Perhaps Lafcadio Hearn will not protest too much if I paraphrase (almost word for word) from Kokoro, his 1895 book of Japanese life. He explains this important Japanese term far better than I ever could:

The entries comprising this volume treat of the inner rather than the outer life, — for which reason they have been grouped under the title Kokoro (heart). Written with the above character, this word signifies also mind, in the emotional sense; spirit; courage; resolve; sentiment; affection; and inner meaning, — just as we say in English, ‘the heart of things.’
#140
Wisdom Inherited
Wisdom Inherited

The Miracle of Literacy

Brooks Jensen
We may have *discovered* fire and the wheel, but we *invented* language and the written word.
Søndernes Toralløse og Korsfold bønne dem som er bølgeløse ved Troom pa mig. V. 35, 5; 77, 6; 1. R. 1, 18. R. 1, 18.

19. Detfor, Kong Agrrippa, ble jeg ikke ubådigt med det himmelske Sønne; men


22. Saa bag jeg da saaet Хiеп fra Схід og fægt til denne Dag og ubjerg

23. at Meydab Frihed ibed, og at han

24. Men da han forfærdede sig så−

25. Til Kongen hendes til Mester, og til

26. Men Agrippa fattede sig i

27. Briten, Ditlev, tilbage og fattede

28. I der Fader, som de fattede sig i Sand

29. Da han baade gift og som fattede sig i

30. Fra den form, som de fattede sig i Sand

31. En Dette sag, som de fattede sig i Sand

32. Og da han baade gift og som fattede sig i

33. Da de fattede sig, som de fattede sig i Sand

34. Og da de fattede sig, som de fattede sig i Sand

35. Og da de fattede sig, som de fattede sig i Sand

36. Og da de fattede sig, som de fattede sig i Sand

37. Og da de fattede sig, som de fattede sig i Sand
ano segun declaración, que compró
y cinco y media de la mañana. Hijía
María de Aragón, su hija. Y nació
Juan de Sanz y Mapalena de
naturales, el del lugar de Derríñez Se
llama Díezco. Materno, hijo de Pra
esta Ciudad, y naturales, el de la An
Villa de Bilbao. Su padrino.
 así el patente co que contrajo, y para.
How is it not a miracle that we can know the thoughts of someone who lived and died a 1000 years ago?
What the thinkers of old thought may be important, but the fact that we can know what they thought is amazing.
The Richest Man in the Village

A One-Picture Story
We were told he was the richest man in the village and wanted us to pay him to make his portrait. My translator — thinking quickly — improvised a white lie: “He has come all the way from America to photograph you.”

He looked at me intently for a few moments and said, “Ok, but only if he buys a chicken.” We paid for the chicken and then conveniently forgot to take it with us. I had no doubt he was, indeed, the richest man in the village.
#141

Pines in the Sky

(A Seeing in SIXES sketch)
A deep breath of pine
and the world rights itself.
Vespers Fruit
A One-Picture Story
It was my second day photographing at this mountain monastery in Lishui, China. This monk was the only person I’d seen all morning and he spoke no English, but he did allow me to photograph and wander the temple grounds at will.

About 4pm, the other monks started to gather in their formal meditation robes for evening service — the Buddhist equivalent of vespers. I had an inkling what was about to happen, so I positioned myself just outside the main temple and started my audio recorder. Wanting to be respectful of their service, I assumed a standing Buddhist position and just listened, without photographing, during the 45-minute ceremony.

After the service was concluded, I noticed all the monks were given a large bag of fruit by the head monk and they wandered off to their dormitory. I turned to leave and was just heading down the steps when the head monk tapped me on the shoulder. I turned around to see him smiling at me with a bag of fruit extended toward me as a gift. I bowed, he bowed, I bowed again, he bowed again and handed me the bag. We said our goodbyes and I left the temple. Perhaps he just had an extra bag of fruit. Perhaps he might have thought I was hungry after spending all afternoon photographing the temple. Or perhaps it was a gesture of inclusion because I had participated, in my limited way, in their daily vespers ceremony. I’ll never know for sure, but I also know I’ll never forget his smiling face.
#142
Gratitude
Gratitude

Brooks Jensen
We cannot escape the fact that we are all creatures who eat other creatures. To live is to chomp and grind and swallow other living things. We genteelly ignore this undeniable truth to ease our guilt for inflicting such pain on our innocent meals. But guilt and numbing ignorance are not the only responses.
The Buddhist mealtime vow begins, “We must think deeply of the ways and means by which this food has come.”

Thinking deeply, with a heart of gratitude toward the plants and animals that are about to become us, and not forgetting all the people in the process who give us the gift of life. Gratitude. Amen.
Some people eat only plants to show their compassion. How do we know that plants aren’t feeling pain or suffering in their own way?

We are left with two choices: stop nourishing ourselves, or cultivate a compassionate gratitude. As Alan Watts once said, “A chicken that is not cooked well has died for you in vain.”
Photographed at the Anchang Village outdoor market near Hangzhou, China
Wynken, Blynken, and Bacon

A One-Picture Story
My brother-in-law, Tom, is retired and now spends his time as a “gentleman farmer.” When I was in China and saw these pigs, I remembered Tom’s adventure raising three turkeys: he named them Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Lucky. Hence, my title for this photograph: *Wynken, Blynken, and Bacon*. It takes all my will power to not put thought bubbles above these guys.
I'm Wynken. Really. I'm NOT BACON!

I'm NOT BACON!

Do I look like Bacon? How ridiculous. He’s Bacon, I’m Blynken.

He’s Bacon, I’m Blynken.

Wake me when he’s done with his stupid picture.

Wake me when he’s done with his stupid picture.
#143
Fog in the Hills and Aits
Fog in the Hills and Aits

Brooks Jensen
Inspired by Charles Dickens
Fog everywhere.

Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls deified among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon and hanging in the misty clouds.

Gas looming through the fog in divers places in the streets, much as the sun may, from the spongy fields, be seen to loom by husbandman and ploughboy. Most of the shops lighted two hours before their time—as the gas seems to know, for it has a haggard and unwilling look.

From the opening page of the 1852 novel *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens
Just on the other side, it's just there, we know it is, just beyond our grasp, hidden in the fog. Enlightenment, wealth, love, fame, answers — life is lived in the fog.

Dickens used fog in his great passage from *Bleak House* to symbolize the law, but the metaphor goes much deeper, I think. What area of life is not shrouded in a foggy limitation beyond which we cannot see? As it was called by that Christian mystic lost to history, the “cloud of unknowing” — it is the impenetrable mist of our very existence. Perhaps that is the innermost nature of life — fog, everywhere we look, everywhere we are, the sun just beyond our grasp, tantalizingly close, yet not quite attainable, glimpsed but not ours.
Basketball Rocks
A One-Picture Story
In 1940, my father was starting his college life at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, where I was born 14 years later. Dad loved basketball. I mean, he really loved it. And in 1943 he was a member of the men’s basketball team that won the National Championship that year. It was the highlight of his sports life and quite an accomplishment for a guy who started — well, I suppose I should tell his story from the beginning.

On the family farm in Bear Lake, Idaho, he wanted so desperately to learn the game and hone his skills. There was no basketball court in his school, no coach, no chance for him to learn. Nonetheless, he did what he could. Decades later during a family reunion at the farm, he took my brother and me out back and showed us where he’d hung a loop of wire on the side of barn to simulate a basketball hoop. He “shot” rocks as though they were basketballs and used the barn as the backboard. He wore a hole in the barn wood that was still there, forty years later.

Dad died in 1990, but three years later my brother and I attended, in his place, the 50th Anniversary celebration of the University’s national basketball victory. I still have the commemorative coin and the memories of my rock-shooting father.
Human, Not Human
Human, Not Human

Brooks Jensen
Why do we humans find inanimate replications of ourselves so comforting, so entertaining, so ubiquitous? We don’t sculpt or carve rocks to imitate rocks. We don’t imitate clouds or trees – unless disguising a cell phone tower. For reasons that escape me, we seem to love surrounding ourselves with humans that are not human.
Quite honestly, I find it hilarious.
The BB Gun Free Throws

A One-Picture Story
One more story about my Dad and basketball.

He was remarkably accurate at the free throw line. It was his claim to fame. Once, all of us went to a fair — it might have been the county fair in Laramie, or maybe it was the State Fair in Cheyenne, I’ve forgotten now — and they had a carnival booth where you could win prizes by making free throws. My older brother and I begged him to win the BB gun, but he resisted, explaining that the hoops were just a little smaller than regulation and the balls were over-inflated to make them harder so they would bounce off the rim. It wasn’t really “rigged,” but it wasn’t regulation either. We didn’t care. We wanted that BB gun.

At long last, we wore down his resistance and he stepped up to the line, paid for his ticket — and then sunk 27 free throws in a row. We had our BB gun. It wasn’t a very good one, and it didn’t shoot BBs more than about 20 feet, but Dad had won it for us and we treasured it like it was the best gun ever made.
#145
Protection from Evil
Protection from Evil

Brooks Jensen
Niō or Kongōrikishi are two wrathful and muscular guardians of the Buddha, typically standing at the entrance of Buddhist temples. They are assistants to the bodhisattva Vajrapāni, the oldest and most powerful of the Mahayana Buddhist protectors from evil spirits. They are also known as the Benevolent Kings.
The other common protectors from evil are the dragons and lions dogs that frighten away those who are not welcome.
If I were an evil spirit, the Guardians would frighten me away.
Wisdom Inherited

Just imagine life without literacy – or even language at all! No wisdom handed down unless directly by word of mouth. We are so fortunate that we can read and that though this simple fact, we can know so much.

Tech notes: Four different cameras using three different lenses, shot over a fifteen year period. The only thing that holds these images together as a whole is their content. Imagine that!

Pines in the Sky

Since I was a boy, my favorite colors have always been green and blue. Perhaps that’s why I like pines and sky. But now that I think about it, perhaps I have that backwards.

Tech notes: I simply love this idea of a photo project that is limited to just six images. All Panasonic gear. I have no idea what species of pine trees they are.

Gratitude

Last year when I was in China, on the very last day of photography I was driven a ways out into the country from the city of Hangzhou. I had no idea where we were going or what I might find there to photograph. My host simply said, “Trust me – you’ll like this place.” He was right. And the best tasting sausage I’ve ever had!

Tech notes: Funny story – well, not so much to me. During this trip, I was having all kinds of problems with my lower back and my legs going numb. I could walk about 20-30 yards, then have to rest for 20 minutes. Almost all of the images in the project are made from a sitting position, found by just looking once I was stationary. As a shooting strategies, that really works!

Fog in the Hills and Aits

Originally published as a printed chapbook. The background graphic is from Dicken’s handwritten manuscript.

Human, Not Human

The seed for this project was planted in China while looking at the red laughing boy. It’s in a park near a river and even my translators had no idea what this was about. The statue is 20-feet tall and painted fire-engine red, standing on a mirrored chrome sphere. Curiouser and couriouser, as they say. I made a few exposures, and then realized I had lots of human figure photographs back home.

Tech notes: Another example of an unconscious project unfolding over time. The first of the images in this group was photographed in 2009 with a Panasonic GM1. The most recent was in November of last year (including the laughing red boy), shot with a Panasonic G9.

Protection from Evil

At first blush, these figures are quite scary looking. After I learned that they are all protectors, they ceased to be scary. Interesting.

Tech notes: Most of these images are from my most recent trip to China and Japan in November of 2019. As such, they are all handheld exposures. I love it.

One-Picture Stories

Memory, like storytelling, is all anecdotes and snippets – the story of our lives.
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Brooks Jensen is a fine-art photographer, publisher, workshop teacher, and writer. In his personal work he specializes in small prints, handmade artist books, and digital media publications.

He and his wife (Maureen Gallagher) are the owners, co-founders, editors, and publishers of the award winning LensWork, one of today’s most respected and important periodicals in fine art photography. With subscribers in more than 70 countries, Brooks’ impact on fine art photography is truly worldwide. His long-running podcasts on art and photography are heard over the Internet by thousands every day. All 1,200+ podcasts are available at LensWork Online, the LensWork membership website. LensWork Publishing is also at the leading edge in multimedia and digital media publishing with LensWork Extended — a PDF-based, media-rich expanded version of the magazine.

Brooks is the author of fourteen books about photography and creativity: Photography, Art, & Media (2016); The Creative Life in Photography (2013); Letting Go of the Camera (2004); Single Exposures (4 books in a series, random observations on art, photography and creativity); Looking at Images (2014); Seeing in SIXES (2016); Seeing in SIXES (2017); Seeing in SIXES (2018); Seeing in SIXES (2019); The Best of the LensWork Interviews (2016); as well as a photography monograph, Made of Steel (2012). Kokoro is a free, monthly PDF e-magazine of his personal work and is available (both current and back issues) for download from his website.

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