

*Augury function*



*Heidi Gustafson*

# *Augury Function*



EARLY FUTURES  
*Oakland, CA*



## *Preface*

*Augury Function* documents cellular phone photographs of found dead animals between 2012–2015. I encountered each corpse as an omen. During this period I was living within the aftermath of loss, initiated in a mantic daze. Long bonds with a dear love, my stormless kin, were severed, undone. When I couldn't move the grief I walked. While walking, auguries emerged with bewildering repetition. An *augury* is an auspicious omen, usually divined from the movement and flight, or absence of flight, of birds.

St. Augustine's favorite word for the heart was abyss. Grow wings on the abyss and you find a common Sufi symbol: a heart with wings inscribed with a devotional phrase *qaddasa Allahu sirrabu* - "protect the secret dilation of the heart." Imagine the heart as a bird, the bird as an abyss, the abyss in flight. Now cut off the wings on the abyss. You watch a fallen heart closing up on the ground. One enters the soul corpse. Such is the premonition which summoned the revelation of our auguries here—the auspicious omens and secret conditions—divined from the absent dilation of the heart.

Each of the omens discovered on my walks became special occasions

in which the heart was alerted to inquire, to commune, to open and learn to dilate again. Everywhere else in my life the grandiosity of grief kept the heart apart, depressed - aperture closed. Only something equally blunted and inexhaustible as death could support the less sensible feeling of the rotting deep core. Instead of seeing something uncomfortable, shameful, pitiful, ghastly in these carcasses, the wingless abyss found delightful fellowship!

For the heart in vain is a vain heart. Dead swan, bloated seal, blind owl, solar thrush. Vanity mirrors. Unable to find solace in grief achievements, these mirrors became ways to recognize, validate and sanctify a soul corpse. How? On the frontiers of psychosis, carcasses and imaginal practice function as mimetic excavators, guides, pontifices, junctions. Places, points, gestures where we make impossible connections. Where we learn to face it or give it a face.

Surviving fissures of the heart through making impossible connections—using life-saving techniques like aesthetic and poietic reveries with the corpse—is a practice that belongs to many ancient traditions. My homage to the daily practice of reading omens, making connections where connection is scarce, is an offering. A prayer that the not-yet-sensed forces playing in human lives may continue to form allegiances with the deep & grotesque mines of psyche.

*Here was my heart, God, here was my heart,  
upon which you had mercy  
when in the depth of the abyss.*

St. Augustine

*Ludicrous carcass!  
I hung there with you.*

Baudelaire







*Wingless Stingray*





*Crucified Seabird*





*Blinded Great Horned Owl*





*Imprisoned Pigeon*







*Sheep Span*





*Deer Ditch*





*Gutless Ray*







*Pulverized Bird*







*Splayed Frog*





*Oneiric Swan*





*Acepahic Seal*







*Languid Seabird*







*Glazed Crow*





*Armed Starfish*







*Dead Elk*





*Feasted Songbird*







*Shadowed Skunk*





*Orogenic Sheep*





*Beached Raptor*







*Solar Thrush*







*Roseate Squirrel*





*Graced Cat*





*Plural-faced Crab*







*Greek Fish Head*







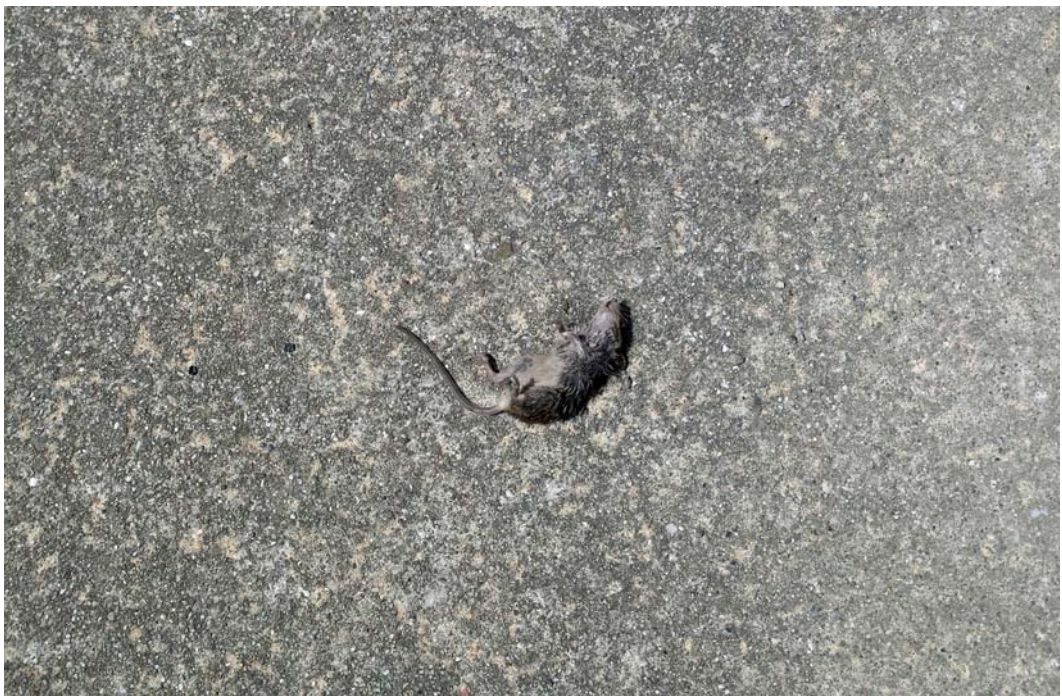
*Spent Blowfish*





*Dislocated Squirrel*





*Blatant Mouse*







*Ghost Composing*







*Duet*

*Colophon*

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Dedicated to Benjamin Turner & English (the cat).  
With grateful thanks to Steven Goodman.

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*Oakland, CA*  
2015

## *Locations*

Wingless Stingray	Berkeley, CA
Crucified Seabird	Outer Hebrides, Scotland
Blinded Great Horned Owl	Berkeley, CA
Imprisoned Pigeon	San Francisco, CA
Sheep Span	Outer Hebrides, Scotland
Deer Ditch	Hayfork, CA
Gutless Ray	Emeryville, CA
Pulverized Bird	Chicago, IL
Splayed Frog	Point Reyes, CA
Oneiric Swan	Outer Hebrides, Scotland
Acephalic Seal	Los Angeles, CA
Languid Seabird	Point Reyes, CA
Glazed Crow	Berkeley, CA
Armed Starfish	Freeland, WA
Dead Elk	Point Reyes, CA
Feasted Songbird	Berkeley, CA
Shadowed Skunk	El Cerrito, CA
Orogenic Sheep	Northern Scotland
Beached Raptor	Freeland, WA
Solar Thrush	Oakland, CA
Roseated Squirrel	Hillsboro, OR
Graced Cat	Hillsboro, OR
Plural-faced Crab	San Francisco, CA
Greek Fish Head	Half Moon Bay, CA
Spent Blowfish	Puerto Vallarta, Mexico
Dislocated Squirrel	Baltimore, MD
Blatant Mouse	Oakland, CA
Ghost Composing	Point Isabel, CA
Duet	Berkeley, CA