

# BEWICK'S DOG



In my favorite bookstore, Barter Books, in the old station in Alnwick, Northumberland, I found an old edition of Bewick's woodcuts. One of them shows a dog fearful of faces and monstrous creatures seen in some trees at night.

(Thomas Bewick (c. 11 August 1753 – 8 November 1828) – wood-engraver and natural history author working in the north-east of England, long the focus of my archaeological research.)



Pareidolia – seeing faces in things (and much more). A fascination of mine – detecting signal in the noise, separating figure and ground, figure in the landscape, figuration. Part of an archaeological sensibility.

The orthodoxy is to hold that there is no face there, that this is misrecognition. But the smiley emoticon ☺ is not a misrecognition of a face. No – pareidolia take us into experiences of the flux, indeterminacy, complexity of that within which we find ourselves – and in re-presentation to self – mediation, transcription, translation.

Bewick transcribes. How the world might present itself to us. In woodblock print ...

Back a while ago in my study of ancient Greek armor, corporality and physiognomy, I suggested that the face (through the Corinthian helmet, in the Gorgon's face on a shield) was simply an arrangement of holes/shadows/features upon a surface. I was inspired by a passage in Deleuze and Guattari's *Mille Plateaux*. Perhaps. I forget.

Bewick's woodblock is the cutting of highlights with burin into the surface of the block that will carry the black ink. Exactly. Eyes and mouth in wood, stone, whatever. Simply dark on light, light on dark. This is the energy of re-

presentation that surpasses distinctions between what is seen and experienced, and how it may be represented.

These are not misrecognitions. They are the substance of an archaeological sensibility that works on traces and remains.



Baucis (or Philemon?). Dolores Park, San Francisco. January 2018.



Sea coal found on the beach at Warkworth, Northumberland. Christmas 2023.