I Imagine You Different

I can imagine you all trying to imagine right now the kind of nonsense that must be running through our minds, trying to imagine what concepts could corrupt a person to pursue you good people with such mad and reckless devotion, with such heaving desire to see you all fold. And so, in this imagining I imagine myself responding, with my hand on your shoulder to brace you against my words. I am here because I can imagine you different. I mean that I can imagine you imagining along with me as I enter those cages in which you keep those birds captive and set them all free. I set those birds free *in* the imagination. I imagine you imagining them free.

I imagine the wire cages in which they are confined, stacked one atop the other in a warehouse full of heat. I imagine the burning of their tracheas against the ammonia rich air, the rawness of their exposed and infected skin, the slow fraying of their sanity from the omnipresent light, and I imagine what it must *be* to live such a life, a life so suffused with suffering that happiness itself becomes unimaginable. Into that void of that suffering of these birds you keep captive I enter; I enter and I imagine them free.

And I imagine you in turn in your spacious air-conditioned offices with wide sweeping windows opening out to the world, and I imagine you there sitting at your desk calculating inputs and outputs and feed conversion ratios in which your birds are just numbers, their lives enclosed in equations, their individuality reckoned with only implicitly by the question: How many can die before profit is lost? And as I imagine you scribbling these numbers into your ledger, I enter into each of those numbers and imagine inside them the birds you keep caged, and I imagine each and every one of them free.

And I imagine you driving home from work in your luxury SUV, AC on full blast, spotify booming from the stereo, cushioned in this way from the world that surrounds you, insulated from the horrors that daily you contribute to. And I imagine you preparing for your family later that day the dismembered body of a hen purchased at your store, butchered at the altar of pleasure and convenience, sliced and breaded and baked or fried. Where have your convictions gone? I cannot bring myself to imagine them in you. In you I imagine only the corpses of the countless birds that now compose you, that now you masticate diligently into a formless and lifeless slurry, funneling that down your esophagus and into your stomach acids where the loose strands of flesh you further break down. And I imagine the deconstructed musculature of the bird you have eaten beginning to harden as you suck the liquid out of it; heeding the call of gravity, it is pumped down the pipes of your intestines. Here I insert myself. As the anus begins to pucker outward to release these dead and captive bodies, the process in reverse I set into motion. I imagine something of the bird awakening now in you, the anus closing up again, the shit moving upwards into your stomach, leaching the nutrients back out of you, your stomach now a womb for that bird you have eaten, giving it its shape and its texture, it's soul and its heartbeat. Once ready, the bird then delivers itself, pushing up through your esophagus, wiggling herself out of your mouth-hole. For a moment her mouth is your mouth and together you utter a single cry—it is the cry of freedom. For a moment, I imagine you a bird, feathered and bruised, crying for your freedom. Crying bird, I approach you. In the imagination I set you free.