

STILLE FRAGMENTE GLIMPSED ONLY IN A CERTAIN LIGHT

What lies behind the enduring power of forests in our popular culture? There is something about forests and woodlands that appeals us to find and create narrative; a stage for countless fairy stories and myths the forest is deep in our psyche both known and unknowable, a place to get lost and to lose oneself. In folklore worldwide it represents a conscious power that can be enraged or placated but never fully understood, both a single entity and collective force.

The site of multiple dualities, interpretations of the forest include contrasts of science and nature; leisure and commerce and can be seen as a place where rights of access between state and the individual are a point of contestation.

A vital force spiritually and economically the forest remains a potent source for the imagination and debate.

Stille Fragmente is an exploration of this enduring fascination, bringing together the responses of photographer **Katja Kerstin Hock** and artist and writer **Emma Cocker** alongside an invitation to the public to contribute their stories.

For Hock, growing up in the 1970s near woodlands on the German Dutch border, the forest came to hold an important place in her personal and cultural history. It is a location to which she has returned to create images over several years, discovering in this process that the memory of the place she knew as a child has become detached from a particular site to become more of an essence or 'type' of space which she can now more closely associate with woodlands elsewhere. Searching for woods resembling those of her childhood memories has led her to photograph in Oxfordshire and most recently in Bestwood Country Park in Nottinghamshire, near to where she now lives.

For Hock the woods is at times both a dark and



mysterious place holding the unspoken trace of past brutalities and a space for contemplation and quiet adventure, its secrets kept at a distance through the camera lens.

Emma Cocker's writing is also a form of contemplation on the forest. Through a series of short reflections in prose she explores aspects of our understanding of woodlands, considering it as a force whose physical limits can never fully be encountered from a single point; as a space to wander; and as a gathering point and site of shared experience. Like woods themselves her text evokes our senses, but is never entirely descriptive, calling to mind sights and sounds the sources of which remain just beyond the limits of our actual perception. The reader is invited to journey through the text bringing their own senses and imagination to their experience of it.

Holding the images and text by Hock and Cocker is a box, this is intended also as container for participants

to collect their finds, writings, images or other artefacts associated with woodlands the box offers a symbolic gathering place for thoughts and ideas. Those who wish to take part in the project can join the artists at a number of events in Bestwood Country Park and Lakeside Arts Centre, or contribute through the project website which will continue after the events. Through these various strands it is intended to take the content of the project beyond the individual stories of the artists and designers involved and create a space also for the memories of others, where like the forest itself, the collective blends with the specific and myth with history, leading to new creative territory.

The artists would like to thank Arts Council England, Lakeside Arts Centre and Nottingham Trent University for their generous support of this project. Details of woodland walks and related events can be found at www.stillefragmente.co.uk.

Lesley Farrell ~ Independent Curator





KATJA KERSTIN HOCK ~ STILLE FRAGMENTE



NOT YET OUT OF THE WOODS

Over the years, the wood has been depleted of folkloric charge, its resonance eclipsed by stories about other places more intricately bound to the contemporary imaginary. It could seem that the wood had more potency or power back then, back before the city had replaced it as the site for **wandering or for getting lost**, for straying from the path. However, in turn of phrase, the wood has remained a site of societal unease, of **murky uncertainty**, an exit from which the errant traveller must strive to find. Older meanings and values thus **linger** in language as reminders or remainders of belief systems long since forgotten; ideas about the world now rejected or abandoned, now rationalized away. Attend then to the idiomatic, to the clichéd proverb or metaphor dropped casually into speech for it is here that a culture unwittingly reveals the persisting nature of its preoccupations. So, we are not yet out of the woods. No, not yet, since reference to the woods still speaks of **that which is challenging or uncertain**, the indeterminate situation within which one's guard must never fall. The welcomed clearing offers clarity, brief reprieve from the confusion of the trees, for the woods have **too much detail it would seem**. Close up the wood itself cannot always be seen; **too dense or intense**, it is difficult to get a sense of distance or perspective. Edges seem difficult to discern; boundary lines are hard to follow. **Bearings can get easily lost here**, since to the unfamiliar eye every pathway in the wood can look the same as any another. It is not the wood that is feared as such, but rather **the threat of the unknown** that it harbours; the risk therein of **losing one's way**, dizzy and disoriented...and of the **unimaginable or unthinkable** that might happen there, protected by the shade.





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DETERMINATE INDETERMINACY

shadows

The wood can play **tricks on the eyes**. In certain places it is not always possible to distinguish the figure from the ground. Trees conceal themselves in their own **shadows**; lines separating one thing and another begin to break down or fail. The wood presents an obstacle to neat classification, to distinctions made between black and white, form and empty void. The wood is always a **grey area** before a green space. Yet, its grey is not one of hazy ambiguity. The uncertainty therein is not so much produced by a deficit of vision, by sight diminished at the fall of twilight or veil of fog; rather, the wood remains **determinately indeterminate**. It becomes increasingly unclear or undecipherable the more visible its details, **unexpectedly more mysterious** when encountered in broad daylight. The wood's indeterminacy results from the excess of visual information therein, **its surplus of matter or materiality**. It is also temporally indeterminate; it has **an excess of time**. The chronology of clock-time does not fair well in the wood for here **one's sense of time is often lost** long before one's sense of place. The wood's rhythms pulse differently to the regulated beat of linear time, never synchronizing to the measured passing of seconds and hours. At first glance, the wood's rhythms seem programmed by natural **cycles of growth and decay**, slower than our own daily repetitions. Yet, this seasonal loop of rebirth and entropy is a fallacy, since the wood is shaped by **continually overlapping durations**. Its pulse is a multiplicity of rhythms infinitely folding and unfolding into other rhythms, into other rhythms... **Tense is disturbed** in the wood for the categories of past and future are not recognizable to the trees. Here, **all times are experienced simultaneously** in the present.





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ABSORPTION

Memories of other places

Every wood is haunted by stories of other woods. **Memories of other places**, of other times, are hidden in the undergrowth, brought to surface only in certain light. The slightest reminder draws **the rush of remembrance**: a crow calling; the distant sound of rain, falling; a barely perceptible change in the coolness of the air. It is not that all woods are the same, for **no wood is entirely like another**. Moreover, no wood ever remains unchanged.

Here then, memory is not provoked by recognition or likeness, by the visual proximity between here and there, or now and then. Rather it is through **something sensed involuntarily**, registered deeper in the body. Like the body's muscle, place has memory; it remembers events that the mind might rather forget or ignore.

A wood stores memories of things **that it never witnessed**, events that happened **elsewhere**. Memory is brought to the wood as much as produced by and within it. In mythological terms and in fiction, the wood appears an ambivalent site of sanctuary and torment, of abandonment and escape. So too in life, it is **a place of refuge** to which some turn to clear their mind, for **muffling** the noise of unwanted thoughts. The wood provides a ground to dump or dispose of that which has become burdensome, surplus to requirement. A bad day can be taken there and put to rest. Other things get **left behind in the woods**, disappearing in its half-light. The wood absorbs those that venture in. The **distracted** mind stills, fully taken by its surroundings; its thoughts in turn are taken by the wood. **The wood is absorbent**, soaked **full of secrets** trapped in its canopy or accumulating in dark sediment on the leafed floor. The wood is **a network of affective flows**, psychically scored with **invisible pathways** to sites returned to again and again, for quietly remembering and **for forgetting, for letting go**.





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FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

It is a rare thing to find oneself suddenly in the heart of a wood or forest. Clues around the periphery indicate towards a **gradual shift in the terrain**, to changes in the quality of light and of air. Habitat gathers density; trees ally, pulling together tethered by unspoken cause. Here, the true nature of a wood refuses to be fully mapped in topographical terms, for it is **always a force before it is a form**. Before it can be named, the pulse of the wood is felt. Every wood has been shaped as the vibrations of its internal rhythm meet with those of the external world. Attend to a wood's form then, for it attests to those moments in history when its own force encountered the pressure of other forces. The borders of any wood are **the site of continual negotiation**; contested places where a wood has breached a limit, or where it has been forced to give or yield. Yet, a wood's power is not determined in territorial terms, not in ground covered, nor in the acreage of its reach. Rather it is measured **according to what it holds back**, what it keeps at bay. Even the smallest wood can become the most impassable line of separation. Certain woods form **a natural boundary** between neighbouring districts or domains, dividing one community from another, shaping the identities of those on either side. The margins of a wood often bear the **trace of human occupation**, as individuals stake their claim to ownership or control. Trees carry the brand of rival loyalties and allegiances; **deeper in** it is not always possible to tell which side you are on. Here, lovers meet, and other things are traded. The wood is a site for rites of passage, a **zone of possibility**. Cross its threshold with due care then, for once inside, the ordinary laws and logic of society become somewhat unreliable, are **no longer** fully applied.





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HOLDING BACK WHILST USHERING IN

It is not only the steady creep of development and urban sprawl that the wood keeps at bay. Rather, it creates **the conditions of suspension**, where daily pressures and expectations can be put temporarily **on hold**. A wood asserts a different rule and order to the territorialized spaces that surround it, **a different quality of time**. Often passed through or traversed rather than strictly inhabited, it is tempting to view the wood as a space of **fleeting liberty** or reprieve. It can be imagined as a permissive terrain, granting the dual conditions of **freedom from** and freedom to. Yet, in this sense, the wood is **in danger of becoming romanticized** for its lawlessness; celebrated for what it refuses and resists (for what it is not) rather than for what it **affirms** or activates on its own terms. The wood does not present a neutral ground where anything goes, but rather highly **contingent**, precarious and always changing conditions, which must be navigated with due care and attention. Less a form of Romantic escape, time spent in the wood (as with other liminal landscapes) enables **the possibility of stepping back** from the structures and systems that govern everyday life, such that they might be reengaged with afresh. The wood thus functions as **a contemplative space** for rethinking the relation between how things already are and how they might yet be. In these terms, the critical capacity of a wood is not only determined by what it holds back, but also by what it might help to usher in, **the insights into the nature of things** that can be garnered there. Yet, this requires the attention of ready initiates, those willing and capable of seeing the wood as **more than just trees**. As its witness, the receptive individual makes a **commitment** to the wood, becoming practiced in the art of seeing beyond the register of the purely visible.





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SEEING BEYOND THE VISIBLE

The art of **seeing beyond what is visible** is not performed through an increase in the pressure of observation, through closer scrutiny, more intensive inquisition. It is not a case of getting nearer to the wood, for this will only amplify its detail, bringing the visible closer into range. Different means of looking produce **different registers of affect**; it is a question of finding the right method. The scientific glance is perhaps too incisive.

It strives to see beyond the visible by searching first beneath, anaesthetizing its subject before **peeling back its layers**. Nor will microscopic curiosity uncover the secrets of the wood's interior. Its lens creates further **opacity**, rendering the visible only **less familiar** to the eye. The act of looking harder, more forcefully, causes the wood to retreat or **withdraw**, for it does not respond well to such advances. Patiently then, for the wood will not give itself up so easily, its trust must be gained. To see beyond what is habitually seen is not achieved by pushing the visible aside, for certain truths become **too vulnerable** if forcibly exposed. **The visible is a veil** whose logic is only ever lifted, briefly; momentarily let to slip or fall. Openings in the fabric of the visible are thus not so much produced then as encountered, **fleetingly glimpsed**. Here, the glimpse operates as **an aperture in the real**, a portal to other places and times, both future and past. The horizontal landscape of the wood's present is ruptured by **another frequency of experience**, the vertical or vertiginous force of **something felt or sensed**. By catching both the wood and the witness off-guard, the glimpse is experienced as a **poetic fall** from or faltering within what is known or certain. It exists at **the cusp of recognition**, where the witness is left **unable to fully find the words** for communicating what they have seen.

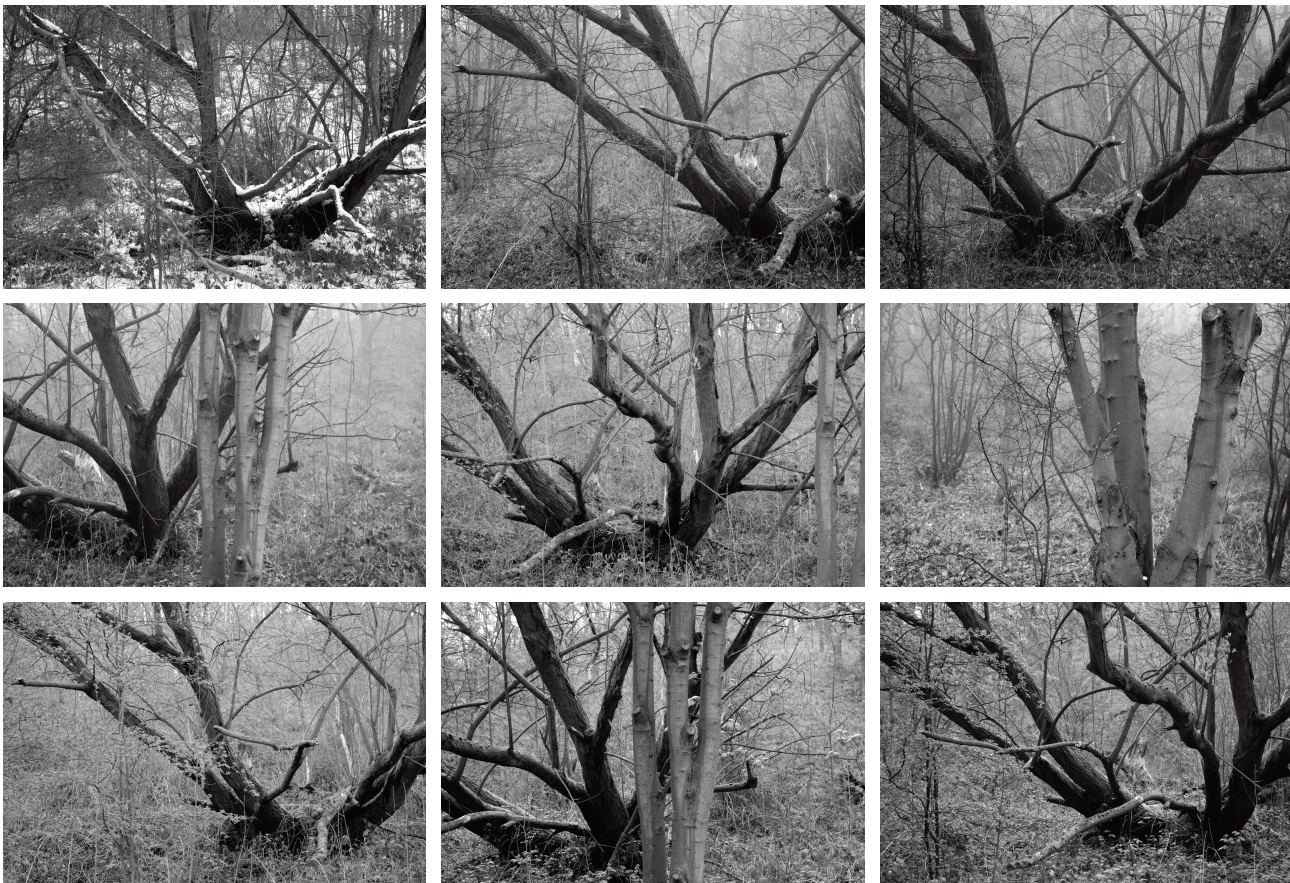




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BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

The glimpse is always a **little otherworldly**; it marks the opening of one world or reality onto the possibility of others. Those receptive to the glimpse thus inhabit **a zone between two worlds**, between now and elsewhere, between the actual and imagined. It is possible to conceive of such moments as the interruption of personal memory, **the déjà vu of the already seen**, when something encountered in the present returns the mind back to the past. It is easy to be reminded by the wood, for it is an evocative landscape. Every wood calls upon memories of other woods, of earlier times. Yet, the act of recollection fills the opening afforded by the glimpse, anchoring it too hastily perhaps within the realm of communicable experience. Here, the memory of **one landscape overwrites the experience of another**; the wood becomes a space of nostalgia, a site for recapturing what has gone, **what has been lost**. The task then is one of attending to moments when memory is triggered, without conjuring its specificity too quickly, without giving it too much shape. The witness thus attends to **the evocative potential of the wood**, not the details of what is evoked. By remaining in the present moment, focus stays fixed on **the eruptive instance where memory is called**. The act of witnessing attests to moments where the visible was momentarily ruptured by something felt, to points when the experience of 'now' became broken by a sense of 'then'. Photography is the practice of bearing witness, yet how to evidence that which is sensed rather than strictly seen? The photograph bears witness to the event of witnessing (**of being there**); it is to this that it is indexical, as much as to the landscape that it captures. The photographic record is a **partial testimony**, attesting only to what was visible. **The rest is latent**, below the surface of the image, promissory.





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TARRY

preoccupied

The poetic force of a wood is illuminated in those **instances of rare lucidity** that hint towards the interconnect-
edness of things, moments when a **glint of the mythic** or mnemonic breaks the surface of the prosaic or everyday.

The project of the witness is one of **attending** to these moments, of trying to capture their affect. Whilst
the glimpse cannot be planned for, it is possible to set up conditions which increase the likelihood of its

happening. A chance encounter comes unannounced; still, what can be prepared is a person's capacity for
recognizing its advent, for **noticing**. The potential witness might begin by practicing the art of looking,

by honing the forgotten huntsman's skills of **watching and waiting**, of biding their time. The wood is often
passed through in haste or distraction: by dog walkers, dutifully, twice daily, or by cyclists as circuit training

for straining limbs. The short cut skirts the wood's edge. The hungry forager keeps her nose to the ground.
For the weekender, the wood allows for a **quick brush with nature** before the (dreaded) return to work.

Teenagers would appear rather more **preoccupied**; the wood becomes the backdrop for other things. It is
regarded only in passing. To really see the wood then **requires a slower approach**, the witness must **learn to**

tarry, take her time. Tarrying lingers in a place long after the original reason for being there has faded, for
longer than is necessary. Necessity has no place within tarrying, for it is a practice purposefully without too

much purpose. In **becoming paused or still**, the person that tarrying stalls the pace of what is normative, creating
a **delay or gap** of attention within which they become witness to things that habitually go unseen.

Tarrying sets up the conditions of **receptivity or readiness**; it thus *makes* as much as awaits its chance to glimpse.





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KEEPING AT A DISTANCE

Be patient then, yet not passively so, for it is **not just a matter of waiting**. The witness must cultivate knowledge of the wood as the stalker regards the deer, becoming familiar with the wood's contours; its dips and hollows, its clearings and open glades. There are places in the wood that are **more conducive than others** to the chance glimpse. The periphery is never wood enough; a further threshold must be crossed. Counter-intuitively perhaps, familiarity with the wood's structural form (its visible or physical identity) enables the witness to better attend to **its capacity for strangeness**. Known well, the wood is no longer considered a site for getting lost or disoriented; it is not only in these terms that **it has potency or charge**. Feeling at home in the wood, the witness is **more sensitized** to moments when the wood turns, when it appears no longer only itself. It is in this sense that **the wood can seem uncanny**, when it appears doubled, both familiar and foreign at one and the same time. The witness looks for **other woods in the wood**, searching for moments when the wood is charged with the resonance of other places, **its present cleaved open** by a sense of the past. It is a task performed at a distance however, for **some degree of neutrality is required**. The witness's glance is to remain a little cool, for they are not trying to recuperate a moment past, nor relive their previous experiences of the woodland. Photography becomes **a tactic of estrangement**, its lens purposefully used to destabilize the sense of subjective point of view. Perspective appears willfully **unfixed**, floating and unanchored. Mediated through the camera eye, the witness's gaze becomes detached, dislodged from its privileged relation to a specific grounded body and its history. The act of witnessing is not so much about the witness then; it is **what they can testify** that matters.

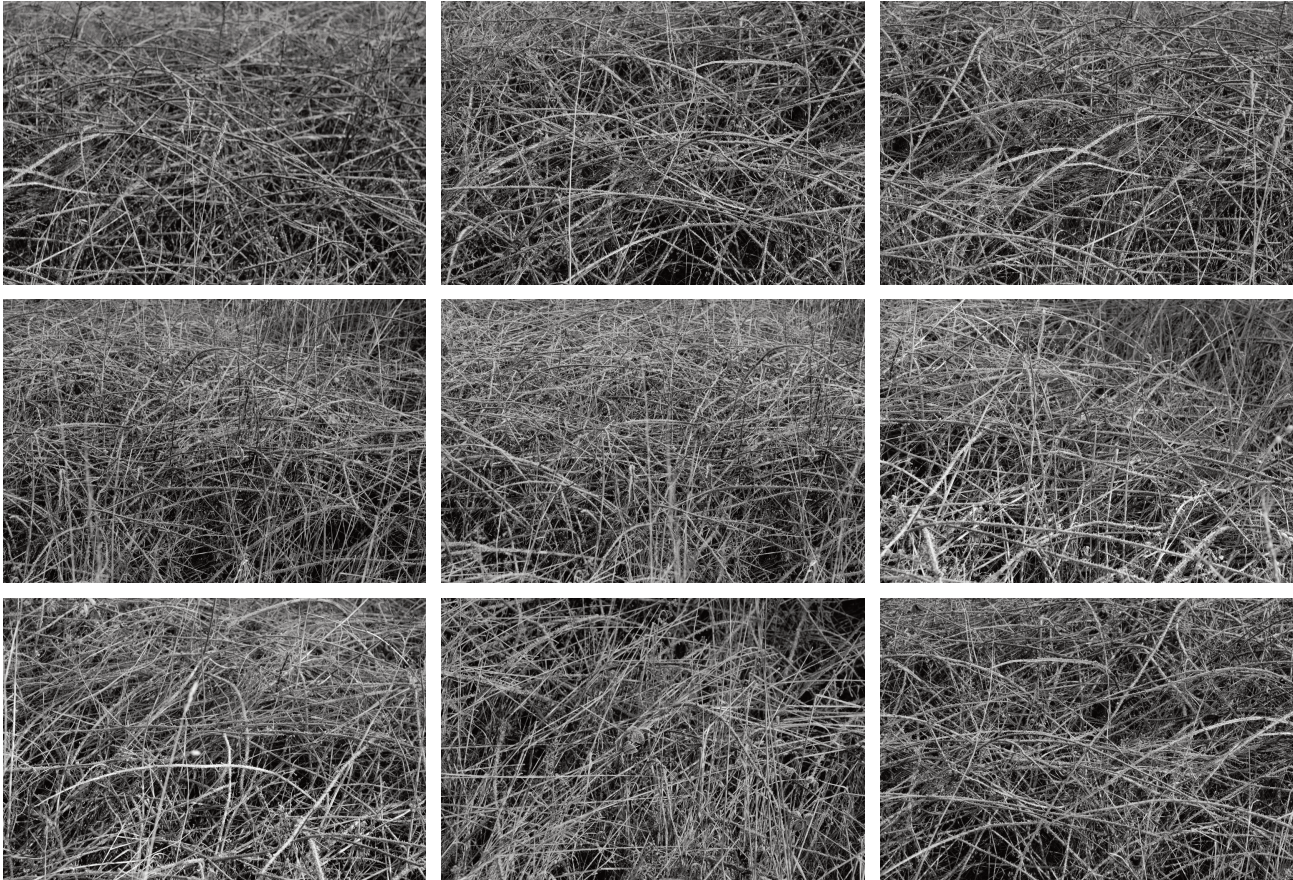




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RE-TURNING

There is always a gap

Documenting something glimpsed is almost impossible, for it must happen simultaneous to the encounter itself. **There is always a gap** between the event of seeing and recognizing what is seen. The photographic image is thus **never coextensive** with the decisive moment. There is always a space of hesitancy, an infra-thin pause between the decision to act and the act itself. The photograph is taken with a **degree of blindness**. The witness strives to **capture a moment of becoming** as the wood tilts or shifts, transformed by memory, by the resonance of other place and time. Yet, the likelihood of catching this glimpse of the wood on film is slim. No single image can hold still **such passing sensation**. In each frame, it is the being of the wood that is attested to, since once static, the wood appears only as the wood. However, the witness is persistent, inching her way around the wood, cataloguing it in different light, in different weather. The photographic record attests to an attempt made; it is **a hopeful practice**, for the chances of missing the mark are high. The endeavour might seem one of futile **repetition**; of returning back to the wood over and over again, endlessly striving to capture **something that refuses to be fully captured**. The witness knows this, uses it to her favour. For it is not so much in the single image that she hopes to catch a glimpse, but in the **turning** from one image to another. Unexpected openings in the wood emerge in the gap between the edge of one frame and beginning of next. Each sequence of images establishes a new route through the wood, **producing endless possibilities** for glimpsing it afresh. It is thus in the activation of the archive that the witness testifies to **the wood's force or intensity**, through **the event of sharing** her experience of the wood with others.

