

Stories of Nothing #10 (final)—

William Kentridge states: 'No, It is' —of coincidence, mirrors, borders and Apartheid. It doesn't add up. It doesn't add up in the end. Along the way—perhaps—but not in the end. Good timing would appear to be essential. Stories cannot be told, of isolates and quarantines, without speaking of Apartheid, at some point. It is a tale projected on a canvas across the railroad tracks; or something else dividing the city. What goes on at each side of the divide... when the divide is a canvas/screen.

It divides the city and is projected unto the screen. It is familiar—huh—in an uncanny sort of way, isn't it? We see William Kentridge's interminable processions, paper-cuts, drawings, film. Is it burial, life or repression? We do not tire at them. Last time I saw his work was in Oslo. He gave a lecture at Henie Onstad Art Centre. We had a short chat. I had seen exhibits and performances by him with Mariann, at several occasions. Last time at the Martin Gropius Bau in Berlin, 2016.

[No, it is](#). There is no overcoming of the divide. Even as the drawing becomes an animation movie, the movie begets a performance, the performance becomes a video-work projected in a room, with strange contraptions: viewing-machines, perhaps—something producing everything that is shown in the space (lots)—perhaps 'history-producing machines'. Calligraphic shapes, auto-portraits, contraptions, walking across old book-pages: legal texts, lexicons, lists. The divide invents itself.

Kentridge was studying to become a lawyer but became instead an artist. Perhaps in the period of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission many lawyers became artists, and artists lawyers. The question of how the border is reproduced—as mirrors within mirrors—is of course not unique to William Kentridge nor to any other non-black opponent to the Apartheid. Once it has occurred you can move it, never remove it, like seemingly an endless and pointless repetition: $1 + 1 = 1$.

This is at the level of a 'repetitious & effective procedure'. However, at another level, there are changes. They appear interminable and slow, and convey a sense that it will take endlessly long time to “arrive”. Wherever that might be. But human beings are strange creatures: since when processes seem pointless, but still somehow compelling, they continue. They want to find out. At last some of them. They ask: am I missing something? When did it happen? When & where? Somewhere in the middle, perhaps.

Like Mads Brugger—the Danish journalist—in his docufiction about Dag Hammarskjöld’s plain-crash in South Africa, in South Africa at Ndola near Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). There were always too many loose ends around that crash to ever come out once and for all as an “accident”. Brugger wants to investigate these events... long since, a ‘cold case’. Interestingly, he uses fiction to drive the investigation onwards. And the series (on NRK) could be a case of 'story-as-software'.

Radical software, of course. When Mads Brugger dresses up as a member of the SAIMR—a black operation where all dressed in white—while his secretaries, during his investigation (writing on old school type-writers to get thee setting right), are two black women. The scenes where he tells them what he has found, and his ideas about it (which they dutifully type), he also gets into conversations during which he often gets good ideas from the two secretaries: this is staged at the Steenberg Farm.

By staging himself—and part of the set—as a protagonist he somehow fictionalises the investigation. He appears as a mature version of Hergé’s Tintin. And he even wears the Phantom’s ring—the hard-striking ring that leaves the famous skull-mark on the bad guys’ chin. So, his intentions are clear. And driving around to people who can testify, phoning people who won’t speak to him (and deny the existence of SAIMR), digging at the landing strip, he generates information.

But it is, as one says (and he says), circumstantial evidence. Till, eventually, there is this former SAIMR operative, who not only will talk to him, but wants to lift a weight on his heart: he seeks closure. So, he relates how and where SAIMR—the “South African Institute of Marine Research”—taught its operatives, and its actions in neighbouring Mozambique of inoculating black people with HIV. “But that’s gruesome!” Said one of Mads’s secretaries. SAIMR also partook of Hammarskjöld’s murder.

Other agencies linked to the operation were the British MI6 and the American CIA. It all took place on the backdrop of Dag Hammarskjöld’s radical democratic vision for the 3rd world—in his position as the General Secretary of the UN—and on the Central-/South- African continent there was simply too much natural resources to be overlooked. Leaving it into the hands of the poor and uneducated would not permit their exploitation. So, he was eliminated. [This is the story.](#)

Be that as it may. The SAIMR comes out as a White Suprematist covert organisation that Mads Brugger emulates in his attire to tease out information. He is too clever to assume that he has solved the case—I think—but he somehow managed to move it. Which is the point. And also the point in William Kentridge’s dealings with the topic of the Apartheid in his art. Moving history, moving us. A common point between them: the place of cartoons in driving a query onwards.

Another common feature: the piling up of ‘circumstantial evidence’. It may be crucial to our understanding of information. Because if the Apartheid was a railroad-track—cutting the cities into

two—the victory gardens cropping up in the edgelands around rails, would be like information: circumstantial evidence. We are left to wonder if information will ever be anything else than this? Circumstantial. And we may ponder on what happens when we accumulate more of it.

But what are the nature of these movements, and whereto? After the Apartheid ended as a State ideology, William Kentridge motioned to create the Centre of the Less Good Idea. To the effect, he quoted a Tswana proverb saying: “If the good doctor can’t cure you, find the less good doctor.” William Kentridge translates this into a practice at the centre, involving both black and white people. As he has done for many years within his own art practice. So this is what he has to say about it.

“It is often the secondary ideas, those less good ideas found in trying to address the cracks in the first idea, that become the core of the work... the intention is to provide a forum for these less good ideas —arguing that in the act of playing with an idea, you can recognise those things that you didn't know in advance, but knew were somewhere inside you.” So, the crack, the border, the divide somehow runs through it. It is not something merely external, it also runs within/through us.

It is in this dual boundary that not only determines the relation of the master and slave—but each one to ourselves under the state of exception—that brings us to the coincidences, mirrors, time-warps of ‘the border’. It is external and internal at the same time, but in a way that lacks closure and our relation to enveloping facts can never be more than circumstantial. To communicate, we rely on the very apparatuses that set up walls that isolate/confine us.

Like the rails of the Apartheid. Separation and exploitation of fellow humans and of nature. Our digital media work no different than this. Or, if possible, radicalises the same situation. Or, this is what we are led to believe. Like Maggie Thatcher, the British Prime Minister, said in her heyday: "there is no alternative!" We're ‘alone together’, as Sherry Turkle wrote under this book title: “Why we expect more from technology and less from each other.” But we are not at this now.

We are ‘together alone’—it’s the opposite contract. There is an online togetherness flanked by our doing ‘each our bit’ alone. So, in a strange way, we are presently less confined by technology than ever, as we are confined by the embodied isolate of the quarantine. Does that mean that we can expect more from each other? Maybe. If we truly understand the potential of ‘story-as-software’. And the property of stories that allow that: being specific but open-ended, and never conclusive.

By this I mean that it is not in the beginning or the end that something conclusive can happen, but in the middle: this is also where stories of this kind connect, it is not at the enclosure—at the entrance and exit—but in the relationship between the two, which is in the middle: this is where we can seek and find some form of consistency. The middle is a wellspring of contingencies—of things touching alongside, according the Middle English Latin word-history—that are truly connective.

So, what is it that we can expect of each other, more than of technology at the present juncture? Well there is little we can do at the edgelands of the quarantine border—no problem to be solved—as long as we are not equipped to understand the situation on ‘the other side’. This understanding is not kept as a secret code into the depth of each story, but because the stories are open-ended their specificity lends itself to scan and stalk situations. Stories connect within and beyond.

The story allows for what’s isn’t in it: "No, it is". If modulated in this way, information is no longer circumstantial. A point that will be amplified if we take (affirmative) action: this is where problem-solving hits in. Stories is what may help you define them. Stories do not solve problems—never—but they can programme for solutions. So, the current horizon for improvements, and expectations, are not in problem-solving, small-time or big-time, on a global level. But in programming for it.

The collection of stories here—featuring in all ten, but told in this story #10—is such a programme (relating to confinement in terms of coincidence, mirroring, time-warps and border). Something we may want to have in our bags, if we agree that we have to reconsider how we understand and live with value creation. Chomsky has expressed that we are seconds to Midnight—if we pile up the crises we're in—so we may not have too much time. But what exactly are we trying to achieve?

We are certainly not going to solve the world-puzzle—and from failed attempts at it try to discover and dismantle world-conspiracies (instead). Nothing is going to happen from our failure to understand: be it from Cartesian doubt, or simple ignorance. What we can and need to improve is our path from confusion to action. We need to be on the money, instead of acquiring as much as we can of it (in the hope that one day we will). We have to quit anticipating and postponing.

So, we can train ourselves at going directly to the middle of things—rather than spending the bulk of our lives in preparing and concluding—and give a direction to what is currently propagated at an enormous speed on a global scale. Where is the middle? Or, when? I have a story from my mother about geese. Her parents kept geese in the garden. They were tasty and better than watchdogs. She was terrified by them. From the gate to the house there was a rather long stretch. And she ran...

While running she would always spot father goose's tail somewhere. And in a matter of seconds he had the entire band with him. A bully-band. She could have gone straight to the geese—as also I failed to do—and stand in their midst. Insisting that she had as much a right to the ground as them. Instead, she avoided them till they ended up on the family's dinner table. Maybe we cannot befriend geese, nor quitting eating them, but we might learn to live and act in the edgelands.

We have to learn to balance our books differently. The ten stories in an attempt in this direction. The stories actually are quite meaningless. Or, at least, they do not aim at resolving something that has to do with meaning. Quite the contrary. Which is why they might partake of the kinds of value creation where 'scanning and stalking the situation', comes before 'problem-solving'. If we manage to concentrate our emotional power in the energy animating situations, then we can start solving problems.

Is it too much to ask that the books should balance across the border (to nature, to other humans, to the planet, to ourselves)? What would the economics of what we are considering here look like? It is sure to be a world in which everything is not solved by economics. Because if economics is the answer, what is the question? Did you ask that question? If yes, please let me know. I need to learn, and would certainly enjoy telling your story. Because, it would have to come with one: no, it is.

(Qua-Qua)

One reason to think about situations bordering unto the unknown—and programme for solutions rather than solving it—is the image it projects in us of the absolute: like our presently living in isolates, historical conditions and transitions as the Apartheid in South Africa, or the mercantile way of operating money economy: there is no alternative, to which I have quoted Margareth Thatcher already, or as Slavoj Zizek said, from his vantage point on the political left: we can imagine the end of the world, but we cannot imagine the end of capitalism. How do we think of sealed boundaries?

This is the common question to all these situations. However, if move our assumptions from being individually affected, to transforming the boundary into a common, we may come to work interactively with 'exchange across the insurmountable'. If you cannot help your family & friends, because you are separated by a border, you can help a stranger—because the stranger has also family and friends. This is the basic idea that I have been trying to explore in story.

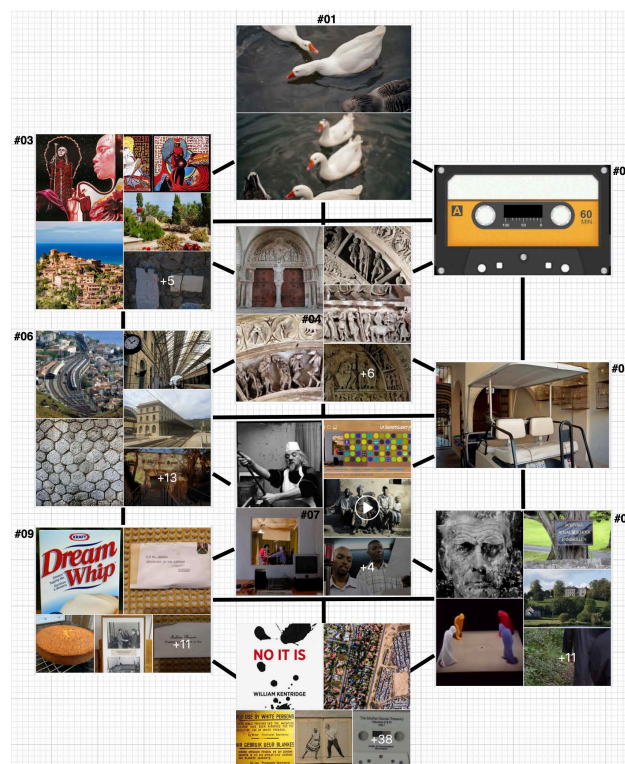
Through this experiment, story has been added as a generative resource for border-dwellers: a condition now shared by all of us who—in the words of Žižek—have the privilege to live quarantined. But the border is more than our present narrowed condition: the proof is that criminals are let out of jail, in some countries. The borderland of quarantine, is not only an enclosure from other people. It is also an enclosure from nature, protecting us from the Corona virus.

We are using technology to connect across a border that we otherwise can cross only at the peril of contamination. The border—I imagine—is thicker than a line: there are edgelands around it. For instance moving outdoors 2 meters clear of one another. To the edgelands I would also include our hand-washing routines. Anything relating to the boundary that makes us operational as border-dwellers, is part of the edgeland. The choreography of hand-washing and movement for instance.

It provides us with a new grid, allowing us to intercept courses of action that are other than those readily opening to us, under normal conditions. We will scan our life-space differently, as we will also stalk/track life-situations beyond our own. In other words, we live on two sides of a mirror, which may be the most economic concept for what an absolute boundary is. It allows us to intercept across this sort of digital mirror, is that it is time-warped: the reflection asynchronous, but active.

Stories are situations related from the 'other side'—which is why we never tire at them: their possibility, but also what they do, in calling for action, when our actions become divisible and transmittable, folding traversing the edgelands. We currently live in the edgeland: a realm between the contaminated (Corona) and the connective (Zoom &c.). But isn't this our current situation also without the pandemia? The Corona crisis has simply brought contamination closer to us.

We will continue to live between contamination and connection—this is our life-sphere—this is the edgeland where we can, or must, develop our 'victory gardens'. Has the Corona-crisis made us wiser? We can hope, or at least bring the wisdom of what can be learned, in our bodies and minds at the present juncture, in story: the situation related from the other side—to be continued...





NO IT IS

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE





FOR USE BY WHITE PERSONS

THESE PUBLIC PREMISES AND THE AMENITIES
THEREOF HAVE BEEN RESERVED FOR THE
EXCLUSIVE USE OF WHITE PERSONS.

By Order Provincial Secretary

VIR GEBRUIK DEUR BLANKES

HIERDIE OPENBARE PERSEEL EN DIE GERIEWE
DAARVAN IS VIR DIE UITSLUITLIKE GEBRUIK
VAN BLANKES AANGEWYS.

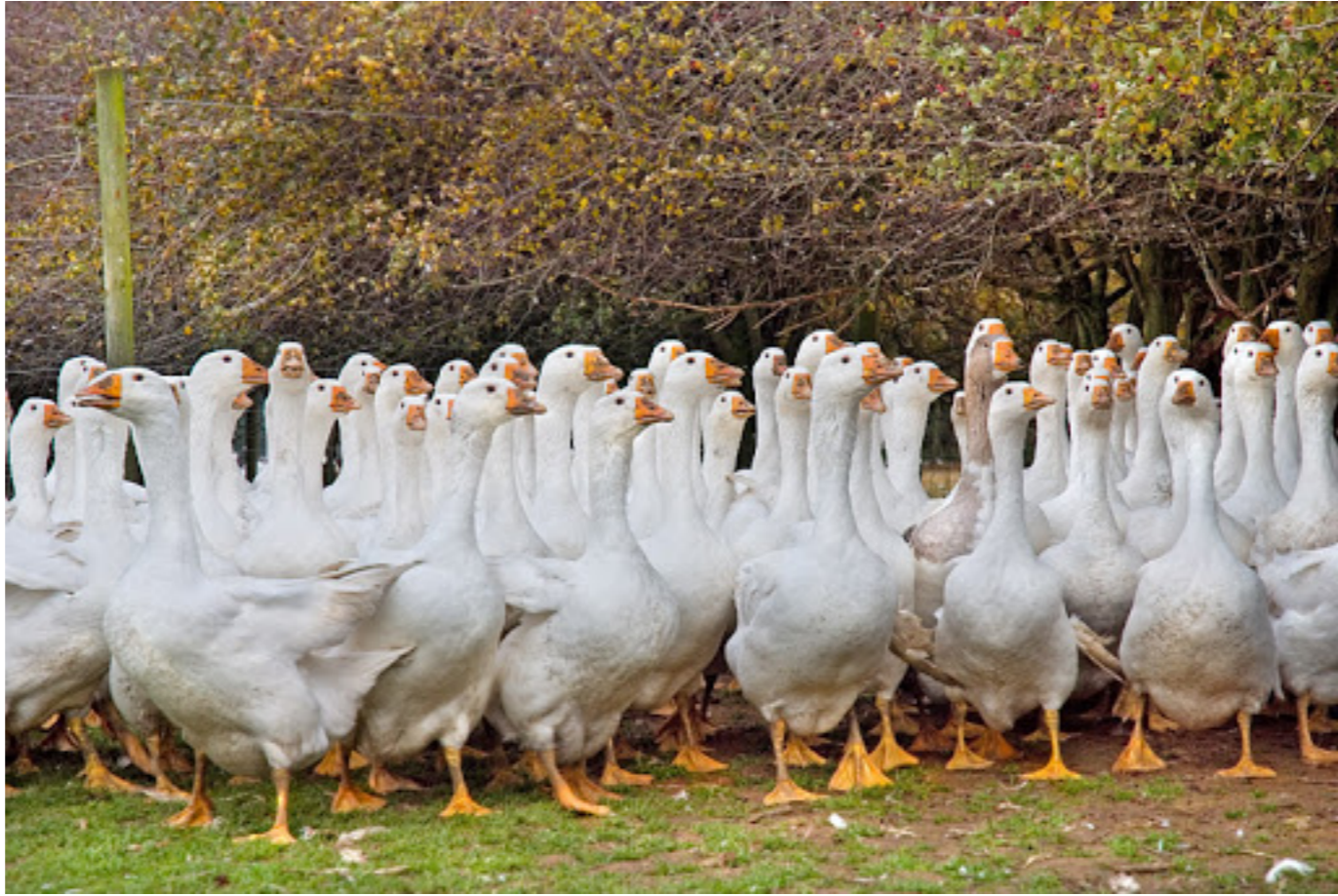
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The Mother Goose Treasury
Volumes III & IV
Side 1

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KENTRIDG



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madness. This disease perhaps gave occasion to that bold assertion of *Pliny*, *some men were turned into wolves in his time, and from wolves to men again*: and to that fable of *Pausanias*,¹ of a man that was ten years a wolf, and afterwards turned to his former shape: to *Ovid's* tale of *Lycan*, &c. He that is desirous to hear of this Disease, or more examples, let him read *Austin* in his 18th Book of *De Civitate Dei*, cap. 5; *Mysalans*, cent. 5. 77; *Schenkius*, *de Morbis*, lib. 1. cap. 2. de Mania; *Foreatus*, lib. 10. de morbis *Magnus*; *Vincentius Bellavicensis*, spec. med. lib. 31. c. 1. *Bodine*, *Zuinger*, *Zelger*, *Pewer*, *Wierus*, *Spranger*, &c. *Madness*, saith *Avicenna*, troubleth men most in February, and snow-a-days frequent in *Bohemia* and *Hungary*, according to *Hornius*, *Hydrophobus* will have it common in *Livonia*. They will bark all day, and go abroad in the night, barking, and deserting; *they have usually hollow eyes, cold, and very dry and pale*, saith *Allomarus*; he will give all the symptoms, and set down a brief cure.

Hydrophobia is a disease well known in every village, which comes by the bite of a mad dog, or scratching, saith *Aurelianus*; touching the wound sometimes, as *Schenkius* proves, and is incident to many other creatures as well as men: so called because the patient cannot endure the sight of water, or any liquor, and they see a mad dog in it. And which is more wonderful, they be very dry, (as in this malady they are) they will not drink. *Calius Aurelianus*, an ancient physician, doubts whether this *Hydrophobia* be a passion of the brain, or of the stomach. The part affected is the brain: the cause is the bite of the mad dog, which is so hot and dry, that it consumes the moisture in the body. *Hildegardus* says, that some be so mad, and, being cut up, had no water in them, nor any moisture left in them. To such as are so afflicted, water begins at 14 days after they are bitten, and continues till 40 or 60 days after: commonly, saith *Avicenna*, they will rave, fly water and glasses, to look redly on the sun, about 20 days after (if

¹ Lib. 8 cap. 22. *Hornius* contra. [² vi. 8; viii. 2.]
² Met. lib. 1. [216-227]. *Avicenna* de Morbis, lib. 1. cap. 2. de Mania, sicut ipse adnotat in modum, pallidi, lingua sicca, &c. [³ Lib. 3. cap. 9.]
³ Lib. 7. de Venenis. [⁴ Lib. 10. de morbis Magni. [⁵ Specul. 2.]

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complain without a cause, in *Apuleius*, of an old bald bedridden knave she had to her goodman. *Poor woman as I am, what shall I do! I have an old grim sire to my husband, as bald as a coot, as little and as unable as a child, a bedfull of bones, he keeps all the day barred and locked, and we is me, what shall I do!* He is jealous, and he will use a cuckold for keeping her up: suspicion without a cause, hard usage, is able of itself to make a woman fly out, that is otherwise honest.

Esse fidei non est levis tractatio peccata

had usage, as *Pliny* says, *quando mulieres cognoscunt maritum habere alterum, peccata non Nevisanus* holds, when a woman thinks she has a man, watch she will sooner offend; *Liberius peccant, et non peccant, non handling makes them worse: as the good man saith in *Chalmer's* words,*

Non enim peccat, sed peccat in seipso.

Of two extremes, *Jealousy* and *Love* is the worst. 'Tis a great fault (for some men are so fond of their wives, to dote on them as *Sonnet Deline* saith, to be too effeminate, or as some do, to be sickly, and breed children for them, and like the *Titmouse*, in some birds hatch eggs by turns, they do so) *Calius Rhodiginus* ant. lect. lib. 6. cap. 24. makes mention of *Seneca*, that was so besotted on his wife, that he would endure a moment out of her company, he would go abroad next his heart, and would never be home till she began first. We have many such fondlings, who will sell their pack-horses and slaves, (*nam grave est*) to see their wives, as the Comical Poet hath it, *non enim peccat, sed peccat in seipso*, let his wife domineer, and he will do what she will, to the breeches, lay out his money, and do what she will, whither, when she will, and consent to what she will.

¹ Lib. 5. de am. animi. [² Seneca, de ira, lib. 2. cap. 2.]
² Seneca, de ira, lib. 2. cap. 2. [³ Seneca, de ira, lib. 2. cap. 2.]
³ Seneca, de ira, lib. 2. cap. 2. [⁴ Seneca, de ira, lib. 2. cap. 2.]
⁴ Seneca, de ira, lib. 2. cap. 2. [⁵ Seneca, de ira, lib. 2. cap. 2.]
⁵ Seneca, de ira, lib. 2. cap. 2. [⁶ Seneca, de ira, lib. 2. cap. 2.]
⁶ Seneca, de ira, lib. 2. cap. 2. [⁷ Seneca, de ira, lib. 2. cap. 2.]
⁷ Seneca, de ira, lib. 2. cap. 2. [⁸ Seneca, de ira, lib. 2. cap. 2.]
⁸ Seneca, de ira, lib. 2. cap. 2. [⁹ Seneca, de ira, lib. 2. cap. 2.]
⁹ Seneca, de ira, lib. 2. cap. 2. [¹⁰ Seneca, de ira, lib. 2. cap. 2.]

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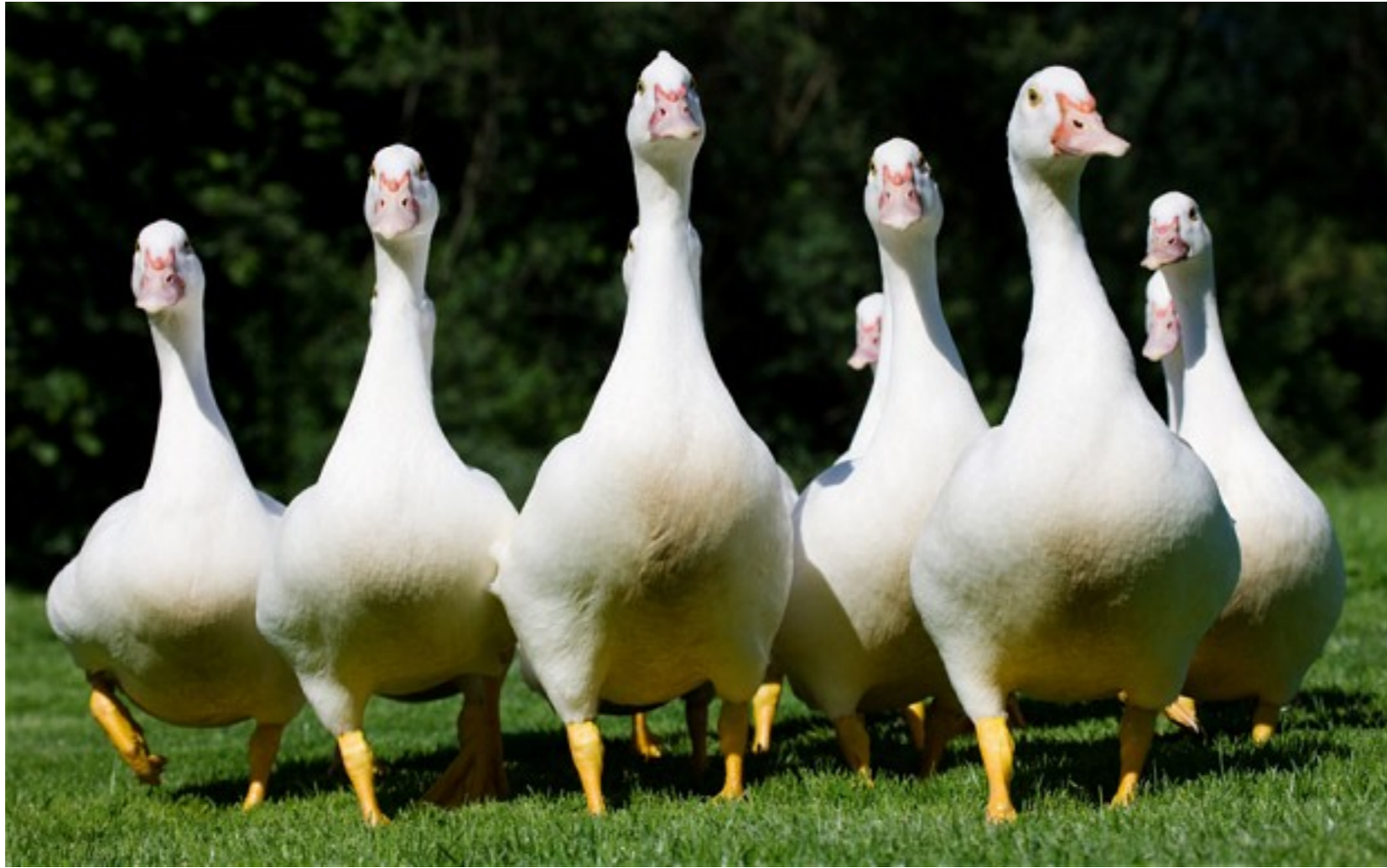




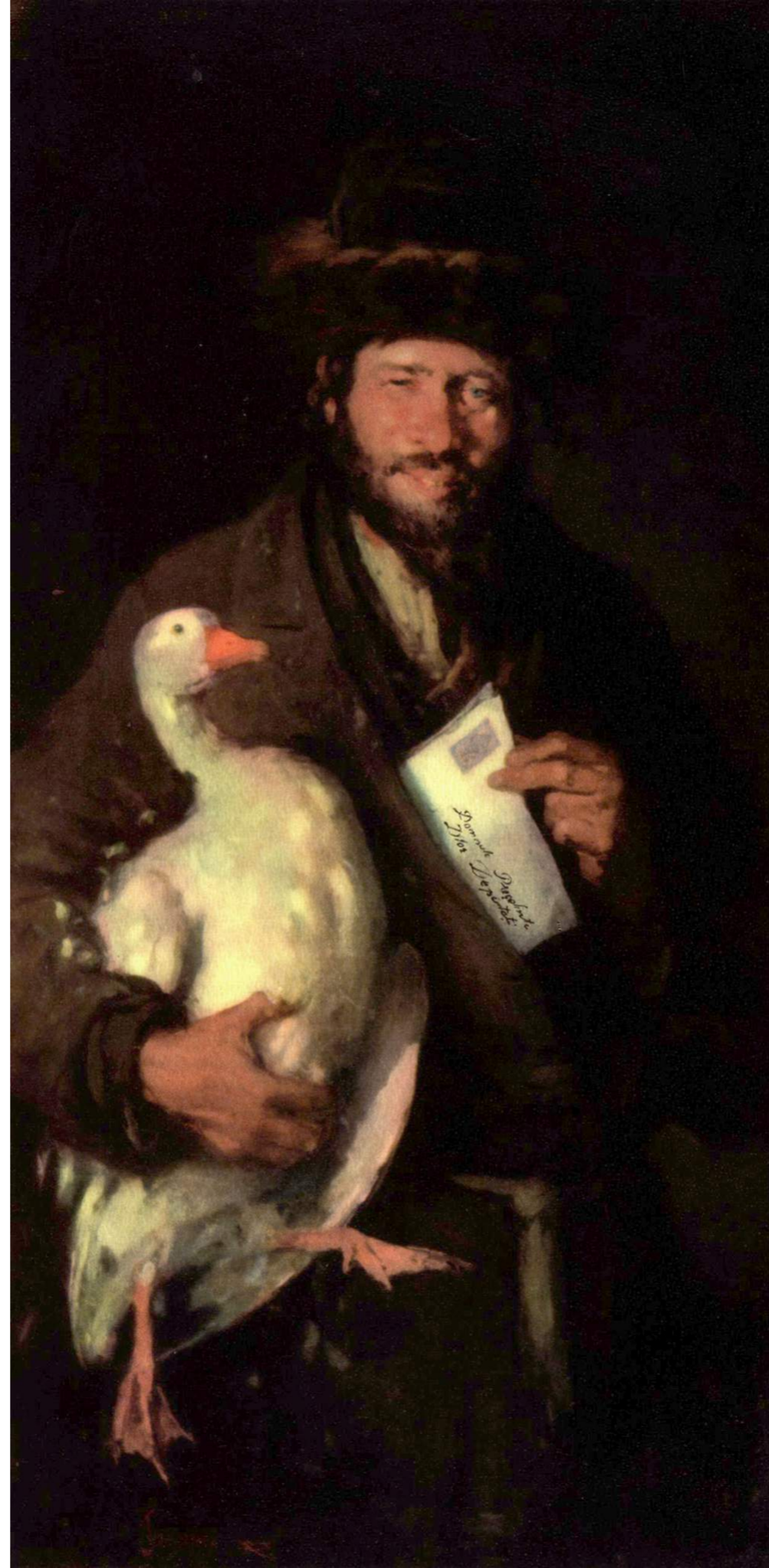






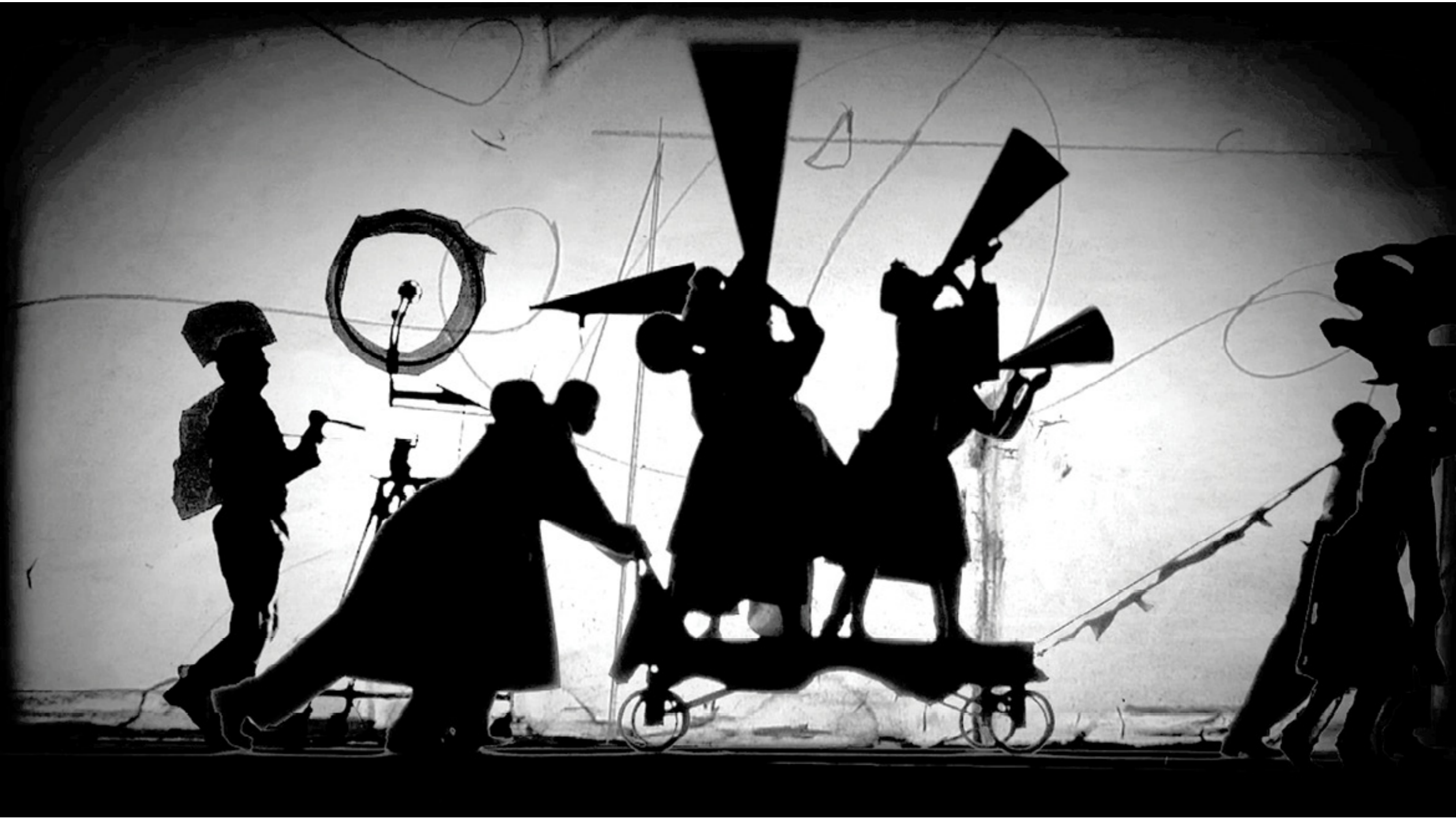




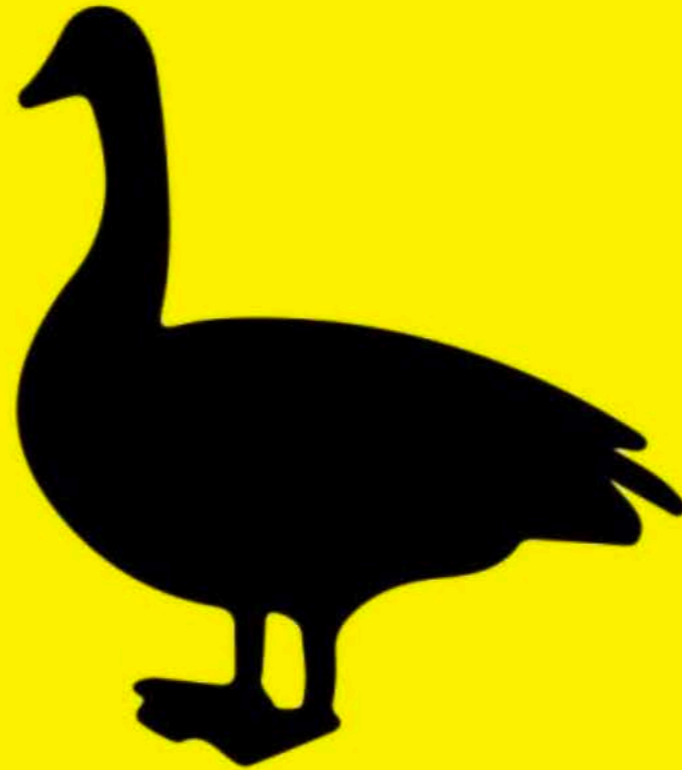








**WARNING
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