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# The Triad of Life

Part I - Phenomenological ecology

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Stephen Wood

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# Encounters with birds - kingfisher

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A flash of sapphire



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Caught sight of on the River Avon in Bathampton

## Encounters with birds - hoopoe

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A huge black-and-white butterfly or moth, 'hoopoe'



Seen crossing the road in the woods outside of Apt  
The paintings are by the French illustrator Martinet  
Notice the contrast between the classical poses and the descriptions of the way the bird appears in the field

## Encounters with birds - lapwing

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Tumbling over  
sodden fields,  
crying 'peewit'



Seen flying over a rain-soaked field in Kent

## Encounters with birds

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Each bird has a particular manner of appearing, of disclosing itself as itself

Bortoft (1971) :

- Science - explains X in terms of Y
  - Phenomenology - shows how Z discloses itself as Z
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Bortoft, H. (1971) The ambiguity of 'one' and 'two' in the description of Young's experiment. *Systematics*, 8(3). December 1970.

X is explained away and replaced by Y, which is the 'truer' description  
In phenomenology, the phenomenon is its own explanation

## Encounters with birds

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Bird books and wildlife films give a misleading impression that the bird displays itself to the watcher in close-up, as if in a museum cabinet

Birds are most often glimpsed in an instant, as a characteristic integration of flight, sound, length and colour of bill, plumage and legs

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## Encounters with birds

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“The beginner may well be baffled at the way on old hand is able to pick out a bird at a distance and identify it with confidence before details of its plumage can be seen.”

The novice still has to decompose what he sees in the brief instant of the bird’s appearing. The old hand recognises the bird all at once.

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(Fitter, *British Birds*, 1966, p. 26)

What is this mysterious ability of the experienced bird-watcher to recognize a bird in an instant? On what quality of the bird is this ability based?

## Jizz

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“A West Coast Irishman was familiar with the wild creatures which dwelt on or visited his rocks and shores; at a glance he could name them, usually correctly, but if asked how he knew them would reply, " By their 'jizz.'"  
(Coward, *Bird Haunts*, p. 141)

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(Coward, 1922, p. 141)

Coward, T.A. 1922. *Bird Haunts and Nature Memories*. London: Warne.

# Jizz

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“...the outdoor naturalist, and in particular the field ornithologist, realises the full value of jizz better than most people. At a distance, too far away to see details of form, colour, or pattern ... he sees a bird and recognises it ... but how does he know? Shape, size, manner of flight, or maybe note, is the reply. Yes, but there is something more ... something which instantly registers identity in the brain ... It is its jizz.” (Coward, *Bird Haunts*, pp. 141, 142)

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cf. A person's gait, their 'allure'

# Jizz

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Where does the word come from ?

- GISS, “general impression of size and shape”
  - A contraction of “just is”
  - A corruption of “gestalt” (wholeness of form)
  - A mishearing of “jism”, the energy of the thing
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GISS - supposedly an military acronym for an approach to identifying aircraft

Notice the complex of meanings: form, energy, impression

All these are good indications of what jizz means. It is interesting that people feel the need to justify these meanings in terms of etymology.

MacDonald, David. 1996. The Etymology of “Jizz.” *Canberra Bird Notes* 21(1): 2-11.

# Jizz

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A contemporary source, Dooley, *Big Twitch*

“Jizz is the indefinable quality of a particular species, the ‘vibe’ it gives off ... the way a bird holds itself...” (p. 78)

“The concept of jizz relies on an innate sense of how a bird is ...” (p. 79)

Dooley, Sean. 2005. *Big Twitch: One Man, One Continent, a Race Against Time - A True Story about Birdwatching*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

He gives an example of two seabirds that are difficult to tell apart except by their jizz: the Sooty and Short-Tailed Shearwaters.

The Sooty has silvery underwing panels, but they are difficult to pick out in bright sunlight. The Short-Tailed, yes, has a shorter tail, but not by much. And if the Sooty you see happening to be moulting... Again it's bill is shorter, by less than an inch. Given that you'll be looking from these birds from a boat lurching around on a choppy sea, it's not easy to spot these differences.

“The wingspan on a Sooty, however, is about ten centimetres longer than on a Short-tailed. Again, this measurement can be difficult to detect at sea, but the longer wings do give the Sooty a different jizz as it flies. That's an extra ten centimetres (around ten per cent) of wing surface with which to fly so the Sooty doesn't have to work quite as hard to travel at the same speed as a Short-tailed. This means that Short-tailed Shearwater tends to flap its wings more often, whereas the Sooty has a more languid jizz in flight, something that you can pick up with practice almost every time ... “

“Finding rarities is like goldmining.” A good sense of jizz allows one to “read the country, assess the lie of the land and search accordingly” (p. 114).

Dooley was able to read the land, know where to look and recognise more than 700 Australian birds in the space of a single year: a record.

## Hopkins' journal - lapwings

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“Peewits wheeling and tumbling, just as they are said to do, as if with a broken wing. They pronounce *peewit* pretty distinctly, sometimes querulously, with a slight metallic tone like a bat's cry. Their wings are not pointed, to the eye, when flying, but broad, white and of a black or reddish purple apparently.”

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## Hopkins' journal - a bluebell

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“The head is strongly drawn over backwards and arched down like a cutwater drawing itself back from one line of the keel. The lines of the bells strike and overlies this, rayed but not symmetrically, some lie parallel ... Then there is the straightness of the trumpets in the bells softened by a the slight entasis and by the square splay of the mouth.”

“I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of our Lord by it. “

“He himself was an excellent draughtsman, and his later skill, as a poet, in communicating through words the essence and individuality of visual forms in nature was partly fostered by his early training with the pencil.”

## **As kingfishers catch fire...**

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*As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw  
flame;*

*As tumbled over rim in roundy wells*

*Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each  
hung bell's*

*Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its  
name;*

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## As kingfishers catch fire...

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*Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:*

*Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;  
Selves--goes itself; myself it speaks and spells  
Crying 'What I do is me: and for that I came.'*

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## Inscape and instress

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- ***Inscape*** “‘individually-distinctive’ form ... the rich and revealing ‘oneness’ of the natural object”
  - ***Instress*** “that energy of being by which all things are upheld, that natural (but ultimately supernatural) stress that determines an inscape and keeps it in being”
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## Inscape and instress

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- A bird's jizz is thus its characteristic form, the essence of what it is be that kind of bird.  
= *inscape*
  - The bird's jizz is also its energy, its 'vibe', the expressiveness that creates a characteristic impression on the watcher.  
= *instress*
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# Expressiveness

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“... expression is the language of the thing itself and springs from its configuration ..

“a thing is a thing because, whatever it imparts to us, is imparted through the very organization of its sensible aspects” (Merleau-Ponty)

Jizz is the integration of the different bodily elements in an expressive unity

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Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge Reader, p. 140

“In the work of his earlier years, Cézanne tried to paint the expression first and foremost, and that is why he never caught it. He gradually learned that expression is the language of the thing itself and springs from its configuration. His painting is an attempt to recapture the physiognomy of things and faces by the integral reproduction of their sensible configuration. This is what nature constantly and effortlessly achieves, and it is why the paintings of Cézanne are ‘Those of a pre-world in which as yet no men existed.’...”

p. 137

... a thing would not have this colour had it not also this shape, these tactile properties, this resonance, this odour, and that the thing is the absolute fullness which my undivided existence projects before itself ... the brittleness, hardness, transparency and crystal ring of a glass all translate a single manner of being...

p. 140

... it is impossible completely to describe the colour of the carpet without saying that it *is* a carpet, made of wool, and without implying in this colour a certain tactile value, a certain weight and a certain resistance to sound.

# Contact

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