

Noemi Quagliati

flying visions atmospheres chicken eggs

THE BIRD SPACE IN THE HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY

This project aims at offering a reading of the history of Western photography that positions birds at its core. The research consists of three parts.

It first analyzes motion picture sequences and chronophotography of bird flights carried out by Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey, Ottomar Anschütz, as well as by nineteenth-century ornithologists. The study of animal flight modalities in the US, France, and Germany is contextualized within the early phase of aviation (e.g., bird flight as the basis of Otto Lilienthal's flights with gliders). In doing so, this part of the project explores the space occupied by birds as *objects* in photographic compositions.

The second part of the study describes another type of space assigned to domesticated birds in the nineteenth-century photographic industry. As a source of egg whites, chickens were essential *components* in the production of photographic printing materials. The albumen prints constituted the main positive photographic process in the nineteenth century. From the early 1870s, Dresden factories supplied most of the world's albumen paper processing up to 60,000 eggs daily, a work mainly accomplished by women.

The project concludes by considering the agency of birds as *subjects* of more-than-human photographic visions. It details the historical example of pigeon photography developed by the apothecary Julius Neubronner around 1900: a curious aerial photographic technique that consisted in securing a miniature camera to homing pigeons. Finally, by reflecting on the literal meaning of the expression "bird's-eye view," this study challenges the human-centered historical narration of aerial perspective and analyzes the point of view of the avifauna inhabiting or temporarily stopping in selected European grounds.