Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird
by Wallace Stevens

I
Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II
I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

III
The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV
A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

V
I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

VI
Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass.
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it, to and fro.
The mood
Traced in the shadow
An indecipherable cause.

VII
O thin men of Haddam,
Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird
Walks around the feet
Of the women about you?

VIII
I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

IX
When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

X
At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply.

XI
He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.

XII
The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII
It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.

Thirteen Ways of Looking at Fukase
Amanda Maddox

In the final installment of his serial "Karasu," published in the November 1982 issue of *Camera Mainichi,* Fukase included a short text wherein he declared: "The ravens themselves weren't really the point. I myself had become a raven."[1] This enigmatic, often referenced passage has perpetuated his mythic status ever since, particularly in the wake of his debilitating fall in 1992, which resulted in a cerebral contusion that left him more or less incapacitated until his death in 2012. While the provocative metaphor has prompted much speculation over the years, it seems that the opaqueness is itself the meaning. Much like the raven's multivalent symbolism–the animal has been linked to solitude, death, darkness, evil, reason, intelligence, divinity, guidance, family, lost love, and more–there were many facets to Fukase and his work, none of them singularly comprehensive or tidy. As Fukase himself wrote: "I have as many faces as I have acquaintances."[2]

Toward the end of Fukase's statement in *Camera Mainichi*, he noted that both the magazine's editor Shoji Yamagishi and photographer Nobuyoshi Araki had recently returned from New York, where *Karasu (Ravens)* had been included in the exhibition *Japan: A Self-Portrait* at the International

[1] Masahisa Fukase, "Ravens: Last Episode," *Camera Mainichi,* November 1982, p.203.
[2] Masahisa Fukase, "Japan Perspective (7): Faces of me and people I know," *Asahi Journal,* July 7, 1972, p.57.

Center of Photography. He wrote that "about the series as a whole, [Araki] said: This is sheer formalism (an opinion that was largely shared by Shomei Tomatsu)."[3] Prompted by this assessment of *Ravens*, the text below offers a character study of Fukase that approaches him and his work through a formalist lens, using Wallace Stevens's modernist poem *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird* as both a source of inspiration and point of departure. Incorporating observations, anecdotes, and comments that emerged during interviews conducted with some of Fukase's friends and acquaintances on the occasion of his retrospective at Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, the following vignettes put forward discrete takes on Fukase that, collectively, may offer a more complex, complete portrait.

I. The Obedient Son

When Miyako Ishiuchi asked Fukase if he ever produced art using mediums other than photography, he demurred. "From the beginning, only photography," he said, adding "my family owned a photography business," as if that fact had determined his fate.[4]

"You never rebelled?" Ishiuchi asked. "I was an obedient son!," he replied.

By the time Fukase was born in 1934, his grandfather had already transferred ownership of the Fukase Photo Studio, in Bifuka, to Fukase's father, Sukezo (who had married into the Fukase family). As a child, Fukase spent considerable time in the studio; from the age of six, he was enlisted to help his mother wash the prints she made in a little darkroom. During high school, he received a camera from his father, who, he wrote, was "probably thinking that if I was going to take over the family business it was about time I got to know a little bit about photography."[5]

In 1952, Fukase left Hokkaido to study photography at Nihon University College of Art, a decision intended "to prepare me to take over the family business, as the third-generation heir," he wrote.[6] But ultimately Fukase did not carry the torch. The family business instead passed to his younger brother after Fukase elected to stay in Tokyo, where he'd met a woman and found a job. While this signaled a turning point in terms of his perceived responsibilities, it didn't mark the end of his engagement with his kin vis-a-vis photography. Beginning in 1971, when he returned to Hokkaido with his then-wife, Yoko, Fukase routinely enlisted his relatives to participate in offbeat family portraits, many of them shot in the *shajo* (shooting place) in Bifuka. These would later be compiled and known as *Kazoku (Family)*. Sometimes Yoko, as well as models who acted as stand-ins for her, would pose half-naked in these images, wearing only *koshimaki*. Fukase and his father also appear in *fundoshi* (loincloth) on occasion. Many family members effectively agreed to act the part, though, as publisher Michitaka Ota put it, "you can tell it's not natural how they smile."[7] Ota suspects they were mainly indulging Fukase's eccentric creative direction.[8] In staging these scenes, which over the years ranged from playful and ridiculous to solemn, upon the absence or death of previously included individuals, Fukase presents the classic family portrait, as well as the family unit itself, as simultaneously a construct and a farce.

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[3] Masahisa Fukase, "Ravens: The End," in *Setting Sun: Writings by Japanese Photographers*, ed. Ivan Vartanian, Akihiro Hatanaka and Yutaka Kanbayashi (New York: Aperture, 2005), p.191.
[4] "Back to the Portrait: Masahisa Fukase x Miyako Ishiuchi," *Image Forum*, August 1991, p.53.
[5] Masahisa Fukase, *Family*, (London: MACK Books, 2019), p.87.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Michitaka Ota, interview by the author, Tokyo, Japan, October 5, 2022.
[8] Ibid.

Fukase once referred to this project as “a parody of myself as the failed director of the Fukase studio, third generation.”[9] On one hand, this statement reads as an admission by Fukase that he knew he’d shirked his responsibilities as heir apparent when he became a freelance photographer. Yet it also acknowledges that Fukase did not fit the mold of a traditional photo studio director, and that ironically his success as a photographer came at the expense of rejecting the family business.

II. Ad Man

After graduating from Nihon University College in 1956, Fukase elected to stay in Tokyo rather than return to his hometown of Hokkaido. He soon found work at Dai-Ichi advertising agency, producing commercial photographs. Eight years later he took a job at Nippon Design Center, before becoming a freelance photographer in 1968. This early work proved formative for Fukase, as well as for many of his contemporaries. “Most of the progressive successful photographers in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Japan come from a commercial background: Fukase, Shinoyama, Sawatari, Takanashi, Yokosuka, Araki,” Kotaro Iizawa noted, because “in the late 1950s and early 1960s, commercial photography exploded… A lot of companies started spending a lot of money on advertising. It’s hard to believe now, but commercial photography was the trendiest form.”[10] According to Iizawa, “it’s important that Fukase came from Dai-Ichi and Nippon Design Center. That’s where he could touch and feel the trends in photography and develop his life as a professional photographer.”[11]

The influence of Fukase’s training registered quickly. In 1960, he landed his first solo exhibition in Tokyo, at Konishiroku Gallery, with images of an oil refinery that he’d originally made for Dai-Ichi. Two years later, the leading photo magazine in Japan, *Camera Mainichi,* published Fukase’s work across six issues. His connection with the magazine, which offered him a vital forum for sharing new and experimental work for more than two decades, extended to its managing editor, Shoji Yamagishi, who would include Fukase’s work in the landmark exhibitions *New Japanese Photography* and the aforementioned *Japan: A Self-Portrait*, which put Fukase on the map in the West.

The high-impact style celebrated by advertising agencies would have likely impressed upon Fukase the ways elements such as framing and staging can be harnessed by photographers and used as tools in their work. His long-standing appreciation of color was another outgrowth of his day job at Dai-Ichi; when Fukase got his start, color film remained largely reserved for commercial use. Iizawa also believes that “Fukase’s basic composition is a kind of collage. There are a lot of dialogues between things [in his pictures], which comes from his commercial background.”[12] Fukase’s output over the years seems to facilitate its own kind of dialogue between the aesthetics of commercial photography and his impulse to generate personal work.

III. Teacher

When Shomei Tomatsu returned to Tokyo in 1974 following a stint in Okinawa, he wanted to re-engage with the photography community that he had temporarily left behind. Curious to learn how the photo scene in the capital had evolved in his absence, he made a point of meeting with Daido Moriyama soon after he arrived. One week later, Tomatsu called Moriyama to say he wanted to start a *shashin gakko* (photography school). He asked Moriyama who else should be approached as teachers; Moriyama recommended Fukase and Araki.

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[9] Masahisa Fukase, “Hometown,” *Asahi Camera*, November 1972, p.159.
[10] Kotaro Iizawa, interview by the author, Tokyo, October 2022.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

This marked the birth of Workshop, a limited-enrollment photography school that ran for two years and also counted Eikoh Hosoe and Noriaki Yokosuka among its faculty, not to mention Mao Ishikawa and Keizo Kitajima among its students. In the absence of a formal schedule and common curriculum, each professional photographer was responsible for the content of his lectures, which were delivered to his own stable of no more than 20 pupils. According to photographer Masato Seto, Fukase's course was notably undersubscribed. Iizawa also heard that Fukase was the least popular lecturer within the school, probably because "he was not a service kind of person."[13] Based on a class portrait, however, it seems that Fukase may have had at least seven male students at one point, and apparently he led them by example, using *i-ei* (funeral portraits) of his parents and his then-wife Yoko as a prompt. Workshop also provided Fukase with an opportunity to publish a newsletter (the responsibility of each teacher) and produce photographs: extant prints feature his Workshop students standing beside Yoko, in the style of the *Kazoku* series.

Beyond the Workshop school, which met in an office space in Iidabashi, Fukase was generous with his knowledge about photographic techniques and processes. In the April 1963 issue of *Camera Mainichi,* he divulged step-by-step instructions for how to make composite photographs, multiple exposure images, and motion shots. Upon disclosing various tricks he used to generate several of his own works in the magazine, Fukase declared that he wasn't seeking a patent for his processes, and that "there's no such thing as a complicated and mysterious, secret method."[14] His willingness to share information extended to the unofficial mentorship that he provided to emerging photographers, such as Asako Narahashi and Masato Seto. "He was a teacher but he never really talked…he looked at the photographs and just said, 'Okay, all good,'" Seto observed, before adding that "if I asked him what he thought, then he would respond. After I started working as an assistant at the office, for the first six months he never really talked, but I could sense that he was actually listening to what I say when I talk about my work and my project because sometimes I could hear him giggle."[15] When Narahashi shared her pictures with Fukase upon meeting him in 1987, he responded by saying "I'm jealous of them!," a comment that encouraged her to continue.[16] After that meeting, Fukase made a point of visiting her exhibitions at her gallery 03Fotos.

He also helped acquaintances like Shuzo Azuchi Gulliver. After meeting Fukase at a disco in Shinjuku in 1967, Gulliver revealed that Fukase spent one night teaching him how to print photographs. In advance of this tutorial, Fukase told Gulliver to prepare an enlarger and other equipment at home, then walked him through the process of printing, dodging, and burning his photographs. Later on, Fukase leant his Nikon F 70 mm wide angle lens to Gulliver, and advised him on how to photograph his wife before she gave birth. Fukase even choreographed these compositions, according to Gulliver, by suggesting that half of the image show the background and half show a figure, in the style of his series "Shikei (Private Scenes)."[17]

IV. Silent Type

"He doesn't talk at all, *almost.* When we'd drink, he'd talk. He would get drunk all the time! And he got crazy when he was drunk. His character changed. But when he was drinking with me, that never happened, so I never had a bad experience drinking with him."[18]

-Miyako Ishiuchi

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[13] Ibid.
[14] Masahia Fukase, "Special Techniques for Expression," *Camera Mainichi*, April 1963, p.85.
[15] Masato Seto, interview with the author, Tokyo, October 1, 2022.
[16] Asako Narahashi, interview with the author, Tokyo, October 5, 2022.
[17] Shuzo Azuchi Gulliver, interview with the author, Yokohama, October 9, 2022.
[18] Miyako Ishiuchi, interview with the author, Tokyo, October 6, 2022.

“He didn’t talk so much. He didn’t look very friendly. Many people thought Fukase was a strong person, but I knew he was a very sensitive and delicate person. He could be shy. Unless he drinks. The drinking helped him.”[19]

-Daido Moriyama

“He was very quiet. I had a feeling that I didn’t need to talk with Fukase. I had a feeling that he accepted me when I wasn’t talking. I was comfortable with him, in the silence.”[20]

-Asako Narahashi

“He was very quiet, he didn’t say a lot, even though he would suggest that we go to the bar. We’d go and he would just sit there quietly. So then I would say, ‘Okay, I’m going,’ and then all of a sudden he would say, ‘Where are you going? Are you going to see your boyfriend?’”[21]

-Akiko Otake

“I am sure if he was here for this interview he would not talk at all.”[22]

-Masato Seto

“He had a gentle personality, and was very quiet. Normally photographers are very self-conscious and have strong personalities. He was not like that.”[23]

-Hiromi Tsuchida

V. Erythrophilic

“When I see something red, I can’t help but photograph it,” Fukase wrote in 1981.[24] His erythrophilia appears to have been common knowledge among his friends and colleagues. Akiko Otake remembered Fukase telling her that he “needed red,” while Daido Moriyama noticed Fukase’s affinity for that color during the first encounter, which took place by chance in the office of Shoji Yamagishi. In that meeting, Fukase looked through Moriyama’s slide film and was particularly impressed by an image that featured red. Moriyama recounted: “Fukase said, ‘I like this one,’ pointing to an image of the carpeted entrance of a Shinjuku coffee shop. ‘If Fukase-san says it’s good, it’s probably good,” Yamagishi said, and he selected images for 8 pages in the magazine.”[25]

From multiple exposures of crimson-hued bodies made in 1962 as part of the “Color Approach” series to images of stop lights and street signs reproduced in the 1985 photo-essay “Polacolored Works—Street Scenes,” red elements populate many of the color photographs that Fukase generated over the years. Looking across his output also reveals that Fukase produced several photo essays wherein the color red was much more than a tantalizing visual component—on occasion it served as the central theme or driving force behind his projects. For the series “A Play,” which depicts Juro Kara’s avant-garde Situationist Theater, Fukase likely deliberately used color film so that he could depict the group’s signature venue, a red tent, located on the grounds of the Hanazono Shinto Shrine in Shinjuku. Across the 1970s and 1980s, after moving to Harajuku following his divorce from Yoko, he often pictured the neighborhood in candid street scenes in which

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[19] Daido Moriyama, interview with the author, Tokyo, October 5, 2022.
[20] Op. cit., note 16.
[21] Akiko Otake, interview with the author, Tokyo, October 4, 2022.
[22] Op. cit., note 15.
[23] Hiromi Tsuchida, interview with the author, Tokyo, October 3, 2022.
[24] Masahisa Fukase, “Harajuku; Scenes in Tokyo 1,” *Nippon Camera*, August 1981, p.119.
[25] Op. cit., note 19.

the color red appeared. And in 1984, he devoted the entire photo essay “Red Zone” to the color, including images that featured only red-colored subjects, such as a *chochin* and koi fish.

What attracted Fukase’s eye to red is unclear, but it is telling that it was apparently the only color to feature prominently in his otherwise monochromatic project “Kill the Pig,” from 1961. Fukase created much of this series inside an abattoir in Tokyo, where he depicted pigs, horses, and cattle led to slaughter. He selectively used color film in this project, mainly when photographing the animals’ blood splattered on the walls and floors of the slaughterhouse, perhaps as a nod to the scene of red smoke in Kurosawa’s black-and-white film *High and Low*, which premiered in 1960. Generated not long after Fukase saw Ed van der Elsken’s book about an African safari, *Bagara*, which included an image of a stillborn baby elephant that apparently floored Fukase, “Kill the Pig” also coincided with the stillbirth of Fukase’s child with his then-partner, Yukiyo Kawakami. Purportedly inspired by *Bagara,* Fukase incorporated an image of his own dead child, as well as pictures of himself and Kawakami, in his project. These personal images, which formed a pendant to the abattoir scenes, precipitated the end of his romantic relationship with Kawakami, who left him shortly after *Kill the Pig* was shown and took their second child with her.

VI. Routine Oriented

Fukase was a creature of habit, a trait that characterized how he approached most activities in his daily life. Among his circle it was common knowledge that he spent every evening at Golden Gai. He had a prescribed route when he visited the neighborhood, which revolved around three specific bars: he started with Saya, which opened earliest, around 5 pm, then moved onto Kodoji before ending his night at Nami, sometimes as late as 3 am. These watering holes became his second homes, as well as places where he could hold court with the other patrons, many of whom admired his work. Toward the end of his life, the bars also doubled as source material. Sometimes they served as the backdrops in the series *Berobero*, which featured fellow customers and friends. (Even the proprietor Nami made an appearance in one image.) Fukase also regularly documented the rather mundane styrofoam and metal ice boxes in the alleys of Golden Gai during his bar crawls, eventually incorporating some in the project *Hibi.*

Fukase’s adherence to a routine extended to his photographic practice, with his last project *Bukubuku* epitomizing this approach. From his bathtub, Fukase made the self-portraits in Bukubuku over the course of one month, generally shooting at least one image per day. (His decision to employ the time-stamp functionality of his instamatic Konica camera underscored the daily exercise.) Masato Seto recalled that Fukase “would come to our office saying, ‘I’ve had three baths today,’ while filming *Bukubuku*,”[26] while Narahashi remembered that he photographed himself in the bath every morning, because he usually went to a coffee shop near the West exit of Shinjuku Station in the afternoons. The act of revisiting the same location and theme often constituted an integral part of the photographic process. In the series “From Window,” he photographed his wife Yoko every morning around 9 am from their fourth-floor apartment using a telephoto lens. Shortly after that he wrote: “Last summer I made a decision. Instead of being lazy I decided to take a picture of Yoko everyday for a year, even if it wasn’t fun.”[27] For both *Ravens* and *Kazoku*, which evolved over the course of multiple years and demanded that he visit Hokkaido repeatedly, the habit of returning helped to reinforce the ritualization of his picturemaking. In the same way that Josef Koudelka returned regularly to document Roma, or that Nancy Floyd has since 1982 consistently photographed herself in her environment to create what she calls a “visual calendar,” Fukase realized certain bodies of work in no small part because he imposed a structured routine.

[26] Masato Seto, *Masahisa Fukase Den* (Tokyo: Nippon-Camera, 2020), p.152.
[27] Masahisa Fukase, “Yohko, 1974,” *Camera Mainichi*, January 1975, p.44.

VII. Alchemist

For many years, Masato Seto worked alongside Fukase and served as his assistant. Privy to how Fukase photographed and printed his work, he likened him to a magician in terms of his technical skill:

"When we went to Hokkaido to photograph *Ravens* I was very surprised because it was totally dark. I tried but you couldn't see anything. I could only make out the separation between the sky and the trees, but you could barely see. I kept asking 'Can you really take photographs of this?' It was beyond the limits of photography. It was amazing that he kept pushing me to develop until the image came out. Normally it took 10 minutes to develop an image at 20 degrees Celsius. After 20 or 30 minutes, if there was no image, you had to raise the temperature to 30 degrees Celsius. If you adjust it higher, then the film melts. Because if you look at the negative, you can't see anything. There is nothing there. I told him, 'We can't do anything with this film. Let's throw it away,' but he kept saying, 'Let's try, try, try until an image comes out.' We did this experimental development, and then an image arrived. If Fukase had given up because the negatives were so thin, then we wouldn't have the images in *Ravens.*

There's one picture in *Ravens,* on one of the first 10 pages, that you could never print yourself because the negative is so thin. You need a lot of hands to mask. Whenever we had to do that kind of printing, I had to be there. So we set up an appointment at the darkroom. But you couldn't see anything. We wondered if the picture should or should not be in the book. I really recommended that it was in the book, so he agreed, finally. When it came to printing it in the darkroom, you needed more than two sets of hands for dodging and burning so that the print would come out. We positioned people so that we knew which hands would go where to ensure the print could be made. For him it wasn't challenging. He just believed in film, in negatives, in cameras. I think because he came from a family wherein his father worked in a studio, and that older generation believed in these techniques and that things that are invisible can be made visible….I think that's where [his belief] comes from. I'm sure if you look at Fukase's other works from this viewpoint that you make the invisible visible…."[28]

VIII. Aruku Me (Walking Eye)

Known to make pictures while prowling the city on foot, Fukase embodied the photographer-as-flâneur. "In my busy daily life, I often have taken about 100 photographs rolls of films of all sorts of unimportant things in these two years," he admitted in the August 1981 issue of *Nippon Camera*.[29] The issue contained the first installment of his project "Harajuku; Scenes in Tokyo," a compilation of strange fragments of urban life, from colorfully dressed young people (presumably Takenokozoku) to a building facade decorated with a red bow.

Two years later, another multipart serial in *Nippon Camera*, "Walking Eye," featured a mix of indecipherable still lifes, pedestrians in motion, and off-kilter, shadow-heavy cityscapes. By this point Fukase frequently made pictures without looking through the viewfinder, a process he described as if "my eyes, like tentacles, would get entwined with things, and before I knew it, the photograph would be taken."[30] This methodology drew from the playbook of Surrealism, a movement that embraced automatism, a form of unmediated artistic production divorced from conscious thought. Surrealists like Man Ray, whom Fukase knew and respected, also valued *flanerie* for its potential to conjure "the

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[28] Op. cit., note 15.
[29] Op. cit., note 24.
[30] Masahisa Fukase, "Note: Waking Eyes 1," *Nippon Camera*, October 1983, p.142.

disruptive forces which lay behind the facade of normality" in urban life.[31] The title "Walking Eye" suggests yet another connection to Surrealism—the eye was a popular subject in Surrealist art.[32]

Despite these references to a movement that celebrated randomness and the unconscious, the street scenes Fukase chose to include were anything but automatic or unimportant. The work in "Walking Eye" emerged in the wake of the self-reflective, soul-searching exercise that *Ravens* has come to represent. "The eye that had been taking pictures of ravens dancing in the jet-black darkness, as if watching itself, became the 'walking eye'…through the city in broad daylight. As he walked, he must have felt as if he were a raven,"[33] Masato Seto wrote. He also recalled that "it seemed as if Mr. Fukase was just taking pictures to 'kill boredom,' as he was fond of saying. However, as was always the case with Fukase, it was his method to search for something, start shooting, and then deepen his conviction."[34]

Like ravens, which may return to the same nest year after year, Fukase apparently felt some pull toward his former residences in Tokyo, enough to revisit and document them for "Walking Eye." Among the locations featured in the series are an area near the Arakawa River, where Fukase lived as a student, and the Matsubara Danchi complex, which he and his ex-wife, Yoko, once called home. Fukase once likened the process of revisiting his old neighborhoods to watching a train wreck or horror scene (*kowai mono mitasa*), suggesting that his artistic production involved some degree of self-inflicted torment.

IX. Corporeal

For his ongoing conceptual project *Body Contract*, initiated in the 1970s, Shuzo Azuchi Gulliver divided himself into 80 parts that designated individuals must preserve upon his death. To confirm these bequests, he requires each beneficiary to execute an agreement. In 1974, Gulliver asked Fukase to participate, assigning his friend to *Body: contract #58*, which corresponded to the liver and bile duct. It was a tongue-in-cheek pairing, as Fukase was prone to heavy drinking and did not take pains to hide it.

The body as subject, and specifically his own body, likewise intrigued Fukase. In the early 1960s he experimented with interspersing pictures of nude figures (that of his partner and himself) among the images he made at the slaughterhouse in "Kill the Pig" This set the stage for various representations of bodies in the 1970s and 1980s, from his depiction of Yoko on the kitchen counter covering her modesty with a dinner plate to formal portraits of his family in various states of dress for the project *Kazoku.* An image of Fukase's hand appears in Miyako Ishiuchi's *Chromosome XY*. (Ishiuchi noted that he was one of the few male photographers of his generation who agreed to pose for her series. Apparently Moriyama declined by saying he needed to go on a diet, while Tomatsu responded that he could take his own picture of himself.) But it wasn't until "Private Scenes" in 1989 that he pictured himself prominently within his work, dominating the picture field with his face and body. Recounting that shift, Fukase wrote: "Last spring, on a whim, I began taking photos that included parts of my body within the frame, and I've spent all my time on this since then. It might be my hands, my feet, my face–snapshots of the city refashioned in my own way."[35] From this moment, which coincided

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[31] Ian Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams: Surrealism and Documentary Photography in Interwar Paris* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p.32.

[32] Tomo Kosuga also discusses this project's connection to Surrealism in *Masahisa Fukase 1961–1991 Retrospective* (Tokyo: akaaka, 2023), while Simon Baker also notes Fukase's interest in Surrealism in "Masahisa Fukase: An Introduction," in *Masahisa Fukase* (Paris: Éditions Xavier Barral, 2018).

[33] Op. cit., note 26, p.125.

[34] Op. cit., note 26, p.148.

[35] Masahisa Fukase, "Private Scenes: A Letter," *Nippon Camera*, December 1990, p.119.

with an instamatic 35 mm camera becoming his preferred device, Fukase compulsively turned the camera on himself, a practice that culminated with the revealing bathtub snapshots made for *Bukubuku.* These tightly composed, uncompromising and sometimes uneasy displays of flesh relate to work being made contemporaneously in the United States by photographers such as Laura Aguilar and John Coplans, whom Fukase referenced in an interview shortly before *Private Scenes* opened. “He’s more than 60 and photographs his own body….It’s pretty powerful work, taking photographs of his own wrinkles,” Fukase remarked.[36] But unlike Coplans, who sometimes relied on an assistant to click the shutter, Fukase worked alone and kept his compact point-and-shoot camera close. “I’m not interested in shots of myself taken remotely – with a timer, or anything like that. I want to see what happens when I take the shots, with a camera that is only an arm’s length away.”[37] As Akiko Otake observed, “there is no space between the camera and himself. He tried to use the camera as one of his body parts.”[38]

X. Thief

Around the time he was completing *Ravens,* Fukase visited Matsubara Danchi, where he’d lived with his first wife following their wedding in 1964. Upon returning to the neighborhood for the first time in more than a decade, Fukase wrote: “It was as if I had seen some horror, or was a thief returning to the crime scene. There was no reason for me to feel like a thief, but there was something behind the photographs I took there. I don’t know what it’s like to pickpocket, but I cannot deny there was a thrill and pleasure that’s probably like the one you get picking pockets. Shooting is stealing, so I felt like a villain.”[39]

In the article “Becoming a Raven: Self-Representation, Narration, and Metaphor in Fukase Masahisa’s ‘Karasu’ Photographs*,”* Philip Charrier expands on this analogy, stating that Fukase’s “photographing of Yōko was not unrelated to pickpocketing, and hence represented a kind of theft.”[40] To support this, he writes, “Yōko strongly dislikes the aforementioned photo of herself on the kitchen counter and says that it was taken against her will; Fukase used it anyway for his first ‘Yoko’ piece in *Camera Mainichi* in 1974, and included it in his book *Yōko* even though he had promised otherwise.”[41] Even if Yoko was playing along with Fukase and performing for his camera at the time, it seems telling that circulation of that image (as well as several others depicting her) in print has all but ceased.

Others who knew Fukase couched his thievery in more playful terms. Gulliver noted that a 1973 issue of his self-published brochure *The Second Life of Gulliver,* a serial that Fukase sometimes contributed to and would have known, featured underwater self-portraits. “I made these before *Bukubuku*,” Gulliver jokingly remarked, a comment further softened by his explanation that everything he knows about photography he learned from Fukase. Likewise Saya recalled how she lent Fukase a copy of Chibi Maruko-chan, a shojo manga series that he expressed interest in but never returned to her. He did, however, give her a print of *A Game: Lips & Needles*, an experimental work he made using the 20x24 Polaroid camera for which she had posed. After recounting these memories, she laughed and said, “he was a very cute person,” suggesting that thievery could be part of Fukase’s charm.[42]

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[36] Op. cit., note 4, p.52.
[37] Op. cit., note 4, pp.50–51.
[38] Op. cit., note 21.
[39] Op. cit., note 1.
[40] Philip Charrier, “Becoming a Raven: Self-Representation, Narration, and Metaphor in Fukase Masahisa’s *Karasu* Photographs*,” Japanese Studies*, 29:2 (2009): p.214.
[41] Ibid., p215.
[42] Saya, interview by the author, October 6, 2022.

XI. Cat Person

Although born in the year of the dog, Fukase spent most of his life in the company of cats. His immediate family counted a calico cat named Tama among their ranks for more than a decade of his childhood. When Fukase moved to Tokyo for university, he got his own cat, Kuro, to fend off rats in his vermin-infested apartment. Another string of feline pets followed until 1977, when, in the wake of his divorce from his first wife (her mother ended up taking care of their cats, Kabo and Hebo), Fukase suddenly found himself alone. He soon filled that void with a stray kitten gifted to him by photographer Yutaka Takanashi. Upon meeting that cat for the first time, Fukase wrote: "As soon as we got home, the kitten started jumping about and exploring, showing no sign of fear in this unfamiliar environment. I immediately thought of the fictional ninja Sarutobi Sasuke, and I decided to call him Sasuke, hoping that he would grow up big and strong and manly."[43] Ten days later, the cat escaped. After posting "Missing Cat" signs around his neighborhood, he heard from someone who was convinced she'd found Sasuke. Ultimately, she presented him with a different lost cat, but he nevertheless took in this imposter kitten, which he also named Sasuke.

Between 1978 and 1979, Fukase published three books and multiple magazine spreads that featured the second Sasuke, and on occasion included another cat, Momoe. The concentrated, obsessive way that Fukase approached Sasuke as a photographic subject rivaled his erstwhile preoccupation with Yoko, whose star turn in Fukase's photographic projects ceased with their divorce. Both his cat and his first wife possessed the ability to captivate him, and both posed tirelessly. In turn he devoted himself to documenting them, even at the risk of repeating himself or wasting film. Toward the end of his marriage to, Fukase committed to photographing her for one year, no matter how bad the pictures might turn out. He also reportedly spent one year depicting Sasuke and Momoe at eye level, which led him to declare: "I spent so much time lying on my belly …. that I became a cat."[44] Much like Yoko once argued that Fukase was in fact photographing himself when he aimed the camera at her, Fukase admitted in *the Strawhat Cat* that "this collection is really a 'self-portrait' for which I adopted the form of Sasuke and Momoe." Ota underscored this observation, stating that "in Fukase's photographs of cats, their faces look like his."[45]

These similarities, combined with Sasuke's timely arrival in the months after Yoko's departure, prompted some critics to refer to the cat as a replacement muse for Fukase's first wife. But Fukase photographed cats long before Yoko left him. He noted that cats had been present in his life since he was three years old, almost as long as photography, the trade he'd effectively entered at birth by way of his family's photo studio. "Basically, in the forty years I've been on this earth, cats have been following me around like a shadow. 'Like a shadow' – it sounds rather photographic, doesn't it?"[46] With this metaphor, Fukase alludes to the difference between Sasuke and most of his other subjects: like shadows, cats were relatively docile subjects that Fukase could direct and stage. Sasuke and Momoe became his in-house theatrical troupe, performing dramas in front of his camera. Fukase recognized this potential in the second Sasuke right away: "When I first set eyes on this cat that was not mine, I was disappointed, but as I'm a real cat lover and can't resist them, I soon thought: 'Come on, let's pretend that it's him,' and that's how I came to adopt Sasuke Two."[47]

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[43] Masahisa Fukase, "Sasuke Diary," in *Sasuke* (Tokyo: akaaka, 2021), p.9.
[44] Masahisa Fukase, "The Strawhat Cat," *Camera Mainichi*, March 1979, p.38.
[45] Op. cit., note 7.
[46] Op. cit., note 43, p.8. Thanks to Tomo Kosuga for providing access to this publication and the English translation of the quotation.
[47] https://www.creativeboom.com/inspiration/a-tender-and-joyful-portrait-of-cat-companionship

XII. Joker

Fukase was usually in on the joke. “He would bring me cheap accessories every time we’d meet, necklaces, earrings from Takeshita Street….it was like a game,” Miyako Ishiuchi recalled of her encounters with Fukase when he lived in Harajuku, in the 1970s.[48] By that point, he’d increasingly found ways to transfer his sense of humor into his work, as well, introducing playful comic elements into the compositions. He hired models as stand-ins for his wife and posed in his underwear alongside his elderly father (also in underwear) for the series *Kazoku*. He portrayed his cat Sasuke posing in sunhats and smoking a cigarette. He punctured his own portrait with pushpins and rephotographed it with a 20x24 Polaroid camera, resulting in a trompe l’oeil for the aptly titled series *A Game.* He developed two other projects, *Berobero* and *Bukubuku*, from the onomatopoeias for the sound of tongues touching and bubbles bubbling, respectively.

“I have a tendency to find myself amusing, and at the same time, I try to make people amuse themselves,” Fukase said.[49]

“He said he always tried to put some funny-ness into photography, but rather than being funny or humorous, I feel strangeness in looking at *Kazoku*,” Akiko Otake recalled, noting the tension visible in the body language and forced smiles of those staged studio portraits. [50] Ishiuchi also remarked that she has difficulty looking at this series to this day, as it visualizes “the weight” of the complicated relationship between Fukase and his father.

“Also, I remember that Yoko-san [his first wife] said in some book that she liked him because of his seriousness. That’s interesting,” Otake said.[51]

XIII. Egoist

After meeting Fukase in 1963, Yoko often performed and modeled for his camera, appearing in numerous series during the course of their relationship. She became his wife in 1964, and his primary source of inspiration, assuming center stage in projects that ranged from the multi-year series *Kazoku* to *Bride,* a magazine feature. In 1973, despite their strained marriage, Fukase affirmed his commitment to Yoko as the subject of his work: “I’m going to photograph Yoko for a year, even if it’s not interesting, and I’m not going to do it lazily.”[52] Two years later, when Yoko initiated their separation, she not only severed their romantic relationship but also ended their creative collaboration. In their divorce she took “her potential to be a Fukase art photograph, which by that time had become his most precious source of artistic creation.”[53] However, in the wake of her departure, Fukase developed *Ravens,* a project that “grew out of the pain caused by Yoko’s decision to end their relationship for good.”[54] He also channeled his anguish into an image published in 1975, which shows Yoko’s funeral portrait behind broken glass and partly obscured by a painting he’d stabbed while drunk, likely an allusion to the domestic violence he may have endured when young and perpetrated as an adult.[55]

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[48] Op. cit., note 18.
[49] Akiko Otake, “The Voices of Postwar Photographers That Can Only Be Heard Now: Masahisa Fukase,” *Geijutsu Shincho*, March 1994, p125.
[50] Op. cit., note 21.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Op. cit., note 27.
[53] Op. cit., note 39, p.213.
[54] Op. cit., note 39, p.228.
[55] For further background on this topic, see Charrier.

“In the ten years we lived together, he really only looked at me through the lens of the camera, and the photographs that he took of me were unmistakably depictions of himself,” wrote Yoko in a text titled “The Incurable Egoist.”[56] Fukase corroborated this assessment, admitting their relationship revealed the “paradox of being together for the sake of photography,” and later stating in the context of his series *Privates Scenes* that “everything I photograph is a projection of myself.”[57] Seto took this claim even further, arguing that the images of “ravens, cats, and even pigs are all Fukase himself.”[58] It is in this context that critics and scholars tend to categorize him as an “autobiographical photographer” whose work espouses the kind of *shi-shashin* (private photography) popularized by Provoke-era photographers, though it bears noting that Fukase apparently did not describe his pictures as *shi-shashin* or refer to his publications as i-novels, a term used by Araki to classify his own personal, intimate projects, such as *Sentimental Journey*.

“I take pictures only for myself,” Fukase repeatedly declared, though it’s unclear to what end they ever really served him because, as he once revealed, “I kept dragging loved ones into my work in the name of photography, but I never could make anybody happy that way – not even myself. I wonder whether I’m truly enjoying myself when I take photographs?”[59]

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[56] Yoko Fukase, “The Incurable Egoist,” *One Hundred Photographers: Their Faces and the Works, Camera Mainichi,* 1973, p.73.

[57] Masahisa Fukase, interview by Chotoku Tanaka, “Serials 5: The Case of Masahisa Fukase,” *Camera Mainichi*, August 1982, p.265; https://michaelhoppen.viewingroom.com/artworks/29339-masahisa-fukase-private-scenes-untitled-1992/

[58] Op. cit., note 26.

[59] Op. cit., note 27 p.45.