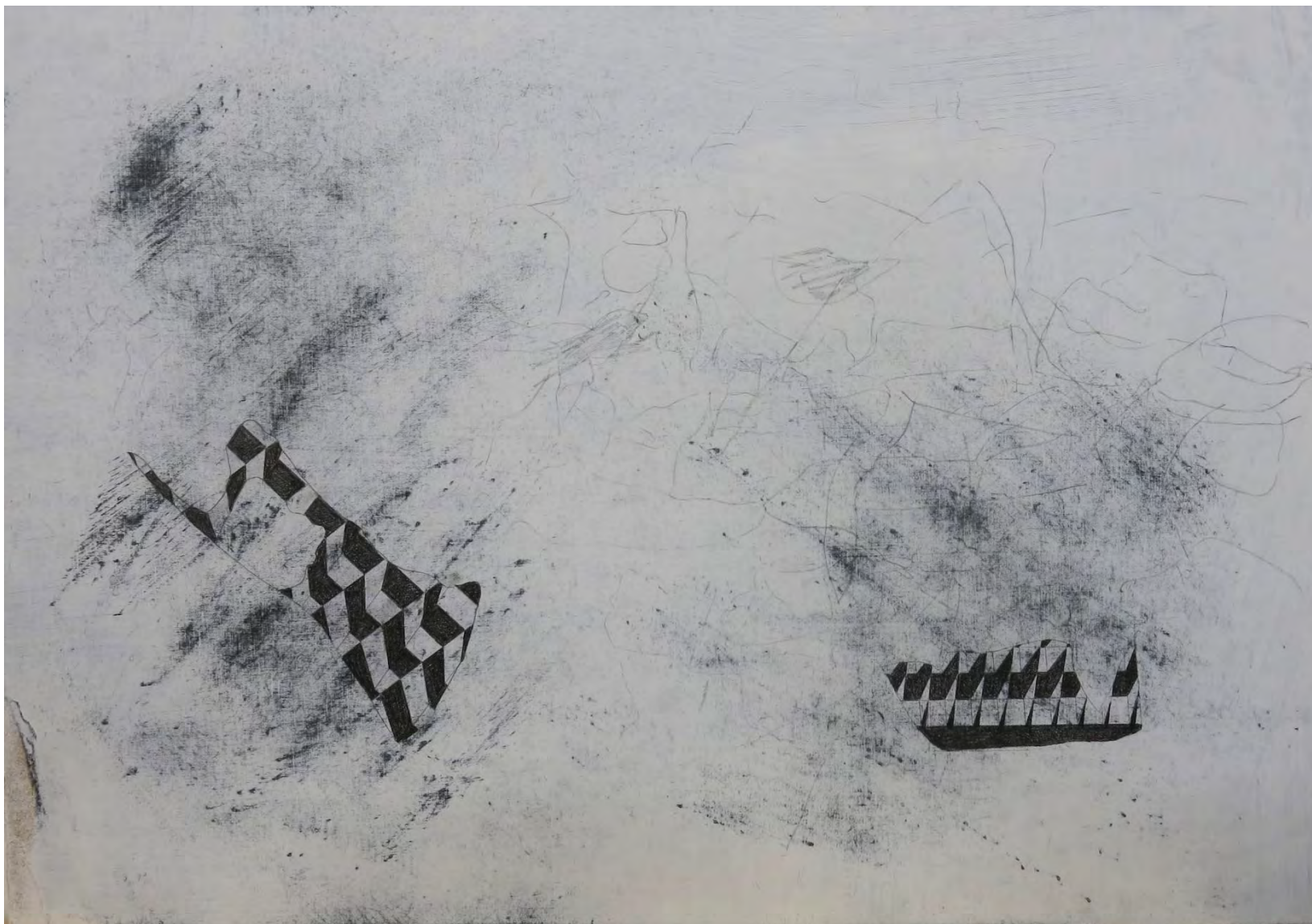


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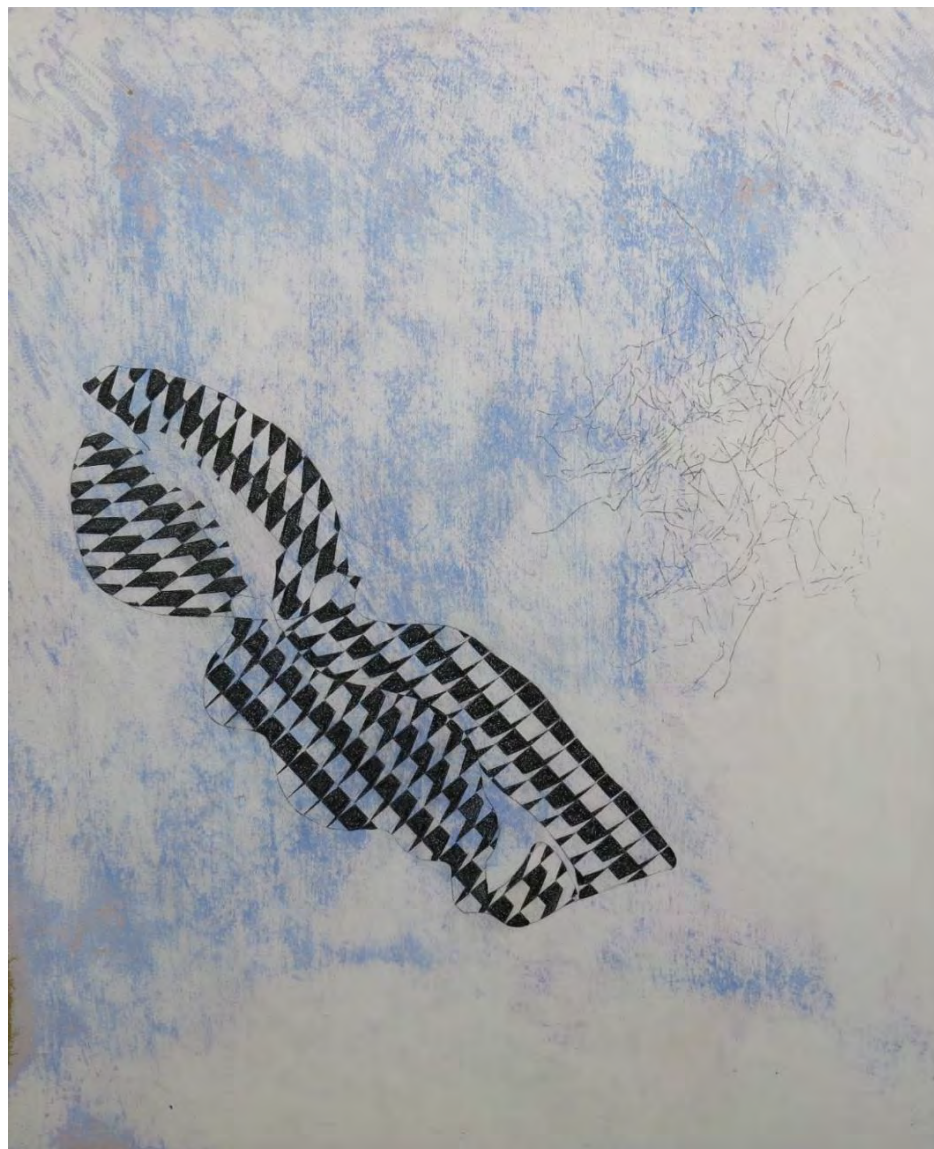


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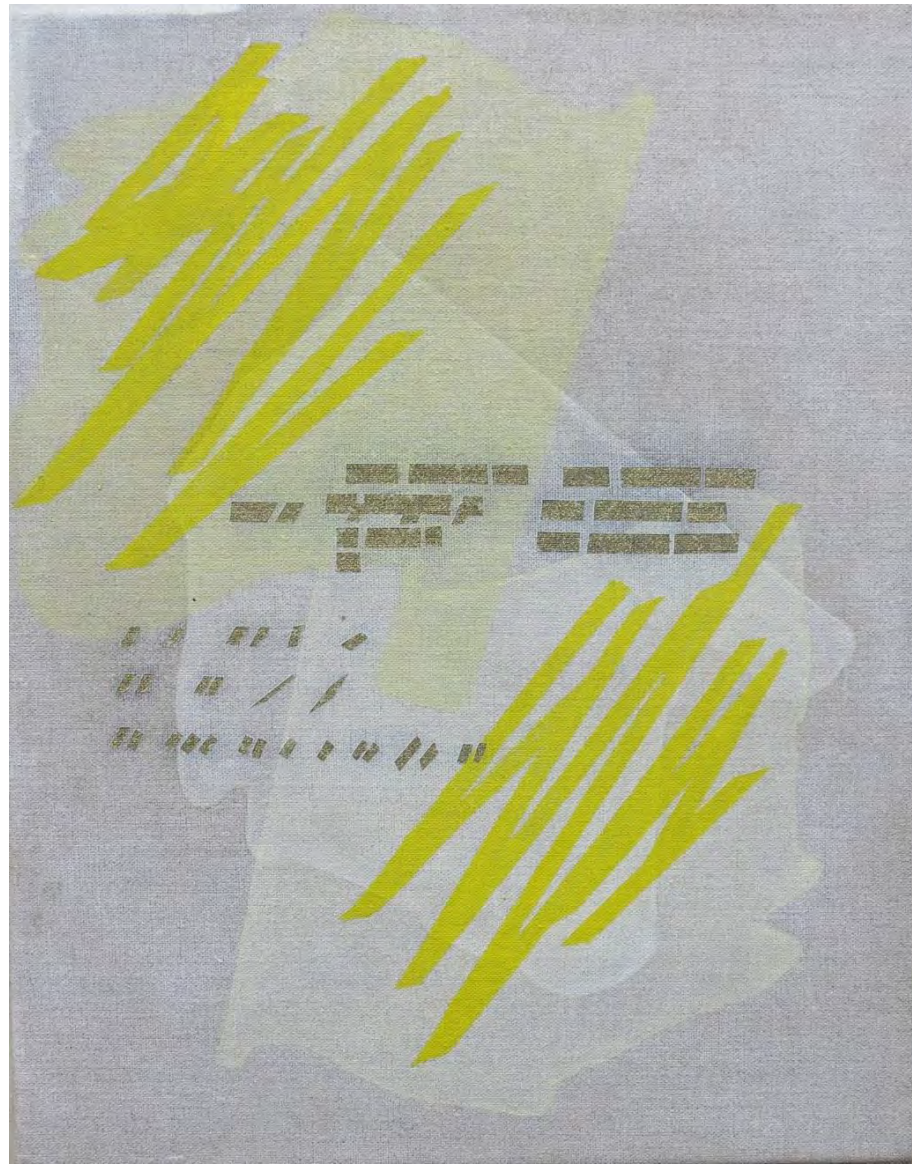


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Plate 23. Harriet Carter, *Cirque de Mourèze V*, (2020). Oil on canvas, 53 x 39.5cm

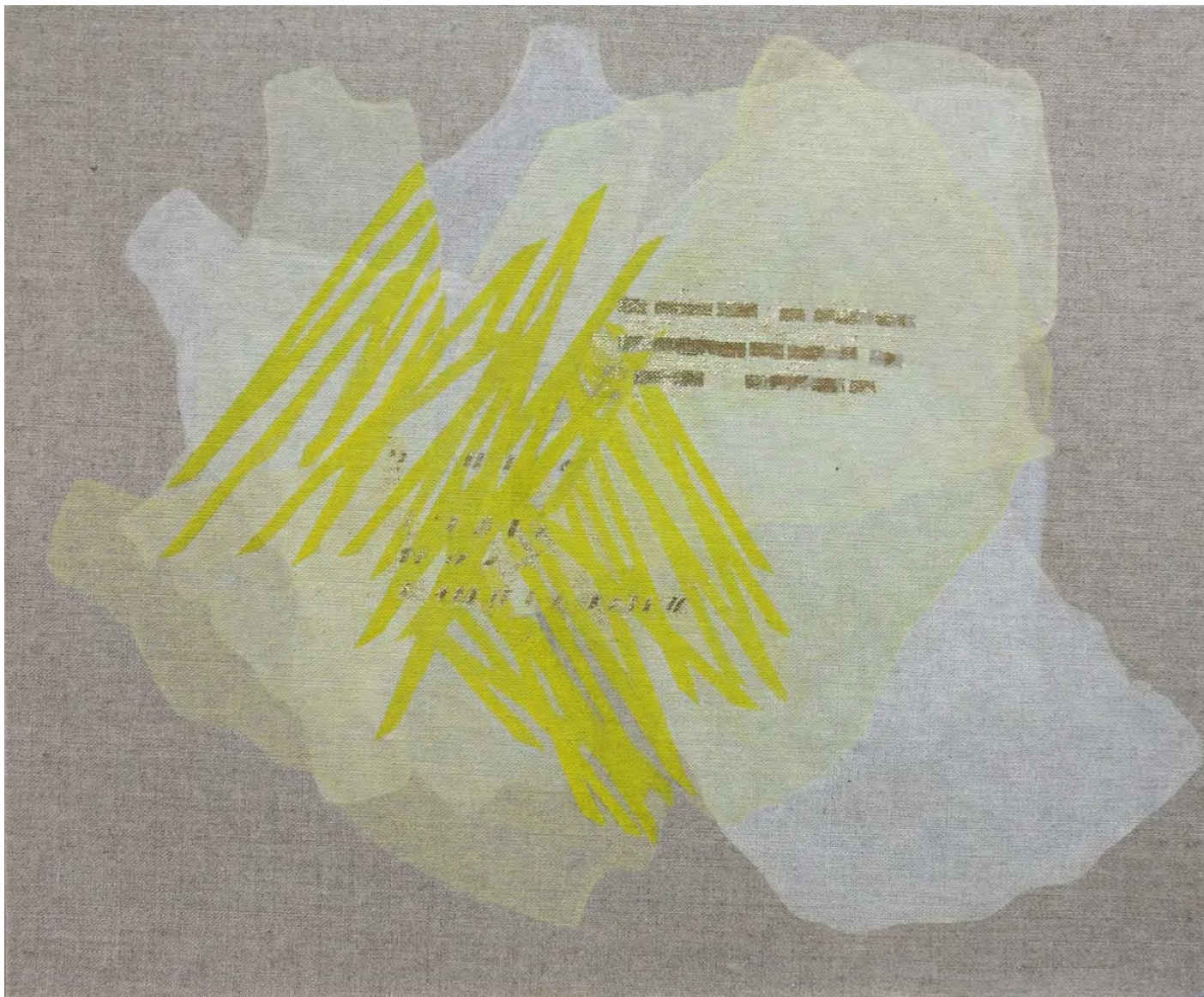


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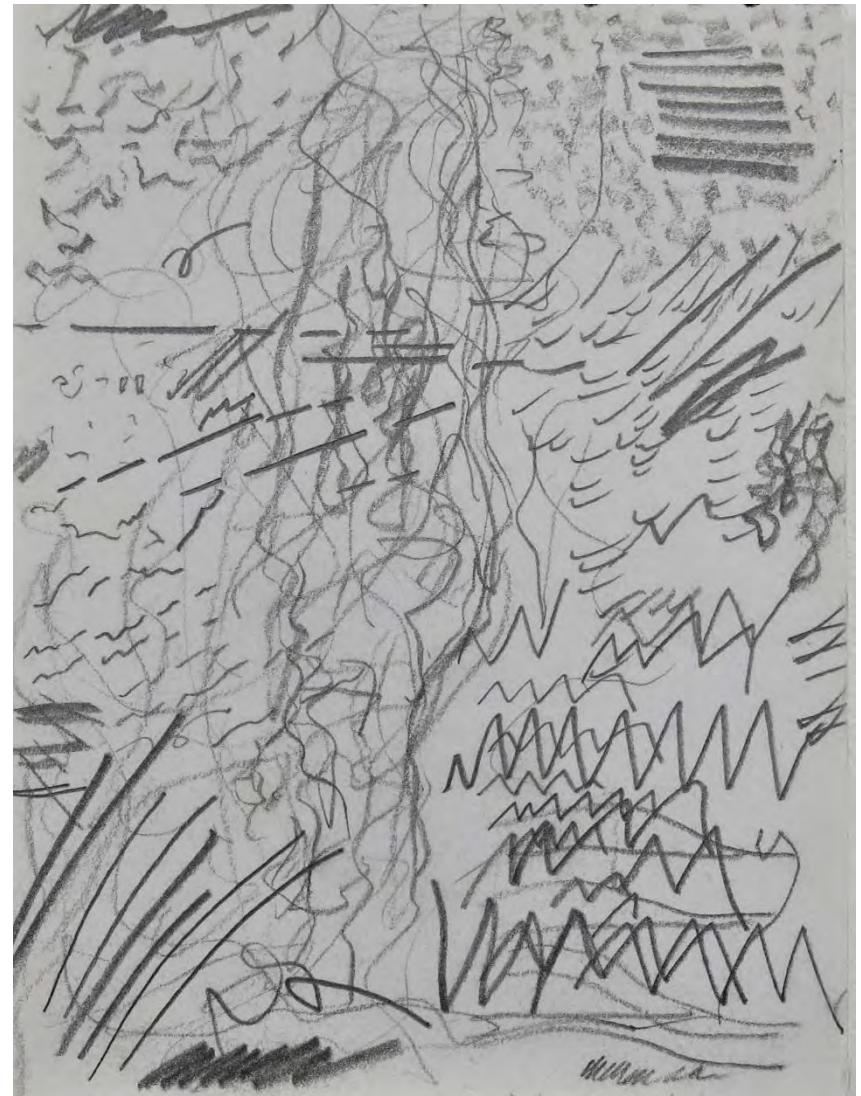
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Painting towards *La Rousserolle effarvate*



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BOOK ONE:
A Topology of Transposition



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Introduction

In this book, I examine how transposition can be approached through an Artistic Research, practice-based lens. This book is split into five sections. Firstly, I discuss how transposition operates in different disciplines across different fields. This provides a context by which the second part of this book positions my argument for exploring transposition in painting practice over translation.

In the second part of this book, I argue that painting practice operates on the peripheries of comprehensible language, by briefly touching on semiotics. I discuss the differences between translation and transposition, and how they operate in art practice and semiotics. I argue for transposition to be understood in the context of materiality as on the peripheries of normative understandings of sign-systems as understood in semiotics. Then, I argue that birdsong resides outside of a sign-system, providing a rationale for using birdsong to explore transposition in painting practice.

In the third part of this book, I explore Olivier Messiaen's birdsong compositions. Firstly, I use a semiotic

lens to explore how Messiaen's musical interpretations of birdsong stand apart from other music compositions of birdsong. Then, I introduce *Catalogue d'oiseaux* as being an example of a transpositional method. In the fourth part of this book, I discuss how birdsong has been approached and explored in the visual arts. Providing a wide scope within the visual arts, I explore how artists have responded to birdsong in different artistic disciplines. I analyse time-based work of Jim Lloyd's *Bird Translator*, and performance-installation by Marcus Coates, and finally painting by Jennifer Durrant. I critically interrogate how these artistic disciplines deal with the ephemera of birdsong, returning to the concept that birdsong resides outside of a sign-system.

I conclude Book One in the fifth section by bringing all sections together in a holistic summary, stating the relationship between transposition, birdsong, materiality in the visual arts, and Messiaen. I argue that transposition to provide scope to operate between the auditory and visual that can be explored in both an artwork and within art making processes.

1. Positioning transposition in art practice

The term ‘transposition’ is polysemic: there are nuances in the way different disciplines utilise transposition, notably through the lenses of art practice, science, music, maths, and linguistics. Drawing on the definitions in these disciplines I present transposition in this research as a cross-boundary repositioning – an action rooted in process. Transposition in music is a distinct, technical resource of moving notes on a music stave, collectively equidistant from where they originated.¹ It is notable to add that Messiaen’s technical use of ‘modes of limited transposition’ (i.e., seven modes of music composition that are ‘limited’ because after a certain number of transpositions, the same arrangement of notes is arrived at)² is irrelevant to my inquiry. Instead, this research interrogates transposition specifically in relation to Messiaen’s transcriptions of birdsong, which I propose is a

¹ Eric Taylor, *The AB Guide to Music Theory: Part 1* (Norwich: Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (Publishing) Ltd, 1989), p. 51.

² Further critical analysis has been undertaken by many others. See Wai-ling Cheong, ‘Rediscovering Messiaen’s Invented Chords’, *Acta musicologica*, 75.1 (2003), 85-105 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25071211>> [accessed 27 February 2022]. See Christoph Neidhöfer, ‘A Theory of Harmony and Voice Leading for the Music of Olivier Messiaen’, *Music Theory Spectrum*, 27.1 <https://doi.org/10.1525/mts.2005.27.1.1> [accessed 27 February 2022]. See Vincent Benitez, ‘Reconsidering Messiaen as Serialist’, *Music Analysis*, 28.2-3, 267-299 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2249.2011.00293.x>> [accessed 27 February 2022].

transpositional methodology that can be undertaken in my painting practice.

My definition of transposition as a cross-boundary repositioning aligns with theory of transposition by art historian and media scholar Birk Weiberg, sound artist and researcher David Pirrò, philosopher Rosi Braidotti, visual artist and writer Yve Lomax, artistic researcher Michael Schwab, philosopher and artist-researcher Esa Kirkkopelto, and researcher Dieter Mersch. Schwab explores how an artist can approach and work with “transpositionality” in artistic research.³ Kirkkopelto examines “logic” in transposition through the lens of art practice,⁴ and Mersch explores transpositions as alchemic transmutations in material through a theoretical lens.⁵ I will explore theory from Mersch, Kirkkopelto, and Schwab later in this book when exploring meaning-making and materiality in painting processes.

³ Michael Schwab, ‘Transpositionality and Artistic Research’, in *Transpositions: Aesthetico-Epistemic Operators in Artistic Research*, ed. by Michael Schwab (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2018), pp. 191–214.

⁴ Esa Kirkkopelto, ‘Abandoning Art in the Name of Art: Transpositional Logic in Artistic Research’, in *Transpositions: Aesthetico-Epistemic Operators in Artistic Research*, ed. by Michael Schwab (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2018), pp. 33-40, (p. 36).

⁵ Dieter Mersch, ‘Alchemistic Transpositions’, in *Transpositions: Aesthetico-Epistemic Operators in Artistic Research*, ed. by Michael Schwab (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2018), pp. 267–80.

Exploring transposition as an action rooted in process, and specifically in painting processes, indicates a need to consider painting a vehicle of transposition. In processes of making artwork transposition operates across space and time. I argue that this can be taken further and that transposition in making art provides the potential to examine the resulting artwork as *standalone*. In doing so, the artwork avoids being representational of a ‘thing’ that is being transposed. This separates transposition from translation that challenges the material existence of a ‘thing’ in causing representation. For Weiberg, photography is a process of transposition, one that is markedly in opposition of translation. Weiberg’s research explores something similar in the discipline of photography, exploring transposition as functioning in time where “knowledge [can] be created without being representational”.⁶ Like Weiberg, Kirkkopelto distances transposition from representation. Kirkkopelto concluded that the logic in artistic practice causes transposition to reconceive a process of “reality”.⁷

⁶ Birk Weiberg, ‘Speculations on Transpositional Photography’, in *Transpositions: Aesthetico-Epistemic Operators in Artistic Research*, ed. Michael Schwab (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2018), pp. 177-190 (p. 187).

⁷ Kirkkopelto, (p. 40).

Whilst this research is not concerned with exploring the philosophy of the ‘real’, I make the argument that transposition is a *creative* artmaking process, and this creativity is embodied in working with materiality. This draws on the idea of the relationship between artist and materiality in the time and space of making art. In early explorations of birdsong in a Worcestershire orchard, I used mark-making to attempt to transcribe birdsong. I considered the implication of making marks that responded to moving sound in an encounter in a live place of birdsong in the landscape (see pages 51-52 now).

My initial explorations of mark-making as a place of transposition in relation to the sound of birdsong in the visual grounding of the landscape aligns with artistic research by Pirrò. Using physics as a lens, Pirrò explored transposition as place “defined by the relationship it has with other [...] positions or objects” that in turn “construct[s] a space from a network of differences”.⁸ I will further develop my explorations of transcriptions of birdsong as a transpositional place in Book Three.

⁸ David Pirrò, ‘Staging Collisions: On Behaviour’, in *Transpositions: Aesthetico-Epistemic Operators in Artistic Research*, ed. by Michael Schwab (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2018), pp. 135-148 (p. 141).

Writing-thinking extract

1st February 2019

Notating birdsong in a Worcestershire orchard

Figure 1.1

I don't know how to notate birdsong!

How can you draw sound?

I am surrounded by so many noises. I'm in an orchard that is on the edge of some woods, so this makes think that there is variety in the species I can hear. I wonder whether they have a language. It's not something I can understand if they do.

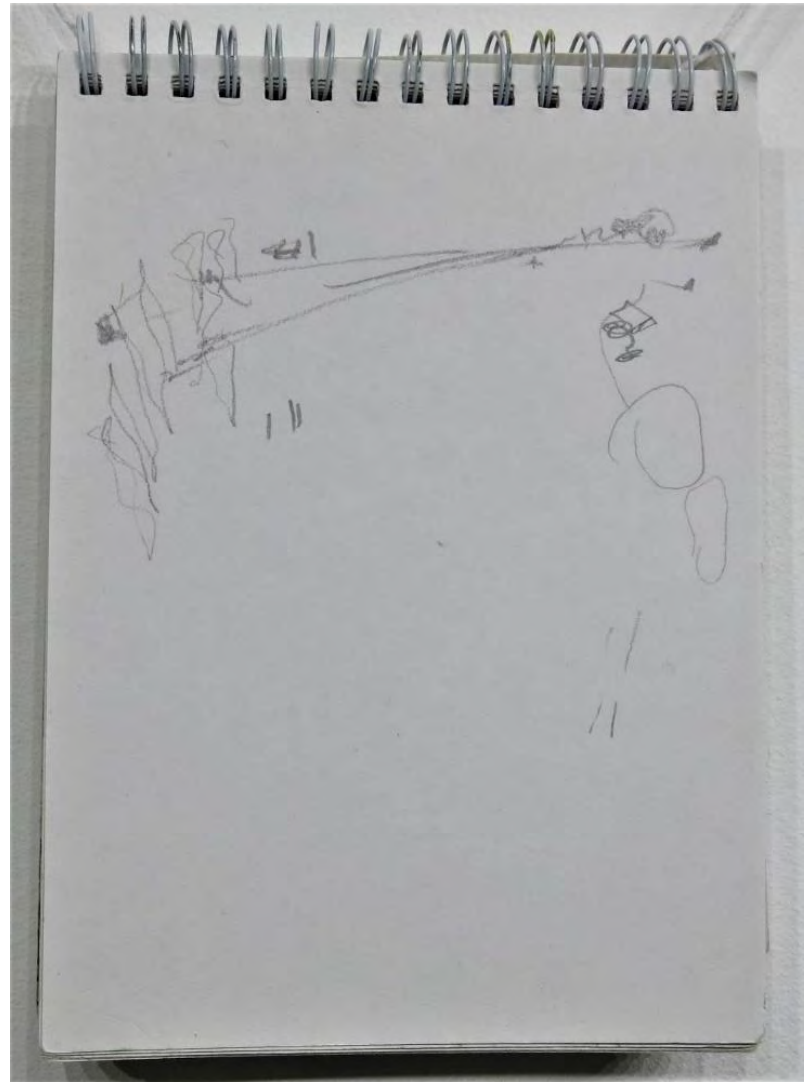


Figure 1.1. Harriet Carter, Notebook page, (2019).

The concept of transposition as a relational entity aligns with Rosi Braidotti's explanation of transposition as a space where things move between. She remarks transposition manifests as an "in-between space of zigzagging and of crossing".⁹ This describes my zigzagging movements between perceiving birdsong and making marks on paper.

Conceiving transposition as producing a place can be applied to appraising an artwork as a transpositional place. A painting is not a representation of transpositional processes that create the painting – the painting exists *as it is*, as a transpositional place. The painting practice as a method by which the painting was created, also exists *as it is*, as a transpositional process. Hence, in painting transposition can be seen as producing equivalent examples of transposition. Lomax theorises that 'example' is a thing that "generate[s] and show[s]" only that which it is.¹⁰ A painting can be an example of transposition, indeed an "exposition" of the concept of transposition that is, to cite Lomax, "being-called", by the painting existing as a product of transposition.¹¹

⁹ Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), p. 5.

¹⁰ Yve Lomax, 'Without Remainder or Residue: Example, Making Use, Transposition', in *Transpositions: Aesthetico-Epistemic Operators in Artistic Research*, ed. by Michael Schwab (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2018), pp. 297–308 (p. 297).

Painting produced through transpositional processes demonstrates itself as an example of transposition. This is crucial underpinning in this research that uses transposition as both a methodology and method in practice-based research, where knowledge is created *through* transposition and in the resulting artworks from this method. For Lomax, an 'example' creates a multiplicity of possible examples that all stand beside themselves.¹² For Lomax, examples exist without remainder or residue where nothing preceding is found nor left behind afterwards.¹³

This research takes the position that encounters with the moving intangibility – the metaphysicality – of birdsong can only be explored through moving processes of transposition in painting. I assert that a painting exposes an 'example' of the unknown, intangible, and irresoluteness of encountering the metaphysicality of birdsong. The transpositional relationship between artist and materiality blurs and causes slippages across borders of transpositional

¹¹ Yve Lomax, *Passionate Being: Language, Singularity and Perseverance* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2010) p. 104.

¹² Yve Lomax, 'Without Remainder or Residue: Example, Making Use, Transposition', (p. 297).

¹³ Lomax, 'Without Remainder or Residue: Example, Making Use, Transposition', (p. 306).

process and artwork as ‘examples’. A painting as an output of this transpositional process is likened to the ungraspable metaphysicality of encountering birdsong *to the artist*. This research takes the position that the finished painting is not fully comprehensible *as itself* by the artist because the artist cannot decouple themselves from the experience of metaphysicality in transpositional processes. The painting generates its own ‘being-ness’. The painting is not seen as the version of the source that the artist experiences in the metaphysicality of making, but instead the ‘being-ness’ produces a new encounter of transposition to others who observe it.

2. A note on semiotics and materiality

Translation Transposition

Building on transposition as both process and artwork, it is useful to develop an insight into of how we might ‘see’ paintings. Drawing on semiotics provides means to do so.

Semiotics is the study of sign systems. In semiotics, language is most basically comprised through a sign system of signifiers and signifieds. In written language, the signifier is a word, and the signified is the idea attached to the word. For semiotician Roland Barthes, perceiving signifiers creates meaning, called signifieds, so reading the word ‘painting’ (signifier) creates a meaning *of* painting according to what the perceiver knows (signified). This meaning is specific to the perceiver, for example, one person when reading the word ‘painting’, may think of the act of decorating a house, whilst another may think of Vincent van Gogh’s *Sunflowers*. Signifieds can only exist in a communicable language system because meaning is produced by language.¹⁴ I draw on the concept of a communicable language system to explore the way transposition operates in contrast to translation. I critique translation using the field of linguistics, art, and music to lay the ground to consider alternative understandings of language in painting practice. This underpins my argument that transposition is a more suitable means of exploring

¹⁴ Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), p. 10.

metaphysical embodied encounters with birdsong through visual material enquiry.

Critiquing an artist's decision-making in creating artwork is crucial in distancing painting from the representational language structures of translation. Semiotician Peeter Torop and translation scholar Brian Osimo define translation as the "transportation of a text from one context to another".¹⁵ A necessary function of this transportation between contexts is the role of the translator, deciding what is key to take across to the new context. Therefore, the translator, or interpretant, can alter the meaning of a text through such decision-making. Translation is a mediation between contexts, indeed between meaning in the signifier – signifieds in the translated text to signifier – signifieds in the context of the translation produced by this process. Translation therefore causes "consequent problems of redundancy and loss".¹⁶

Transposition operates instead as a space where there is no translator because to return to the concept of example:

¹⁵ Peeter Torop and Bruno Osimo, 'Historical Identity of Translation: From Describability to Translatability of Time', *TRAMES: A Journal of the Humanities & Social Sciences*, 14.4 (2010), 383–93 <<https://doi.org/10.3176/tr.2010.4.06>>, (p. 388).

transposition *is* and does not rely on language to create meaning. This is where transposition largely departs from translation. Applying semiotic logic, translation in Torop and Osimo's theory changes the original signified as the translator decides what fits into the context of the creation of a new signifier. Humans are wired to make sense of things and language is one key factor that makes us linguistically orientated. Due to the way that humans are linguistically programmed, we can only think in terms of language. When perceiving things outside of human linguistic orientation, such as birdsong, thinking in terms of language causes what semiotics scholar Morten Tønnessen labels as an "anthropocentric mistake".¹⁷ Taking this stance, it can be argued that translation and transposition are separate terms defining different actions. Translation operates within language and transposition operates as a space where a standalone 'thing' is observed, either in process or object.

Metaphor, metonymy, and visual language

¹⁶ Torop and Osimo, (p. 388).

¹⁷ Morten Tønnessen, 'Steps to a Semiotics of Being', *Biosemiotics*, 3.3 (2010), 375-392 p. 377 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12304-010-9074-0>>, (p. 377).

Metonymy and metaphor are intrinsically bound with semiotics. I consider metonymy and metaphor in conjunction with visual language because of the relationship between the two terms 'translation' and 'transposition'. I explore metonymy and metaphor to further make a case for transposition as operating separately from translation.

Metonymy references the context by which a text/object has been employed, using existing component parts.¹⁸ Dominic Lash describes metonymy as:

both material realities in the world and signs for other realities, both material and non-material.¹⁹

Metaphor on the other hand, operates by creating a relationship to another thing where there is no clear initial connection.²⁰ For example, the use of a metonymical sign might be to place an image of a painting palette and paintbrush above a shop door to inform customers that the shop custom deals in painting equipment. An example of using metaphor might be referring to someone who works

very hard as someone who is 'working themselves to the bone'. Metaphor relies on resemblance whilst metonymy relies on contiguity.²¹ Even though metaphor and metonymy play with the signified and signifier interpretant, they default to it representational modalities of articulation.

Transposition resides outside of both metaphor and metonymy, in the context of aesthetic practice that disrupts normative relations of signifiers and signified, as this research explores. I assert that the artwork '*Shifting Lines*' *Sound Walk* (2021) by Mona Arshi is an example of how transposition operates (see figure 1.2). In collaboration with Cley Marshes, Arshi used haptics and VR to make poetry in conversation a *with* the landscape.²²

Arshi considers her position in the work as simultaneously interlocuter, visitor, and transposer. As interlocuter, Arshi moves between experiencing the landscape and creating poetic devices, in doing so, Arshi immerses herself in the landscape. This moves her practice into

¹⁸ Dominic Lash, 'Metonymy as a Creative Structural Principle in the Work of JH Prynee, Derek Bailey and Helmut Lachenmann with a Creative Component' (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Brunel University, 2010), pp. 12-13.

¹⁹ Lash, 'Metonymy as a Creative Structural Principle in the Work of JH Prynee, Derek Bailey and Helmut Lachenmann with a Creative Component', pp. 8-13.

²⁰ Lash, p. 12.

²¹ Lash, p. 8.

²² This work can be accessed remotely at mutiny.org.uk/shifting-lines/sound-walk.html

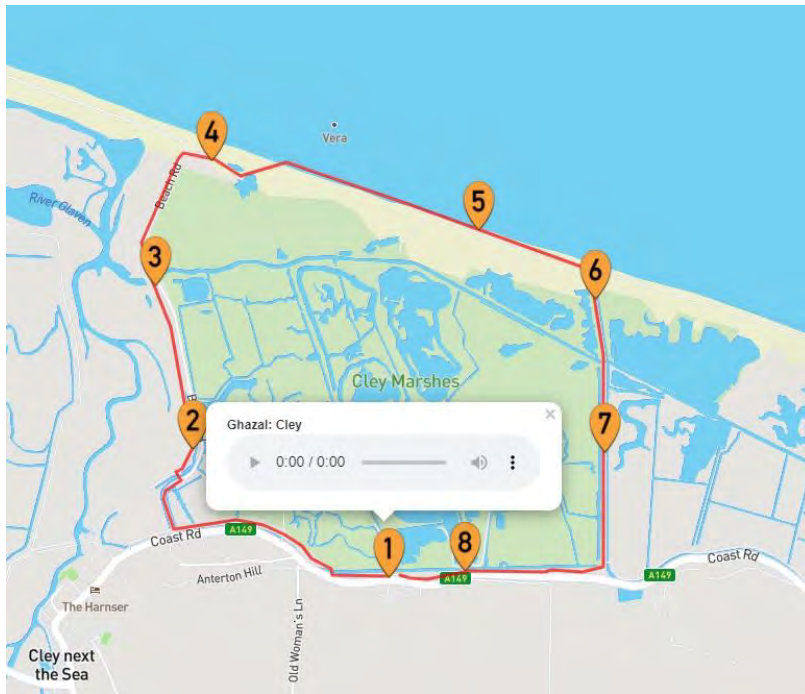


Figure 1.2. Mona Arshi, '*Shifting Lines*' Sound Walk, (2021). Installation, ©Mutiny.

transposition over translation due to the nature of how Arshi creates a space to move between contexts. '*Shifting Lines*' was created from these conversations where poems combined the Punjab language with English, and recorded birdsong and landscape. It features eight contact points around Cley Marshes where visitors can scan a QR code and

listen to the poetry made in conjunction with the landscape *whilst also* immersed in the landscape. I argue that Arshi's practice and specifically the example of '*Shifting Lines*' demonstrates an art process that is neither metonymical nor metaphorical. Arshi does not undertake translation from the landscape to poetry but exceeds semiotic frames by absorbing markers such as light, sound, and feeling into the work and presenting this work back in the same context. The language of painting can be considered in visual terms, such as colour, tone, hue, form, and line.

These visual facets operate differently to written or verbal language as they do not rely on a signified and signifier to cohere with one another. Painting challenges this binary of the signified and signifier, operating differently outside of operational parameters of language, with emphasis on effect and response. There are things on the 'edges' of language that I consider in this research in Book Three as a 'metaphysicality'. This research interrogates the extent to which things that are at the edge of comprehension might be transposed in painting practice. There is a danger that in attempting to articulate experiences that might be

understood as metaphysical, we attempt to give comprehension to something that resides in the 'elsewhere'²³ of language (i.e., the intangible ephemera of birdsong) through a communicable language. I have explored the slipperiness of trying to transcribe the unknown 'language' of birdsong in initial notations undertaken in a Worcestershire orchard (see pages 59-60 now).

I argue that this 'elsewhere' or 'peripheries' of language exists on the level of encounter that is bound up *in* tacit language but is *outside* of a non-designated and cohesive system. Having language exist outside of language means that language, or the signifiers contained therein, cannot signify a metaphysicality (as metaphor), nor relate to a language that already exists (metonymy) as this is bound in the connect signifiers and therefore through a representational framework, signifieds.

Materiality

²³ I adopt 'elsewhere' from Luce Irigaray, who uses the term to describe the 'otherness' of women that cannot be defined, as this 'otherness' of language as 'elsewhere'. See Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 29.

²⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 59.

To continue to explore how transposition can explore the metaphysicality in the 'elsewhere' of birdsong, directs the need to interrogate how painting might operate on the 'peripheries' of language. To do so, and to move away from translation, it is crucial to explore materiality. I will first establish the slippery nature of perceiving materiality, then explore how the artist and materiality of an artwork work together in this observation of a transpositional space. I argue that materiality can disrupt language structures, particularly the signifier-signified binary. The agency of materiality disrupts meaning making in perceiving artwork. Philosopher Julia Kristeva's concept of 'poetic language' is notable here. Poetic language disrupts representational language systems. For Kristeva, poetic language "undermines meaning".²⁴ She considers paintings in the context of the 'poetic' language. Through a semiotic lens, Kristeva highlights certain aspects in painting, i.e., surface, colour, juxtaposition, tonality, movement, hue, composition, and material – as signifiers. Therefore, these aspects of painting are open to interpretation.

Writing-thinking extract

5th February 2019

Notating birdsong in a Worcestershire orchard

Figure 1.3

I make marks responding to the different birds I can hear – the marks I make are responsive to what I can hear.
Because of how many different birds I hear, I find my note page is suddenly full of lots of different drawn forms.

All these different marks don't represent the different bird songs, they are the product of *hearing* the different noises. As such these marks are the result of how I have heard these songs that I don't understand – that sit outside of my language.

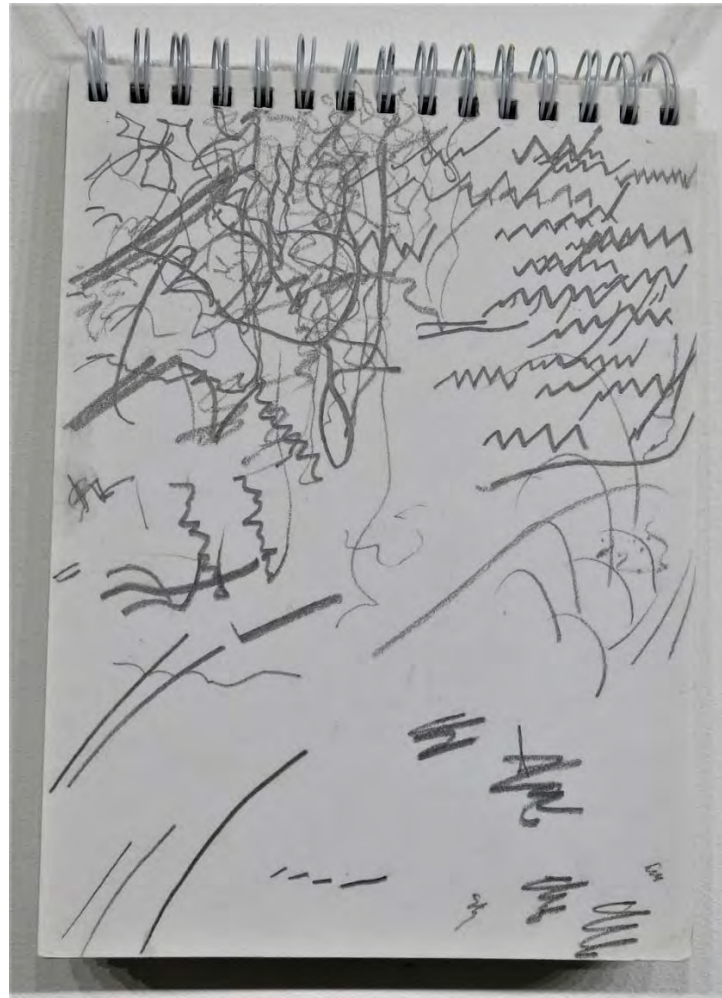


Figure 1.3. Harriet Carter, Notebook page, (2019).

I contend that thinking of these visual elements as signifiers is an appropriate way of perceiving figurative painting that is more closely associated with representation. To use *Sunflowers* (see figure 1.4) by Van Gogh (1888) as an example, the painting is configured with a mixture of colour, gesture, and composition that have been brought together via the medium of paint to form a figuration of sunflowers in a vase. Yellow floral shapes arranged around brown floral shapes connect signifiers (colour, gesture, and composition) to signifieds (our understanding of how sunflowers bloom) and this causes us to perceive a representation of a sunflower. However, if the signifiers are changed, for example colour and composition where blue rectangles replace the yellow floral shapes, the interpretation is harder as the fixity between signifier and signified loosens and this triggers a partial representation instead. This example, demonstrates Kristeva's concept that the poetic language provides "infinite possibilities of language".²⁵ Barthes states that it is:

difficult to conceive a system of images and objects whose signifieds can exist independently of language.²⁶

²⁵ Kristeva, p. 2.

²⁶ Barthes, p. 10.



Figure 1.4. Vincent can Gogh, *Sunflowers*, (1888). Oil on canvas, 92.1x73cm. ©National Gallery, London.

This slippage in fixity between signifier and signified disrupts a systematic painting language. Barthes' exploration of the 'writerly' and 'readerly' text is a useful example of how disruption of the signified – signifier relationship evades representational frameworks. For Barthes, a writerly text is straightforward, whereas the readerly text is affective and ambiguous but more pleasurable. The pleasure of a text creates unpredictability in the text: it is to "stumble".²⁷ For Barthes, this pleasure "suspends the signified value",²⁸ and is not a facet of the text itself. The 'pleasure of the text' arises in the reading when observers bring their 'individuality' to use Barthes' term. Instead of text *being* a language, reading *becomes* the language.²⁹ The individuality brought to reading, causes language to 'become' through complex nuances of "biographical, historical [and] sociological" backgrounds.³⁰ This individuality of perception is how an artwork can be seen as poetic. Whilst signifiers, such as colour and composition present themselves, perceiving these signifiers causes

²⁷ Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p. 4.

²⁸ Barthes, p. 65.

²⁹ Barthes, p. 31.

³⁰ Barthes, p. 62.

stumbling, disrupting the representational framework of signifiers – signifieds. To use Mark Rothko's painting *Light Red Over Black* (1957, see figure 1.5) as an example, the



Figure 1.5. Mark Rothko, *Light Red Over Black*, (1957), oil on canvas, 2306 x 1527 x 38mm, ©Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko/DACS 2021.

signifiers of the visual aspects of the painting are present and signified absent. I assert that in *Light Red Over Black*, there is 'free play of the signifier'. 'Freeplay of the signifier', defined by philosopher Jacques Derrida, refers to the lack of fixity between signifiers to the signified.³¹

Instead, the signifier points beyond itself, to other signifiers in an indefinite referral,³² that therefore avoids representation. An absence of signifieds means that perceiving the material signifiers in this way is bound up in perception. In *Light Red Over Black*, the black and orange rectangular forms appear to hover above the painting and with no perspective, they invite focus into an immeasurable beyond. Coupled with the vastness of the painting, *Light Red Over Black* plays and distorts our sense of place in the gallery. The 'free player of the signifier – of the colour and forms – moves encountering *Light Red Over Black* away from the realm of semiotics (and representation) and into the realm of poetics.

Poetics is the distancing from meaning making in representation to *perceiving* making meaning in encountering art. This perception-based realm is extremely slippery and challenges the binary between representation in figuration and non-representation in abstraction. Artist researcher Jacqueline Taylor's doctoral thesis *Writing//painting; l'écriture féminine and difference in the making* provides a notable example of problematising the relationship between painting and language. Using the concept of '*l'écriture féminine*'³³ to explore abstract painting, her art practice interrogates meaning making in semiotics through explorations of "intermateriality" (see figure 1.6).

For Taylor, the 'intermaterial' explores "material potential" in abstract painting³⁴ that accounts for:

elements of the poetic that exceed signification [where] meaning is open-ended and there is no closure to interpreting the elements that make up the work.³⁵

³¹ Oxford University Press, 'Freeplay', in *Oxford Reference*, <<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095834423?rskey=8PEgwQ&result=1>> [accessed 16 November 2021].

³² Oxford University Press, 'Freeplay' [accessed 16 November 2021].

³³ '*L'écriture féminine*' is the poetic dimension of writing that operates on a more abstract level.

³⁴ Jacqueline Erika Taylor, 'Writing//Painting ; l'écriture Féminine and Difference in the Making' (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Birmingham City University, 2013) p. 132.

³⁵ Taylor, p. 133.



Figure 1.6. Jacqueline Taylor, *detail of vinyl gesture on plinth in Continuous without limits*, (2012), vinyl on plinth.

Her problematisation of language is particularly useful, particularly in her investigation through painting process that incorporates concepts of the 'poetic'. Taylor's use of abstract painting to explore this aligns with my initial explorations of birdsong through abstract gesture (see figure 1.7).

Furthermore, Taylor's problematisation of sign-systems is particularly useful in this research that explores encountering

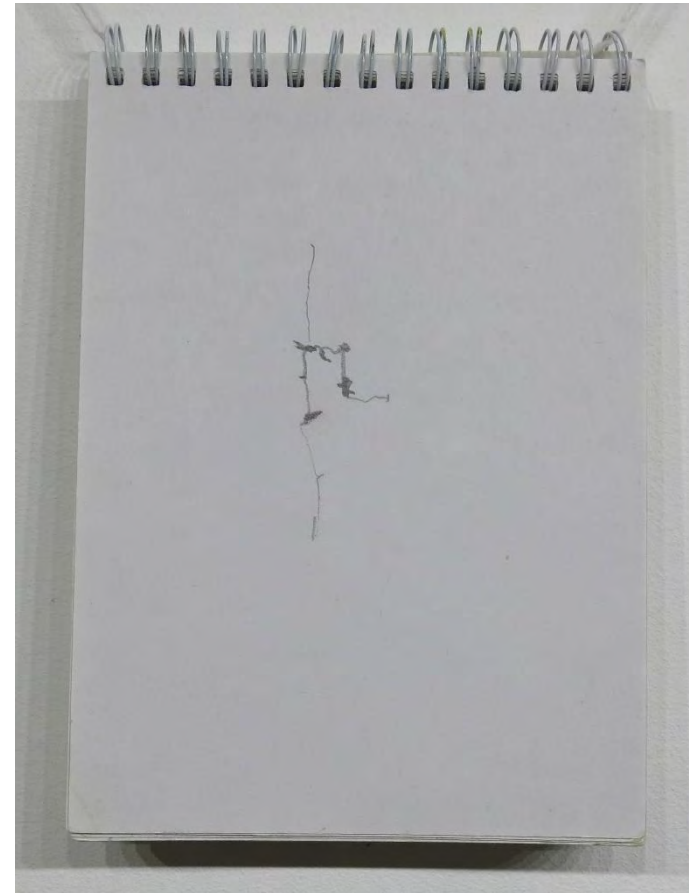


Figure 1.7. Harriet Carter, *Notebook detailing marks made in response to birdsong*, (2019).

the metaphysicality of birdsong that resides outside of communicable language. Building on from the work of Taylor, and Kristeva, the signified is missing when there is an

absence of recognisable figurative forms during processes in painting, and the signifier is the only thing present. Abstract painting operates as a form of language but outside of normative semiotics which makes it unable to be entirely devoid of language. This is crucial in exploring how making art, and specifically painting, tests the boundaries of language.

Working with materiality

I have just introduced the slipperiness of perceiving meaning in artwork. As I introduced in my definition of transposition, a relationship exists between an artist and materiality when making art. To be specific, an artist works in symbiosis with materiality. I have been exploring the working relationship between the artist (myself) and materiality in previous practice. During my MRes research project, I found that painting process are sites of 'happenstances'. Researching the ephemerality of light through making paintings during my MRes project led me to discover that encountering ephemera resonated with the moving moments of chance, orchestrated by the artist, but ultimately created in the performativity of materiality (see figure 1.8).

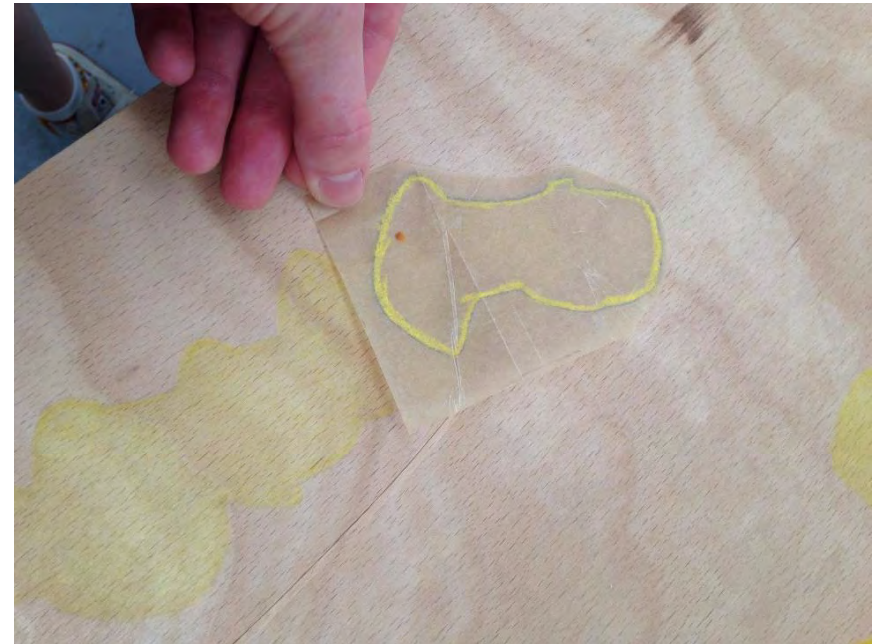


Figure 1.8. Harriet Carter, *All My Life I Have Felt I Was in Two places*, (2017). Detail, w.i.p.

Perceiving materiality is incidental: things are communicated between an observer and an artwork only in that specific symbiotic space and time. Therefore, the information that emerges is specific to this engagement with materiality, and only this engagement. To quote philosopher Graham Harman, this incidental relation does not provide information

on “the stuff of which [a thing is] constituted”.³⁶ Materiality, then, remains partially hidden from view. Psychoanalyst Parveen Adams comments on the materiality of paint as having an “otherness” that resides “outside the signifying chain”.³⁷ Consequently, I contend that working *with* materiality leads to working on the peripheries of language.

Artist researcher Barbara Bolt interrogates painting process as disrupting semiotic frameworks via material thinking embodied in her own figurative painting practice. Her interrogation of painting process is notable in exploring how this research identifies working with materiality on the peripheries of language. For Bolt, painting is performative, rather than representational whereby:

the material practice of painting can transcend its structure as representation and become more than the medium that bears it.³⁸

The performativity of materiality disrupts human-placed perceptions of signifiers of the medium representing something in the world, separating conscious attempts to

control it. I see this performativity of painting as severing the intention of an artist and taking on an alternative trajectory. For Bolt the painting “transcends itself and becomes a dissembling presence”.³⁹ Material thinking draws mutual reflection between bodies (human and material) and meaning, that I argue is essential in separating translation and transposition. The dissembling presence of a painting disrupts a sign system beholden both intentionally and unintentionally to the artist. Painting operates in a way that is on the periphery of intention. Material thinking is crucial in providing alternative modalities of meaning-making that do not rely on semiotic frameworks per se.

Bolt’s concept of the painting transcending itself through the performativity of painting as an epistemological state aligns with process where meaning is created, yet hard to pin down. Philosopher Gary Banham and art theoretician Simon O’Sullivan state that production in the encounter between artist and material causes meaning in the

³⁶ Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2018), p. 77.

³⁷ Parveen Adams, *The Emptiness of the Image: Psychoanalysis and Sexual Differences* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 113.

³⁸ Barbara Bolt, ‘Painting Is Not a Representational Practice’, in *Unframed: Practices and Politics of Women’s Contemporary Painting*, ed. by Rosemary Betterton, (London: I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2003), pp. 41–61 (p. 43).

³⁹ Bolt, (p. 42).

“suspension of becoming” of production.⁴⁰ This is a poetic dimension of language, to use Kristeva’s concept, whereby material thinking creates infinite possibilities for meaning to ‘become’. The suspension of meaning ‘becoming’ in working with materiality is bound up in potential that can only be dimly grasped in the ‘otherness’ of materiality (to use Adams’ term). I will develop the concept of ‘becoming’ in working with materiality through interrogating embodied encounter in Book Three.

Transposition in art practice

Transposition within art practice provides a means to explore the possibilities of metaphysicality as located on the peripheries of language. All art practice might be seen as engaging with essayist Andres Claro’s theory of artistic transposition, drawing on the materiality of processes in painting as explored earlier with Taylor, Bolt, and Banham and O’Sullivan. For Claro, artistic transposition is defined as a process of:

capturing the organization of a work and constructing an organization that can subject the viewer to an

⁴⁰ Banham and O’Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2005), p. 21-22.

analogous experience in another media.⁴¹ Arshi’s ‘*Shifting Lines*’ *Sound Walk* (2021) – as explored earlier – provides a good example of this. Artistic transposition is useful to consider how the materiality of processes across artwork negotiate between different modalities of language and phenomena. Specifically, across the auditory and visual that is pertinent in this research that explores birdsong, Messiaen’s musical explorations of birdsong, and painting.

The open-ended meaning created when working with materiality as explored earlier in painting, can be explored as a ‘complexification’. For Pirrò, ‘complexification’ means “centring focus on interaction processes rather than on the extraction of static qualities”.⁴² Considering interactive processes with materiality as a ‘complexification’ moves these processes into the scope of artistic transposition. Such ‘complexification’ actively seeks to evade representation by extending away from a structured system of signifiers and signifieds. The slippage of meaning caused by the complexification of interacting with material draws on Schwab

⁴¹ Andrés Claro, ‘Borgean Transpositions: From Ear to Eye’, *New Centennial Review*, 11.1 (2011) 161-211, <<https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2011.0006>>, (p. 195).

⁴² Pirrò, (p. 140).

who argues that transpositions do not:
alter the world by materially changing their objects;
what changes in a transposition are the interrelations of
material objects in the world and, hence, the difference
of meaning that those objects carry across distinct
positions.⁴³

For Schwab, interrogating transposition requires moving away from observing a painting and instead looking closely at *painting* itself. This echoes Kirkopelto's statement that transposition has a logic. Translation melds preconceived facets of knowledge with encountering an object to 'make sense' of it and transform it into a communicable language. In transposition, meaning making is consequently rooted in process, and through ascribing meaning to material interactions as eliciting a 'complexification' is therefore an act of transposition. The signifier within materiality continues to be deferred with each new interaction with materiality (engaging with Derrida's concept of the 'free play of the signifier'. Derrida defines this indefinite referral of the signifier producing an

endless deferral of meaning as *différance*.⁴⁴ Derrida created *différance* by combining the French words for 'difference' and 'deferral'.⁴⁵ *Différance* exists in a state of indeterminacy which denies the existence of ultimate determinable meanings.⁴⁶ Complexification as imbued in transpositional processes produces a multiplicity in a continual state of *différance* and disruption to sign-systems that challenges binary forms of representation.

This challenge to representation emerges via material thinking. To return to Bolt's theory that the painting disassembles itself, visual elements of a painting (Kristeva would call signifiers) shift from representing signifieds into a state of indeterminacy with each new repositioning between artist and material. Because interacting with materiality during making disassembles its presence (to return to Bolt), this causes the signifiers exceed themselves (to return to Taylor). To draw on thought from Claro, Pirrò, and Schwab, materiality disrupts representation, and rejects frameworks of metaphor and

⁴³ Michael Schwab, 'Transpositionality and Artistic Research' (p. 191).

⁴⁴ Oxford University Press, 'Différance', in *Oxford Reference*, <<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095717848?rskey=cRaknH&result=4>> [accessed 16 November 2021].

⁴⁵ Oxford University Press, 'Différance' [accessed 16 November 2021].

⁴⁶ Oxford University Press, 'Freeplay' [accessed 16 November 2021].

metonymy. The concept of 'complexification' in material interaction lifts transposition away from representational frameworks, such as metaphor and metonymy, and into the peripheries of language.

Drawing on Braidotti and Pirrò's concept of transposition as a space as discussed earlier, transposition is embodied within the making of a painting. Specifically, in the epistemological state of material thinking where determination is disrupted by materiality, and therefore language is slippery. The material *processes* that take place in making painting are means to explore the peripheries of language, over the *style* of painting. The movement between artist and painting is a transpositional space that evades modes of representation. Interrogation the *making* of paintings and approaching the 'otherness' of materiality is key to unpacking how transposition might explore a metaphysical thing in the 'elsewhere' of language, i.e., birdsong.

Birdsong

In my initial transcriptions of birdsong in a Worcestershire orchard, I found myself attempting to articulate birdsong in a visual language (see pages 70-71 now). As I have just explored, in translation, a sign is comprehended whereby a signifier and signified connect to make sense of a thing. This research makes the case that encountering birdsong challenges comprehending a sign system. Birdsong is proposed as ephemera outside of a communicable language system because meaning in birdsong (if there is any) cannot be easily grasped or translated. We know that different bird calls might indicate different things, such as calls of alarm, searching for food, or returning to their nests for example. Contemporary debates have explored the possibilities of language in birdsong,⁴⁷ where different disciplines perceive various signifiers in birdsong. Different disciplines locate a variety of meaning from encountering the behaviour of birds and the resulting song. For example, in ornithology, the biological and ecological functionality of birdsong is matched

⁴⁷ Tom Service, 'Is Birdsong Music?', *The Listening Service*, BBC Radio 3, 19 June 2016,

<<http://www.listenersguide.org.uk/bbc/podcast/episode/?p=b078n25h&e=b07gn6km>>.

Writing-thinking extract

16th February 2019

Notating birdsong in a Worcestershire orchard

Figure 1.9

I am attempting to comprehend what happens when I draw responsively to birdsong. I note that I automatically think of the birdsong as a sort of 'bird language'. This starts to make think about the accuracy of what I'm doing – but surely that isn't the point? This feels like the criticism Messiaen faced when people analysed the realism of his musical interpretations of birdsong and that was DEFINITELY missing the point.

I'm thinking about this through the lens of my own linguistic language – surely this is a problematic lens for attempting to explore birdsong as metaphysical?

Have I fallen at the first hurdle?

to our knowledge of bird behaviour. Through observing birdsong and birds' habitats, empirical instruments are used to capture and translate birdsong into measurable data. This data provides an empirical language which is analysed and evaluated to create knowledge and meaning of birdsong.⁴⁸ Perceived similarities in noise and behaviour are wrongly assumed through translation into the same language (i.e., data).

In a project outside of this doctoral research, I undertook comparative analysis of an empirical mode of perceiving and transcribing birdsong (sonogram) with an artistic mode (mark-making). Through interrogating the holistic encounter of mark-making during an *experience* with birdsong, I concluded that the closed nature of electronic transcriptions of birdsong was unable to transcribe the holistic encounter with the ephemera of birdsong in time and space.⁴⁹ As I have found in my research, the closed nature of

systemised frameworks is problematic. I will explore this a little further in Book Three.

As transposition in art practice produces the need to explore process in making artwork to evade representational frameworks, exploring birdsong outside of communicable language must also be explored through process. Experiencing and thinking through *encountering* birdsong without falling foul of making an 'anthropocentric mistake' (to use Tønnessen's concept I used earlier). Tønnessen's concept of semiotic thinking as a creature in the world as *Umwelt*, is useful to explore this further. Tønnessen describes the *Umwelt* of a creature as the:

aspect of a[n] experienced world that is organism-specific (rather than species-specific) and ultimately refers to an existential realm.⁵⁰

The ephemeral quality of birdsong is related to our experiences with birdsong. Bird noise and behaviours change across species, which creates a problem when attempting to

⁴⁸ See Joeri Bruyninckx, *Listening in the Field: Recording and the science of birdsong*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2018).

⁴⁹ See: Harriet Carter, 'Drawing birdsong: A comparative analysis between the electronic and the human', *Drawing: Research, Theory, Practice*, 5.2 (2020), 319 – 332 <https://doi.org/10.1386/drtpr_00041_1> [accessed 27 February 2022].

⁵⁰ Morten Tønnessen, 'The Global Species', *New Formations*, 69 (2010), 98-110 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3898/NEWF.69.05.2010>> (p. 101).

draw a singular language from birdsong. I assert that birdsong is a combination of signifiatory systems, none of which are pertinent to the language of the bird itself, relating more to Derrida's theory of 'freeplay of the signifier'. The language of the bird – birdsong – has a sign system that is completely unfathomable to the language systems created by humans to make sense of encountering things in the world.⁵¹ Therefore, I argue exploring the very ungraspability of birdsong is important in identifying an encounter with it as resonating with metaphysicality, which I explore further in Book Three.

Without certainty of what birdsong means, the signifier disconnects from the signified. The sound-based sign of birdsong generally can be connected to the signified *concept* of birdsong (in our understanding of birdsong as relating to birds). However, the meaning-making system of birdsong cannot be understood semiotically or translated as a linguistic system per se. I argue therefore, that birdsong cannot be

approached semiotically and translated. To return to Barthes - signifieds that exist independently to language are hard to systemise.⁵² We seek to 'make sense' of birdsong, to allocate signifiers (i.e., birdsong) that is not within our understanding of language, to signifieds that we can see and recognise (birds). Instead, I propose that an appropriate method of attempting to comprehend an encounter with birdsong is to approach it poetically through transposition, not translation.

Therefore, the only thing that can be transposed is what has been encountered, which in the case of encountering birdsong as outside of our communicable language frameworks, is the poetic meaning-making that develops during a birdsong encounter.

I consider that the complex and intangible ephemera that are embedded in an embodied encounter with birdsong, is not something that can be communicated in language. Instead, recognising an encounter with birdsong as an encountering an unknown, intangible, elusiveness, is to create

⁵¹ For an example of the comparative use of human and birdsong communications to further enrich knowledge about human language, see: Olga Fehér, 'Atypical birdsong and artificial languages provide insights into how communication systems are shaped by learning, use, and transmission', *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 25 (2017), 97-105 <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.3758/s13423-016-1107-5>> [accessed 27 February 2022]. For an example of the use of human-devised

empirical technology to attempt to advance understanding on the functionality of birdsong, see: Masakazu Konishi, 'From central pattern generator to sensory template in the evolution of birdsong: Language and Birdsong', *Brain Lang*, 115.1 (2010), 18-20 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20955898/> [accessed 27 February 2022].

⁵² Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, p. 10.

poetic meaning-making of the scenario. In Book Three, I develop on encountering birdsong as metaphysical.

Exploring birdsong through the lens of painting – which as I discuss aligns with poetics – can conduct an appropriate exploration positioned on the peripheries of language. Any aural or visual interpretation of birdsong risks translation. I argue that *processes* in composing music and creating visual art – as bound up with materiality – provide a transposed *encounter* with birdsong. I correlate the impracticability of cohering birdsong in a way that can be better understood with processes in painting practice residing on the peripheries of language. I assert that to approach transposition *of* birdsong is to consider transposing encounters *with* birdsong.

3. Birdsong in the visual arts

There are too many examples of visual art that explore birdsong to list here in an entirety. To give just two examples, artist Mike Collier and music composer Bennett Hogg worked collaboratively to create '*A Dawn Chorus: Singing the World, Mimesis and Birdsong*' using music and art to respond to and articulate a dawn chorus encountered at Cheeseburn in Northumberland. Daisy Ginsberg created a synthetic dawn

chorus in installation '*Machine Auguries*', highlighting concern of diminishing bird populations and life after birdsong.

For the scope of this argument, I will analyse three examples of how three artists have engaged with birdsong to explore limitations of responding to birdsong that this thesis will address. Jim Lloyd's *Solresol bird translator* translates birdsong using Sudre's 'Solresol language' and 'Pure Data graphical language' (see figure 1.10) by decrypting it into code.

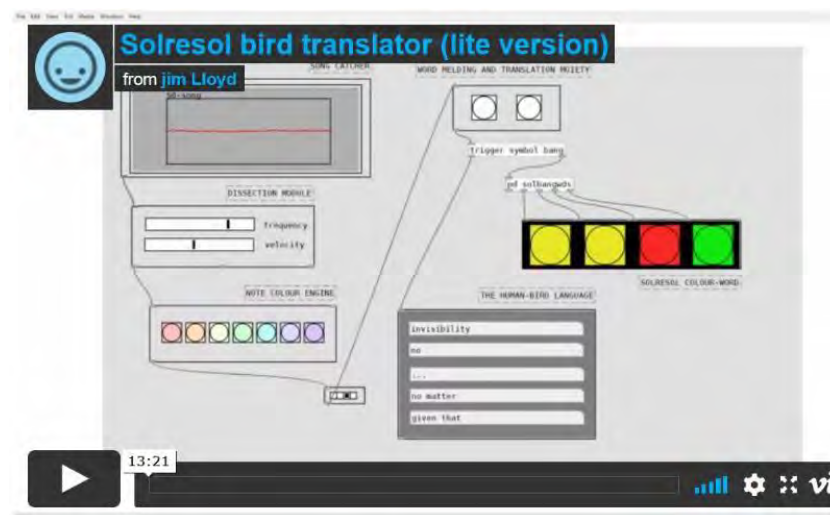


Figure 1.10. Jim Lloyd, *Solresol bird translator (lite version)* (no date), film.

Birdsong recordings are processed through a system which convert the sound collected into musical notes found in the 'Solresol' dictionary,⁵³ that are then used to create words. The words are shown in a live stream during the processing of the sound to musical notes and placed with colours. The creation of the *Solresol bird translator* relies on representation. It creates a final language from birdsong through anthropomorphologising the initial song into words (through electronic data). Translation is therefore presented in *Solresol bird translator* in multi-layered ways. Overarchingly, processing birdsong through a system assigns unknown aspects of birdsong to code that can be comprehended makes sense of the unknown. Furthermore, the code is human devised, the use of which I assess as creating Tønnessen's concept of an 'anthropocentric mistake' or perceiving the ephemeral qualities of birdsong in a systemised way.

A different anthropomorphological approach to birdsong in a visual art context is the 2007 installation *Dawn Chorus* by artist Marcus Coates (see figures 1.11 and 1.12).

⁵³ The Solresol dictionary contains an invented musical language by Francois Sudre from 1827 onwards.



Figure 1.11. Marcus Coates, *Dawn Chorus* (2007). Digital video, 6 minutes 20 seconds.



Figure 1.12. Marcus Coates, *Dawn Chorus* (2007). Video installation, HD 1080 x 1920 16:9, 18-minute loop.

Coates edited recordings of humans mimicking the sound and timing of a dawn chorus, creating a connection between human and the impersonated bird.⁵⁴ In doing so, *Dawn Chorus* filters the sound of birdsong via human mimicry and the agency of the human voice. At first glance, it could be suggested that *Dawn Chorus* translates birdsong, and the mimicry is representational. We can recognise the human voice, sped up to a fast and high frequency, connecting the human voice as signified, to this sounding as signifier. However, the language system slips because the unknown 'language' produced by the human is elusive as the signified is distorted and unrecognisable as the human voice. The manipulation of the voice into a register of high frequency allows us to comprehend the human voice but not what the voice is saying.

I argue that *Dawn Chorus* transposes a metaphysicality that I associate with the elusiveness of birdsong. Furthermore, as an immersive installation, *Dawn Chorus* further addresses the metaphysicality of birdsong. Positioning screens at varying

heights in the room with the synchronous projections confounds a listening audience seeking to pick out a specific song that mirrors the ungraspability of birdsong. The slippage of signified creates a free play of the signifier (to use Derrida's term) in this confounding of the audience. Compared to the *Solresol Bird Translator*, birdsong here is not codified. Instead, Coates transposes the unfathomable language of birdsong by creating a birdsong *encounter*.

The bright colours created by a mix of earth and natural tones with the more exotic purples and pinks, in Jennifer Durrant's painting *Four series Uccelli* evoke an alternative visual encounter with birdsong (see figure 1.13). In an interview with critic Fiona Maddocks, Durrant discusses her fascination of birds, saying that she has been "mesmerised by hearing and watching birds" and makes paintings that "come" from seeing and watching birds and noticing their colours.⁵⁵ As Maddocks observes, Durrant's paintings "borrow from nature but are in no sense literal" in bands of colour and vivid dots of contrasting colour.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Workplace, 'Dawn Chorus, FABRICA, Brighton, U.K', *Workplace Gallery*, 2022 <<https://www.workplacegallery.co.uk/exhibitions/149/>> [accessed 31 December 2018].

⁵⁵ Fiona Maddocks, 'In the Studio with Jennifer Durrant RA', *RA Magazine*, 21 November 2008 <<https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/in-the-studio-jennifer-76urran>> [accessed 27 February 2022].

⁵⁶ Maddocks.



Figure 1.13. Jennifer Durrant, *Four Series Uccelli (18)* (2002-2004). Mixed media and collage 24.5 x 27.5cm

In *Four series Uccelli*, it is possible to identify parts of two trees in an abstract gathering of rectangles, creating a referent to trees in the landscape. In contrast to this signifier

and signified, the contrast of the vivacity of bright colours not directly taken from nature amalgamated with more natural earth tones, present an idea of Durrant experiencing birdsong, elevating them and their habitat into realms of an otherworldly and imagined dais in the pictorial plane. The very way the paint sits on the canvas and manipulates ambient light repeats the artist's original sense of mesmerisation of the birds in the landscape.

Four series Uccelli then, becomes a device of remembering for the artist. Whilst this is the case, through materiality, Durrant's pictorial planes evoke movement and light that also creates an encounter for an audience. Critic Sarah Kent notes that in areas of matt paint, light is sucked in and absorbs the observer's attention whilst in other areas, the paint glistens with a soft metallic sheen that as a result makes the paintings "sing with effortless grace".⁵⁷ The suggestion of trees from rectangular forms contrasts to the absence of any other figuration in the pictorial plane. Identifying the rectangular forms as trees, creates the situation of the

⁵⁷ ART FIRST, 'Jennifer Durrant', *Art first*, 2008
<https://www.artfirst.co.uk/jennifer_durrant/pe_durrant_08.html> [accessed 27 February 2022].

freeplay of a signifier. The trees are hard to interpret, and so allude – over directly representing – signifieds in the landscape associated with trees, namely light, movement, colour, and birds. The figuration of trees leads potential to attempt to map the materiality, colour, and composition of the abstract forms surrounding the figuration of trees, to these signifieds. *Four series Uccelli* demonstrates my earlier exploration that abstract painting can operate within a certain type of language. Semiotic codes are created by the observer, aided by the sign-systems they bring to the painting, which in turn cause a painting to *become* a transposition of a birdsong encounter. To return to Schwab, Durrant's work demonstrates that an interrogation of transposition within painting *processes* requires moving away from simply observing a painting and drawing conclusions from this.

4. Birdsong in music

As with birdsong in the visual arts, there are multiple examples of birdsong in music, too many that I can name here. For the purpose of this thesis, I introduce Messiaen's

exploration of birdsong in his music to position how Messiaen approached musical interpretation of birdsong. This is aided with comparison of his work to six music pieces by other composers to position how Messiaen approached birdsong in a unique way, that provides a conceptual backbone to this thesis and my discussion of encountering birdsong. I will then introduce and explore *Catalogue d'oiseaux* to provide an example of Messiaen's unique approach to birdsong.

I have explored how humans seek to answer questions about birdsong and make discoveries from things yet unknown. This draws into question the problem of imitating birdsong within human musical capabilities and more widely, language systems. Writer Tom Service comments that it is natural for humans to automatically attempt to “straight jacket” birdsong into music⁵⁸ – in other words, squeeze into human shaped structures. There is a paradox in doing so, much of the elusiveness and unknown secrets of birdsong that in fact contribute to their very allure, are lost in the translation into recognisable human system of musical notation.

⁵⁸ Service.

Overarchingly, historical and contemporary music demonstrate a fascination in attempting to understand birdsong. This tended to be through musically replicating their song, marrying pitch to musical notes, to follow Service: “alchemising” it into human form.⁵⁹ Messiaen was a key composer who explored this complex phenomenon in his music, both raising birdsong on a dais whilst sharing his spiritual encounters with birdsong in music, and repositioning his encounters with birdsong for an audience.

I argue that the way Messiaen approached his birdsong compositions avoids some of the limitations of translation, firstly in the way he perceived birdsong, and secondly in his composition of *Catalogue d’oiseaux*. Specifically, examining Messiaen’s transcription to composition processes addresses the ‘complexification’ – to appropriate Pirrò’s terminology – of transposing birdsong.

Messiaen considered birds as God’s messengers providing him with heavenly messages. As a result, Messiaen heard birdsong musically, evidenced by his deconstruction of

the timbre of birdsong directly into musical notation in his *cahiers*. To return to Kristeva’s concept of poetic language, birdsong, for Messiaen, was a poetic musical language of infinite possibilities. I therefore argue that Messiaen did not translate birdsong into music, as to him, the birds’ performed songs already. As I described earlier, birdsong as a signifier extends beyond the signified (representational parameters of comprehending birdsong in our communicable language structures). Messiaen conducted poetic meaning-making by perceiving birdsong musically, perceiving birdsong as having a musical timbre.

Messiaen’s perception of birdsong as music contrasts to musical imitation of birdsong which demonstrates an appeal for mimicry. For example, musical imitation of the cuckoo is fostered through producing identifiable imitations of avian sound patterns.⁶⁰ Musician Cassandre Balosso-Bardin’s 2020 performance of Jacob van Eyck *Den Nachtegael* (The Nightingale, date unknown) is an example of a piece of music that attains a close mimicry of birdsong in music.

⁵⁹ Service.

⁶⁰ For example: *Capriccio III sopra il Cucco* (1624) by Girolamo Frescobaldi, *Le Coucou* [1757] by Louis-Claude Daquin, and *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring* [1912] by Frederick Delius.

Balosso- Bardin performed *Den Nachtegael* on a replica of a cylindrical bore recorder. She used flutter-tonguing (vibrating the tongue as if rolling an r)⁶¹ when moving between registers, jarring the notes, and seemingly splitting them, mimicking the fast-paced movements created by a nightingale's syrinx. As I have published elsewhere, recognising birdsong in music enables humans to temporarily experience a feeling of inhabiting the same plane of existence as birds in the world.⁶² This is what sets *Den Nachtegael* apart from Coates' *Dawn Chorus*. Simply, through filtering bird-making sounds into music, *Den Nachtegael* and other music mimicking birdsong demonstrates the differences between birdsong and the human language, much like Jim Lloyd's *Solresol Bird Translator*. To quote Homi Bhabha:

mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal.⁶³

⁶¹ Lexico.com, 'Flutter-tonguing', in *Oxford Lexico* <<https://www.lexico.com/definition/flutter-tonguing>> [accessed 27 February 2022].
⁶² Harriet Carter, 'Shared Birdsong? Exploring Messiaen's Relationship with Place and Birdsong through Drawing', in *Songs of Place and Time: Birdsong and the Dawn Chorus in Natural History and the Arts*, ed. by Mike Collier, Bennett Hogg, and John Strachan (Manchester: Gaia Project, 2020), pp. 332–42 <https://issuu.com/drling/docs/songs_of_time_place_final_high_res_reduced_> [accessed 27 February] (p. 333)

Whilst mimicry acknowledges the 'elsewhere-ness' of birdsong, it is seen in this research as more of a metonymical device, and therefore, representational.

Striving to explore the intangibility of birdsong can be mapped through the twentieth century in compositions and performances of birdsong *with* recorded birdsong.⁶⁴ The marriage of recorded birdsong with musical imitations of it soon arrived following the popularity of recording birdsong (from 1898),⁶⁵ which featured famously in part III of Ottorino Respighi's 1923–4 *The Pini di Janiculum*. Respighi achieved this marriage by using a birdsong recording to accompany an orchestral narrative of the landscape. His orchestration features a recording of a nightingale at the end of the piece to provide an illusion that the bird is flying somewhere above the audience, accompanied by a murmuring of strings and gentle plucking of the harp. Similarly, *Cantus Arcticus* (1972) by Einojuhani Rautavaara features a constant murmuration of

⁶³ Homi Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', *Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis*, 28 (1984), 125–33 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/778467>> [accessed 27 February 2022] (p. 126).
⁶⁴ Most notably when Beatrice Harrison played the cello, accompanying nightingale song in a Surrey garden in 1924. An audio recording of this can be found on the BBC at: <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p01z12h7>>
⁶⁵ Joeri Bruyninckx, *Listening in the Field: Recording and the Science of Birdsong* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018), p. 61.

birdsong that weaves in and out of orchestral accompaniment to signify birdsong.⁶⁶

Another example of the unattainable language of birdsong filtered into a music structure is *Birdsong Concerto with Pianosong* (2001)⁶⁷ by Jonathan Harvey. In this piece, birdsong recordings are manipulated and intertwined with an orchestral score. Birdsong samples are mapped to a musical key that was then performed by using an electronic keyboard and computer.⁶⁸ The birdsong is edited to enable the sound to merge with the tone of the piano. As well as being edited to comply with music, in sharing the space of performance with musical imitation and birdsong recording, birdsong is shaped into human musical language. The edited birdsong performs alongside the orchestra who occupy the same musical space and time⁶⁹ whereby the two perform together. The birdsong sample is constrained to work with musical instruments and performers, that paradoxically pay homage to its complexity.

⁶⁶ See Rique Borges, *Einojuhani Rautavaara: Concerto for Birds and Orchestra "Cantus Arcticus" Op. 61*, online video recording, YouTube, 21 June 2015) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLjXgV-Mhp0>> [accessed 27 February 2022].

⁶⁷ Ryan MacEvoy McCullough, *Jonathan Harvey Bird Concerto with Pianosong (2001)*, online video recording, YouTube, 30 May 2018) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0b4Y8i1PuYM>> [accessed 27 February 2022].

Whilst this complexity is acknowledged in this way, the freedom of birdsong and the inaccessibility to its 'unknown' qualities are lost by being translated into electronic music in the shared platform.

Much like Coates' *Dawn Chorus* art installation, in *Birdsong Concerto with Pianosong*, the contortion of human-made birdsong instead of birdsong itself evokes the idea that birdsong surpasses the capacity of human language. This is further exemplified in the choral piece *D'Monstrantz Vöögeli* (1998) by Per Nørgård, and composition for violin and choir *Acqua di mare amaro* (2019) by Luca Antignani.⁷⁰ The performance of Nørgård's *D'Monstrantz Vöögeli* is comprised of choral singers whistling and singing alongside a recording of birdsong. The work addresses the complexity of birdsong through a difficult score that results in human voices struggling to keep up with the recording of birdsong. The difficulty of this musical dialogue contorts the physical rows of the choir into a gaggle, as the bodies move as they exert their

⁶⁸ McCullough, YouTube.

⁶⁹ Carter, p. 333.

⁷⁰ Performances of *D'Monstrantz Vöögeli* and *Acqua di mare amaro* are referenced from the event 'Les Chants des Oiseaux', at Les Chazelet Church, La Grave at the 2019 Messiaen Festival 'Pour les oiseaux'.

energy. In doing so, they evoke the way birds gather en masse to sing, for example, from a telephone line. The choir's concentration on the scores creates a frantic avidity, further manifesting the complexity of birdsong, and exposing the human inability to fully translate it fully into human language.

This translation is further exposed through the choir's use of tuning forks to guide their pitch. This accentuates their human-centric limitations, in which tools are needed to ensure they meet the correct pitch. The need for tuning forks seems to be the result of singing simultaneously at different pitches, making it hard to locate notes amongst the distracting cacophony. Whilst the human endeavour is evident, the inclusion of sound recordings, whistles, and frantic whispers creates further noise that seem to stretch beyond the human realm, resulting in a constant movement between the human and the imitated avian counterpart. The tumultuous energy that takes something in danger of enacting a pantomime produces a masterpiece of the human perseverance to connect in some way to birds through birdsong communication.

Luca Antignani's *Acqua di mare amaro* combines mimicry of birdsong in both the human voice and violin. A

violinist performs alongside vocalists, stood in the middle of a choir as if posing as the protagonist bird, supported with the surrounding creatures providing a backing chorus for his song. Once again, expression of the performer testifies to the complexity of the piece, this time by the violinist. The violinist plays chords, presumably attesting to the dual voice box birds possess – the syrinx, giving them the ability to sing different sounds at once. As with *D'Monstrantz Vöögeli*, the piece is complex to listen to in the audial tangle of voices with violin.

The extreme lengths the singers go to in order to create sound that sounds like birdsong highlights the untranslatability of birdsong. However, unlike Coates's *Dawn Chorus*, by placing music that sounds like birdsong *alongside* birdsong recordings places a signifier next to the signified and ultimately, I argue creates a sign system. Filtering birdsong through a musical structure translates perceived signifiers and signifieds of birdsong into the context of music, which to draw on Torop and Osimo, is to *translate* birdsong through music. Framing birdsong recording in music runs the risk of repurposing it as a musical tool. Simply, doing so places the translation next to the translated, altering what would be a

standalone transposition of the ungraspability of birdsong, to a representation.

The temporal nature of these examples of music performances from compositions by van Eyck, Respighi, Harvey, Nørgård, and Antignani create an encounter with birdsong. Whilst this is the case, they all slip in different ways into representing and hence, translating birdsong. To compare these arguments of musical translation to Messiaen's music, by perceiving birdsong as music, Messiaen transposes his experience of birdsong, indeed – repositioning – these experiences using music. The repositioning of experiencing birdsong in the landscape, as demonstrated in *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, transposes the imbrication birdsong has with the landscape. I will argue later in Book Three how this transposition articulates the metaphysicality of encountering birdsong in time and space.

Whilst Messiaen's musical interpretations of birdsong could be seen as 'making-sense' of the intangibility of birdsong, I argue that his overarching approach to birdsong demonstrates an element of the 'poetic' – to use Kristeva's

concept. Messiaen changes the musical vehicle (signifier) by which to compose birdsong music, which can be seen in the range of instruments that the compositions are for.⁷¹ In doing so, meaning is disrupted in the lack of fixity between the signifier (musical interpretations of birdsong) and signified (bird). To return to Derrida's 'free play of the signifier', Messiaen's music provides seemingly limitless musical messages from heaven. 'Free play of the signifier' can also be identified in the nuances of how Messiaen came to create *Catalogue d'oiseaux* and indeed, in its presentation – both filtered through Messiaen's perception.

Catalogue d'oiseaux (Catalogue of Birds) is a two-hour piano cycle comprised of thirteen nature portraits arranged into seven books:

Book 1

'Le Chocard des Alpes' | Alpine chough

'Le Lorient' | Golden oriole

'Le Merle bleu' | Blue rock thrush

⁷¹ See for example orchestral compositions *Réveil des oiseaux* and *Oiseaux exotiques* and flute composition *Le Merle noir*.

Book 2

'Le Traquet Stapazin' | Black-eared wheatear

Book 3

'La Chouette Hulotte' | Tawny owl

'L'Alouette Lulu' | Woodlark

Book 4

'La Rousserolle effarvatte' | Reed warbler

Book 5

'L'Alouette calandrelle' | Greater short-toed lark

'La Bouscarle' | Cetti's warbler

Book 6

'Le Merle de roche' | Rock thrush

Book 7

'La Buse variable' | Buzzard

'Le Traquet rieur' | Black wheatear

'Le Courlis cendré' | Curlew

Catalogue d'oiseaux is recognised across Messiaen studies specifically as a 'piano cycle' because of the way time is presented.⁷² There are connections between each book, particularly in the central three books with 'La Rousserolle effarvatte' (book four) forming the hub of the cycle, as its longest section and either side of this lengthy burst of activity in book four is the motionless characteristics of books three and five. Messiaen scholar Christopher Dingle comments that the timescale in 'La Rousserolle effarvatte' is circadian in itself, the piece:

covering twenty-seven hours in the life of the marshes in the Sologne region, starting and ending at night, with the clear implication that this snapshot merely typifies the kind of activities occurring day after day.⁷³

The narrative of *Catalogue d'oiseaux* is in part the result of Messiaen's travels around France, exposing the love he had for nature and the opportunities he encountered to transcribe

⁷² Legalities prevent me from including a Peter Hill's performance of *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. If you are interested, you can find the three pivotal books in this research here: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_m-QxkrAB8w0KujYID2PDuYjzNd9KXQIXw

⁷³ Christopher Dingle, *The Life of Messiaen* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 150.

birdsong. Highly reflective of his relationship with the landscape, is that of the last nature portrait in the cycle 'Le Courlis cendre'. Dingle comments that this cycle "ends in gloom" as it mirrors Messiaen's imminent departure from his "period of escape" exploring the bird's habitats, to return to his home and work life in Paris.⁷⁴ I contend that the 'mirroring' of experience in the moving music is a form of repositioning Messiaen's literal movements around France. This is a helpful reminder of how Messiaen developed a relationship with the landscape and birdsong. Messiaen's method involved travelling the landscape and notating live birdsong and the landscape. He would mostly create musical 'sketches', but in some cases would compose on the move, aided by birdsong recordings that his student (and later wife) Yvonne Loriod would capture whilst Messiaen transcribed. During an interview with Claude Samuel, Messiaen himself said, he is "a modern man" and would sometimes use the taped recordings to reflect on his hand notations.⁷⁵ Messiaen praised the ability of the recording instruments to capture the precision of the

pace of birdsong that his transcriptions could not keep up with.⁷⁶

Whilst it is useful to compare recorded birdsong and hand-notated birdsong, I do so to highlight the importance of Messiaen's transcriptions. *Catalogue d'oiseaux* leans naturally into criticism of the contentiousness of the realism of the birdsong material, and furthermore the realism of the landscape that Messiaen transcribes to house the birdsong. This research does not seek to analyse the realism of birdsong in *Catalogue d'oiseaux*.⁷⁷ Instead, focus is on Messiaen's perceived experience with birdsong in his transcriptions, that I identify as a transposition.

Messiaen's experiences with birdsong through transcribing in the landscape can be identified in *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. The piano cycle can be seen as embodying thirteen different attempts to musically interpret birdsong or encounter birdsong as manifesting musically. In doing so, *Catalogue d'oiseaux* demonstrates as much about Messiaen's ornithological and musical journey of birdsong notation and

⁷⁴ Dingle, pp. 152-3.

⁷⁵ Claude Samuel, *Olivier Messiaen: Music and Color: Conversations with Claude Samuel* (Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1994), p. 36.

⁷⁶ Samuel, p. 36.

⁷⁷ For a leading voice in this field, see Robert Fallon, 'The Record of realism in Messiaen's bird style', in *Olivier Messiaen: Music, Art and Literature*, ed. by Christopher Dingle and Nigel Simeone (England: Ashgate Publishing, 2007) pp. 115-136

composition as it explores thematic content on time and the eternal. Messiaen's dedication to exploring the relationship birdsong has with the landscape is evident with the addition of the poetic scene-setting for each birdsong piece or 'nature portrait' spanning over locations across France. Each of the thirteen nature portraits demonstrates Messiaen's growth in ability and love for transcribing birdsong and the landscape, and in creating the nature portraits, each a progression of the previous one. This is observed in pianist Peter Hill's appraisal of Messiaen's *cahiers* MS: 23056 and MS: 23057 as demonstrating "marvellous virtuosity of observation and imaginative response"⁷⁸ where Messiaen used a different method with each nature portrait as he responded to his evolving learning.

The things Messiaen experienced during his transcriptions can be further mapped in the descriptive detail in poetic prefaces to *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. The prefaces to each nature portraits set a scene for each piece, describing

the landscape, atmosphere, and exact intervening moments of birds within that setting. Dingle highlights these important subtexts in *Catalogue d'oiseaux* commenting that Messiaen reinvented his parameters with each nature portrait.⁷⁹ The reinvention of Messiaen's parameters demonstrates Messiaen responding to the unique encounters he had in each setting, responding to his perception. Messiaen treated things in the landscape, for example, birds, plants, rocks, anthropomorphically. Doing so, provides the birds, plants, and rocks with characteristics so that the music conveys the "feelings that they induce in the observer" to quote Dingle.⁸⁰

Messiaen's choice of the piano as the instrument that *Catalogue d'oiseaux* is composed for is of note, extending observations of Messiaen's style and influence that I have drawn on so far. Whilst this research does not examine the performance styles of *Catalogue d'oiseaux* and resulting theoretical analysis,⁸¹ it is pertinent to assess Messiaen's choice of the piano for his birdsong interpretations. As I have

⁷⁸ Peter Hill, 'From Réveil Des Oiseaux to Catalogue d'oiseaux: Messiaen's Cahiers de Notations Des Chants d'oiseaux, 1952-59', in *Messiaen Perspectives 1: Sources and Influences*, ed. by Christopher Dingle and Robert Fallon (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013, pp. 143-174, p. 168.

⁷⁹ Dingle, p. 149

⁸⁰ Christopher Dingle, p. 149.

⁸¹ For analysis of *Catalogue d'oiseaux* through the lens of performing the piece, see Loo Fung Chiat, 'Olivier Messiaen's Catalogue d'oiseaux: A Performer's Perspective' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sheffield, 2005).

drawn on already by analysing music from composers historically and contemporaneously, stringed and woodwind instruments, and the human voice have the ability to sound microtones (unmarked intervals between semitones). Due to the positioning of intervals on a piano of semitones and tones, microtones cannot be notated for the instrument. Furthermore, the piano as a percussive instrument (notes are played through playing keys that strike strings) means that microtones cannot be negotiated as they can using for example, a stringed or woodwind instrument with a sliding technique (movement between notes without a break). As a result, instead of a composition interpreting birdsong microtonally to attempt to access the fast-paced microtones of birdsong, Messiaen constructed chords to address the timbre he perceived in birdsong.

Examining a 2017 performance of Messiaen's flute and piano ensemble *Le Merle Noir*⁸² by musician Iva Ugrčić is a helpful exercise in realising the significance in Messiaen's choice of piano for *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. Ugrčić follows

directed tonguing techniques (like van Eyck's *Den Nachtegael*) but situates her flute near the open piano lid during the performance so the notes intermingle with those of the piano strings, as if interpreting birdsong that is flitting through the landscape and the sounds that surround it (see figure 1.14). Ugrčić creates a holistic encounter with birdsong echoing through the landscape.



Figure 1.14. Iva Ugrčić, performing *Le Merle noir* in 2017. This can be seen and heard on YouTube.

Catalogue d'oiseaux presents a different kind of holistic encounter of birdsong in the landscape. The landscape,

⁸² See: Iva Ugrčić, *Olivier Messiaen - Le Merle Noir*, online video recording, YouTube, 1 April 2017) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8h022fPWoE>> [accessed 27 February 2022].

atmosphere, and the circadian nature of a day affect birdsong. To extrapolate birdsong and place it on a musical pedestal in a different register and frequency to that of the musical landscape, would mean that its embeddedness in the landscape would be undone. Instead, the piano music imbricates all senses, for example, of sound, smell, sight, touch in depictions of birdsong, cypress and broom, rocks and the sea, and heat in the atmosphere.

The holistic presentation of *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, specifically Messiaen's transcriptions of birdsong into music and written prose, demonstrates that birdsong for Messiaen was on the peripheries of language and this operates differently to translation as it is normatively understood. In *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, birdsong is not extrapolated, translated into music notes, and held up by musical interpretation as with imitations of the cuckoo in Daquin and Delius's work. Messiaen also does not attempt to translate birdsong *into* music because he encountered birdsong in the landscape *as* music. He simply repositions the musical transcription of birdsong in the landscape to music score. An entire multisensory encounter of experiencing birdsong moving in the landscape, notated as music, is instead transposed from

score in Messiaen's *cahiers* to score in the nature portrait. Furthermore, these complex chords are played simultaneously, that once again imbricates all these senses in a moving musical birdsong encounter.

I propose that Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux* presents something different to the examples of pieces by van Eyck, Respighi, Harvey, Nørgård, and Antignani. He creates a musical portrait, with levels of perceptive detail of the landscape that can provide a musical encounter with each avian protagonist, surrounded by a landscape that we can envisage clearly due to the level of detail Messiaen includes. Whilst the piano is unable to manipulate spaces between notes like the human voice, violin and woodwind, Messiaen's manipulation of timbre provides chords where chords did not exist in the song; the unseen complex dual voice box discovered through the combination of notes.

Additionally, through including and treating the landscape anthropomorphically, Messiaen articulates a multi-layered encounter. To return to Pirrò's concept of 'complexification', through articulating a multi-layered encounter, I assert that Messiaen acknowledges that "what is

observed might be more than the sum of its parts”.⁸³ In doing so, instead of imitating of birdsong, he repositions – indeed transposes – a staged musical encounter. The musical encounter becomes an ‘example’ – to use Lomax’s term – of Messiaen’s encounter with birdsong *within* the landscape, much like Arshi’s ‘*Shifting Lines Sound Walk*’.

Whilst transposition can be identified in Messiaen’s processes, *Catalogue d’oiseaux* can be pigeon-holed as representational. To return to the concept of metaphor, Messiaen scholars and pianists Roderick Chadwick and Peter Hill state that the piano cycle is “almost entirely referential [where] nearly every bar represents something from nature”.⁸⁴ I argue that *Catalogue d’oiseaux* departs from metaphor in the way that it was created. If we were to examine Messiaen’s use of music to interpret the landscape and birdsong as signifiers, his folding of these facets of encounter together causes the signifiers to ‘free play’, to return to Derrida. This draws on Chadwick and Hill’s analysis of Messiaen’s use and exploration of time:

the harmonic relationships (Messiaen would say colours) ensure that beings and events both blend in with, and can be seen against, their surroundings.⁸⁵

In the case of the ninth portrait in book five ‘La Bouscarle’, the music that denotes the river can be distinguished from immediate events (the flight of a kingfisher).⁸⁶ In doing so, Messiaen uses time to reposition the experiences of encountering the flight of a kingfisher amidst the busy sound of a flowing river, stimulating our sense of time and the way it passes at varying speeds.⁸⁷ I do not seek to argue against this, but instead propose that in the process of notating birdsong, Messiaen undertook an act of transposition and this elevates his interpretations into the ‘poetic’, to use Kristeva’s term. The slippage between representation and transposition exemplifies the intangibility of attempting to transpose birdsong. By bringing in the natural surroundings of the landscape to accompany the birdsong, Chadwick and Hill state that Messiaen found a solution for composing with the “limitations” of the solo piano.⁸⁸ It is this characteristic that I

⁸³ Pirrò, (p. 140).

⁸⁴ Roderick Chadwick and Peter Hill, *Olivier Messiaen’s Catalogue d’oiseaux: From Conception to Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 64.

⁸⁵ Chadwick and Hill, p. 60.

⁸⁶ Chadwick and Hill, p. 60.

⁸⁷ Chadwick and Hill, pp. 60-61.

⁸⁸ Chadwick and Hill, p. 206.

suggest can develop the possibility of identifying a methodology in Messiaen's interpretations of birdsong. In doing so, the potential for transposition to interrogate the 'elsewhere-ness' of birdsong can be explored. A methodology can be created to explore Messiaen's lifting of visual and auditory encounters with birdsong in the landscape through auditory musical encounters, in the mirror opposite approach of lifting visual and auditory encounters with birdsong to visual encounters with birdsong through painting. I propose that doing so, provides means to explore metaphysicality in birdsong encounters in an equally limiting vehicle.

The landscape and birdsong become a multiplicity within the same space (the piano). As I explored earlier, the rejection of a sign-system is necessary when exploring the 'elsewhere' of language that I argue is a quality of birdsong ephemera. Analysis can be undertaken of serialist⁸⁹ approaches to creating the nature portraits in *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, most notably commentated on by Roderick Chadwick and Peter Hill. For example, in 'L'Alouette calandrelle', Messiaen links different moments of lark song

into a set of variations that Chadwick and Hill describe as "an evolving musical structure framed by static symmetry."⁹⁰

Through this structure, Messiaen articulates his perception of the arid, heat-stricken landscape of Provence.⁹¹ Messiaen uses musical time (that is embedded in his musical language) to embody his encounter. I propose that the slippages between Messiaen's different forms of notation provide moments of slipping between language and the peripheries of language. This research considers Messiaen's transcriptions as key to explore transposition. I will further draw on the importance of Messiaen's transcriptions in Book Three when interrogating encounters with birdsong as embodied. In Book Four, I will expand on serialism through further analysis of Messiaen's compositional techniques as blurring the boundaries between working systematically and working more in the 'poetic', through analysis of Messiaen's *cahiers*.

5. Conclusions

This book has brought an interrogation of language to define transposition in this research as a cross-boundary

⁸⁹ Serialism is a composition technique where notes are pre-decided to an extent by their relationship to mathematics.

⁹⁰ Chadwick and Hill, p. 14.

⁹¹ Chadwick and Hill, p. 14.

repositioning. I have brought together key thinking on transposition theory from Kirkkopelto, Weiberg, Schwab, Braidotti, and Pirrò to consider transpositional processes in art practice.

By briefly exploring semiotics, I have made the case for disaggregating translation and transposition. I brought together thought by Bolt, Taylor, and Adams to consider the impact materiality has on moving away from translation in art practice. I intersected the importance of materiality in conducting transpositional processes, introducing thought from Bolt, Taylor, Adams, Barthes, and Kristeva. In doing so, I have argued for transpositional processes in painting as residing on the peripheries of language by problematising metaphor and metonymy.

I then developed this theory by applying Pirrò's concept of 'complexification', and Schwab's theories of looking at painting *process* to further interrogate transposition. I folded in notions of *Umwelt* from Tønnessen, and artistic transposition from Claro, to challenge the normative frameworks of meaning-making in art practice as transposition. In doing so, I have presented a case for transposition in art practice as operating within the process of

artmaking.

Next, I explored birdsong. Drawing from Tønnessen, I proposed that the intangibility of birdsong evades human devices of rationalisation and modes of representation. As such, I have argued for birdsong as existing outside of human linguistic structures and existing in the 'elsewhere' of language, appropriating Irigaray's term. By returning to my definition of transposition as a cross-boundary repositioning, I have problematised the notion that birdsong has signifiers and signifieds. I made the case that transposing encounters with birdsong disrupts semiological approaches that fall into the trap of translating birdsong.

To further interrogate birdsong as residing in the 'elsewhere' and outside of communicable language systems, I critically interrogated how birdsong has been explored in art to problematise how birdsong is approached in visual language. In varying ways, I explored how Lloyd's *Solresol Bird translator*, Coates *Dawn Chorus*, and Durrant's *Four series Uccelli* demonstrate that birdsong is not a structured language that can be decrypted without slipping into translation. Instead, *experiences* and *encounters* and *perceptions* of with birdsong can be explored through visual language.

Similarly, I demonstrated that the 'elsewhere' of birdsong has been explored in music. I introduced Messiaen's approach to musically interpreting birdsong as uniquely stylised. I compared Messiaen's approaches to examples of how other composers and musicians have composed and performed musical interpretations of birdsong to lay the foundations that Messiaen's process of making *Catalogue d'oiseaux* demonstrates a transpositional approach. Furthermore, I have argued that *Catalogue d'oiseaux* provides a unique musical encounter with birdsong, a musical transposition of Messiaen's encounter with the landscape.

**BOOK TWO:
Metaphysicality**



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Introduction

It took me a long time to decide where this part of the thesis would live. This book is placed at this point to set out the terrain of metaphysicality in art practice as an inherently non-categorizable thing. This follows my discussion in Book One about painting practice operating on the peripheries of language and identifying birdsong as being in the 'elsewhere' of language. I have structured this book with three nuanced explorations of the metaphysical to ground my argument for metaphysicality in this thesis.

Firstly, I explore the 'metaphysical' as a philosophical mode of thinking which I come to term as 'thinking on the metaphysical' in the context of this research. Secondly, I explore 'Metaphysical Art' in the work of Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978) that informs an examination of how thinking on the metaphysical connects to art practice. Thirdly, I explore the connection between the metaphysical and spirituality in reference to Messiaen. I propose that each of these nuances has certain qualities that overlap. I draw on these qualities to support my argument for the connection of metaphysicality to

birdsong, encounter, materiality, and Messiaen.

In Book One I positioned my interrogation of transposition as a cross-boundary repositioning that is rooted in process. This culminated with questions surrounding the nature of experience. I draw on metaphysicality here to further address how my research approaches the notion of 'experience' and our comprehension of it. My research aims to explore the metaphysical in correlation with birdsong and Messiaen. It should be made clear at the outset that this thesis is not exploring metaphysics and the word 'metaphysical' is used as distinct from the philosophical field of metaphysics. Through experiencing encounter with birdsong, the definition of 'metaphysicality' in this research resides outside of the broader field of metaphysics. 'Metaphysicality' is defined in this research as having a metaphysical quality.¹ To further explain metaphysical qualities, I must first explain how 'metaphysical' is defined in this research. 'Metaphysical' defines something that is immaterial, incorporeal, and beyond the reach of our senses.² Metaphysical qualities manifest in many ways as I will explore further with a brief look at Metaphysical Art in part two of this

¹ Oxford University Press, 'Metaphysicality, N.', *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2022 <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/252739?redirectedFrom=metaphysicality#eid>> [accessed 13 May 2022].

² Oxford University Press, 'Metaphysical, adj. and n.', *Oxford English Dictionary*,

2022 < <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/117349?redirectedFrom=metaphysical#eid>> [accessed 27 May 2022].

book. The simple definition of ‘metaphysical qualities’ in this research is: the unknown, intangible, and irresolute. This is a project dealing with the very tangible medium of painting whilst attempting to explore birdsong encounters that have metaphysical qualities (for example: inscrutable meaning). This research uses painting to explore the ways in which metaphysical qualities of a birdsong encounter are experienced, which is why it lends itself to the definition of the metaphysical.

The unknown largely refers to a thing that resides outside of the scope of knowledge. The intangible refers to a thing that cannot be physically touched. The irresolute describes the uncertainty of a thing. These terms lead my argument concerning metaphysicality in this research as the *coming towards* knowledge and *towards*³ language, rejecting fixed and resolute knowledge. I argue that an expanded understanding of metaphysicality enables a process that embraces the unknown

³ I adopt the term ‘coming towards’ as a nod to the process of eternal becoming that Hélène Cixous explores in writing. See: *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*, London: Harvard University Press, 1991, pp. 104-131.

⁴ Oxford University Press, ‘OED | Oxford English Dictionary: The Definitive Record of the English Language’, 2021
<<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/117150?rskey=UaPw3w&result=4&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 6 November 2021].

⁵ In the compilation of lectures in *Metaphysics: Concept and problems*, Adorno gathers philosophical thought from Aristotle, Plato, Nietzsche, Kant, and Hegel,

and intangible aspects of art practice that requires total clarity of meaning. I do not claim these qualities as a general truth; these are identified as my experience, as such, I consider metaphysics only briefly to carve out my experience of the metaphysicality of birdsong as ‘thinking on the metaphysical’.

1. The metaphysical as a philosophical mode of thinking

The prefix ‘meta-’ is defined in this research as going beyond the named subject (that the prefix is attached to) to question assumptions of the subject.⁴ ‘Meta’, therefore elevates the perceived understanding of a subject to a ‘higher’ level. So, when conjoining ‘meta-’ and ‘physics’, ‘metaphysics’ is broadly understood as questioning what is physical and materially understood through exploring unknown and intangible aspects of physical reality. Philosopher Theodore Adorno’s treatise on metaphysics⁵ foregrounds the difficulties in defining

bringing the antithetical thought together to bring a succinct concept forward of metaphysics.

⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 4.

⁷ Patrick Suppes, *Probabilistic Metaphysics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Ltd, 1984), p. 11.

⁸ Karen Bennett, ‘There Is No Special Problem with Metaphysics’, *Philosophical Studies*, 173 (2016), pp. 21–37, (p. 32).

metaphysics with any precision. He considers that metaphysics explores “existing entities which could be experienced beyond our empirical, spatial-temporal world”.⁶ Philosopher Patrick Suppes further defines this exploration to examining the “nature of being, substance, and space and time”.⁷ Whilst these definitions are useful, and provide a starting point, I consider metaphysicality in painting processes and explore it as a tool. I draw on Philosopher Karen Bennett’s more contemporary interrogation of metaphysics which she defines as a philosophical method that investigates categories, tools, and notions of philosophy.⁸ I contend that the idea of metaphysics as a sort of toolbox is seen as using the metaphysical as a thinking mechanism, specifically in practice (see pages 98 – 99). It is useful to note here how landscape architect Ian McHarg considers metaphysics in his creative practice, naming metaphysics as a “central adaptive strategy” for humans.⁹

⁹ Ian L. McHarg, ‘The Garden as Metaphysical Symbol’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 128.5283 (1980), 132–43 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41373057>>, (p. 139).

Writing-thinking extract

1st June 2019

Figure 2.1.

The Orchard

I turn to wood cut printmaking to explore my transcriptions of birdsong undertaken in the Worcestershire orchard. I mark shapes from my note pages – squiggles and lines where I had notated loads of different sounding birds and forms of the landscape – onto a wooden printing block. Before I begin carving around these marks, I use a roller to spread a gold-pigment oil paint over the plate. I then press paper firmly onto the inked-up surface and use a baron to press the paper to the ink. I lift the paper up. There is now a square of gold on the paper.

I now carve over the drawn marks of landscape forms and use the roller to now apply a light turquoise-blue layer to the surface. The ink does not go into the areas that I have carved, so when I repeat the method of pressing paper to the surface, a square of turquoise blue sits on top of the gold. But there is a deviation from my intention – I hadn't registered the plate in the same place as last time. As a result, the blue square overlaps white paper on the right of the page, exposing the gold square underneath on the left. Where I carved the wood to form shapes in the landscape, there are delicate gold lines running across the blue square.

I now carve around the shapes that I have drawn of birdsong so that the relief ink will sit on the raised forms. After repeating the pressing of paper onto the surface once inked – this time with a much darker navy – I lift the paper up. The birdsong marks are bold against the greenish background caused by the layering of turquoise over gold. The marks of birdsong cut over the gold lines of the landscape and dominate the picture plane. The blue birdsong marks fall once more, outside of my intended setting due to another registering error.

I am thinking through printmaking, the materiality causing me to think about the metaphysicality of birdsong that I am exploring in this physical method. I think of the way the gold ink shimmers when visible in breaks in the blue layer. I think of the way the printmaking method causes interruptions to my intention – in misregistering the plate to paper. I think about how printmaking is in some way a tool of thinking through making.

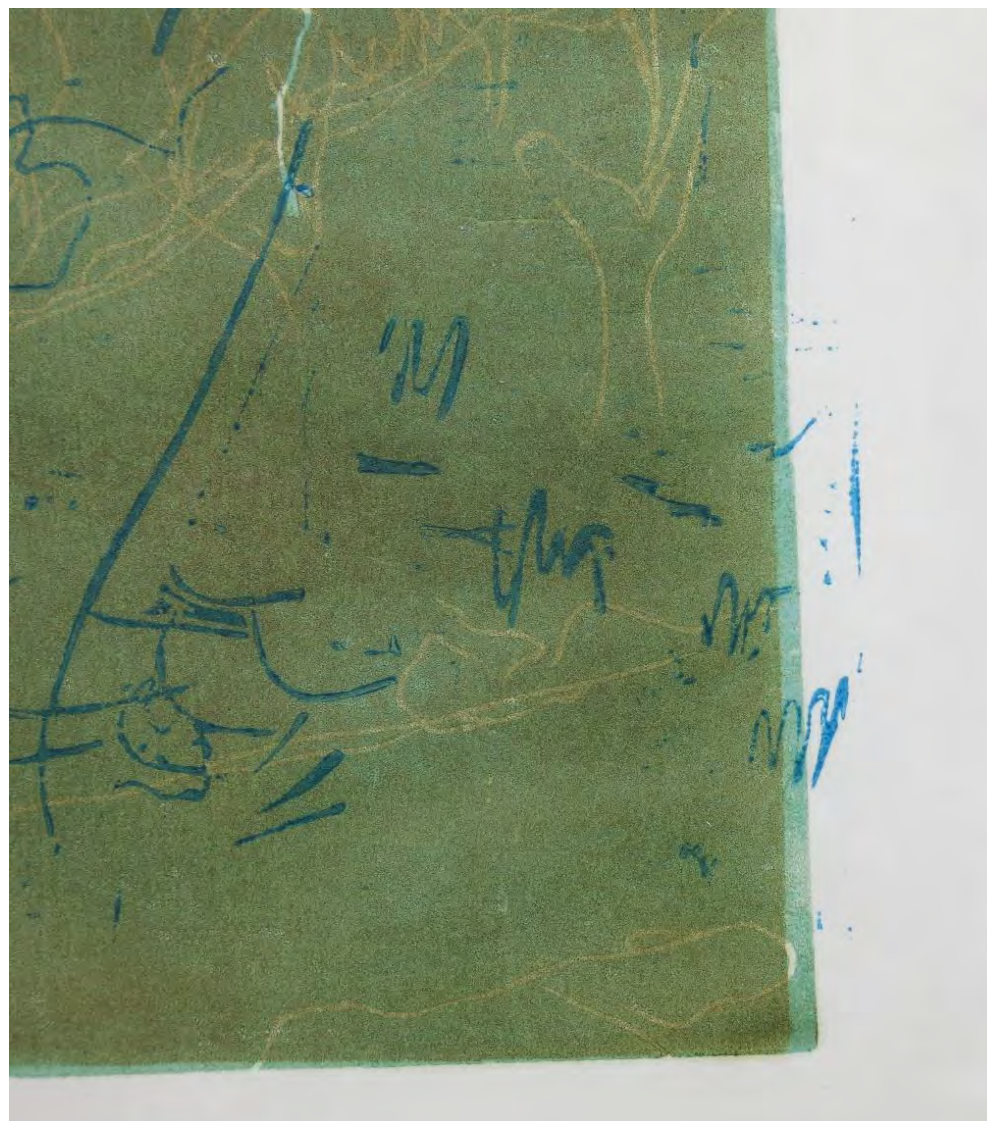


Figure 2.1. Harriet Carter, Off-set rendering of relief printing process working towards the monoprint *The Orchard*, (2019).

Bennett's definition of metaphysics provides a strong rationale for considering a position for the metaphysical in transpositional methodologies that concern encounter with birdsong in the landscape. She describes metaphysics as the study of "*what* there is", and in undertaking studies into metaphysics, argues that one exploring what "*what there is* is like", only to culminate in a "restricted value of '*what*'" [added emphasis].¹⁰ For Bennett, metaphysics maintains and develops the philosopher's toolbox, to excoriate terms in the philosophical vocabulary like object and event, by figuring out "what worldly matters (if any) answer to this pervasive 'toolbox' philosophical vocabulary".¹¹ As I will draw on in Book Three, this research explores birdsong as an 'event' through tangible objects of mark-making on paper. Therefore, I draw on the metaphysical as a mode of philosophical thinking to further define the nature of interrogating transposition in intangible encounters with birdsong and painting. I argue that exploring birdsong outside of structured language incorporates an awareness of the possibility that the enquiry may be irresolute or unresolved. Exploring the unknown

qualities of birdsong means exploring it as a metaphysical thing.

Bennett, and McHarg's analysis of the use of metaphysics is useful to note in this research that explores birdsong as 'unknown'. To further my exploration into transposition taking place outside of communicative sign systems, I consider that an artwork can be used as a vehicle for metaphysicality but does not culminate in a symbolic state per se. Departing from McHarg's concept of an object as metaphysical symbol,¹² Bennett's notion of 'what' is a key facet that I draw on to explore the unknown, intangible, and irresoluteness of a birdsong encounter. This research considers that there is a 'what' of birdsong that can be explored, but that this 'what' is on the periphery of language and is thus, hard to see. As such, this research considers the metaphysical as intrinsically bound in investigating birdsong through encounter. I suggest that to explore the intangibility and unknown-ness of birdsong is to consider the 'what' of a birdsong encounter (see page 101 – 102).

¹⁰ Bennett, (p. 32).

¹¹ Bennett, (p. 32).

¹² McHarg, (p. 139)

Writing-thinking extract

5th June 2019

Figure 2.2.

Notebook

I'm struggling to know (still) how to transcribe birdsong – making marks feels wrong somehow, and a bit awkward. I'm too slow for the song. I turn to transcribing what I see often instead – the things that are more tangible to capture in some way. Trees and bushes are my go-to thing to transcribe – the way their limbs reach out into space makes it somehow easier to make marks responding to them.

Birdsong continues to sound overhead as I do this.

As I hear birdsong and think about how I see it as metaphysical, I wonder – why?

I think it is because it is so elusive – it moves so quickly through the air that it is impossible to listen to and scrutinise at the same time (at least for me). I can't seem to grasp at it either. It's like those creatures that flit through the air torment me in my inept human-form, lumbering around on the ground trying to transcribe my experiences. This is when I pause – I realise something – the metaphysicality of birdsong is exactly this unreachability of it, the metaphysicality is bound up in my being in the landscape and perceiving it.



Figure 2.2. Harriet Carter, Notebook page, (2019).

Speculating on the potential of encountering the unknown and intangible nature of birdsong and developing knowledge about these experiences draws on Patrick Suppes' concept of probability in "metaphysical and epistemological matters".¹³ Suppes puts forward some metaphysical propositions, stating: "[t]he fundamental laws of natural phenomena are essentially probabilistic rather than deterministic in character" and "the certainty of knowledge [...] is unachievable".¹⁴ In Book One I discussed the slippery moments in painting practice where the 'otherness' of materiality causes a transpositional exploration to move to the peripheries of language. Exploring through working with materiality, i.e., in the material epistemological place, is where I have argued transposition can be interrogated. As a result, knowledge from this interrogation is partly shared with materiality.

The very investigation of birdsong as metaphysical through transposition in painting practice is a metaphysical proposition. This research sees the interrogation of transposing birdsong encounters in painting practice as a form

of what I term 'thinking on the metaphysical'. 'Thinking on the metaphysical' means that this research does not seek to make sense of the intangible 'what' – to return to Bennett's term – of birdsong. 'Thinking on the metaphysical' does not aspire to indefinitely make the unknown known, the intangible tangible, or the irresolute clear. This research interrogates the *extent* to which transposition can operate between encountering the unknown, intangible birdsong in the still, resolute vehicle of paintings. It is useful to draw on philosopher Richard Taylor here who describes 'metaphysical thought' that I align as a similar premise to Suppes' metaphysical propositions. Taylor states: "the fruit of metaphysical thought is not knowledge but *understanding* [original emphasis]".¹⁵

'Thinking on the metaphysical' in this thesis does not operate as means to *understand* the irresolute, intangible, and unknown qualities of birdsong in painting practice. Instead, to build on from my explorations of working with materiality on the peripheries of language in Book One, poetics of

¹³ Suppes, p. 2.

¹⁴ Suppes, p. 10.

¹⁵ Richard Taylor, *Metaphysics* (Michigan: University of Michigan, 1974), p. 2.

transposition in painting process cause meaning to infinitely 'become'. I argue that the metaphysical operates outside of a structural framework where the signifier and signified are connected in a conventional semiotic relationship to make meaning, and in doing so, with representational structures. It is outside this structural framework, "coming towards [a] place where meaning collapses",¹⁶ where I argue intangibility and irresoluteness inhabit.

To draw on my conclusions from Book One, I stipulate that 'thinking on the metaphysical' occurs during painting processes that are situated on the peripheries of language. In other words, 'thinking on the metaphysical' comes towards the outer edges of language, and as such, the shared epistemology with materiality in painting processes can only be speculative, carried by irresolution and non-recognition. A process outside of structure where meaning is infinitely deferred – to draw on Derrida – aligns with the procedure of exploring the metaphysical as causing an "infinite, or indefinitely continuing progression of knowledge" to draw on Adorno.¹⁷

¹⁶ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 2.

¹⁷ Adorno, p. 2.

I draw on philosopher Hélène Cixous' interrogation of what forces her to 'come' to writing can explain further how this research problematises 'understanding'. For Cixous, a force pushes Cixous to write:

from an inconceivable region, deep down inside me but unknown, as if there might exist somewhere in my body [...] another space, limitless; and there, in those zones which inhabit me and which I don't know how to live in, I feel them, I don't live them, they live me, [...] it's incomprehensible but that's how it is.¹⁸

Separate to translation, I have associated my definition of transposition as imbricated in encounter with the 'otherness' and unknown qualities of materiality. The way Cixous' fights between comprehension and incomprehension of the reasons she begins writing is how I see the relationship of working with materiality. The relationship is probabilistic by physically interacting with painting and perceiving moments that slip outside of comprehension. This research draws importance on the incomprehension of processes with materiality on the periphery of language. Furthermore, perception or – to draw

¹⁸ Hélène Cixous, 'Coming to Writing', in *"Coming to Writing" and Other Essays* ed. by Deborah Jenson (London: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 1-58, p. 10.

on Cixous – ‘feeling’ engenders this. Instead of coming to writing, I consider thinking on the metaphysical in painting processes as coming to *understanding*, rather than accomplishing understanding itself.

2. Metaphysical Art: Giorgio de Chirico

Historically, metaphysicality has been dealt with representationally in paintings, notably in the *Pittura Metafisica* ('metaphysical painting') movement. My experience is that engaging with the materiality of painting can operate on the peripheries of language. Furthermore, I have argued that it must do so when exploring the metaphysicality of birdsong. As I mentioned in my introduction to this Book, the metaphysical is commonly defined in *Pittura Metafisica*. This is however problematic in terms of this research because of how metaphysicality is explored in my painting practice. To distinguish my exploration of the metaphysical from Metaphysical Art, I turn to Giorgio de Chirico's period of *Pittura Metafisica*. I contend that at first glance, de Chirico's *Pittura Metafisica* defers to representational strategies to embody the metaphysical, which I argue undermines metaphysicality. *Pittura Metafisica* is deliberately uncanny because of where the figurative verges on realism that as writer Roderick Conway

Morris describes, “reflects strange and elusive psychological landscapes [and] fugitive states of mind”.¹⁹

The Seer (1915, see figure 2.3) is just one example of how de Chirico paradoxically utilised representational

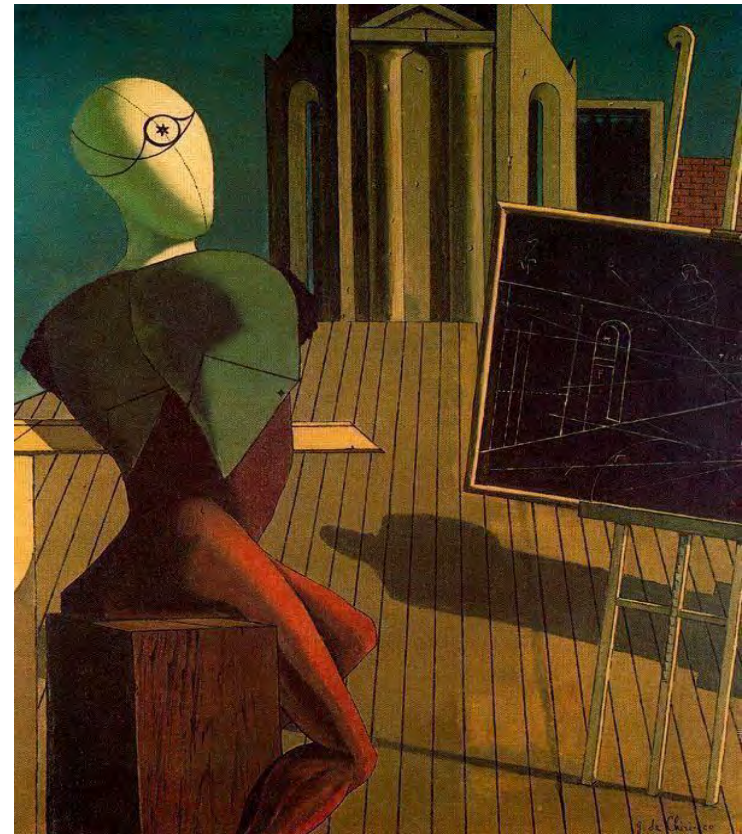


Figure 2.3. Giorgio de Chirico, *The Seer*, (1914 – 1915), oil on

¹⁹ Roderick Conway Morris, 'De Chirico: Painting Landscapes of the Mind', *The New York Times*, 9 February 2007 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/09/arts/09iht-conway.4533707.html>> [accessed 27 February 2022].

strategies to depict the metaphysical. *The Seer* presents an armless, mannequin like figure. It is not possible to see whether the figure is perched or stood next to a wooden vertical post, as the bottom of the picture prevents us from seeing the relationship between the lower leg and the floor. Nearby props of a set square and rudimentary easel carrying an architectural sketch suggest that the figure is an architect. The figure occupies a space of distorted perspective due to the amalgamation of an inside and outside setting, where floorboards meet a large building in the distant plane. The figure's only facial feature is a third eye that points towards whatever statue-like object resides outside of the picture plane to the right, that is casting a shadow onto the floorboards. The forms in the picture plane create meaning out of recognisable figurations (where signifieds and signifiers connect), however they possess an uncanniness that seems disquieting. As a result, the figurations, teeter on the brink of surrealism, depicting recognisable forms that trigger recognition and therefore a degree of understanding.

I contend that at the outset, the concept of *Pittura Metafisica* does not align with transposition as it conforms to

²⁰ Morris.

representing the metaphysical. Nevertheless, de Chirico's reworking of an old painting presents a perspective crucial to my understanding of metaphysicality and painting in this research. Morris states that *Pittura Metafisica* is a "mode of thinking"²⁰. I propose that *Pittura Metafisica* as a 'mode of thinking' is not evident in the analysis of *Pittura metafisica*, as I have just demonstrated in my analysis of *The Seer*. Instead, I suggest that this is instead exposed in the relationship de Chirico had with his 1914 work *Mistero e malinconia di una strada* (*Mystery and melancholy of a street*, see figure 2.4 on page 107) which he returns to later in the creation of *La Strada* (*The Street*, see figure 2.5 on page 107). Whilst designer Anne Spittler comments that *La Strada* "seems to cast an ironic [...] self-parodying look",²¹ I assert that de Chirico returning to this older piece – and taking nine years to finish it – encapsulates being challenged by the unknown and irresolute. Arguably, di Chirico's practice reveals here a metaphysical challenge brought about by the 'otherness' of materiality. Indeed, I contend that the process of making *La Strada* responds to de Chirico's own description of *Pittura metafisica* as being like a calm ocean that:

²¹ Anne Elizabeth Spittler, 'Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1979)', *Christies*, 2021 <<https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5727139>> [accessed 27 February 2022].



Figure 2.4. Giorgio de Chirico, *Mistero e malinconia di una strada*, (1914). Oil on canvas, 87 x 71.5cm.



Figure 2.5. Giorgio de Chirico, *La Strada*, (1968). Oil on canvas 59 x 48 cm.

disturbs us not so much by the idea of the miles that extend between us and its end, as by all the unknown that is hidden in the depth.²²

De Chirico's return to *Mistero e malinconia di una strada* in creating *La Strada* also demonstrates that reworking – or indeed transposing – the representative pictorial content of the first piece into the second, where he uses painting to disrupt the meaning connected with *Mistero e malinconia di una strada*.

3. Sacramental perception: Messiaen's 'thinking on the metaphysical'

Messiaen's theological interpretation of birdsong is underpinned by his spiritual connection to nature. His relationship with religion and nature aligns with medieval concerns with the metaphysical. Certainly, to quote writer

²² Giorgio De Chirico, 'On Metaphysical Art, 1919', in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, ed. by Herschel B. Chipp, Peter Selz, and Joshua C. trans by Taylor Taylor (California and London: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 448–453, p. 451.

²³ Angus Stewart, 'General Notes', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 135.5367 (1987), 2246–47 <www.jstor.org/stable/41374282> [accessed 27 February 2022], (p. 246).

Angus Stewart, the medieval desire for salvation and exploration of the meaning of Christ's message was "enmeshed" in iconography.²³ Whilst manifesting in music, rather than being visual and image-based, Messiaen's musical interpretations of birdsong, nevertheless links to iconography. Birds to Messiaen were also icons. His religious beliefs led him to consider birdsong as a source of inspiration, thinking of birdsong as musical symbols of creation providing heavenly messages, indeed to quote musicologist Siglind Bruhn, creating "exemplary hymn[s] to God".²⁴ This can be seen in Messiaen's commentary in *Technique of my musical language* whereby the melodic contours of birds (particularly blackbirds) "surpass the human imagination in fantasy".²⁵ Messiaen further comments that "Since [birds] use untempered intervals smaller than the semitone, [...] it is ridiculous servilely to copy nature".²⁶

²⁴ Siglind Bruhn, *Messiaen's Contemplation of Covenant and Incarnation: Musical Symbols of Faith in the Two Great Piano Cycles of the 1940s* (New York: Pendragon Press, 2007), p. 65.

²⁵ Olivier Messiaen, *The Technique of My Musical Language* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1956), p. 34.

²⁶ Messiaen, p. 34.

This leads him to transcribe, transform, and interpret the “volleys and trills of our little servants of immaterial joy”.²⁷ This in mind, Messiaen’s notation of birdsong into music in his *cahiers* is iconographic. Messiaen’s belief that birds were messengers of God’s word connects with medieval metaphysical ideology of God manifesting in all “things” and “creatures”, to quote McHarg.²⁸ Another correlation between Messiaen’s beliefs and medieval metaphysical ideology is stained glass. Stewart observes: “how miraculously colour could be positioned to encourage the acceptance of the supernatural”. The way the coloured glass was positioned in the light and colours appear to move with passing light acted as a signifier for an otherworldly place. This imbrication of spirituality and metaphysical encounters can once again be correlated with Messiaen’s relationship with theology. Pianist Håkon Austbø states that Messiaen “marvelled” at the stained glass that surrounds the chamber of Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, describing it as a mystical experience.²⁹ The material vehicle of stained glass transmitting perceived metaphysical experiences is useful to note in relation to this research’s

²⁷ Messiaen, p. 34.

²⁸ McHarg, (p. 134).

²⁹ Håkon Austbø, ‘Visualizing Visions: The Significance of Messiaen’s Colours’, *Music & Practice*, 2 (2015) <<https://doi.org/10.32063/0201>> [accessed 27 February 2022].

exploration of the metaphysical – the unknown, intangible, and irresolute – through the materiality of painting process. Messiaen’s spiritualism connects to this exploration in his use of music as vehicle to connect to God’s message through transposed intangible ‘messages’ in birdsong.

I assert that Messiaen’s beliefs were the reason he perceived music and that in encountering birdsong, Messiaen undertook a form of ‘sacramental perception’ and that this research sees as a form of ‘thinking on the metaphysical’. Philosopher Mark K. Spencer’s enquiry into sacramental perception is useful here. Sacramental perception is an example of spiritual perception in Thomistic metaphysics. Spencer describes Thomistic metaphysics as “every being is the kind of being that it is through its immaterial form” and that being is “to perceive”.³⁰ In other words, Thomistic metaphysics explores the very nature of being and existence in both matter and immaterial form. Spencer asserts that sacramental perception occurs by perceiving God “in or with some creaturely object”.³¹ I contend that Messiaen’s perception of birds singing hymnal songs is a demonstration of sacramental

³⁰ Mark K Spencer, ‘The Phenomenology and Metaphysics of Spiritual Perception: A Thomistic Framework’, *New Blackfriars*, 97.1072 (2016), 677–92 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12221>>, (p. 683).

³¹ Spencer, (p. 678).

perception, as is his preoccupation with seeking the eternal in his music, i.e., “things external to nature”³² that McHarg notes as characteristic of metaphysics.

Messiaen’s Catholicism and love for birds are also tied together through the concept of time. Messiaen connects birdsong to light and the beauty that it brings in the rising and setting of the sun within its circadian rhythm. Referring to a trip to the Jura Mountain range (on the French-Swiss border) and witnessing a correlation between the song of the song thrush and the brilliance of the “magnificent red and violet lightning”,³³ Messiaen notes:

[w]hen the color [sic] was less beautiful or the sunset was shorter, this thrush didn’t sing, or sang less interesting themes.³⁴

Messiaen’s connection between birds and time, paradoxically clashed with his “aspiring towards the eternal”.³⁵ As I have argued elsewhere, for Messiaen, the eternal links to God’s nature.³⁶

³² McHarg, p. 133

³³ Claude Samuel, *Olivier Messiaen: Music and Color: Conversations with Claude Samuel* (Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1994), p. 86.

³⁴ Samuel, p. 86.

³⁵ Samuel, p. 34.

In conversation with Claude Samuel, Messiaen describes God as “he who is without beginning, without end, without succession”.³⁷ Messiaen notes the paradox in his endeavour, explaining to Samuel that striving for the eternal hampers one with “temporal notions of ‘before’ and ‘after’”.³⁸ To me, Messiaen striving for eternity – which is external to nature – is a further demonstration of sacramental perception embedded in his of making music. Seeking the irresolute, intangibility of eternity through the medium of music that has to begin and end, demonstrates ‘thinking on the metaphysical’, indeed, only being able to come *towards* understanding this metaphysicality.

Sacramental perception can be further mapped and analysed across *Catalogue d’oiseaux*. Whilst my research is not concerned with exploring these themes,³⁹ it is notable to consider the impact Catholicism had on Messiaen’s transpositional processes. Through sacramental perception, I argue that Messiaen conceived and responded to birds in ways

³⁶ Harriet Carter, ‘Shared Birdsong? Exploring Messiaen’s Relationship with Place and Birdsong through Drawing’, in *Songs of Place and Time: Birdsong and the Dawn Chorus in Natural History and the Arts*, ed. by Mike Collier, Bennett Hogg, and John Strachan (Manchester: Gaia Project, 2020) <https://issuu.com/driling/docs/songs_of_time____place_final_high_res_reduced_> [accessed 27 February 2022], p. 337.

³⁷ Samuel, p. 34.

³⁸ Samuel, p. 28.

that others did not.

The circadian structure of nature portraits in *Catalogue d'oiseaux* echo Messiaen's fascination with the eternal. As Bruhn comments that Messiaen's use of time in the cycle "reveals his fascination with the boundary between time and eternity, space and infinity".⁴⁰ The nature portraits can be seen in this case as an excerpt of time, made eternal by the cyclical structure of *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. Bruhn comments that "each piece [...] is a deliberately limited sample of a principally unlimited number"⁴¹. As the piece must eventually end, it simultaneously both ceases to move and signifying the eternal in the proposed limitlessness of nature's relationship with time. By producing a piece of music that narrates the cycle of a day plus the beginnings of the next in the case of 'La Rousserolle effarvatte', Messiaen acknowledges that he is not narrating the events of just one day. By continuing onto the next day, he signals the constant movement of time.

³⁹ For an interrogation of how religion inspired Messiaen's work, see: Siglind Bruhn, *Messiaen's Contemplations of covenant and incarnation: Musical symbols of Faith in the Two Great Piano Cycles of the 1940s* (New York: Pendragon Press, 2007).

Messiaen's spiritualism is a strong contender for the reasoning behind this. By transcribing and transposing birdsong into music, I consider his process is considered an embodiment of his theological beliefs, and *Catalogue d'oiseaux* a transposition of his sacramental perception. Whilst this is the case, *Catalogue d'oiseaux* as a cycle provides signifiers that contribute to *meaning* of the eternal. Indeed, composer Loo Fung Chiat observes the following in three nature portraits in particular, 'Le Lorient', 'La Rousserolle effarvatte', and 'L'Alouette calandrelle':

The element of eternity is apparent in that a short phrase or fragment often reappears at the end of some movements, signifying infinity or the cycle of nature.⁴²

The twenty-seven-hour depiction in 'La Rousserolle effarvatte' subverts people's expectations of time and in addition subverts the expectations of musical structure. The piece, by recognising the infinite nature of time touches the divine and signifies the

⁴⁰ Siglind Bruhn, *Messiaen's Contemplations of covenant and incarnation: Musical symbols of Faith in the Two Great Piano Cycles of the 1940s* (New York: Pendragon Press, 2007), p. 67.

⁴¹ Bruhn, p. 67

⁴² Loo Fung Chiat, 'Olivier Messiaen's Catalogue d'oiseaux: a performer's perspective', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sheffield, 2005), p. 213. University of Sheffield

eternal. He used birdsong as a temporal vehicle to explore nature's divinity and the eternal.⁴³

The nature portraits in *Catalogue d'oiseaux* denote Messiaen's metaphysicality in encountering nature's relationship with time, the intangibility of grasping such a concept, and the realisation that it can never be fully apprehended. Messiaen's interrogation of the eternal in this way is seen as Messiaen grappling with the limitations of his communicable language structure that consequently places birdsong and the eternal in the 'elsewhere' of language, as I explored as a facet of birdsong in Book One.

I assert that sacramental perception is a metaphysicality that has been grasped at in painting in a way that mirror's Messiaen's grappling with the limitations of his musical language. Giotto di Bondone explored sacramental perception in his painting *St. Francis of Assisi preaching to the birds* (c.1266-1337, see figure 2.6). I contend that di Bondone used gold to attempt to articulate the power of God at the very peripheries of his ability to do so as a painter. Gold paint has been used for the sky in *St Francis of Assisi preaching to the*

birds. The bright colour engulfs the figure of Saint Francis and the accompanying friar, birds and the tree that reflects ambient light. The gold becomes temporal as it is activated by ambient



Figure 2.6. Giotto di Bondone, *St. Francis of Assisi preaching to the birds*, c.1266-1337. Tempera on panel, 313 x 613cm

⁴³ Carter, (p. 337).

light. It shimmers and moves which makes it unearthly and immaterial compared to the tangible, muted colours used for the figures. The gold seems supernatural next to the solid, stilled figures, in the same way extraordinary pitch, volume, and speed can be created through a physical musical instrument.

I have explored the way ambient light activates stilled painted surfaces and brings movement to the solid object previously in my MRes project (see figure 2.7). I found reflectivity in painting media and surfaces activated ambient light. This directly addressed my focus of how painting can apprehend encounters with light.

I assert that just painting and music can be tools for 'thinking on the metaphysical'. Di Bondone explored the over-encompassing brilliance and otherworldliness of God using worldly materials, and I used still painted surfaces to explore moving encounters with light. Messiaen used the temporality of music to grapple with the eternity of God's nature.



Figure 2.7. Harriet Carter, Exploring the performativity of the painted surface and ambient light with *Untitled*, (2017). Acrylic on aluminium, 40 x 40cm.

4. Conclusions

I have explained that this research does not seek to contribute to the study of metaphysics. Instead, it recognises that through acts of attempting to comprehend an artistic process that responds to immaterial experiences in the world, questions of the metaphysical arise.

I firstly examined the metaphysical through the theories of Adorno, Suppes, and Bennett. Then I applied the concept of slippery knowledge production in thinking on the metaphysical to artistic practice, using examples of artistic practice in McHarg's work and de Chirico's *Pittura Metafisica*. Through the lens of metaphysical enquiry, I explored the importance of experience in painting processes. I have made the claim that in doing so, making artwork is a material experience of 'thinking on the metaphysical', rather than controlling the process and causing representation in the artwork. Exploring 'thinking on the metaphysical' has critically built on the focus on painting process in this research. I have made a case that 'thinking on the metaphysical' becomes a space of potential knowledge *apprehension*. Through appropriating Cixous' theories of 'coming towards writing', I placed the metaphysical in the space of materiality as a

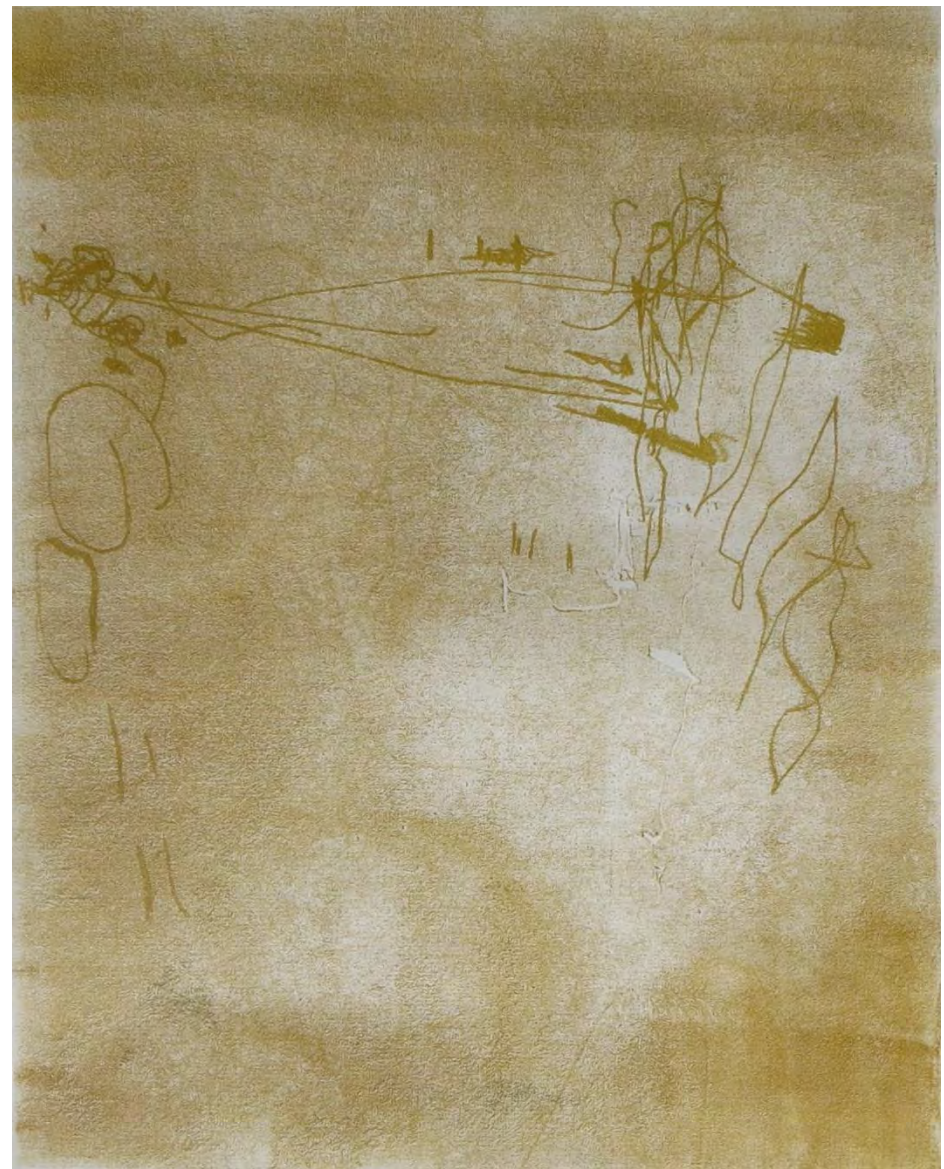
'coming to understanding' material processes.

Secondly, I examined Giorgio de Chirico's *Pittura Metafisica* to explore the slipperiness of how the metaphysical is investigated in painting. Exploring *Pittura Metafisica*, I determined a difference between my own experiences in painting and de Chirico's approach as a metaphysical and representational painter. I explained how the key point of departure is that in my own painting practice, painting *process* is crucial to transposition and metaphysicality. I did this by considering de Chirico's process separate from the way his paintings slip into representing the metaphysical. In doing so, I suggested that de Chirico provides an example of 'thinking on the metaphysical' in his two paintings *Mistero e malinconia di una strada*, 1914 and *La Strada*, 1968. I concluded that 'thinking on the metaphysical' can be adopted through painting practice as any meaning that is created will be shared by the agency of the materials leaving it partially undisclosed to the painter.

Thirdly, I examined the metaphysical in the context of Olivier Messiaen. I considered the ways in which Messiaen experienced birdsong and made music in response as an example of Spencer's definition of 'sacramental perception',

that I claimed is a spiritual vehicle for thinking on the metaphysical. I applied the concept of 'sacramental perception' to explore how Messiaen interrogated time and eternity in *Catalogue d'oiseaux*.

BOOK THREE:
Encountering Birdsong



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Introduction

In Book One, I positioned painting processes and birdsong in relation to language. I identified birdsong outside of comprehension and 'elsewhere' to language, and material processes in painting as taking place on the peripheries of language. In Book Two, I explored the role metaphysicality takes as a philosophical mode of thinking in experience in art practice, and in Messiaen's perception of birdsong and resulting musical interpretations. I described how this research considers metaphysicality as intrinsic to the affective and sensory capacity of perception. I placed emphasis on how exploring encounters with birdsong is a form of 'thinking on the metaphysical'. Exploring the unknown and intangible qualities of encountering birdsong brings the possibility that these experiences cannot be apprehended in a normative language, and instead might only be explorable through coming to understanding.

This book builds on these themes by exploring the potential metaphysical dimensions of experiencing birdsong

through art practice. I interrogate here, how the intangible, unknown and irresoluteness of birdsong is activated and operates in time and space.

The first part of this book explores facets of embodied encounters with birdsong. Firstly, I examine the concept of the 'event' to think through how we might perceive an encounter with birdsong. Then, I examine the concept of the 'specious present' to scrutinise the spatio-temporal aspect of experiencing birdsong and consider how this might be transposed in art practice. Next, I use this thinking to examine how the metaphysical corresponds with materiality in moments of drawing (as a precursor to painting) as acts of material perception.¹ In doing so, I propose that metaphysicality can be explored materially but only on the peripheries of visual language. I bring together transposition and metaphysicality to propose new ways that transposition can operate through transcribing embodied encounters with birdsong.

The second part of this book explores the relationship between metaphysicality and painting. I build on earlier spatio-

¹ By 'material perception' I mean observing an encounter through responding to things experienced by making marks. I claim this definition in the context of this

research against 'material perception' in science that refers to perceiving and recognizing a material.

temporal explorations through reintroducing materiality to investigate circumstances of chance brought about via material thinking. In doing so, I explore the dynamics of embodied encounters with birdsong as ‘becoming-knowledge’ in painting processes – a term adopted from artistic researcher Michael Schwab.

The third part of this book develops the concept of transposing birdsong through encounter through analysis of Messiaen’s encounters with birdsong, building on my claim in Book Two that Messiaen demonstrates ‘thinking on the metaphysical’ in his transcriptions of birdsong. I then fold in the concept of chance to explore Messiaen’s composition from his *cahiers* as moments of relinquishing control to claim that Messiaen’s *cahiers* are sites of ‘becoming-knowledge’.

1. Experience of the ‘event’

Reconceptualising birdsong and landscape as ‘situation’

In this research, I approach encountering birdsong as an ‘event’. Furthermore, I consider experiencing encounters with birdsong as metaphysical. Visual artist and writer Yve Lomax’s critical development of philosopher Alain Badiou’s theory of the ‘event’ provides a way to interrogate my

explorations of attempting to grasp the metaphysicality of birdsong. Through an analysis of encountering nature and time, Lomax considers Badiou’s description of the five facets of an event – evanescent, supplement, chance, the incalculable, and origination of truth – as all facets of a ‘situation’. For Lomax, a ‘situation’ is a thing in the world. Lomax’s thinking is useful to draw on the relationship between human interaction and birdsong. I draw on this thinking to approach birdsong and the landscape as a ‘situation’ whereby an ‘event’ of birdsong is only triggered through human interaction. This has been crucial to my understanding that an *embodied encounter* with birdsong creates an ‘event’ within a ‘situation’.

Lomax describes the ‘evanescent’ as “something that vanishes from ‘being’ as soon as it appears”.² This resonates with the passing of sound through air, or an object through space, disappearing as soon as it is received in the moment of observation. In my initial transcriptions of birdsong, I found myself in a constant state of attempting

² Yve Lomax, ‘Fortuity’, in *Sounding the Event: Escapades in Dialogue and Matters of Art, Nature and Time* (London: I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2004), pp. 162–84, p. 163.

to notate the song as soon as I heard it. In doing so, I found myself 'chasing' the sound, and indeed – this evanescence (see pages 121 – 122 now).

Lomax describes the 'supplement' as something extra to what "is".³ An encounter with birdsong can be seen as something extra to what already exists; birdsong does not begin to sound or move only when observed – it already does this, as I had found stood 'chasing' the sound of birdsong in my transcriptions. However, the chasing of this birdsong using mark-making causes an intervention in the 'situation' of birdsong in the landscape. My making marks responding to the sounds around me creates an opportunity for something to happen. In my case, the 'something to happen' was finding a connection between the temporality of the song and the spatiality of my drawn line. Lomax would describe this as the event "open[ing] a chance"⁴ enabling possibilities to arise – all caused by the overarching 'situation' of birdsong existing in the landscape. Chance does not exist until it is activated by experiencing the 'event'.

³ Lomax, p. 165.

⁴ Lomax, p. 166.

Paradoxically, chance is dependent on observation and due to the nature of chance – is incalculable. For Lomax, the "chance breaking of an event may [...] be incalculable with respect to the situation in which it irrupts". By transcribing birdsong, one enters into the 'situation' of birdsong and the landscape, causing the chance 'event' of perceiving birdsong. This 'event' of perception could not be predicted by the 'situation', which Lomax describes as the situation not being able to account for the 'event' "by the resources available to the situation".⁵ In other words, the 'situation' cannot account for the presence of the observer and moments of perception that result. I see this 'incalculability' in the situation mirrored in the inability to notate birdsong as it sounds – and furthermore – the unpredictability of birdsong.

⁵ Lomax, p. 167.

Writing-thinking extract

11th February 2019

Notating birdsong in a Worcestershire orchard

Figure 3.1 and 3.2

I can't see birdsong, but I *can* see the landscape that I am in, and that birdsong occupies the landscape with me in this moment
I decide to make marks and draw forms in the landscape when I hear the birdsong, I can hear sounds like a lark. The lark sings quite a lot – making marks whenever I hear the lark has enabled me to draw outlines of trees on the slanting hill of the orchard.
I'm able to draw the outlines of trees on the slanting hill of the orchard... transposition = a cross-boundary repositioning of an action rooted in process. Is this moment of drawing a transposition?

I experience looking at the landscape and listening to birdsong comprehending and reconciling what is around me as I do.

Is making these marks a repositioning of comprehension and configuring forms and sounds in my perception, embedded in process? Are these marks transpositional?

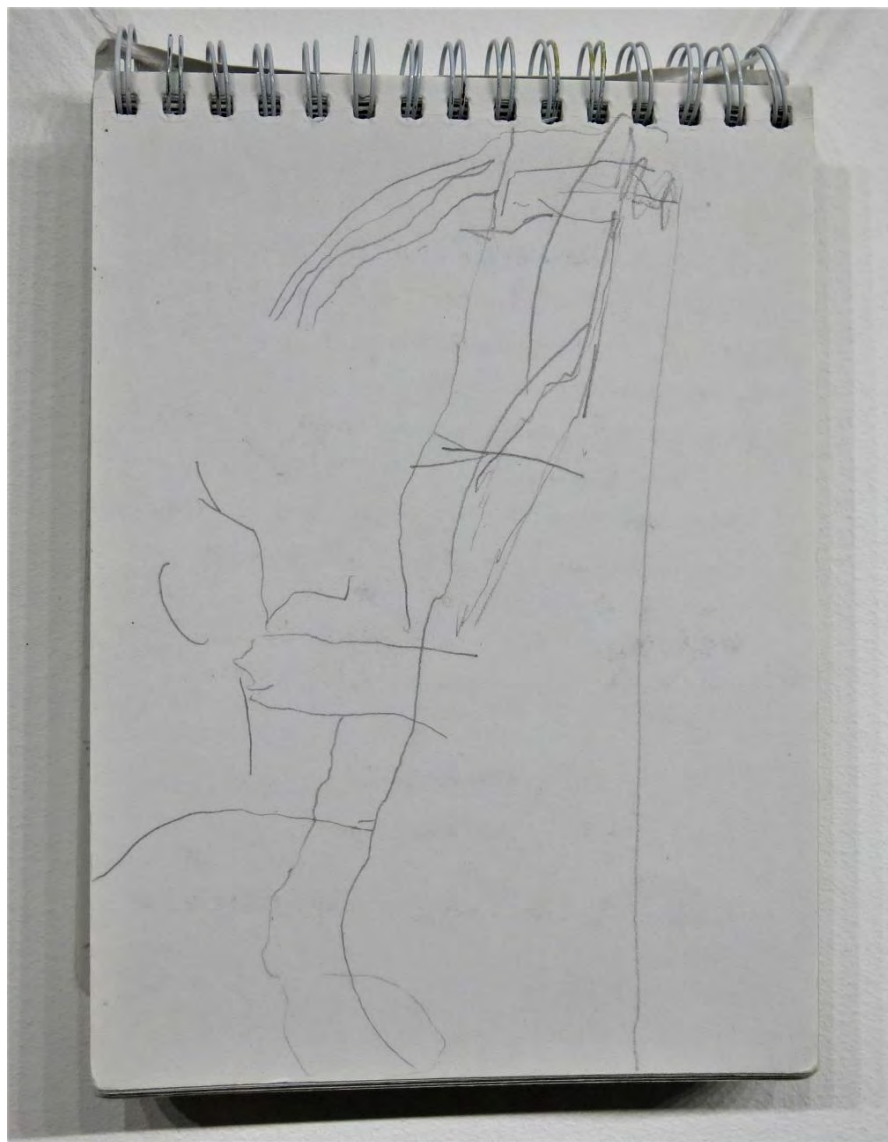


Figure 3.1. Harriet Carter, Notebook page, (2019). Pencil on paper, 14.8 x 21cm.

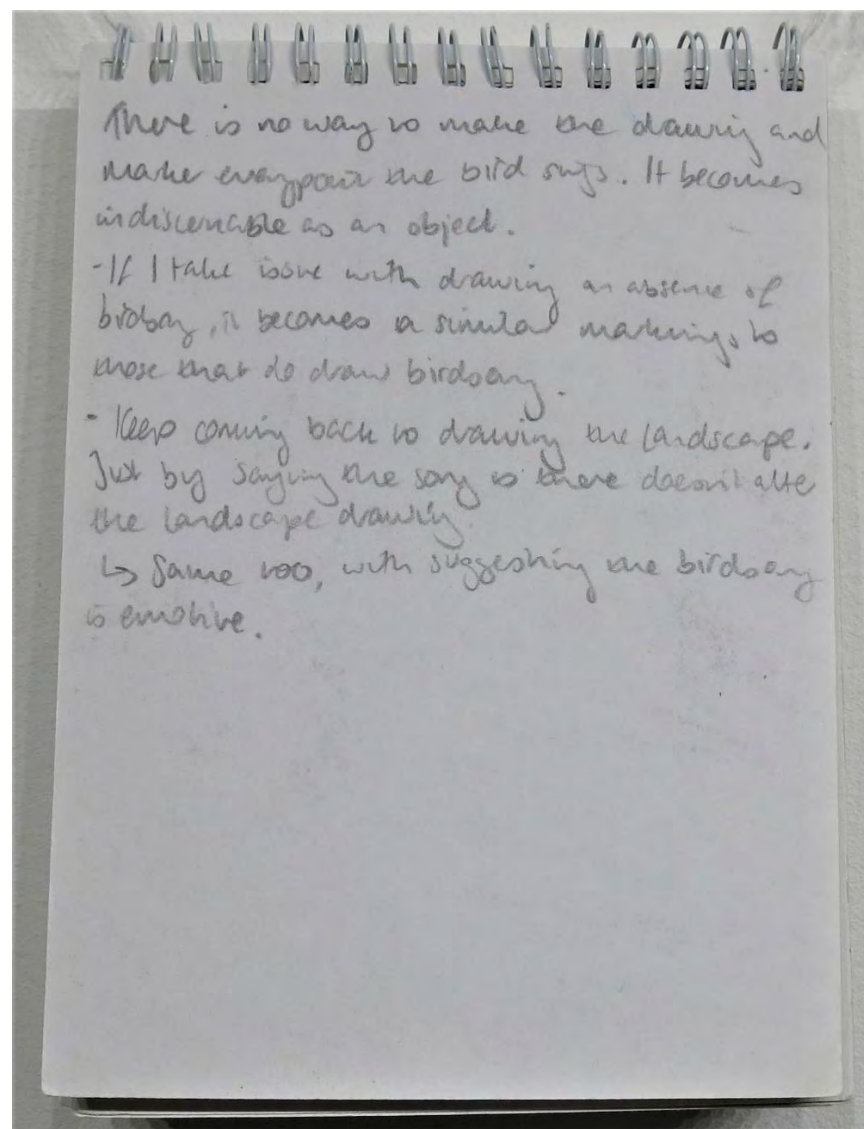


Figure 3.2. Harriet Carter, Notebook page, (2019). Pencil on paper, 14.8 x 21cm.

The ‘incalculable’ in this way further articulates the way this research sees birdsong as outside of comprehensible language. The ‘incalculable’ develops the idea that birdsong is ‘elsewhere’ of language. Entering the ‘situation’, i.e., the landscape and causing the ‘event’ of perceiving birdsong causes this perception to be the ‘elsewhere’ of the ‘situation’. The ‘situation’ of birdsong and the landscape cannot account for the presence of a human and the perception they create during encounter. This leads to the final facet of the ‘event’: the ‘origination of truth’. The ‘origination of truth’ is the result of the taking place of ‘evanescence’, ‘supplement’, ‘chance’, and ‘the incalculable’. Lomax states that “if there is no event then there can be no truth”.⁶ I take this to understand that ‘truth’ exists *in* and *because* of the ‘event’, therefore ‘truth’ is the experience of perception. Hence, transcribing birdsong in the landscape as an ‘event’ means that this is not ‘translating’ encounters with birdsong. Perceiving birdsong during an embodied encounter as an ‘event’ is a moment of incalculable chance whereby transcribing during this ‘event’ does not translate the ‘event’ but *is* the ‘event’.

⁶ Lomax, p. 171.

Perception as embodied encounter

Coming to understand an ‘event’ of a birdsong encounter opens questions of how perception is an embodied encounter, implicated by space and time. Perception is central to an ‘event’ and noting perception is pivotal in explaining how this research understands the metaphysicality of a birdsong encounter. Perception is the crucial term in my exploration of polysensory experience here, as there is no delineation between sight, smell, hearing, and touch.

My initial transcriptions of birdsong have highlighted the highly embodied, polysensory nature of encountering it; by seeing, hearing, smelling, and touching the landscape. Encountering birdsong and indeed, *perceiving* an encounter with birdsong is underpinned by observing processes and objects, i.e., the spatio-temporal imbrication of processes and objects. An ‘event’ is imbricated with time and space. To follow Lomax, three facets of an event in particular are imbricated with temporality and spatiality: ‘evanescent’, ‘supplement’, and ‘chance’. It is useful to note philosopher Anthony Quinton here. Quinton states that “things of common

observation [...] are finite, [coming] into existence and

eventually go out of it again”.⁷ As I described earlier, I explored the feeling of ‘chasing’ birdsong as it came to my attention. Embedded within the ‘event’ of birdsong (through perception) means that one shares a spatio-temporality with birdsong in the landscape. This shared spatio-temporality brings a state of indeterminacy. A state of indeterminacy, or to put it different words – not quite knowing – builds on my earlier exploration in Book Two of ‘thinking on the metaphysical’ as speculative and irresolute. I argue that perceiving birdsong through embodied encounter with things moving incalculably through time and space ignites a relationship with the intangibility of the metaphysical.

I suggest that the moment of intangibility caused by the chance encounter of perceiving birdsong in the landscape develops its own spatio-temporality. I return to Quinton here, to consider this moment of incalculability the ‘specious present’. Things occupying time and space temporally and spatially ‘extend’ beyond the scope of an observation. Quinton describes the moment of observing these things as a “period of observation” [...] known as the

⁷ Anthony Quinton, *The Nature of Things* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 81.

⁸ Quinton, p. 30.

specious present”.⁸ Therefore, the ‘specious present’, as imbued in perception, relates to experiencing the ‘event’. Perceiving birdsong move through the landscape creates a ‘specious present’ of incalculability that speaks to embodied encounter.

In my explorations of transcribing birdsong, I found myself thinking about the connection between birdsong passing through time and space, indeed, ‘thinking on the metaphysicality’ of the encounter (see pages 125 – 126 now). Semiotics scholar Morten Tønnessen’s concept of the ‘embodied mind’ is useful to consider ‘thinking on the metaphysical’ as part of an ‘event’ of encountering birdsong. For Tønnessen, we have a relational existence with nature that causes inter-corporeal diffused “awareness”.⁹ The spatio-temporal moment of perception in the specious present provides ‘truth’, only of this moment and crucially, only to *our sense of perception*. This is where an embodied encounter with birdsong further identifies birdsong as ‘elsewhere’. Exploring such moments of perceiving birdsong in this ‘specious present’ is therefore, not a means to construct meaning making of the wider ‘situation’ of birdsong.

⁹ Morten Tønnessen, ‘Steps to a Semiotics of Being’, *Biosemiotics*, 3.3 (2010), 375–92 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s12304-010-9074-0>> [accessed 27 February 2022] (p. 376).

Writing-thinking extract

11th February 2019

Figures 3.3 and 3.4

Notating birdsong in a Worcestershire orchard

As I stand in the landscape, I become acutely aware of my physical presence within the environment – my weight on the ground, the air moving past me, my body casting a shadow on the grass. I wonder whether this goes further, whether I am impacting the birds' habitat, am I the reason for their singing? I do not know.

I make marks in my notebook, as I do I think about how I chase the sound, marking as soon as I perceive the birdsong, knowing that I'm already lagging behind. Sounds I hear become simultaneous with the movement of my tool across paper.

I think about how I prescribe a language to the birds by talking about my own language. I think that this is wrong – birds don't have a 'language' that my understanding can define. Perhaps marking space in the temporal moment of perceiving the movement through the landscape pushes my supposed 'language' to the periphery of my capabilities to reach out and touch thus, unknown sounds coming from the birds with my pencil. In this moment of mark-making, do I somehow connect us together in space and time?

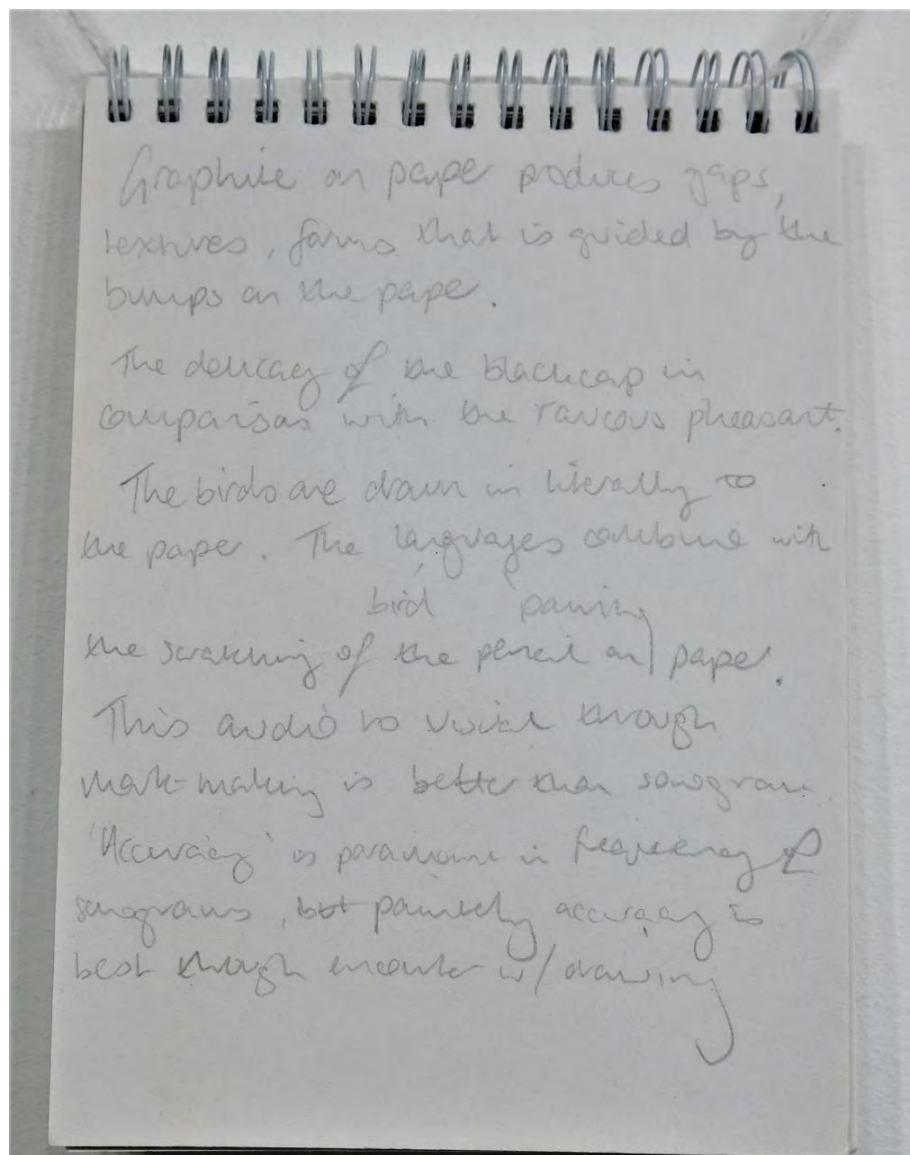


Figure 3.3. Harriet Carter, Notebook page, (2019).

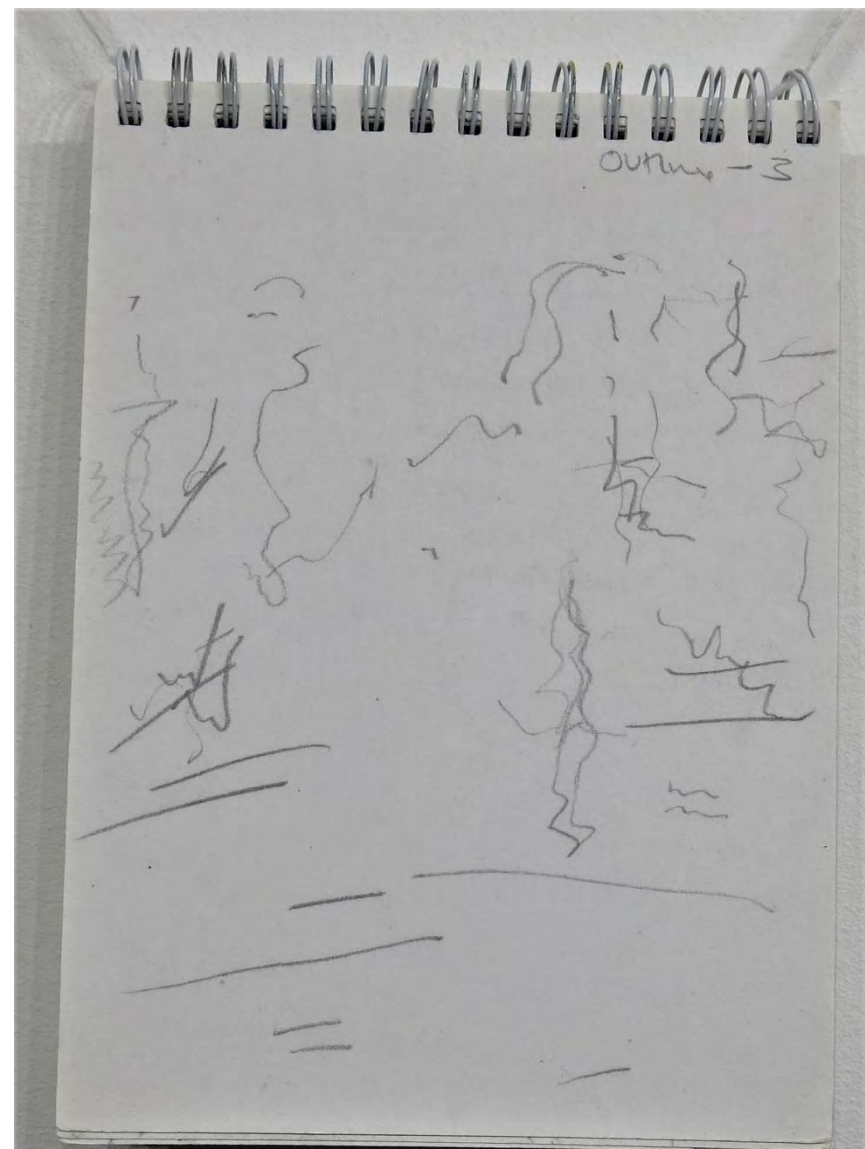


Figure 3.4. Harriet Carter, Notebook page (2019).

It is useful to quote philosopher Graham Harman here, who states that humans are closed off from the “inner sanctum” of an object.¹⁰ During perception, we are locked out of the wider ‘situation’.

To rehearse this idea, perceiving an embodied encounter with birdsong provides only ‘truth’ of that one ‘event’ of encountering birdsong. This ‘truth’ is not universal and cannot be applied to the wider ‘situation’ of birdsong and the landscape, rendering the possibility of a ‘truth’ of the situation as speculative; beyond our comprehension, and therefore a metaphysicality. Encountering birdsong therefore causes an infinite state of simultaneously grasping at what we perceive and being rendered into an infinite state of not-knowing the ‘situation’ around the ‘event’. We are prevented from understanding where birdsong is – and to adapt Lomax’s term – ‘situated’ in the world.

Transposition in the ‘event’

To consider the extent to which transposition can enable the metaphysical to be understood as a form of encounter, it is pertinent to examine how the precursory aspects of painting practice *during* this ‘event’ folds into perception. As I have already explored, a shared spatio-temporal experience in an ‘event’ of transcribing birdsong blurs the boundaries between the person encountering it, and birdsong. To consider how transposition fits into this ‘event’, it is important to incorporate the responsive mark-making (as considered under the umbrella of painting practice) in the polysensory experience of perception.

Perception interprets what is experienced. Within this perceived interpretation of the senses, looking seems more accurate over seeing, and listening over hearing. I contend that composer Pauline Oliveros’ ‘deep listening’ theory is a particularly important example of how to think through

¹⁰ Graham Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things* (United States of America: Open Court Publishing Company, 2005), p. 250.

embodied encounters; that is of thinking *with* things in the 'specious present'. 'Deep listening' explores the importance of listening over hearing,¹¹ departing from voluntarily selecting sounds to 'hear' (i.e., selective hearing) and instead exploring all sounds that in turn expand the boundaries of perception. This research makes use of such ideas of 'listening' to enhance perception but through an attempt to explore the 'event'.

It is possible to then draw on art theorist Rosalind Krauss' theory of 'simultaneous contrast' to identify the role of seeing in perception. 'Simultaneous contrast' describes the moment of seeing something and is defined by Krauss as follows:

Simultaneous contrast, which describes the interaction of the cones at the surface of the retina and the way the color field is produced by their mutual stimulation and innervation, is a phenomenon of sensory impact at the level of the eye [sic].¹²

This sensory moment is shared between the physiology of the

eye and what it sees, triggering perception that is caused between both physiological responses and the object observed. Therefore, listening and seeing as spatio-temporal facets during an embodied encounter with birdsong can be identified as existing in the 'specious present'. These concepts of embodiment can be applied to the wider senses (smell, touch, taste) as a way to consider the multiplicity of an embodied encounter in an 'event' and dissolving boundary lines between the observed and the observer.

Conducting mark-making to respond to an embodied encounter, or indeed *transcribing* the encounter can be seen as alternative means of perception. The action of moving a pencil across paper to 'chase' birdsong is seen as a form of looking and hearing. In this way, mark-making can be seen as a material vehicle of perception. Furthermore, creating marks on a surface becomes an 'example' – to use Lomax's concept – of perceiving an embodied encounter with the 'event' of birdsong in the 'specious present' (see figure 3.5). I propose that there is a shared spatio-temporality during transcription of

¹¹ For an exposition of deep listening by Pauline Oliveros, see: Pauline Oliveros, 'The Earth Worm Also Sings: A composer's practice of deep listening', *Leonardo Music Journal*, 3 (1993), 35-38 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1513267> [accessed 27 February 2022].

¹² Rosalind E. Krauss, 'The Story of the Eye', *New Literary History*, 21.2 (1990), 283–98 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/469253>> (p. 290).



Figure 3.5. Harriet Carter, Notebook page, (2019).

birdsong, between the perceived (birdsong), perceiver (transcriber), and material vehicle (mark-making on paper). The 'example' created in a transcription of an embodied

encounter with birdsong is an 'example' of a simultaneous contrast between materiality and birdsong.

Drawing on Krauss' theory of simultaneous contrast and Oliveros' practice of deep listening, drawing a birdsong encounter is an act of *material* perception. I redefine and claim 'material perception' in this research as describing any form of mark-making – that falls under the umbrella of painting – as taking place during an embodied encounter with the *event* of birdsong.

In my research published elsewhere, simultaneous to the PhD, I explored mark-making in encounters with birdsong. I concluded that drawn gesture¹³ filters sound waves and visual cues are materially filtered through material perception as an extension of an embodied encounter.¹⁴ This research expands on these ideas to consider the moving moments of transcribing in the 'event' of birdsong as a 'thinking on the metaphysical'. By thinking through embodied encounter as an 'event', drawing is not an extension of an embodied encounter, but imbricated with it. The 'example'; the drawn

¹³ I have named the mark left by mark-making on a page, a 'drawn gesture'.

¹⁴ Harriet Carter, 'Drawing Birdsong: A Comparative Analysis between the Electronic and the Human', *Drawing: Research, Theory, Practice*, 5.2 (2020), 319-332 (p. 330).

artwork, stilled once the transpositional process is complete becomes a new encounter with transposition. In other words, mark-making in the 'event' of birdsong is both a transposition vehicle *within* and *of* the event of experiencing birdsong.

To return to my earlier definition of transposition as a cross-boundary repositioning, this act of material perception can be seen as transpositional. To appropriate Pirrò's term, material perception is a complexification of an embodied encounter because it "resists analysis" of the 'event' of birdsong, by *being* the 'event' of birdsong.¹⁵ This indeterminate nature of complexification embedded in material perception is therefore an appropriate place to explore the polysensory experience of encountering the metaphysicality of birdsong.

Expanding Transcription

Transposition is by its nature, intrinsic to the act of 'transcribing' birdsong as an embodied encounter through materially perceiving birdsong as an 'event'. Olga Karlíková's

transcriptions of birdsong undertaken in the landscape provide an example of perceiving an 'event' of birdsong through gesture. Karlíková's drawings are described by Museum Kampa as "humbly listening to nature".¹⁶ Her method of transcribing imbricates the landscape and birdsong and can be seen as a product of her embodied encounter within the landscape. Curator Eva Skopalová describes Karlíková as using the landscape as a "tool for thinking through shape and space". She states:

A tree is a living organism firmly attached to the earth. Its own movement takes place in its inside. It is invisible, but we can sense its power [...] It lives in symbiosis with the birds. Its crown is embroidered with their flight [...] The trees convince me of the order of nature. It's a large topic and I don't know whether I am enough.¹⁷

Karlíková's transcriptions are paradoxically described both as a language of symbols and descriptions of a seismographic record of processes in nature. Skopalová describes

¹⁵ David Pirrò, 'Staging Collisions: On Behaviour', in *Transpositions: Aesthetico-Epistemic Operators in Artistic Research*, ed. by Michael Schwab (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2018), pp. 135-148 (p. 140).

¹⁶ Museum Kampa, '8/9 - 13/12/2020 Olga Karlíková 1923-2004 Listening', *Museum Kampa*, 2020 <<https://www.museumkampa.cz/vystava/karikova/>> [accessed 27 February 2022].

¹⁷ Eva Skopalová, 'Olga Karlíková', *Secondary Archive*, 2021 <<https://secondaryarchive.org/artists/olga-karikova/>> [accessed 18 November 2021].

Karlíková's process via a semiotic lens here, suggesting that she conducted "structural abstraction [...] of the acoustics of nature, [...] oscillating between text, notation, and visual sign".¹⁸ Whilst describing Karlíková's process in a similar language-based way, Monoskop states that Karlíková's drawings demonstrate "tracing the motion of the hand and eye and guided by hearing".¹⁹ Monoskop's statement suggests a much more nuanced encounter with birdsong and the landscape than simply creating sign-systems, and ultimately translations, for what she could hear and see.

Drawing on the spatio-temporality of an embodied encounter with birdsong as an 'event' might allow us to understand Karlíková's drawing process differently. I argue that it is exactly *because* Karlíková conducted her drawings within the landscape, that the resulting marks are not simply structured abstractions per se. My position is that Karlíková undertook her drawings within a spatio-temporal embodied encounter with the landscape. This thinking comes from my experiences drawing during an embodied encounter with birdsong. In my initial explorations of transcribing birdsong, I

found myself creating similar marks to Karlíková (see figures 3.6 and 3.7 on page 132). In *The voice of a Rooster and a Turkey*, and pages of my notebook, the drawn marks look as if they were made with urgency. In *The voice of a Rooster and a Turkey*, the marks look responsive, the horizontal forms seemingly the result of if struggling to keep pace with the birdsong, and the clouded in the centre of the page the result of feeling unable to render sound in lines in the way the other sounds have. A similar observation can be made in my transcription of birdsong. In my notebook a vertical flurry of lines in the bottom left of the page seem less certain than darker lines, caused perhaps by less pressure being placed on the page in order to move quickly across the surface.

I contend this embodiment of tracing sound – indeed 'chasing' sound in the light-touch franticness of marks in both Karlíková and my transcriptions are a form of material perception. The marks of resulting from the material perception are spatio-temporally imbricated with encountering birdsong. Marks made during a birdsong encounter are not

¹⁹ Monoskop, 'Olga Karlíková', *Monoskop*, 2021 <https://monoskop.org/Olga_Karlíková> [accessed 27 February 2022].

¹⁸ Skopalová.



Figure 3.6. Olga Karlíková, *The voice of a Rooster and a Turkey*, (2004). Dimensions and medium not known.



Figure 3.7. Harriet Carter, Notebook page detailing early exploration of transcribing birdsong in the Worcestershire orchard, (2019). Pencil on paper, 14.8 x 21cm.

separated from an 'event' of encountering birdsong, and are therefore ultimately, not a translation.

The marks do not fit under the nomenclature of abstraction either. They are not a simplification of an experience – they are the *product* of experience. Furthermore, I assert that material perception resides on the periphery of language. Piecing together my earlier theorisation that birdsong exists in the 'elsewhere' of communicable language structures and Lomax's theory of the holistic, imbricated aspects of an 'event', it does not seem feasible to isolate a perceived observation as a 'sign', as these marks were not created within a communicable language. The evanescent 'event' – that is fleeting, intangible, and cannot be fully grasped and extrapolated from the 'event' – therefore cannot be translated into a structured language. Instead, Karlíková's – and indeed my own – transcriptions of birdsong as an 'event' are transpositional *places*.

²⁰ Anthony Quinton, 'Ontology', in *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, ed. by A. Bullock and S. Trombley, 3rd edn (London: HarperCollins, 1999), pp. 608–9.

2. 'Becoming-knowledge'

Ontology of place in artmaking

The connection between material perception during an embodied encounter and metaphysicality can be further explored through ontology. Ontology, according to Quinton, explores "what really exists, as opposed to that which appears to exist but does not".²⁰ Perception as operational in the 'specious present' is a form of ontological speculation, in that it considers embodied existence in space and time. I link ontology – and ontological speculation in particular – to focus on the importance of exploring just the encounter with birdsong and not birdsong in a wider 'situation'. Ontological speculation provides a suitable lens through which to interrogate transposition. Painter Naren Barfield's definition of ontological speculation in art practice is notable. Much like Harman and Quinton suggest of an object's spatial extension, Barfield describes ontological speculation as an artist's mindfulness of an artwork's extension in space and the artist's

awareness of their “being-ness” in this space.²¹ Ontological speculation is an inquiry into the “self-conscious personal spatial extension [...] in relation to external spatial phenomena or cues”.²² Interrogating an embodied encounter with materiality can hence be described as engaging with ontological speculation (see pages 135 – 137 now). This develops my examination in Book One of artistic transposition. Specifically of how artistic transposition engages with materiality in a way that pushes art practice into the peripheries of language and away from representational frameworks of translation. To be specific, working *with* the ‘otherness’ – to appropriate Adams’ term – of materiality via material thinking (Bolt’s theory), and the material potential (Taylor’s theory).

I consider the installation *perceptual doubt, constant becoming* by artist and academic Mhairi Vari as a demonstration of how ontological speculation is vital in art practice (see figure 3.11 on page 138). Vari states that her art practice is generated from a symbiosis of ideas and

processes.²³ *Perceptual doubt, constant becoming* challenges the hierarchical positioning of approaching an artwork led by subjectivity and intention. I propose that Vari’s process in making the installation demonstrates working *with* the ‘otherness’ of materiality via material thinking. Through ontological speculation of how materiality operates in time and space – in other words, an embodied encounter of material thinking – I propose that knowledge about this process is always in the state of ‘becoming’. To explain further: to surmise a definitive answer from working *with* materiality creates conclusions and labels that subjectively translates the ‘otherness’ of materiality representing material thinking. To instead think about one’s ‘being-ness’ in making an artwork, i.e., the spatio-temporal embodied encounter of the making process, is to consider knowledge as always in a state of developing on the cusp of communicable language.

Material perception in this way mirrors material thinking. Material perception as imbricated with embodied

²¹ Naren Barfield, ‘Spatial Ontology in Fine Art Practice’, in *Thinking Through Art: Reflections on Art as Research*, ed. by Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), pp. 106–21 (p. 108).

²² Barfield, (p. 108).

²³ Mhairi Vari, ‘Perceptual Doubt, Constant Becoming’, in *The Dark Precursor: Deleuze and Artistic Research (Vol.2) The Dark Precursor in Image, Space, and Politics*, ed. by William Brooks, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2017), pp. 408–14 (p. 408).

Writing-thinking extract

1st October 2019

Figures 3.8 – 3.10

Notebook pages and Untitled

I'm thinking about the blinding sunlight that engulfed me as I transcribed birdsong in the Worcestershire orchard and the way this tethered birdsong to the landscape – a cacophony of sound presumably due to the light stimulating the birds to sing.

I decide to explore this in printmaking.

I spread ink thickly onto a plate of glass using a roller to spread the ink out evenly across the surface of the glass.

Taking a pencil, I flip it over and use the sharp edges of the end of the pencil to mark out a form taken from one of my transcriptions. This takes some time because as I drag the pencil end through the ink it gathers where I stop and lift the pencil away. I don't want this gathered ink to cause a splodge over my marking of birdsong, so I carefully pick at the gathered ink until I am satisfied that it is even with the rest of the ink on the plate. I then press paper on top of the plate and use a baron to press the paper down onto the surface to collect the ink. The white paper can be seen through the yellow ink – the birdsong mark cuts through the yellow.

I want to add more birdsong – to convey the cacophony of sound. The white mark seems delicate – a singular bird singing a gentle tune. This time I try a different approach to drawing 'through' the ink on the plate. I place the same piece of paper down on the surface and this time draw on the back of the paper so that the pressure of the mark-making on the back of the paper will pick up the ink on the plate. I have to be careful not to put my weight anywhere other than through the tool I am using (a pencil). I lift the paper up – this time, the birdsong gestures are formed using the yellow ink that evoked the sun – the materiality of the ink bonding the two different marks. I want to add more birdsong. I wipe the plate clean and apply a turquoise colour to the plate and repeat – this time with many more marks.

I'm getting more and more a sense of the physicality of the printing plate, paper, and ink. Each print I make is nuanced and largely affected by this other facet of making these prints – the tools I am using. I also notice now that the marks I draw on the back of the paper are the mirror opposite to what is in my transcriptions. As soon as I turn the paper over, the print becomes a mirror of the note page. I am interested in this printmaking process – the physicality of the materiality involved feels like a process – is this a transpositional process?

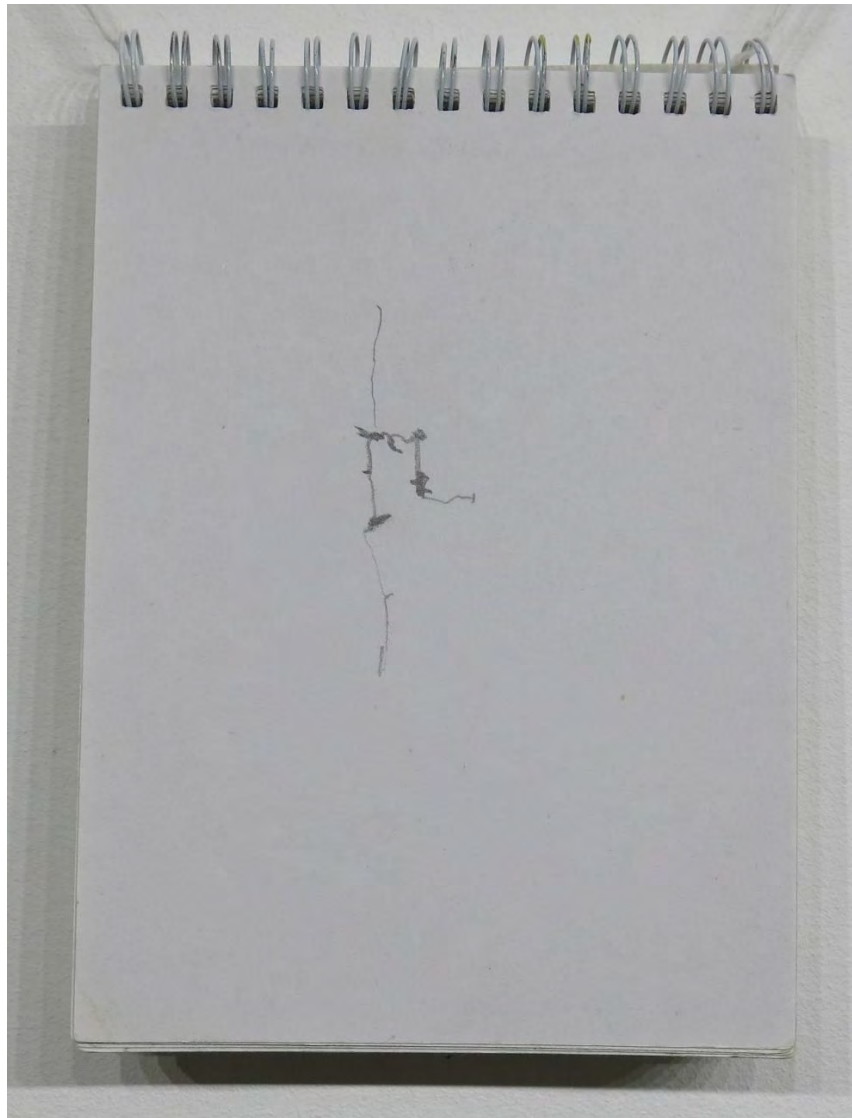


Figure 3.8. Harriet Carter, Notebook page, (2019).

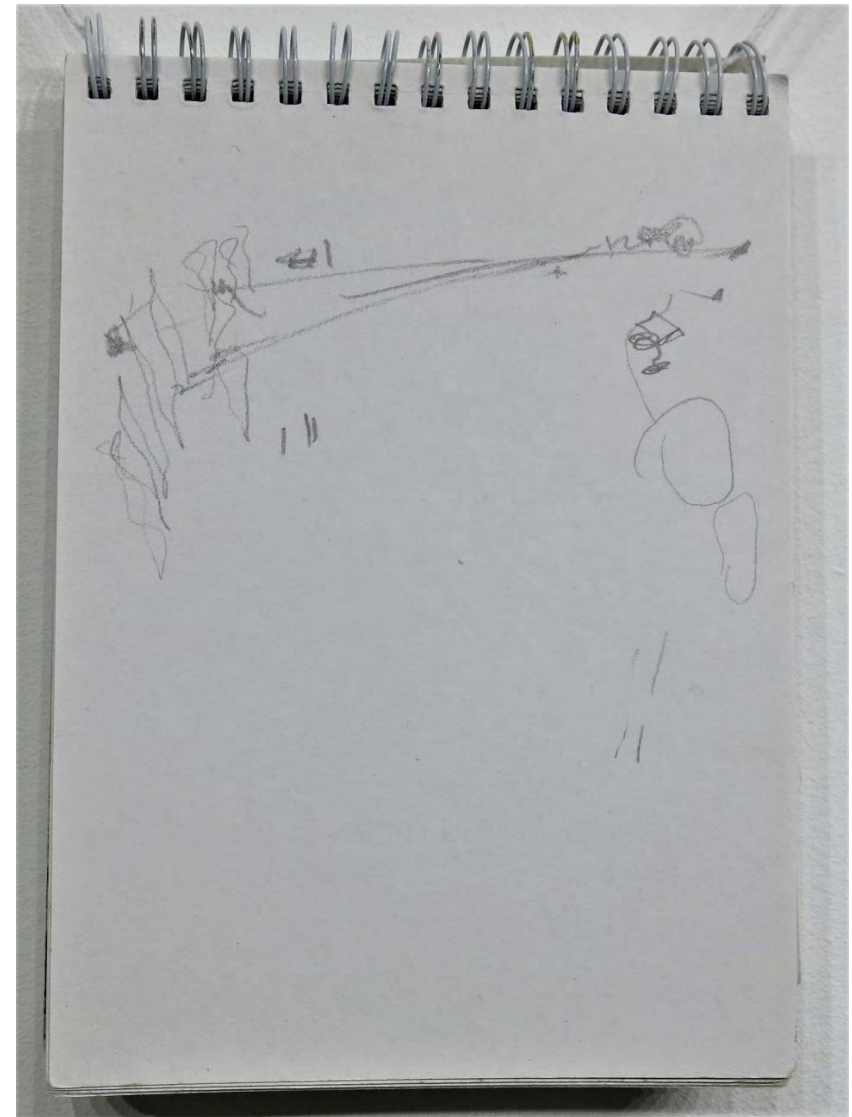


Figure 3.9. Harriet Carter, Notebook page, (2019).



Plate 3.10. Harriet Carter, *Untitled*, (2019). Monoprint, 46.8 x 31.5cm.



Figure 3.11. Mhairi Vari, *perpetual doubt, constant becoming (Lydney)*, (2015), loombands, dimensions not known, Lydney Park Estate, Gloucestershire.

encounter during transcribing birdsong in the landscape compares to material thinking as imbricated with an embodied encounter *with* materiality. In Book One, I described making artwork as a transpositional place and in this book, I have described how transcription of birdsong in the landscape can be thought of as a transpositional place of embodied encounter. A transposition occurs within material *places* of mark-making during embodied encounter between the landscape and art studio. I assert that a ‘place’ is created when speculating ‘through’ an embodied encounter where knowledge is in a continual ‘state of becoming’. A description of ‘place’ by anthropologists Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso is useful to note here. They describe place as “the most fundamental form of embodied experience” [and] “the site of a powerful fusion of self, space, and time”.²⁴ Their theory of place can be connected with anthropologist Tim Ingold’s commentary that ‘place’ is formed through movement.²⁵ The state of ‘becoming’ is tallied with the processes involved in transposition – to build on my exploration of painting process

in Book One – and expands the transcription of birdsong to a transposition of birdsong.

However, transpositional places are slippery. The incalculability of the ‘event’ of interacting in space and time with the ungraspability of birdsong, creates a state of indeterminacy. To return to Pirrò: “complexification elicits behaviour”, bringing interaction between what is observed with other processes or objects.²⁶ Specifically, complexification is grounded in interactive processes, in other words, the observed simultaneously “unfolds *internally* and stretches out to other processes or objects in the environment”.²⁷ The absence of a distinct singularity means that it is difficult to understand the exact intricacies of this transpositional place. Essentially, transposition through material interaction as taking place on the periphery of language in painting process extends to transcribing birdsong.

The indeterminacy of the transpositional place is also considered in this research as a form of ‘thinking on the

²⁴ Steven Feld and Keith H Basso, *Sense of Place* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), p. 9.

²⁵ Tim Ingold, ‘Binding against Boundaries: Entanglements of Life in an Open World’, *Environment and Planning*, 40 (2008), 1796–1810 (p. 1808).

²⁶ Pirrò, (p. 140).

²⁷ Pirrò, (p. 140).

metaphysical'. Geographer Harriet Hawkins' theory is useful to note here. She comments that art 'opens up' new spatialities and temporalities that provides "potential for creative encounters with the affective, precognitive and non-representational aspects of the world".²⁸ For Hawkins, art becomes a "thinking space".²⁹ To develop my theory that 'thinking on the metaphysical' occurs in the incomprehensibility of material painting processes, I argue that this thinking space is better defined as operating as a thinking *place* of 'becoming-knowledge' in painting practice.

Transpositional places

My early print explorations of birdsong transcriptions undertaken in the Worcestershire orchard have revealed that making paintings from transcriptions of birdsong creates a material dialogue between the transcriptions and painted surface. Making prints revealed a 'becoming-knowledge' about how simultaneous contrast blurs the boundaries between my intention as an artist and the material intervention of the 'otherness' of materiality.

²⁸ Harriet Hawkins, *For Creative Geographies, Geography, Visual Arts and the Making of Worlds* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 189.

To build on Harman's theories on the spatial interiority of objects in the context of this project, Schwab's theory on the spatio-temporal aspect of transpositions is notable. Schwab comments that transpositions do not occupy spaces in a way that are:

exclusively exterior or interior [...], rather, transpositions transgress the order of subject and object not having settled yet in *this* internal or *that* external representation, be it 'subject' or 'object'. Transpositions *must* be outside singular places or times as they concern relations between them.³⁰

Transpositional place is both process and dimension, always on the brink of comprehension through 'coming-to-understanding', and thus, 'becoming-knowledge'. I suggest that a transpositional place in this way rejects structure, where the interaction between artist and materiality becomes non-hierarchical. Philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari's concept of the 'rhizome' is useful to note here. Banham and O'Sullivan elucidate theory of the 'rhizome':

²⁹ Hawkins, p. 189.

³⁰ Michael Schwab, 'Transpositionality and Artistic Research', in *Transpositions: Aesthetico-Epistemic Operators in Artistic Research*, ed. by Michael Schwab (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2018), pp. 191–214 (pp. 198–199).

A rhizome is an anti-system [...] without any central organising motif, [...] instead it is composed not of points but of the lines between these points.³¹

I see a 'central organising motif' as a language that translates complex processes into a system. To avoid a 'central organising motif' avoids representation caused by the structured language system is to operate on the peripheries of language. By operating on the peripheries of language, a rhizome explores the intangible 'otherness' of materiality during painting process.

I return to Vari's process of making *perceptual doubt*, *constant becoming* and my printmaking experience to elucidate this point further. Vari notes that working in a rhizomatic scenario establishes a "set of conditions that support the necessity for unknowingness and uncertainty as methodology".³² Unknowingness and uncertainty as a methodology embodies 'thinking on the metaphysical' leading to 'becoming-knowledge' that is always in a state of process. I found that the process of spreading ink onto a printing plate and then making marks on paper laid flat on the plate caused

a transference that was reliant on the pliability of the printing ink. In fact, I found that it was the moment of contact between the plate, paper, and mark making where the moving encounter of transcribing birdsong in the landscape was transposed. Once the paper was lifted and set aside, the picture became a new iteration of the encounter.

Vari recounts a similar experience in the making of *perceptual doubt*, *constant becoming*, describing the process "arrested momentarily by fleeting instances of articulation".³³ I propose that fleeting instances of articulation embody 'thinking on the metaphysical' but still remain at the edges of a communicable language structure that renders 'becoming-knowledge' slippery. Vari's exploration of process to describe intangible moments of articulation aligns with a sense of almost-knowledge – becoming and then disappearing – which I argue aligns with metaphysicality in art-making processes. Accordingly, my earlier definition of transpositional spaces – as a cross-boundary repositioning – as an action rooted in process is imbricated with metaphysicality.

³¹ Gary Banham and Simon O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2005), p. 12.

³² Vari, (p. 408).

³³ Vari, (p. 409).

Painting metaphysicality

Printmaking revealed that I was chasing the imminence of transposing moving birdsong, causing a slipperiness in transposing the metaphysicality of a birdsong encounter. philosopher Hélène Cixous' description of imminence is useful to clarify this. For Cixous, painting moves beyond the ego when painting an imminent thing, which helps distance the process from representing any intention of an artist. Cixous describes a painter as a "bird-catcher of instants",³⁴ and as such, "voyagers of truth".³⁵ To return to Lomax's theory of an 'event' embodying the 'origination of truth', it is crucial to say here that painting this imminence of birdsong transposes the 'truth' of the transposition of birdsong undertaking in the landscape. I take this to suggest that it is the moving of the tool pressing against the paper, squeezing, and displacing ink that transposes the movement of pencil across paper in the spatio- temporal experience of birdsong in the landscape, over the print itself. This process moves my thinking away

³⁴ Hélène Cixous, 'The Last Painting or the Portrait of God', in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. by Clive Cazeaux (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 599– 614 (p. 599).

³⁵ Cixous, (p. 608).

from painting the *concept* of birdsong, i.e., the wider 'situation' of birdsong, which would be to represent birdsong. Identifying this aspect of the process suggests that a painter cannot paint ideas as to quote Cixous: "[t]here is no subject. There are only mysteries. There are only questions".³⁶ Materiality fosters an intangible exploration where it intervenes with the artist's ego through chance. Painting with a printing plate that opens-up an infinite number of contingent possibilities and changes demonstrates painting *towards* 'thinking on the metaphysical'.

Painting towards 'thinking on the metaphysical' avoids exploring metaphysicality in a communicable language.

Returning to Bolt is useful here:

The insistence of the dynamic [painting] constitutes a key energy [that] prevents the painting from being reduced to just a sign.³⁷

Painting as producing an energy that I suggest brings the possibility to move towards a 'becoming-knowledge' that provides a means for exploring 'thinking on the metaphysical' in the peripheries of language. In this way,

³⁶ Cixous, (p. 608).

³⁷ Barbara Bolt, 'Painting Is Not a Representational Practice', in *Unframed: Practices and Politics of Women's Contemporary Painting*, ed. by Rosemary Betterton, (London: I.B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2003), pp. 41–61 (p. 50).

painting can be seen as an 'event' in itself. To draw on Claro, an *aesthetic* event that "convey[s] the imminence of a revelation."³⁸ Therefore, painting processes – as they are understood in this research – are seen as the site of an aesthetic event of knowledge that is always in a state of becoming.

Painting as an 'event' that touches on the imminence of an understanding can be further explained by exploring Taylor's theory of the 'quasacle'. For Taylor, the 'quasacle' describes the "*becoming* of an event" that is "tied up with the practice of painting".³⁹ She describes this 'becoming of an event' as bound in the "performative and material nature of painting" that rejects any representational model.⁴⁰ I engage Taylor's concept of the 'quasacle' with the thinking *place* in material embodied encounter because of how the 'quasacle' operates in materiality.

Painting process as a place for 'thinking on the metaphysical' creates the need to interrogate how the

processes are interpreted. A shared material place of thinking, between artist and materiality, as a form of material thinking disrupts the dualism between the maker and the art object. In doing so, this follows Schwab's theory that transposition mitigates against the dangers of a "representational fallout" of knowledge during interpretation of the transpositional processes.⁴¹ As I have explored earlier, material thinking is epistemological. Interpretation of the slippery shared knowledge between materiality and artist is in danger of being represented when exploring such processes. To draw on Schwab, interpretation causes a "break" in this epistemological place that results in representational knowledge.⁴² It seems that an artist interpreting an art making process extracts singular moments from the shared epistemology with materiality to form a communicable language from material thinking that disrupts the dualism of materiality and artist. Therefore, exploring painting as a transpositional

³⁸ Andrés Claro, 'Borgean Transpositions: From Ear to Eye', *New Centennial Review*, 11.1 (2011), 161–211 <<https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2011.0006>> [accessed 27 February 2022] (p. 194).

³⁹ Jacqueline Erika Taylor, 'Writing//Painting ; l'écriture Féminine and Difference in the Making' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Birmingham City University, 2013), p. 126.

⁴⁰ Taylor, p. 130.

⁴¹ Schwab, (p. 198).

⁴² Schwab, (p. 198).

place that moves towards ‘thinking on the metaphysical’ can only be seen as ‘becoming knowledge’.

Exploring this means approaching the development of knowledge very carefully. To avoid representational frameworks encumbering the moving transpositional process, reflective thought on such processes should be seen as an epistemic function that to quote Schwab, postpones:

claims as to what precisely it is we know while continuing to add relevant materials.⁴³

It is key to acknowledge moments of the unknown in material thinking here. A way to undertake this complex task is to explore facets of chance that emerge from making art and how this operates in cooperation with an artist’s intention. Using painting practice to explore transposition means that the artist sets up the circumstances by which chance can happen. To draw on Emma Cocker, the artist’s intention is

“used for making openings, for rupturing the terms of what is already known”.⁴⁴

To return to Lomax, an artist’s intention curates the ‘situation’ for working *with* materiality. The ‘event’ of material processes then takes place in the performativity of working with the ‘otherness’ of materiality – i.e., material thinking. Returning also to Lomax’s concept of ‘being-ness’ in ontological speculation provides means to explore how processes of ‘becoming-knowledge’ are activated. Nadja Gabriela Plein’s theory of painting as an experimental lab is useful here. Plein describes a painter as both “observer and doer”⁴⁵ whereby a mark on a painted surface speaks “of specific moments and specific conditions”.⁴⁶ Painted surfaces, then, are seen as a record of convergence between artist and material. The epistemological state of material thinking is the result of intention of the artist and chance, brought about by the plasticity of materials, worked with during painting practice.

⁴³ Schwab, (pp. 198-199).

⁴⁴ Emma Cocker, ‘Tactics for Not Knowing: Preparing for the Unexpected’, in *On Not Knowing: How Artists Think*, , ed. by Elizabeth Fisher and Rebecca Fortum, 2013, pp. 126–135, p. 130.

⁴⁵ Nadja Gabriela Plein, ‘The Intentional Brushstroke’, *Nadja Gabriela Plein*, 2019 <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5efb1157ead5295eee48ce98/t/5f032b18e84f7d7af22ded65/1594043160525/Nadja+Gabriela+Plein_The+Intentional+Brushstroke.pdf> [accessed 27 February], p. 12.

⁴⁶ Plein, p. 13.

Chance and intention

My explorations in printmaking found that the distancing of an artist from a painting is activated by moments of chance whereby the agency of material and tools created unexpected moments (see pages 146 – 149 now). The printing plate became a “social object” To use artist Timur Si Qin’s term.⁴⁷ The process of working on the prints were conditioned by the social object that leads this research to understand that the intention of an artist creates a space for materiality to intersect with chance. I propose that material thinking via the creation of paintings operates in the realm of ‘not-knowing’. It is the ‘otherness’ of materiality that creates ‘not-knowing’, activating slippages between intention and chance as bound up in an embodied encounter. Adams states that an:

‘otherness’ is that which has remained outside the signifying chain, desired and only dimly seen by the artist and acceded to only with the help of ‘accidents’ and ‘chance’ interventions.⁴⁸

‘Not-knowing’ is central to explore due to the ways in which ‘thinking on the metaphysical’ explores the unknown, intangible, and irresolute facets of birdsong on the peripheries of language. In order to investigate ‘thinking on the metaphysical’ in the peripheries of visual language, an artist must be open to ‘not-knowing’. To follow Cocker, to navigate not-knowing, the artist must attune to the pressures of contradictory forces and hold back the familiar to usher in the “unfamiliar, unrecognisable or unknown”.⁴⁹ The knowledge of the painting process cannot be gained without experience – painting must be approached in a state of not-knowing so that in experience, things can be found out. It is only through experiencing the unknown during the social engagement with materiality in painting process that ‘becoming-knowledge’ emerges.

⁴⁷ Timur Si Qin, ‘Aesthetics of Contingency: Materialism, Evolution, Art’, *Timur Si Qin*, 2017 <<https://www.pca-stream.com/en/articles/timur-si-qin-aesthetics-of-contingency-materialism-evolution-art-108>> [accessed 3 October 2021].

⁴⁸ Parveen Adams, *The Emptiness of the Image: Psychoanalysis and Sexual Differences* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 113-4.

⁴⁹ Cocker, (p. 127).

Writing-thinking extract

1st October 2019

Figure 3.12

Untitled

I repeat my earlier methods of spreading ink onto the printing glass and use the end of a pencil to carve out the shape of one of my transcriptions. I then place some paper on top of the ink and move a baron firmly across the paper so the paper will lift the ink from the plate. I use green this time.

As I carefully peel the paper away from the plate, I find an uneven layer of green paint on the paper. Forms that I had not drawn have registered on the page, and upon inspecting the plate correlate with areas where the ink has seemingly semi-dried and has stayed stuck to the glass. The paper has rendered my movements with the roller to spread the ink across the glass too.

The print presents dialogue between materiality and my intention. Through chance occurrences during the printing process, new forms have appeared and communicate with my drawn marks. There are gaps in the ink, most noticeably on the left-hand side of the print. The whiteness of the paper in these gaps matches the whiteness of the form that I had carefully curated on the plate. The way the white forms are suspended in the pictorial plane reminds me of how my marks were suspended on some of my note pages as if floating on the page. The print is spatial – the ink changes and roller marks cause a depth that was not found in my transcriptions but very much speaks to the depth of the landscape and distance between birds and myself as I notated the birdsong.



Figure 3.12. Harriet Carter, *Untitled*, (2019). Monoprint, 29 x 29cm.

Writing-thinking extract

1st October 2019

Figure 3.13

Untitled

I am spurred on by this new information learned about the printmaking being so interactive with my actions with its materiality. It makes me look back at a print that I had initially discarded because the marks I had made were blurred and smudged because of a different density of ink and water residue leftover from cleaning the plate between colours.

The haze of blue seems to hover over blue and faint golden marks – they sort of accompany them. The marks remind me of the hazy air that surrounded me in the warm summer's morning where condensation on the orchard grass was quickly dissipating into atmosphere at the arrival of the morning sun. The actions of the materiality have caused this mirroring of experience in the landscape – this is something that could not have been foreseen – indeed it is difficult to grasp this process as it is not something I will be able to repeat. Is this moment of making a metaphysicality somehow?



Figure 3.13. Harriet Carter, *Untitled*, (2019). Monoprint, 46.8 x 31.5cm.

Improvisation – to act without premeditation – is seen as the result of working intuitively with materials, indeed *inventing* with materials, and consequently, I argue vital in ‘not-knowing’ (see pages 151 – 152 now). To turn to academic Paul Carter’s deliberations on material thinking, invention [...] is located neither after nor before the process of making but in the performance itself”.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Carter describes that in this process, “materials are always in a state of becoming”. The constant ‘becoming’ of materials prevents the artist from being able to grasp at the development occurring in the materiality’s ‘otherness’. It is useful to turn to Deleuze and Guattari, who state that: “art can live only by creating new percepts and affects” where a sensation exists “as long as the material lasts”.⁵¹ Materiality can hence be seen as disrupting an artist’s knowledge of process.

To follow O’Sullivan, the material interruption of an artist’s comprehension creates a “zone of indeterminacy [that] allows a multiplicity of different pathways [to emerge]”.⁵² The

indeterminate ‘otherness’ of materiality creates contingent possibilities in a push-pull of dialogue with the artist. To follow Si Qin, material “takes an active role in the creation of its own form”.⁵³ In conjunction with Cocker, the epistemological conditions created via material thinking might therefore be seen as a dialogue of chance and contingency.⁵⁴ Therefore, working *with* materiality – and embracing not-knowing – is a negotiation between the artist’s intention and the tendencies of the material. Working *with* materiality in this sense creates endless possibilities that mirrors the chance-based ‘event’ of transcribing birdsong in the landscape.

This research strives to explore transposition of a moving, metaphysical encounter with birdsong, using stilled painted surfaces as physical objects to locate the metaphysical within birdsong. The concept of ‘becoming-knowledge’ creates *potential* for finding things out via material thinking, through chance and contingency.

⁵⁰ Paul Carter, ‘The Ethics of Invention’, in *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, ed. by Estelle Barratt and Barbara Bolt, (London: I.B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2010), pp. 15–26 (p. 19).

⁵¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. by Columbia University Press (London: Verso, 2009), p. 193.

⁵² Simon O’Sullivan, ‘From Stuttering and Stammering to the Diagram: Deleuze, Bacon and Contemporary Art Practice’, *Deleuze Studies*, 3.2 (2009), 247–58 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/45331700>> [accessed 27 February 2022] (p. 250).

⁵³ Si Qin.

⁵⁴ Si Qin.

Writing-thinking extract

1st October 2019

Figure 3.14

The Orchard II

I repeat my earlier method of drawing on top of paper pressed onto an inked-up plate.

I ink the plate up again using a golden colour to once again, evoke the bright sunshine that surrounded me when I notated on a sunny day in the Worcestershire orchard. I am careful with the roller this time – using a larger roller which was the width of the paper I was using to prevent roller marks from occurring. I press the paper on top of the inked-up plate and this time, draw on the back of the paper. I copy the drawn marks I had made in the orchard.

More surprises – there must have been a trace of ink left from the last print because the form I had carved through the ink last time has appeared creating a ghostly mark on the right-hand side of the print. Another ghost from the previous print is a sweep of ink that looks to me like the movements I had made before with the baron.

Once more, the ink must have dried before I had time to render it on the paper – the gold colour is unevenly spread across the page. Once again, this reminds me of depth. The marks I had drawn on top of the paper have come through really clearly – they are bold and stand out against the more textured background.

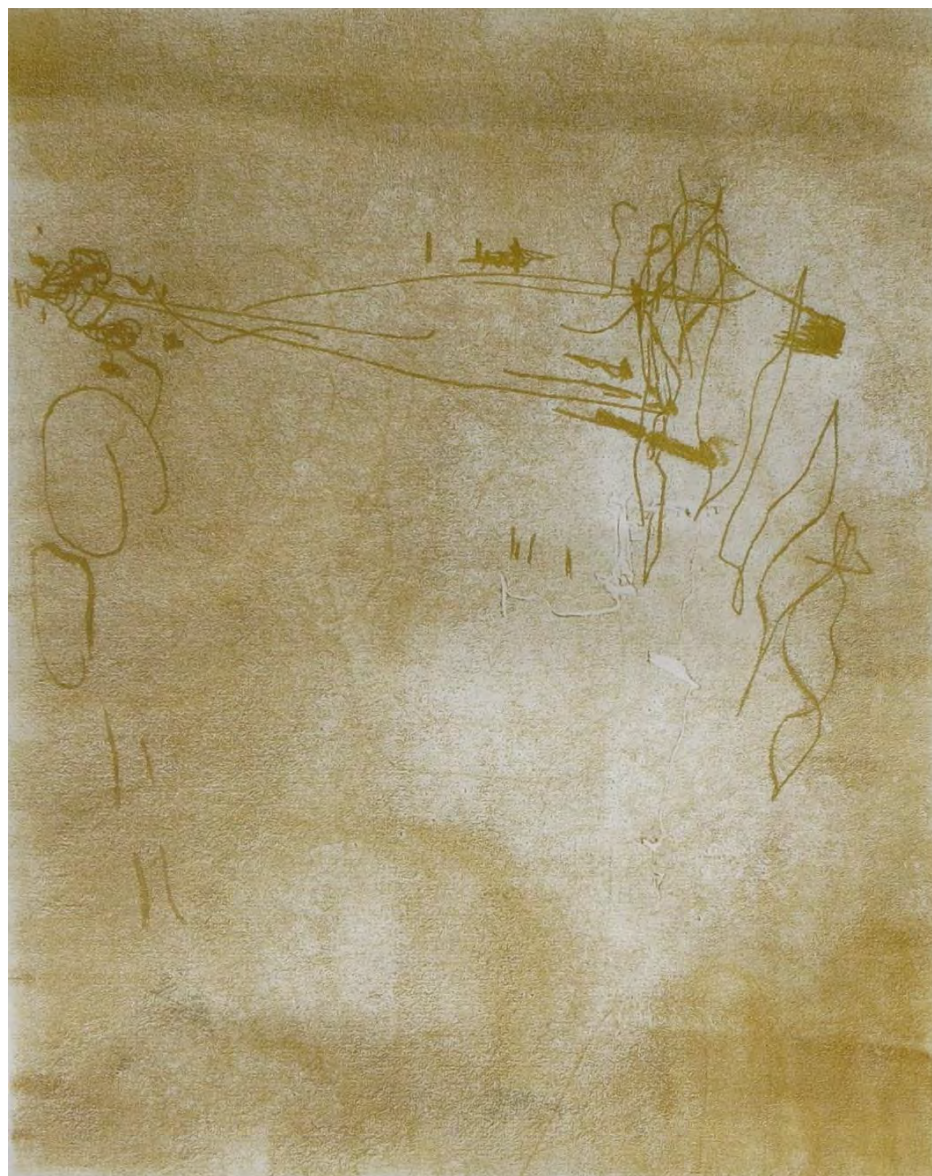


Figure 3.14. Harriet Carter, *The Orchard*, (2019). Monoprint, 46.8 x 31.5cm.

Not-knowing provides means to move painting processes to the peripheries of language – a suitable vehicle to exploring birdsong that resides in the ‘elsewhere’ of language.

Materialism counters intention through chance. Mark-making or transcription, in the evanescence (to use Lomax’s term here) of a moving ‘event’ of birdsong is a place of ‘becoming-knowledge’ aided by material perception, and a transposition of a polysensory encounter. Exploring painting as an ‘event’ provides further means to explore the transpositional place of transcribing birdsong in the landscape through transposition. Painting processes are then another transpositional thinking place of material perception for ‘becoming-knowledge’, this time from a transposed encounter with birdsong in transcription, to the construction of painted surfaces. Transposition is bound in mark-making processes. Constructing painted surfaces can be considered a cross boundary repositioning of the ‘becoming-knowledge’ in the spatio-temporal transcription of birdsong, to the ‘becoming-knowledge’ in the spatio-temporal construction of painted surfaces. Metaphysicality is then, potentially located in the ‘becoming-knowledge’, within these transpositional movements.

3. Messiaen: material perception and ‘becoming-knowledge’

The idea of making space for material thinking, of setting up the circumstance for which chance can happen can be mapped in Messiaen’s work. It is possible to identify Messiaen engineering circumstances by which his birdsong transcriptions can be transposed into the final music composition.

I have found that mark-making embodies polysensory, spatio-temporal encounters with birdsong as an ‘event’ (to appropriate Lomax’s term that describes encountering a thing in the world). I propose that Messiaen’s *cahiers* demonstrate evidence of similar experiences. Whilst Messiaen transposed auditory and visual transcriptions of birdsong into an auditory medium (music), and I explore the transposition of auditory and visual transcriptions of birdsong into a visual medium (painting), the transpositional methodology is the same. Simply, the transferral of polysensory encounters with birdsong to an encounter for an audience with just one sense, for Messiaen: sound, for me: sight. Hence, it is crucial here to explore how his compositional processes can be identified as transpositional.

Messiaen's hand drawn transcriptions in his *cahiers* embody his polysensory encounters with birdsong in the landscape (sight, smell, taste, hearing, touch) through written prose, and musical notation of birdsong. Furthermore, I contend that Messiaen's *cahiers* are an 'example' (using Lomax's term to describe a thing that stands beside itself) of the 'event' of birdsong. I contend that the *cahiers* are the key to exploring Messiaen's encounter with the landscape which I position as transpositional and are examples of 'becoming-knowledge', a result of material perception. This notated spatio-temporal experience in his *cahiers* demonstrate transcription as transposition, specifically via the imbrication of birdsong and landscape from polysensory encounter.

Like my transcriptions of birdsong in the Worcestershire Orchard, Messiaen's transcription of birdsong in his *cahiers* can be explored in the same way. I assert that Messiaen's transcriptions that were carried out in the landscape are directed by chance, due to the moving, uncontrollable ephemera that is embedded in a

spatio-temporal encounter with the 'event' of birdsong in the landscape. As I have published elsewhere, looking at Messiaen's *cahier* pages provides an idea of how Messiaen perceived his experience with birdsong:

A conglomeration of hurried prose is squeezed into the margins, and the note placements on the stave have a run-like aesthetic [that] provides a pictorial echo of Messiaen's hand, his attempts to keep up with birdsong.⁵⁵

Following my attempts to 'chase' the sound of birdsong in the Worcestershire orchard through mark-making, I suggest that the indecipherable quality of Messiaen's musical notation and written prose demonstrate that he too 'chased' the sound of birdsong.

Exploring how Messiaen used this transposition of birdsong in his *cahiers* to compose his birdsong music provides means to explore 'becoming-knowledge' in his compositional processes. To do so, I consider aleatoricism and serialism, to build on the relationship between intention

⁵⁵ Harriet Carter, 'Shared Birdsong? Exploring Messiaen's Relationship with Place and Birdsong through Drawing', in *Songs of Place and Time: Birdsong and the Dawn Chorus in Natural History and the Arts*, ed. by Mike Collier, Bennett Hogg,

and John Strachan (Manchester: Gaia Project, 2020), pp. 332–42
<https://issuu.com/driling/docs/songs_of_time____place_final_high_res_reduced_> (p. 332).

and chance that I have identified as vital for transposing the metaphysicality of a birdsong encounter.

Aleatoricism is the incorporation of chance in the creation of artworks. An example of aleatoricism can be found in artist Lee Krasner's oeuvre of collage paintings, a period which lasted between 1938 – 1981, debuting in 1955. Tearing up her own, and (her husband) Jackson Pollock's older paintings, Krasner composed these collages via chance juxtaposition of pre-decided content in her previous work outside of her full control compared to the immediate act of painterly composition (see figure 3.15). This process demonstrates material thinking where contingencies and chance are brought to the fore in aleatoricism. As I explored earlier, chance and intention define the relationship between materiality and transposition.

An alternative example of aleatoricism is the 1952 music composition *4'33"* for any instrument or ensemble by John Cage. Cage produced a score that apart from an instruction for a timer to keep the time, is absent of musical notation. Performers are instructed not to play their instruments. Rather, the incidental sounds caused by the

audience and movements around the performance space create the music for the work.



Figure 3.15. Lee Krasner, *Stretched Yellow*, (1955). Oil with paper on canvas, 209.55 x 146.69cm.

Cage removed as much of his control as possible, which echoes serialism, a strand of music composition in music during this period. The creator of serialist music severely restricts their artistic freedom, handing over control to the

process. To use composer George Rothberg's definition of serial music, a serialist composition is aleatoric in the sense the notes are already decided by "predetermined relationships derived from number and mathematics" and therefore liberated from "the dictatorship of inspiration".⁵⁶ I see a serialist technique in composition as mirroring the working *with* materiality in painting process.

Drawing on compositional acts of serialism and aleatoricism, as described in the visual arts and music, the movement between Messiaen's transcriptions in his *cahiers* and music scores in *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, I assert that this is a form of an aleatoric 'collaging'. For example, in the taking and repositioning his birdsong notations from his *cahiers* into music score.

Messiaen composed from his *cahier* material differently throughout the nature portraits in *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, which I will explore in Book Four. *Catalogue d'oiseaux* presents a transposition of Messiaen's 'thinking on the metaphysical'.

This can be explored specifically through examining how he used intention and chance in his birdsong music. Two other musical interpretations of birdsong by Messiaen that came before *Catalogue d'oiseaux: Réveil des oiseaux* (1953) and *Oiseaux exotiques* (1955 – 1956) provide means to explore this.

Orchestral piece *Réveil des oiseaux* appears to be composed literally from Messiaen's *cahiers*, as Hill states: "[t]he *cahiers* show how literally Messiaen incorporated his notations into the score".⁵⁷ *Réveil des oiseaux* was, as Hill says: "an experiment in musical ornithology, conducted under strict rules",⁵⁸ in an indicated character of composition that demonstrates his "reluctance to alter his birdsong data".⁵⁹ In doing so, I contend that *Réveil des oiseaux* is an example of aleatoricism where there is little evidence of compositional editing by Messiaen in the straight lifting of the birdsong from *cahier* to stave. He makes the circumstances where

⁵⁶ George Rothberg, *The Modern Composer and His World*, ed. by John Beckwith and Udo Kasemets (Scholarly Reprint Edition: University of Toronto Press, 1978), p. 62.

⁵⁷ Peter Hill, 'From Réveil des Oiseaux to Catalogue d'oiseaux: Messiaen's Cahiers de Notations des Chants d'oiseaux, 1952-59', in *Messiaen Perspectives 1*:

Sources and Influences, ed. by Christopher Dingle and Robert Fallon (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), pp. 143-174 (p.170).

⁵⁸ Hill, (p. 152).

⁵⁹ Hill, (p. 148).

chance is allowed to play a part in the composition through the straight lifting from the *cahier* to the stave.

Oiseaux exotiques in contrast, demonstrates Messiaen's intention as a composer once again, working largely from recordings and from birds at Madame Billot's aviary in 1954, and re-notating his transcriptions and selectively picking out motifs from many transcriptions in his *cahiers*.⁶⁰ The organisation of a vast number of birds in *Oiseaux exotiques* provides evidence of Messiaen reworking his *cahier* transcriptions. Importantly, the birdsong acts as a compositional found material where there is no structure framed by nature that the resides within, unlike the musical interpretation of the dawn chorus in *Réveil des oiseaux* and indeed all the portraits of *Catalogue d'oiseaux* that are framed by the landscape and time. By using the *cahier* content this way, Messiaen erases the moments of space and time that embodied his transcriptions of birdsong. As a result, *Oiseaux exotiques* can be seen as a representation of the wider 'situation' of exotic birds.

In contrast, *Catalogue d'oiseaux* is seen as a transpositional thinking place. In *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, each nature portrait birdsong is framed by a habitat. This mirrors the embodied encounter Messiaen had with both birdsong and the landscape where he transcribed the landscape using written text, and birdsong using musical notation. Repositioning both the ensemble of birdsong and landscape transcribed during his encounters with birdsong and the landscape attests to Messiaen polysensory experiences transcribing birdsong in the landscape. This can be explored in the elements of serialist control in the *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, that demonstrate a push-pull between chance (as embodied in his birdsong transcriptions) and intention (repositioning his transcriptions into music). It is useful to use Hill's words here:

Eight of the 13 pieces contain [serialism] in some form, clear quasi-serial passages that follow strictly their own logic but at the same time create a counterpart to the image in nature being described.⁶¹

Throughout *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, there is evidence of Messiaen taking an orchestrating role to allow for chance in

⁶⁰ Hill, (p. 156).

⁶¹ Hill, (p. 170).

transposing from his *cahiers*. Chance (in the aleatoric sense of removing his voice – or orchestrating role – as the composer) can be seen in the way he repositioned his birdsong transcriptions from his *cahiers* directly to score. Intention can be seen in the places where he reworked transcribed birdsong material into the musical score, reinstating his voice – or orchestrating role (in the aleatoric sense).

To follow Hill, *Catalogue d'oiseaux* for Messiaen “reconciled [the] two extremes” of composition approaches with *Oiseaux exotiques* and *Réveil des oiseaux*.⁶² Chadwick and Hill state that *Catalogue d'oiseaux* is the outcome of Messiaen sampling nature by “creating musical discourse from found objects”.⁶³ This musical discourse is embodied in Messiaen’s use of serialism, describing the piano cycle as a pitch series that is subjected to thirty-five permutations – several possible ways the series can be ordered – using the method Messiaen devised whereby: “the same pattern of rearrangement recurs from one intervention to the next.”⁶⁴ I

assert that the serialist techniques employed to house the found material allows his transcriptions of birdsong to occupy their own space by framing it with permutations either side of it.

I see this ‘sampling’ of nature – to use Chadwick and Hill’s term – as a transposition of the way in which Messiaen perceived birdsong as music. The written prefaces setting the scene to each nature portrait act in dialogue with the score in the same way Messiaen’s written and musical transcriptions in his *cahiers* transposed the spatio-temporal embodied encounter with the ‘event’ of birdsong. By framing the birdsong transcriptions in his *cahiers* with transcriptions of the landscape, Messiaen changes the place of encountering the spatio-temporal imbrication of birdsong and landscape, from material perception in his *cahier* to the temporal medium of music.

It is possible to speculate that the central piece of *Catalogue d'oiseaux* – ‘La Rousserolle effarvatte’ (The Reed warbler) – highlights a potential push-pull between intention

⁶² Hill, (p. 144).

⁶³ Roderick Chadwick and Peter Hill, *Olivier Messiaen’s Catalogue d’oiseaux: From Conception to Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 68.

⁶⁴ Chadwick and Hill, p. 69.

and chance in the way Messiaen can be seen as directed by his experience in the landscape. Specifically, in the way Messiaen explores the infinite nature of time and how nature operates in the temporal cycle of a day (as I explored in Book Two). The infinity of time manifests in the musical cycle of a day and a bit via the twenty-seven-hour reconciliation in the piece. Western musical structures tend to start in a place (depicted in a musical key), move away from it, develop, and then returns at the end. The last three hours depicted in 'La Rousserolle effarvatte' do not follow this model. Messiaen goes a step further in that the journey continues outside of the parameters of the normative structures of a music piece.

The nature portrait provides the imaginative cacophony of wildlife and birds in a composite of a daring structure. The piece is very much in this sense composed – whereby the imaginative design of the portrait demonstrates Messiaen's intention – whilst at the same time taking its cue precisely from the chance-directed temporal events in nature of the cycle of a day that Messiaen experienced during his transcriptions of birdsong at the Camargue (these can be found in *cahier* MS-23043).

The different approaches in Messiaen's compositions in the examples of *Réveil des oiseaux*, *oiseaux exotiques*, and *Catalogue d'oiseaux* demonstrate three different forms of Messiaen thinking *through* process of moving between his *cahiers* and compositions. I contend that Messiaen's changing use of aleatoricism in working with his birdsong material from his *cahiers* as I have explored in *Réveil des oiseaux*, and *Oiseaux exotiques*, presents a process of 'thinking on the metaphysical' that ultimately slips into translation.

Just as I explored painting process as a transpositional place for 'becoming-knowledge', *Catalogue d'oiseaux* can too be considered a transpositional place for 'becoming-knowledge'. I propose that Messiaen's repositioning of his transpositions in his *cahiers* to the prefaces and score of his nature portraits was a mirroring of how he perceived the music of birdsong as framed by the landscape.

Messiaen's 'thinking on the metaphysical' as embodied in his sacramental perception of birdsong was transposed into material perception through the musical notation of birdsong and written prose in his *cahiers* as he 'chased' birdsong. By using the time-based medium to transpose moving mark-making of transcribing birdsong demonstrates a process of

‘becoming-knowledge’ of ‘thinking on the metaphysical’ in his fascination with the eternal. The metaphysicality of the eternal could have been glimpsed during the *process* of moving between his *cahiers* and music score in music practice, in the ‘becoming-knowledge’.

4. Conclusions

I have used the notion of the ‘event’ to explore the spatio-temporal nature of an embodied encounter with birdsong in the landscape. I have explored how transcribing birdsong encounters can be defined in this research as ‘material perception’, taking place in the ‘specious present’ of encountering birdsong. Exploring the spatio-temporal encounter with birdsong led to a further problematisation of translation, building on Pirrò’s theory of complexification from Book One. By using the concepts of ‘deep listening’ and ‘simultaneous contrast’, I have explored the ways in which a polysensory embodied encounter with birdsong can be considered an expanded form of transcription that is a form of ‘thinking on the metaphysical’.

Furthermore, I have explored how mark-making and painting processes are thinking *p/aces* that foster ‘becoming-

knowledge’. I considered how these thinking places of ‘becoming-knowledge’ activates a transpositional dimension of an encounter with birdsong. Building on theories of the ‘situation’ and ‘event’, I have considered birdsong in the landscape as a ‘situation’ that leads to the ‘event’ of experiencing it as a form of embodied encounter. Mark-making is intertwined with the moving multiplicity of senses that are activated in the event during ‘material perception’. Therefore, the moving spatio-temporality of encountering birdsong is transposed through the moving spatio-temporality of mark-making in the encounter.

Rather than attempting to read, make sense and ultimately translate birdsong, I have used mark-making to explore the metaphysicality of a polysensory embodied encounter with birdsong. To seek the metaphysicality of birdsong means that birdsong cannot be studied as a language. Rather, the embodied encounter with birdsong as an ‘event’ imbricated with metaphysicality can be explored in transcription as transposition. This has helped me to understand that transcribing birdsong in the landscape provides opportunities to explore its metaphysicality. Experiencing birdsong as a form of embodied encounter

resonates with being in space and time as unknown, intangible, and irresolute.

I have explored how – as an artist – I provide opportunities for this material thinking to happen, for materiality to intersect processes operating by chance.

I have explored how Messiaen's role in transposing shows he allowed for the metaphysicality to do the thinking for him through a combination of him making space for chance to happen (in his use of both aleatoric and serialist composition methods). I used this thinking to consider Messiaen's transcriptions of birdsong as transpositional, by exploring Messiaen's *cahiers* as vehicles of material perception. I have explored Messiaen's movements from his *cahiers* to compositions, exploring *Réveil des oiseaux*, *Oiseaux exotiques*, and *Catalogue d'oiseaux* to propose that Messiaen's composition of *Catalogue d'oiseaux* was a transposition of his encounter with birdsong as transposed in his *cahiers*. In doing so, I explored how Messiaen allows his sacred perception to thrive with chance, to reengage his 'thinking on the metaphysical'. This enabled me to explore *Catalogue d'oiseaux* as a further transpositional place of 'becoming knowledge'.

BOOK FOUR:
Transposition²



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Introduction

In Book One, I defined transposition as a cross-boundary, repositioning. In Book Two, I introduced how metaphysicality is understood and operates in my research. In Book Three, I connected metaphysicality with experiences transcribing embodied encounters with birdsong as transpositional vehicles of material perception. In this book, I explore both transposition and the metaphysicality via analysing Messiaen's methods of birdsong transcription and composition in his *cahiers* and scores of two nature portraits in *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. I analyse Messiaen's transcriptions of birdsong and the landscape in his *cahiers* to further interrogate my argument that these are transpositional vehicles of a birdsong encounter.

Here, I focus on two of the thirteen nature portraits in *Catalogue d'oiseaux*: 'L'Alouette calandrelle' (Short-toed Lark) and 'Le Merle de roche' (Rock Thrush), proposing that the

cahiers that informed these two pieces embody my definition of two different modes of transposition: polysensory unimodal transposition and polysensory multimodal transposition. 'Poly-' is used in this research in the etymological definition of a combining form, standing for more than one of something.¹ 'Uni-' is defined as a combining form, standing for the consistency of something as being only one.² 'Modal' is defined as an adjective indicating a characteristic of something³ and 'sensory' is defined as an adjective referring simply to the physical senses.⁴ My new definitions build on the medical definition of polymodal as "responding to several different forms of sensory stimulation".⁵

This book is split into three sections. The first section of this book critically analyses connections between the preface of 'L'Alouette calandrelle' and the music score. I do this in two ways, firstly by drawing correspondences between transcriptions of birdsong and the landscape in the *cahiers*

¹ Collins Dictionary, 'Definition of "Poly"', in *Collins*, 2021 <<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/poly>> [accessed 27 February 2022].

² Collins Dictionary, 'Definition of "Uni"', in *Collins*, 2021 <<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/uni>> [accessed 27 February].

³ Collins Dictionary, 'Definition of "Modal"', in *Collins*, 2021 <<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/modal>> [accessed 27 February].

⁴ Collins Dictionary, 'Definition of "Sensory"', in *Collins*, 2021 <<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/sensory>> [accessed 27 February].

⁵ Merriam-Webster, 'Polymodal', in *Merriam-Webster*, 2021 <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/medical/polymodal>> [accessed 16 November 2021].

and music score and secondly, by undertaking listening encounters with the two pieces (building on Oliveros's deep listening theory as discussed in Book Three).⁶ I propose that Messiaen demonstrates polysensory unimodal transposition in the imbrication of landscape and birdsong in his transcriptions that ultimately leads to the composition of 'L'Alouette calandrelle'.

The second section then conducts the same critical analysis of the preface to 'Le Merle de roche' and the music score. I propose that Messiaen demonstrates polysensory multimodal transposition in transcribing birdsong from recordings and transcribing the landscape in-situ that leads to the composition of 'Le Merle de roche'.

The third section articulates the ways and the extent that my own painting practice interrogates the two forms of transposition that I argue are undertaken by Messiaen. I firstly describe my painting processes undertaken to explore polysensory unimodal transposition in detail. I describe the processes undertaken in painting to explore my field notebooks as transpositional objects of material perception,

focusing on the two imbricated facets of a spatio-temporal encounter in a 'situation': birdsong and the landscape. By comparing Messiaen's transpositional processes, the paintings explore how 'L'Alouette calandrelle' operates as having been composed from a transpositional object (his *cahiers*). In doing so, I explore Messiaen's responsive composition of a musical embodied encounter with birdsong ('L'Alouette calandrelle') through creating responsive visual embodiments of a birdsong encounter. To do so, I explore the imbrication of the landscape and birdsong in my notebooks, directed by exploring this imbrication in Messiaen's *cahiers*, underpinned by the polysensory encounter (of experiencing aroma, heat, sight, and hearing, unimodally), incorporated into a pictorial plane.

My transpositional explorations are analysed in the order that I encountered them. I undertook transpositional explorations of 'L'Alouette calandrelle' first, and then 'Le Merle de roche' which, due to the global pandemic, were explored without direct access to the *cahier* material. I accessed *cahier* material at the Bibliothèque nationale de France archives for 'L'Alouette calandrelle' and it was through exploring this

⁶ These listening encounters will be clearly indicated and appear in *italics*.

nature portrait that I was able to build on knowledge that I was unable to source for 'Le Merle de roche'. Because of the interrupted fieldwork, it was only sometime after that it became clear to me that 'L'Alouette calandrelle' and 'Le Merle de roche' embody two different forms of transposition. Had I been able to, I would have returned to the archives prior to the summative fieldtrip (that the global pandemic prevented), to source the material that I realised I needed.

Instead, immersing myself within the landscape in Cirque de Mourèze during the field trip in 2019 informed how I undertook transpositional methods in my painting practice responding to the preface and score of 'Le Merle de roche'. As a result, I provide here, an in-depth exploration of my painting processes surrounding *L'Alouette calandrelle* that relate to the *cahier* transcriptions I accessed and the locations in France I was able to visit. I use this exploration to inform how I responded to my transpositional encounter with birdsong and the landscape at Cirque de Mourèze, to speculate about the polysensory multimodal potential of transposition.

The third section is comprised of two voices: the first is definitive prose in the main text (as signified here), and the other is that of 'writing-thinking' (adopting Taylor's method of thinking through writing as art-writing).⁷ Writing-thinking is situated alongside images of my painting practice, interspersed throughout the main text. Writing-thinking is dated and can be identified in this green text. As I explained in Book One, this research identifies material thinking as imbricated in painting practice, residing on the peripheries of communicable sign-systems (both written and visual language). There is a material dialogue between materiality and painting processes that is embodied therein in writing-thinking. Writing-thinking takes the form of more descriptive prose that reflects on the making process and material thinking. In doing so, writing-thinking aims to address the slippage of meaning during working with the 'otherness' of materiality in the peripheries of visual language and therefore, navigates the nuances of 'becoming-knowledge' that takes place during my painting enquiry. The inclusion of writing-thinking aims to articulate the complex layering of embodied

⁷ Jacqueline Erika Taylor, 'Writing//Painting ; l'écriture Féminine and Difference in the Making' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Birmingham City University, 2013), p. 94.

thoughts and actions that incorporate processes of not-knowing in making with materials. Writing-thinking acts as a bridge between material thinking in the painting processes and definitive prose, where I include the moments of attempting to grasp the things that happened in the embodied painting encounter.

1. Polysensory unimodal transposition (L'Alouette calandrelle')

Before reading on – I recommend you listen to a performance of 'L'Alouette calandrelle' as you read my listening encounter.⁸

Listening encounter

'L'Alouette calandrelle' takes the listener to the hot, desert-like planes of La Crau and Les Baux with pauses and drawn-out chords that reflect the vastness of the planes of Provence, juxtaposed with the fast-paced interventions of birds and insects. The piece opens with the slow, peaceful introduction of the landscape through two chords and a direction above the score for those playing the piece: 'heat and solitude of La

Crau desert'. The chords are entirely alone and the use of the sustain pedal holds the notes a little longer. The extended vibrations of the piano strings create a moment of stillness, transporting the listener to the sweep of wilderness that is described in the written preface. Then, the desert chords ring out twice more after two sudden, sharp interruptions from the Short-toed Lark (L'Alouette calandrelle'). After a monotonous scream from a choir of cicadas, the piece gets into full swing with a busy, fast-paced five-minute ensemble of birdsong from the Common Kestrel, Quail, Short-toed Lark, and Crested Lark, all vying for attention. The cicada's abrasive call conjures the desert planes of Provence engulfed in fierce heat. Messiaen's use of monotone after the fluid song of the Short-toed Lark provides a jarring sound element, so we might almost feel the invisible creatures are enveloping the listener with their racket competing with the avian protagonist. Around two thirds of the way through the piece, the surrounding landscape creeps back into focus with a long interruption from another choir of cicadas. The Common Kestrel reappears, followed once again

⁸ You can find a performance of 'L'Alouette calandrelle' by Peter Hill on YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDj9zRBc1vY>

*by the Quail, in an echo of earlier motifs. Then the landscape returns to the foreground; slow and steady chords permeate the ensemble, creating moments of calm in between more interruptions from the piece's main protagonist: the Short-toed Lark. Another cry from the Quail interjects as a support-act for a one-time only, long song of 'Jubilation vehemente' (vehement jubilation) from the Eurasian skylark. The nature portrait concludes with the Quail, a final set of chords evoking the desert and then the Short-toed Lark, which steals the last word with a single bar of birdsong.*⁹

Messiaen notated birdsong and the landscape at Les Baux and La Crau into a musical sign-system, which corresponds with the argument that birdsong to Messiaen *was* music (as explored earlier in Book One). Correspondences between the score of 'L'Alouette calandrelle' and the *cahier* content that informed the piece (MS-23043, pages 6 and 8)¹⁰ demonstrate that Messiaen transcribed material gathered at Les Baux and La Crau with very little structural change to compose

'L'Alouette calandrelle'. One example of many is the matching notation of the Short-toed Lark in the *cahier* (page 8, line 12) and the introduction to the Short-toed Lark in bar 2 of the score, (see figure 4.1 on page 170).

The aspects of transcription in the *cahier* that are most central to this research are the places where Messiaen's perceived encounters that do not fit into Messiaen's musical signs of birdsong: the heat, aromas, and sights of the landscape. These phenomena are situated outside of Messiaen's musical language, and as such, he finds clarity in describing his encounter with these things in an alternative language – written prose. This is exemplified in Messiaen's description of Les Baux (page 8, lines 2-3) where he describes the scent of broom and cypress and the unforgiving heat (see figure 4.2 on page 170).

In the *cahier*, La Crau is described in terms of the heat and its surroundings (page 8, line 11, and again on page 6, line 8. See figure 4.3 on page 170).

⁹ This listening encounter is published in my chapter: Harriet Carter, 'Shared Birdsong? Exploring Messiaen's Relationship with Place and Birdsong through Drawing', in *Songs of Place and Time: Birdsong and the Dawn Chorus in Natural History and the Arts*, ed. by Mike Collier, Bennett Hogg, and John Strachan

(Manchester: Gaia Project, 2020), pp. 332–42

<https://issuu.com/driling/docs/songs_of_time___place_final_high_res__reduced_>

¹⁰ The microfilms that house digital copies of Messiaen's *cahiers* are labelled in the collection as 'MS' followed by the *cahier* number.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), Département de la Musique, Paris. MS-23043

Figure 4.1. Olivier Messiaen, *Camargue cahier*, MS-23043, page 8, digital image of archival manuscript. Permission and ©Fonds Messiaen and Bibliothèque nationale de France, detail.

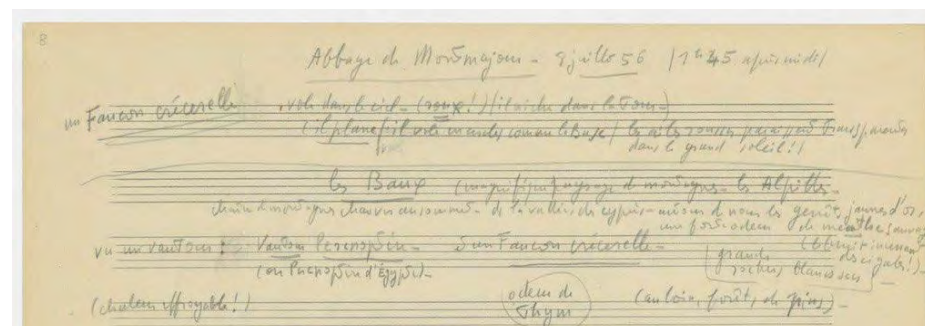


Figure 4.2. Olivier Messiaen, *Camargue cahier*, MS-23043, page 8, digital image, of archival manuscript. Permission and ©Fonds Messiaen and Bibliothèque nationale de France, detail.

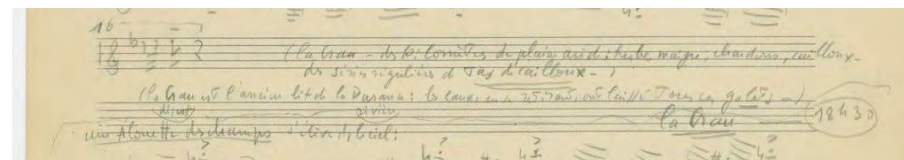


Figure 4.3. Olivier Messiaen, *Camargue cahier*, MS-23043, page 6, digital image, of archival manuscript. Permission and ©Fonds Messiaen and Bibliothèque nationale de France, detail.

In the score, the written descriptions of the landscape populate the poetic preface to the piece:

VIII. L'Alouette Calandrelle – The Short-toed Lark
Calendrella brachydactyla

(Provence in July. Les Baux, Les Alpilles: arid rocky terrain, with broom and cypress. The Crau, a stony wilderness. Fierce light and heat.)

2 p.m. The piping call of the Short-toed Lark. Chorus of cicadas, the staccato alarm of the Kestrel, the dull long-short-long of the Quail. A two-part invention for the Short-toed Lark and the Created Lark. Silence. The cicadas, Kestrel, Quail.

4 p.m. Alone in the heat and solitude of mid-afternoon the brief phrases of the Short-toed Lark...

6 p.m. The Skylark erupts into song, vehement, jubilant. Again the Short-toed Lark..¹¹

More descriptive prose is also found in annotations above single bars in the score that evoke the heat and solitude of the desert at La Crau: “*Chaleur et solitude du désert de la Crau*”

¹¹ Olivier Messiaen, *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, trans. by Peter Hill. Peter Hill (Unicorn-Kanchana Records, RRC3008, 2002) [on CD].

¹² Chadwick and Hill comments on Messiaen's musical interpretation of the heat and solitude of the Crau desert into two chords as unusual to his aesthetic taste.

(‘the heat and solitude of the Crau desert’).¹² Birdsong and the landscape are imbricated in the *cahier* with the descriptions of the landscape in the marginalia. This continues in the score, between the Short-toed Lark and landscape. Bars annotated as the heat and solitude of the Crau desert introduce and respond to the themed bird – the Short-toed Lark. In doing so, Messiaen takes forward his holistic transcription (incorporated through different forms of language) of an embodied encounter with birdsong into the final music composition.

I propose that the connection between the landscape and birdsong in Messiaen's transpositions, and the correspondence with the score, defines the *cahier* created at Les Baux and La Crau, (MS-23043, pages 6 and 8) as a polymodal act of transposition. In the landscape, Messiaen transposes the heat at Les Baux and the aromas of the broom and cypress into written prose at the same time as transposing the sound of birdsong into music. To draw on Pirrò's use of the term, I propose that this dual responsiveness demonstrates ‘complexification’. By taking

See Roderick Chadwick and Peter Hill, *Olivier Messiaen's Catalogue d'oiseaux: From Conception to Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 97.

this forward into the score using a combination of poetic prefaces, musical notation, and annotation as multiple forms of articulation, ‘L’Alouette calandrelle’ (and as I have articulated in Book One, *Catalogue d’oiseaux*) presents an example of Messiaen’s endeavour to attempt to comprehend, and hence come-to-understand the intangibility of birdsong. I propose that moving between written prose and musical notation elicits a slippage between languages, neither able to articulate the polysensory embodied encounter with the landscape. I contend that the similarities between *cahier* pages and score act as transpositional vehicles on the peripheries of language.

I have argued in Book Three for Messiaen’s approach to creating birdsong music as a transposition of his polysensory embodied encounter transposition of the ‘event’ of birdsong in the landscape. Whilst it could be argued that Messiaen translates birdsong into music through taking a natural sound and matching a musical sound to it, creating representation, the inclusion of the landscape in his notations

and pieces complexifies any sign-signifier. I propose that it demonstrates a grappling toward comprehension. Timbral deconstruction of birdsong and reconstruction into chords for the use of percussive instrument provides a complex musical interpretation of birdsong.

Building on Messiaen’s own words describing his method of listening as transcribing birdsong, during an interview with Claude Samuel,¹³ I propose that Messiaen’s *cahiers* manifest as a physical method of listening. To draw on Book Three, his *cahier* pages demonstrate the ‘simultaneous contrast’ of perceiving birdsong and the landscape through mark-making. I therefore contend that Messiaen’s *cahier* MS-23043, is a transpositional vehicle of material perception that constitutes as a form of ‘thinking on the metaphysical’.

2. Polysensory multimodal transposition (‘Le Merle de roche’)

(Hérault in May. The cirque of Mourèze: dolomites, rocks jumbled into fantastic forms.)

¹³ Claude Samuel, *Olivier Messiaen: Music and Color: Conversations with Claude Samuel* (Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1994), p. 94.

Night, moonlight. Looming overall, an immense hand of stone! Towards the end of night, the Eagle Owl utters its powerful and sombre hooting. The female responds with muffled accents, a sinister hilarity whose rhythm merges into the racing pulse of terror.

Dawn breaks: the varied cried of Jackdaws. Then the Black Redstart sets up its monotonous chant, alternating with a noise like pearls raffling, paper being creased, or rustling silk. The rocks are terrifying tone, prehistoric creatures – Stegosaurus, Diplodocus – stand guard, a group by Max Ernst, a cortège of cowed ghosts in stone, bearing the corpse of a woman whose hair trails on the ground...

Perched on a pinnacle, the Rock Thrush! How fine he is! Blue head, russet tail, black wings, vivid orange breast. He sings through the hours of the sun, warmth and light: ten in the morning, five in the afternoon – and his song is gleaming orange, like his plumage!

The moments of silence are rhythmical, measured in long durations. The Black Redstart resumes its rustling. Last cries of the Jackdaws.

Dusk fades. The Eagle Owl hoots: its voice echoes among the rocks, heralding darkness and dread.

There, still, is the giant hand, raised above the stone monsters, a magic sign!¹⁴

¹⁴ Olivier Messiaen, *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, trans. by Peter Hill. Peter Hill (Unicorn-Kanchana Records, RRC3008, 2002) [on CD].

Before reading on – I recommend you listen to a performance of 'Le Merle de roche' as you read my listening encounter.¹⁵

Listening encounter

Quiet short chords open the scene; profound blackness of night, moonlight cast on an immense stone hand raising a magic sign. The stillness is suddenly interrupted by the sombre hoot of the male Eagle Owl. Quietly in the lower registers of the piano, the female rumbles a muffled response, their call and response culminating in a chordal duet. We are reminded by the engendering of night in the scene by the return of slow short chords. Spotting the giant stone hand again, an undulation of chords takes us on a sweep of the vista, as if we were turning on the spot, taking in the looming stone formations that surround. As abruptly as the Eagle Owl's interruption of the landscape earlier comes the Jackdaw, its lively song juxtaposed with the slow reverence of the vista that breaks the song. After a pause, the Black Redstart sings loudly, this time, its fast pace is married with the vista of rocks shaped like a Stegosaurus that duets with

¹⁵ You can find a performance of 'Le Merle de roche' by Peter Hill on YouTube at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJBgN_n_fDo

the bird. Almost as soon as the Redstart's song begins, there is a sudden interruption by the sight of the stone shaped like a Stegosaurus, the rapid fire of individual notes could almost be the quickening of the heart as the form suddenly looms into recognition out of the darkness. The song of the Redstart is soon joined by powerful slow chords of the vista of a stone Diplodocus – the sight impressive and almost expected after the shock of the stone form of the Stegosaurus, the light rising, the sights becoming less frightening. Barely has the resonating sound of the Redstart gone when the Rock Thrush loudly proclaims its arrival with the heat and light of the ten o'clock morning sun. Following the Rock Thrush's introduction, sequential loud and quiet chords lead our imagination around the rock formations that now resemble a procession of ghosts carrying a dead woman. The rock chords fluidly lead onto the chords of the five pm Rock Thrush call. The move into more of a melodic tone, as the Rock Thrush takes the stage, is cut across by the Jackdaw's cries. Before the Jackdaw's cries are even complete, the Rock Thrush retaliates, loudly. The two vie for attention, altering their song each time, likely aware of the other's presence. The Redstart quietly joins the skirmish, its song

gaining confidence and reaching a chordal crescendo. The Rock Thrush responds loudly and slowly, the song fading into the silence, awaiting a response. Instead of the birds, it is the landscape that replies next; the Stegosauri, Diplodocids, and other stone monsters. We are reminded of them as their song reverberates across the various stone structures. The Redstart that follows is almost immediately cut off by the Jackdaws that enjoy a long solo, call and response highlighted in the loud and quiet sequential passages. The stone Stegosaurus quietly appears once again out of the shadows, its arrival of eerily singular notes bringing the unease that only nightfall can bring. The reappearance of the Eagle Owls reinforces the arrival of night, the male and female duetting just as they did at the opening of the piece. The pace eases off, more pauses appear, night has truly fallen as the giant stone hand comes back to the fore. After one last loud cry from both Eagle Owls, we slowly depart from the landscape, taking in the stone formations in the light of the moon.

'L'Alouette calandrelle' presents the unification of senses that comprise Messiaen's encounter with birdsong and the

landscape at Les Baux and La Crau, continuing the imbrication of senses as they were transcribed in the *cahier*. 'Le Merle de roche' presents a similar imbrication of sight and sound (of the landscape and birdsong), for example, the interjection of the procession of stone ghosts, carrying the corpse of a woman (*cortège de fantômes de pierre, transportant une femme morte*) between the song of the protagonist Rock Thrush (score, pages 9 - 14).

The same use of framing birdsong with the landscape as used in 'L'Alouette calandrelle' could suggest that the two pieces were composed from a similar embodied encounter in the landscape. However, material for 'Le Merle de roche' resulted from Messiaen's transposition of birdsong and landscape undertaken in many parts, from the Swedish Discs – a set of commercially available discs of recorded birdsong – and also transcriptions at Cirque de Mourèze. As Peter Hill identifies in his exhaustive comparative analysis of the *cahier* material and scores, Messiaen used transpositions of the featured birdsong from the Swedish Discs.¹⁶

The listening encounter above, guided by the imaginative descriptions in the preface, makes it hard to believe that the transposition of birdsong was separate from the transposition of the landscape at Cirque de Mourèze. Messiaen's narration leads us through the night, day, and nightfall again at Cirque de Mourèze. In places, such as the vivid description of the gleaming orange plumage of the Jackdaw, it feels like Messiaen taps on our shoulder to point out what he can see. This theatricality is largely staged.

Whilst there are correlations between birdsong transcriptions taken from the Swedish Discs, Messiaen notated all four characters of 'Le Merle de roche': the Eagle Owl, Black Redstart, Rock Thrush, and Jackdaw, in the landscape. However, as Hill notes, it is difficult to determine many correspondences between the *cahier* notations themselves (in *cahier* MS-23045). A brief overview of the correlations and dissonances in these instances can be drawn using the four birds as an example.

¹⁶ For example, Hill identifies that the birdsong on p.7 of the score has been composed from transpositions of recorded birdsong from *cahiers* MS-23045 and 23048.

Transcriptions of the Eagle Owls in 'Le Merle de roche' were drawn from the 1956 Swedish Discs in MS-23045. For example, page 60 of *cahier* MS-23045 contains transpositions of the Eagle Owl (*Grand Duc*). The written description of the dialogue between male and female Eagle Owl on the *cahier* page matches annotations above the score on pages 1 and 26 of the score ('*ululement grave du mâle, la femelle répond*'; the female responds to the serious hoot of the male').

Cahier MS-23063 contains a written description of the Black Redstart on the 30th of June 1958 between 0900 and 1100hr at Cirque de Mourèze. In addition, the word 'Diplodocus' can be made out at the same site of transposition, evidencing that Messiaen was writing prose relating to the landscape whilst he was transcribing birdsong in situ at Cirque de Mourèze. This can be found on page 5 of the *cahier* where '*dolomitiques*' (dolomites) can be read at the top of the page, transcribed at '20hr'. Messiaen further describes the landscape on page 10 of the same *cahier*.

Chadwick and Hill note that there are notations of a

Rock Thrush both from the Swedish Discs and the landscape in 1958, yet "little of this surviving material found its way to 'Le Merle de roche'".¹⁷ The *cahier* to which they refer to is unknown.

There are transcriptions of Jackdaws (*choucas*) in Chartres in 1957 (MS-23051) and then again later at Cirque de Mourèze in 1958 (MS-23063) which Chadwick and Hill suggest gave Messiaen the inspiration to include them in 'Le Merle de roche'.¹⁸ One bar notated on the 28th of June 1958 (MS-23063, page 5) matches a bar of Jackdaw song in the score (page 4, bar 2). Notations of Jackdaws at Chartres dated 28th of April 1957, fill the *cahier* between 1900 to 2015hrs (MS-23051, page 3). Messiaen appears to be fixated on the birdsong, though these marks are accompanied by written descriptions of the surroundings of the bird: '*La cathédrale*' (the cathedral) can be made out on line 5, however, the rest of the handwriting on the page is indecipherable. On page 9 of the same *cahier* (MS-23051), notations of the *choucas* can be made out occupying the lower half of the *cahier* page, with the time of day recorded as

¹⁷ Chadwick and Hill, p. 162.

¹⁸ Chadwick and Hill, p. 162.

'1800'. There is another notation of Jackdaws at 1045 on the 27th of April 1957 at Poitiers (MS-23051, page 7, line 8). Transcriptions on page 10 of the same *cahier* demonstrate Messiaen's return to Chartres on the 28th April, with notations at 1130hr, and 1800hr. Page 13 (page 10 is rendered three times in the collection) describes *choucas* (Jackdaws) at 1800hr on the 18th April 1957. There is no written prose describing the landscape, just a note that the Jackdaws were transcribed at the cathedral at Chartres.

Messiaen seems to be working backwards through his *cahier*, which correlates with his travels that Hill maps through Chartres on his return to Charente.¹⁹ *Cahier* MS-23051 contains a sketch for 'Le Merle de roche' without the Jackdaw (page 20). If Messiaen did in fact use his notebook backwards, it is likely that this sketch was done before he came across the Jackdaws. Notably, there are transcriptions of a Black Redstart (*Rouge-queue tithys*) at Cirque de Mourèze on the 30th of June 1958 at around 0900 (MS-23062, page 4, lines 1-3). A phrase in these transcriptions matches the song

of the Black Redstart in page 5 of the score. There are transcriptions in written prose of the landscape for 'Merle de roche' as well. It is possible to make out descriptions of a 'Sphinx' and 'Diplodocus' from line 11 onwards, in reference to Messiaen's interpretations of the giant stone formations of the Cirque de Mourèze. Pages 5, 10, and 15 all contain more transcriptions of birds and landscape at Cirque de Mourèze.

Chadwick and Hill note that *cahier* MS-23060 features compositional sketches for 'Le Merle de roche':

with the heading 'Messiaen' where the location would normally be written [...] implying an autobiographical element of some kind.²⁰

From this evidence and building on knowing Messiaen perceived birdsong and the landscape as imbricated, I argue that Messiaen knew the piece was missing important context of the landscape – that the birdsong was not enough by itself, which he would have discovered from creating the *Catalogue d'oiseaux* ('Le Merle de roche' was one of the last pieces to be created). The importance of the different modes of

¹⁹ Peter Hill, 'From Réveil des Oiseaux to Catalogue d'oiseaux: Messiaen's Cahiers de Notations des Chants d'oiseaux, 1952-59', in *Messiaen Perspectives 1: Sources and Influences*, ed. by Christopher Dingle and Robert Fallon (England:

Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), pp. 143-174 (p. 167).

²⁰ Chadwick and Hill, p. 163.

transposition that I argue take place in Messiaen's birdsong and landscape notations is congruent with Chadwick and Hill's commentary that Messiaen's visit to Cirque de Mourèze was the catalyst for the final composition of the piece.

Here, transposition is demonstrated in a different register to 'L'Alouette calandrelle', it is less linear and manifested from Messiaen's reaction within the landscape. Chadwick and Hill's description of Messiaen transcribing at Cirque de Mourèze very much describes the embodiment of the polysensory aspect of encountering landscape as I have found in my own fieldwork: "There, in the summer heat, his imagination became more fevered".²¹

I argue that because transposition of birdsong and the landscape were undertaken in many notebooks, i.e., modes (birdsong, in *cahiers* MS-23045, 23048, 23051, 23056(2), and the landscape in *cahiers* MS-23063), transcribing material that informs 'Le Merle de roche' stems from multimodal transposition. Following on from the understanding of polymodal transposition as the holistic transposition of several sensations as explored in the material that informed

'L'Alouette calandrelle', I use the term 'multimodal' because this is consistent with transposing in different forms at different points. Some transcriptions of birdsong were the product of an embodied encounter with a birdsong recording, and others were the product of an embodied encounter in the landscape. I see the *cahiers* MS-23045, 23048, 23051, 23056(2), and 23063 together as existing as a collective: as multimodal transposition. The reason I do not instead see them as a group of singular transpositions is because of the way Messiaen presents 'Le Merle de roche' as a holistic encounter to the audience; the way these *cahiers* are transpositional vehicles of material perception, operating as a place alongside the nature portrait. Indeed, the multimodal transpositions behaving as a collective example of Messiaen's varied encounters with birdsong and the landscape that 'Le Merle de roche' exemplifies its staged theatricality.

3. Painting transpositions

²¹ Chadwick and Hill, p. 165

**i. Painting towards *L'Alouette calandrelle*: exploring
Messiaen's polysensory unimodal transposition**

This section articulates my exploration of Messiaen's transpositional methodology through fieldwork undertaken at Les Baux and La Crau and consequential painting investigation. In my investigation of processes that led to Messiaen's '*L'Alouette calandrelle*', access to the *cahier* material allowed me to explore Messiaen's transcriptions in tandem with my own, which gave me a simpler starting point. As a result, I explore the material created in my field notebook from Les Baux and La Crau which encapsulates this approach.

I travelled to Les Baux and La Crau in July 2019, transcribing birdsong and the landscape at 1400, 1600, and 1800, directed by the times Messiaen noted in his *cahiers*. I sought to arrive in these locations at the same time of year and time of day to provide the best chance of a similar encounter with nature that Messiaen had, specifically due to

the relationship birds have with the seasons and passing of time. I collected both visual and auditory material, in the form of photographs of the landscape (see figures 4.4 – 4.7 on pages 180 – 181), drawings and observational writing of both landscape and birdsong (see figures 4.8 – 4.13 on pages 182 – 187), and sound recordings of birdsong (see appendix C), to explore my polysensory encounters.

In the creation of the photographs and sound recordings, it transpired that these two methods only captured, indeed *took*, a single visual viewpoint of a moment of birdsong and the landscape. The photographs and recordings were unable to transpose the imbrication of the two. The photographs provided just a visual perspective, and sound recordings an auditory perspective. The photographs became akin to Donna Haraway's definition of the "vision in [a] technological feast"²² that is "direct, devouring, generative, and unrestricted".²³ The photographs created an exaggerated visual perspective to the encounter I had. The camera's eye picking out details in the landscape that I did not notice at the

²² Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, 14.3 (1988), 575–99 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3178066>> [accessed 27 February 2022] (p. 581).

²³ Haraway, (p. 582).



Figure 4.4. Harriet Carter, Val D'Enfer from the top of Les Baux, (2019). Digital photograph.



Figure 4.5. Harriet Carter, Castle ruins at Les Baux, (2019). Digital photograph.



Figure 4.6. Harriet Carter, Broom at La Crau, (2019). Digital photograph.



Figure 4.7. Harriet Carter, Ruins at La Crau, (2019). Digital photograph.

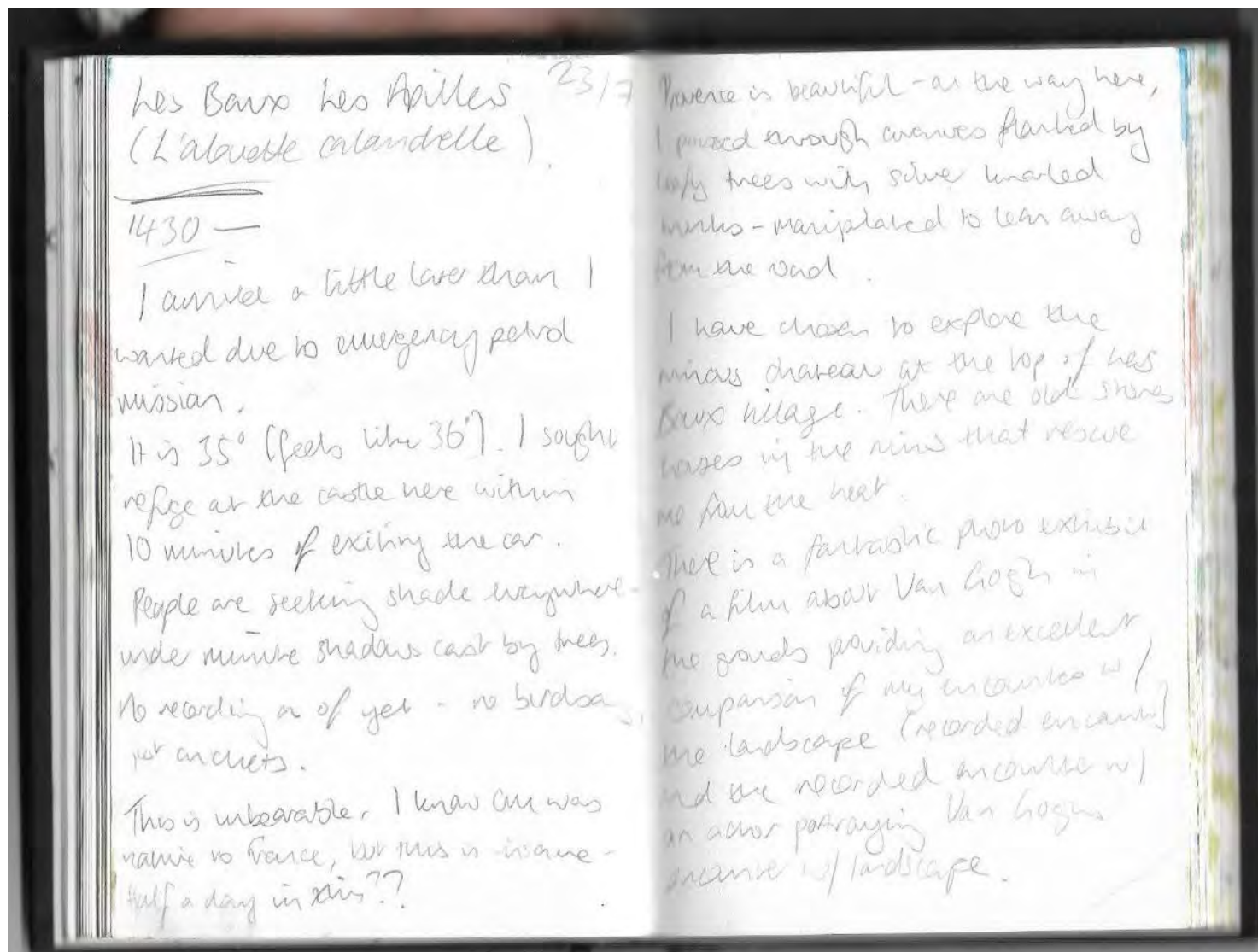


Figure 4.8. Harriet Carter, Field notebook detailing my arrival at Les Baux, (2019).

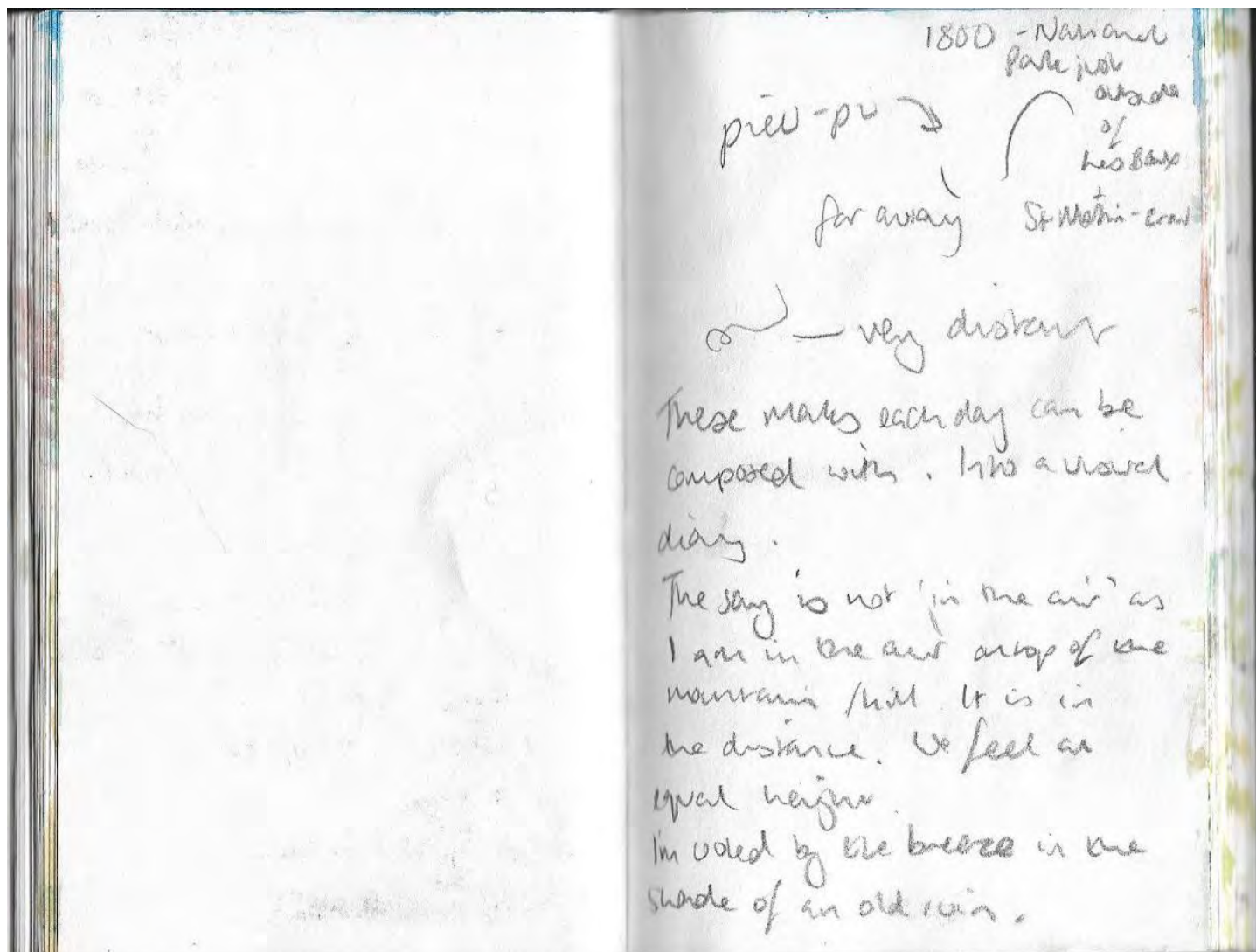


Figure 4.9. Harriet Carter, Field notebook detailing mark-making and written transcriptions of birdsong, (2019).

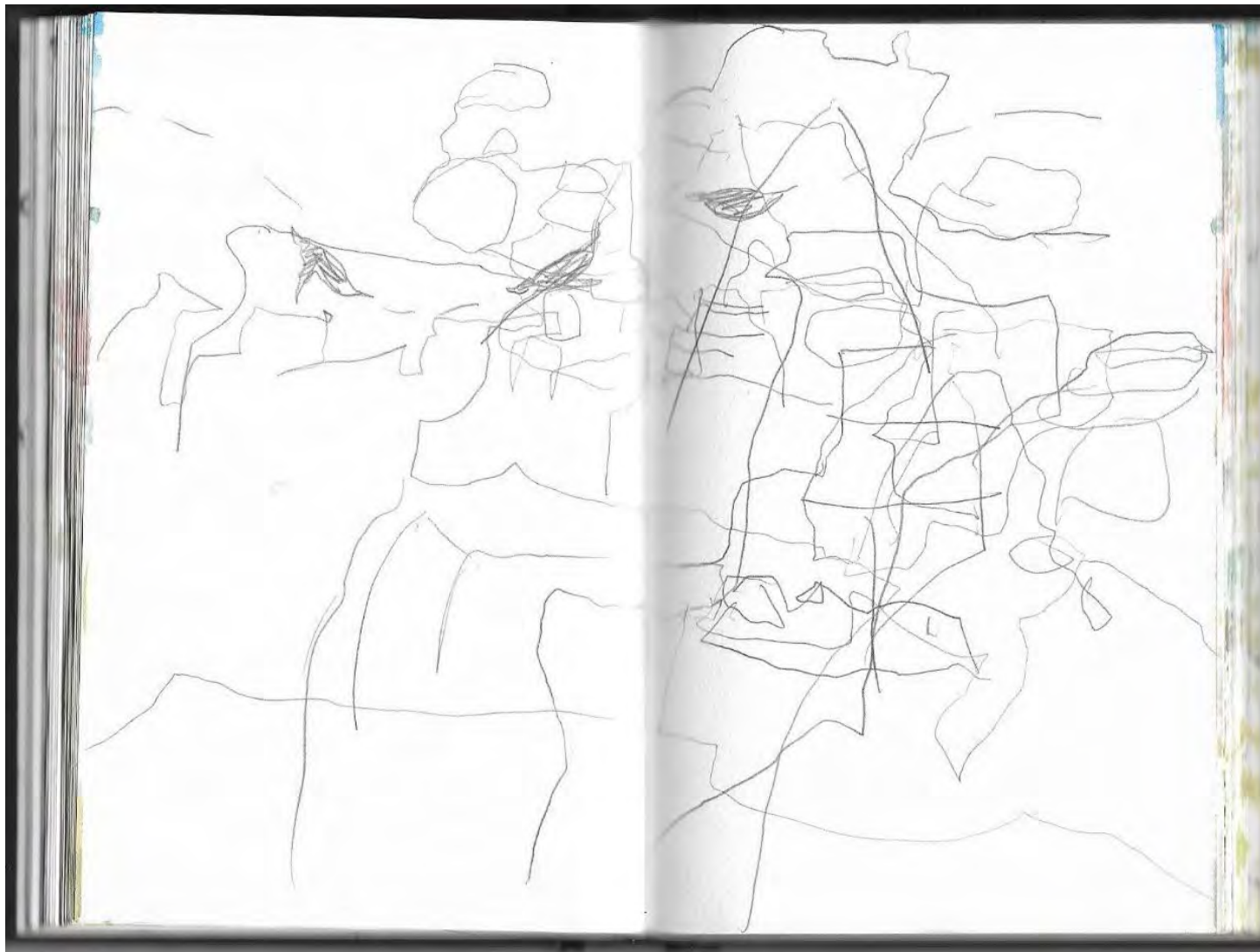


Figure 4.10. Harriet Carter, Field notebook showing detail of a layered drawing of a 360° view across Val d'Enfer, (2019).

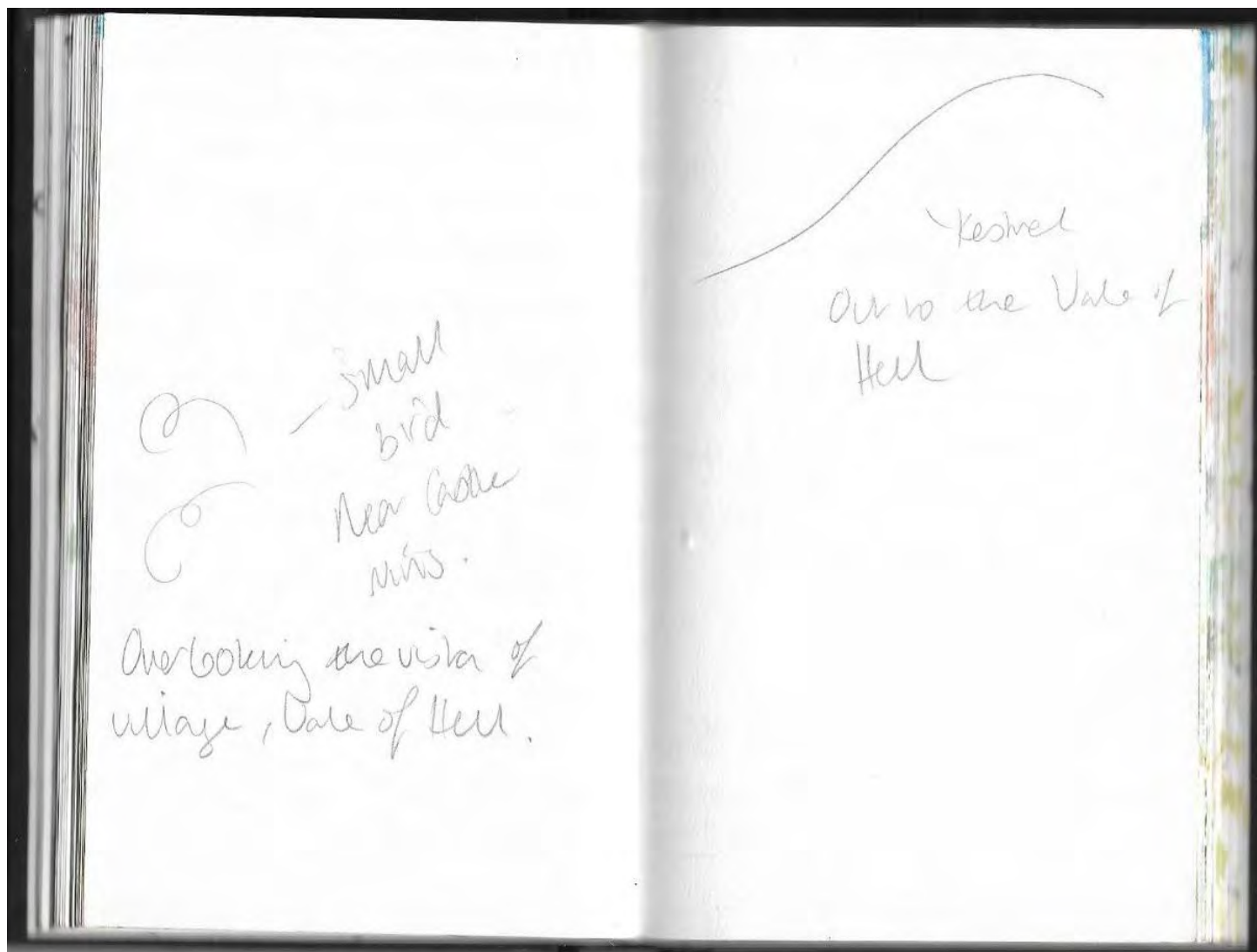


Figure 4.11. Harriet Carter, Field notebook showing detail of birdsong transcriptions in mark-making and written prose, (2019).



Figure 4.12. Harriet Carter, Field notebook showing detail of watercolour and pencil drawing taken at La Crau, (2019).

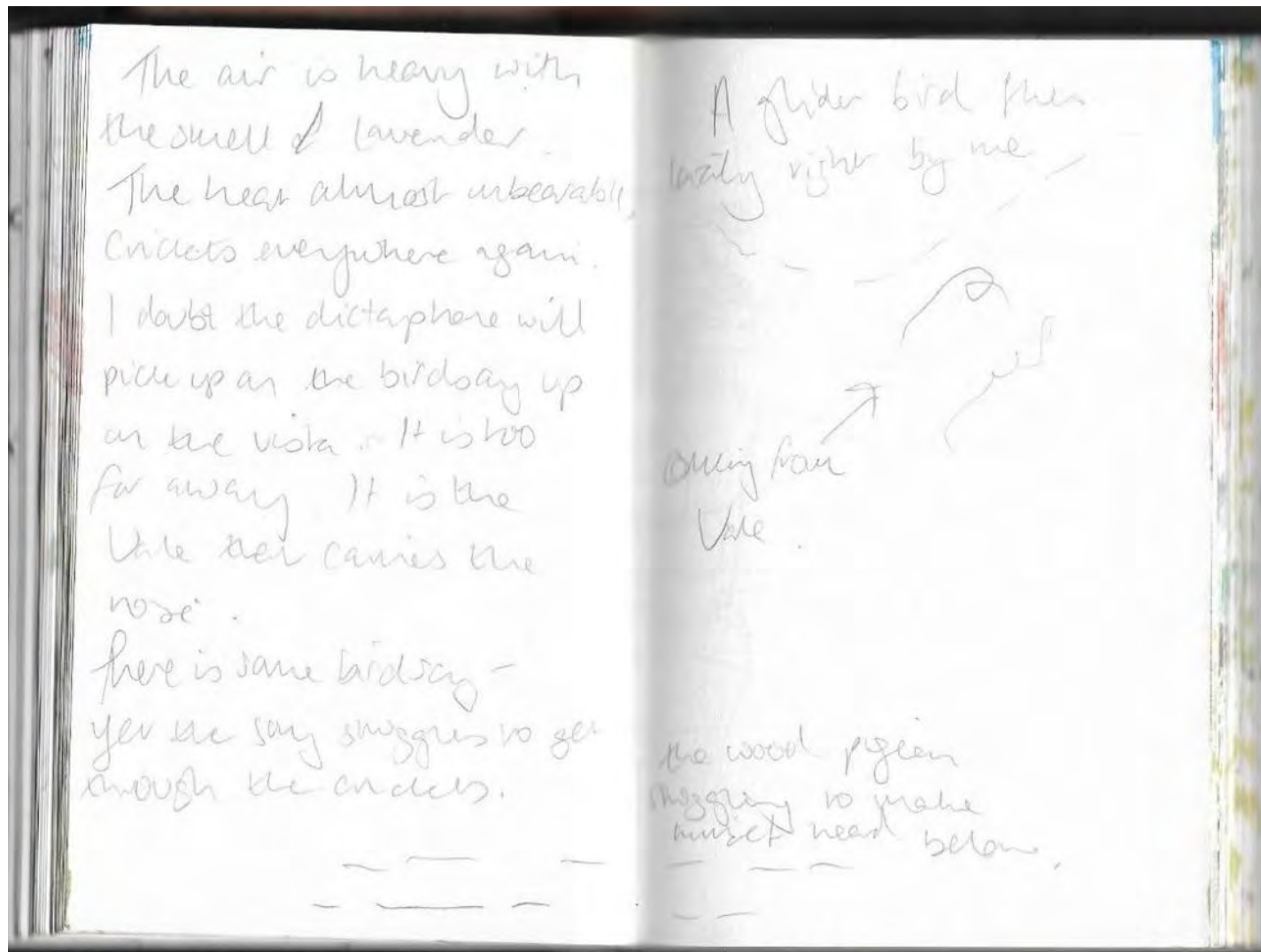


Figure 4.13. Harriet Carter, Field notebook showing detail of birdsong transcriptions in mark-making and written prose, (2019).

time and therefore were not part of my experience with the landscape. This contrasts with the holistic embodiment in the 'event' of birdsong via material perception created in 'simultaneous contrast' (as I explored earlier in Book Three).

In addition, the sound recordings of birdsong, whilst capturing a moving moment in time, also produced an enhanced sense of 'listening' using a technological aid which is unlike the moment of drawing in a spatio-temporal situation, as I found with the photographs. Building on from my discussion of embodied encounter in Book Three, listening to the birdsong in the landscape and its amalgamation with atmospheric sounds, such as the sound of the wind passing over the rocky terrain, cannot be substituted with a recording.

As Murray Schafer argues, a tape recorder can only remind the ear of details that were unnoticed.²⁴ Any details that are not perceived are not unnoticed per se. Details that reside outside of the 'event' of perception reside in the wider 'situation' of birdsong in the landscape. As I explored in Book

Three, I am only interested in exploring perceived unknown, intangible, and irresolute aspects of birdsong and the landscape.

Oliveros' exposition of deep listening is a useful example of how to explore the unknown, intangible, irresolute moments of a birdsong 'event' through "grounding" with sound.²⁵ Following Oliveros, I argue that the entanglement of birdsong and the landscape needs to remain together through perceiving them in embodied encounter to avoid attempting to 'translate' metaphysical qualities (unknown, intangible essences of an ephemera) via the closure of representational structures. I see the photographs and sound recordings as rejecting the imbrication of the temporal and spatial aspect of encountering the landscape, providing a metaphor uncharacteristic of what was encountered.

It should be noted that Messiaen took recordings of birdsong on location visits that aided his composing of *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. However, because I found using such a

²⁴ R. Murray. Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, (Vermont: Destiny Books, 1994), pp. 208-9.

²⁵ Pauline Oliveros, 'The Earth Worm Also Sings: A Composer's Practice of Deep Listening', *Leonardo Music Journal*, 3 (1993), pp. 35-38

<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1513267>> [accessed 27 February 2022], (p. 38).

method of audial capture as damaging on the same level as taking visual capture with photography, I deem these methods by Messiaen as translational and not acts of transposition. Whilst a vital part of the research process, these methods act as aide memoire to assist in reconnecting with that point of encounter experienced by both Messiaen and myself. As such, they become as unsuited to the polymodal transposition undertaken by Messiaen in his *cahiers*, and as such, led me to new avenues in my research.

In the transpositional moments via graphic notation and written observation, I combined moments of sensing birdsong and the landscape: seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching. I experienced an embodied encounter with the landscape through my polysensory responses to the environment which manifested in the movement within my drawn marks. Certainly, I was looking through the act of mark-making.

My experience of the site visits was immersive, but I

felt unable to embrace and articulate the invisible ephemera that I encountered: the atmosphere, the perceived space between objects in the landscape, the birdsong. As I drew, I created marks that were the product of encountering intangible, moving ephemera of birdsong and the landscape; they were not a depiction of what was already there but of what existed in the moment of my experience. My efforts to 'transcribe' these ephemera recall Jorella Andrews' description of:

the emergence of a world that will always reach beyond our encounter with it and in which we are not certain of our own limits.²⁶

I did not experience the same place Messiaen experienced over sixty years ago, rather what I experienced was an echo. The landscape, that remains wild and rural as it would have been all that time ago, continues to shape the air that passes through it with the sharp stony forms of a desert environment. Whilst my experiences there were not of the same moment of Messiaen, they were nevertheless shaped by similar means.

²⁶ Jorella Andrews, *The Question of Painting: Rethinking Thought with Merleau-Ponty* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 243.

As I have published elsewhere, the material perceptions that emerged from my transcriptions were a product of this land, an echo of the soundscape that inspired *Catalogue d'oiseaux*; ultimately beyond transcription, extending to transposition.²⁷

I align the epistemic dimensions of my transpositional encounter in the same realm as Lomax's positioning of 'truth' in the event.²⁸ I argue that the moment of transcription ignited the move towards knowledge, created in the transposition of the spatio-temporality of what I had perceived. However, this transposition occurred *during* the movement bounded up in the act of drawing: the transposition *had been*. Both my field notebook and Messiaen's *cahiers* contain transcriptions (graphic and written marks) of our moments of transposing birdsong encounters.

I found – in my transcriptions – that I could not recognise the metaphysicality of transposing birdsong during material perception. Therefore, Messiaen's and my transcriptions were 'examples' of a transpositional process as the marks themselves are elusive. I see the notebook as a

transpositional object, one that holds a moment of transposition, a coming towards understanding and of 'becoming-knowledge'. Drawing on Lomax, the notebooks and *cahiers* therefore generate their own 'being-ness' that provides an example of this endeavour. Specifically in the marks that now stilled and decoupled from the experiences of making them, are an example of coming towards something.

²⁷ Carter, (pp. 332–42).

²⁸ See Yve Lomax, *Sounding the Event: Escapades in Dialogue and Matters of Art, Nature and Time* (London: I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2004) <ProQuest Ebook Central>.

Making *Les Baux*

Writing-thinking extract

19th January 2020

Figure 4.14

My usual approach to beginning a painting is to create a smooth ground, preparing the surface for painting by adding a layer either clear or white gesso, sanding it back with an electric sander, and applying another layer so the surface is smooth. I approach this painting in the same way, using white gesso to mirror the white pages in my notebook. As I begin to sand back the gesso to smooth the surface, brown forms emerge – exposed by the sander passing over.

Gesso is sticking in globules to the surface of the sander – these globules are carving the gesso surface creating a pitted surface and exposing the brown MDF surface below. I find myself connecting the gestures created by this process with my notations of a Kestrel in the Val d'Enfer in Les Baux. Resultingly, I decide to continue using the sander, knowingly abrading the surface so more of the natural brown colour of the MDF can appear in dots and arching lines. Preparing the ground of the painting is creating figure and field that I see as shaped first by this sanding tool, then my response, gesturing with the tool. The abraded lines become figures, stood in front of a faded white field.



Figure 4.14. Harriet Carter, *Les Baux*, (2020). Detail of ground, w.i.p.

Writing-thinking extract

25th January 2019

Figures 4.15 and 4.16

I find myself seeking resonances between the painted surface and the field notebook when presented with changes to the painting's materiality. The agency of the surface responding to the electric sander makes it feasible to establish two semiotic markers by matching the embodied experiences in the landscape and in the pictorial field and figures created in applying a ground.²⁹ Specifically, these brown flecks make me think of how I transcribed birdsong and the experience of heat described in written prose. As a result, I find myself comprehending a signified in a semiotic marker. Marks that I likened to the swoop of the Kestrel moved through the white, hazy field on the surface that I relate to the searing hot and bright day that engulfed me as I transcribed in the landscape.

The likeness in form between the painted surface and drawn mark in the notebook has been created via material thinking – in simultaneous contrast to receiving information presented by the materials triggering response. The abrasive coagulating interaction between sander and fugitivity of paint reminds me of the simultaneous contrast that took place during a moment of transcribing a Kestrel at Les Baux. The abrading movement of the sander correlates with the scratching movement of my pencil over the page as I followed the bird's flight. This movement seems to recall movement undertaken during transposition in the landscape – transferring movement from outside in the landscape into studio. The note pages are transpositions of an experience with birdsong; material vehicles of perceiving the 'event'. They don't mimic the flight nor song. As such, the drawn mark does not translate the call and flight of the Kestrel. Instead, the marks map my sight following the bird and my sense of hearing the call echo through the valley as a form of material perception. The drawn mark embodies the point of perception, both in looking and listening, as the mark is made during the simultaneous contrast of retinal and pictorial physiology of seeing. In the moment of transposing the encounter with the Kestrel in the landscape, the mark was made with cooperation between pencil, paper, and my own movements. Material thinking has simply changed the place of material perception, between transposing in the landscape and creating the painting in the studio. To build on Lomax, then, this material thinking becomes an 'example' of the material perception that took place during the transposition in the landscape.

²⁹ As Fisher used in his doctoral research, for clarity in distinguishing between the technical language of creating ground as a prepared surface for painting, and the ground in relation to figure, I will use field in place of ground. See: James Fisher, 'I Came Here a Stranger, as a Stranger I Depart: An Investigation into the Relationship between Drawing and Narrative of Place' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Gloucestershire, 2009), p. 76.



Figure 4.15. Harriet Carter, *Les Baux*, (2020). Detail of forms emerging through the ground, created by the sanding process.

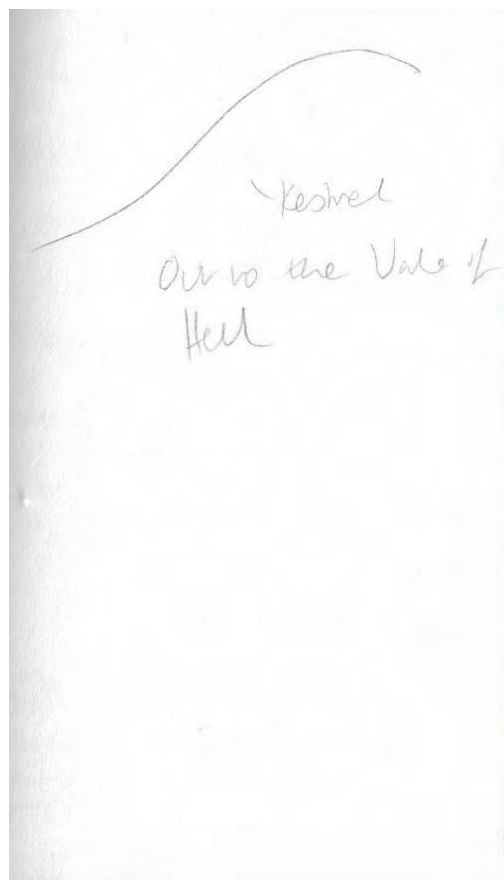


Figure 4.16. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, (2019). Detail.

25th January 2020

Figure 4.17

Figure 4.17

mission.

It is 35° (feels like 36°) - I sought
refuge at the castle here within
10 minutes of exiting the car.

People are seeking shade everywhere -
under minute shadows cast by trees.

No recording as of yet - no birdsong,
not an insects.

This is unbearable. I know one was
native to France, but this is insane -
half a day in this??

Figure 4.17. Harriet Carter, Page from field notebook detailing the experience of heat upon arriving at Les Baux, (2019).

26th January 2020
Figures 4.18 and 4.19

Using a trace method seems to have developed an act of spatial organization much like Messiaen's curation of material from

[illegible]

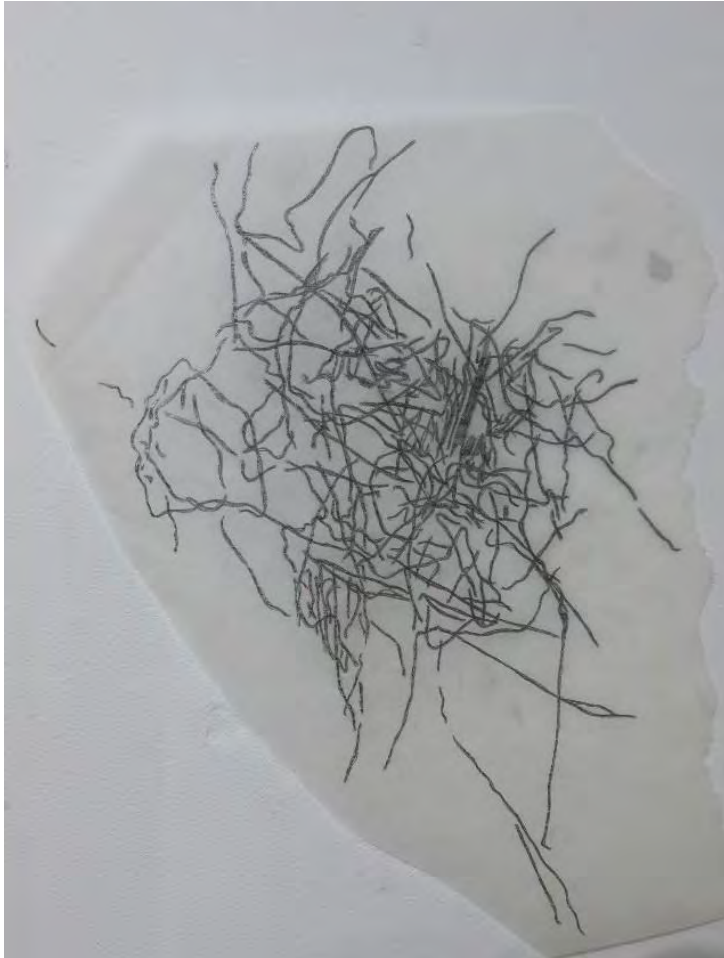


Figure 4.18. Tracing paper stencil used to transfer marks from notebook to painting surface.



Figure 4.19. Harriet Carter, *Les Baux*, (2020). Detail of the trace transfer.

2nd February 2020
Figures 4.20 and 4.21

[illegible]



Figure 4.20. Harriet Carter, Page from notebook. Detail of graphite used to transcribe cicada sound, (2019).

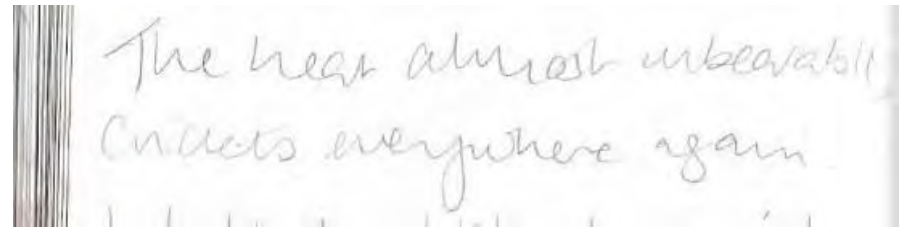


Figure 4.21. Harriet Carter, Page from notebook, (2019).

Writing-thinking extract

2nd February 2020

Figure 4.22

I give form to the cicada sound in the pictorial plane, just as I had done in the notebook during the transposition of the birdsong 'event' at Les Baux and La Crau. I consider the anatomical vibrations of the cicadas when creating a tight, rhythmic pattern in graphite. I explore the repetition of the cicada call by repeating the pattern in graphite, shaped by the layered landscape drawing taken at Val d'Enfer. I think about the way the cicada sound invisibly echoed around the forms in the landscape, shaped and decided by the hot ground underfoot. The two were imbricated because of this. The birdsong and heat were imbricated in my painting process – during the creation of the ground, creating a pictorial field for more figures to be added. It was through working responsively to materials that dialogue could open-up in the figure and field of the pictorial plane and ultimately, between the transcribed marks in the field notebook and painting surface.

I want to activate the graphic patterns of the cicada sound in the same way the cicadas' vibrating tymbal muscles are activated by the heat and the way the noise married with the scribbling sound of my pencil during transcription. The tool for activating the sound seems to be the surrounding ambient light in the studio that reflects the graphite forms evoking the relationship cicadas have with light and heat. The sharp bursts of metallic shapes are discordant with the soft forms of the landscape that embeds them into the field of heat and birdsong as the lightness of the pencil is almost camouflaged against the ground. The sharp cut lines almost shake as the eye attempts to adjust, which reminds me of the illusion of movement in Optical Art where busy shapes affect the vision of the observer. A rhythm is created in the combination of the reflective graphite and unwavering pattern, the material agency of the graphite works with my design to produce an uncontrollable effect; an uncontrollable dance of light across the surface.

I associate cicadas with blistering heat in a desolate landscape. This is embodied in the transposed cicada noise in my notebook, created almost with a frustration of attempting to capture the noise in the unbearable heat that surrounded me. I see this business and reflection of the cicada pattern carry the legacy of this blisteringly hot day transcribed at Les Baux. Particularly in the way the graphite shimmers and reflects light appearing bright at times, just like the brightness I encountered in the landscape.



Figure 4.22. Harriet Carter, *Les Baux*, (2020). Detail of the reflectivity of the graphite with ambient light, w.i.p.

Writing-thinking extract

10th February 2020

Figures 4.23 and 4.24

It occurs to me that I am forcing meaning onto the intangible material processes by creating semiotic connections between colour, material, and light, forming the inarticulable into a communicable language. I have described what I have done and made metaphorical correlations between what I had experienced in the landscape and the things that were in the paintings, Messiaen's *cahiers*, and nature portraits. But explorations through my painting, through 'material thinking' to interrogate transposition in these painterly processes on the peripheries of language, I find myself slipping into translation

Though material practice leading my work has not been unsuccessful – it is in the act of articulating the practice of painting itself that translation takes place. In the paradoxical position of descriptive analysis as means to consider material thinking, I am being presented with metaphysicality on two levels. Firstly, it is embedded in the embodied encounter of making the painting, and the tensions between the intention of the artist (me) and chance occurrences in the material responses. This happens in 'moving' moments, that it seems that perhaps I can only see. The act of describing what I see 'solidifies' the metaphysicality imbued in the tensions between me and materiality and turns it into a tangible language. Yet, this painterly encounter cannot be articulated, particularly not in a cohesive written language as it ultimately creates a sign-system for painting 'moments' that fall the peripheries of language shared by materials. Secondly, I notice metaphysicality in the material exchanges and identified points of correlation between the making processes in the painting and the moment of transposition created during transcription in the landscape processes.

The moving encounter has been transposed from my moving transcriptions into my notebook to (moving) painting processes. It seems that this happens when I take transcription from the 'still' notebook page. But now the process has stopped, and the moving moment of doing this has gone, the marks and the moment that embody the transposed encounter are different somehow. The transposition in the moving moment that has been and gone, yet the paintings are the product of transposition... I feel like I'm being 'presented' with a different kind of metaphysicality in this product of transposition in the way the paintings reflect and move. This has not been by design, though I ascribe a name it, just as Jacqueline did with defining the 'quasacle' in her research. It seems that the 'becoming-of-knowledge' in the 'event', bound up in the perception of birdsong in the landscape, is mirrored in the 'becoming knowledge' in the 'event' of painting process but is harder to see once the painting is still.



Figure 4.23. Harriet Carter, *Les Baux*, (2020). Detail of the reflectivity of the graphite with ambient light, w.i.p.



Figure 4.24. Harriet Carter, *Les Baux*, (2020). Detail of the reflectivity of the graphite with ambient light, 53 x 39.5cm.

Writing-thinking extract

15th March 2020

Figures 4.25 and 4.26

I think transposition of a birdsong encounter in the landscape looks something like this:

Transcribing birdsong and landscape in my notebook to create a moving encounter through polysensory unimodal drawing...

... and exploring the transpositional object that is stilled from this transpositional moment, in painting practice looks something like this:

Making painted surfaces through encountering the stillness of the transpositional object is an encounter with the product of polysensory unimodal transposition, in the form of just one sense – sight.

In this first instance, the moving encounter of transposing birdsong in the landscape contains transcribing moving ephemera through moving mark-making using the senses and materiality – the specious present – it creates a still transpositional object (the notebook). In the second instance, the moving encounter of making paintings to explore the mark-making undertaken as a transpositional process creates a stilled transpositional object, ergo, another transpositional object.

The moving encounter then, is not necessarily just a description of the polysensory experience of being in the landscape, but it is bound in the drawing of this moment, once again positioned in the specious present. In extracting singular moments that respond to senses, have I stumbled once again, into the trap of creating a translation by identifying a singularity?



Figure 4.25. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, (2019). Digital photograph.



Figure 4.26. Harriet Carter, *Les Baux*, (2020). Mixed media on panel, 53 x 39.5cm.

15th March 2020
Figures 4.27 and 4.28

The stilled object – that is my notebook – comes out of the artmaking processes bound in the moving event – mark-making, that is material perception. Yes, it is a transpositional object; not because of what it contains, but because the object is the site of transposition. I reapproach this transpositional vehicle in the studio as I prepare for the painting process to apprehend this object. I lift the still graphic imagery and written text from the notebook, taking the forms of the transposition and activate these forms in painting.

Once I feel I have explored these singular elements, I stop. The painting is now stilled. The forms and field of the pictorial plane embody a movement of material exchanges between the painted surface, tools, and me: the artist. I realise that the things that occur during painting mirror my moving transposed encounter with birdsong. Transposition is embodied in the act of mark-making, but exactly where or how, is not fully known to me. Both notebook and painting are examples of a transposed encounter.

Yet, I find this impossible to talk *about* – these painted moments of transposition cease the minute I put down my paintbrush or pencil and reach for my pen.

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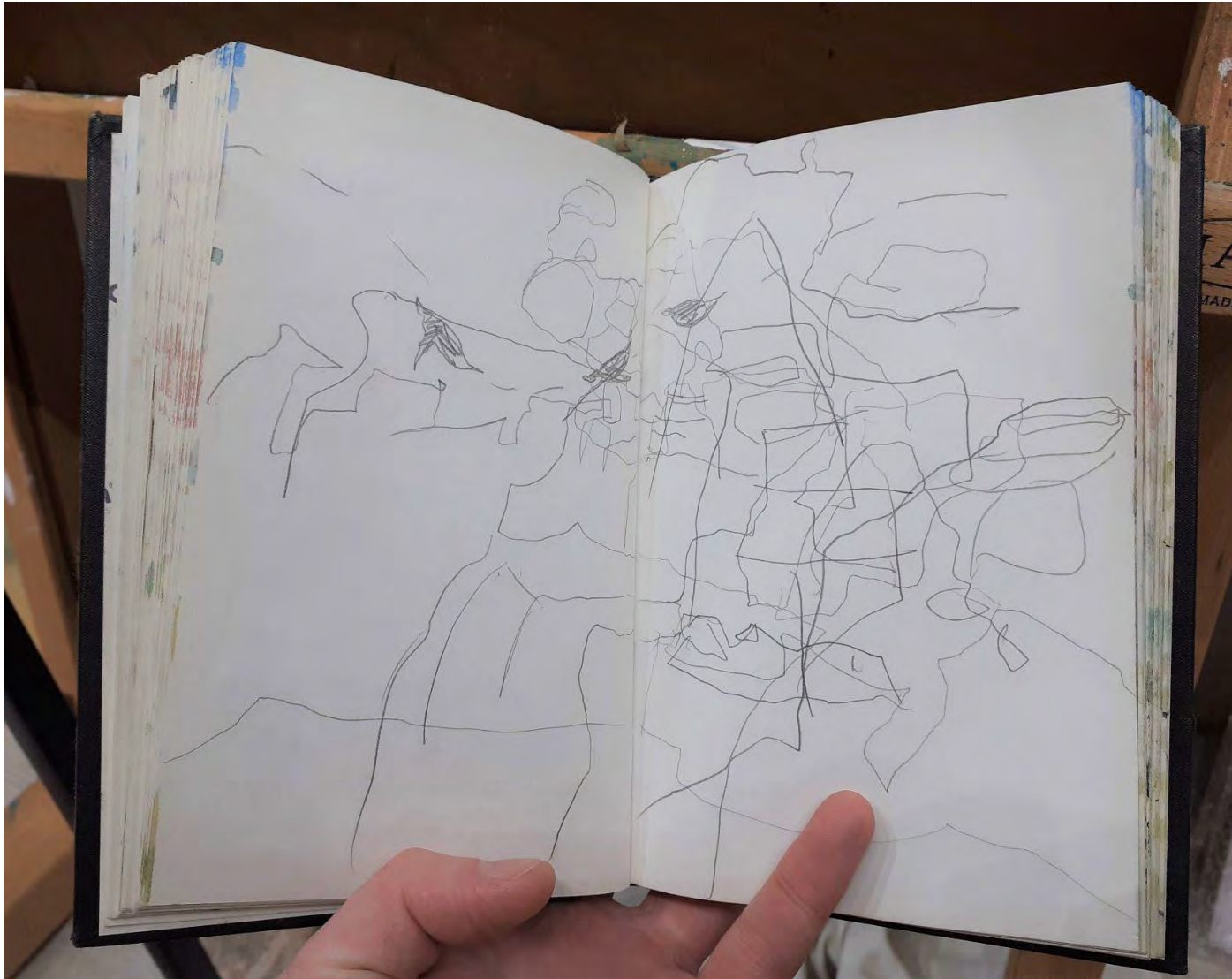


Figure 4.27. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, (2020). Digital photograph.

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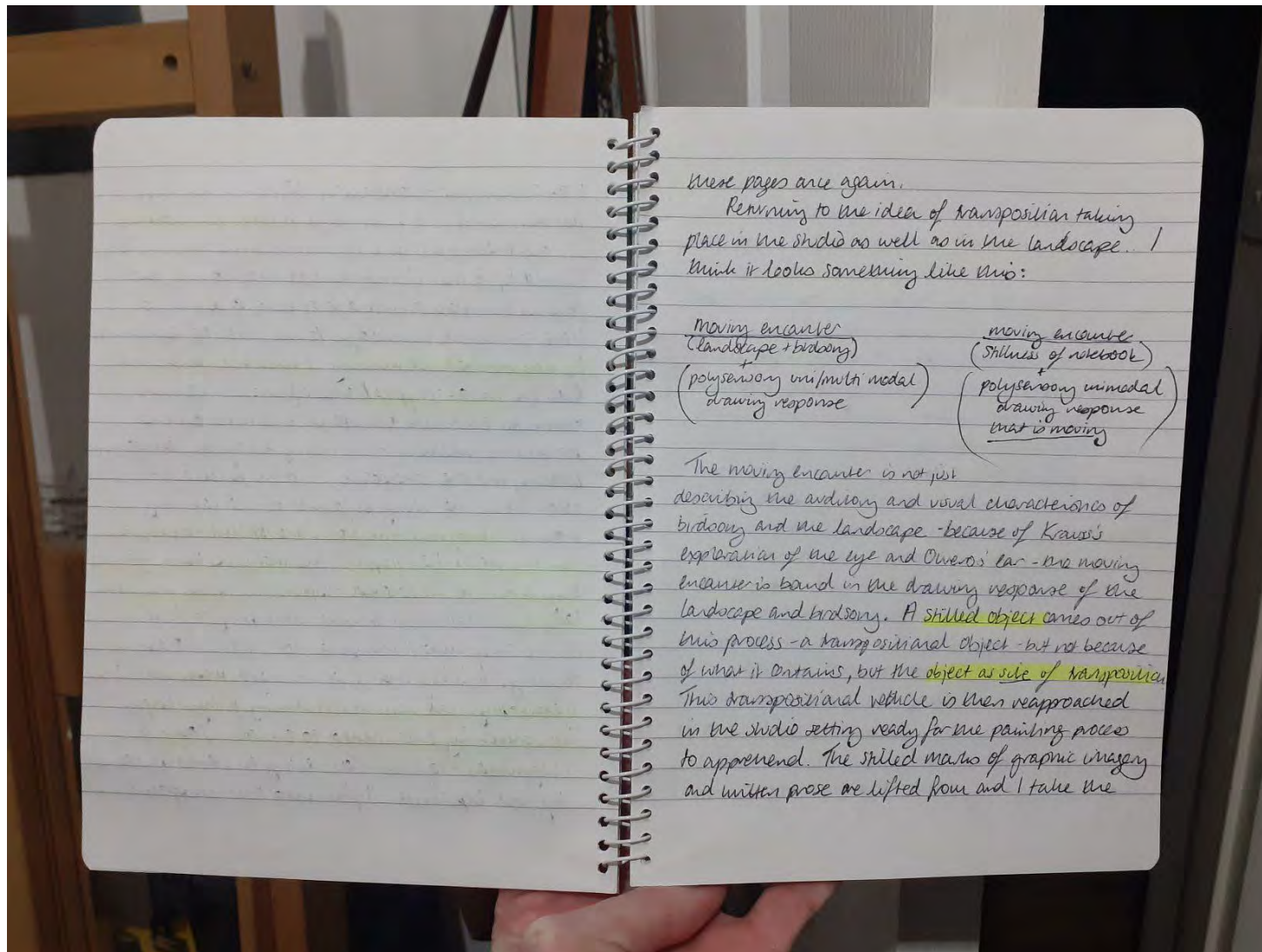


Figure 4.28. Harriet Carter, Writing-thinking excerpt, (2021). Digital photograph.

**Making *Les Baux II*, *Les Baux III*, *Les Baux IV*, and
*L'Alouette calandrelle***

Writing-thinking extract

27th March 2020

Figures 4.29 – 4.32

I find a constant push-pull between being led by 'material thinking' and conjuring signifiers that relate to my encounters. The Encountering the still marks on the painted pictorial plane feel different to how the push-pull between responding to materials and tools, and adding new marks, informed by graphic shapes and written descriptions in my notebook.

It is clear only afterwards that the largely unchanged processes in making paintings – after finding correlations between the notebook and painting process for *Les Baux* – revealed that my painting process have become dependent on finding familiar scenarios. I have made sense of moments in painting, manipulating them into signifiers to match a sign-system that I unwittingly created of the contents of my transposed encounter with birdsong in the landscape: the field notebook.

This is where I find myself stuck. I find myself needing to stop and remember how metaphysicality is understood in my research: it is located within a material dimension, bound by the nature of perceiving a moving 'event'. In articulating correspondences between painted surface and transpositional object (field notebook), I have found that I have been anticipating something that will not come, because it has passed; transposition as a moving dimension is a metaphysicality by being a dimension of 'becoming-knowledge'. The 'being-ness' of the paintings once still provides a different encounter with transposition that I don't recognise as a metaphysicality. This makes me think of Derrida's deferral of meaning in the 'free play of the signifier'. The marks and their 'being-ness' cause two very different meanings through perceiving them during the making process and perceiving them once the process has stopped.



Figure 4.29. Harriet Carter, *Les Baux II*, (2020). Acrylic, oil, and pencil on MDF panel, 53 x 39.5cm.

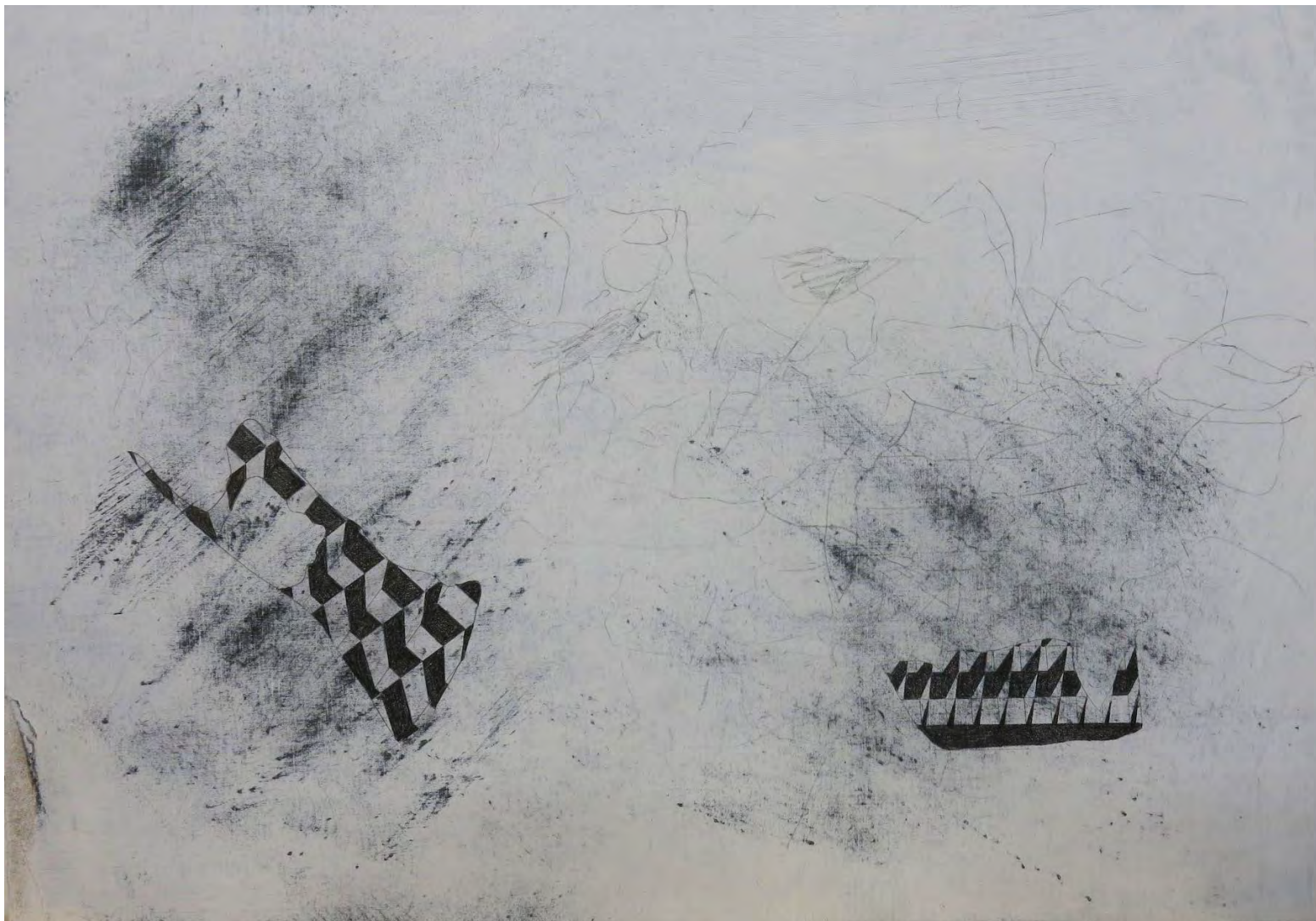


Figure 4.30. Harriet Carter, *Les Baux III*, (2020). Acrylic and graphite on MDF panel, 53 x 39.5cm.

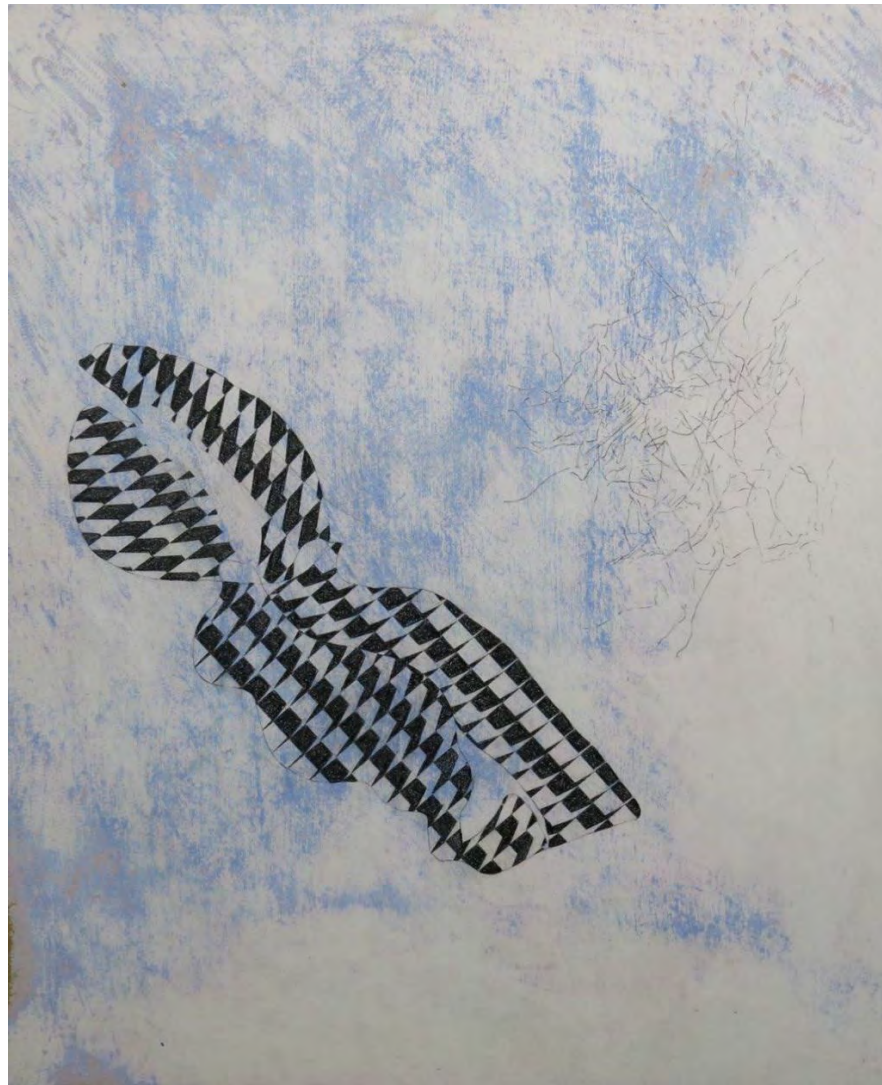


Figure 4.31. Harriet Carter, *Les Baux IV*, (2020). Acrylic and graphite on MDF panel, 53 x 39.5cm.



Figure 4.32. Harriet Carter, *L'Alouette calandrelle*, (2020). Acrylic, oil, and graphite on panel, 122 x 122cm.

I have articulated the complex process in the making of *Les Baux*, creating correspondences between the ‘events’ that took place in the painting practice and the transposed ‘object’ of my field notebook. These processes were largely unchanged in the creation of four subsequent paintings that imbricated birdsong and the landscape. Each action in the painting practice was a singular extraction from the notebook that resulted in a sense of simultaneity in the picture plane, marrying these extrapolated points of transposing in the landscape. I continued to lift elements from my field notebook to layer pictorial surfaces, finding continued slippages into semiotic frameworks of meaning-making. *L’Alouette calandrelle* (the culminative piece of this enquiry) contains all the different ‘semiotic markers’ that I found myself falling into naming. A ‘semiotic marker’ simply refers to the action of singling out a thing and conceptualising it by naming it as a sign for a signified (see glossary). I introduced a lilac colour to evoke the heady aroma of lavender at Les Baux, the colour

sanded down to create an overall haze. I also included gold painted gestures to evoke the flight and song of birdsong in La Crau, the ambient light reflecting the pigment on the pictorial plane that evoked the flight of the bird appearing and disappearing against the bright sun.

L’Alouette calandrelle challenged my ideals as it did not conform to how I perceive the way that my ‘visual voice’ behaves.³⁰ *L’Alouette calandrelle* revealed how I made room for chance to take place. The material agency that led the process and consequent decision-making resulted in paintings that were generated from the research, and not just my agency as practitioner. The paintings operating in this way are key in developing knowledge or coming to understand the painting processes *through* painting practice. This process has surprised me and led the painting to go in directions that I could not have envisaged. I have found the language difficult to reconcile, the agency of art practice research evading my comprehension. This in fact demonstrates what a

³⁰ An ongoing collaborative print making research project with Dr James Fisher (University of Gloucestershire), investigates the ‘visual voice’ of the artist, specifically on how this is challenged by collaboration. We argued that the material agency of the printing press as a tool and site of encounter with materiality created a third voice in our collaboration. In doing so, our resulting work is seen as created

between three voices: my colleague, my own, and what we have come to term the ‘material third’. See Appendix D for images of this collaborative research and Appendix E for the transcript of *Birdwatching* a paper I gave at Research in the Arts, the Arts in Research at a symposium held by Cultural Literacy in Europe, Lodz, Poland.

sense of a metaphysicality is in this situation – the painting providing agency over myself as practitioner, allowing the processes and research in the painting to take it in the visual direction that it needs to go rather than me holding onto my own visual voice. The ‘otherness’ of the materiality was pushing me into the peripheries of my painting language.

The marks made in this body of work are bold and separated on the pictorial plane. My usual visual voice is barely there – glimpsed in ephemeral marks and forms. Chance has taken place and directed the process. *L’Alouette calandrelle* is an artefact of an interrogation of transposition. Whilst I slipped into finding a language through semiotic markers, this change and departure from my visual voice provides an ‘example’ of transposition through processes. However, to return to warnings from Pirrò – transposition is taking note that “what is observed might be more than the sum of its parts”.³¹ I found I needed to problematise the slippages from semiotic markers further. Painting towards *Le Merle de roche* developed this enquiry.

ii. Painting towards *Le Merle de roche*: Exploring Messiaen’s polysensory multimodal transposition

Following my idea of the multimodal approach that I have identified in Messiaen’s method to create ‘Le Merle de roche’, my paintings have been created by transposing birdsong transcriptions undertaken in a Worcestershire orchard to use alongside landscape material transcribed at Cirque de Mourèze. Working with transcription material undertaken at two different sites, I set out to explore the relationship between the two forms of transcription in the pictorial plane and to question how the multimodal aspect affects the painting process (if at all).

I began to stage the picture, just as Messiaen had staged his nature portrait. I used the same ground preparation as with *Les Baux* – painting a surface white and then sanding it back, using the sander as means to carve out forms that evoked soaring birds and their song.

³¹ Pirrò, David, ‘Staging Collisions: On Behaviour’, in *Transpositions: Aesthetico-Epistemic Operators in Artistic Research*, ed. by Michael Schwab (Leuven: Leuven

University Press, 2018), pp. 135-148 (p. 140).

Writing-thinking extract

1st May 2020

Figure 4.33 – 4.35

Making *Cirque de Mourèze*

To imbricate the landscape with birdsong, I use tape to mark out gestures of birdsong transcribed in the Worcestershire orchard. I then paint a faint wash of yellow oil over this tape, in the shape of landscape drawings transcribed at Cirque de Mourèze. The oil medium I use creates a sheen when ambient light passes through it and bounces back from the white gesso underneath. The ambient light activates the marks, as it did with the birdsong gestures in *L'Alouette calandrelle*, however this time, it activates both the landscape and birdsong simultaneously, passing around the areas that were taped out for birdsong, directed by the form of large rocks that Messiaen identified as Diplodocus-like.



Figure 4.33. Harriet Carter, detail of a page in my sketchbook that contains early transcriptions of birdsong undertaken in the Worcestershire orchard, (2019).



Figure 4.34. Harriet Carter, *Cirque de Mourèze*, (2020). Detail showing the translucency of paint, taped out forms for birdsong gesture, and the reflectivity of the oil medium used, w.i.p.



Figure 4.35. Harriet Carter, *Cirque de Mourèze*, (2020). Acrylic and oil on panel, 120 x 120cm.

Writing-thinking extract

27th May 2020

Figure 4.36

Making *Cirque de Mourèze II*

I move onto a different surface this time – canvas.

The texture of the canvas seems to have interfered with my mark-making: gesture and colour are much more prolific on the canvas substrate than with the wooden surfaces I used before, with the colours saturating the material. As the overwhelming noise I encountered at Cirque de Mourèze were cicadas just like at Les Baux and La Crau, I use tape to cover the canvas in the notebook of both cicada sound and birdsong.

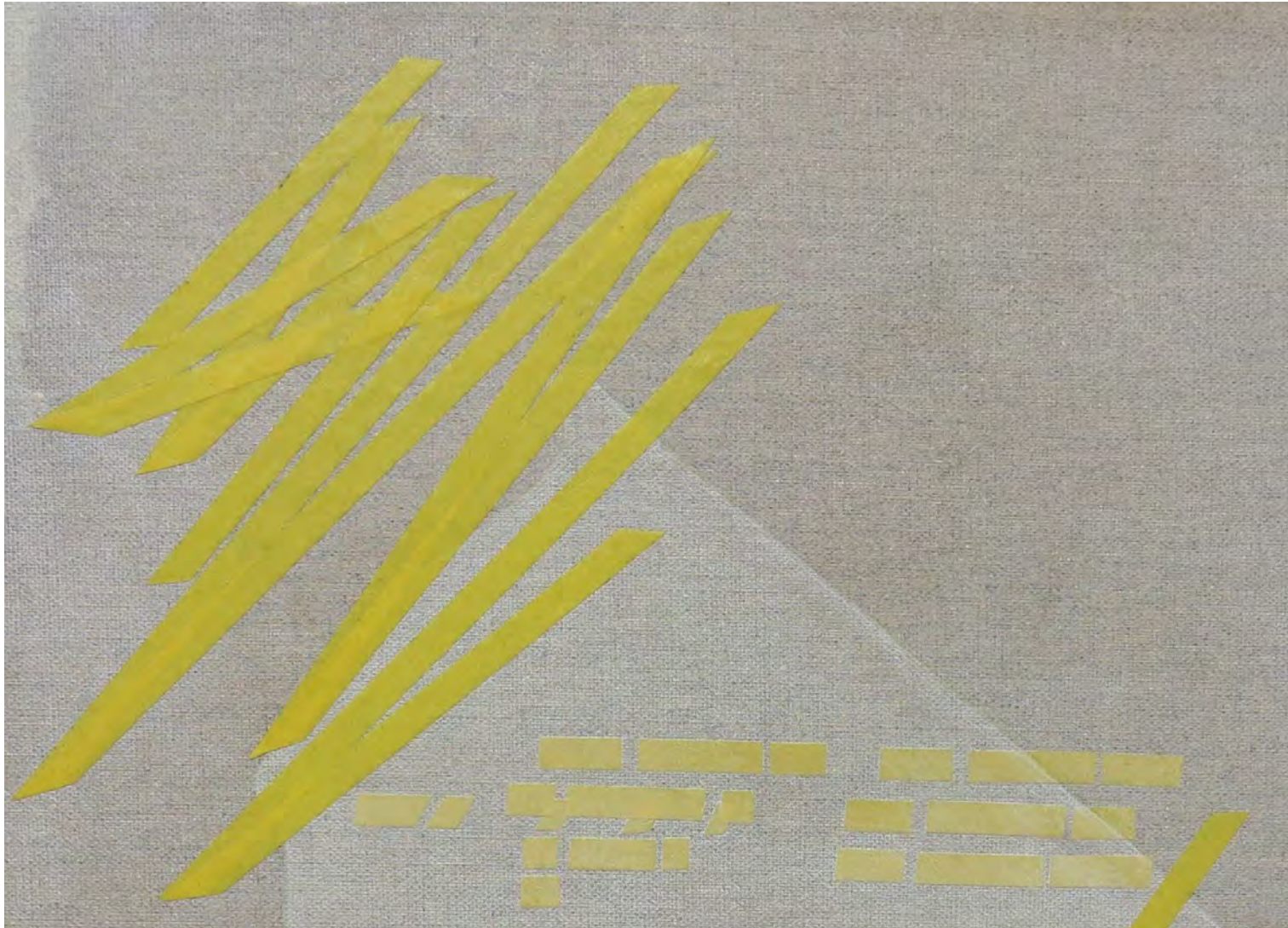


Figure 4.36. Harriet Carter, *Cirque de Mourèze II*, (2020), detail of tape, w.i.p.

Writing-thinking extract

27th May 2020

Figure 4.37

The bright yellow colour of the tape evokes the yellow colours of the stones at Cirque de Mourèze enhanced by the brightness of the sun on the yellow rock formations. The yellow tape also enhances the subtle hues of yellow in the landscape after the sun had passed. Directed by this chance finding caused by the tape, I find an imbrication of cicada sound and landscape. After applying the wash of the shape of the landscape, I paint the gestures of cicada sound yellow to marry with the colour of the tape – now removed.

I feel driven to lift the birdsong onto the substrate to mirror with Messiaen's staging of the birdsong that he transcribed from recordings and curated within the landscape at Cirque de Mourèze. I tape out birdsong gestures taken from my transcriptions at the Worcestershire orchard. I then repeat forms of the landscape that I transcribed at Cirque de Mourèze and then remove the tape leaving the wash underneath exposed. I apply gold pigmented oil this time remembering the way the graphite on the panel in *Les Baux* created movement and carried the cicada sound on ambient light.

The gold pigment seems otherworldly in the pictorial plane. The paint shimmers and dances amongst the muted colours that surround it. I also see the birdsong gestures as framed by the landscape here. A combination of the resistance of paint to canvas has caused the painted forms of the landscape to slightly protrude at the forms of the birdsong gestures, and so the gold paint sits within these protruding edges. I am reminded of how Messiaen framed the birdsong transcriptions taken at other places and recordings with the landscape of Cirque de Mourèze.

Have I mirrored Messiaen's polysensory multimodal transposition?

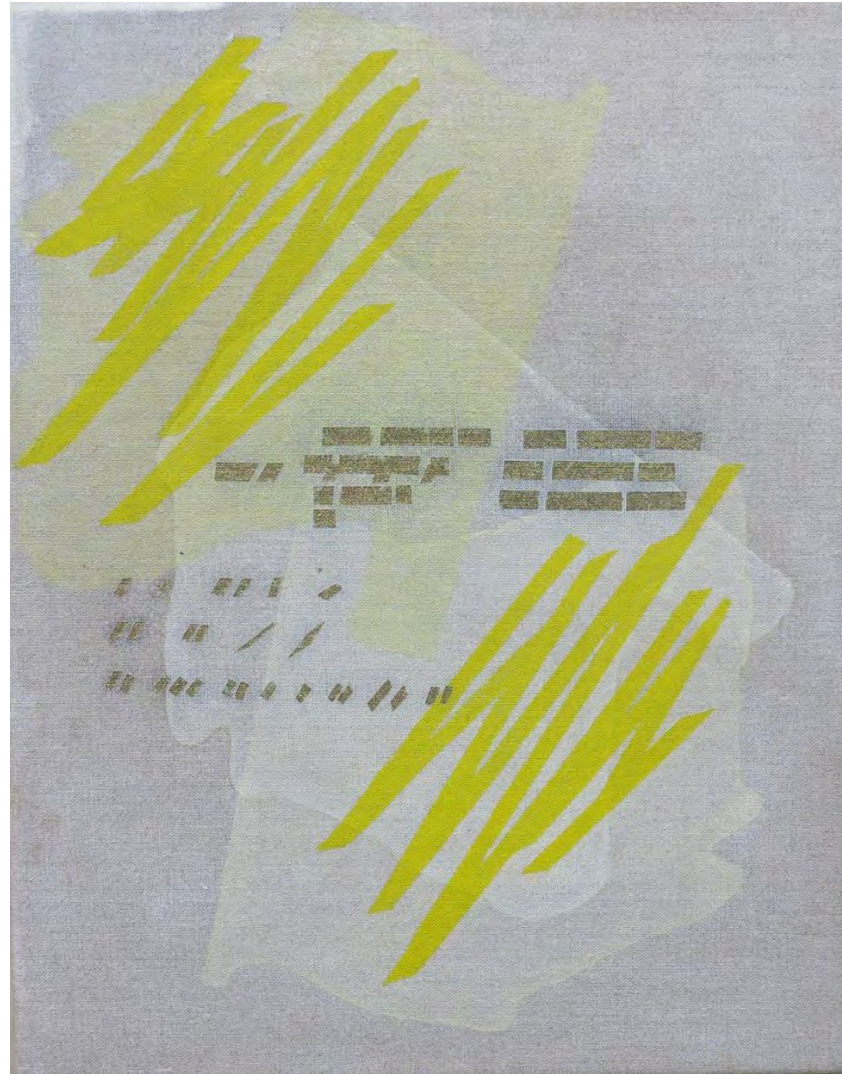


Figure 4.37. Harriet Carter, *Cirque de Mourèze II*, (2020). Oil and acrylic on canvas on board, 39.5 x 53cm.

Writing-thinking extract

23rd June 2020

Figures 4.38 and 4.39

Making *Le Merle de roche*

I develop the relationship between the surface of the work using opaque muted colour of landscape forms and gold pigment. During transcription I had spun around in a 360° circle to notate the entirety of the surrounding landscape. This created a layered drawing of different views of the surrounding dolomites. I print a copy of the transcription in my notebook and increase the size where I then trace forms in the drawing to place on the canvas surface. I use white chalk to do this to echo the way the chalk was used to transcribe my experience in the landscape became fugitive and echoed itself on the facing page when I shut the notebook. The chalk on the canvas surface becomes fugitive too, the more I layer forms on top and particularly when I begin to add faint, translucent white oil.

I lift a drawn outline of the cicada noise, and apply it to only some areas of the landscape forms underneath to provide a sense of how the cicada noise seem to pulsate and weave in and out of the landscape, appearing to come from different places every time I turned around to perceive the landscape.

I use gold pigment again – this time to fill in the space I'd made using cicada forms, to imbricate the way the cicada sound and birdsong melded together. From what I had found through painting towards *L'Alouette calandrelle* and in the paintings leading up to this one, the birdsong operates effectively on the reflectivity of light just like the cicada sound. The reflectivity of the pigment bouncing off the dark canvas provides a way for me not to semiotically assign shapes to birdsong here. I use lots of oil to a small ratio of pigment hoping this time the gold will operate even more strongly as a light reflector. Indeed, ambient light passes through the work reflecting the opacity of the landscape forms through the cicada gesture.

The birdsong is muddled with the cicada sound, sharing the same gesture, the sound of my experience – birdsong and cicadas – are married with the sight of my experience – of the landscape that surrounded me at Cirque de Mourèze. Sound from the Worcestershire orchard has been placed with sight and sound from Cirque de Mourèze. This process has made me see that the transpositional object of my notebook in the Worcestershire orchard is the carrier of one mode of experience, and the transpositional object of my notebook used for material perception Cirque de Mourèze is another mode. I think I have found a mirrored methodology to Messiaen's polysensory multimodal transposition.

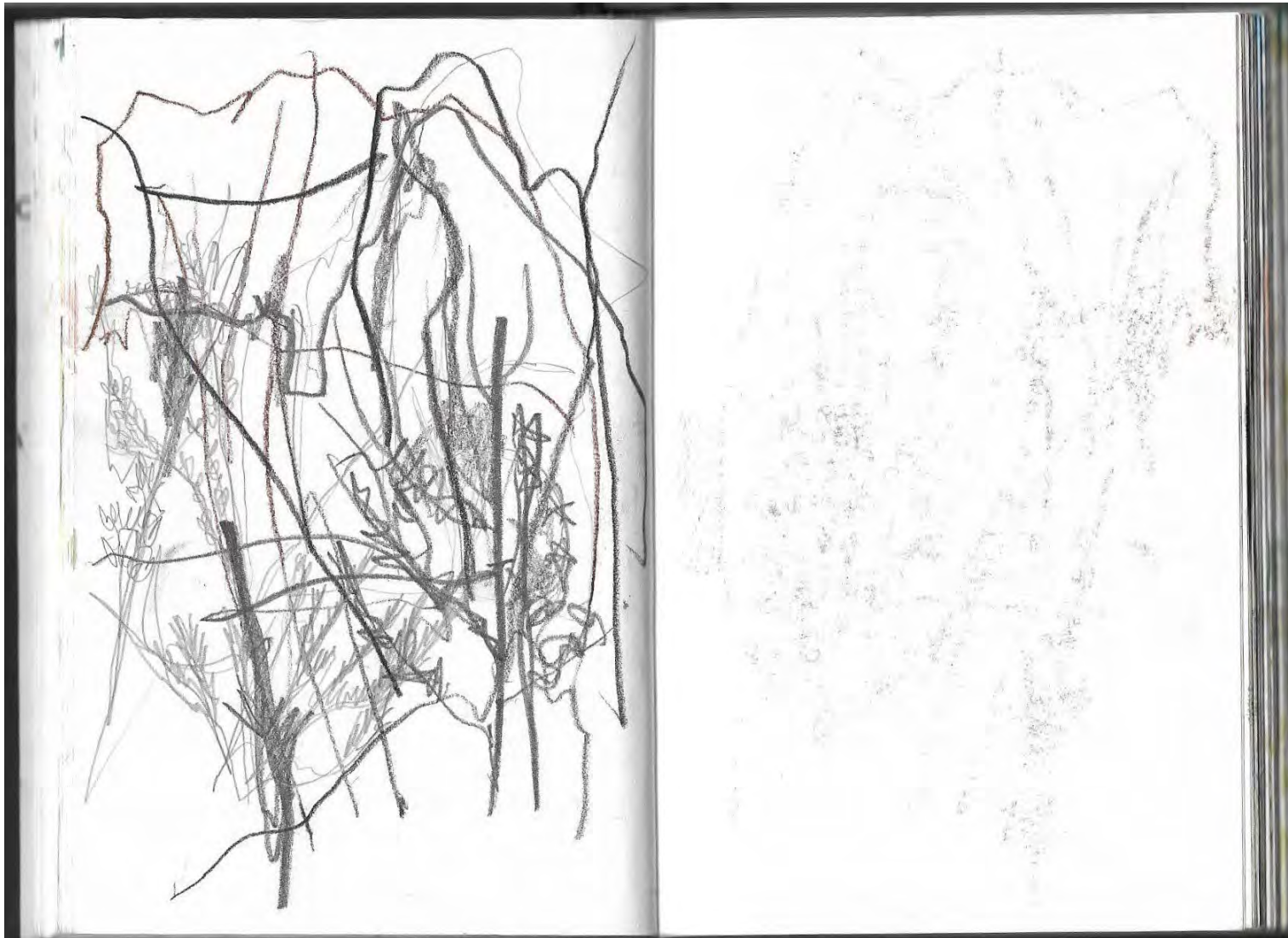


Figure 4.38. Harriet Carter, *Field notebook detailing 360° drawing*, (2019).



Figure 4.39. Harriet Carter, *Le Merle de roche*, (2020). Oil and chalk on canvas, 53 x 39.5cm

4. A new encounter with transposition

As Taylor argues that the *aftermath* of the quasacle manifests the complex spaces of “‘things’ such as ‘chance effects’, ‘accidents’ and ‘slippages’,”³² I contend that there is too an aftermath of the process of transposition. The processes used to construct the surfaces of my paintings exploring polysensory unimodal and polysensory multimodal transposition manifest as an embodied spatio-temporal encounter with transposition, which as I have discussed occurs in the specious present of an ‘event’ of birdsong. My field notebooks are ‘examples’ of material perception that were transpositional vehicles for my spatio-temporal embodied encounter.

During the painting processes, I found myself slipping into structured language systems by using semiotic ‘markers’ in my field notebook and painted surfaces to signify certain sounds or birds, for example. It was the material interventions in the painting process that provided poetic means to move away from this structuration, as Taylor found in her own

painting research.³³ For example, the reflectivity of graphite activated the form that I was creating responding to cicada sound. In turn, the movement created by the ambient light created a mirrored moment, i.e., ‘event’ of the moving sound of cicadas in the moving interplay of graphite with light. The various nuances of material thinking and writing-thinking operated as epistemic vehicles for ‘becoming-knowledge’, only partially comprehensible in the shared slippery place between artist and ‘otherness’ of materiality.

The slippage into translation first occurred when I extrapolated singular facets of the material perceptions captured in my field notebook and sought to transpose them into painting towards *L’Alouette calandrelle*. The transpositional vehicle (field notebook) was arguably a transpositional object – a stilled thing left in the wake of the becoming of knowledge. In attempting to respond to the ‘being-ness’ of the painting, I veered away from exploring the becoming of knowledge as bound up in the stilled painting itself, and instead explored painting as a transposed ‘thing’. My embodied encounters with the materiality of painting

³² Taylor, p. 130.

³³ Taylor, p. 130.

processes have led the temporal action of transposing the 'becoming-knowledge' through the spatial order of the pictorial plane, mirroring the 'becoming-knowledge' of the moving moments of material perception during birdsong 'event'. Once the painting process has ceased, the surfaces and various aspects of visual language – composition, light, form, colour – still the 'becoming-knowledge' as I know it, in their materiality as an aftermath of the transpositional movement.

During the construction of painted surfaces, and the slippages into the peripheries of language, I have come to see that my paintings were transpositional vehicles too. Material perception has been mirrored in material thinking. Furthermore, the seeming metaphysicality of 'becoming-knowledge' that was engendered during the painting process was harder to see once the surfaces became still. The metaphysicality was only alluded to through new encounters with the work through observing the 'being-ness' of the painting, mirroring the 'being-ness' of my field notebooks.

Undertaking transpositional painting practice has mapped connections between embodied encounters in the landscape and studio, that to follow Banham and O'Sullivan, creates trajectories of future "becomings".³⁴ The paintings themselves are seen as Lomax's concept of the 'example'; a thing that generates and shows only what it *is*: the place for metaphysicality to 'become'. The paintings stand alongside the field notebooks as 'examples' of transposition. Furthermore, all the paintings stand alongside one another as 'examples' of transposition.

To go further than Lomax however, they have also become examples of transposition that I can't recognise as a metaphysicality. To follow Adorno, what might "lie in the beyond makes its appearance only in the materials [...] within".³⁵ Metaphysicality is connected intrinsically only to the creation of a transpositional 'place'. The metaphysicality is hard to see on the painted surfaces yet can be glimpsed in the performativity of the materiality. This performativity resides in reflective paint working with ambient light and forms placed

³⁴ Gary Banham and Simon O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2005), p. 35-36.

³⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1973), p. 140.

around the pictorial plane that force the eye to move between them. During the making process, and now seeing the paintings afterwards, the 'poetic' nature of the materiality in the 'free play of the signifier' manifest during attempts to interpret the artworks. As Banham and O'Sullivan note, the aesthetic effect (also known as the signification effect) does not come from the object, but from the beholder.³⁶ In observing these paintings, I found myself identifying signs to attempt to 'make sense' of what I could see.

A way to help think through this is Deleuze and Guattari's concept of difference, as explored by Banham and O'Sullivan:

There the world is no longer thought as being comprised of distinct entities, not even aggregates of smaller and smaller parts. Instead, a notion of difference becomes the condition of possibility for phenomena. But this difference is not that between already demarcated signifiers (it is not a semiotic) rather it is a difference in intensity.³⁷

I assert that the difference in intensity noted by Banham and O'Sullivan causes a slippage between translation and

transposition in act of observing the paintings. To follow Banham and O'Sullivan, the act of observing the paintings reconceptualises them in the movement "from a signifying register to an asignifying one".³⁸ The 'free play of the signifier' will cause different audiences to encounter the paintings in different ways, through perceiving facets of the painting as connected to things in their world and creating meaning in these moments. An observer encounters the paintings and binds their experience with an interpretation of materiality. I assert, therefore, that the paintings become a conduit for new meaning. I am reminded of Paul Rosenbloom's paintings of the landscape where materiality *names* a fugitive sensation:

An experience in landscape is a complex one: treading on baked earth, the smell, the heat, memories, images glimpsed in peripheries vision, the sound of one's own breath. There are no words or simple sentences to express these sensations. Only art, with its sensuality and its metaphoric power, can provide objective correlatives for these otherwise ineffable sensations,

³⁶ Banham and O'Sullivan, p. 22.

³⁷ Banham and O'Sullivan, p. 31.

³⁸ Banham and O'Sullivan, p. 31.

paintings [thus become] analogies or metaphors for experiences of being in the landscape. 39

I found out similar narratives to Rosenbloom when interpreting metaphors in a relief print I made transposing from my transcriptions of birdsong in a Worcestershire orchard, published elsewhere.⁴⁰

The notebooks and paintings became transpositional vehicles and a thinking 'places', specifically a material dimension of expanded perception. To draw on terminologies associated with metaphysicality, boundaries are blurred between the unknown and the known, as materiality and perception engage in 'simultaneous contrast'. I contend that metaphysicality is therefore embedded in embodied encounters with birdsong through the painting process. It is through exploring transcription in an embodied encounter with intangible birdsong as a mode of transposition, that brings transposition and metaphysicality together in painting.

The metaphysicality embedded in interacting with painting as both site and encounter appeared different once I

had relinquished the processes and the paintings became still. It made me realise that when someone else encounters my paintings, they will not be encountering the original metaphysicality embedded in working with the 'otherness' of materiality. Paintings, as I have found through the painting process, bring an encounter that is incorporated through what the observer brings to the observation, providing an alternative encounter with birdsong. I see Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux* as doing the same thing. This encounter is poetic where meaning is created through perception. The observer encounters the paintings (and *Catalogue d'oiseaux*) and binds their experience with an interpretation of the making and meaning-making that they bring to the encounter. As a result, I see the role of the paintings as a *conduit* to transposing a metaphysicality, led first and foremost by the materiality, orchestrating interpretation of the observer.

To follow Pirrò, the 'being-ness' of the paintings "resist stabilisation into a finite propositional formulation".⁴¹ The paintings are not transposition alone, but sites and encounters

³⁹ Paul Rosenbloom and Tony Godfrey, *Paul Rosenbloom: Paintings and Drawings* (England: Pale Green Press, 1994), p. 3.

⁴⁰ See: Catherine Baker, 'IMPACT 11 part 1', *flipsnack*, 2021
<<https://www.flipsnack.com/B89C555569B/impact-11-part-1-v7jaz11wb1.html>>.

⁴¹ Pirrò, p. 54.

with transposition and therefore the metaphysical (as I have found the two are imbricated with each other). Therefore, because making with the ‘otherness’ of materiality in the poetic ‘free play of the signifier’, the paintings are not, to follow Pirrò:

under the complete control of the artists who produced it, in the sense that it offers an openness to be seen, perceived, or thought in different ways to how it was first conceived.⁴²

I have found that encountering materiality on the periphery of language creates a transpositional place and a transposed ‘event’ of an embodied encounter with birdsong in the landscape. A birdsong encounter existed in the transpositional movements between landscape and studio, indeed, a transposition of a spatio-temporal ‘event’. I assert that once the paintings are still, the birdsong encounter is therefore *restarted* in the spatio-temporal ‘event’ of observing the paintings, just like listening to *Catalogue d’oiseaux* using methods devised by the listener (i.e., as I have shown using listening encounters).

5. Conclusions

This book has brought an interrogation of transposition through painting practice. I have explored the extent to which the transposition of a birdsong ‘event’ manoeuvres around translation. I examined Messiaen’s imaginative responses to his encounters with birdsong in his transcriptions in his *cahiers*, score directives, and prefaces. Through analysis of the *cahiers* and scores to ‘L’Alouette calandrelle’ and ‘Le Merle de roche’, and by undertaking listening encounters, I have identified two transpositional methodological frameworks: polysensory unimodal transposition and polysensory multimodal transposition.

By using the two different modes of transposition in practice, I have explored the extent to which they operate in my own transcriptions of birdsong and the landscape. I used two different ‘voices’: writing-thinking and definitive prose to explore the slippery moments of ‘becoming-knowledge’ during material thinking. Echoing Book One: the written element of my thesis does not attempt to create meaning from the

⁴² Pirrò, p. 54

material explorations in the painting practice. Instead, I used writing-thinking excerpts in dialogue with photographs, listening encounters, notebooks, and paintings to explore how meaning is exposed to enable the reader to come close to it and encounter it in their own terms within the wider frame of this thesis.

I utilised Messiaen's methodology to explore polysensory unimodal transposition and polysensory multimodal transposition. During my interrogation, I inadvertently created sign-systems – and signs – slipping into comprehending birdsong in a language that I could navigate that resonates with translation rather than transposition. Due to the intangible and unknown qualities I attach to the metaphysicality of birdsong, there were no signs to signify *per se*. Any attempt to 'make sense' of the metaphysicality of a birdsong encounter therefore became reducibly representational. I did not seek to create meaning of metaphysical encounters with birdsong through painting processes, nor attempt to codify or structure meaning when articulating the painting processes. Yet, this is what happened.

By making room for chance from working with the 'otherness' of materiality, the painting processes evaded a comprehensible sign system (aligned with representation), to enable metaphysicality. As my painting processes developed, it became clear that I could not *develop* knowledge but attain to 'becoming knowledge' and coming *towards* understanding that metaphysicality in this process cannot result in the creation of finite knowledge grasped in representational and semiotic structures.

The epistemological dimensions of material thinking in making with materiality informed the paintings moving towards *L'Alouette calandrelle* and *Le Merle de Roche*. I found that transposition occurred during the spatio-temporal processes of painting, moving between the field notebook and construction of painted surfaces. These findings helped me to define Messiaen's methods as transpositional.

Through exploring transposition in Messiaen's methods to create 'L'Alouette calandrelle' and 'Le Merle de roche' and my painting practice, this book comes to a paradoxical conclusion. Messiaen's *cahiers* and two nature portraits, my field notebooks and my paintings, are transpositional vehicles

and present an encounter with transposition. Whilst this is the case, 'L'Alouette calandrelle' and 'Le Merle de roche' and my paintings create a *place* for metaphysicality as bound with transposition to be experienced in encountering the music and paintings. The paintings act as a transposition place for the 'imminence' to use Cixous' word, of 'becoming-knowledge'.

INTERLUDE:

‘La Rousserolle effarvate’

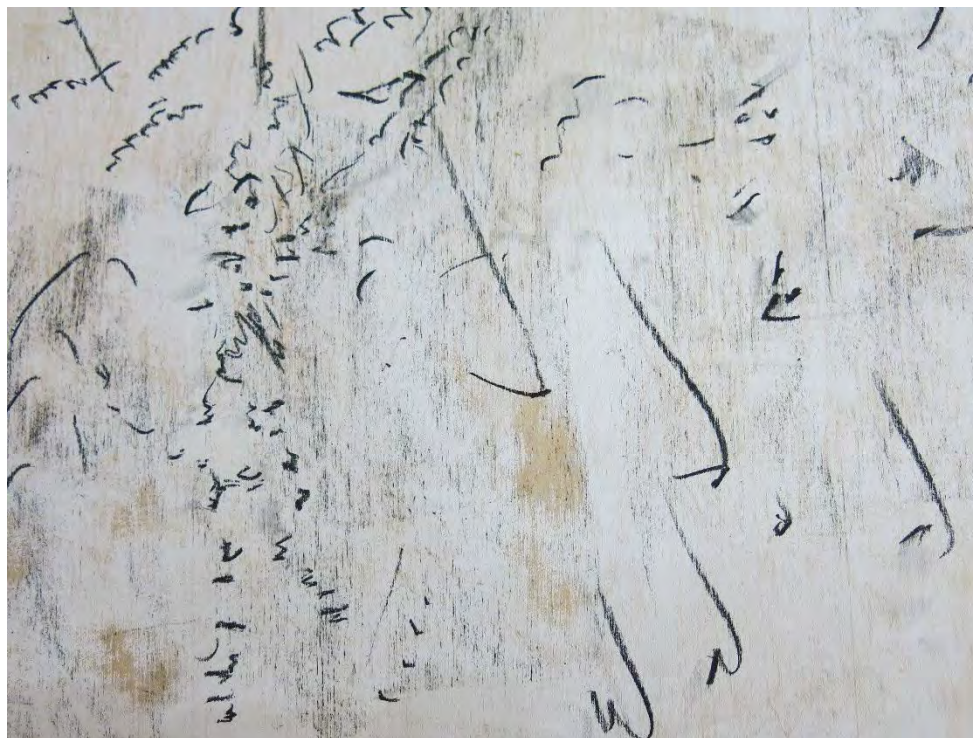


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Writing-thinking

8th June 2021

Studio

To develop on my findings that my field notebook is a fossilised remnant, I feel I need to explore the embodied encounters of transcribing in the event of birdsong, rather than extrapolate and ultimately translate the residue as I found in my painting investigations of polysensory multimodal and polysensory unimodal transposition.

Writing-thinking

8th June 2021

Figure i.

I have chosen to work on big panels again. I want to reposition my experience of the looming vastness of the salt marshes and lake.

I work on the floor, returning to the way I sometimes hunched over my field notebook as it lay on the dusty soil at Lake Vaccarès.



Figure i. Harriet Carter, Making *Étang de Vaccarès* (2021). Digital photograph.

Writing-thinking

10th June 2021

Figures ii. and iii.

I begin to construct a new surface thinking of one very specific encounter with birdsong at in the early hours of July 2019, at Lake Vaccarès in the Camargue.

There were mosquitos everywhere, attracted to the damp, humid salt marshes. I was being bitten – a lot – so decided to watch the sunrise from inside my car. The birdsong was very faint – almost inaudible from inside the car. I painted the sunrise and drew the flights of the early morning birdsong around me.



Figure ii. Harriet Carter, Field notebook showing a watercolour sketch of a sunrise, (2019). Watercolour on paper, 15.7 x 10.8cm.

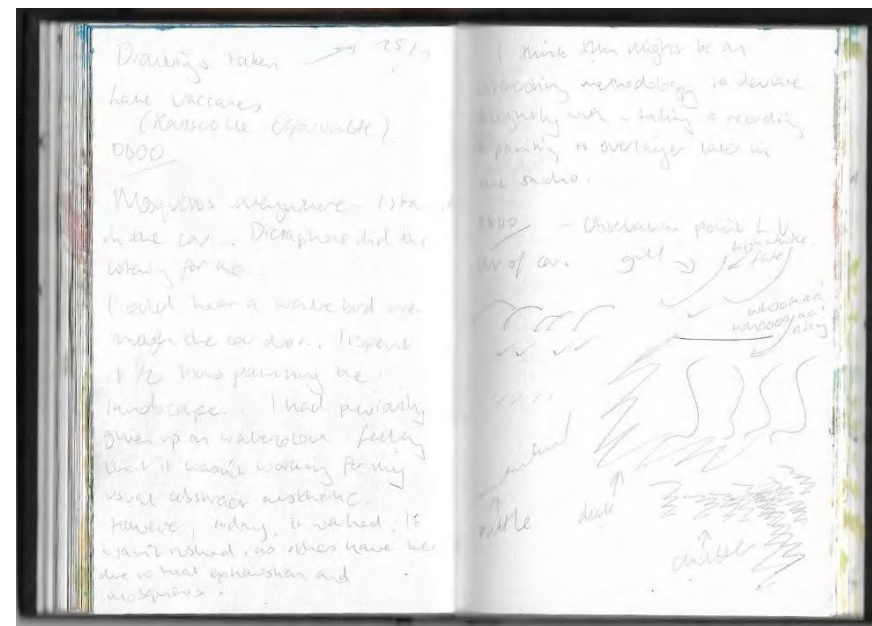


Figure iii. Harriet Carter, Field notebook describing daybreak, (2019). Pencil on paper, 15.7 x 10.8cm.

Writing-thinking

10th June 2021

Figure iv.

This time I listen to a recording my Dictaphone made by positioning the Dictaphone out of the car. It projects from a speaker studio. I know that I am enhancing what I initially experienced, but I want to have the sound envelop me as I begin to transpose my field notebook.

I sit on the floor next to the panel and close my eyes. I use charcoal to make marks on the surface of the panel when I can make out sounds. I mark the surface in places where I perceive the sounds are coming from. There are more marks appearing on the left-hand side of the panel as there is an activity of birdsong emanating to my left.

Suddenly, I hear a cacophonous sound. A car has zoomed past on the recording – and I am instantly taken back to being sat in the car jumping with similar surprise as a car shot past me down the quiet road.



Figure iv. Harriet Carter, *Étang de Vaccarès*, (2019). W.i.p.

Writing-thinking

10th June 2021

Figure v.

As I reach across the surface of the panel, my arms extend beyond its edges.

I place another panel next to it so that my passing gesture can continue its journey, sounds guiding my spatial movements.



Figure v. Harriet Carter, *Étang de Vaccarès*, (2021). W.i.p.

Writing-thinking

10th June 2021

Figure vi.

Dirt is collecting on my panels as they remain on the studio floor. Dust sticks to the still-drying watercolour. Charcoal fingerprints begin to appear as my marks continue to be directed by where sound is emanating from. Mark-making has become hastier as the birdsong sounds more frequently, guided by the breaking of dawn.

The panel is becoming a site where marks are fugitive, escaping their placement by being brushed past or catching dust particles in the studio air. I am reminded of the fugitivity of the watercolour in my field notebook, where colour would smudge and bleed into the central fold when I closed the note pages before the paint had time to dry. My hastiness in transcribing my encounter with birdsong by Lake Vaccarès in the Camargue in 2019 is being repositioned before my very eyes, here, on the painted panel that is falling victim to my movements around it.

Am I creating a transpositional place where metaphysicality might become?



Figure vi. Harriet Carter, *Étang de Vaccarès*, (2021). Acrylic, oil, watercolour, graphite, and charcoal on wooden panels, 105 x 210cm.

Writing-thinking

10th June 2021

Figure vii.

I look over and see that there are more panels in the studio. I begin to make marks with yellow watercolour, allowing liberal lashings of water to allow me to paint quickly, for I feel an excitement building, I need to respond to this development.

Material thinking is leading my hand.



Figure vii. Harriet Carter, *Étang de Vaccarès I*, (2021). W.i.p.

Writing-thinking

10th June 2021

Figure viii.

Suddenly I realise that I have made impulsive marks without consulting the field notebook first. With a jolt, I realise that I had not consulted the field notebook past the recorded encounter inside the car at daybreak.

These impulsive marks are similar in form to the gestures I had been making responding to sound in the making of *Étang de Vaccarès*.

I run upstairs to find some salt. I find Droitwich salt – perfect – salt from Worcestershire being used in my Worcestershire studio heightens the spatio-temporal movements that are guiding me, between the salt marsh in the Camargue and my newly salt-infused air of my studio.



Figure viii. Harriet Carter, *Étang de Vaccarès I*, (2021). W.i.p.

Writing-thinking

10th June 2021

Figure ix.

I use salt, thinking of the salt-saturated landscape. I crunch the granules and press them into the watercolour paint. The salt absorbs the water from the paint and leaves a dry, pale residue of yellow across the surface of the panels.

I think about how I have developed the theory that Messiaen's birdsong transcriptions and compositions are acts of transposition. Messiaen made transcriptions at Lake Vaccarès and Salin-de-Badon in the same *cahier* as his transcriptions that informed 'L'Alouette calandrelle'. Yet I remember the preface to 'La Rousserolle effarvate' situates the nature portrait in the Sologne marsh region. Tantalisingly, there is no evidence Messiaen transcribed encounters in the Sologne marshes in his *cahiers*. The transpositional vehicle of his material perception is thus missing – if there even was one.

It feels like I am on the verge of a discovery.

Could this seventh nature portrait in the fourth book, central to *Catalogue d'oiseaux* be the result of a *third* type of transposition by Messiaen?

I need to go to the Sologne marshes to experience the place myself, to find out.

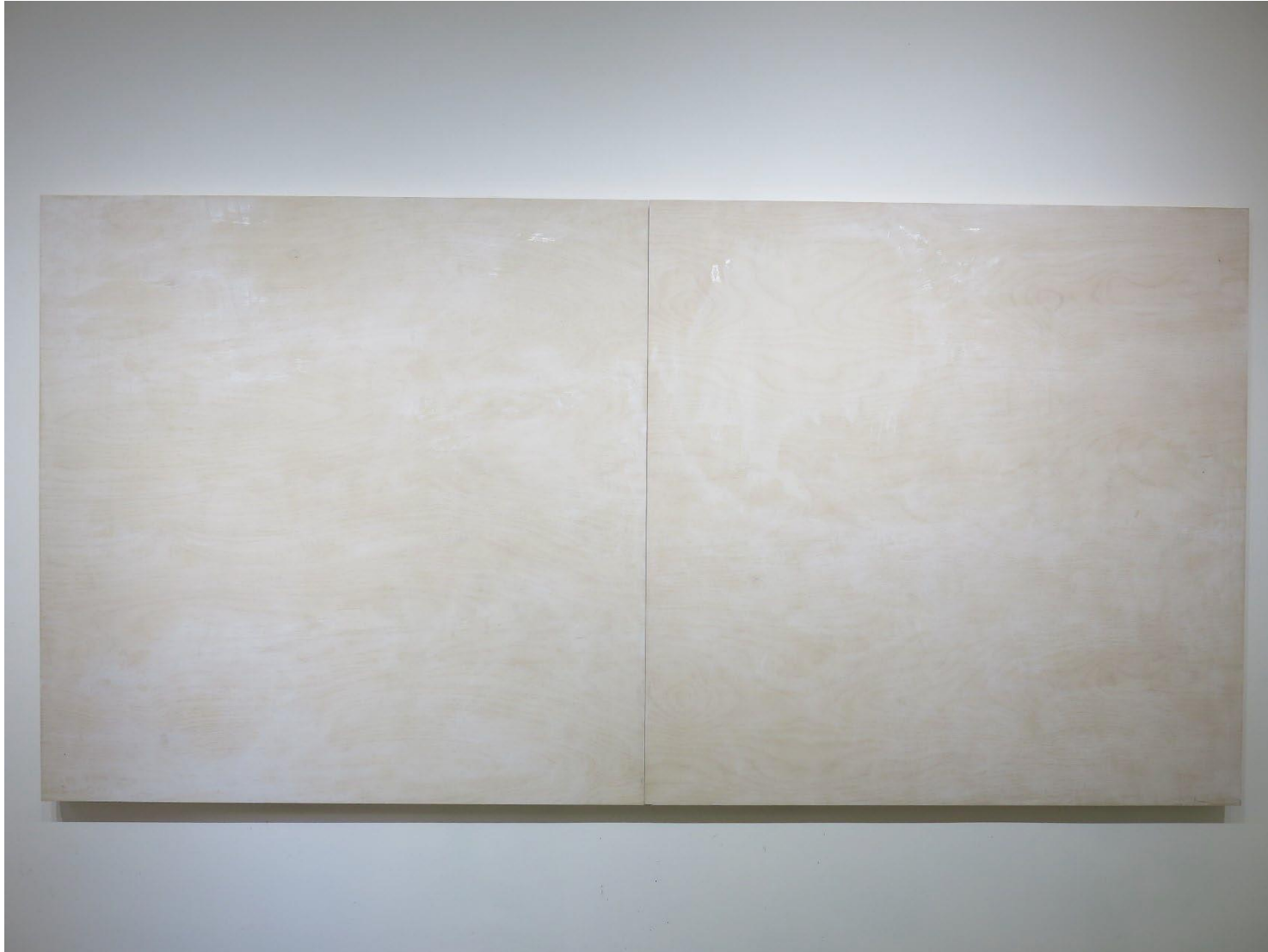


Figure ix. Harriet Carter, *Étang de Vaccarès I*, (2021). W.i.p.

BOOK FIVE:
Not the End



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Introduction

In this thesis, I have interrogated transposition by exploring the ways and the extent to which it operates between the auditory and the visual. I have examined transposition via Olivier Messiaen's methodology of transcribing encounters with birdsong into music, specifically in his seminal work *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. I argued that Messiaen used a 'transpositional' methodology. Through my research, I used this methodology to transpose experiences with birdsong encounters into painting. I have developed new thought within my practice on polysensory encounters with metaphysicality. This led to an expanded notion of transposition, reflected in the provocation within the title of this thesis: "Beyond Transposition?".

This book draws together my research findings. Firstly, I bring together the main themes of this research in which I present the multiple—and interconnected—contributions to knowledge. Secondly, I explore the extent to which my research question and aims have been met. Thirdly, I present how the research has created possibilities for future research.

1. Contributions to knowledge

A critique of translation

Via my use of transposition as a methodology this research contributes a new critical interrogation of 'translation' which highlights the need for a new conceptual framework in the context of conceiving encounter in painting practice through transposition. In doing so, this critique argues that translation is limited due to the way that it is tied to and constrained by semiotic language systems.

Thinking through painting as both site and encounter has revealed that translation and transposition are not separate endeavours. Rather than being an act of translation per se, which relies on fixed semiotic structures, encountering birdsong in painting can instead be understood as imbricated with transposition; a slippery 'place' that resides during moments of material perception and via material thinking. As such, I present the first critique of translation in this way by demonstrating that in my practice, the metaphysicality of birdsong sits outside—and 'elsewhere' to follow Irigaray—of language systems and thus needs to be explored outside of translation.

Thinking on the metaphysical

This research contributes new knowledge through a shift from thinking *about* metaphysicality to thinking *on* the metaphysical. In doing so, I define a new term: ‘thinking on the metaphysical’ that is bound up in process where metaphysicality emerges *through* embodied encounter.

Via exploring encountering birdsong and capturing this experience through transcription, this research contributes new insights into the ungraspability to birdsong. Through transcribing birdsong *encounters*, this research contributes knowledge that attempting to codify birdsong reduces the intangible ephemera into a representational framework and risks the act of translating the inconceivable ‘language’ of birdsong (if there is one) into a communicable language. In doing so, I have contributed a new definition of metaphysicality by defining encounters with birdsong as intangible, unknown, and irresolute.

Through my own transcriptions of birdsong and analysing Messiaen’s transcriptions of birdsong, I have asserted that in my painting practice, metaphysicality is intrinsic to perceiving an embodied encounter with birdsong and is by

its nature, tied up with spatio-temporal nuances of perception.

Material perception

Through transcribing birdsong in the landscape, I have demonstrated that encounter is embodied and intertwined with perception. In doing so, I contribute theories of transcribing a birdsong encounter through mark-making to create a transpositional *place*. Using my own transcriptions and exploring the work of Olga Karlíková through the lens of Lomax’s ‘event’ theory, I evidenced that that the spatio-temporal nature of creating an ‘event’ of birdsong caused a holistic moment. Incorporated in this holistic moment is the act of transcribing by mark-making on paper. In doing so, I provided a new definition of transcription within perception as ‘material perception’.

Based on my exploration of transcribing birdsong in the landscape, I also proposed that transcription occurs on the peripheries of language, evading translation. As such, I contribute the first critique of transcribing the ‘elsewhere’ of birdsong on the peripheries of language, which provides the foundations for new knowledge surrounding the need for an

expanded understanding of painting processes as a facet of perception.

Reconceptualising Messiaen's sacramental perception

Via exploring transcribing birdsong as 'thinking on the metaphysical', this research contributes a new theory of the relationship Messiaen had with birds. I contribute the first concept of applying 'thinking on the metaphysical' to Messiaen's musical interpretations of birdsong. Through investigation of Messiaen's interests in the eternal, I defined his birdsong transcriptions as an example of sacramental perception. I proposed an expanded understanding of Messiaen's relationship with the metaphysical by arguing that he grappled with the 'elsewhere' of birdsong in his explorations of infinity in the limiting temporality of the vehicle of music. Undertaking a transpositional methodology that mirrors Messiaen's own demonstrated that it was possible to glimpse his exploration of metaphysicality through transposing between material perception in the 'event' and via material thinking in the construction of painted surfaces.

I proposed that transcriptions of birdsong became transpositional vehicles of perception. I applied these findings to develop a theory that Messiaen demonstrates a form of 'thinking on the metaphysical' through exploring his *cahiers* as transpositional vehicles of material perception. In doing so, this research provides ways for Messiaen's metaphysicality to be explored in painting practice.

Through undertaking fieldwork to conduct mark-making (a facet of painting practice) in embodied encounters with the same landscape Messiaen undertook his birdsong transcriptions, this research provided ways to explore the spatio-temporal process of transcribing in an 'event' of birdsong. Furthermore, the act of transcription has the capacity to reposition the spatio-temporality of perception in the 'event' itself. Each gesture made during the transcription in the 'event' of birdsong in the landscape was the product of polysensory perception; a similarity with polysensory acts of transposition identified in Messiaen's *cahiers*.

New theories of transposition: Polysensory unimodal transposition and Polysensory multimodal transposition

Based on my exploration of Messiaen's *cahiers* and scores to 'L'Alouette calandrelle' and 'Le Merle de roche', I proposed that Messiaen's methods of transcription establish a polysensory encounter with birdsong. Through undertaking transcriptions in the same French landscape that Messiaen transcribed birdsong, I claimed that Messiaen articulated a polysensory experience of encountering birdsong in his *cahiers* through descriptive prose of what he could see, smell, and feel – the landscape, aroma, and touch, and musical notation of what he could hear: birdsong. As such, I contribute the first critique of Messiaen's *cahiers* as 'transpositional places' in this way through surmising that 'L'Alouette calandrelle' and 'Le Merle de roche' are the products of two different forms of transpositional method. This has provided the foundations for my new contributions to knowledge surrounding my claim for two new definitions of transposition in Messiaen's methods of transcribing birdsong: 'Polysensory unimodal transposition' and 'Polysensory multimodal transposition' as follows:

Polysensory unimodal transposition

Messiaen's transpositional movement of almost directly lifting his polysensory experience through one 'mode' (i.e., *cahier* MS-23043), to the score of 'L'Alouette calandrelle' is defined as 'polysensory unimodal transposition' (see Diagram 1 on page 6).

Polysensory multimodal transposition

Messiaen's selection of polysensory experiences in *cahiers* MS-23045, 23048, 23051, 23056(2) to feed the composition of 'Le Merle de roche' is considered a transpositional movement through multiple 'modes'. I define Messiaen's movement between the *cahiers* – as a collective – and score as 'polysensory multimodal transposition' (see Diagram 2 on page 6).

Diagram 1

Polysensory unimodal transposition:

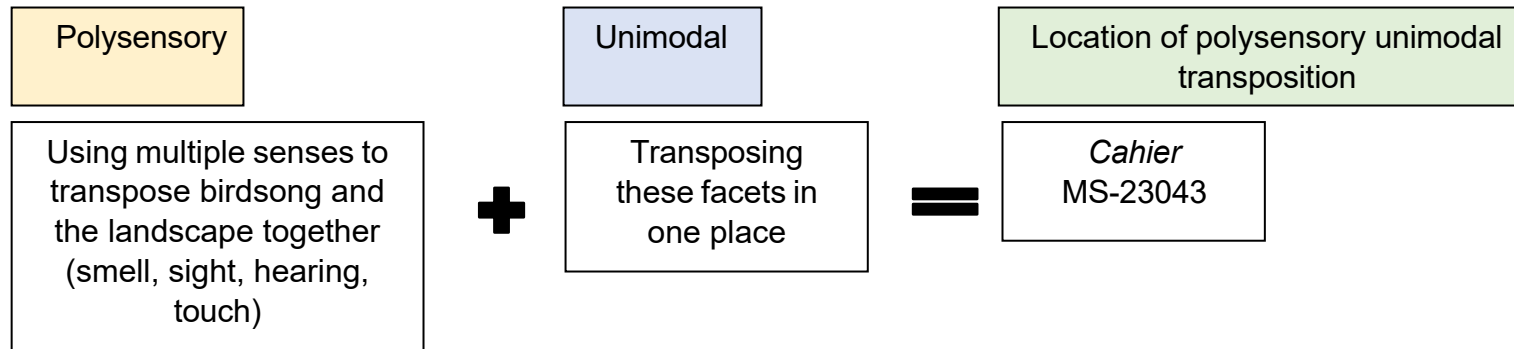
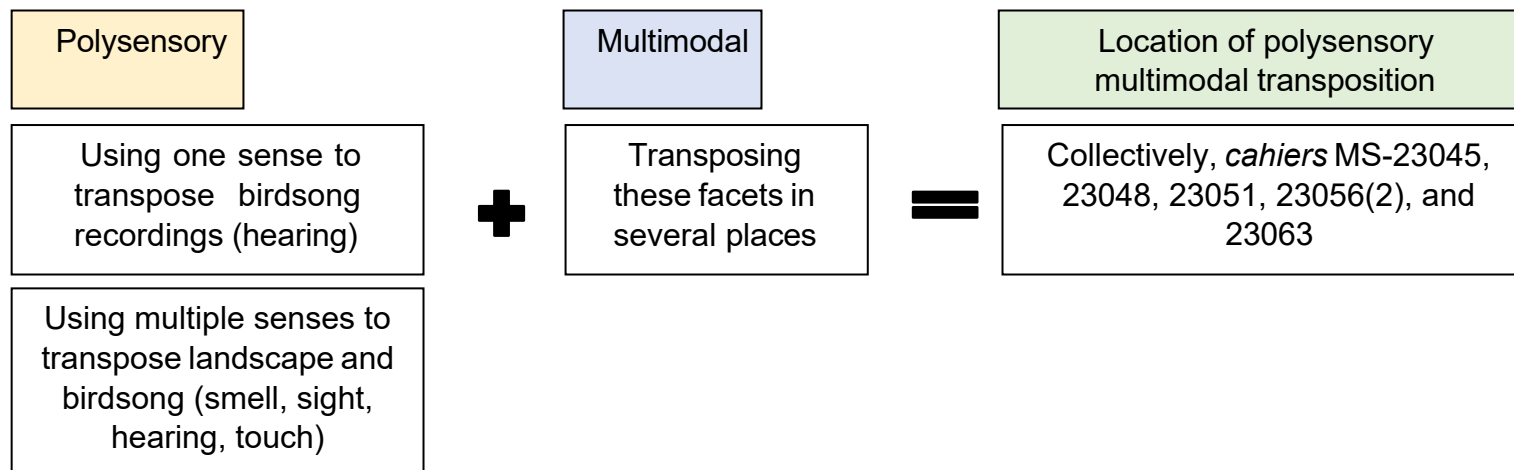


Diagram 2

Polysensory multimodal transposition:



A polyvocal transpositional methodology

Through initial explorations of birdsong in a Worcestershire orchard, I found that I was unable to articulate my experiences adequately through both visual or written language. In doing so, this research makes a new contribution whereby multiple 'voices' can come closest to articulating the experience of the metaphysical in encounters with birdsong as they best encapsulate the experience and epistemological dimensions of materiality via material thinking.

I evidenced that material thinking cannot be fully comprehended in communicable language because of the 'otherness' of materiality in creating paintings. I evidenced this by adopting 'writing-thinking' as a space to attain the slippery concepts in material thinking. 'Writing-thinking' has thus acted as a bridge between material thinking and the definitive written prose of this written thesis and can be used as a polyvocal modality to capture concepts such as encounter, perception, materiality, and the metaphysical as central to this research.

Furthermore, I analysed the two nature portraits from *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, 'L'Alouette calandrelle' and 'Le Merle de

roche' through developing listening encounters as a method. The listening encounters have enabled a move between the poetic prefaces of Messiaen's nature portraits and performance of *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. In doing so, the listening encounters contribute new insights into how Messiaen transposed his embodied encounter with birdsong into music. This occurs specifically through considering an encounter with birdsong as an 'event' of birdsong and transcribing as an 'event' of material perception. A further insight has been gained through working with multiple approaches to constructing paintings to define different forms of transposition. Mining information through practice mirrors the way Messiaen learned about his relationship to birdsong through creating *Catalogue d'oiseaux*.

Using multiple voices thus has the capacity to enable a cross-boundary repositioning of thought developed through painting and writing (or indeed other aesthetic practices). Thoughts that are unspoken, uttered, and then either abandoned (not included in this thesis), or taken forward across the boundaries of one language to another. Undertaking transposition between these voices further has provided new insights into the slipperiness of transposing the metaphysicity of birdsong. I propose that the using a

polyvocal strategy that incorporates multiple voices contributes a new method for artist-researchers to articulate what may otherwise elude the close and fixity of semiotic structures, and their own instances of 'becoming knowledge'

Becoming-knowledge

Through undertaking transpositional movements in painting practice, this research provides new understandings of the potential for metaphysicality (as an expanded term) to be comprehended via encounter as it is bound up with materiality in 'becoming-knowledge'. By developing Schwab's concept of 'becoming-knowledge' in transposition during artistic research, this thesis presents new insights into 'becoming- knowledge' in painting practice. Specifically, through reaching for the unknown in encountering birdsong, I have brought transposition and metaphysicality together in painting. I have not redefined metaphysicality in general – but encountered and explored metaphysical qualities within transposition in my practice.

Building theories on 'not-knowing' from Cocker, and 'spatial ontology' from Barfield into painting practice has contributed new ways for artists to explore working *with*

materiality to generate knowledge. I provided evidence on how making paintings becomes an embodied experience by the artist making room for chance in working with the 'otherness' of materiality. Via using a polyvocal approach to articulating this embodied experience of painting, this research has provided new contributions on transposing 'becoming-knowledge as means to encounter the metaphysicality of birdsong. Transposition cannot be created (or a metaphysicality) per se, as it will always fall into the trap of translation. Rather, one can create the *conditions* for transposition – in polysensory spatio-temporality – to *become*. Therefore, in my own practice, this research contributes the theory that metaphysicality occurs only in the *coming towards* transposition.

On the peripheries: reconceiving transposition as place

Via exploring painting process, this research contributes new knowledge that transposition connects with metaphysicality in a transpositional place. I adapted Hawkins' theory of art as a thinking space, to consider paintings as transpositional thinking *places*, providing new insights into how knowledge is continually on the point of emerging, and not fully visible in chance occurrences bound up in working with materiality. I

propose that transposition and metaphysicality are connected by working *with* materiality, where the 'otherness' of materiality cannot be fully grasped. As such I contribute the first critique of transposition as metaphysical in painting process because of how materiality pushes transposition to the peripheries of a communicable visual language. In doing so, this research provides new ways to define transposition as both an overarching methodology and a method (as well as the object of this research) in 'becoming-knowledge'.

Transposing encounters from material perception to material thinking demonstrates that painting is a site of transposition and thinking place. My practice has utilised multiple approaches to painting, such as: precursory mark-making during birdsong transcriptions, printmaking, and the construction of painted surfaces. Through the construction of these painted surfaces in my practice, this research has explored the slippage between signifier and signified in materiality. By doing so, this research contributes insights into how the transpositional thinking place as shared between artist and materiality pushes painting processes to the peripheries of language. Furthermore, elevating the importance of the 'otherness' of materiality during moving

painting processes has been key in reconceptualising the metaphysical as an ungraspable, unknown, and irresolute occurrence.

Through construction of these painted surfaces, this research contributes new insights into the continued performativity of the materiality. Working *with* the painted surface repositions the material performativity during the transpositional process. Observing the stilled marks of the moving transpositional process – in gesture and reflective material – created insight that the paintings were an 'example' (to use Lomax's term) of transposition. In doing so, this research surmises that an 'example' of transposition is created from the new encounter with the painting once stilled. Painted surfaces enact transposition through the performativity of the materiality left behind after the transpositional painting process had come to a halt.

Furthermore, this research has contributed knowledge in identifying that a metaphysicality of an encounter with birdsong appears in both Messiaen's temporal auditory *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, and my still, visual paintings. In doing so, this research contributes new insights into how paintings are affective, aligning with Kristeva's concept of the 'poetic'. Indeed, to draw on Derrida, the 'free play of the signifiers' in

the facets of the painting create infinite possibilities of perception.

Paradox(es)

Many of the contributions put forward by this research are centred around paradox(es). Whilst it is human nature to resolve conflicting states or ideas, one of the new insights I propose is that these paradoxes are in fact crucial to exploring metaphysicality through encounter in painting. This research has demonstrated the extent to which the metaphysicality of the physical and the unknown in embodied encounters with birdsong has been repositioned between transpositional vehicles of material perception in transcribing birdsong to material thinking in constructing painted surfaces. Through exploring transpositional *places*, the concept of transposition has become intertwined with metaphysicality. This research defines the metaphysical as intangible, unknown, and irresolute. As such, a paradox has emerged: through material construction, the ungraspable exists somewhere beyond reach and the only way to explore this is through process.

This research therefore provides new insights into how

transposing metaphysicality causes the painting to be apprehended differently when painting processes stop and the painting becomes still. The artist and painting relationships changes. Concluding, or halting painting process dissipates the 'becoming-knowledge,' where the metaphysicality of painting processes then halts. By using Messiaen's methods in painting as means for 'thinking on the metaphysical', particularly through his contemplations of the eternal, this research has contributed knowledge on the paradox of how transposition operates in conjunction with metaphysicality. The eternal resides in the structure of *Catalogue d'oiseaux* as a cycle, however, it is ungraspable and irresolute in the way music begins and stops.

My painting research that has culminated in stilled, eternal surfaces where the metaphysical is hard to find due to the transpositional process, has highlighted the metaphysicality of Messiaen's music. Messiaen elevated birdsong into the metaphysical in his assumption that birds were eternal messengers of God, using the finite vehicle of music to do so. In the mirror opposite case, I explored the unknown, intangibility, and irresoluteness of birdsong using the infinite materiality of painting.

It is exactly the mirrored methodology and outputs of

Messiaen's auditory *Catalogue d'oiseaux* and my visual paintings where a paradox is located. I have made the case that the metaphysical is intertwined with process, yet the moving encounter with birdsong that Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux* provides, demonstrates a metaphysicality *after* process. My notebooks and paintings became transpositional objects where metaphysicality is hinted at through encountering the objects and is encountered in a different way in the eternal stillness of paintings. In doing so, this research provides new insights into how through 'becoming-knowledge', the materiality of the work can come into being. This provides alternative means to representing the coming *towards* knowledge in translation via documentation. Photographing and writing demonstrated that it is only feasible to describe what is knowable and this is restricted to the extent of the experience of the artist. What is knowable has only been partly grasped in the 'becoming-knowledge', a shared epistemological place with materiality. Material thinking points towards the metaphysical, fostered by the not-knowable 'otherness' of materiality.

By writing about the paintings and articulating what I had found out, I paradoxically created a communicable

language that explains an ungraspable event and thus a translation of the metaphysical. Via understanding that I was not writing *about* painting, this research provides insights into transposing *towards* a painting and that this is an infinite process, behaving in the 'poetic' realm of language. In doing so, this research contributes knowledge to the metaphysical by finding that metaphysicality exists in the moments that cannot be clarified, the moments led by materiality where the signifier – signified slip. As such, metaphysicality is challenged in the relationship between painting and written thesis.

Metaphysicality, like Taylor's 'quasacle' is bound in the moment of break in the placing down of the paintbrush and picking up of the writing tool.

2. Fulfilment of research question and aims

This research has been centred around the question:

To what extent can transposition enable metaphysicality to be encountered and comprehended in painting processes via an interrogation of birdsong and Olivier Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux*?

Before I describe the extent to which my research question

has been answered (through my aims), here is a reminder of my aims, which were to:

1. Explore the intangible and ephemeral qualities of birdsong as metaphysical;
2. Use Messiaen's transcriptions of birdsong into composition as a methodological framework for painting practice;
3. Reconceptualise transposition through examining the ways in which the intangible, unknown, and irresolute nature of birdsong can be made tangible in the painted surface.
4. Develop new ways of conceiving encounter in painting practice through transposition.

In addressing my first aim, I have argued that birdsong resides on the 'elsewhere' of language, and that birdsong is outside of the human capability to make sense of it in communicative and linguistic terms. In doing so, I conceptualise birdsong as an ephemera that, by its nature, is incomprehensible. However, I have argued that this very incomprehensibility—or what I have explored as *coming towards* comprehension or understanding—contributes to it encapsulating a sense of the metaphysical. I then

interrogated the potential of 'metaphysicality' in the context of this research, (re)defining it as an ephemera that is intangible, unknown, and irresolute. As such, I have explored that such a definition of metaphysicality is bound up in *encountering* birdsong. I approached this through investigating polysensory embodied engagement with birdsong as an 'event'.

In reference to my second aim, I have explored birdsong and the extent to which it can be encountered and comprehended in painting through interrogating Messiaen's transcriptions of birdsong and two nature portraits: 'L'Alouette calandrelle' and 'Le Merle de roche'. Specifically, my interrogation of transposition led me to consider Messiaen's transcriptions in his *cahiers* and the two nature portraits as transpositional 'places' of 'thinking on the metaphysical'. I adopted transcription methods of my own drawn from my analysis of Messiaen's transpositional methods of notating birdsong in the landscape. These were used as a framework to approach my painting practice, informed by fieldtrips based on encountering the same sites in the French landscape that Messiaen visited to conduct his birdsong transcriptions. I then explored how Messiaen used in his birdsong transcriptions

in the composition of the two nature portraits to create an expanded transpositional framework to explore the construction of painted surfaces in response to my birdsong transcriptions.

In relation to my third aim, my original intention was to explore transposition as both a *topic* and *lens* of enquiry, using transpositional methods as means to find out new knowledge about transposition *through* transposition. This was pivotal to approaching this PhD project as artistic research enquiry that sought to gain new knowledge through both practice and outputs of practice.

I critically interrogated the relationship between artist and materiality in the process of my art-making. This interrogation was fostered through coming towards two methods of transposition in Messiaen's practice, which are central to my contributions to knowledge: 'polysensory unimodal transposition' and 'polysensory multimodal transposition'. Having established the concept 'polysensory unimodal transposition', I intended to use Messiaen's compositional methods as a blueprint to inform my own paintings. However, I found that this risked the limitations of

translation. Instead, by foregrounding the notion of material thinking as central to the epistemological dimensions of my research and encounter itself, this led into my new concept of 'polysensory multimodal transposition'. Mirroring Messiaen's transcriptions of birdsong and resulting *Catalogue d'oiseaux* as methods of transposition, I developed a methodology between auditory encounters with birdsong and visual encounters with birdsong in painted surfaces. By reconceptualising transpositional movements between the Messiaen's auditory practice and my visual practice, I theorised that metaphysicality is intertwined with transposition, during embodied encounters with birdsong in the landscape and making paintings. This transpositional metaphysicality exists in the process of material perception in transcribing birdsong in the landscape and also in making tangible, the physical painting processes that becomes harder to see once the painting process stops

In addressing my fourth aim, I used multiple transpositional methods of mark-making during transcription, printmaking, and constructing painted surfaces, to conceive of encounter in painting through embracing the slippery and intangible nature of visual language and materiality to avoid

the limitations of translation. I found that transposition became imbricated in the different facets of painting practice – in transcribing birdsong in the landscape, creating prints in response, and constructing painted surfaces. To explore the extent to which transposition can enable metaphysicality to be encountered in painting processes, I worked through embodied encounter with the ‘otherness’ of materiality to explore tensions between intention and making room for chance. In doing so, I theorised that metaphysicality was bound with transposition in the slippery moments of working in the peripheries of visual language.

I also devised the means to articulate moments of metaphysicality, positioned on the peripheries of language through adopting two ‘voices’ as part of a polyvocal methodology: writing-thinking and definitive prose. In doing so, I found this process another means of conceiving (and comprehending) encounter with painting practice and the metaphysicality therein. I found that metaphysicality is embedded in the intangible ‘becoming-knowledge’ of the process of transposing birdsong in both my own and Messiaen’s methods. These metaphysical moments are

reactivated by listening to the moving, temporal medium of *Catalogue d’oiseaux*. In my mirror-opposing approach, the metaphysical is reactivated in the movement in the stilled surfaces by the ambient light when encountering the paintings.

3. Possibilities for future research

By defining two new modalities of transposition (polysensory unimodal transposition and polysensory multimodal transposition) from Messiaen’s approaches towards creating ‘L’Alouette calandrelle’ and ‘Le Merle de roche’, this research raises questions regarding the other eleven nature portraits in *Catalogue d’oiseaux*:

- a) No one piece in the *Catalogue d’oiseaux* was created in the same way. As such, this deep investigation into two of thirteen creates a framework to explore the remaining eleven pieces and subsequently, different potential methods and modalities of transpositions. I had begun to undertake such investigations, looking into Messiaen’s *cahiers* that informed ‘La Rousserolle effarvatte’ that was prevented by the global pandemic.

- b) This framework can be extended further than *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. As I explored in Book Three, Messiaen used his birdsong transcriptions in his *cahiers* in different ways to create *Réveil des oiseaux* and *Oiseaux exotiques*, both of which demonstrate a different engagement Messiaen has with composing and birdsong.
- c) In my exploration of polysensory multimodal transposition, I acknowledged Messiaen's use of both birdsong recordings and live notations in the landscape when composing 'Le Merle de roche'. I was prevented from investigating this further by the global pandemic. However, it would be a fruitful area for future research because the unisensory nature of encountering recordings of birdsong might interrogate the ways in which transposition operates compared to the focus of the polysensory in this research.
- d) Furthermore, the interdisciplinary exploration of transpositional methodologies in music and in painting

provides the scope for continued investigation into compositional processes in music through painting practice. Through devising and using a methodology through an analysis of Messiaen's processes, I have demonstrated the potential to expand into investigating methods of transcription through processes other composers have undertaken.

- e) Painting practice could also be used to explore the transpositional moments during performances of 'L'Alouette calandrelle' and 'Le Merle de roche', namely transposition between music score and performer. The same use of multimodal methods can be used to explore the musical form of birdsong: mark-making embodied encounters with a live performance of *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, methods of listening with both a live and recorded performance, construction of painted surfaces, and writing-thinking.¹
- f) Finally, I am claiming that this research based on my painting practice is a rigorous study of metaphysicality

¹ Ideas for this future research germinated from attending Roger Muraro's performance of *Catalogue d'oiseaux* at Festival Messiaen: pour les oiseaux in

2019. Muraro performed the entire piano cycle during an evening concert at the chapel at La Grave.

in birdsong and painting practice. Identifying *processes* in painting as integral to exploring metaphysicality in birdsong creates the scope to expand the artistic medium out to other creative disciplines.

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Appendix A: Worcestershire orchard notebook

The following images display the note pages in chronological order.

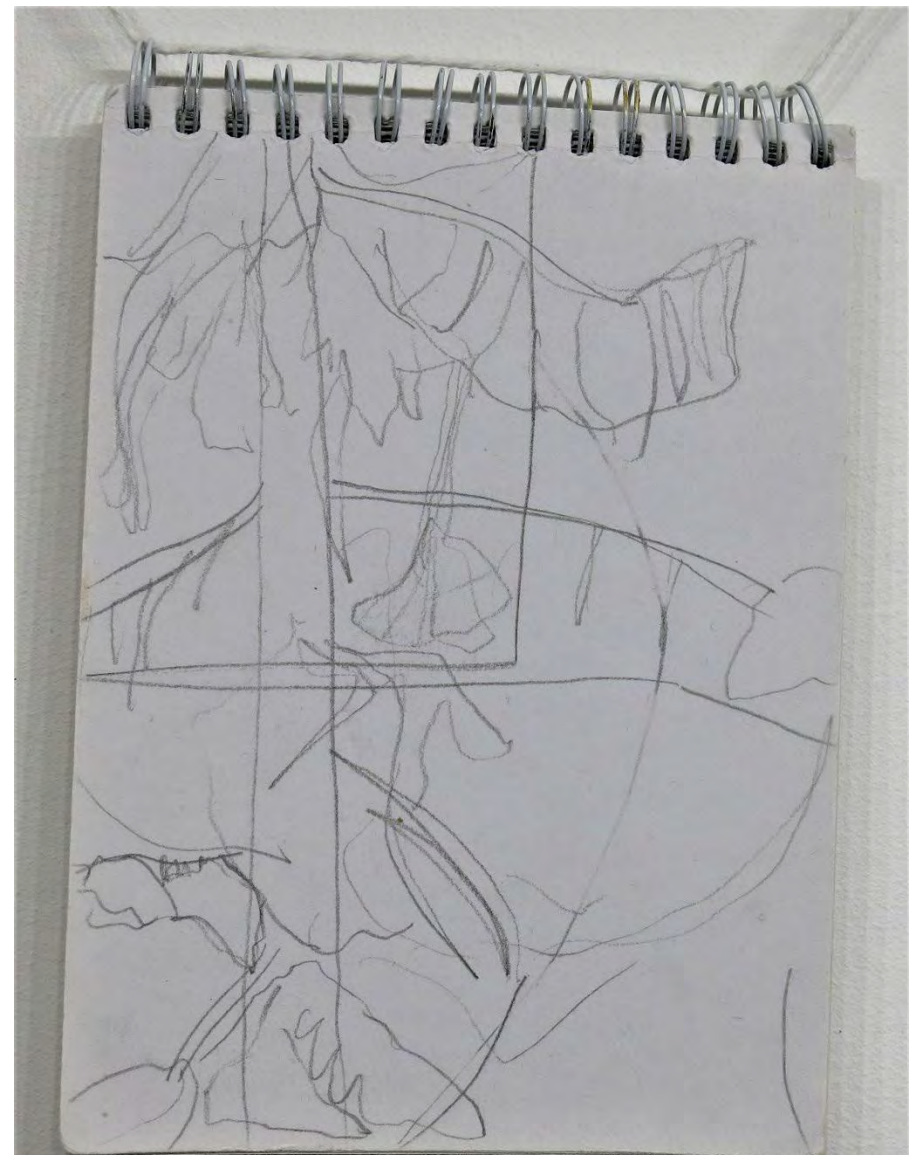


Figure a.1. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page,

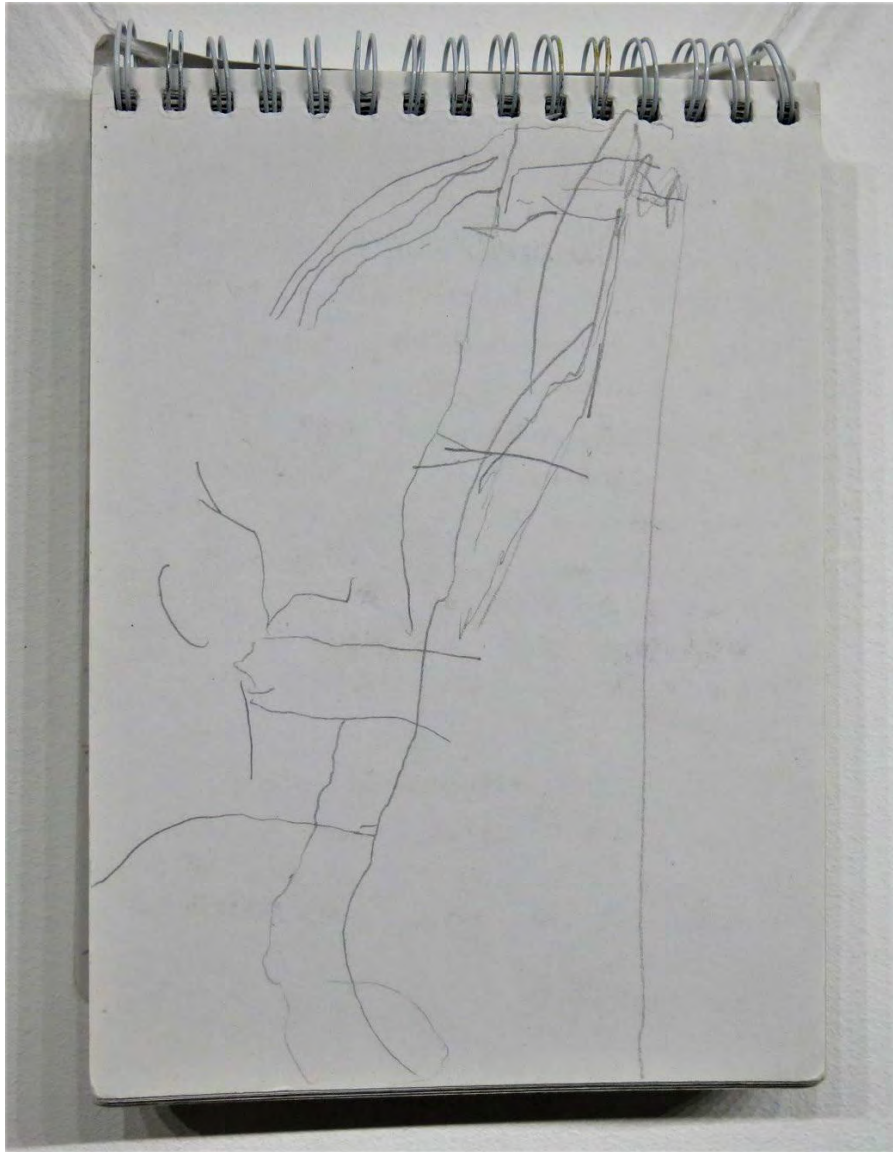


Figure a.2. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

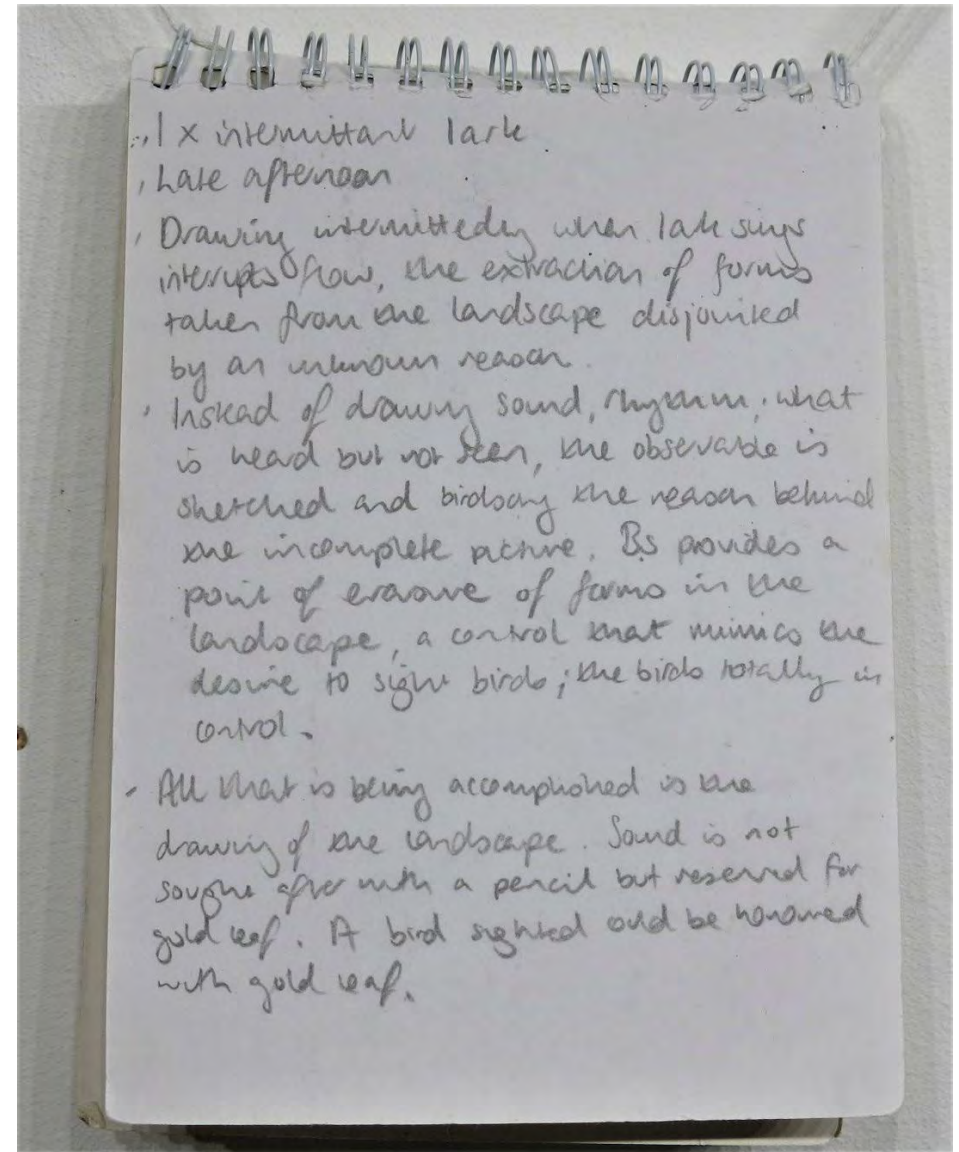


Figure a.3. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

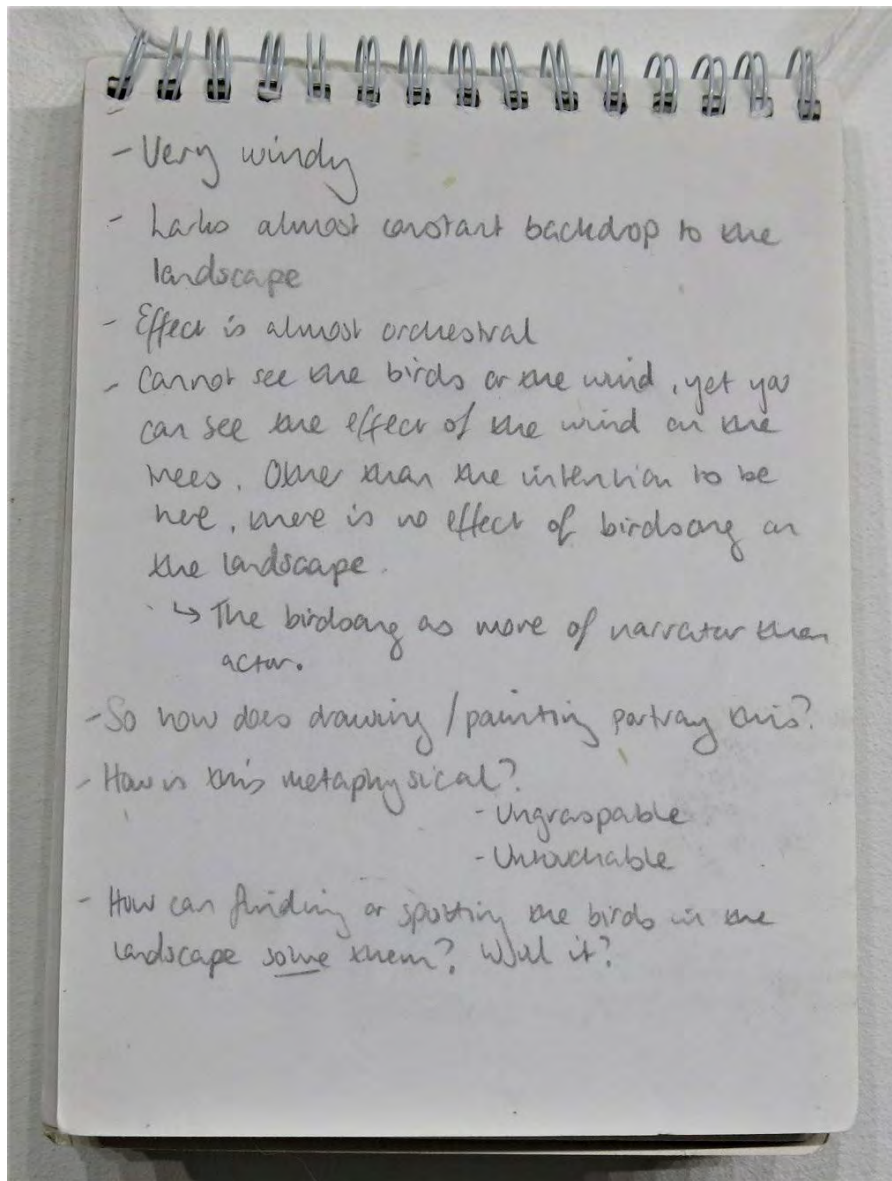


Figure a.4. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

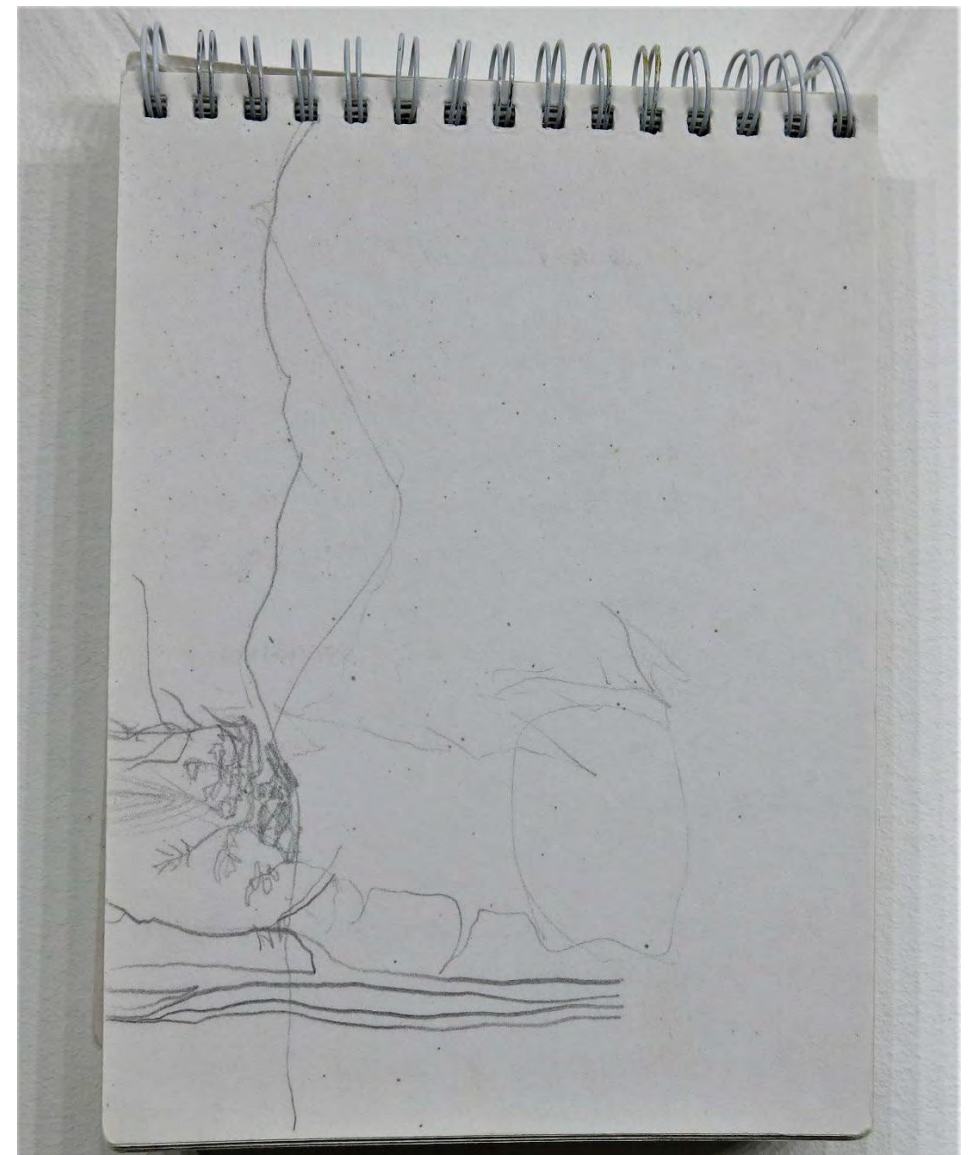


Figure a.5. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

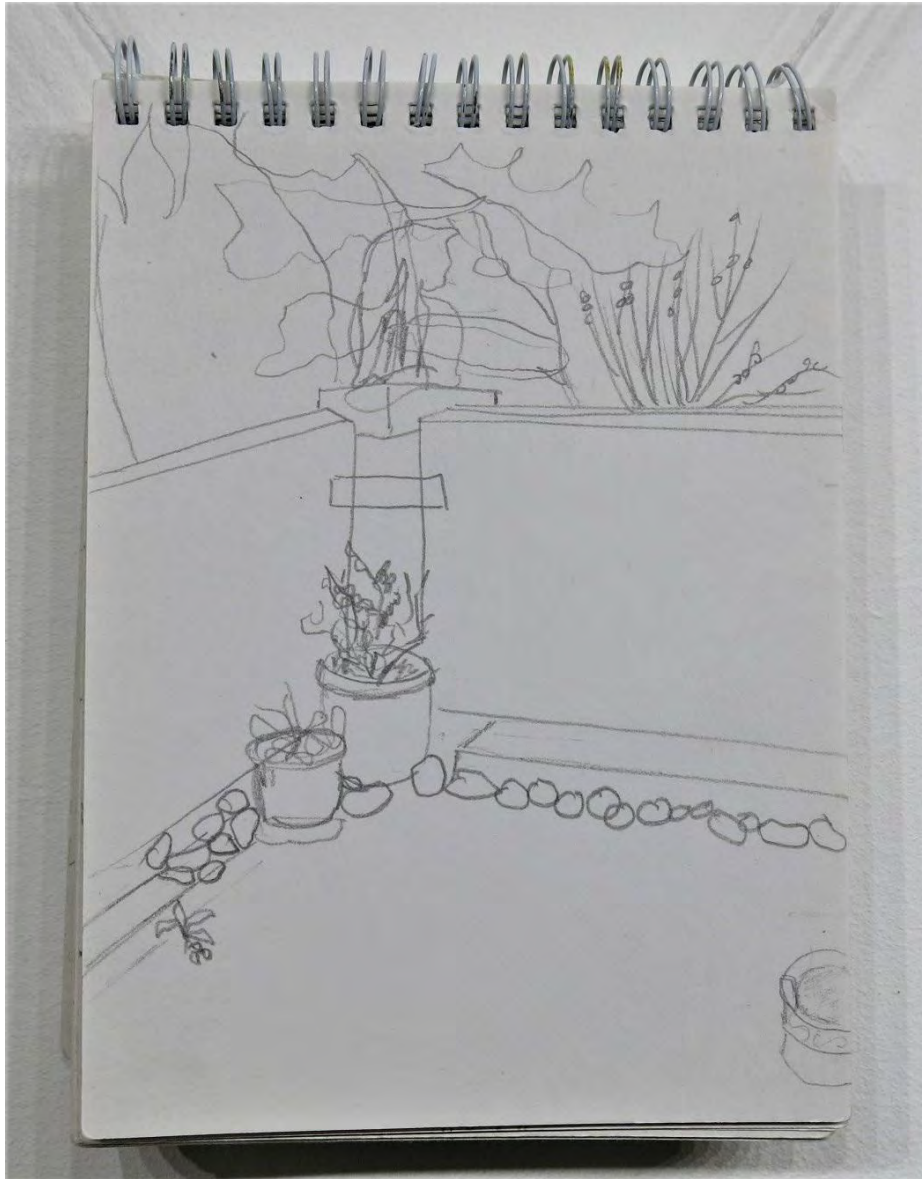


Figure a.6. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

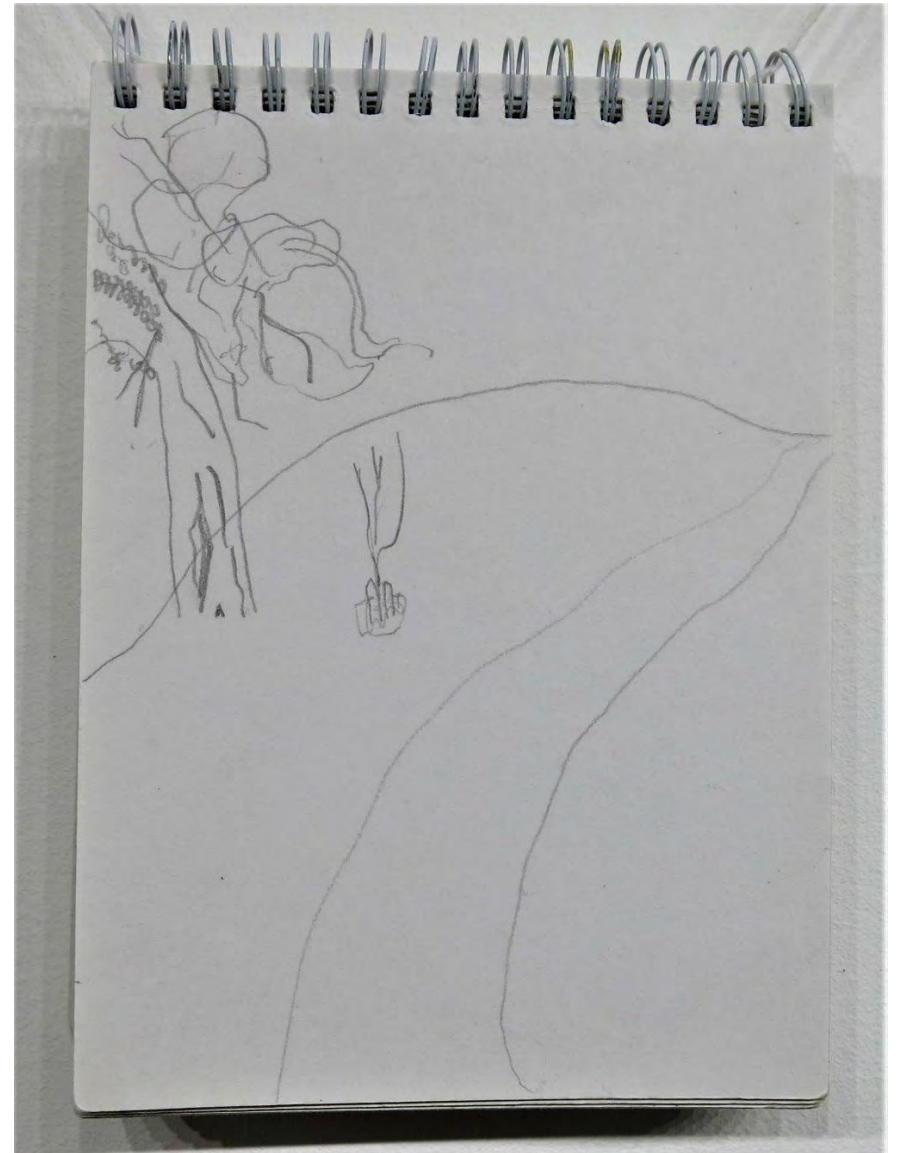


Figure a.7. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

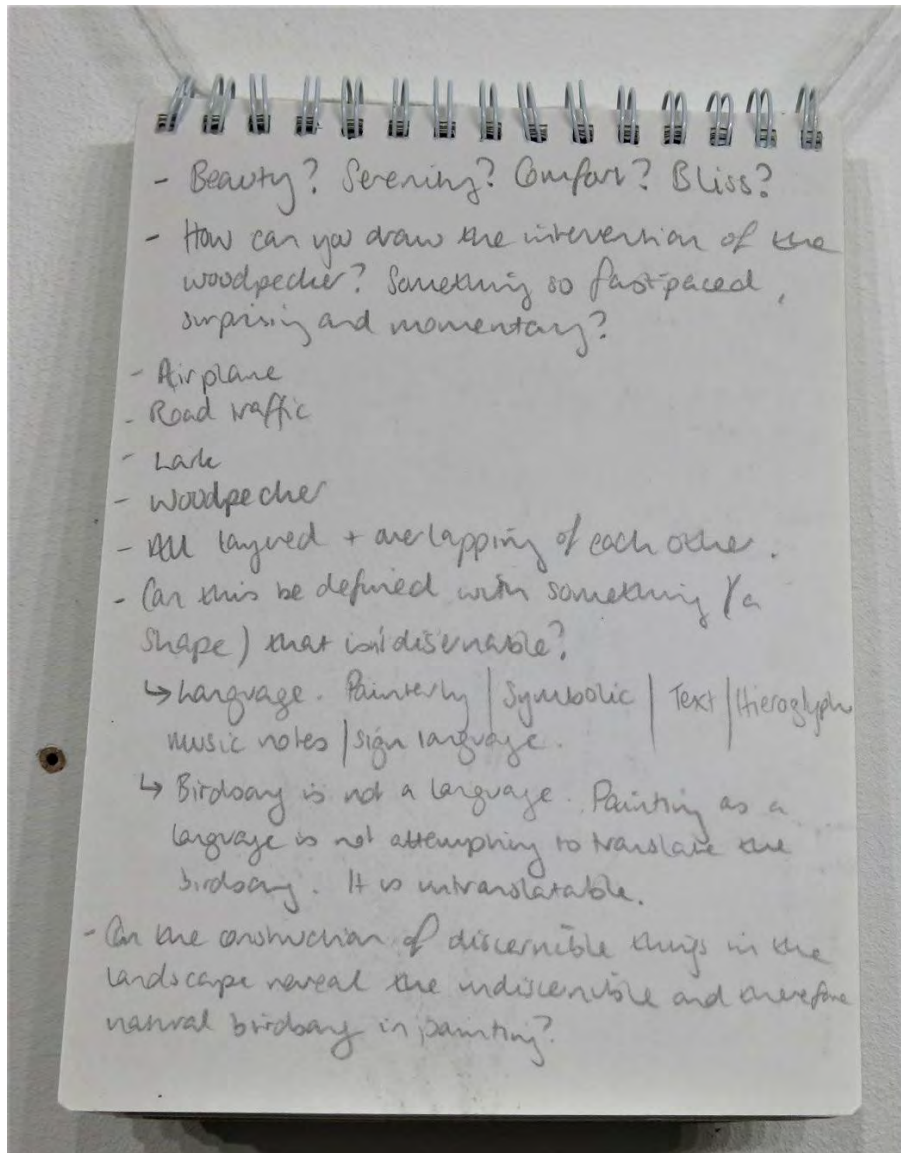


Figure a.8. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

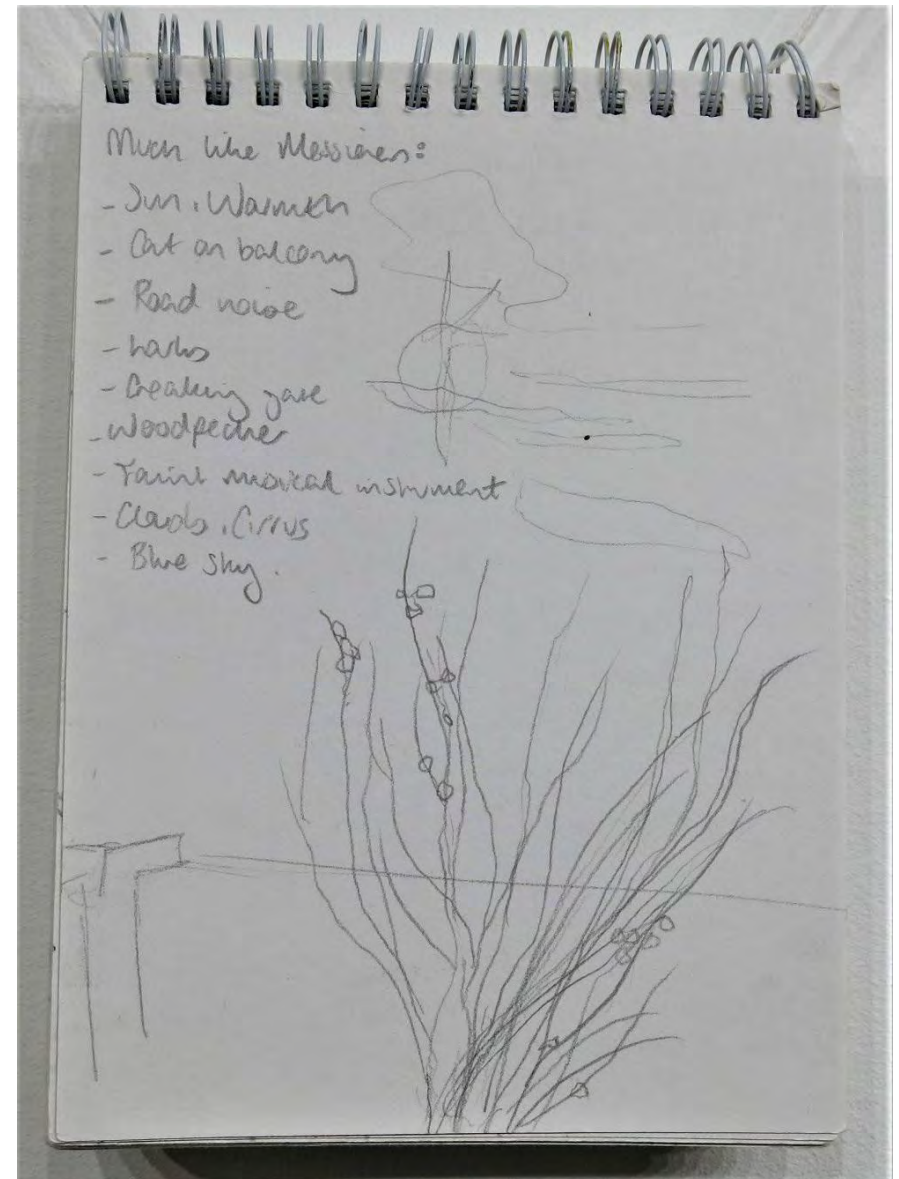


Figure a.9. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

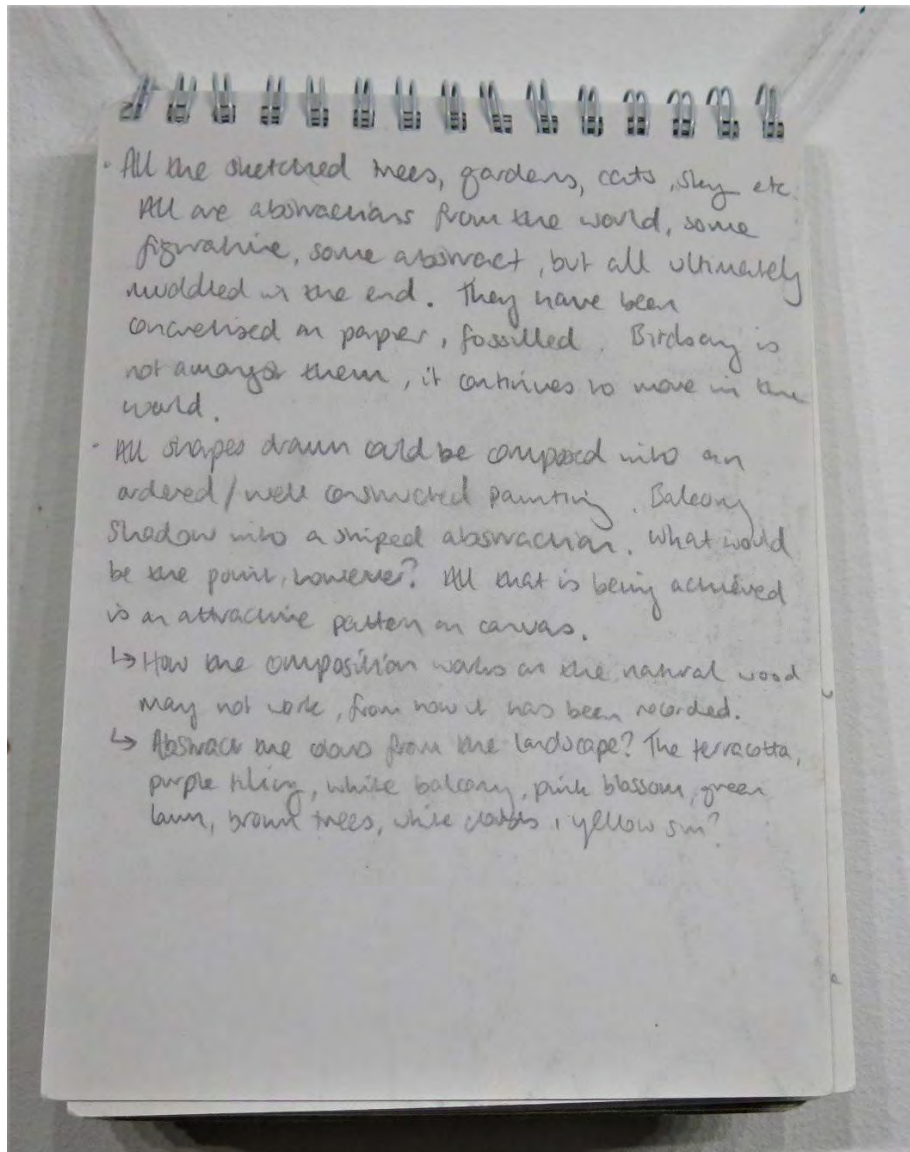


Figure a.10. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

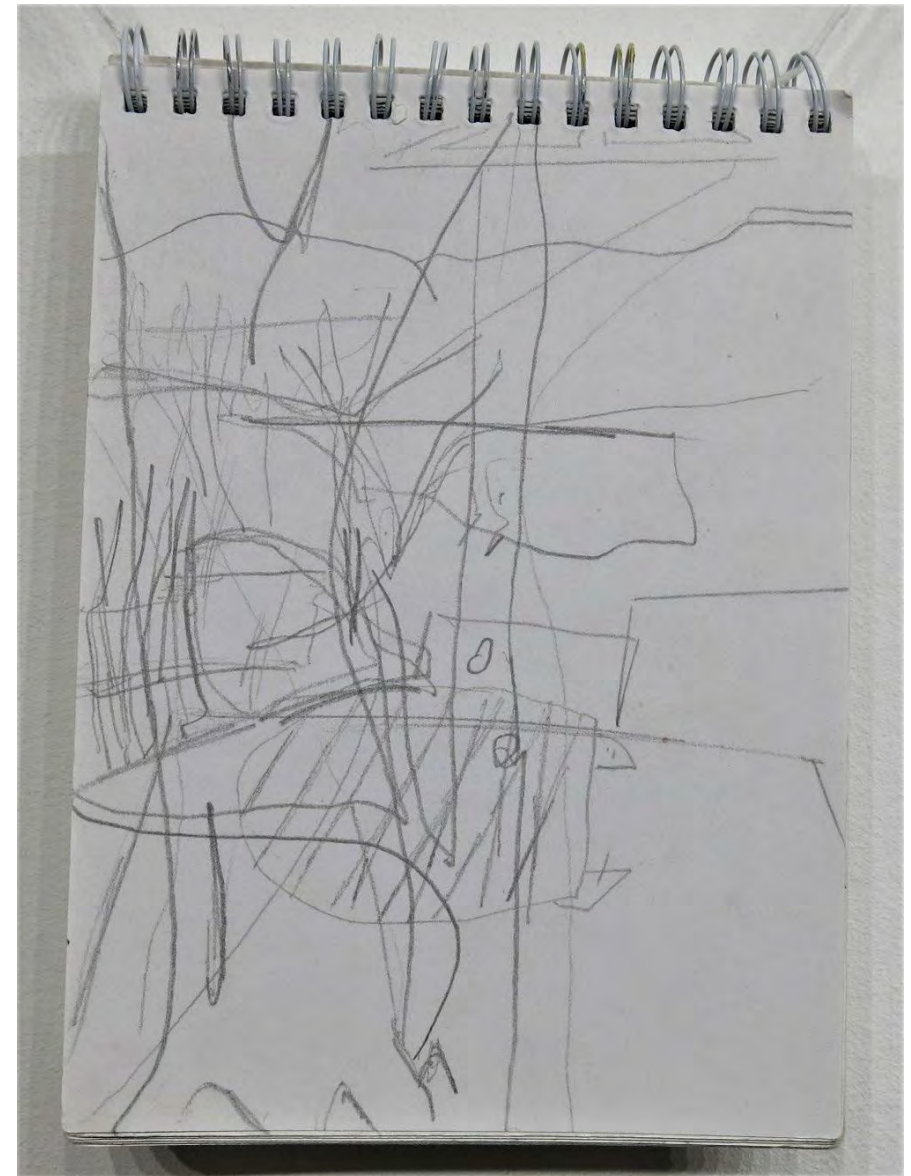


Figure a.11. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

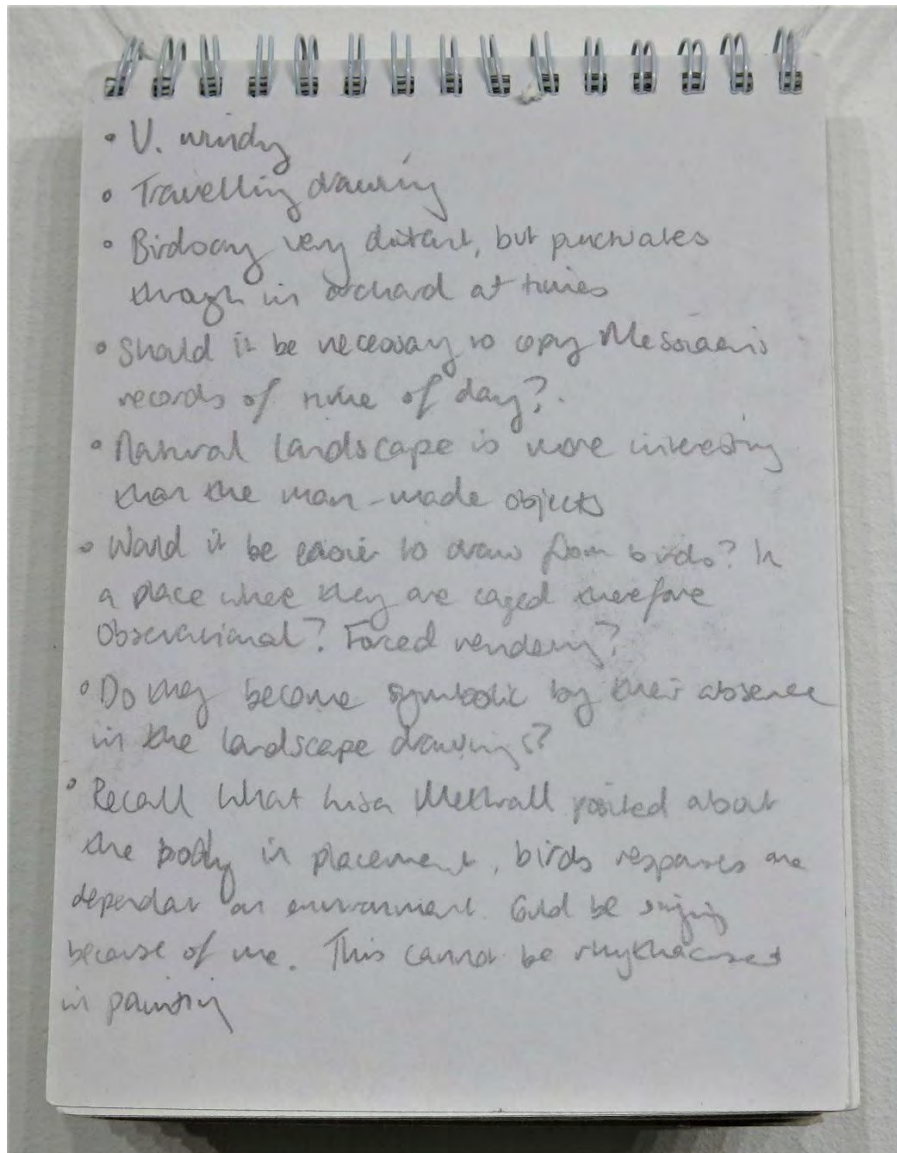


Figure a.12. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

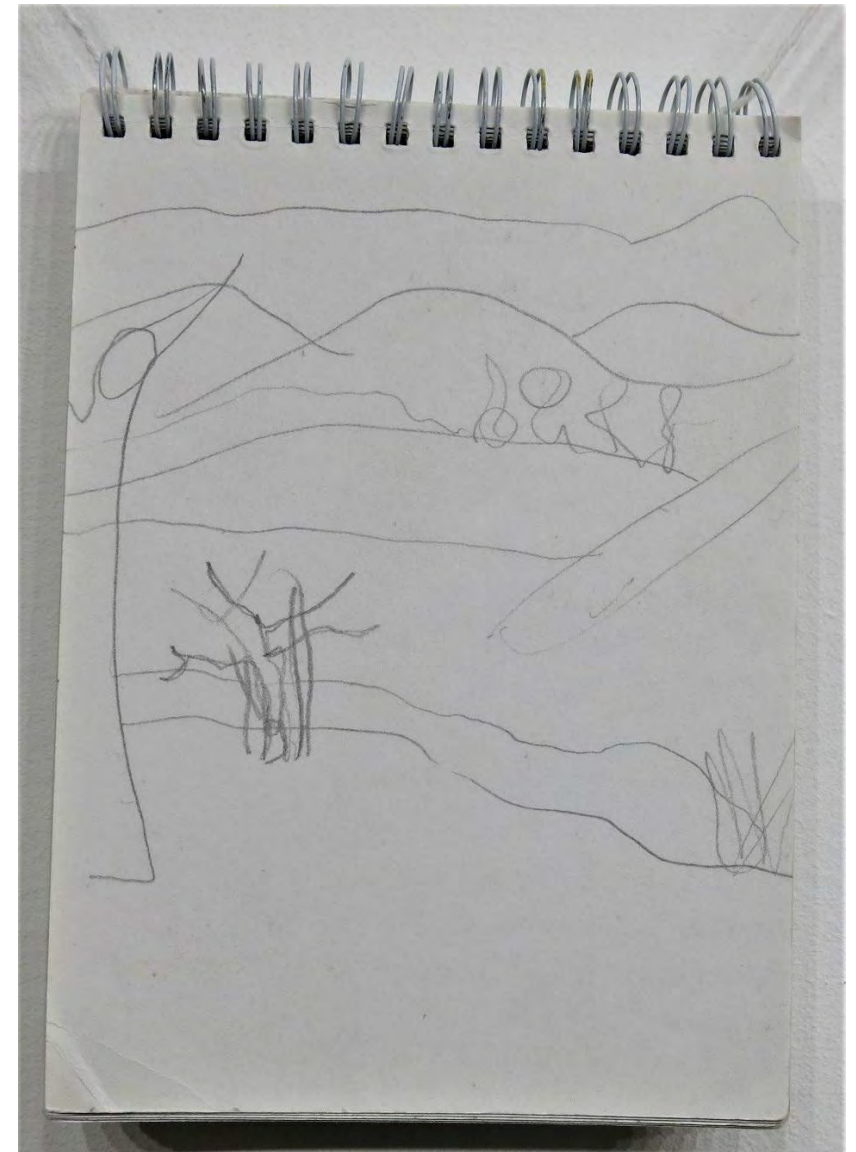


Figure a.13. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

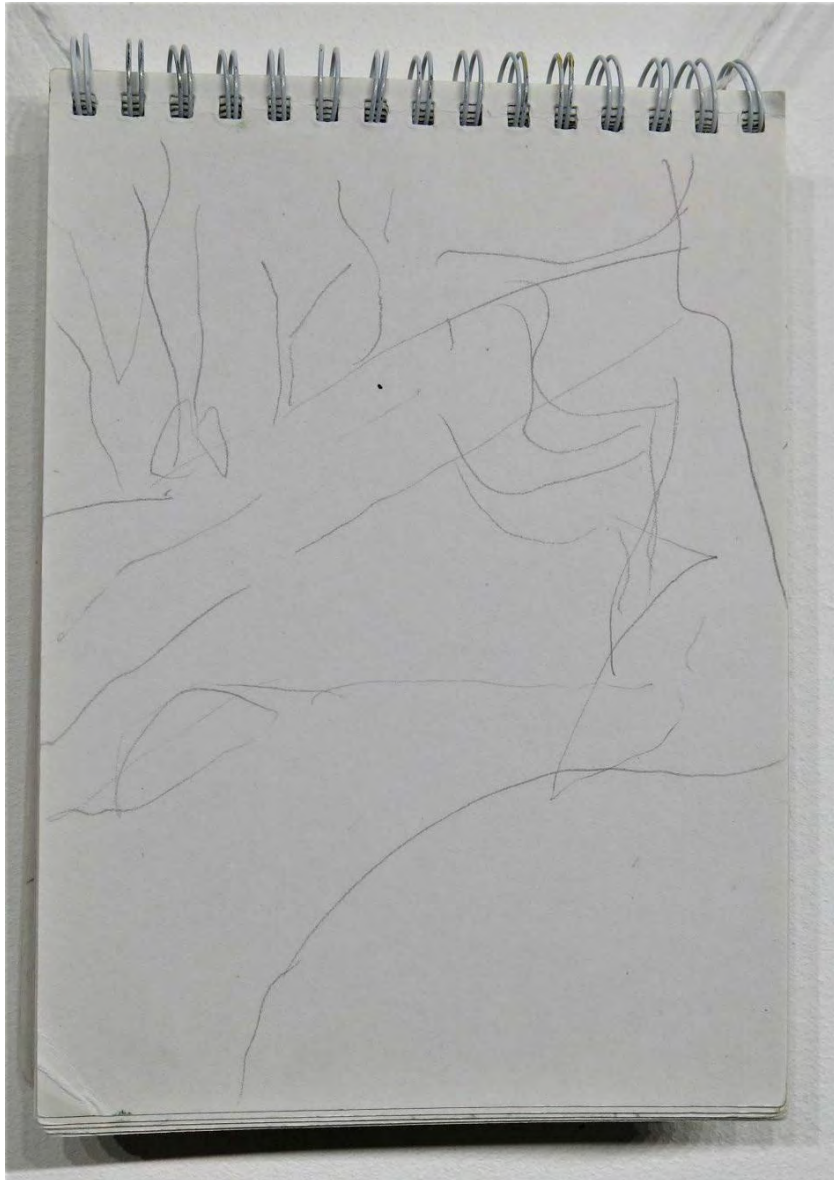


Figure a.14. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

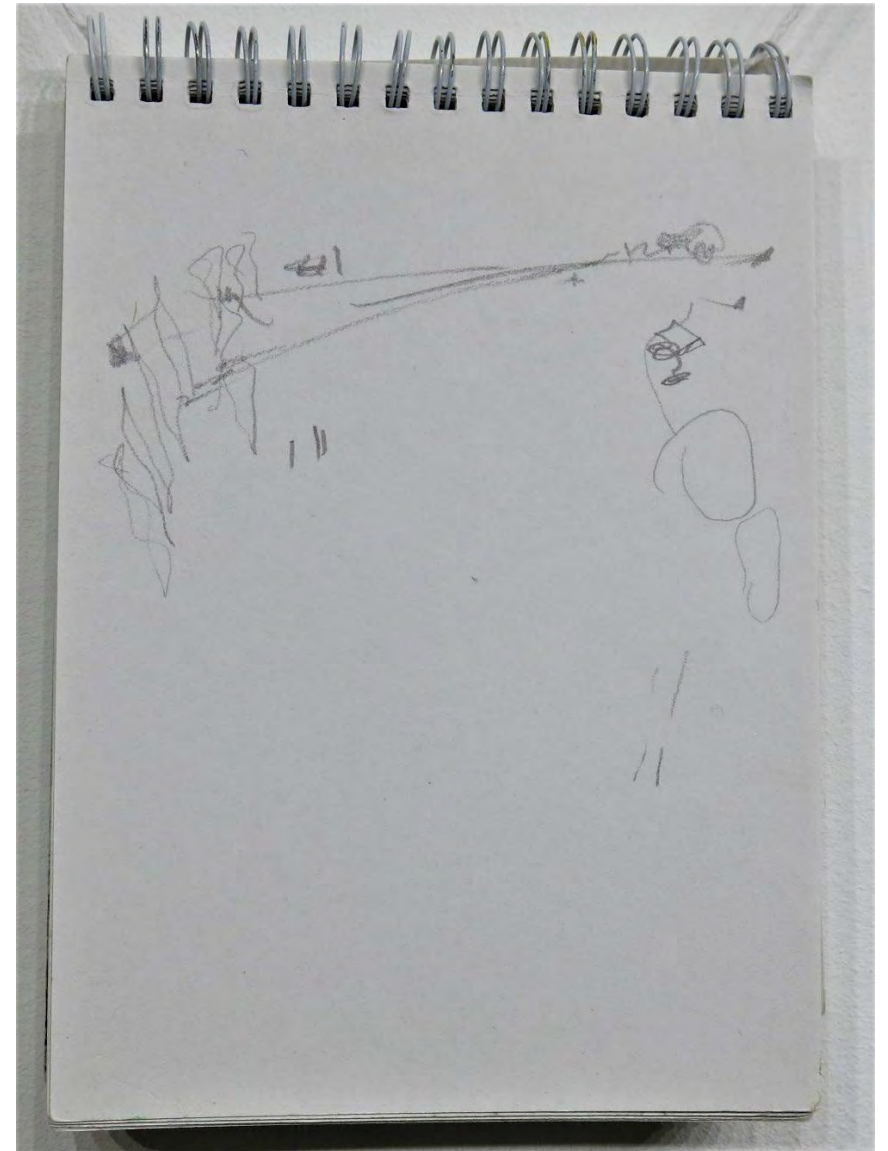


Figure a.15. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

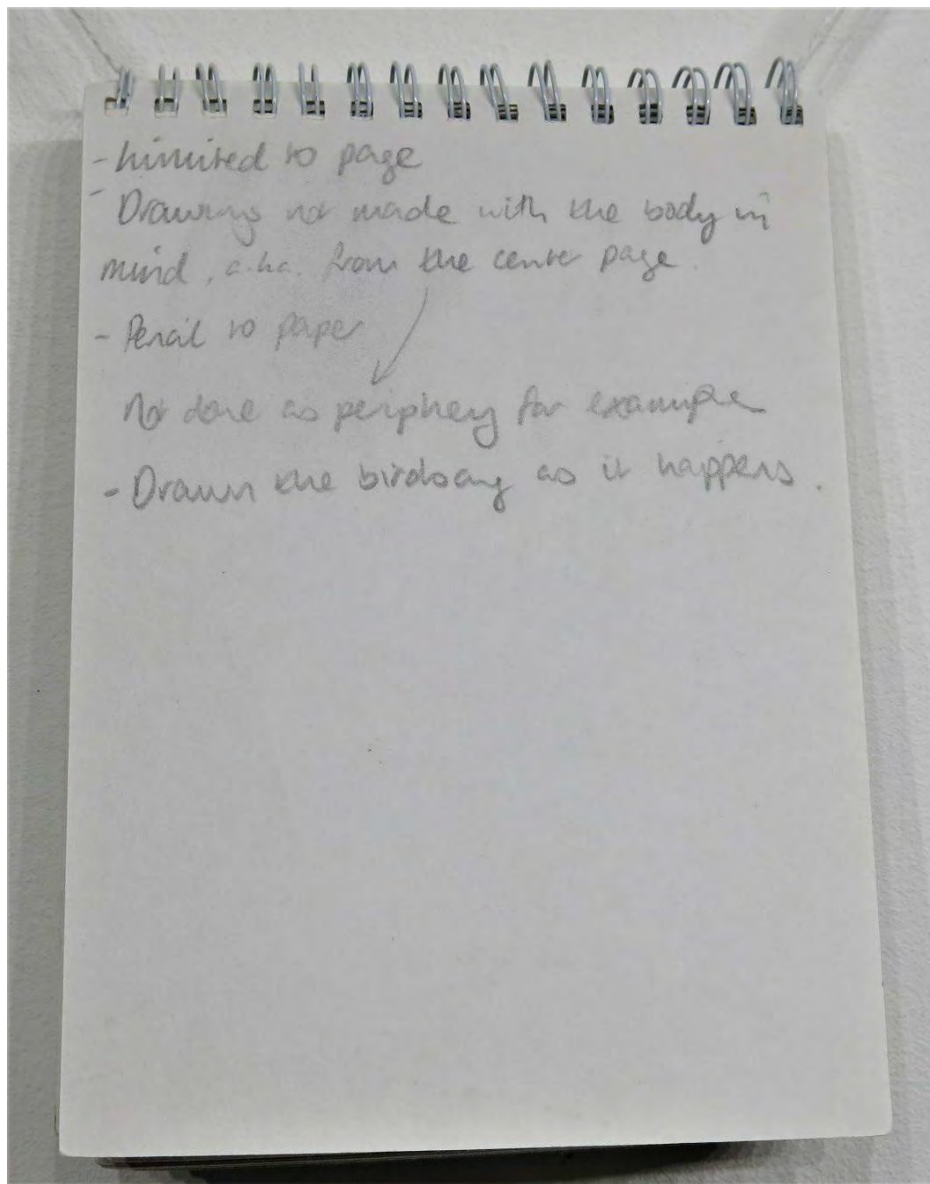


Figure a.16. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

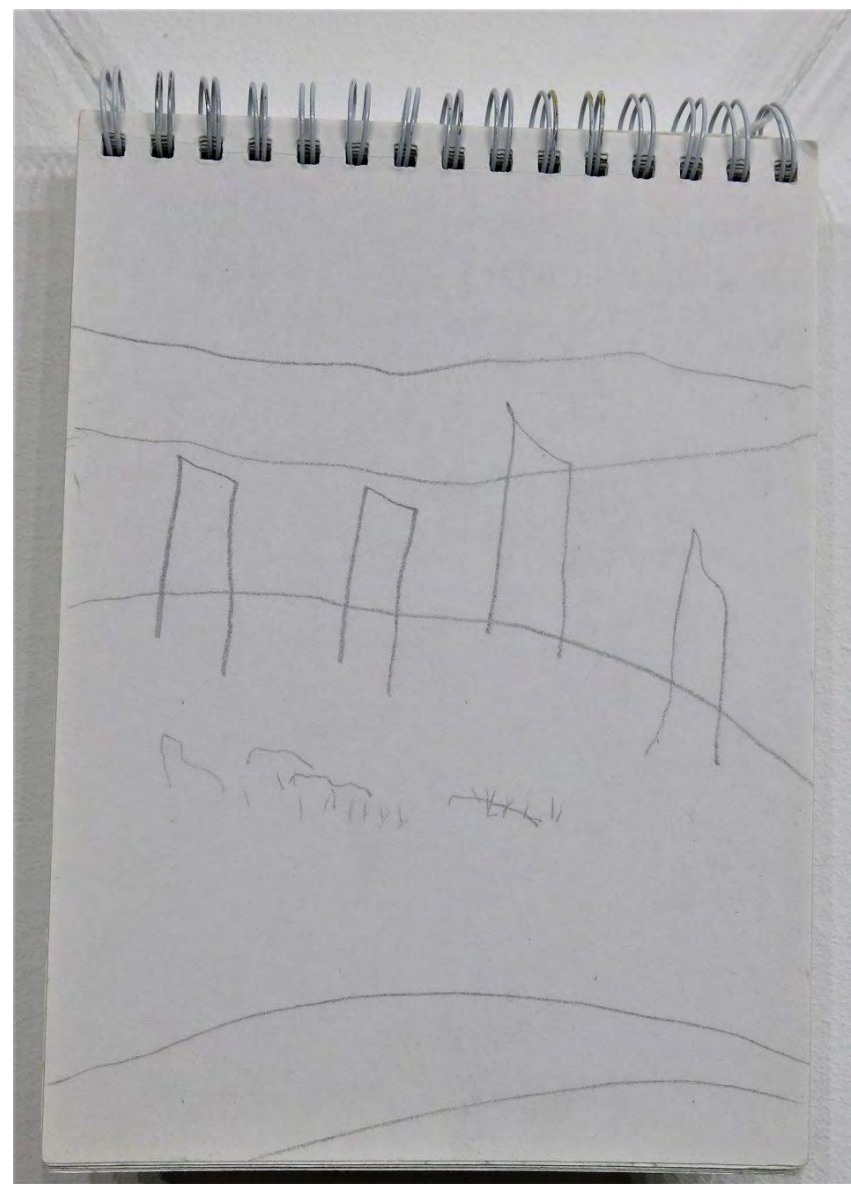


Figure a.17. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)



Figure a.18. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

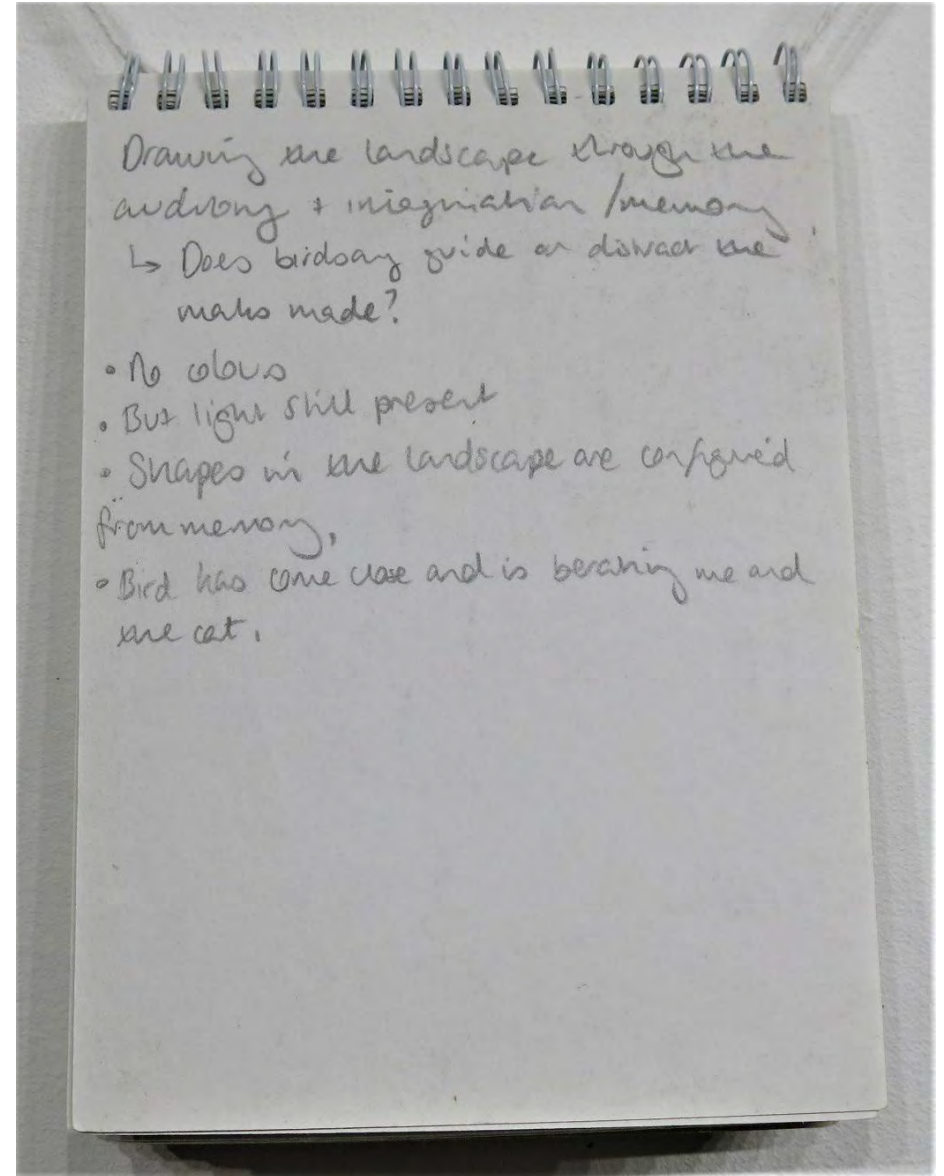


Figure a.19. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

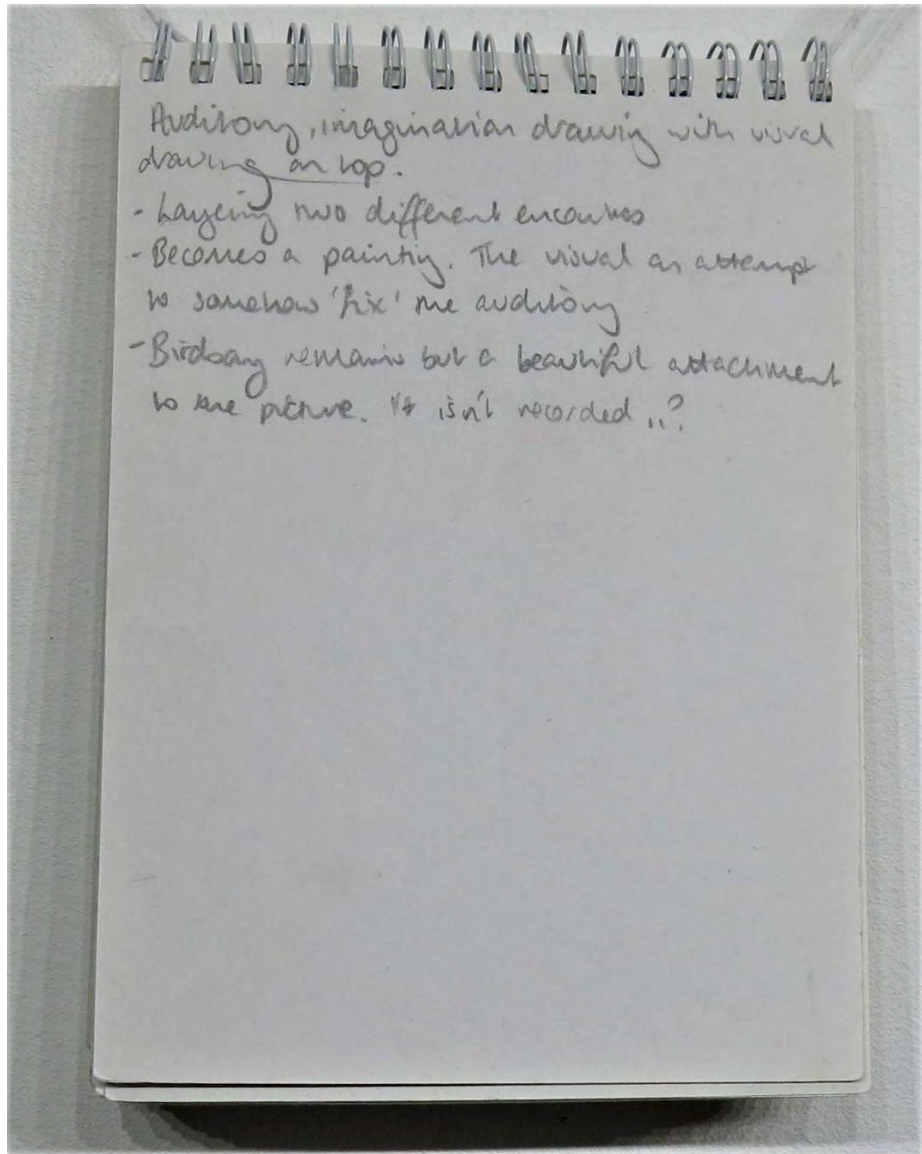


Figure a.20. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

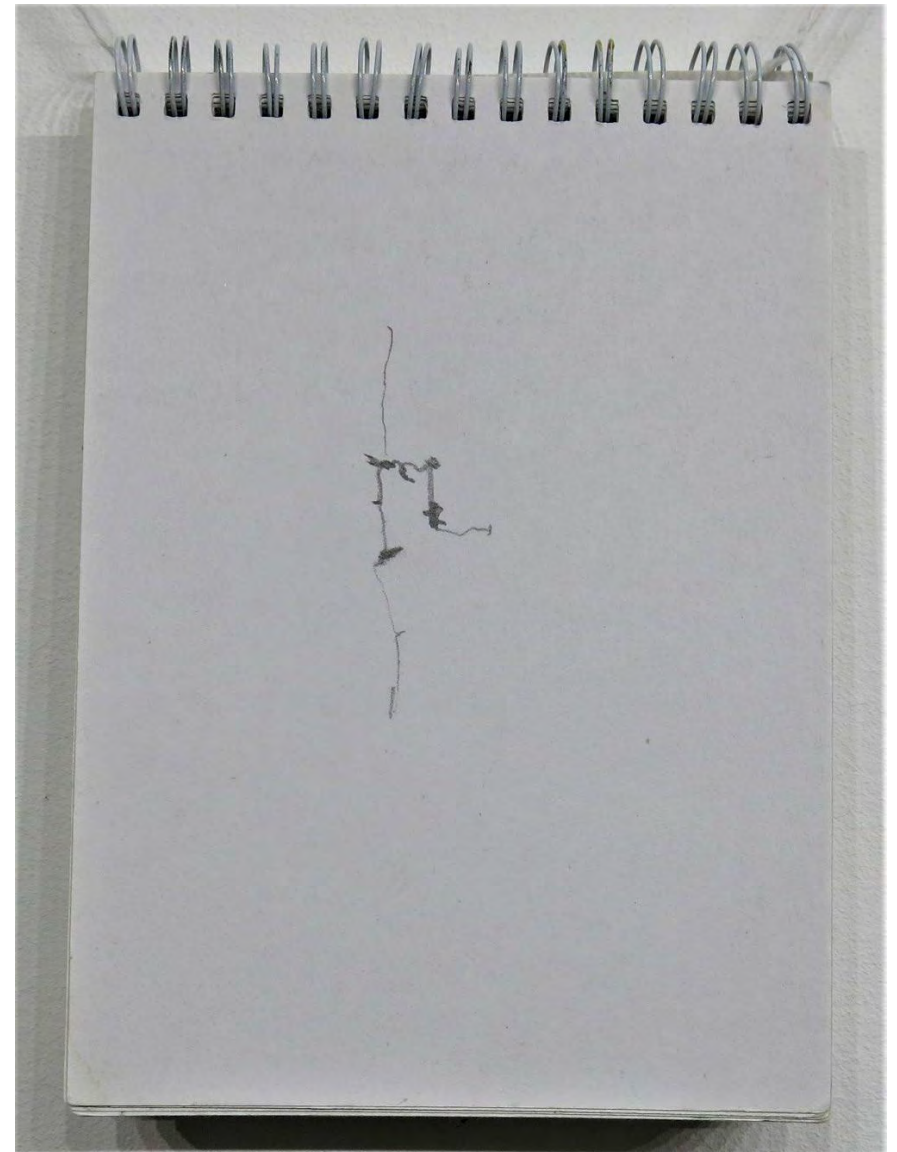


Figure a.21. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

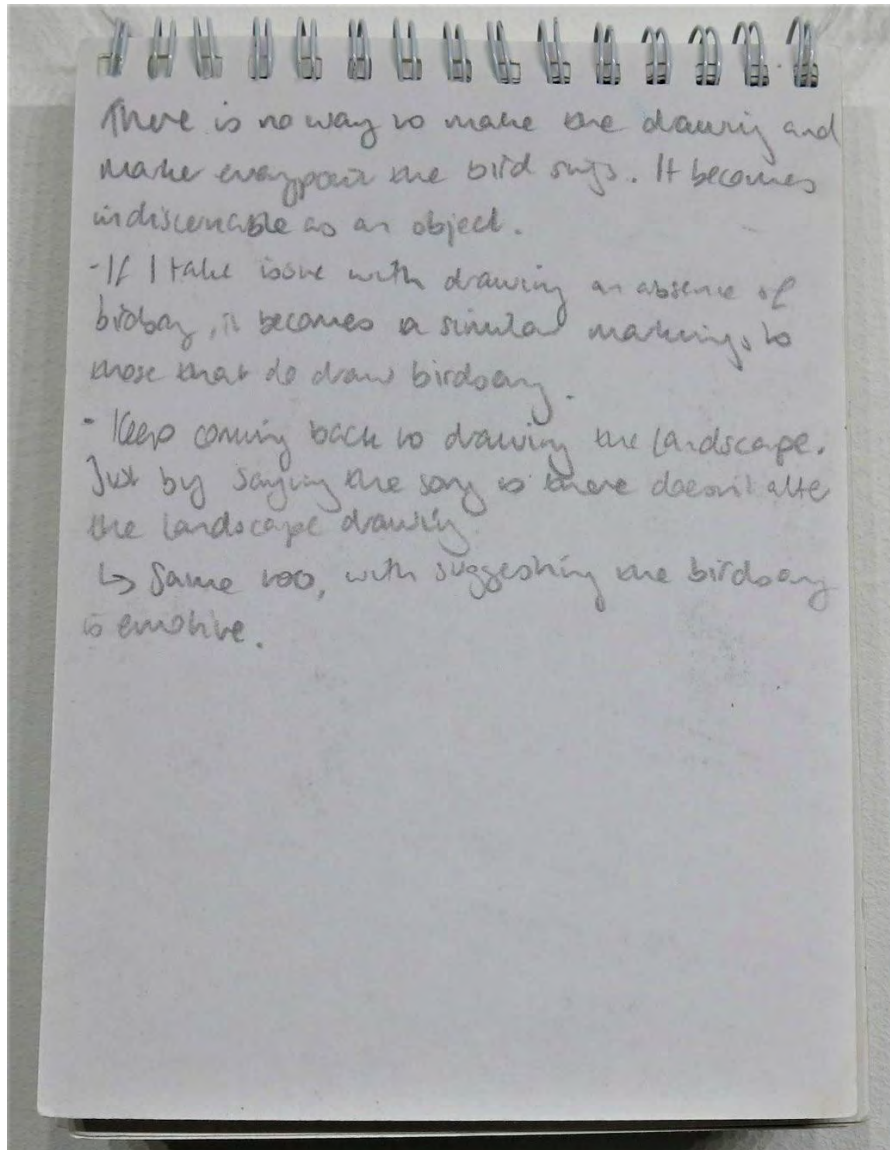


Figure a.22. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

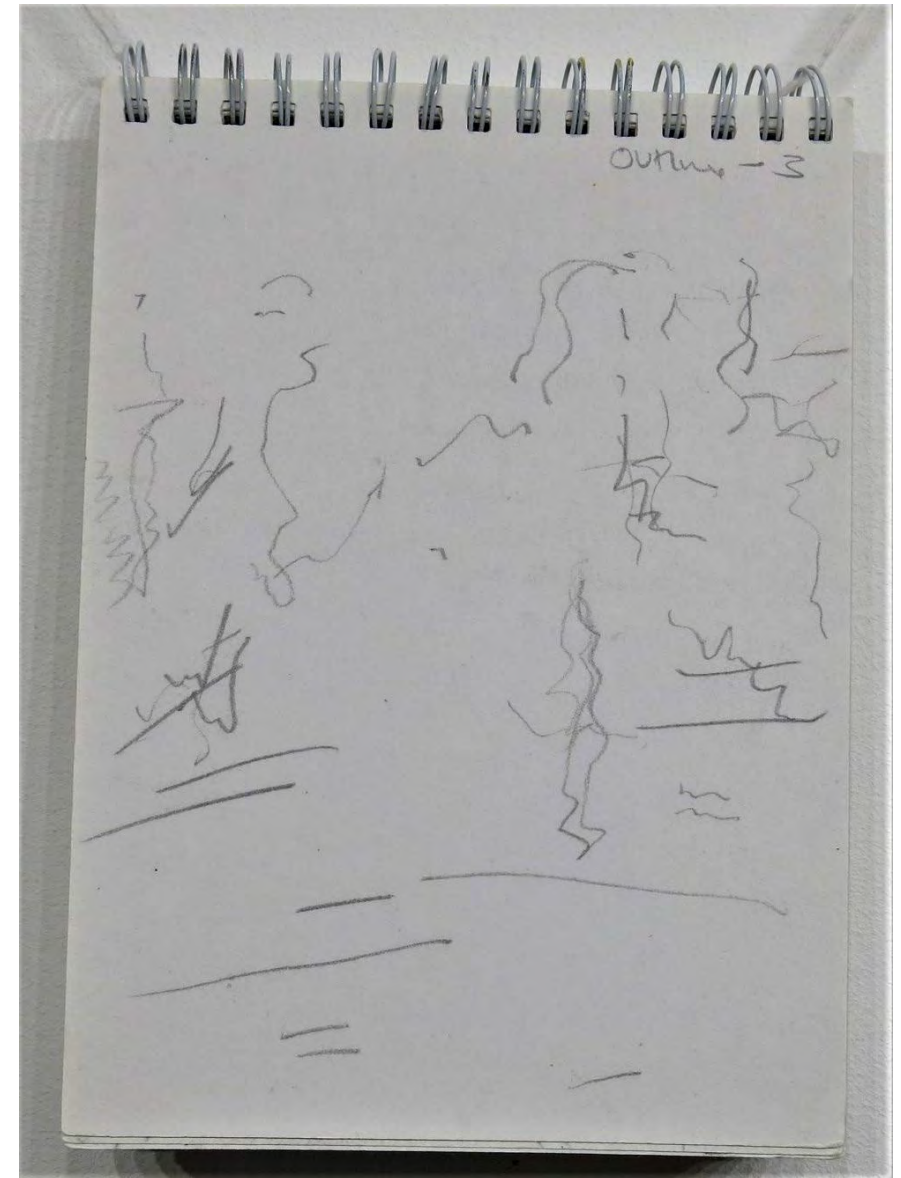


Figure a.23. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)



Figure a.24. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

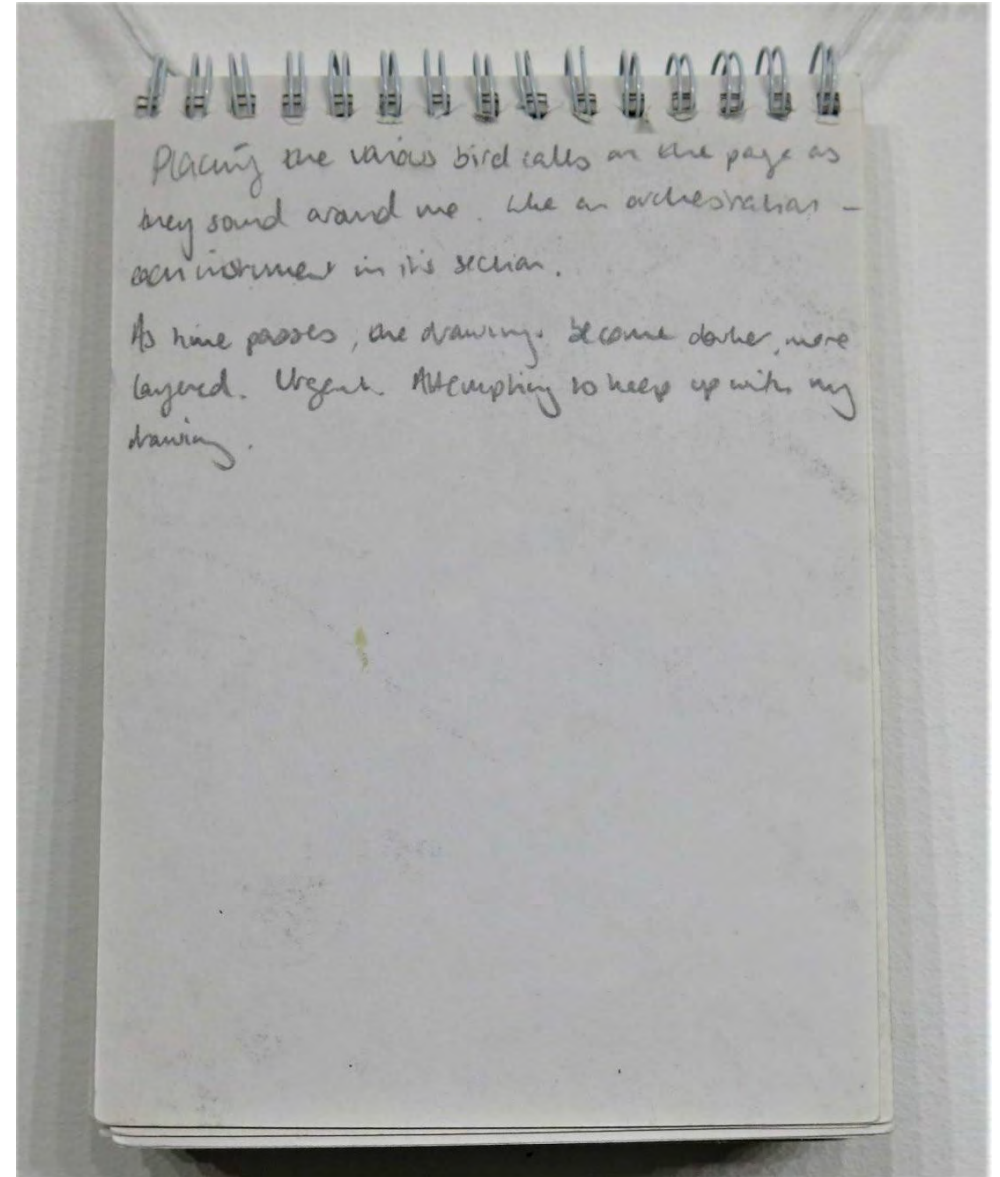


Figure a.25. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)



Figure 26. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

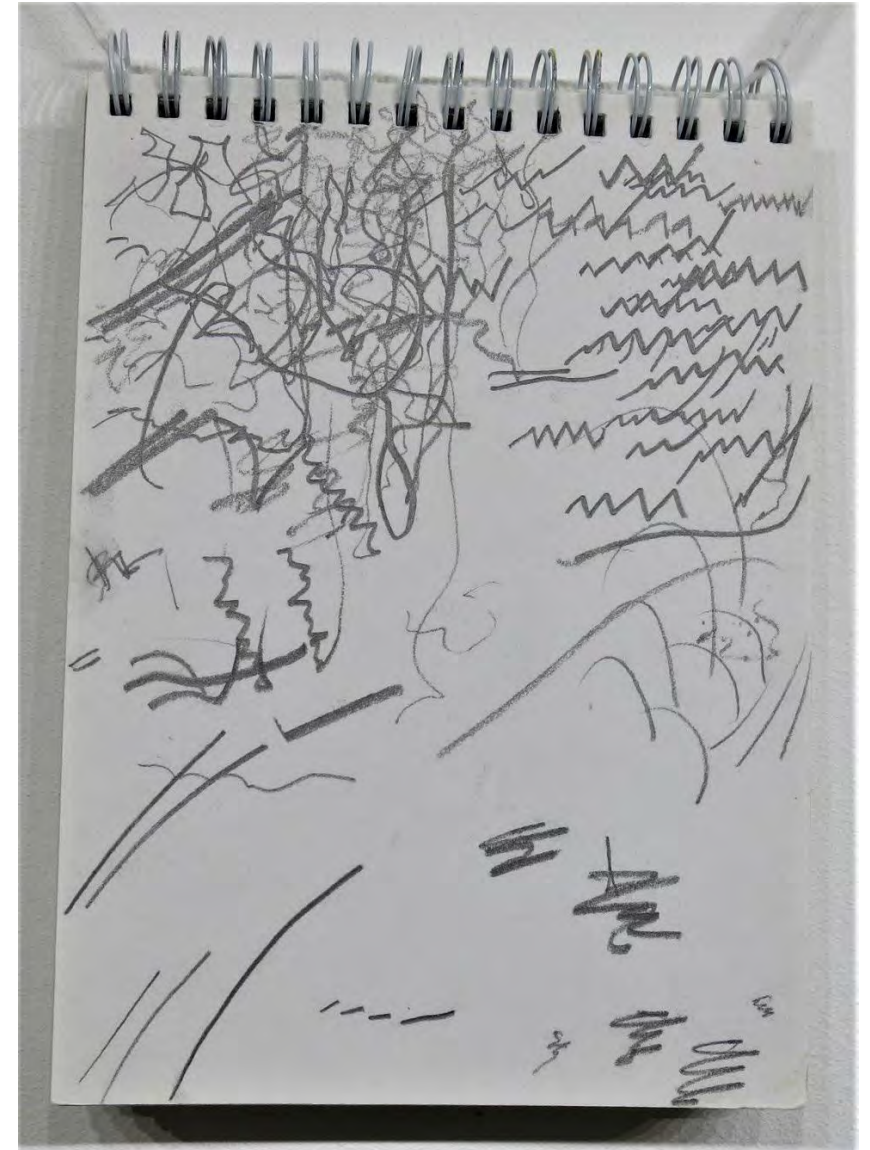


Figure a.27. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

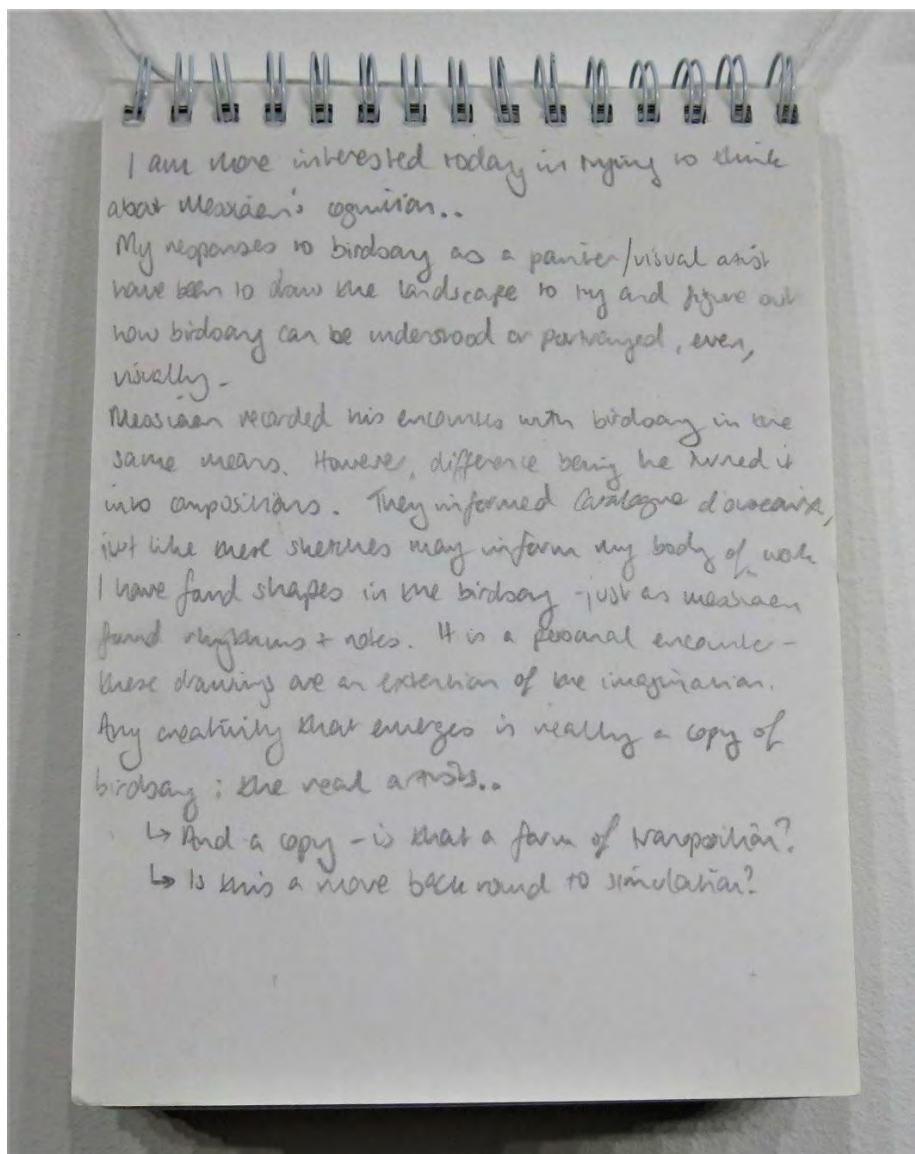


Figure a.28. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

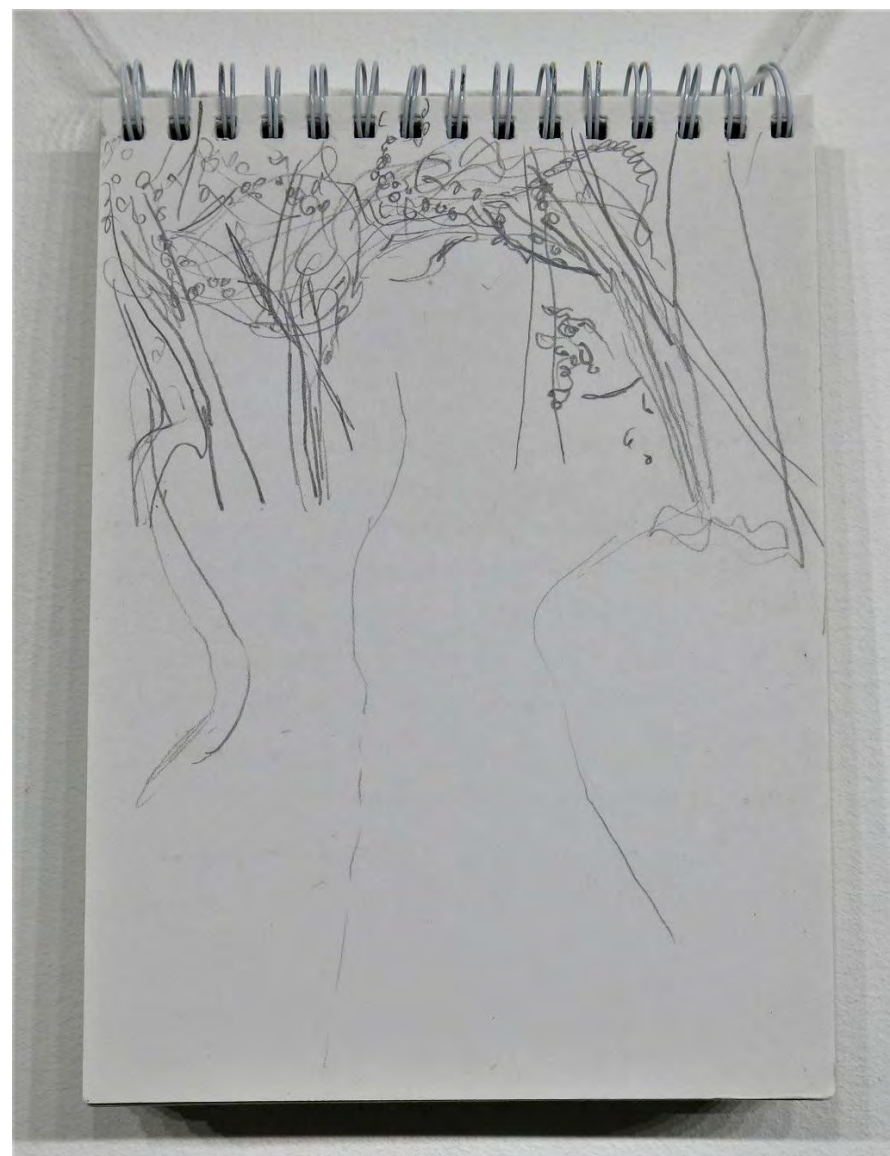


Figure a.29. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

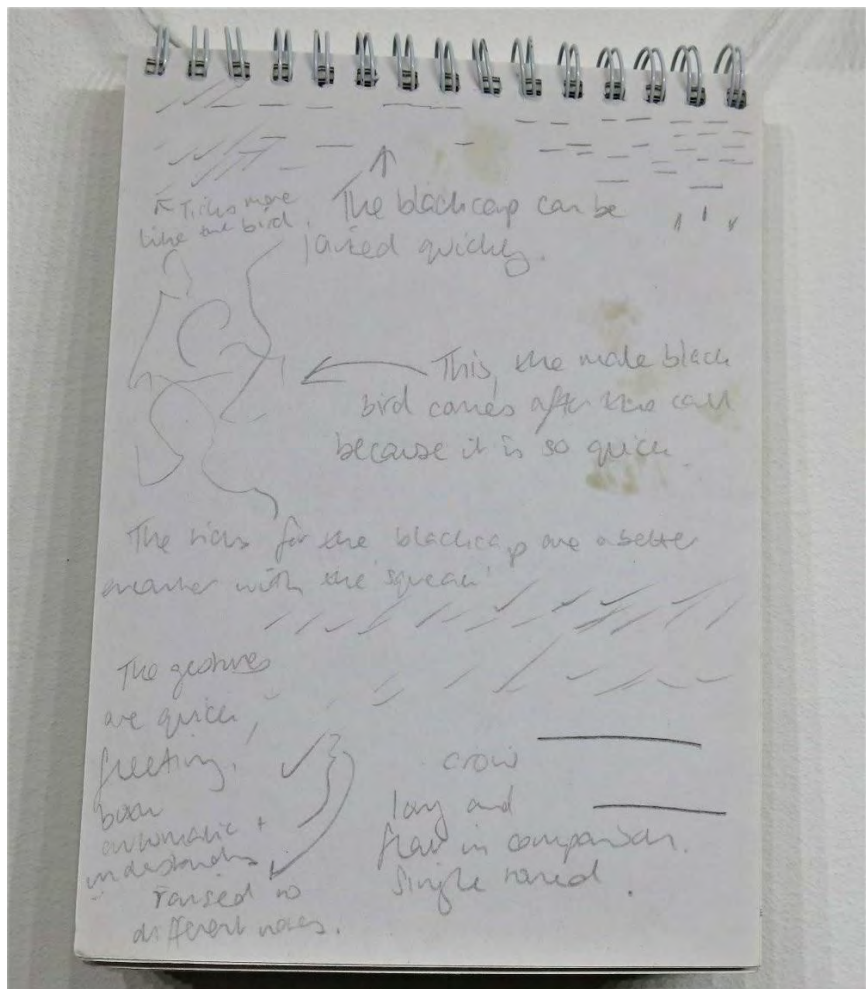


Figure a.30. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

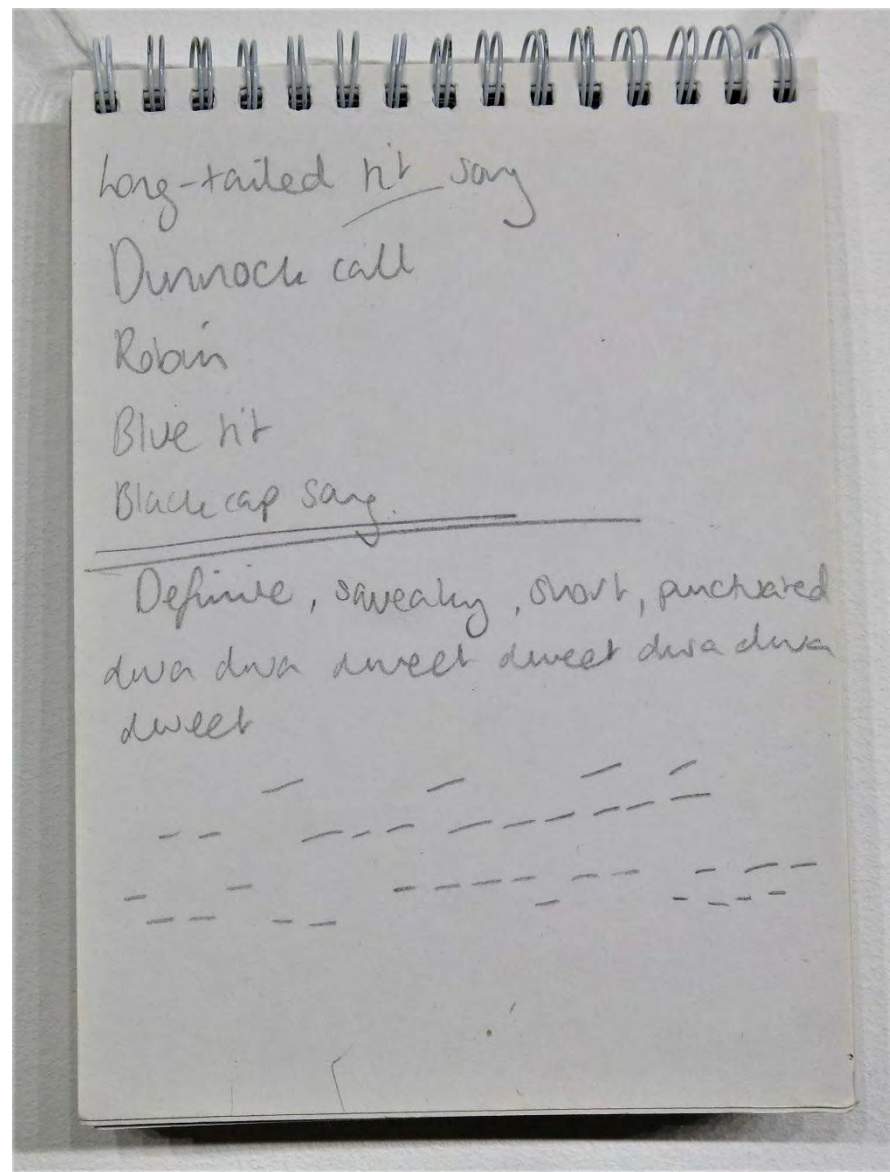


Figure a.31. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

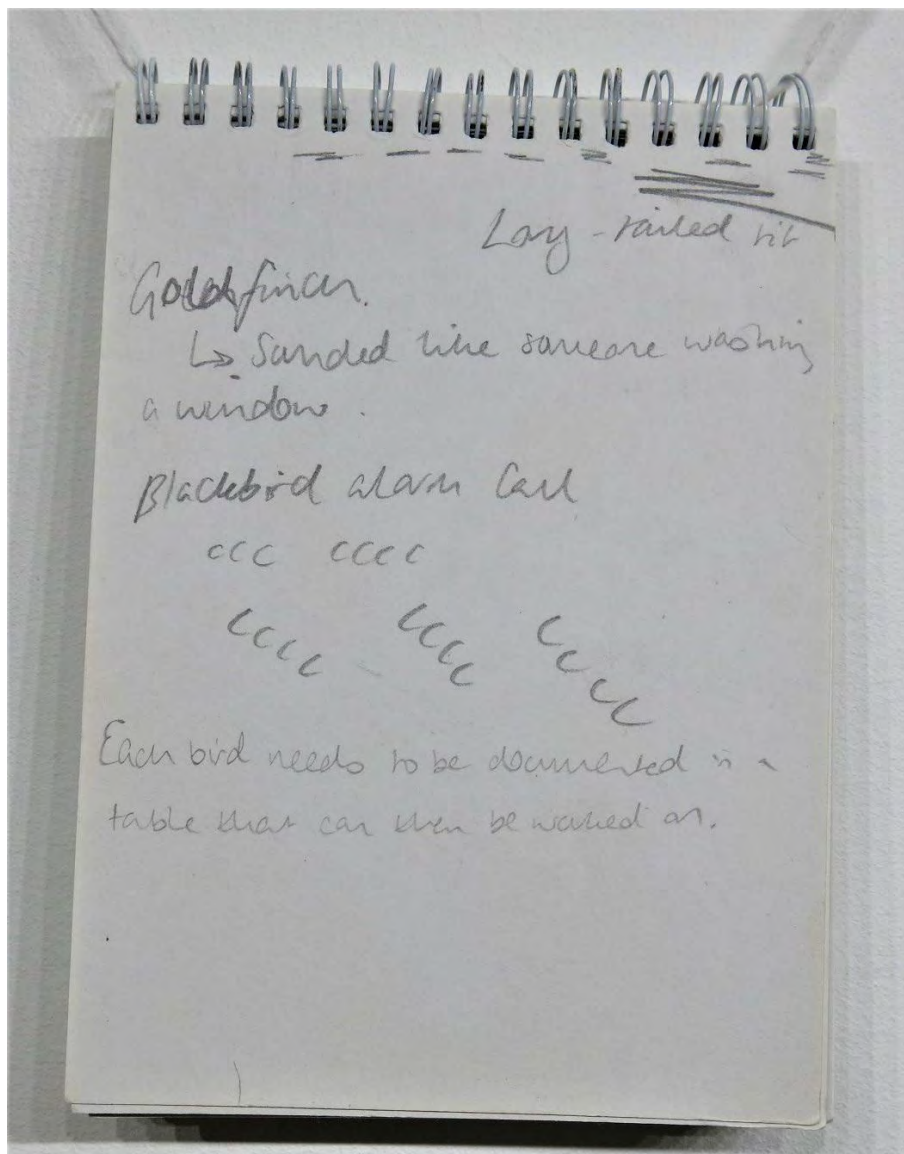


Figure a.32. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

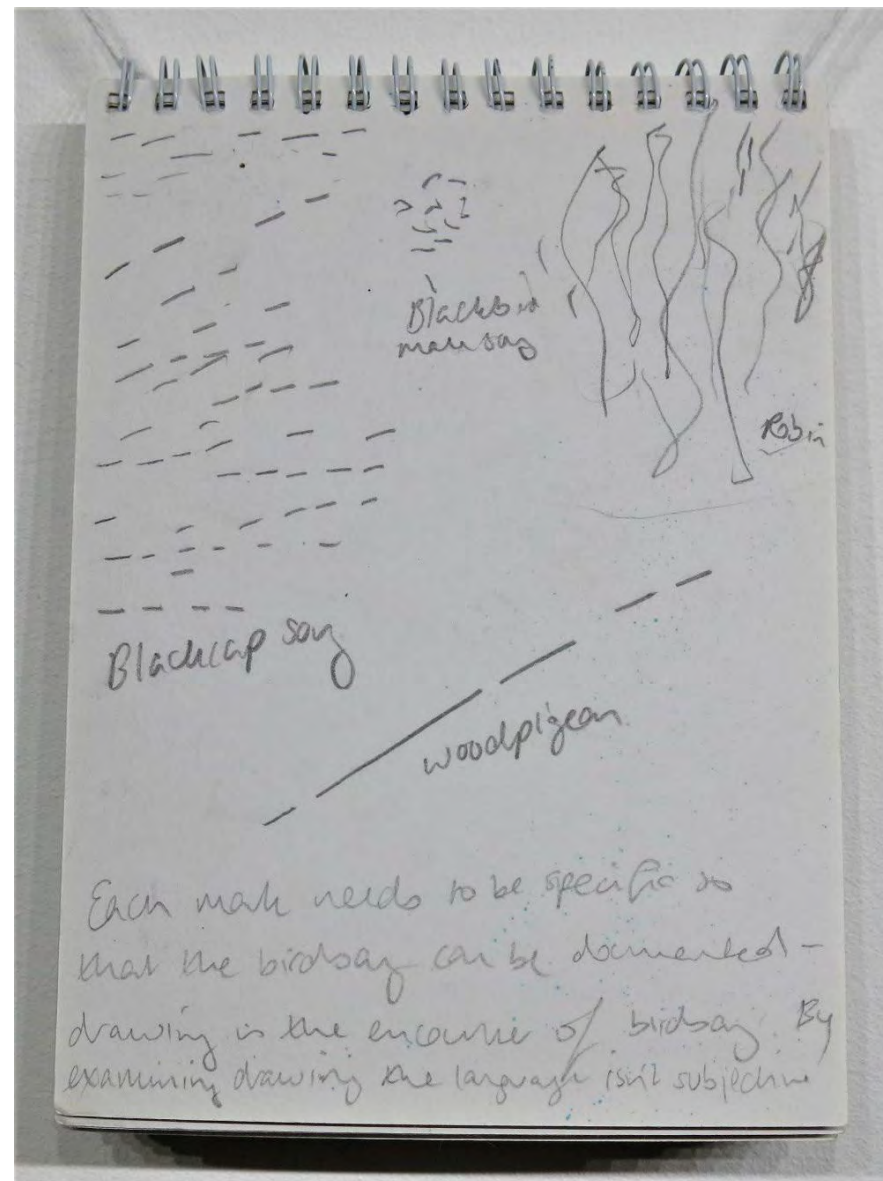


Figure a.33. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

Graphite on paper produces gaps,
textures, forms that is guided by the
bumps on the paper.

The delicacy of the Blackcap in
comparison with the ravenous pheasant.

The birds are drawn in literally to
the paper. The languages combine with
the scratching of the pencil on paper.

This audio to visual through
mark-making is better than songgram.

'Harriet' is paragon in frequency of
songgrams, but painterly accuracy is
best through marker w/ drawing.

Figure a.34. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

It feels almost foolish to attempt to
make marks of the different birds. My
marks came too late, each call is different
and the crossover and multiple birdcalls
at once means the drawing is selective.

[leave intuition at of this]

The blackcap actually changes in
note the closer I listen.

He stops. Perhaps it's because it's so fucking hot

Figure a.35. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page,

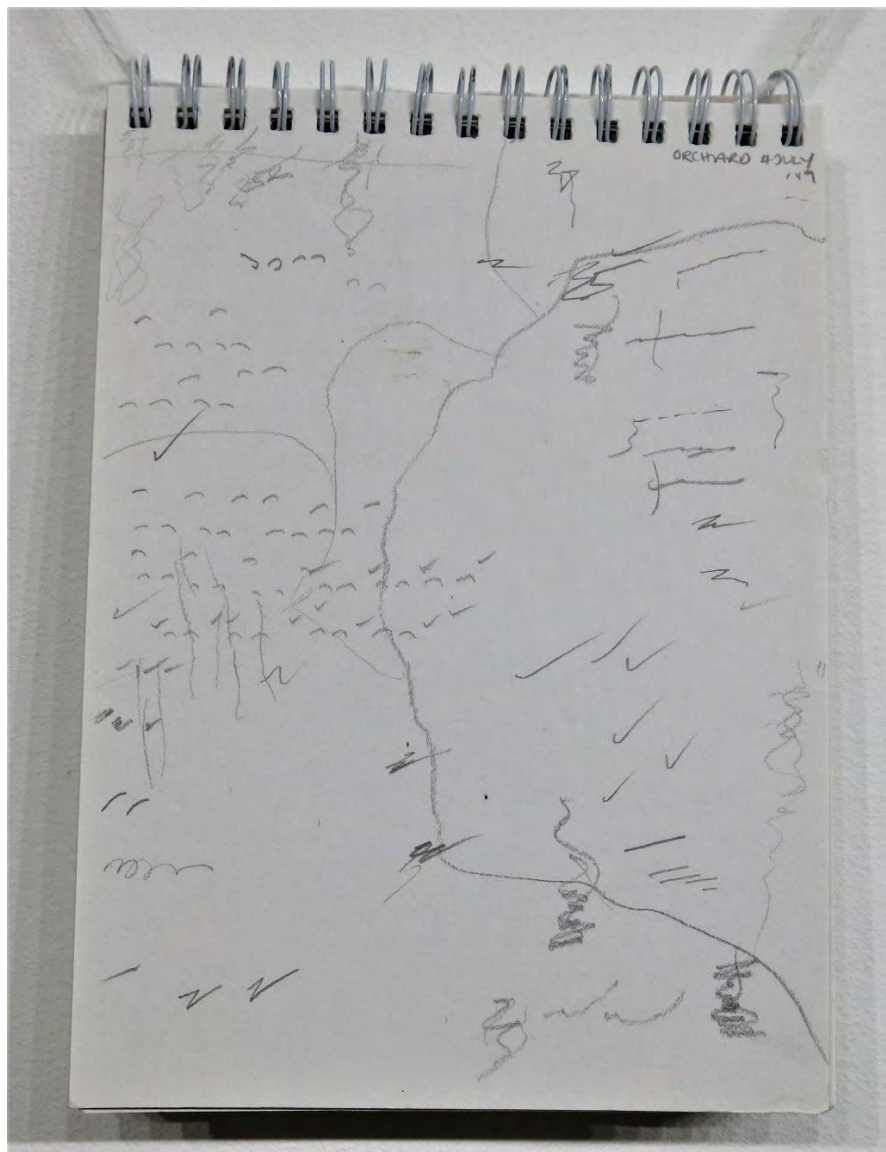


Figure a.36. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

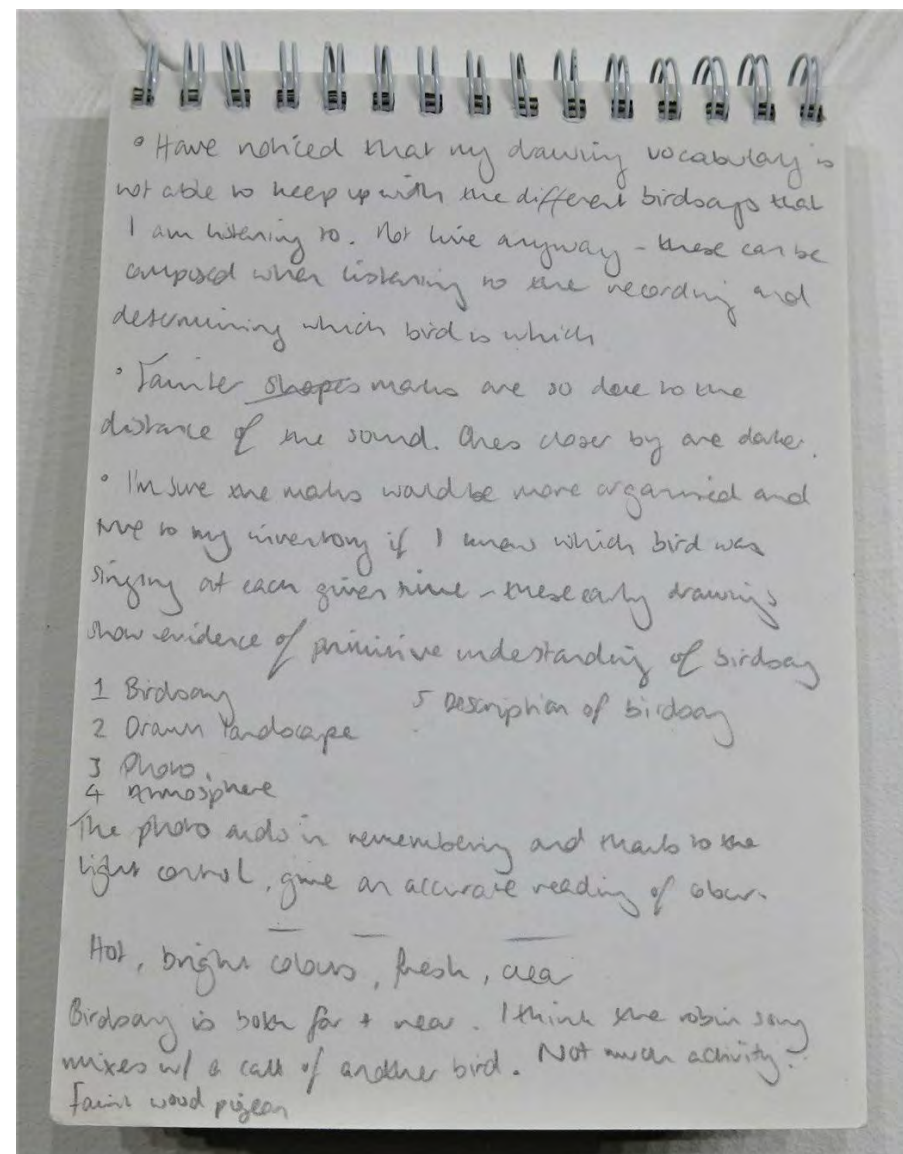


Figure a.37. Harriet Carter, Worcestershire orchard note page, (2019)

Appendix B: Field notebook

The following images depict the notebook pages in chronological order.

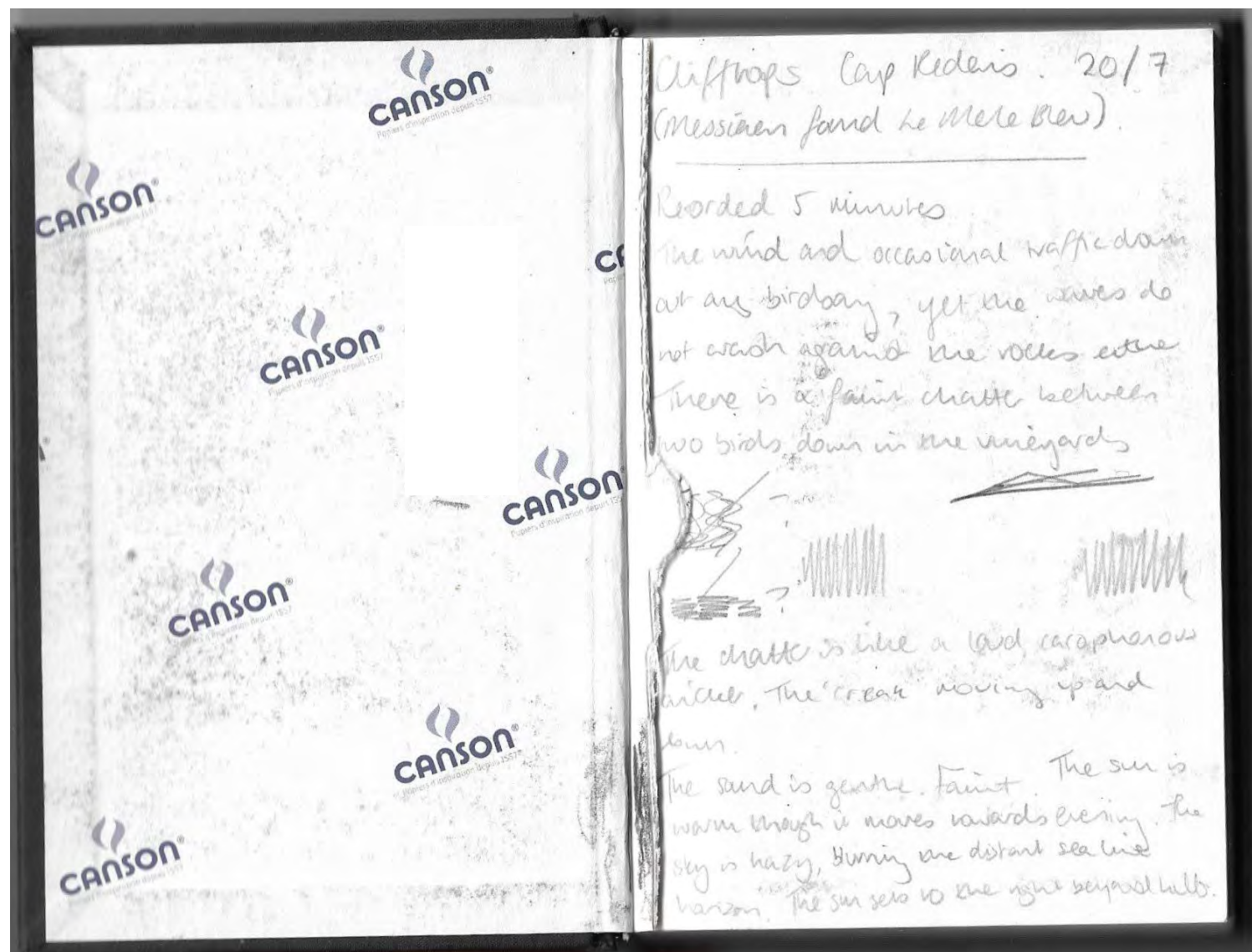


Figure a.38. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cap Rederis, (2019).

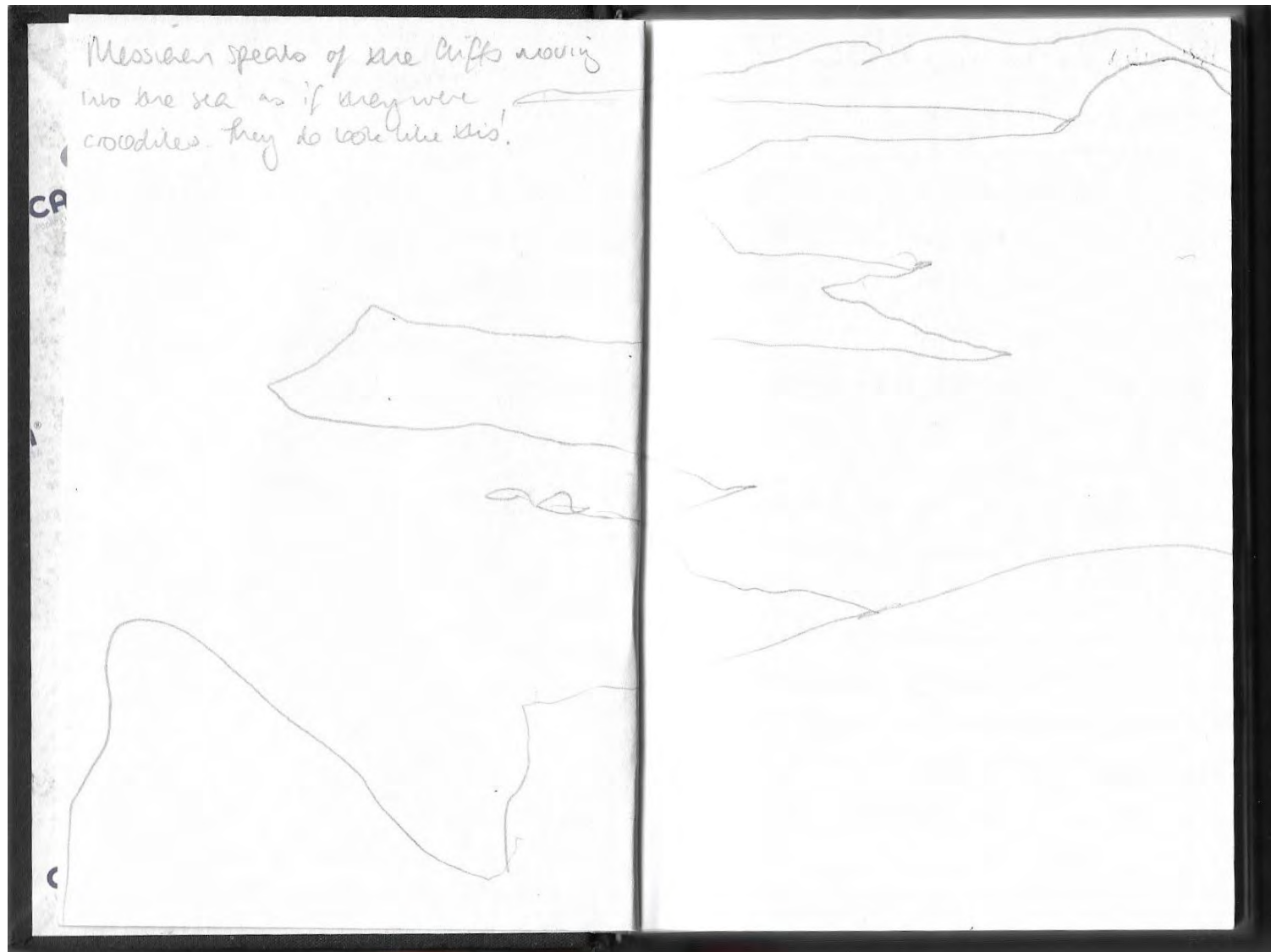


Figure a.39. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cap Rederis, (2019).

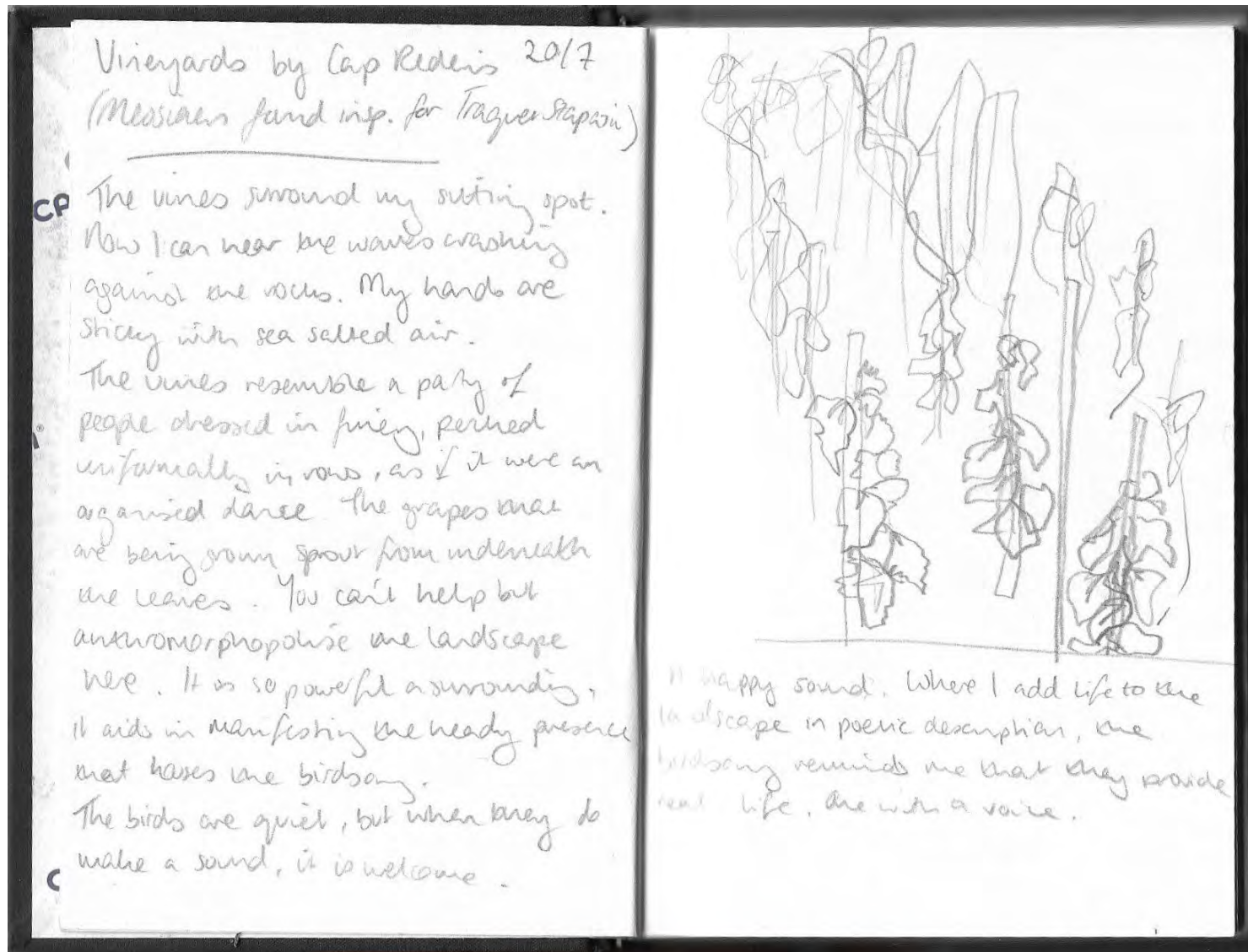


Figure a.40. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cap Rederis, (2019).

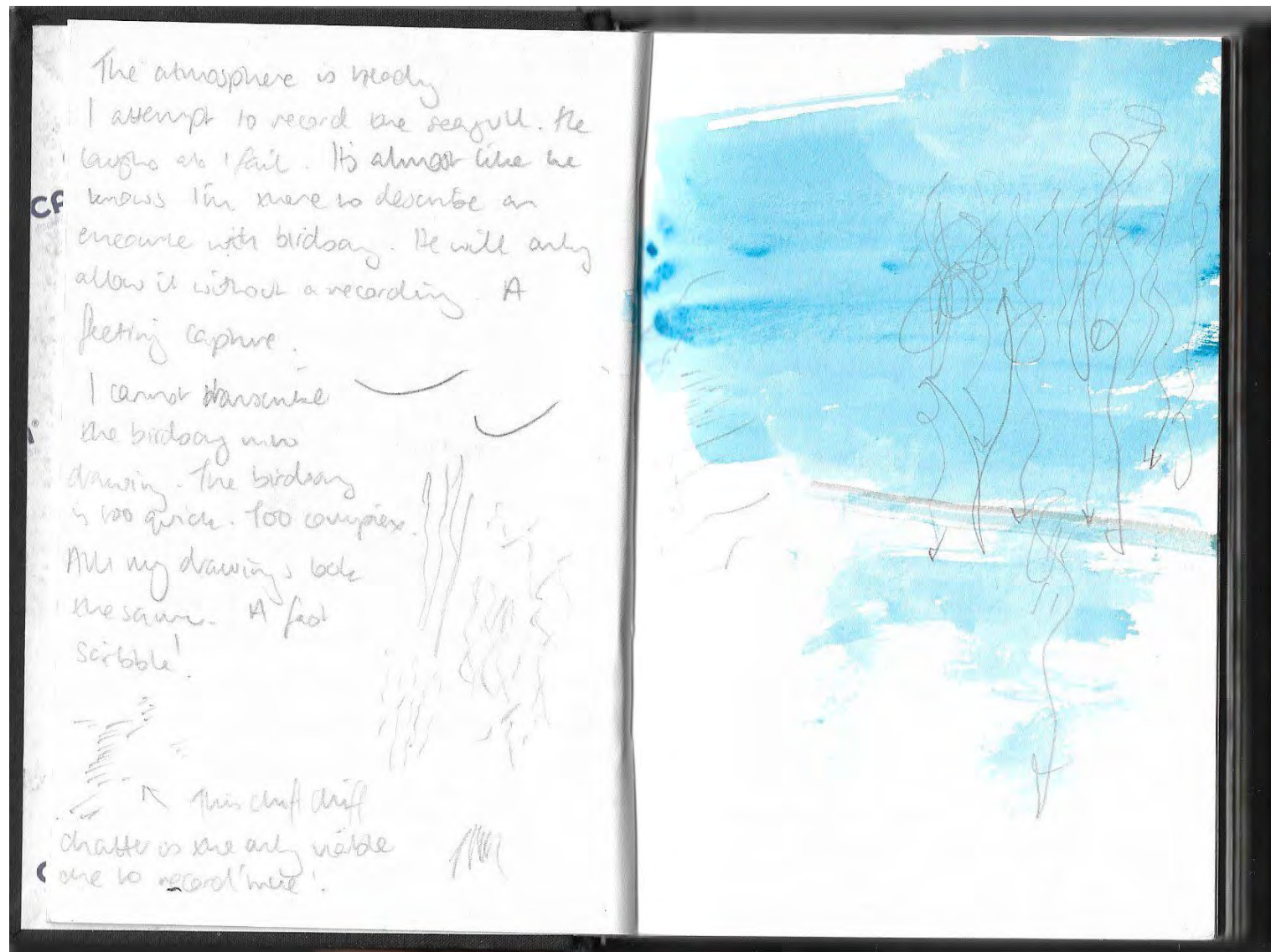
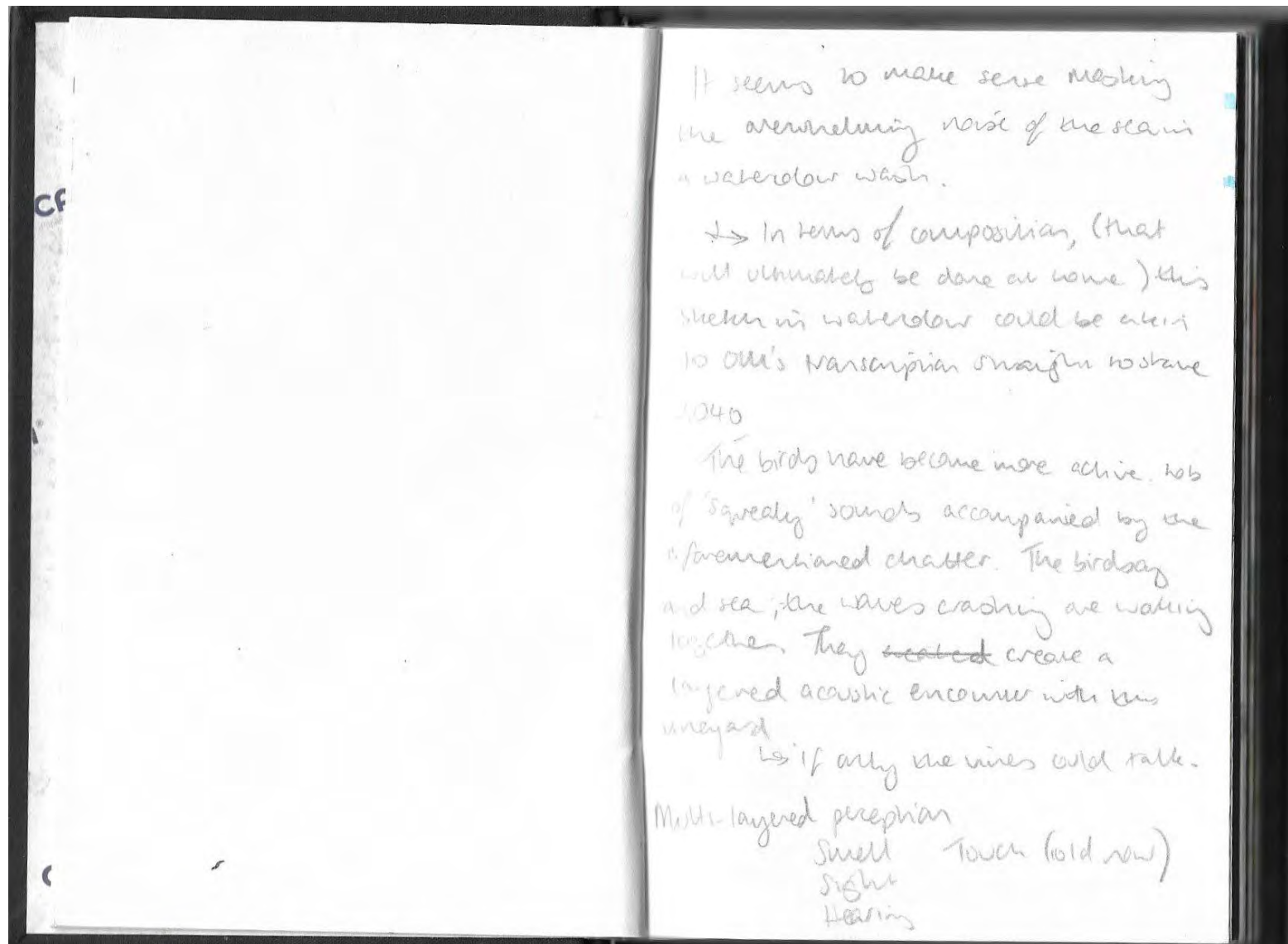


Figure a.41. Harriet Carter, scan of field notebook, transcriptions at Cap Rederis, (2019).



It seems to make sense matching
the overwhelming noise of the sea in
a watercolor wash.

→ In terms of composition, (that
will ultimately be done at home) this
sketch in watercolor could be akin
to Old's transcription on page 1040
1040

The birds have become more active. lots
of 'squeaky' sounds accompanied by the
 aforementioned chatter. The birdsong
and sea, the waves crashing are working
together. They ~~seated~~ create a
layered acoustic encounter with this
vineyard

↳ if only the vines could talk.

Multi-layered perception

Smell

Sight

Hearing

Touch (old row)

Figure a.42. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cap Rederis, (2019).

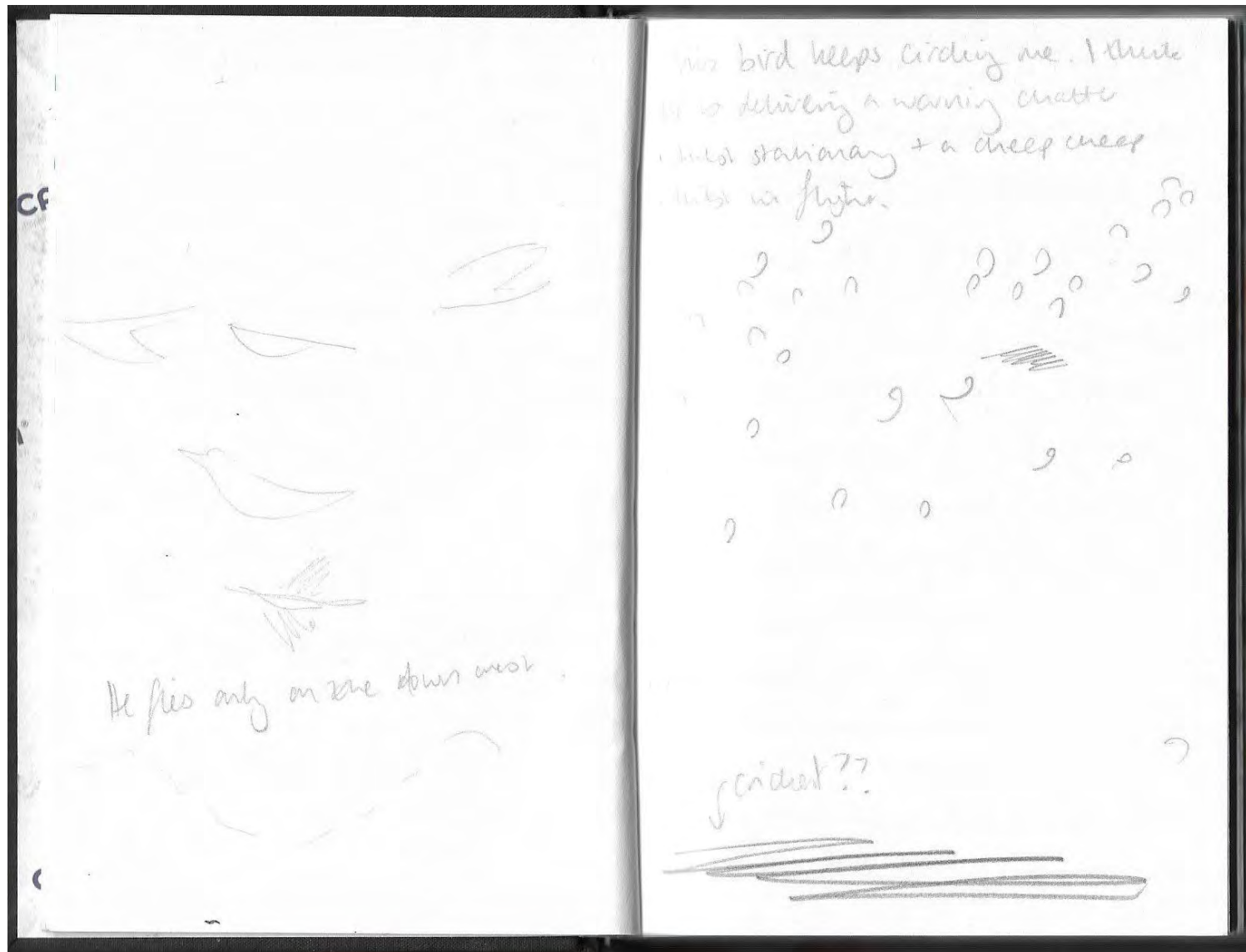


Figure a.43. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cap Rederis, (2019).

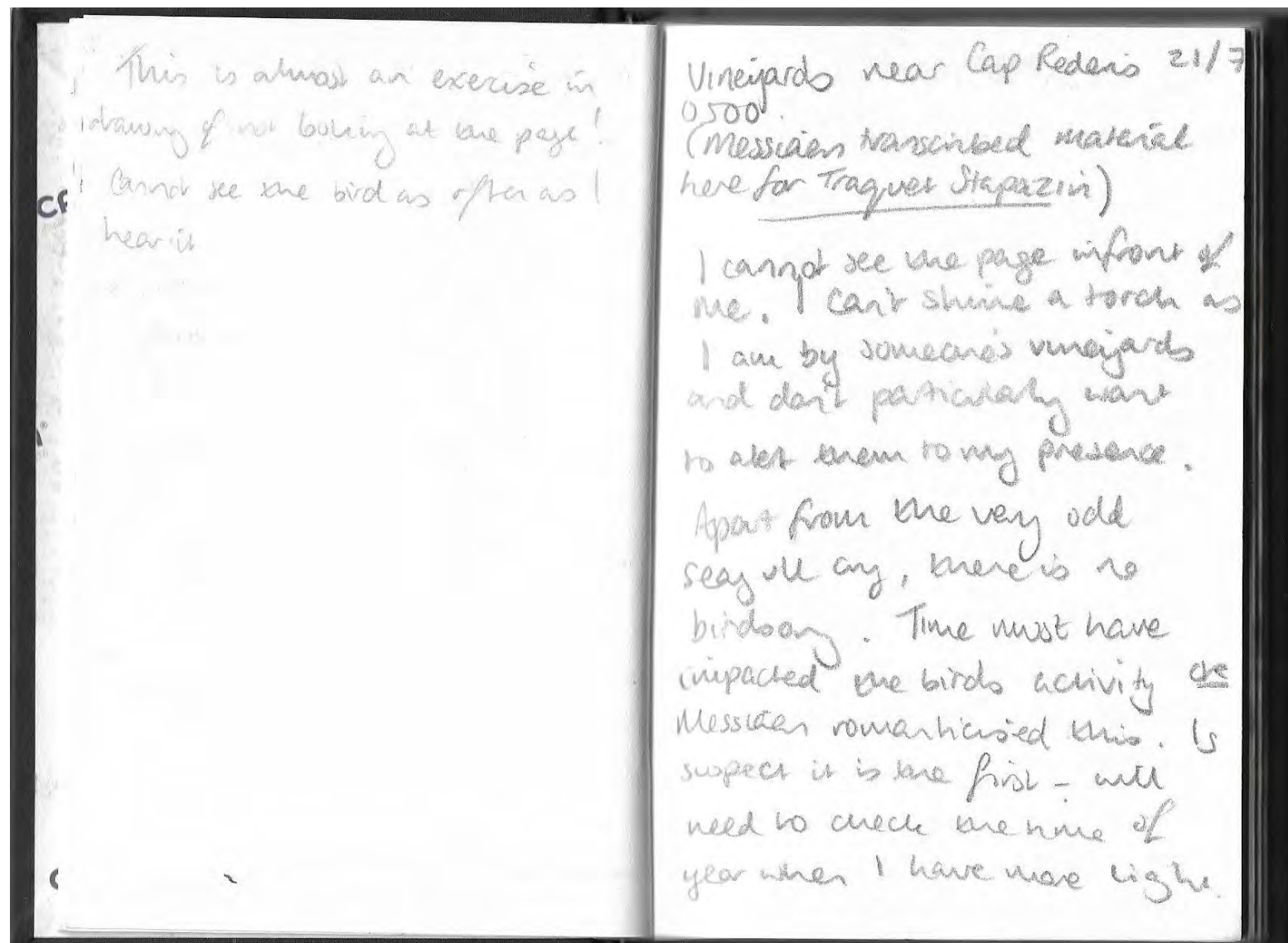


Figure a.44. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cap Rederis, (2019).

The moon is still high in the sky at my night and there is a hint of a potential sunrise - not due for at least 30 mins. The waves seem quieter this morning - the dense foggy mist shifting the noise. The air is so laden with salty moisture, my hair is curling.

Glows of things in the landscape are muted - the only visible colour is the dusty mauve/orange that signals the forthcoming sunrise.

The only bird song that I can detect so far is the tentative squeak behind me, in the

Vines. Perhaps the same bird is yesterday, waiting for the day.

I am no ornithologist - my encounter is very different to DM. He could identify the songs/calls and attributed his understanding + perception of the song/call to his knowledge of the bird 'personality'.

0600 Birds have finally woken (at dawn). Nearly dawn! It is much lighter and the night fog has lifted. Every morning sounds better.

Figure a.45. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cap Rederis, (2019).

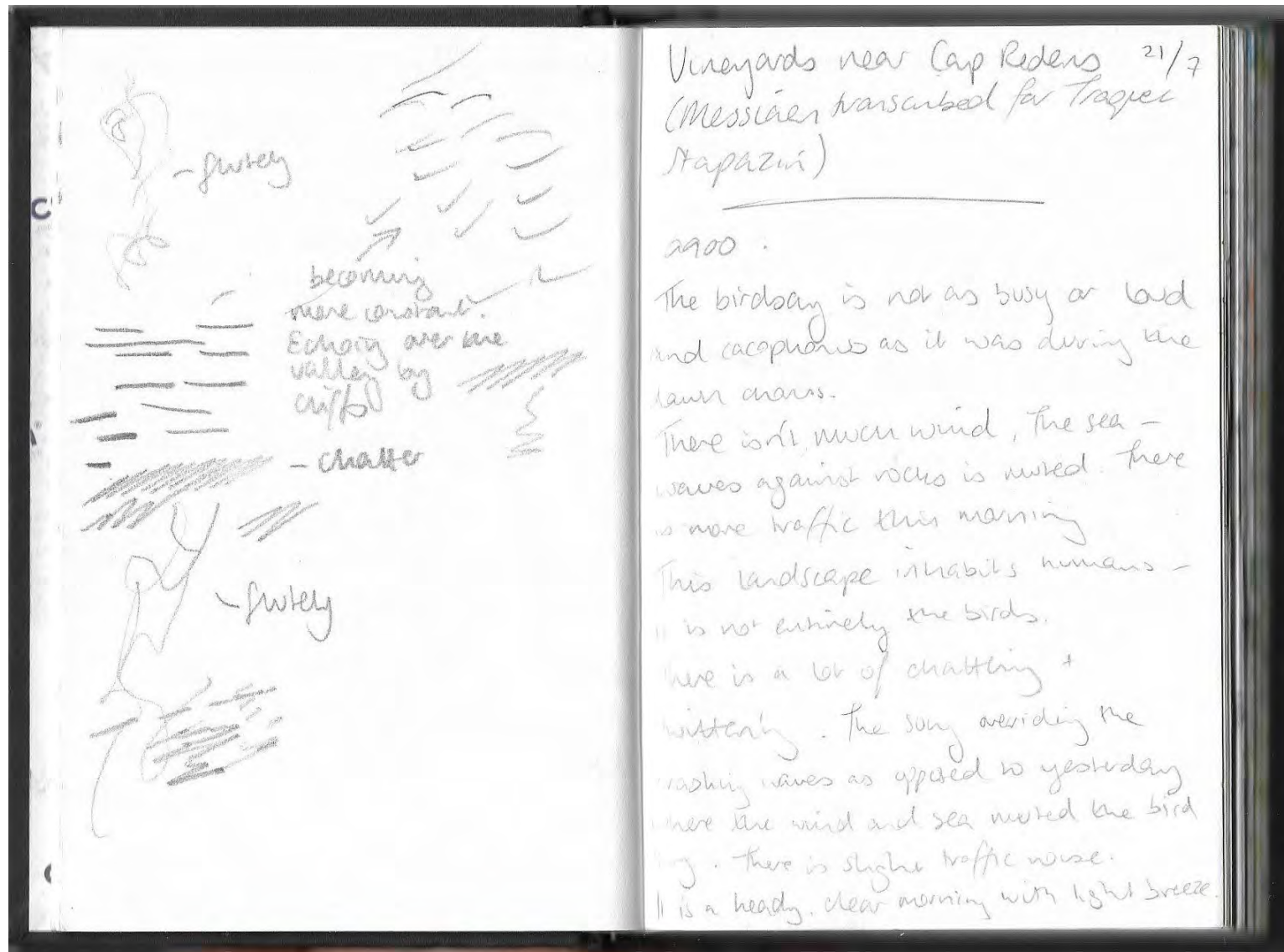


Figure a.46. Harriet Carter, scan of field notebook, transcriptions at Cap Rederis, (2019).

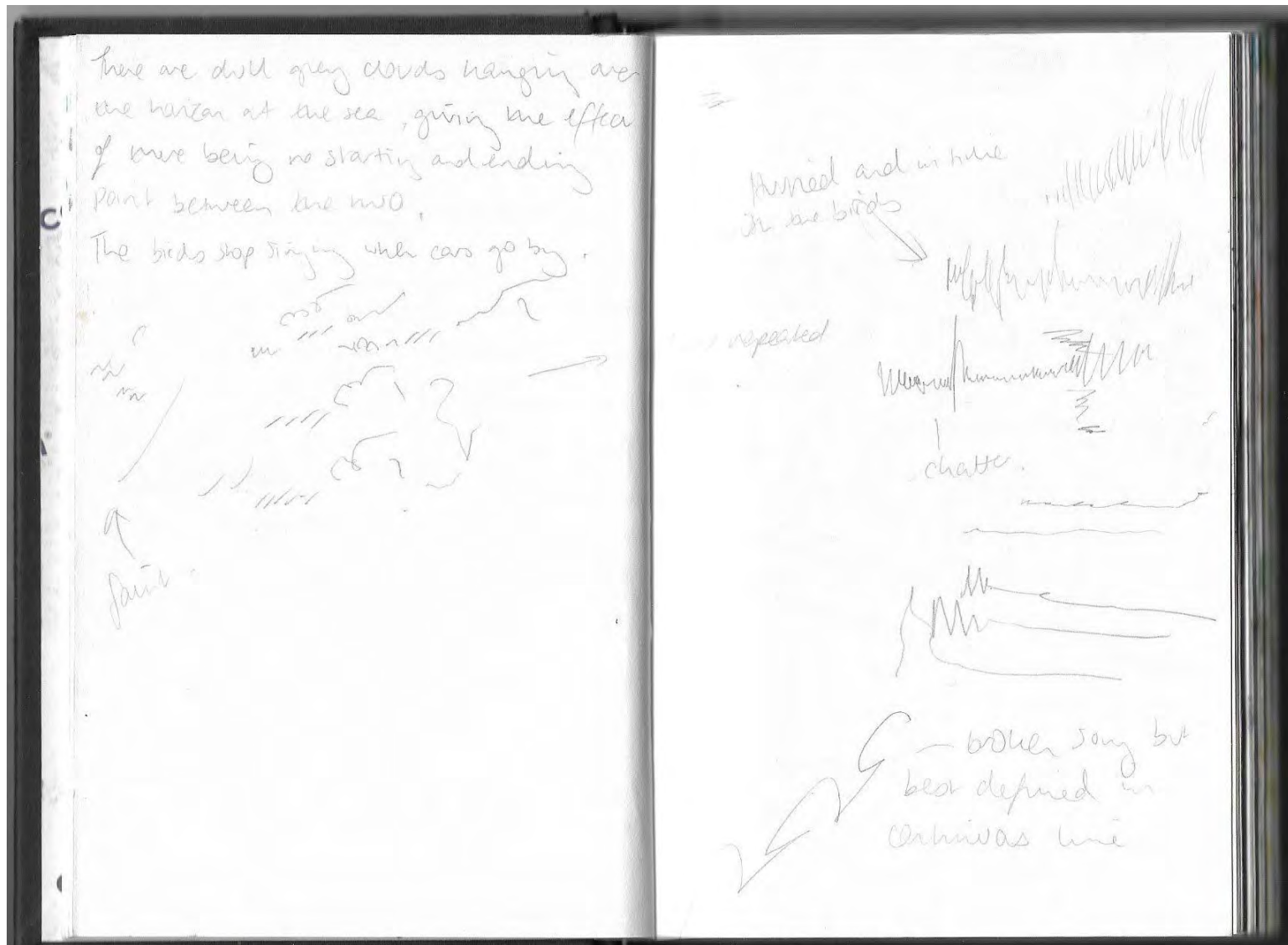


Figure a.47. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cap Rederis, (2019).



Figure a.48. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cap Rederis, (2019).

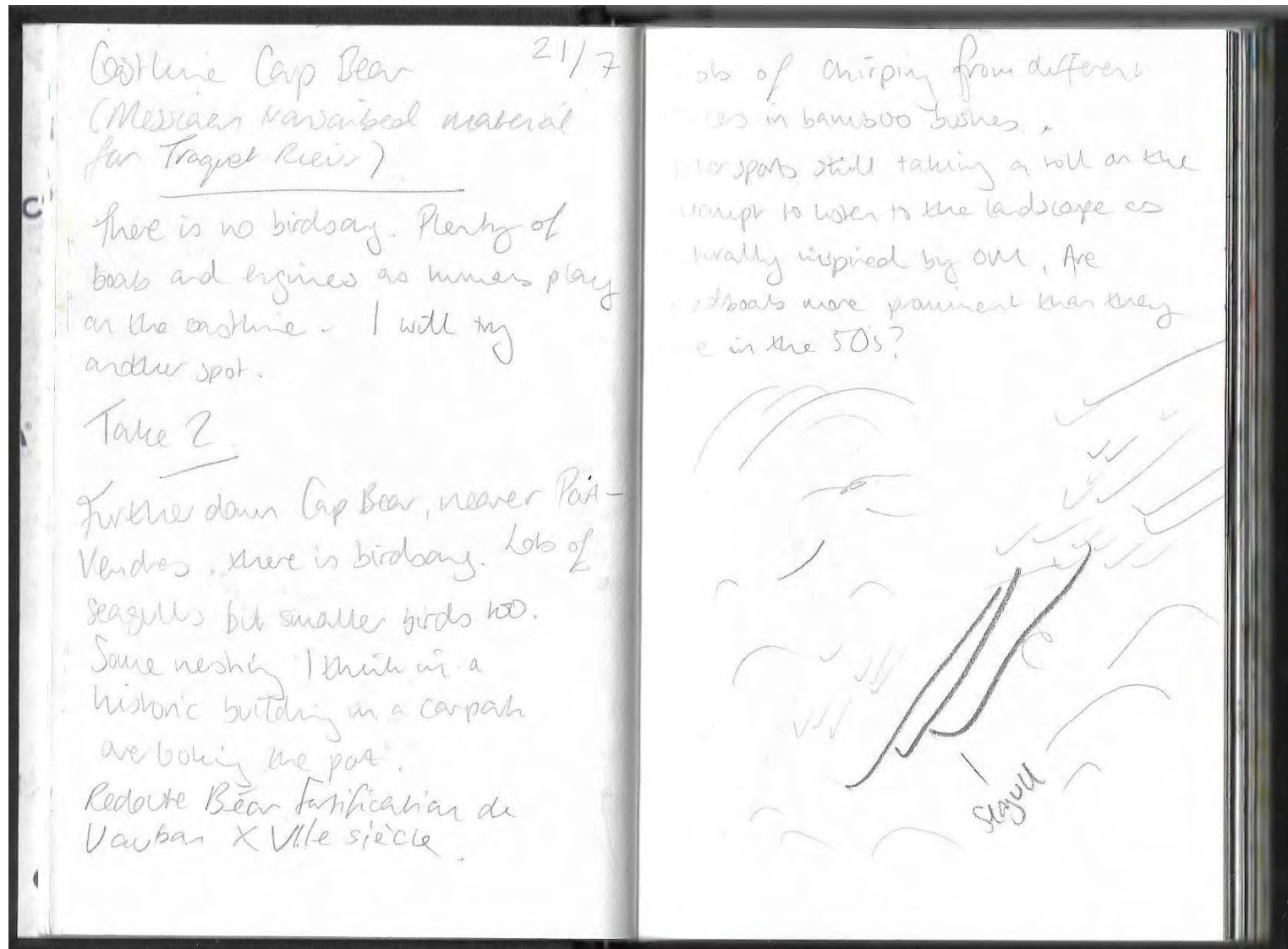


Figure a.49. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cap Bear, (2019).



Figure a.50. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cap Bear, (2019).

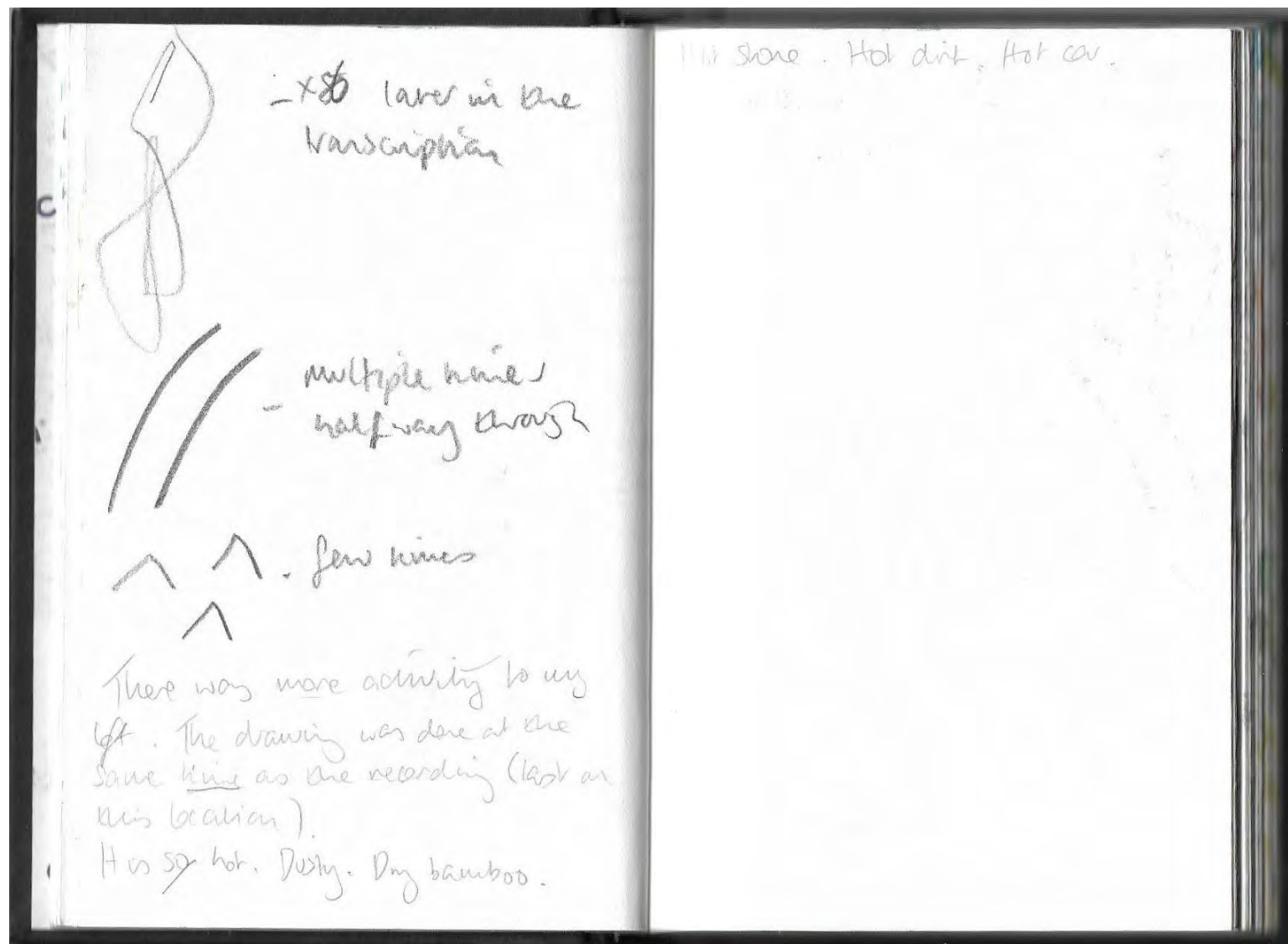


Figure a.51. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cap Bear, (2019).

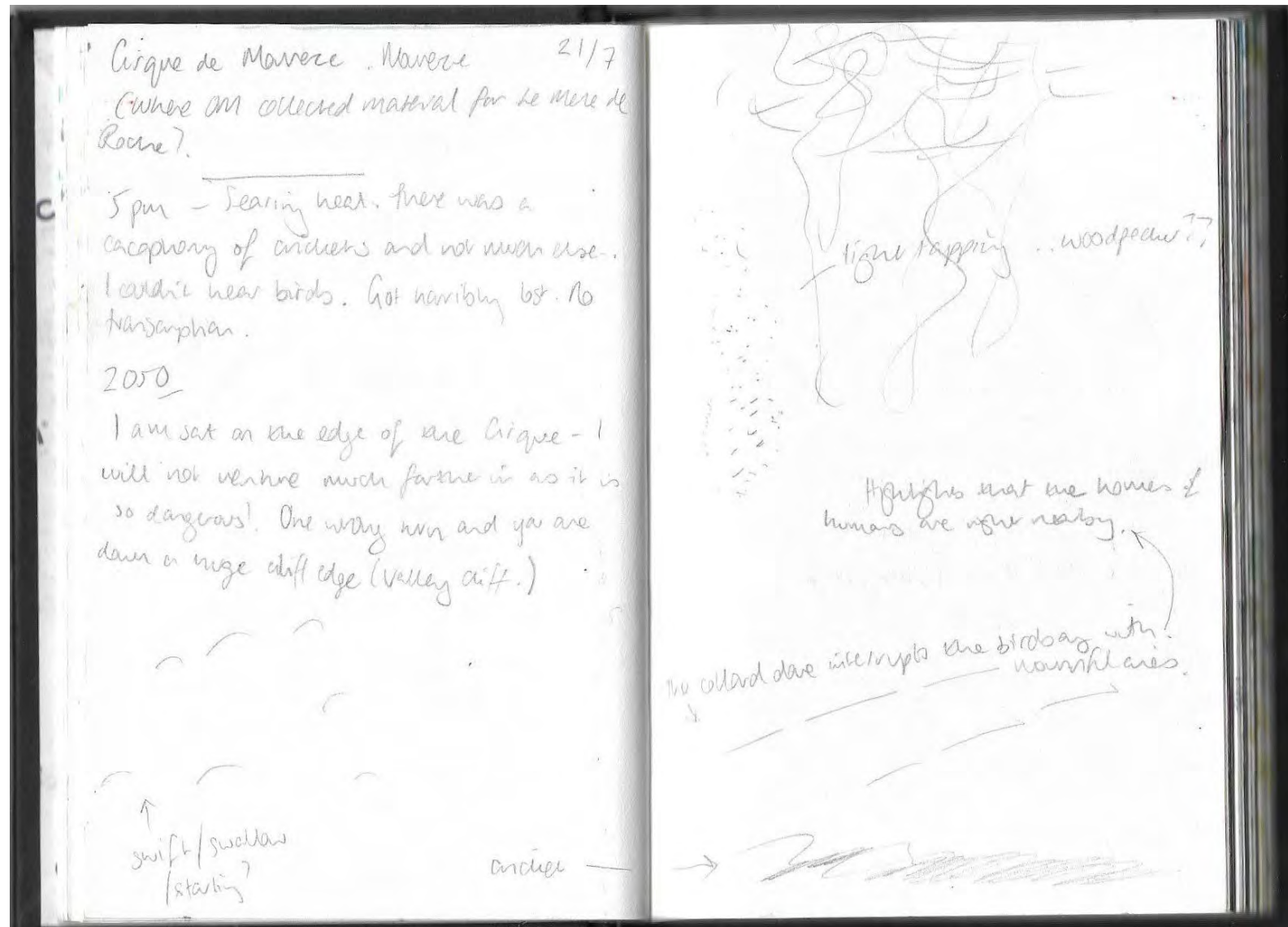


Figure a.52. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cirque de Mourèze, (2019).



Figure a.53. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cirque de Mourèze, (2019).

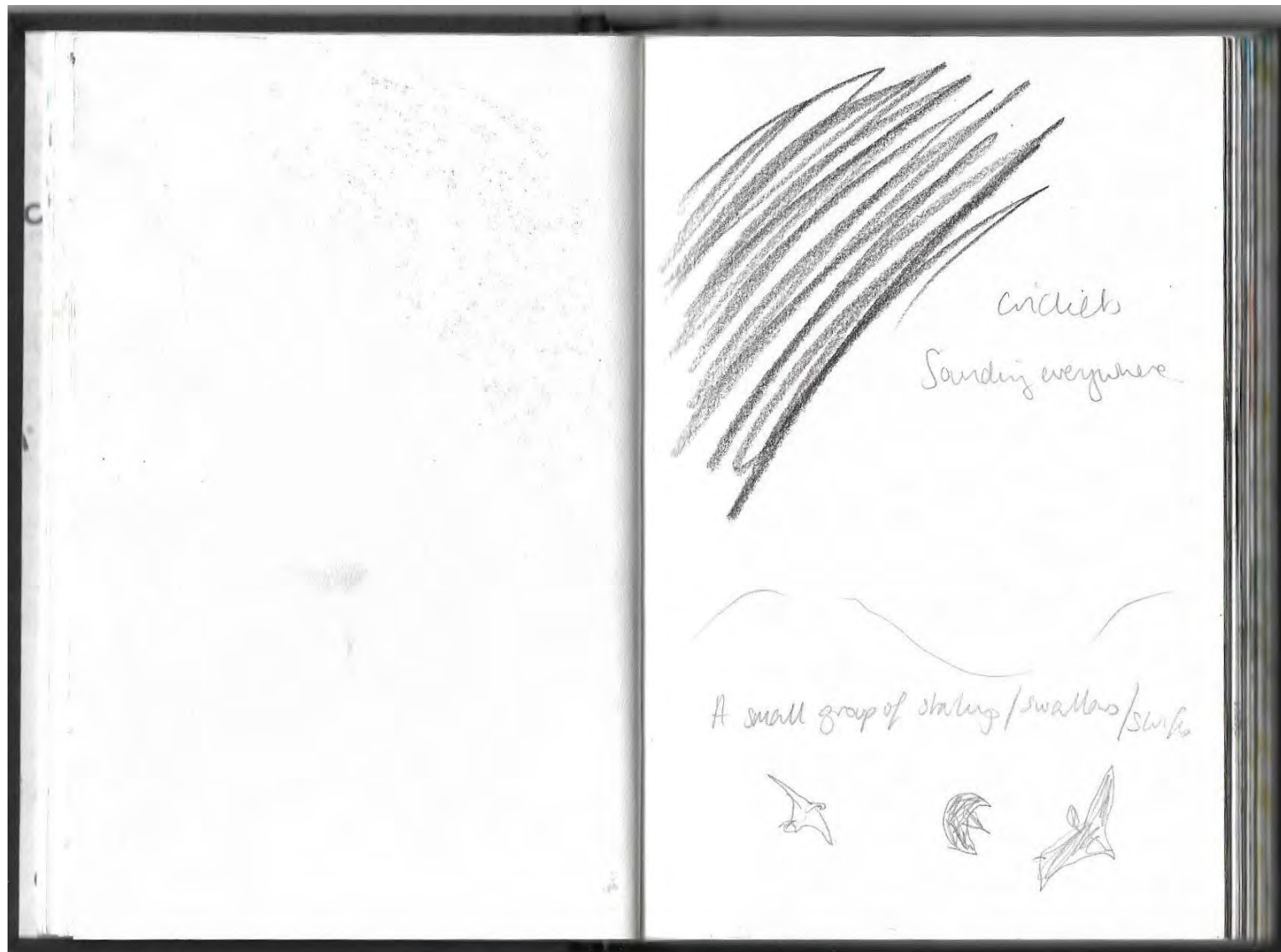


Figure a.54. Harriet Carter, scan of field notebook, transcriptions at Cirque de Mourèze, (2019).

The water/clear is admirably incomplete. Usually a pencil outline + structure would guide the eye + clear. This time the birdsong guides the clear. Structures it.

Whilst it's true that the birds provide loudness to the atmosphere, the clear still belongs to the landscape. The crickets are so jarring, they suit placement on top of the clear, maintaining any understood form out of shape. Whereas the swift / swallow / other glides above this chaos.

530am - 0634

End of night, dawn. 22/7

No crickets. No birdsong. Then suddenly, the dawn chimes. It was fantastic, lively, uninterrupted by

three peeping crickets. And then at the blurry fading darkness - an owl!!

I'm writing this post-recording, still set as the sun rises as I did not wish to interfere with the recording with the scratching of my pencil on paper.

I felt important that the recorder be next to me, so it captures near to what I hear in real time.

The echoes of the small gliding birds



swallow/swift/other echoed across the notes - The undulating sound carving a shape around the huge imposing notes

Figure a.55. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cirque de Mourèze, (2019).

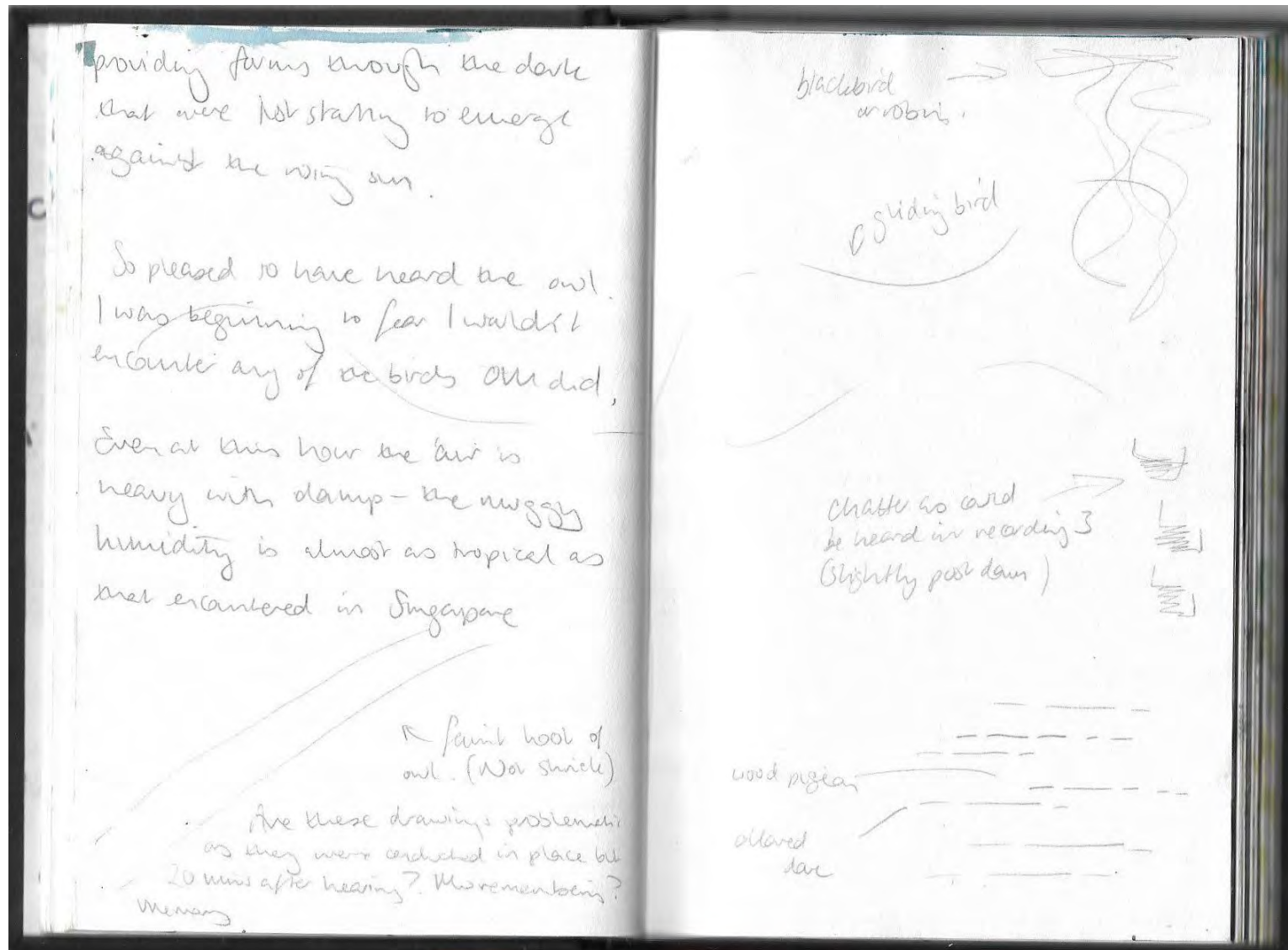


Figure a.56. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cirque de Mourèze, (2019).



Figure a.57. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cirque de Mourèze, (2019).

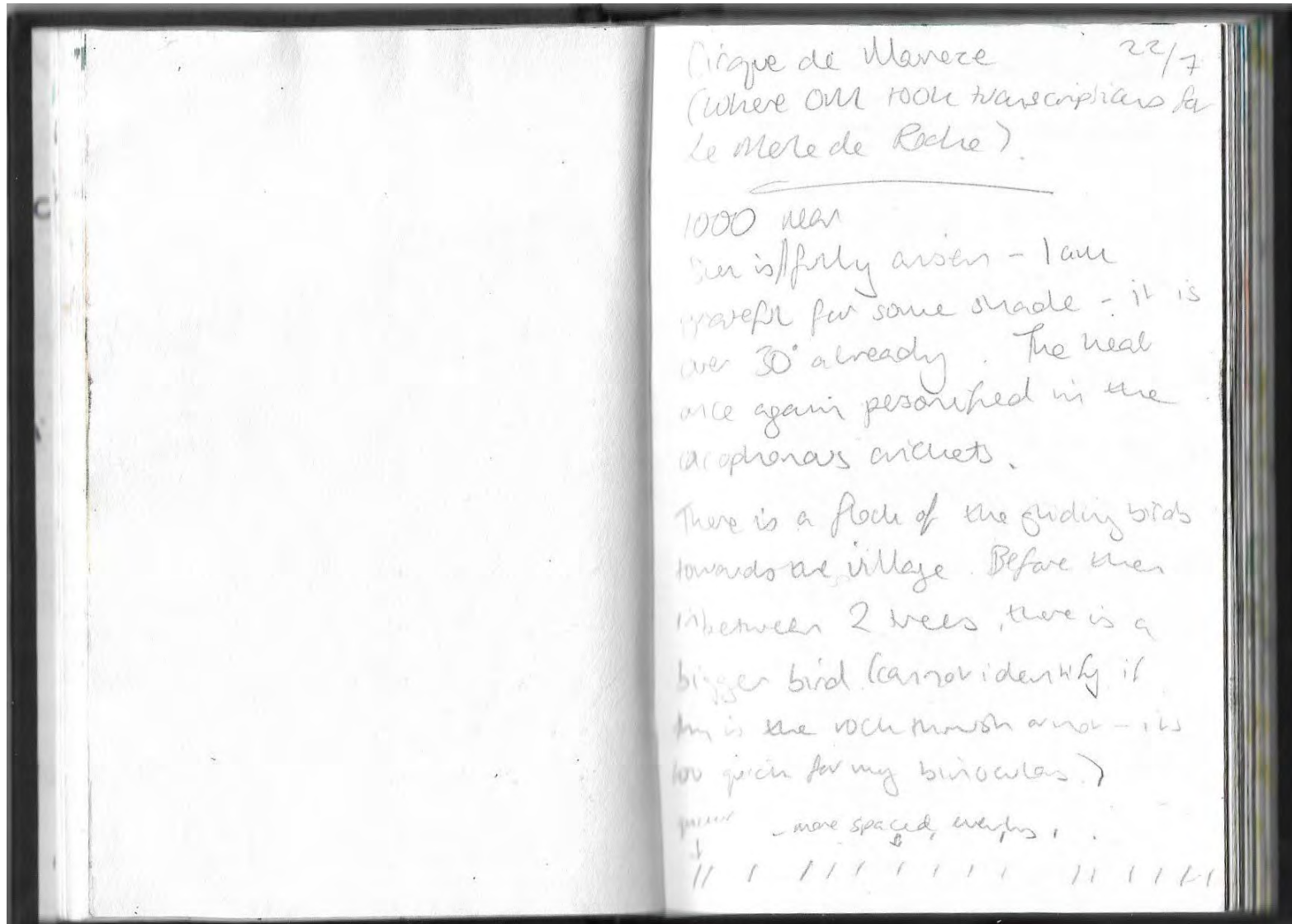


Figure a.58. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cirque de Mourèze, (2019).



Figure a.59. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cirque de Mourèze, (2019).

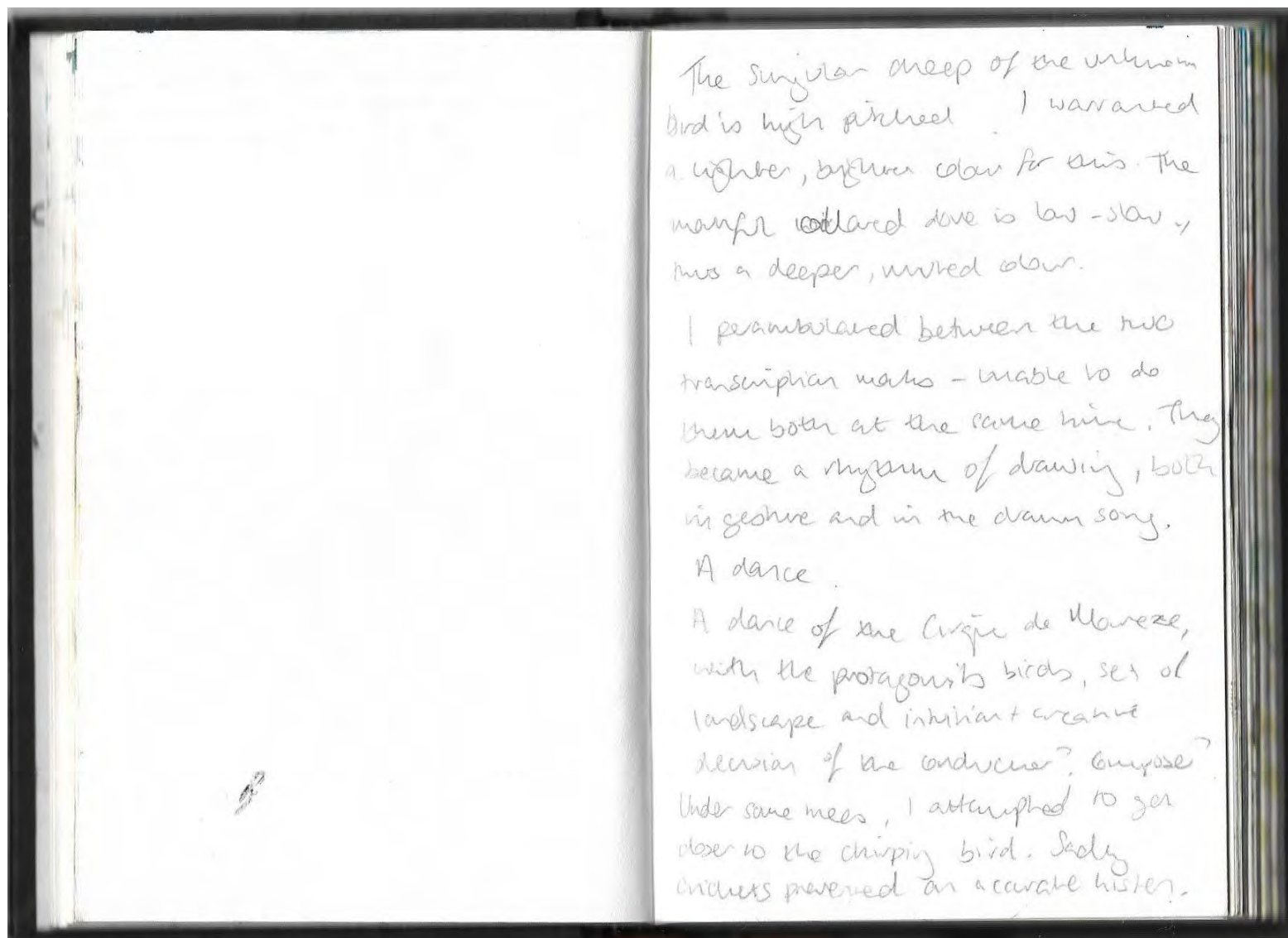


Figure a.60. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cirque de Mourèze, (2019).

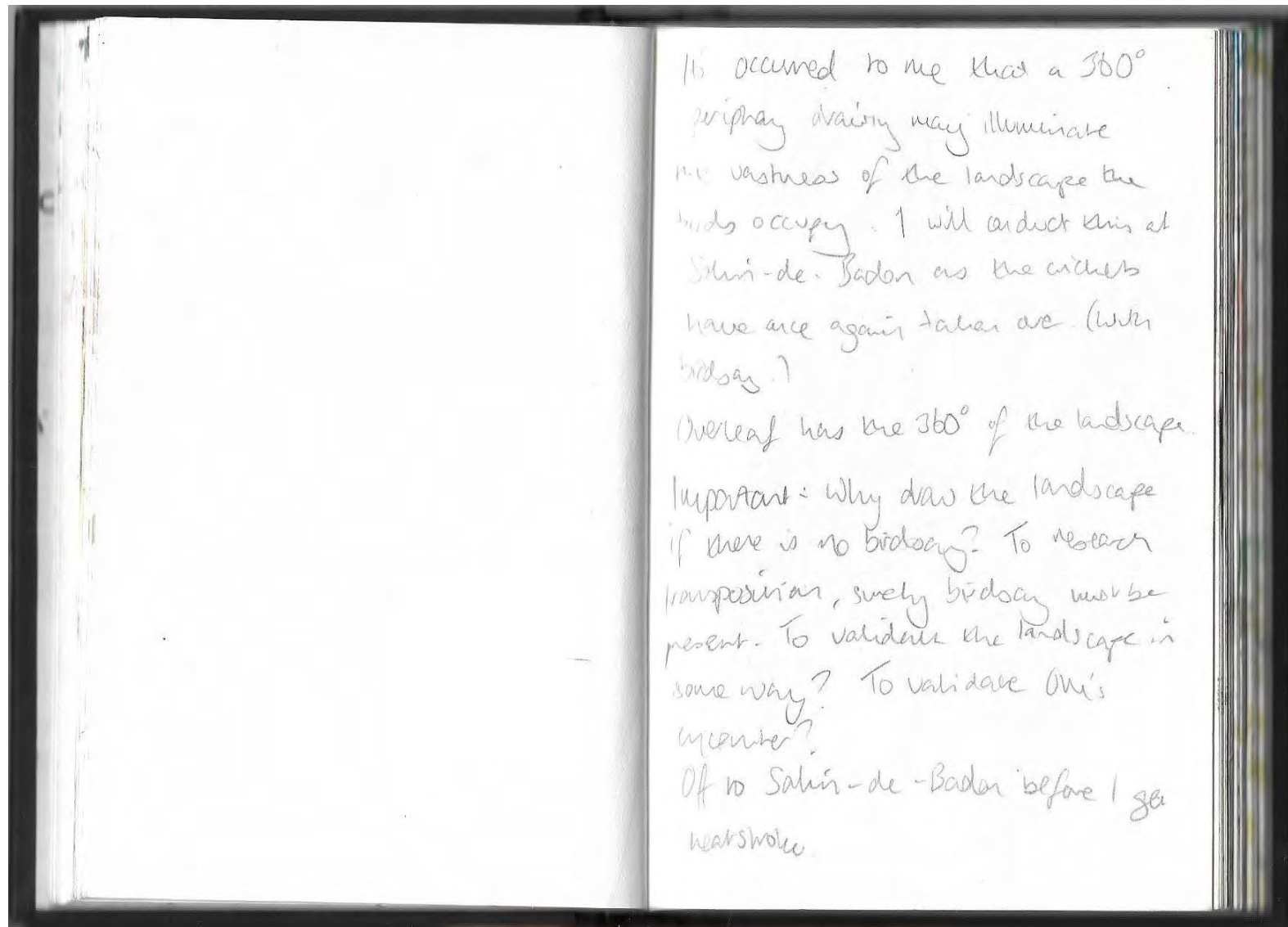


Figure a.61. Harriet Carter, scan of field notebook, transcriptions at Cirque de Mourèze, (2019).

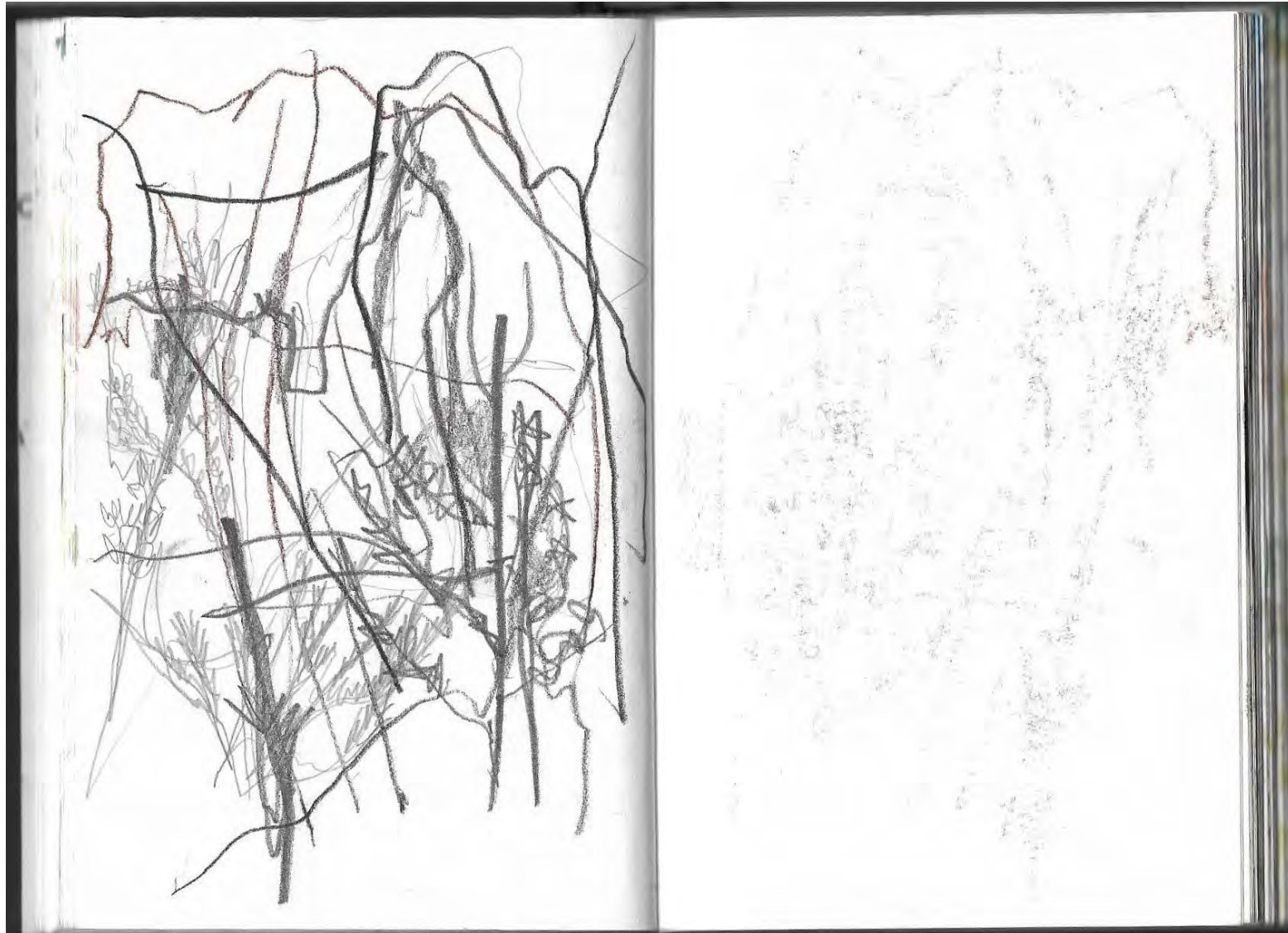


Figure a.62. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Cirque de Mourèze, (2019).

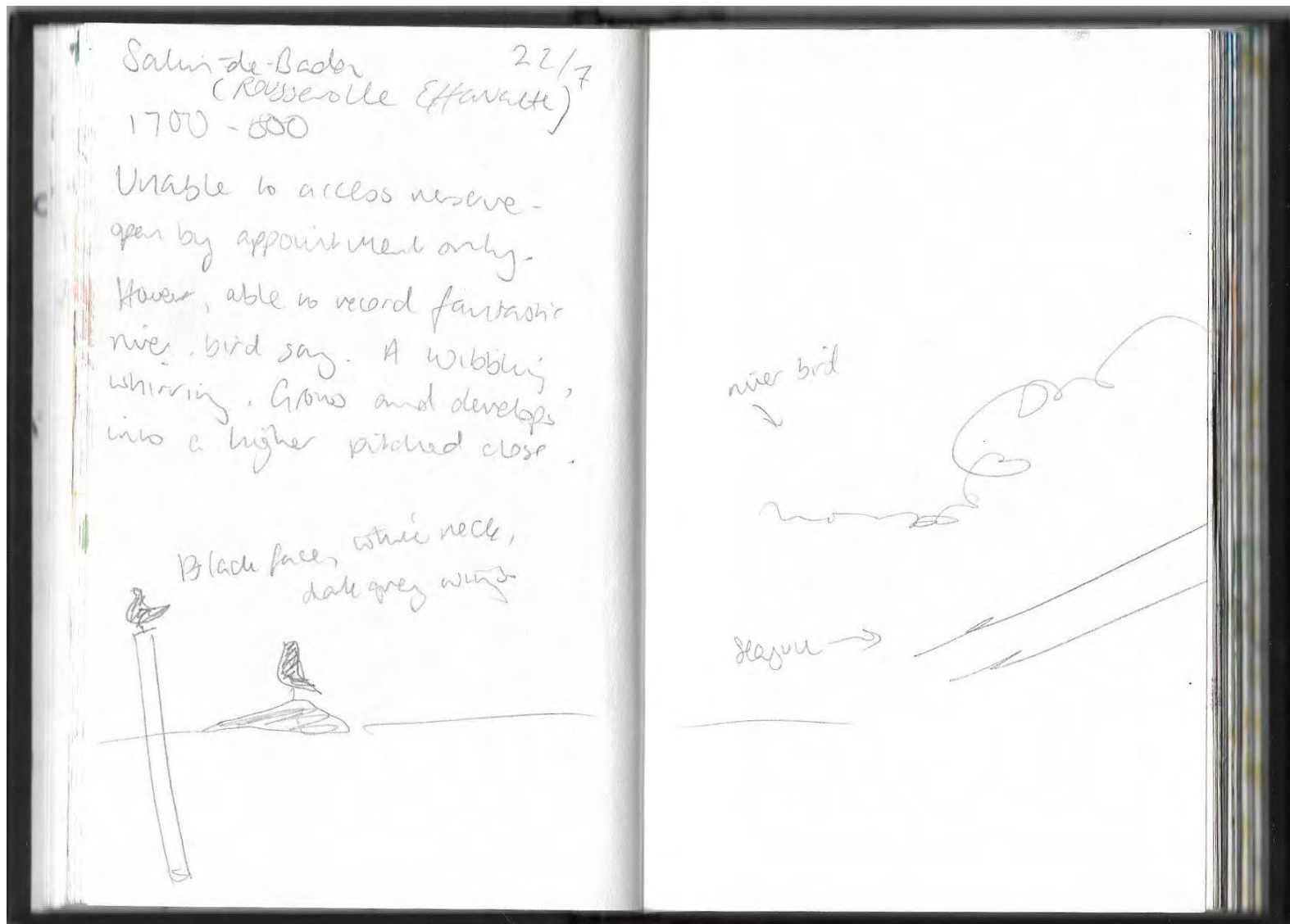


Figure a.63. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Salin-de-Badon, (2019).

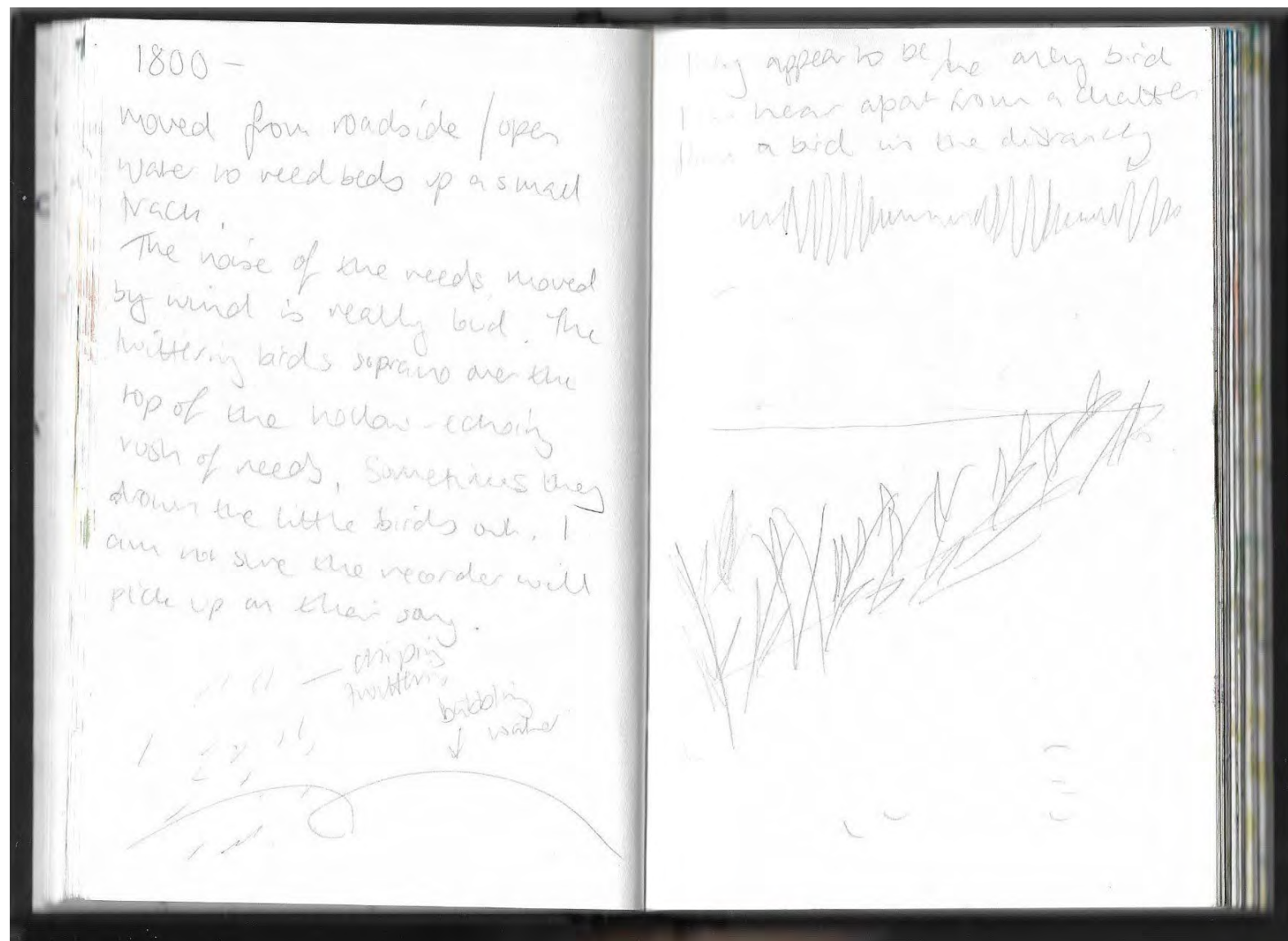


Figure a.64. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Salin-de-Badon, (2019).

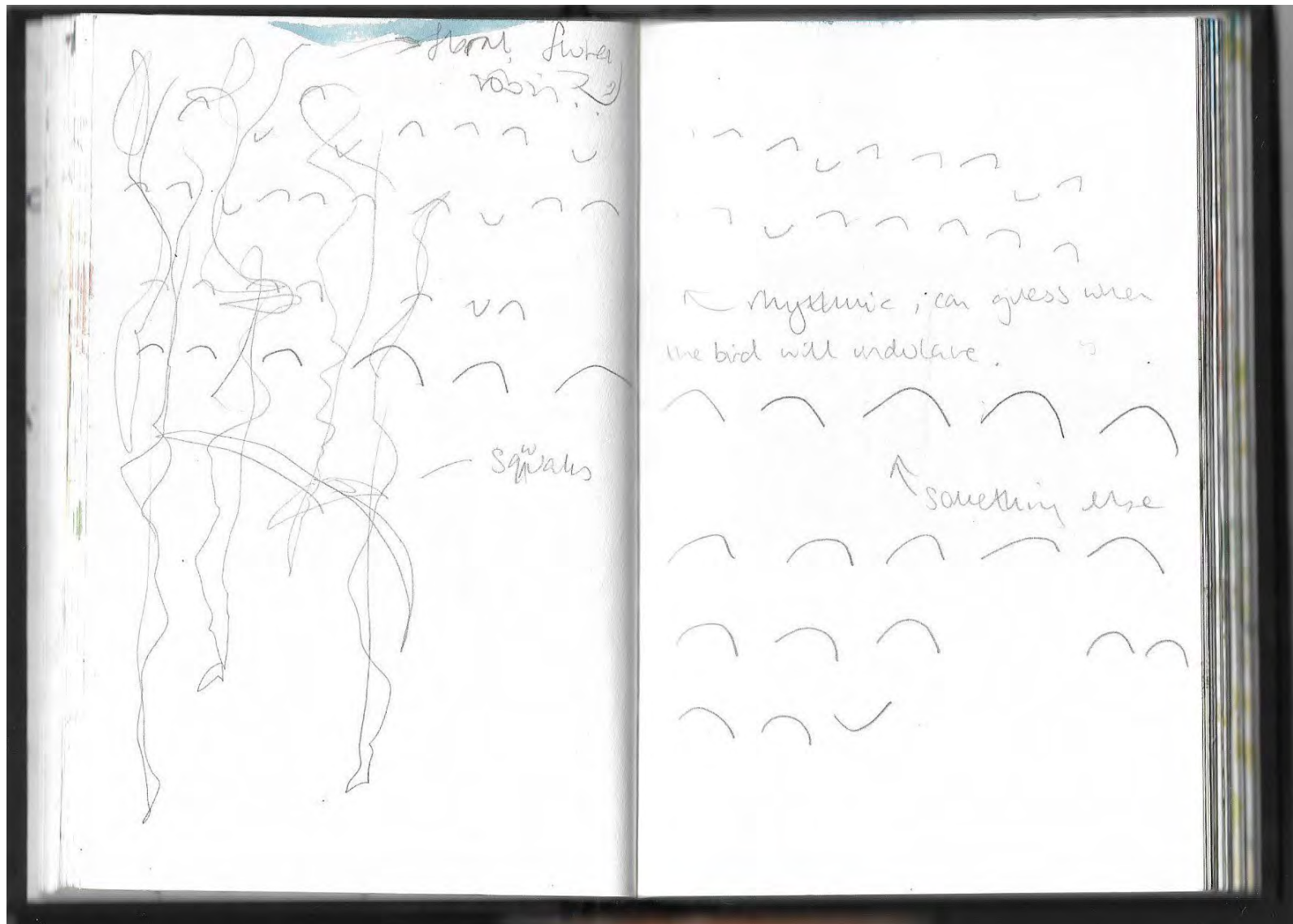


Figure a.65. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Salin-de-Badon, (2019).



Figure a.66. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Salin-de-Badon, (2019).

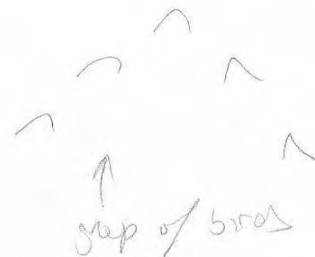
You can tell that it is marshland
for the puddles on the tracks, not
drying as far the water table,
frogs, water beetles, frogspawn
all evident!

1900

I'm down a small lane that leads
to 'Lodges du Vaccarès'. The
sun setting slowly provides relief
from the blistering heat (with
breeze rushing through the reeds)



I saw 2 herons, flying in
tandem.



Squids.

In the distance I can hear seagull -
who cries



Figure a.67. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Lake Vaccarès, (2019).



Figure a.68. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Lake Vaccarès, (2019).

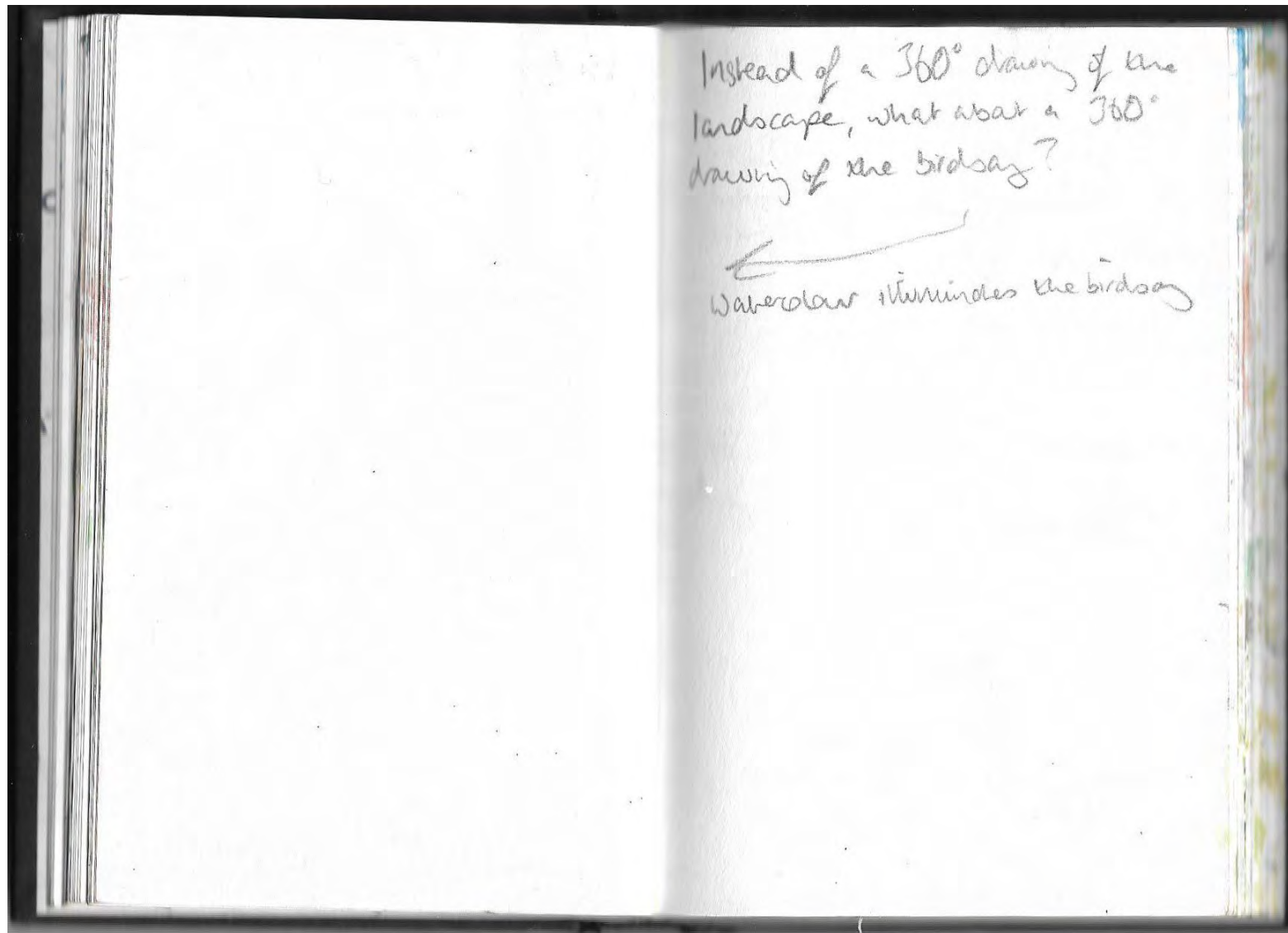


Figure a.69. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Lake Vaccarès, (2019).

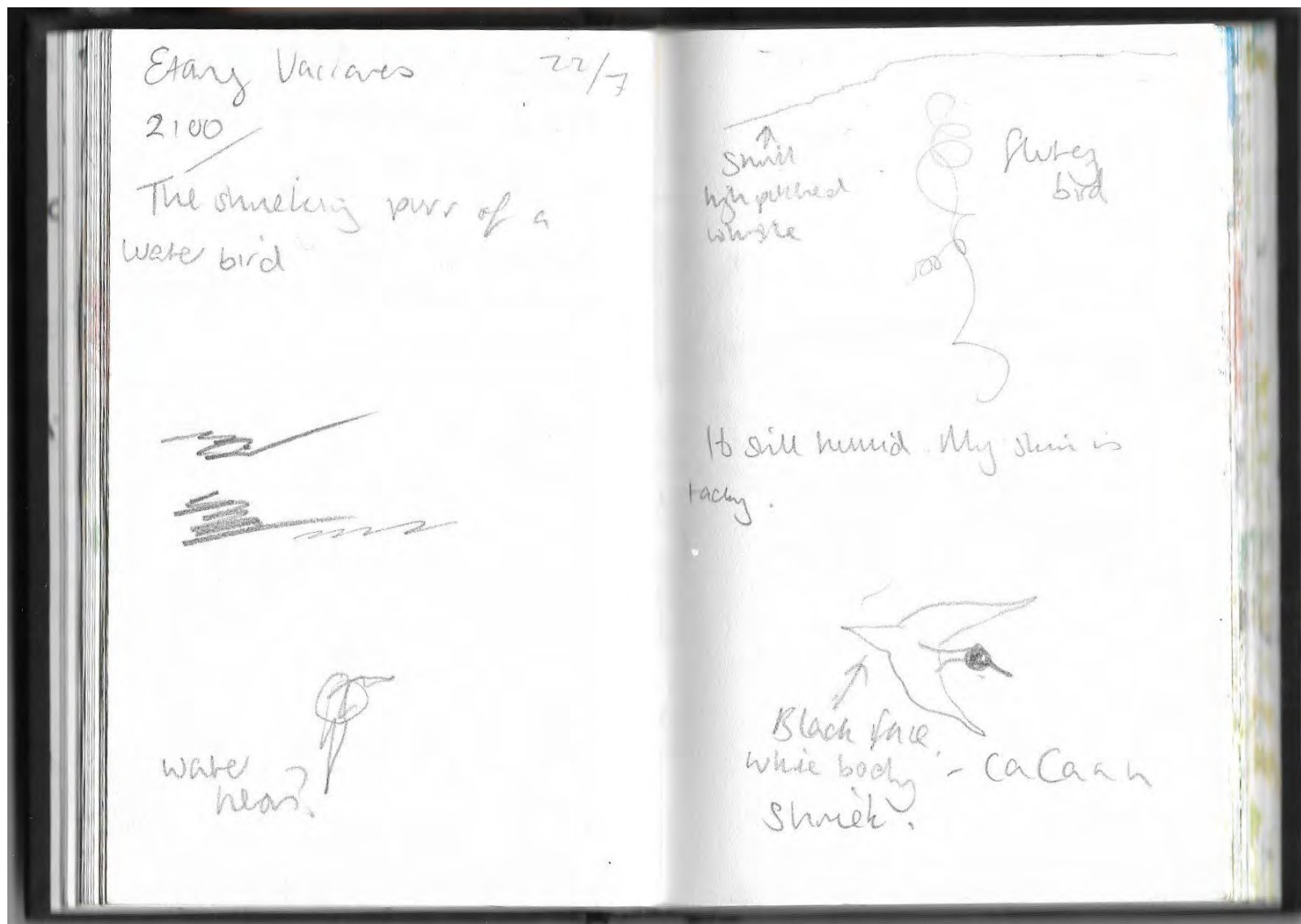


Figure a.70. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Lake Vaccarès, (2019).

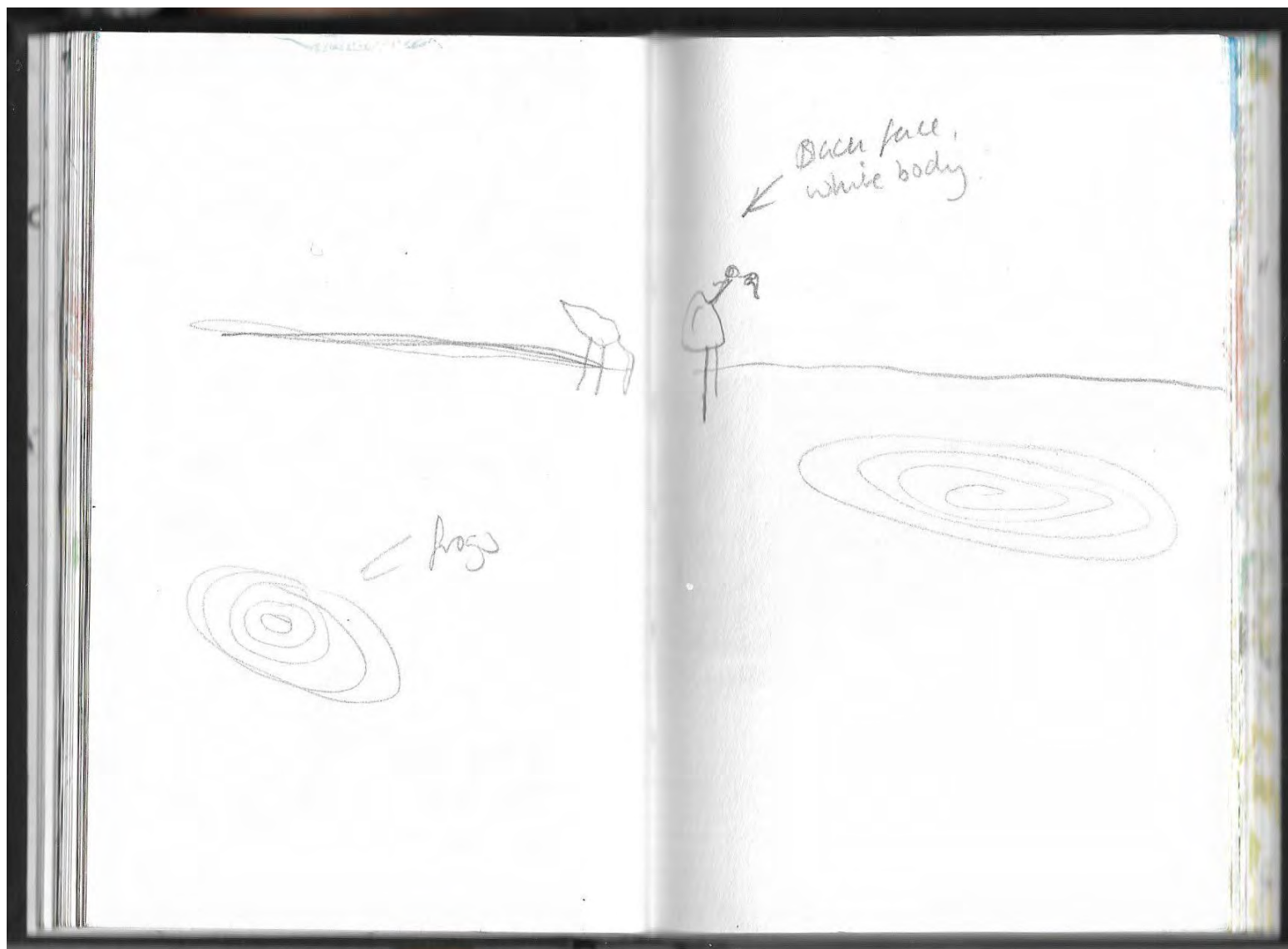


Figure a.71. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Lake Vaccarès, (2019).



Figure a.72. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Lake Vaccarès, (2019).

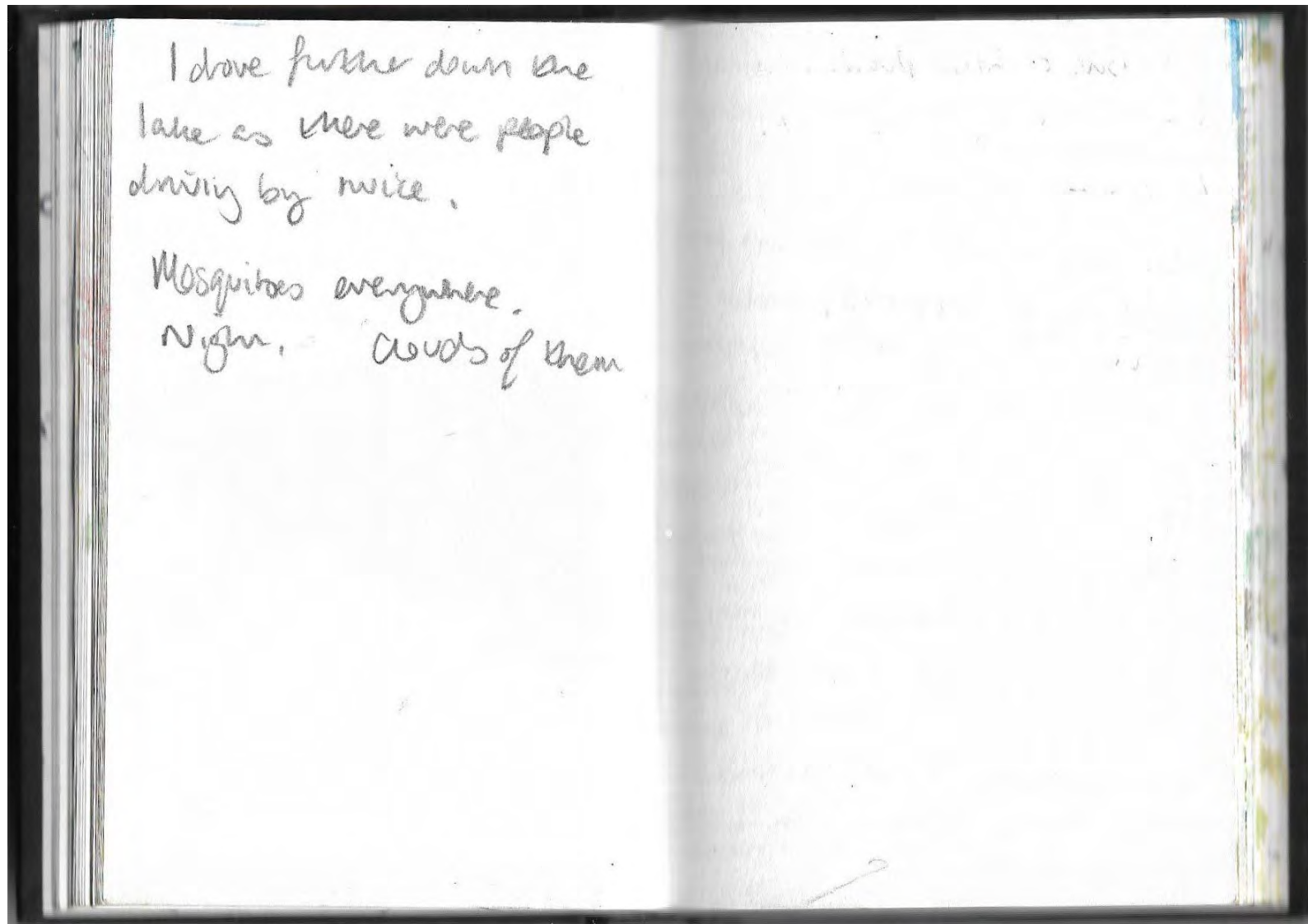


Figure a.73. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Lake Vaccarès, (2019).

Les Baux les Apilles ^{23/7}
(L'abouette calandelle).

1430 —

I arrived a little later than I
wanted due to emergency petrol
mission.

It is 35° (feels like 36°). I sought
refuge at the castle here within
10 minutes of exiting the car.

People are seeking shade everywhere
under minute shadows cast by trees.
No recording as of yet - no birdsong,
just crickets.

This is unbearable. I know one was
naïve to France, but this is insane -
half a day in this??

Provence is beautiful - as the way here,
I passed through avenues flanked by
lofty trees with silver marked
trunks - manipulated to lean away
from the road.

I have chosen to explore the
mansion chateau at the top of Les
Baux village. There are old stone
houses in the ruins that rescue
me from the heat.

There is a fantastic photo exhibit
of a film about Van Gogh in
the grounds providing an excellent
companion of my encounter w/
the landscape (recorded encounter)
and the recorded encounter w/
an actor portraying Van Gogh
encounter w/ landscape.

Figure a.74. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Les Baux, (2019).

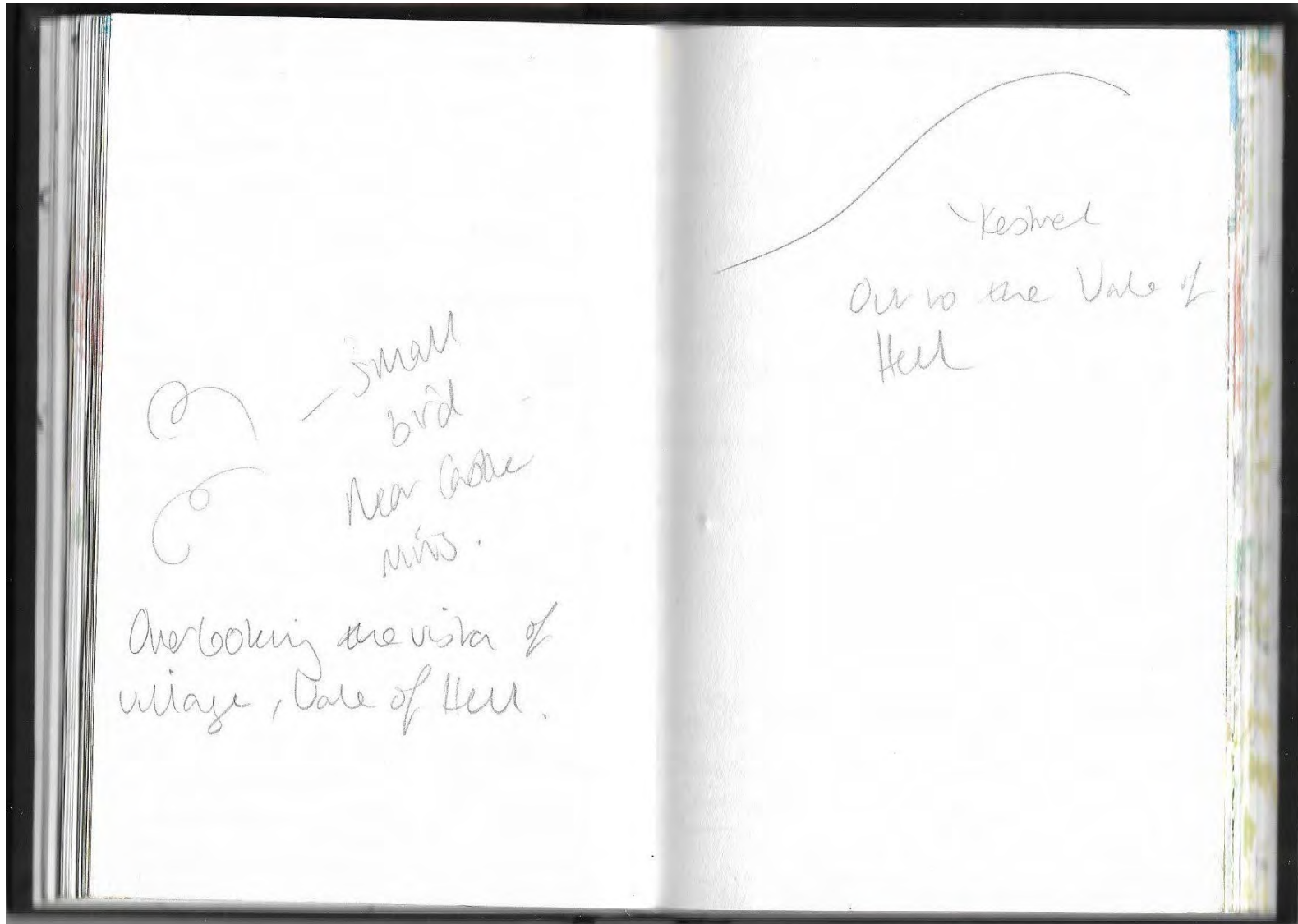
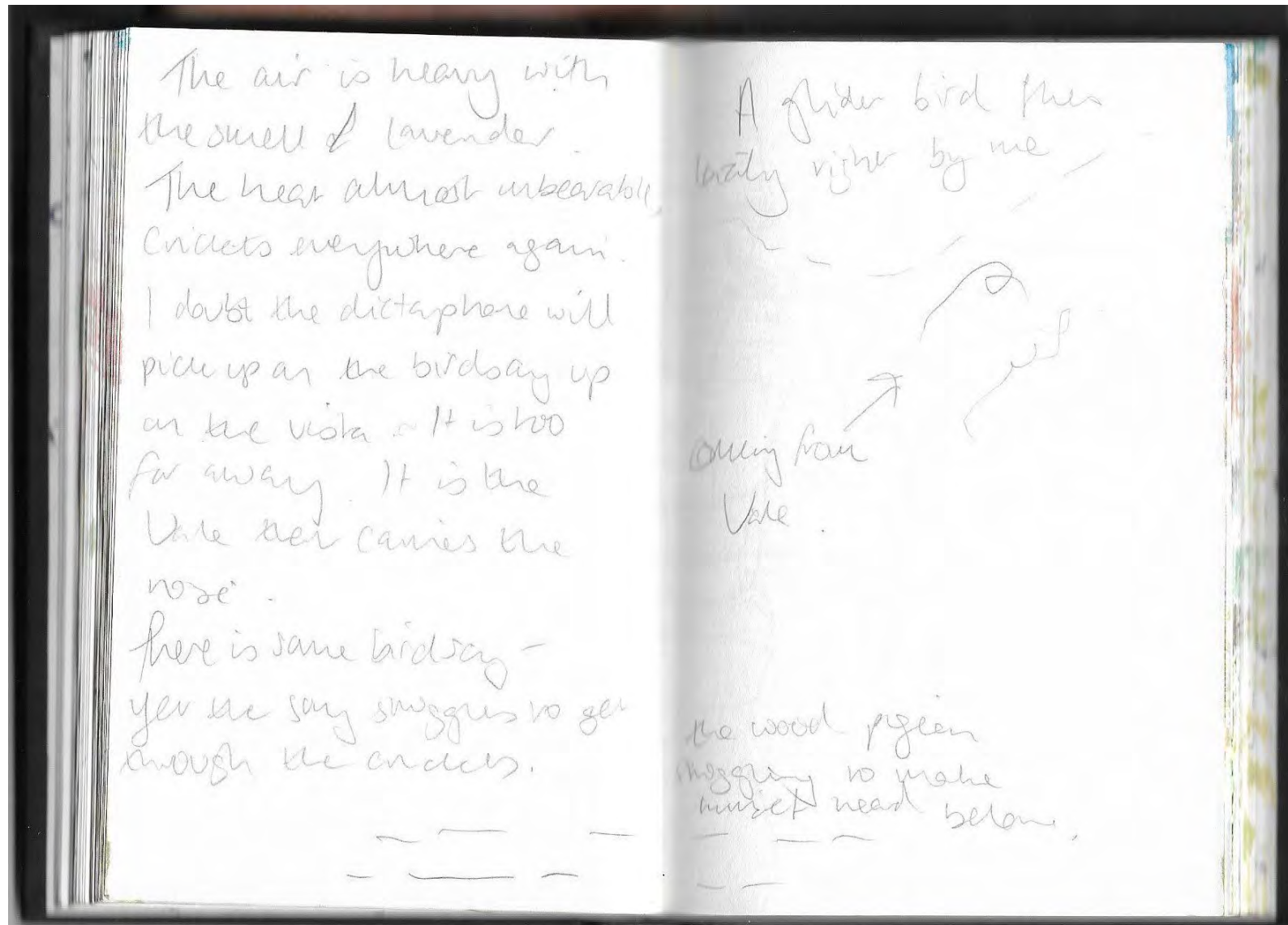


Figure a.75. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Les Baux, (2019).



The air is heavy with
the smell of lavender.

The heat almost unbearable.
Crickets everywhere again.

I doubt the dictaphone will
pick up as the birdsay up
on the viola. It is too
far away. It is the
Vale that carries the
noise.

There is some birdsay -
yet the song suggests to get
through the crickets.

A glider bird then
flutters right by me.

Coming from
Vale.

The wood pigeon
sings to make
musical head below.

Figure a.76. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Les Baux, (2019).

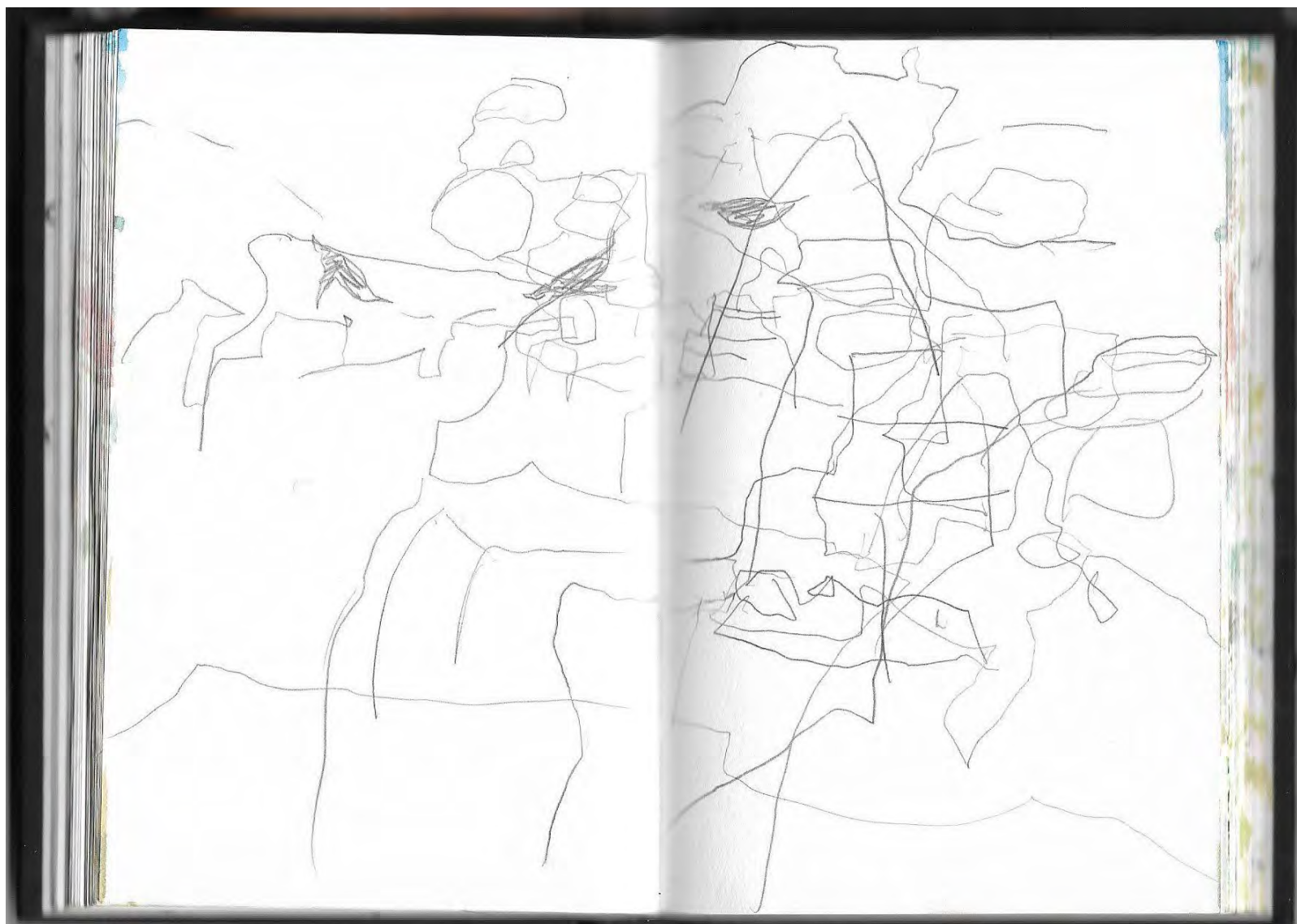


Figure a.77. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Les Baux, (2019).



Figure a.78. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at La Crau, (2019).

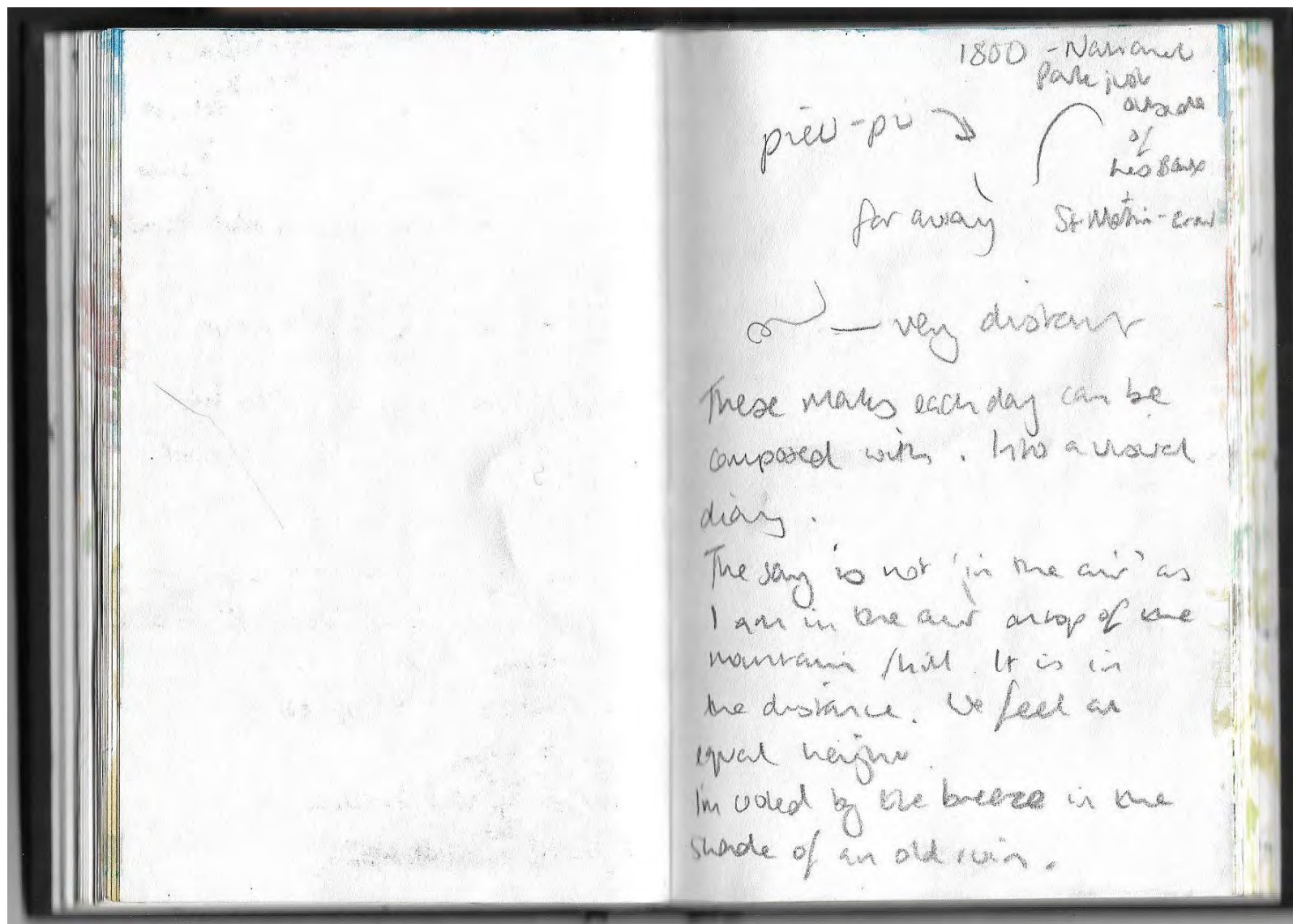


Figure a.79. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at La Crau, (2019).



Figure a.80. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Lake Vaccarès, (2019).



Figure a.81. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Lake Vaccarès, (2019).



Figure a.82. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Lake Vaccarès, (2019).

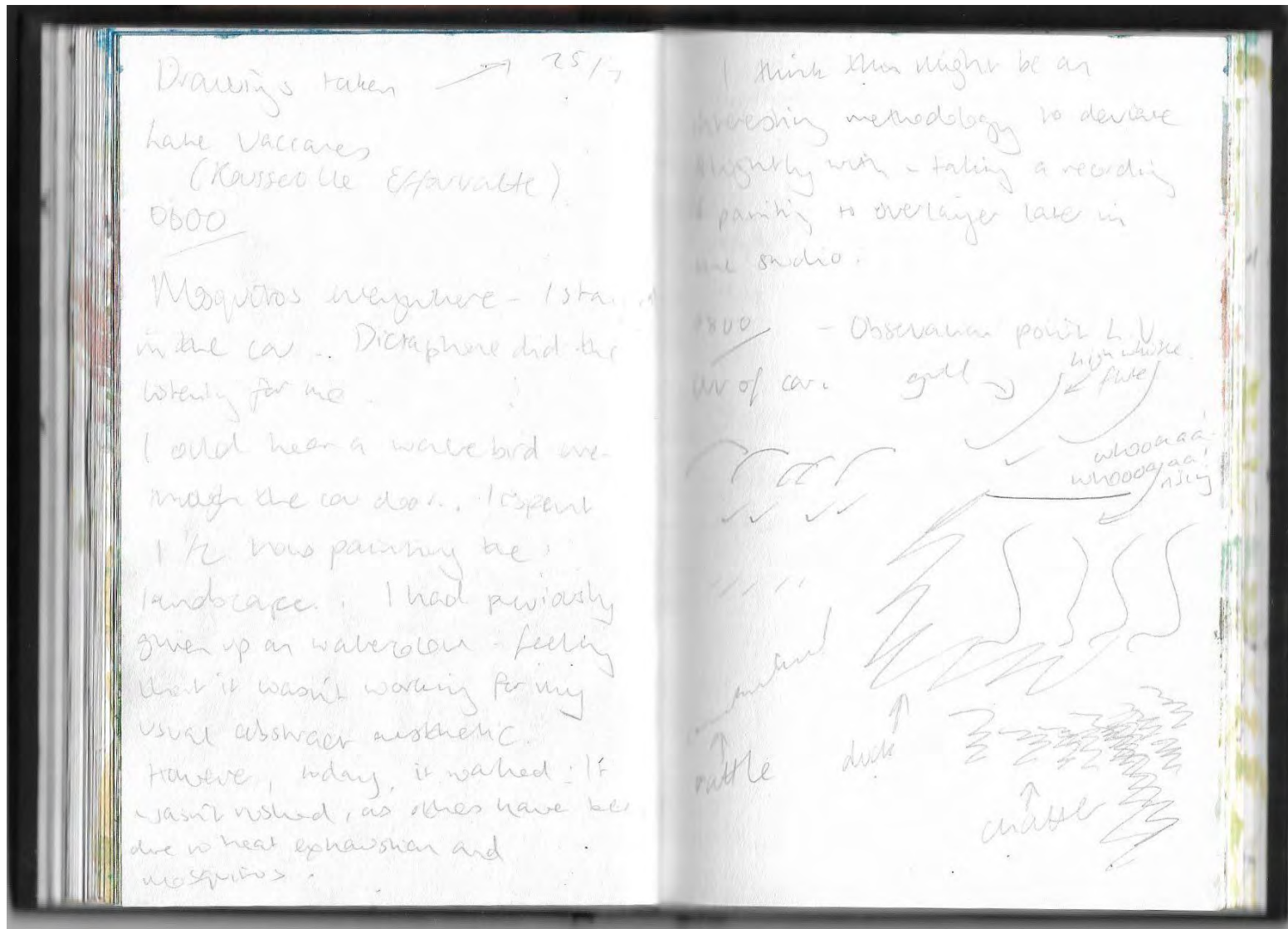
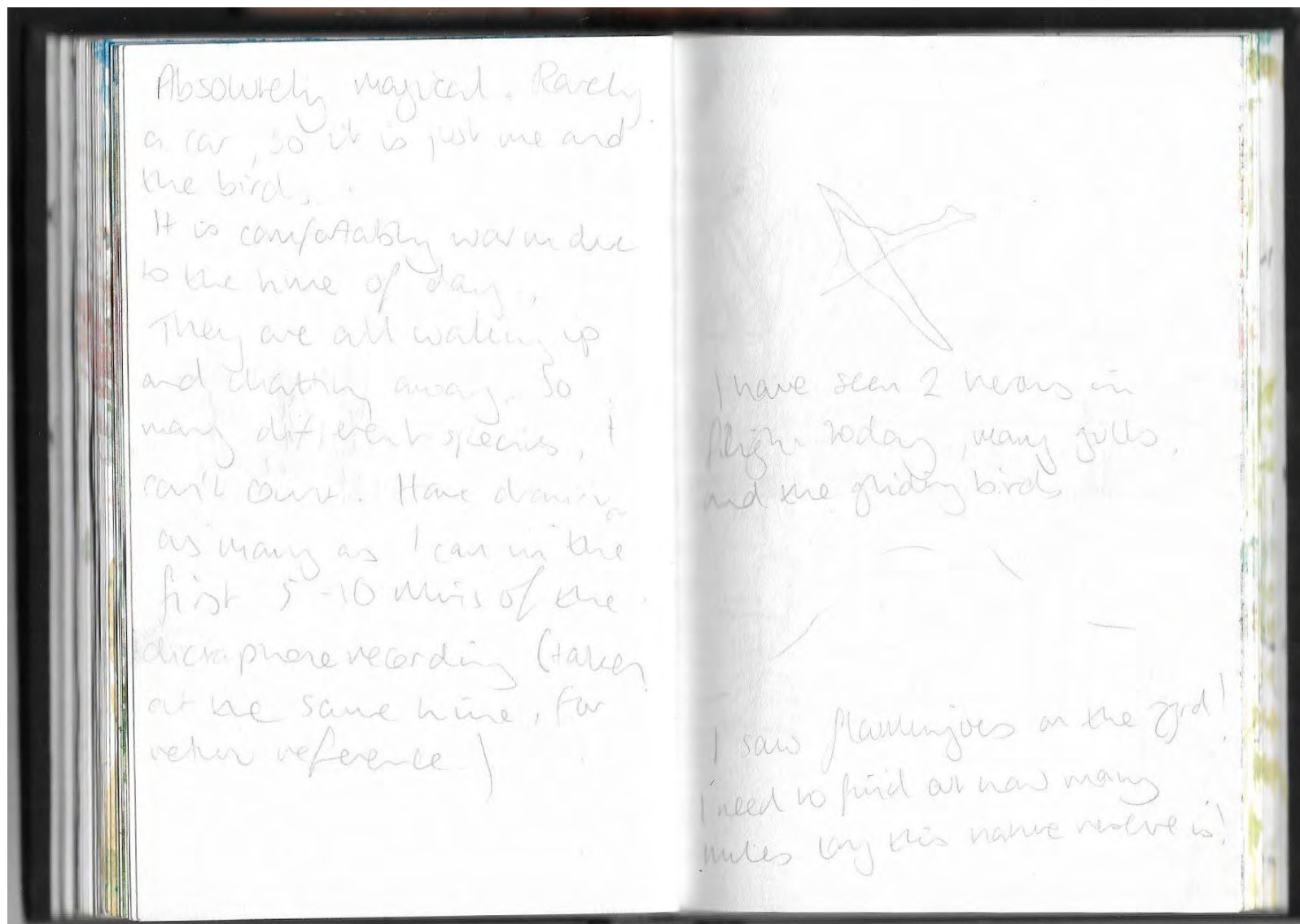


Figure a.83. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Lake Vaccarès, (2019).



Absolutely magical. Rarely
a pair, so it is just me and
the bird.

It is comfortably warm due
to the time of day.

They are all waking up
and chatting away. So
many different species, I
can't count. Have drawn
as many as I can in the
first 5-10 mins of the
dictaphone recording (taken
at the same time, for
reference.)



I have seen 2 herons in
flight today, many gulls,
and one gliding bird.

I saw Ptarmigan on the 2nd!
I need to find out how many
miles by this name resolve is!

Figure a.85. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Lake Vaccarès, (2019).

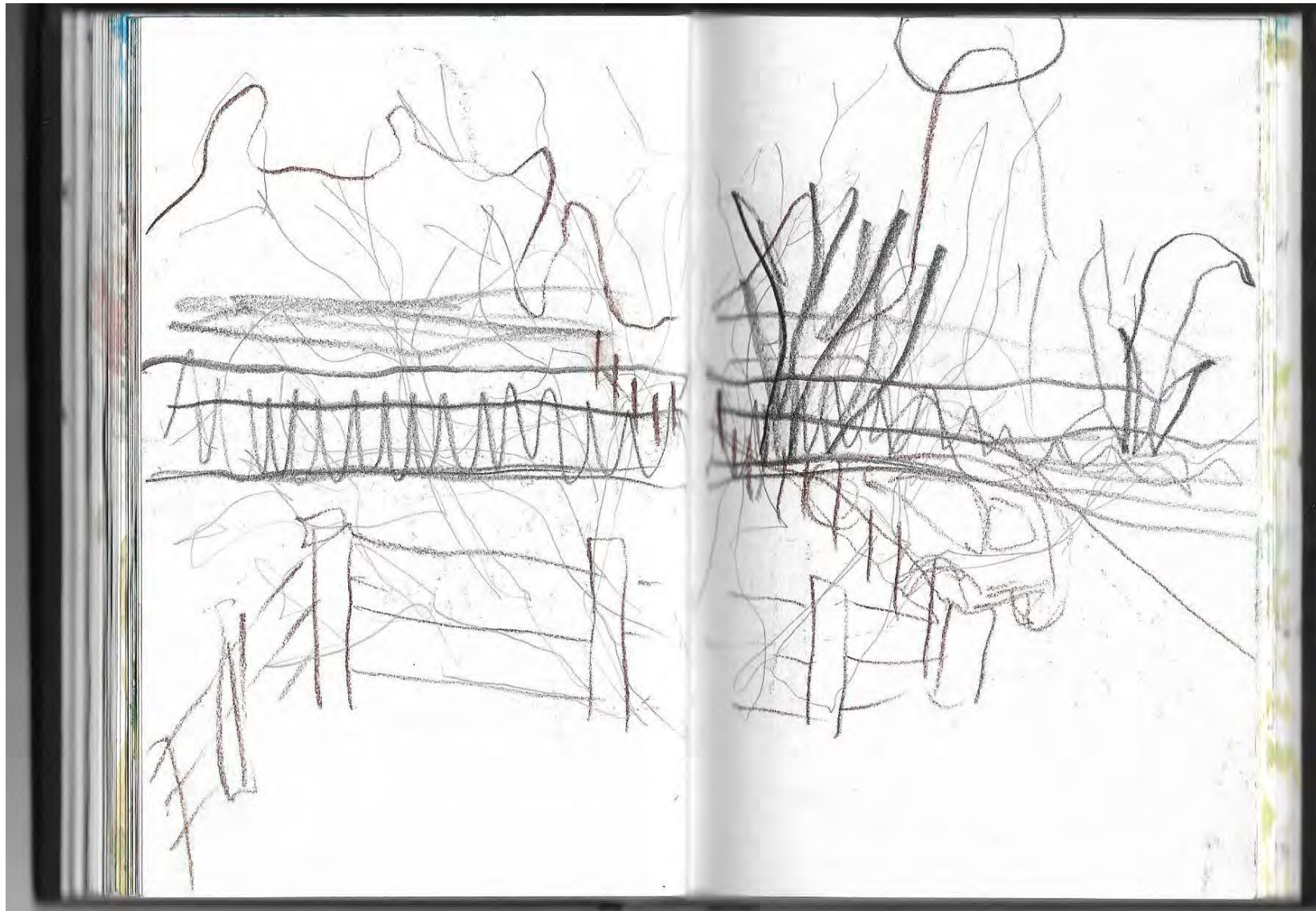


Figure a.86. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Lake Vaccarès, (2019).

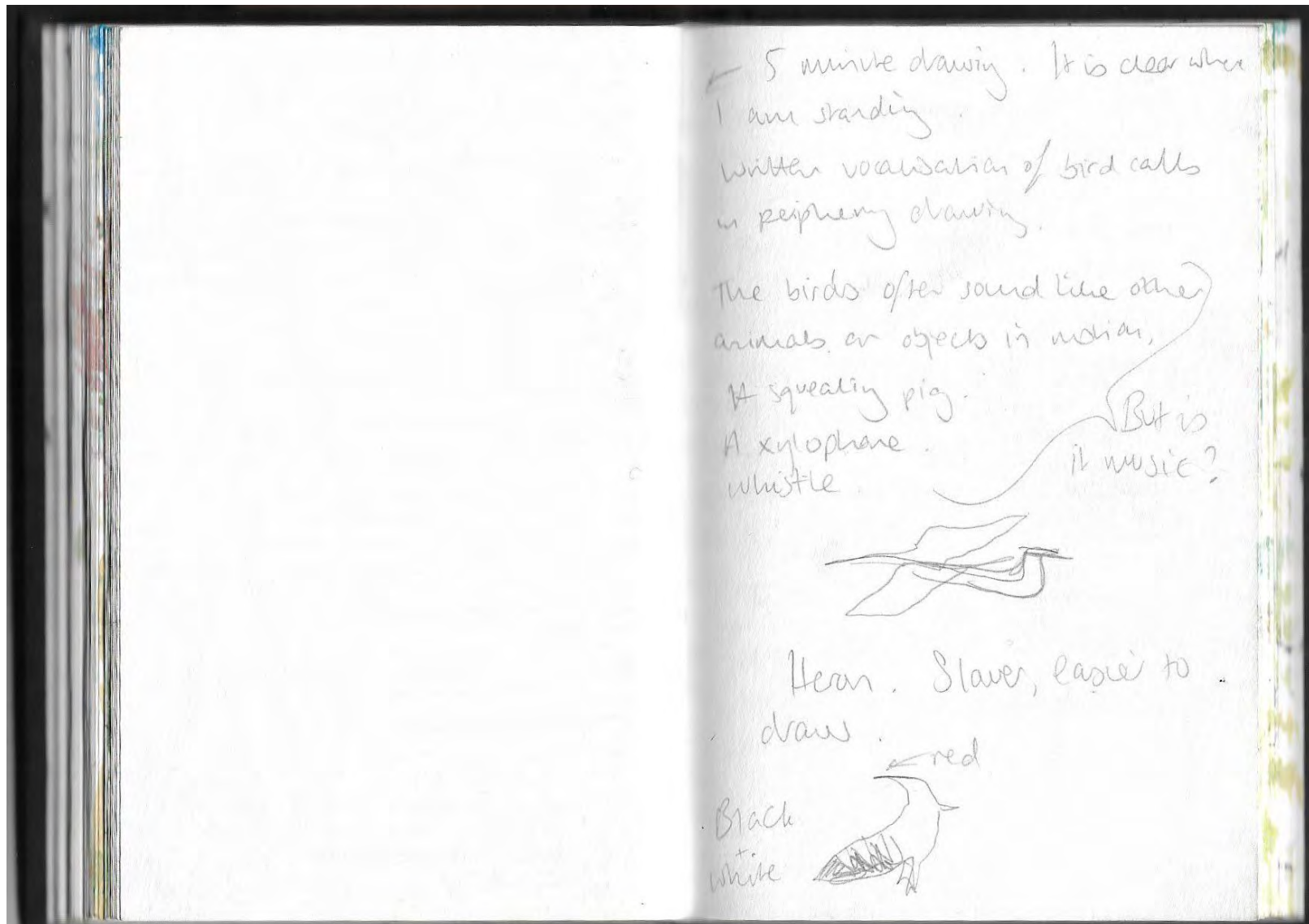


Figure a.88. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Lake Vaccarès, (2019).

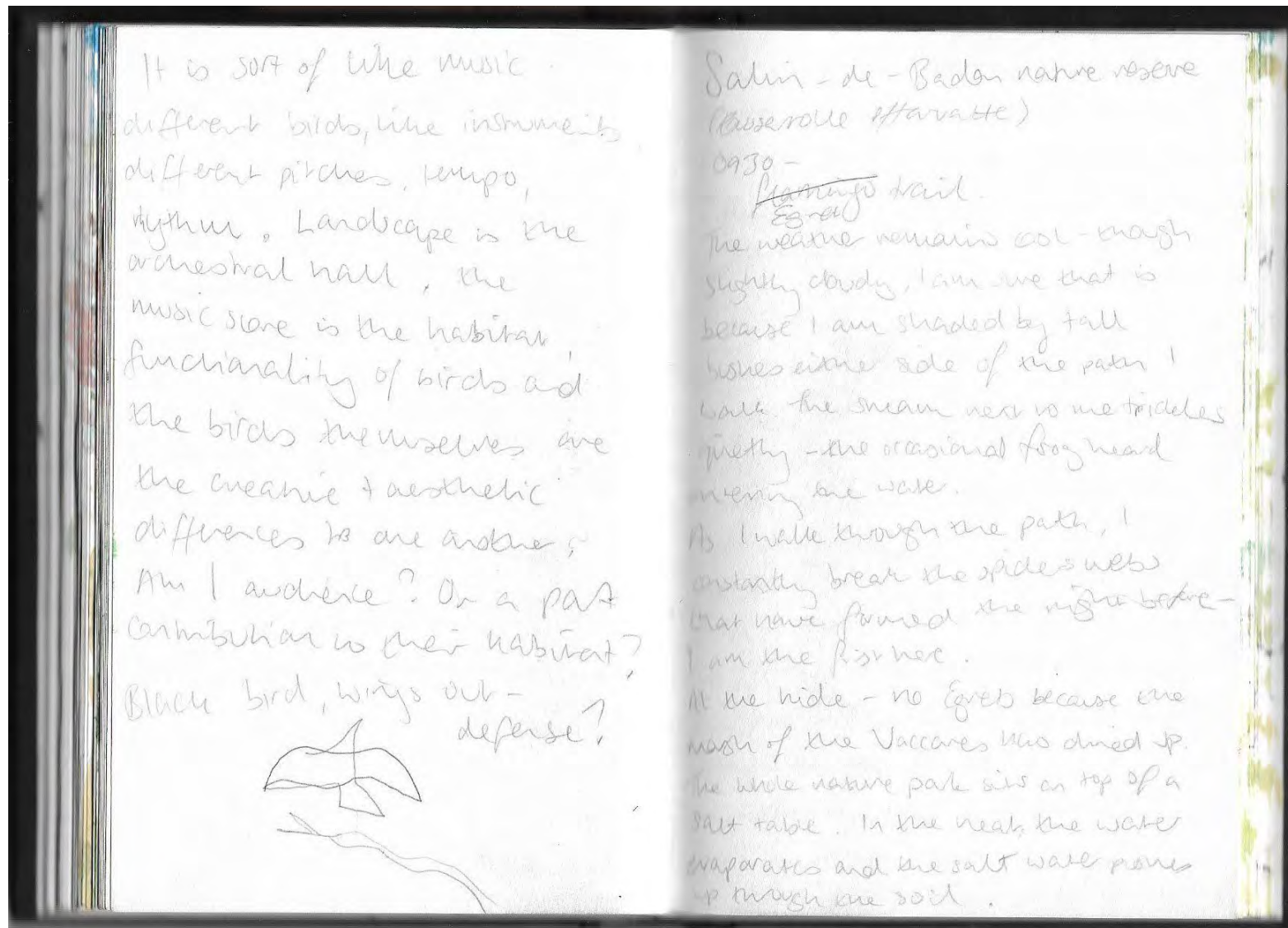


Figure a.89. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Salin-de-Badon, (2019).

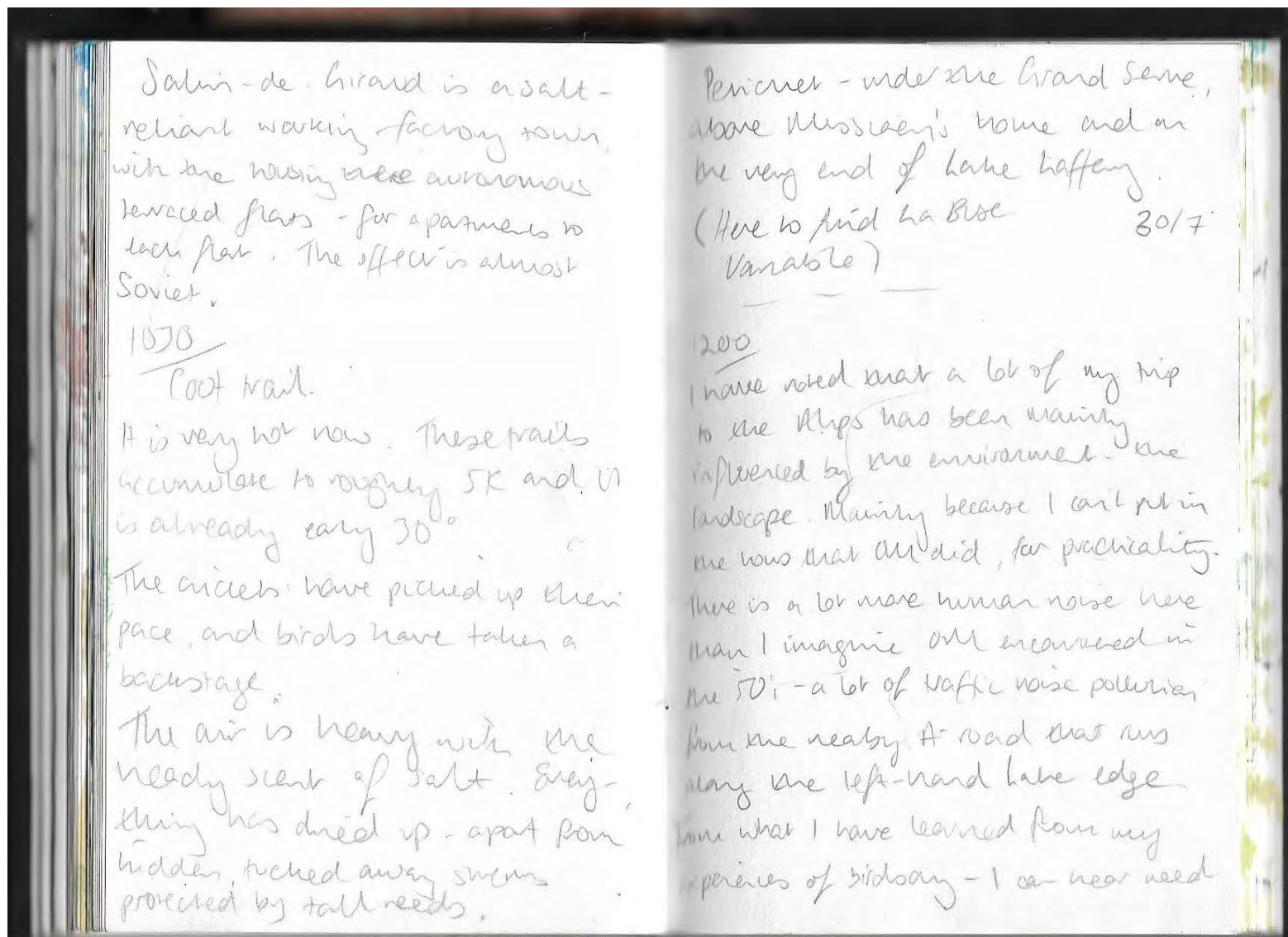


Figure a.90. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Salin-de-Badon, (2019).

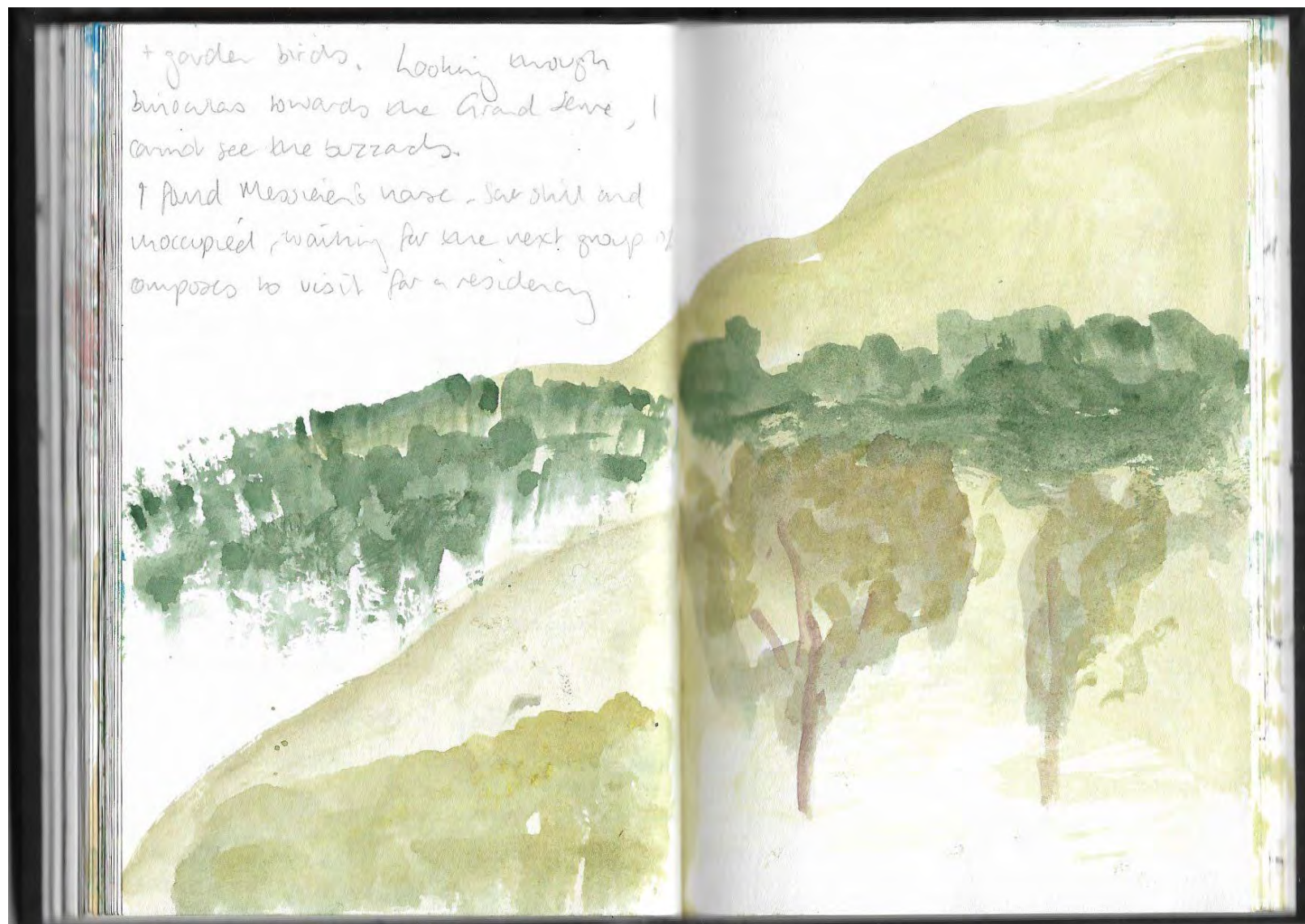


Figure a.91. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Petichet, (2019).

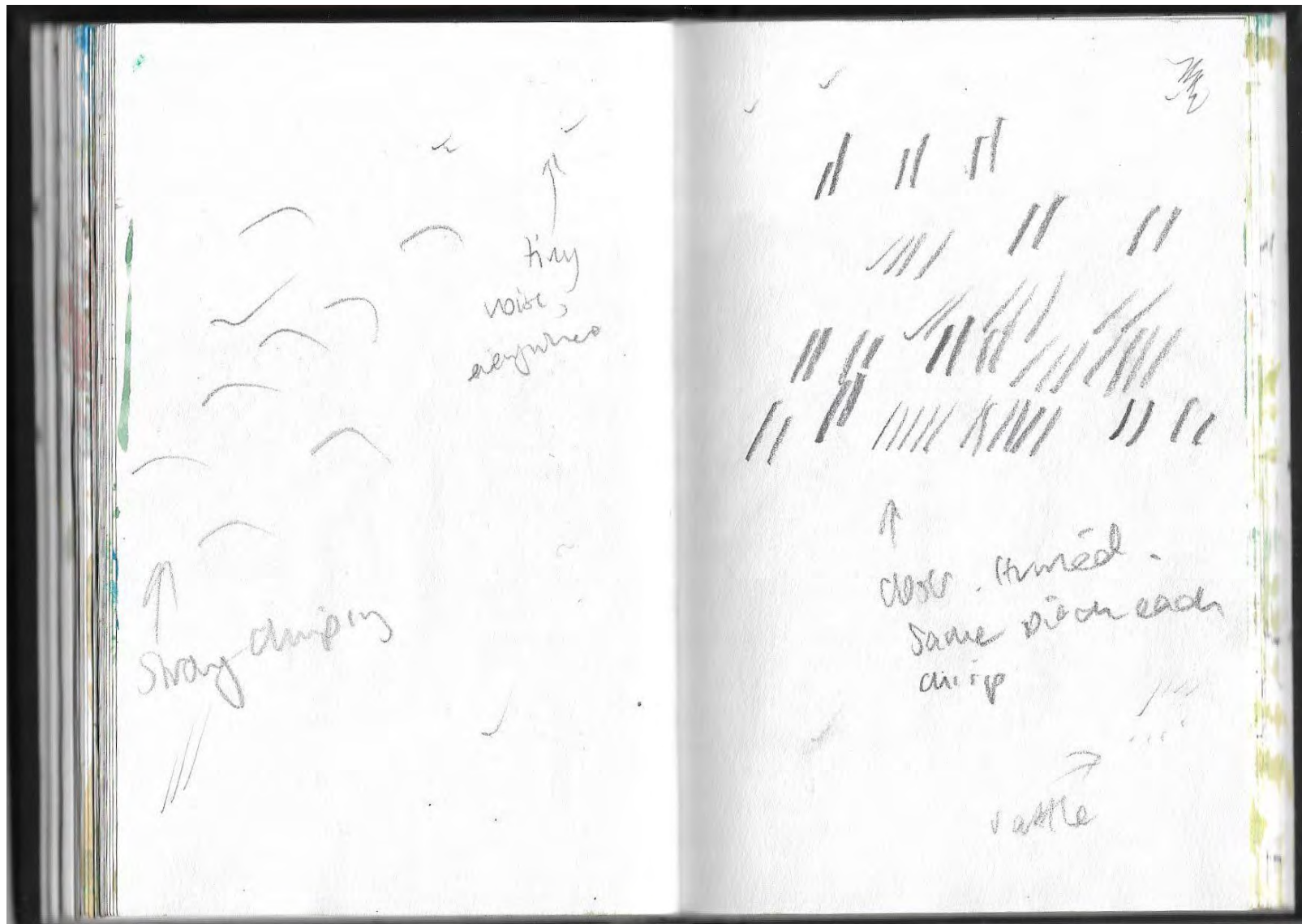


Figure a.92. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Petichet, (2019).



Figure a.93. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Petichet, (2019).

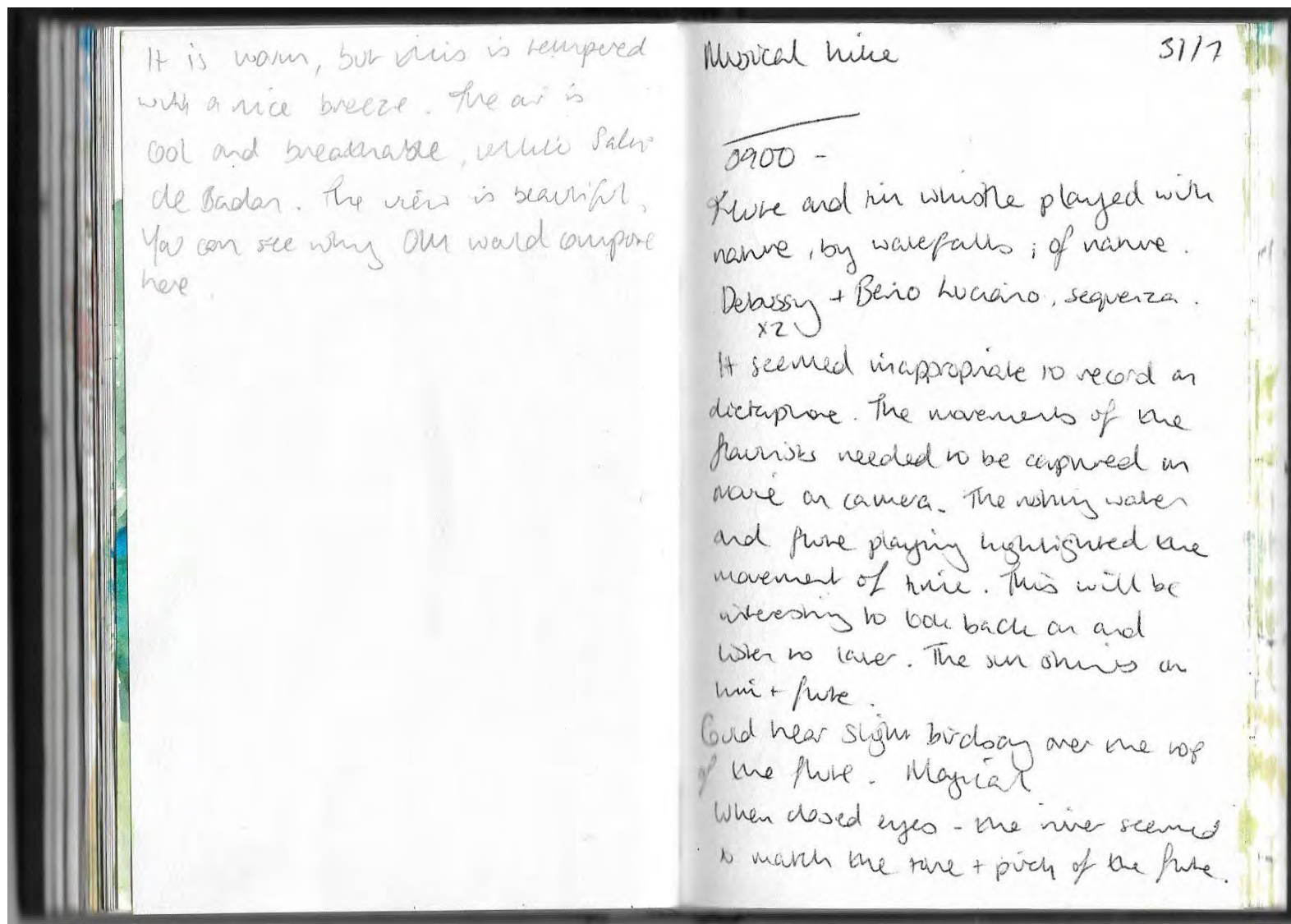


Figure a.94. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at La Grave, (2019).

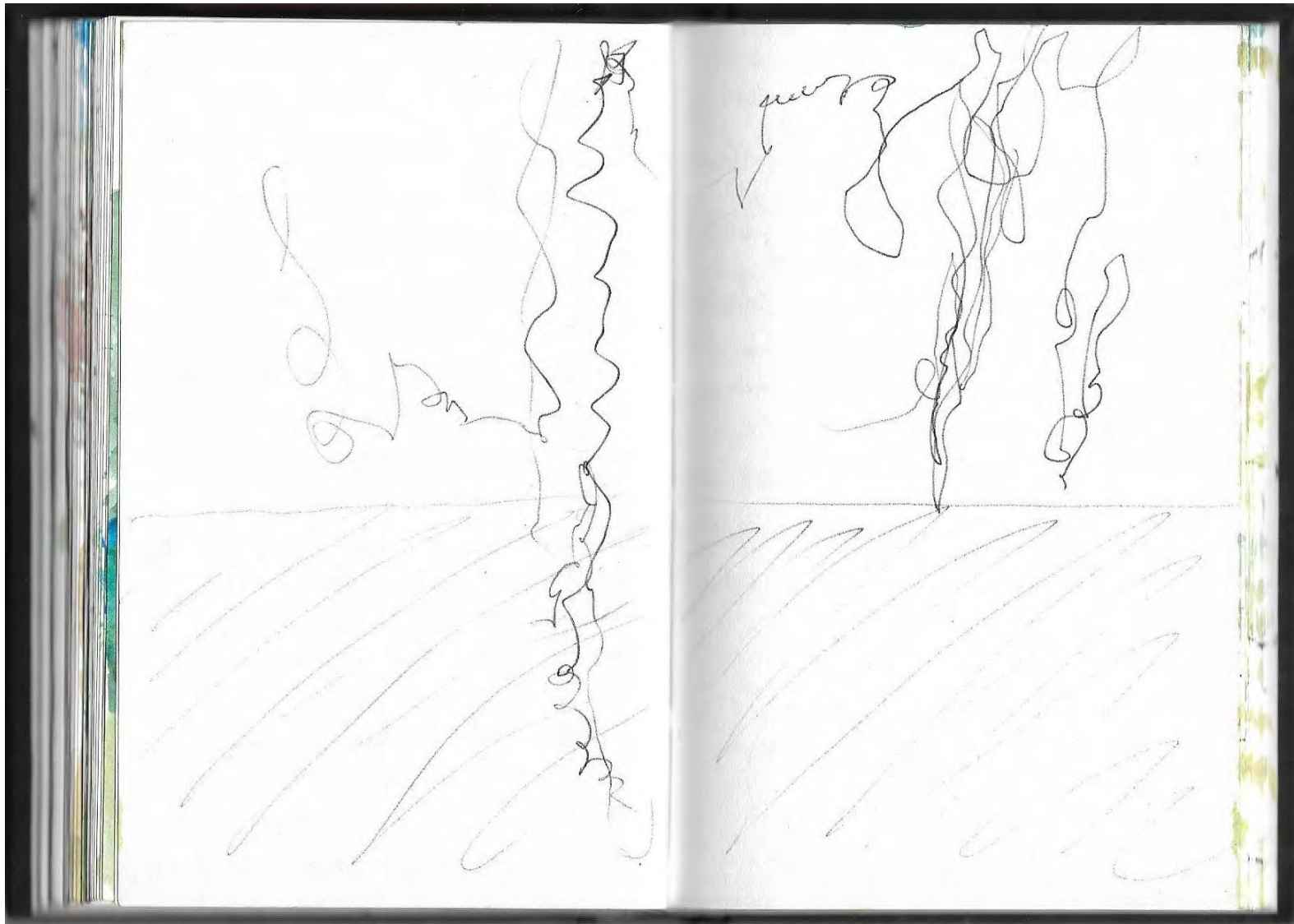


Figure a.95. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at La Grave, (2019).

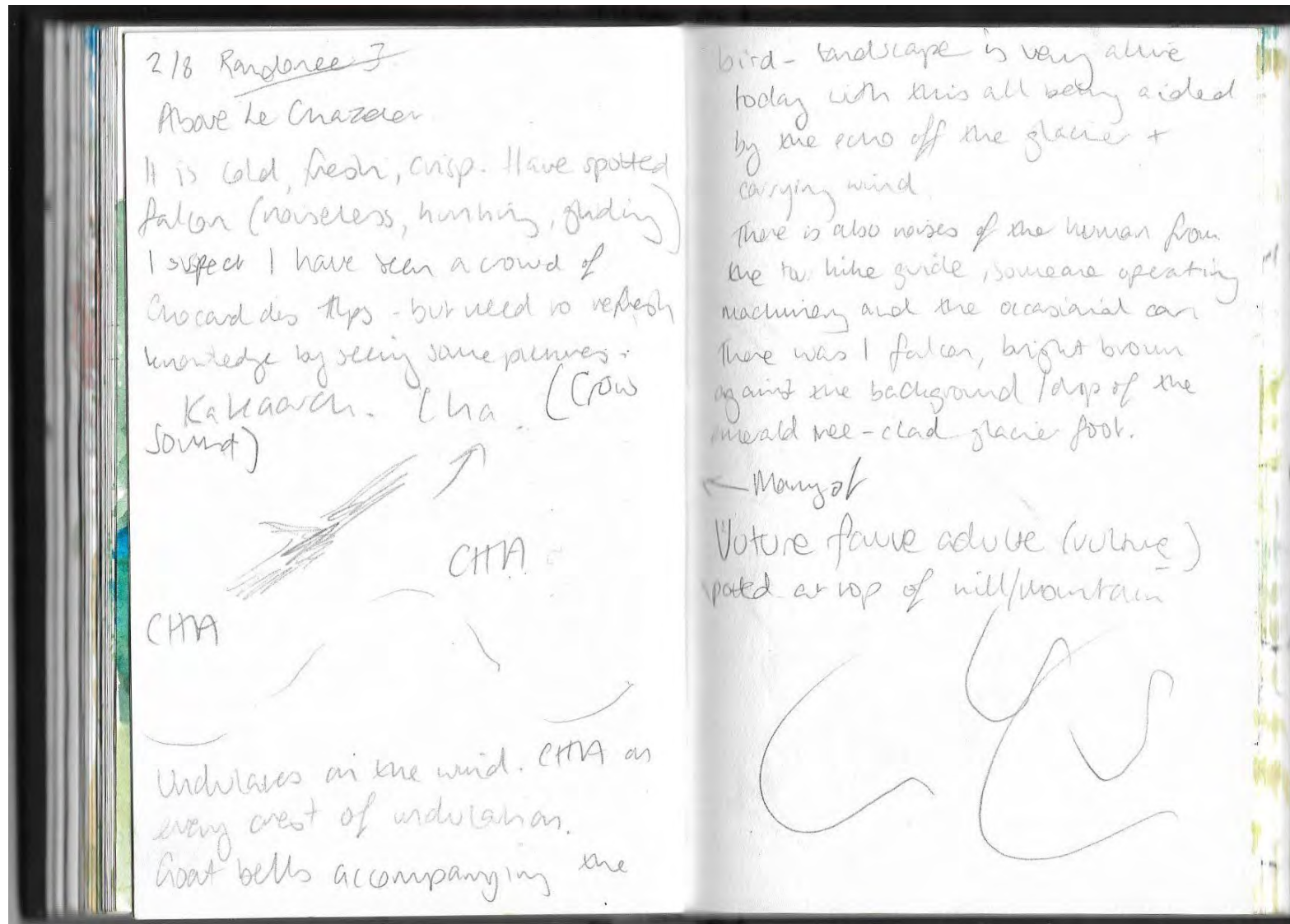


Figure a.96. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at La Grave, (2019).

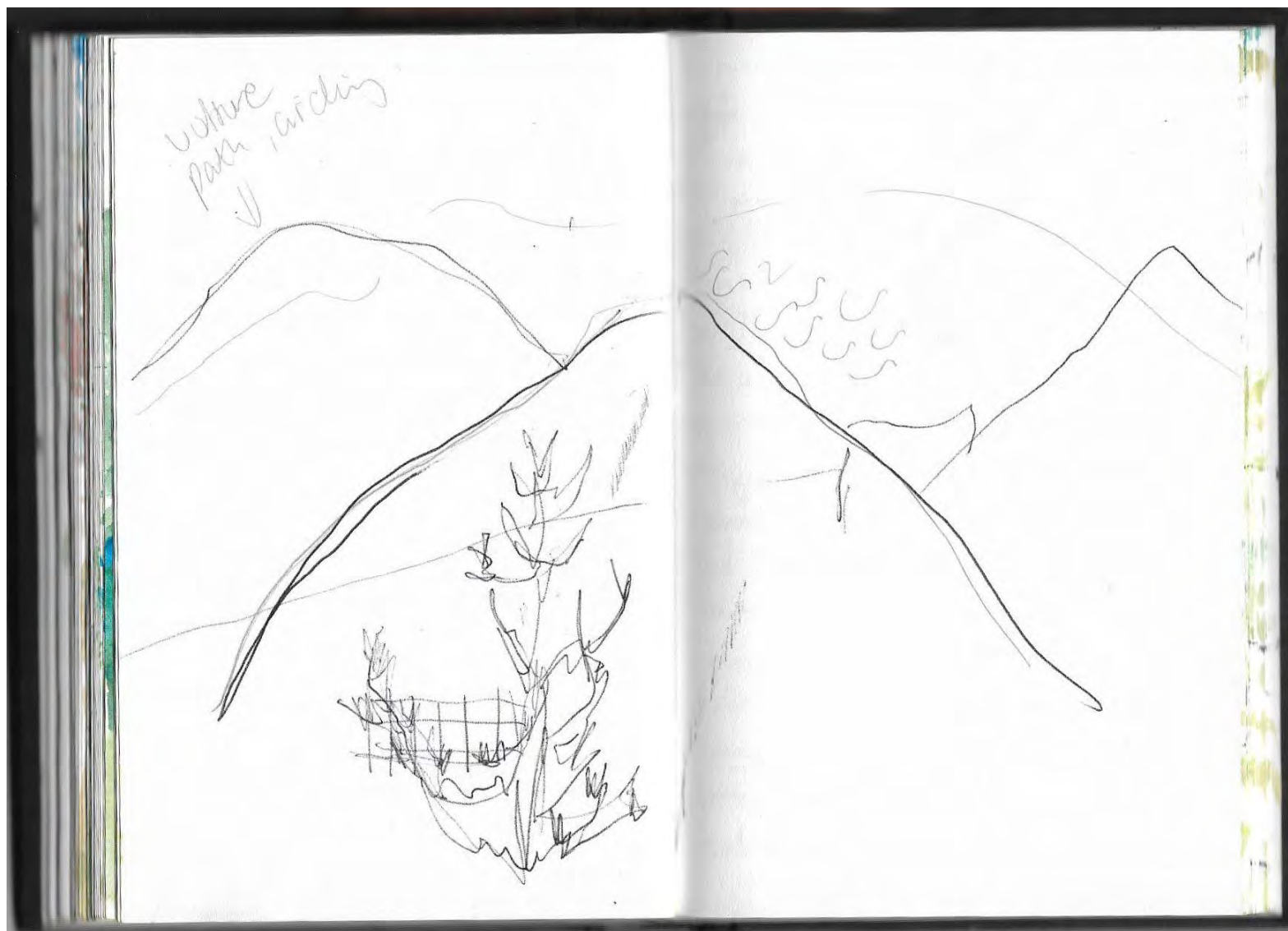


Figure a.97. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at La Grave, (2019).

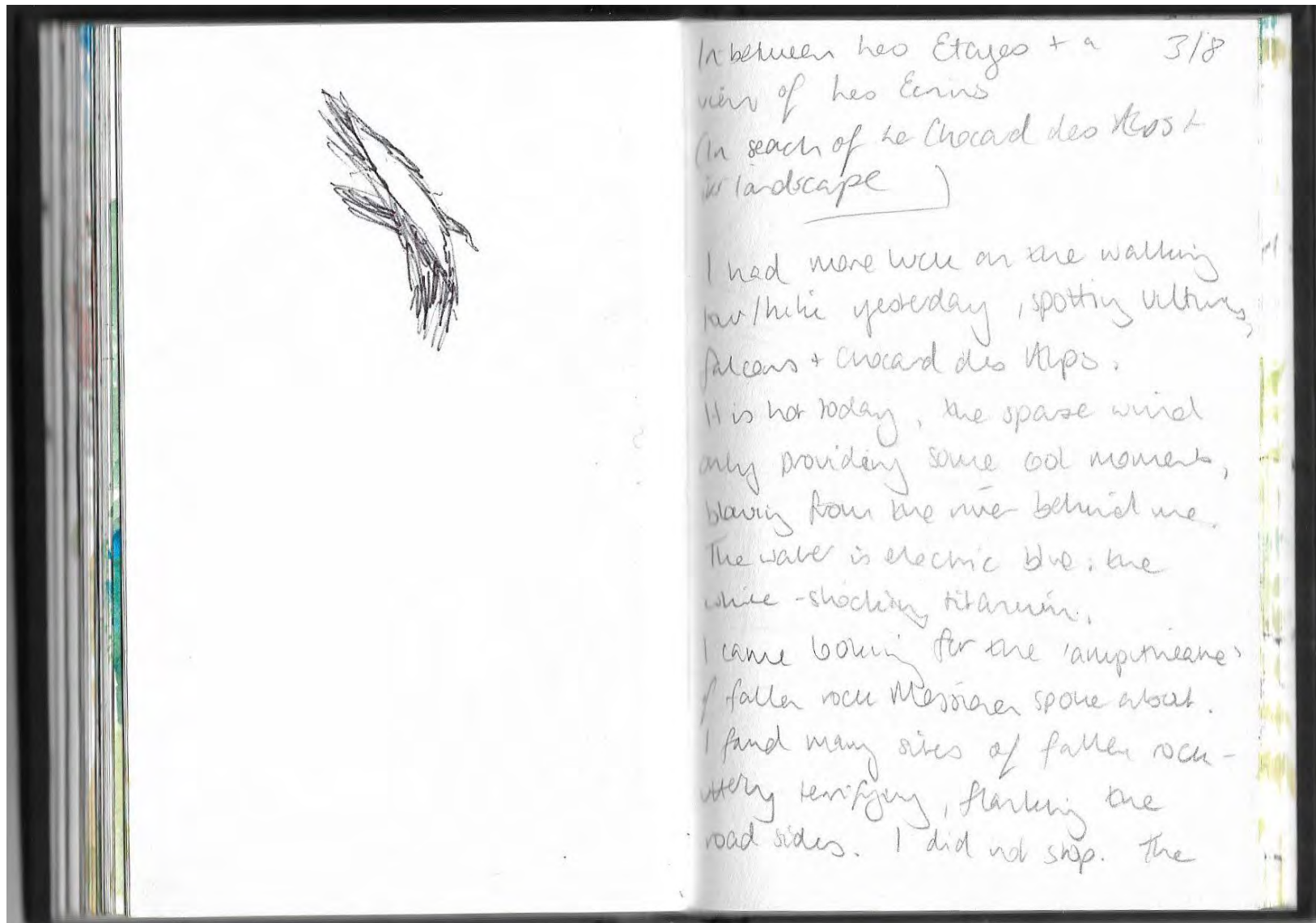


Figure a.98. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Les Ecrins, (2019).

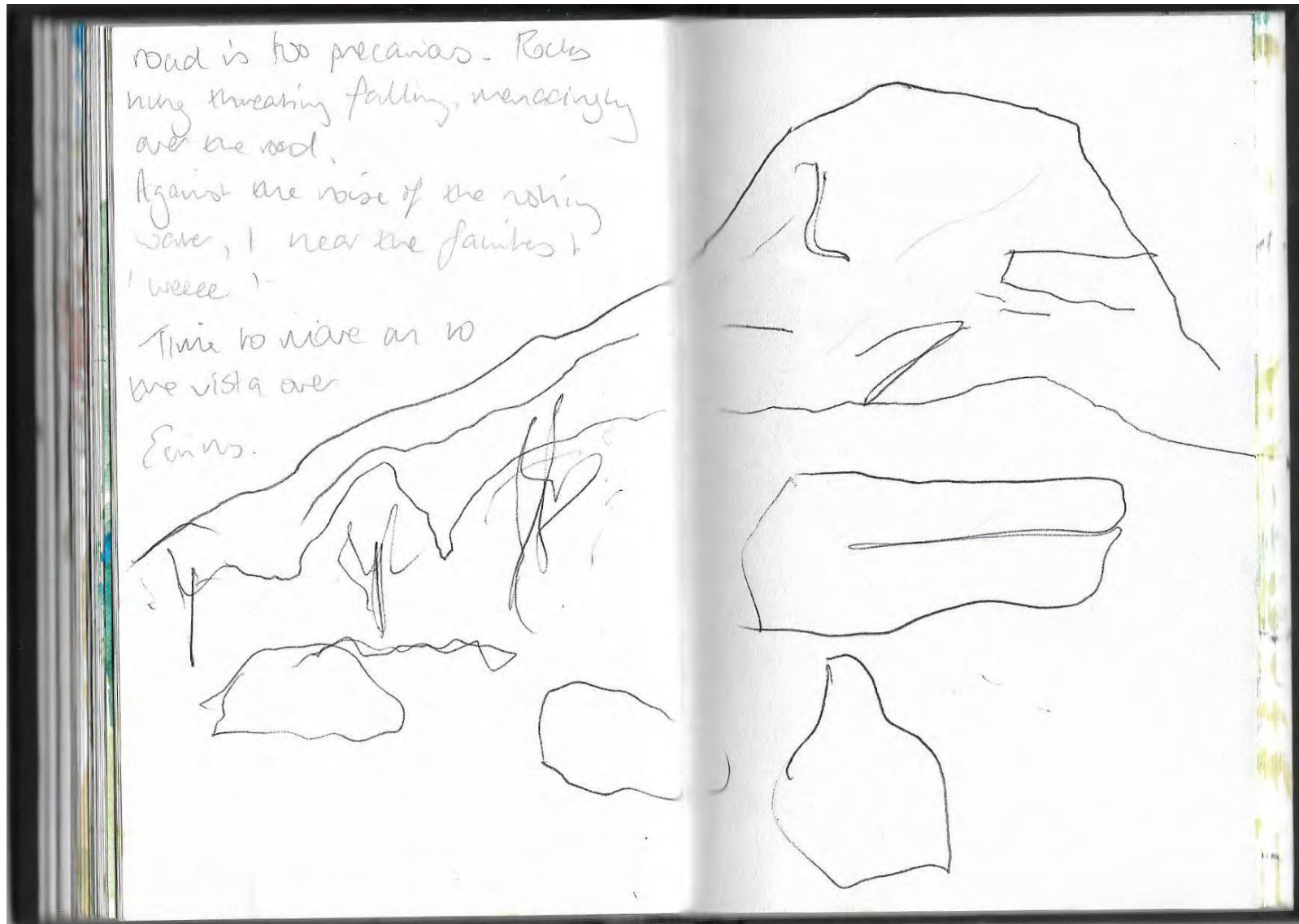


Figure a.99. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Les Ecrins, (2019).



Figure a.100. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Les Ecrins, (2019).

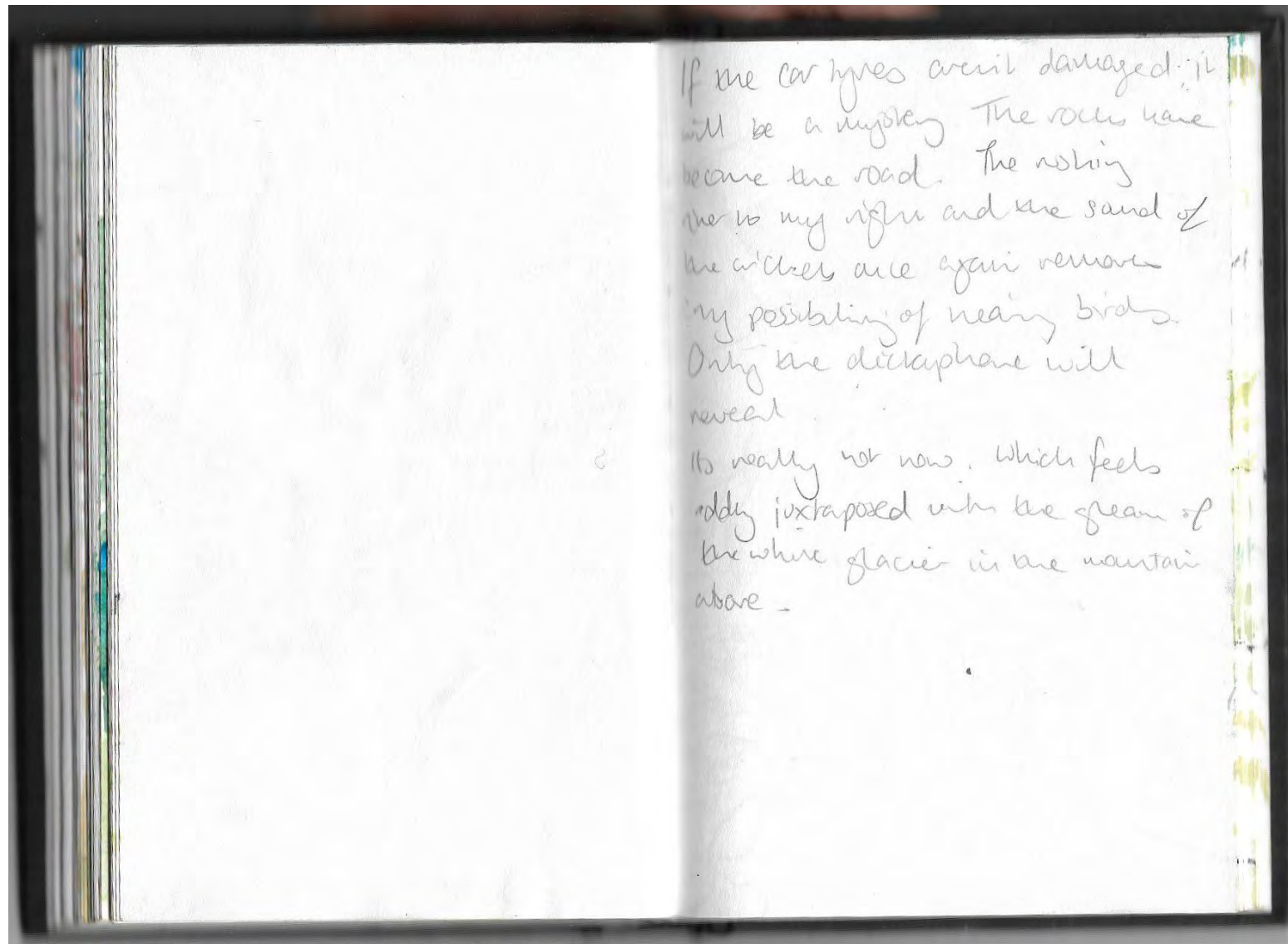


Figure a.101. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Les Ecrins, (2019).

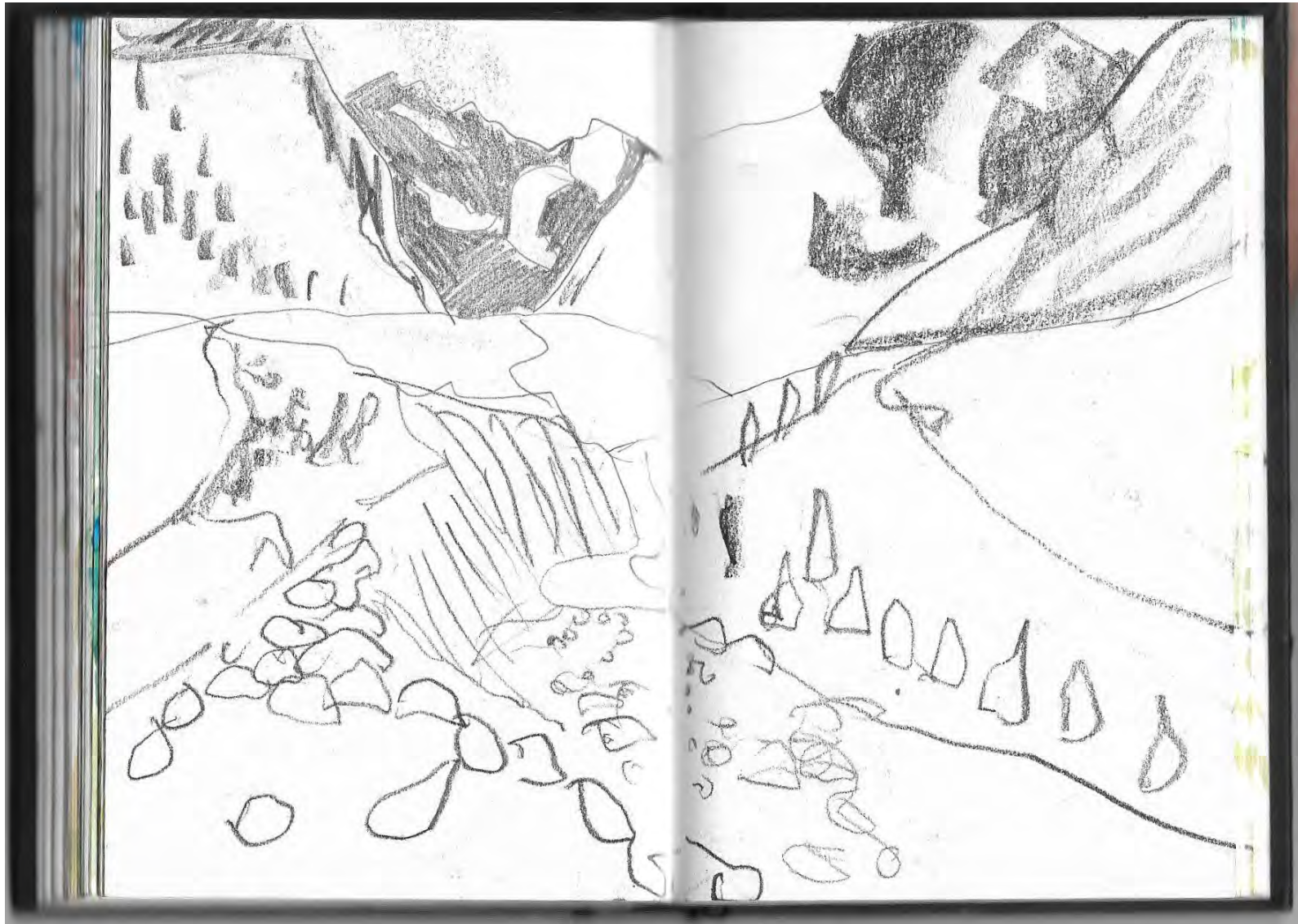


Figure a.102. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at Les Ecrins, (2019).

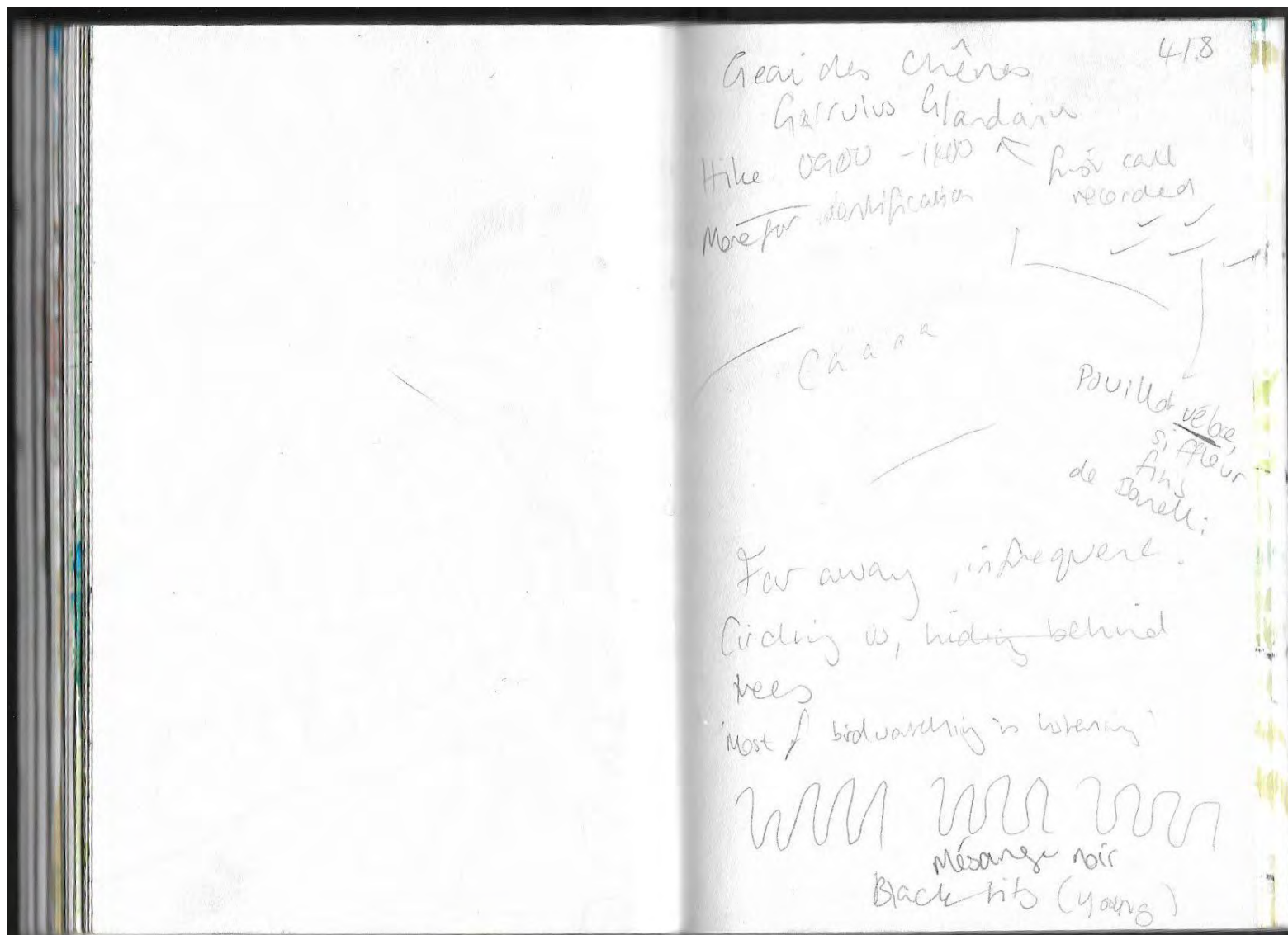


Figure a.103. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at La Grave, (2019).

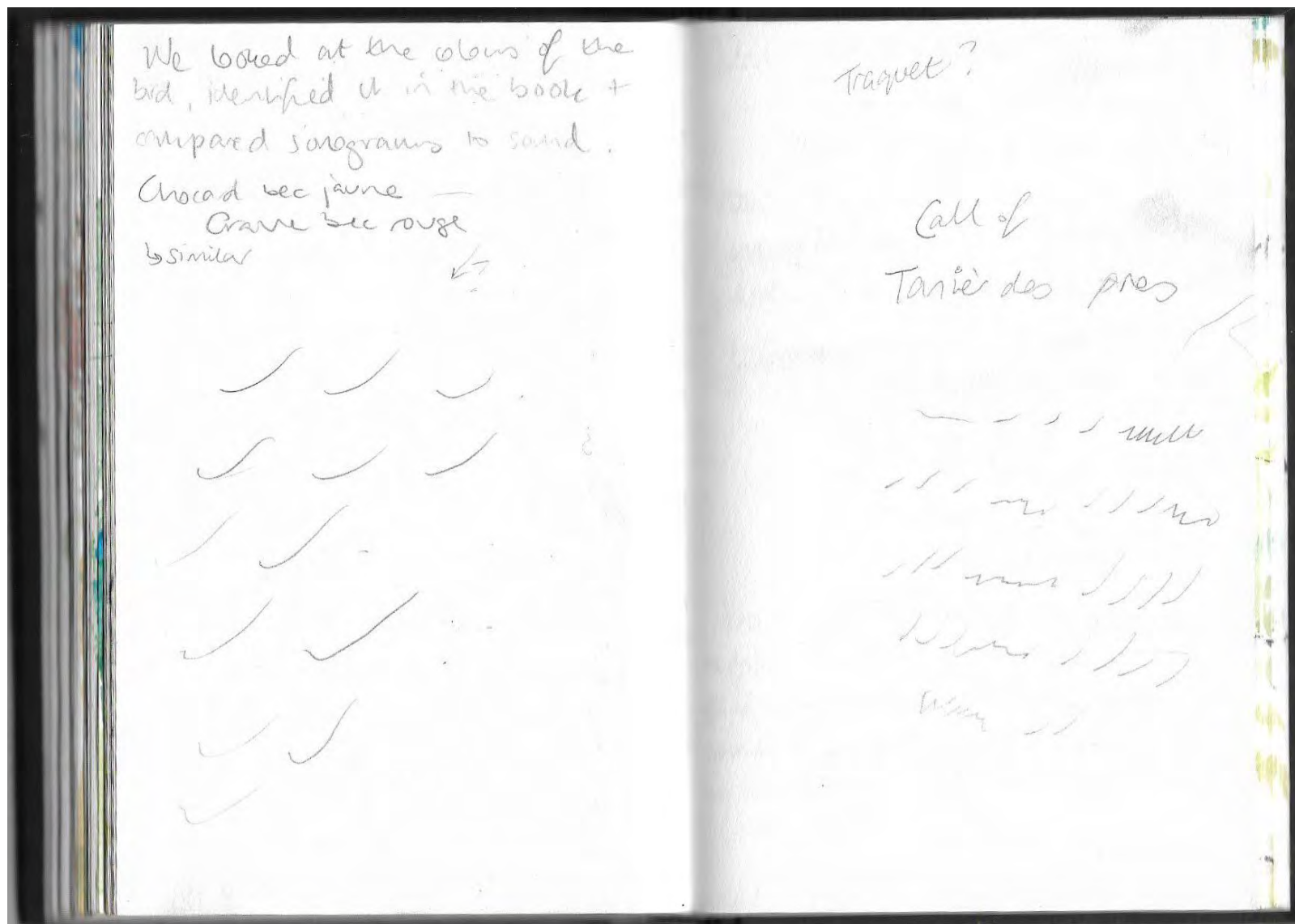


Figure a.104. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at La Grave, (2019).

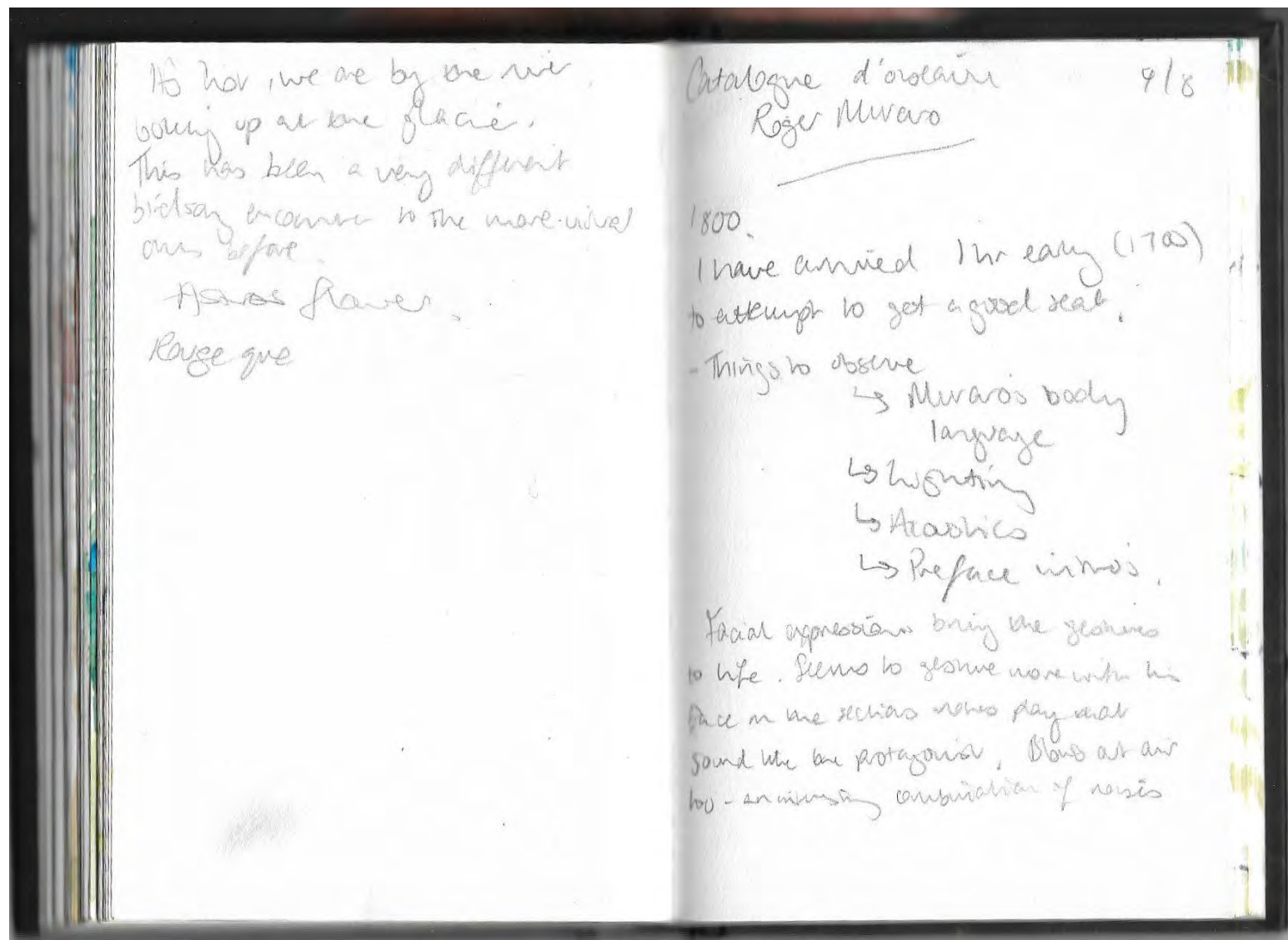


Figure a.105. Harriet Carter, Field notebook, transcriptions at La Grave, (2019).

Appendix C: Sound recordings taken at Les Baux

See link:

<https://www.mediafire.com/folder/kpg7yioxoi4ga/Sound+recordings+France+2019>

Appendix D: Images of collaborative research project with Dr James Fisher



Figure a.106. Harriet Carter and James Fisher, Printmaking process, (2020).



Figure a.107. Harriet Carter and James Fisher, Printmaking process, (2020).



Figure a.108. Harriet Carter and James Fisher, Printmaking process, (2020).



Figure a.109. Harriet Carter and James Fisher, Printmaking process, (2020).

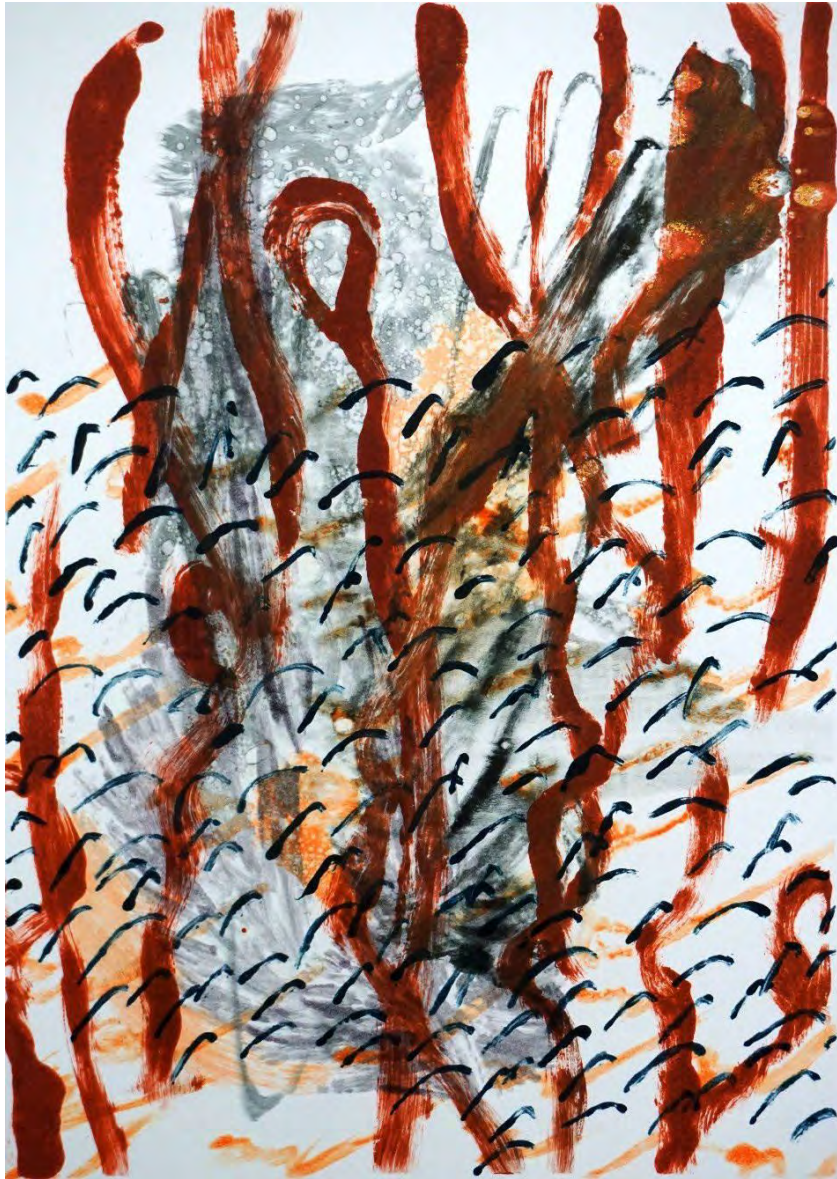


Figure a.110. Harriet Carter and James Fisher, *Untitled*, (2020). Relief ink on paper, 76x56cm.



Figure a.111. Harriet Carter and James Fisher, *Untitled*, (2020). Relief ink on paper, 76x56cm.



Figure a.112. Harriet Carter and James Fisher, *Untitled*, (2020). Relief ink on paper, 76x56cm.



Figure a.113. Harriet Carter and James Fisher, *Untitled*, (2020). Relief ink on paper, 76x56cm.



Figure a.114. Harriet Carter and James Fisher, *Untitled*, (2020). Relief ink on paper, 76x56cm.

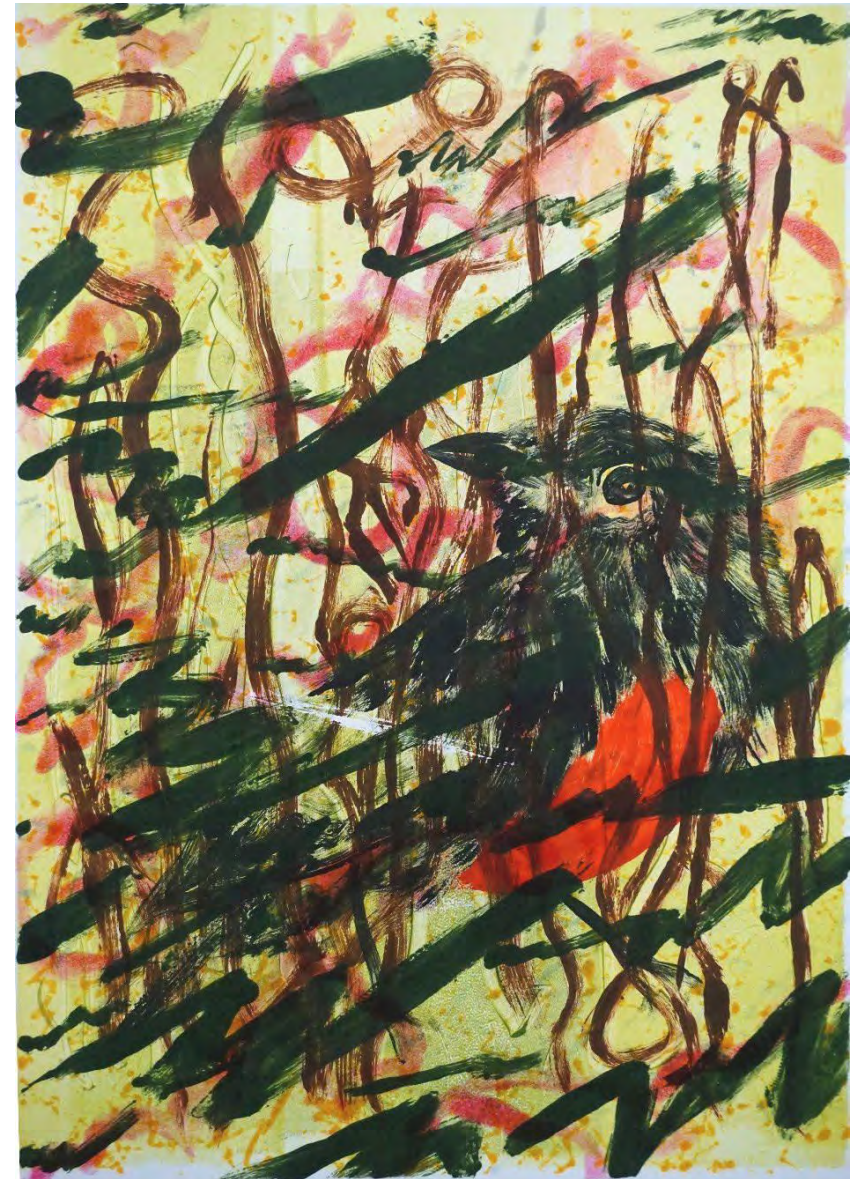


Figure a.115. Harriet Carter and James Fisher, *Untitled*, (2020). Relief ink on paper, 76x56cm.



Figure a.116. Harriet Carter and James Fisher, *Untitled*, (2020). Relief ink on paper, 76x56cm.

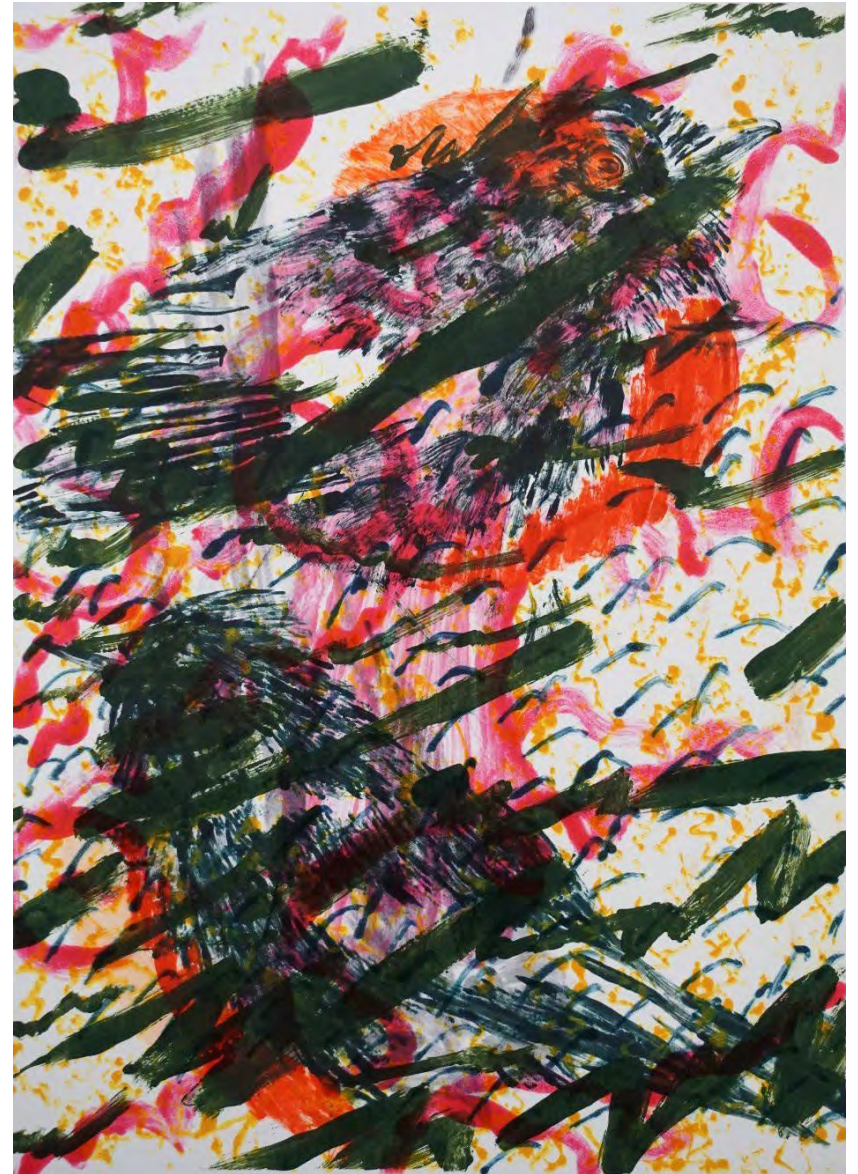


Figure a.117. Harriet Carter and James Fisher, *Untitled*, (2020). Relief ink on paper, 76x56cm.



Figure a.118. Harriet Carter and James Fisher, *Untitled*, (2020). Relief ink on paper, 76x56cm.



Figure a.119. Harriet Carter and James Fisher, *Untitled*, (2020). Relief ink on paper, 76x56cm.

Appendix E: 'Birdwatching' presentation, transcript

I presented the following paper at the Symposium 'Research in the Arts, the Arts in Research', 14-15th May 2020, Cultural Literacy in Europe, Łódź, Poland.

Slide 1

Birdwatching is Dr James Fisher's and my (Harriet Carter) ongoing collaborative research print project exploring metaphysical and metaphorical essences of birdsong.

In monotype print making marks are made using relief printing ink on a plate. A roller is then moved across, picking up the inked image and placing it onto paper. What remains behind on paper is something like a ghost of the initial painted image on the plate. Our process involved building on this printing plate, placing new marks on top of the previous marks that had just been captured instead of cleaning the plate and then printing a fresh image. This process created palimpsests. Fisher painted figurations of a Redstart and Carter worked with transcriptions of birdsong she had taken during a fieldtrip to France last summer.

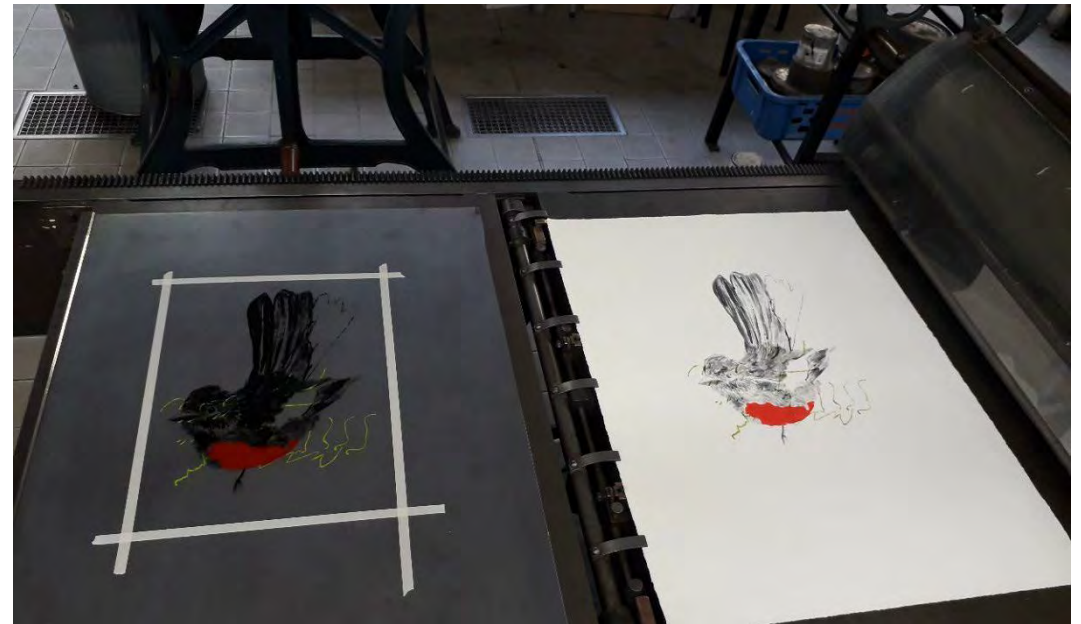


Figure a.120. Harriet Carter and James Fisher, Printmaking process, (2020).

Slide 2

We began to consider the impact of the two different artist voices on the artwork and indeed the artwork on the artist voices. We considered the hypothesis: how and to what extent is it possible for this palimpsestic nature of monotype print making to reveal and curate two visual voices of different practice?



Figure a.121. Harriet Carter and James Fisher, *Untitled*, (2020). Relief ink on paper, 76x56cm.

Slide 3

The skin of the artist was relinquished in the act of collaborative printmaking. As one artist approached the printing plate, the marks left behind from the collaborator brought awareness to the sensitivity of mark making. Marks that we wanted to add were suddenly put under scrutiny by the presence of the collaborator. Away from private practice, where one's style or method may lead the practice (to a fault), any marks made were going to affect the collaborator's marks on the plate.

One artist held vigil whilst the other worked. The vigil was time-pressuring. Anything that took too long was not appropriate, thus, the prints were made in more of a hurry than they would have been made in individual practice. It became a dance of mindfulness towards the other's voice with the printing press leading this dance. Any pauses for decision-making were exposed that encouraged a more fluid response to the artwork, instead of a pre-planned design- a methodology now shed alongside the other private rituals of individual practice. Immediacy became paramount resulting in actions taken in the practice that were out of the familiar.

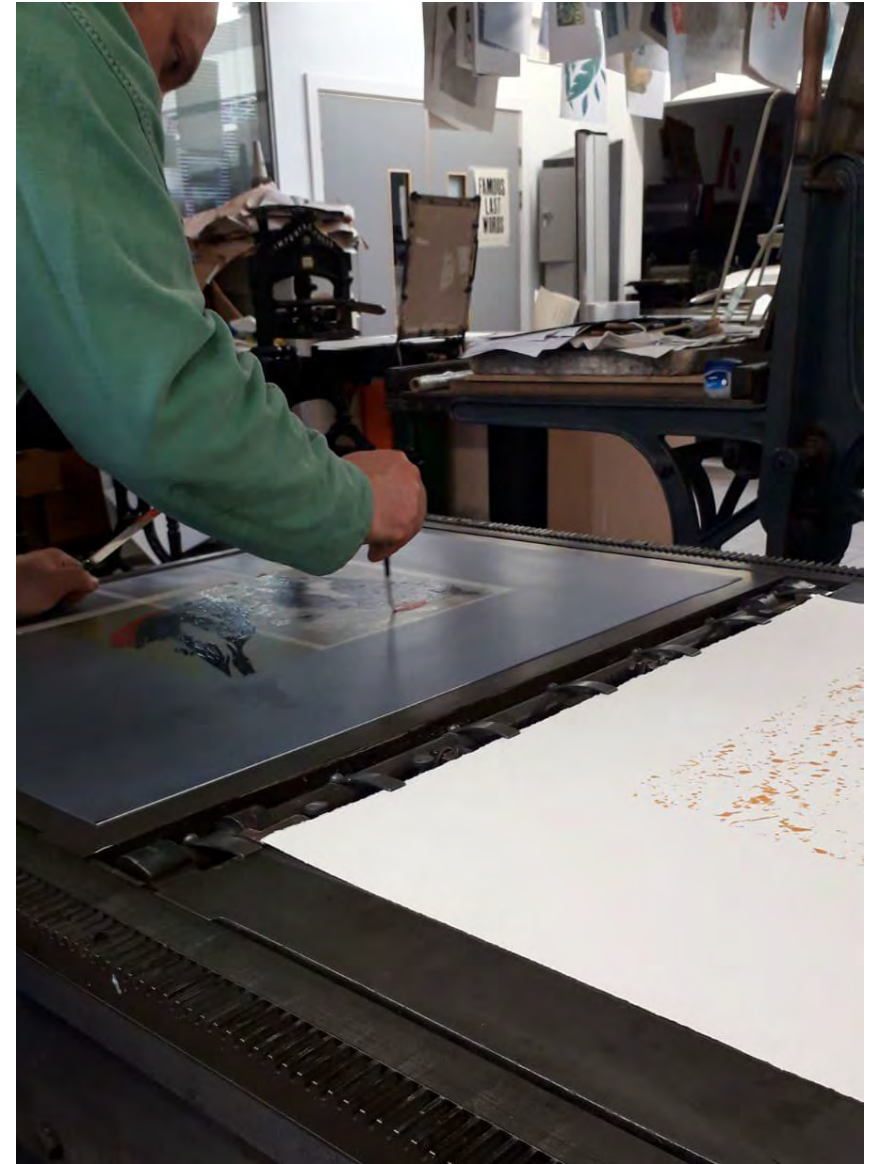


Figure a.122. Harriet Carter and James Fisher, Printmaking process, (2020).

Slide 4

It is the private rituals in the unique skins that provided a key to unlock the unearthed potential of the other, one that has not been discovered in singular practice. This collaborative printmaking created a juncture of the two practices. A slippage of common practice, offering freedom from one's artist 'skin' through the developing performance of awareness of the other.

Constructing the print revealed hidden nuances of methodologies, unseen by the lone artist. Layers elicited aspects of each other's practices. A voice was created and then released, the other voiced and again, released. The printed palimpsest of these two voices became a third visual voice, separate from the two different artistic practices- a material third. This material third was devoid of any subjective bias. It became the vehicle for the two voices to pass across, an artefact that recorded these moments and an influencer for the next decision.

The material third quantifies just how 'blind' each artist is to the secret nuances of their practice in the production of the pictures that begin to emerge from each pass over of the roller. Thus, this private and recurrent skin was shed and instead the true essence of the artist was brought to the fore, responding to the developing picture, unhindered by common practice.

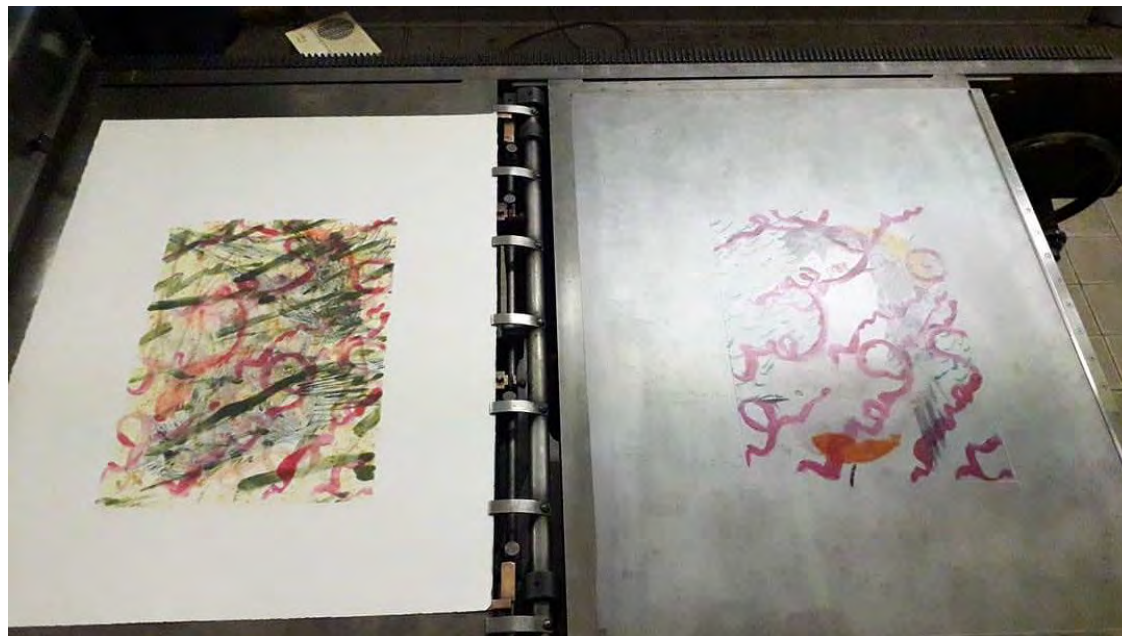


Figure a.123. Harriet Carter and James Fisher, Printmaking process, (2020).

Slide 5

Carter's gestures of birdsong eradicated and blurred the detail of Fisher's bird figurations, as in turn, the sometimes bold and fulsome figurations of birds disguised the rhythmicity of the gestures that passed before. The two different voices overlapped each other repeatedly, a product of new marks constantly added to the increasingly busy and blurred plate where both new and old marks were lifted and layered.

Birdsong and its host's poetic metaphor became involved in a duet. One of antiphony with the slow emergence of the material third. A narrative emerged in the material third's construction. For example, Carter's ambiguous birdsong gestures provided a key to unlock the encounter with Fisher's bird figurations. A seemingly stray gesture of birdsong connects with the red breast of the Redstart, piercing the chest of the bird and severing the wing. Has the metaphor for love and flight been extinguished by the encapsulation of the shrill bark of a pheasant in *Terre Verte*?

Ghosts appeared in this narrative through this layering antiphony, as marks are left become more faded or are taken over by a newcomer. These ghosts are a manifestation of collaborative process, a singularity, borne from the two different signatures of practice. A singularity that severs both artist's identity, shedding their skin. The collaborative voice is manifested through material and the printmaking process, the two artist's application a mere vehicle for this discovery.



Figure a.124. Harriet Carter and James Fisher, *Untitled*, (2020). Relief ink on paper, 76x56cm.