

BIRDS AND LANGUAGE

Conference

Thursday 19 and Friday 20 August 2021

9:00am – 5:00 pm

Room 203 RD Watt Building Room,
and Zoom
The University of Sydney

Pop-up event:
Sydney College of the Arts,
Building A22, Old Teacher's College

Birds and Language is supported by the Sydney College of the Arts, School of Literature, Art and Media, and the Sydney Environment Institute at the University of Sydney



Image: Raquel Ormella, Bird Hunter (2004–2018) (Detail). Objects from the artist's collection: books, field guides, zines, stamps, paper binoculars, ceramic and paper birds, drawings; objects from SAM's ceramics collection. Dimensions variable. Exhibition view: I hope you get this: Raquel Ormella, Shepparton Art Museum, Shepparton (26 May–12 August 2018). Courtesy © the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane. Photo: Christian Capurro

BIRDS AND LANGUAGE

The sounds birds make form structured series, comprised of complex syntaxes, nuanced in tone, precise, sometimes excessive, often regarded as being of compelling aesthetic value. We do not hesitate to refer to many of these sounds as *songs*, or, more prosaically, *calls*. We move, easily, too, towards thinking about these sounds as a species of *language*.

More, we readily speak of the visual rhetorics of birds: ideas of performativity, display, mimesis and deception. We sometimes dare to think of birds as artists—not only singers, but bricoleurs, assembling extravagant, colour-coded nests, as in the case of the bowerbird. More, recently, we have become more comfortable with thinking of some birds as capable of higher-order reason, as experiments with crows demonstrate capacities to think through and to solve complex physical problems.

This conference poses a simple question:

What is it to talk of birds and language?

How might such a question provide the impetus and grounds for an interdisciplinary encounter between the natural sciences, the humanities, and the creative arts?

PROGRAMME

Thursday 19 August

9:00 – 9:30 Madeleine Kelly **Welcome and context**

Papers on birds, sky and materiality

9:30 – 10:00 David Brooks *Bird Song (extracts)*

10:00 – 10:30 Elizabeth Presa **Of gods and birds**

Morning Tea 10:30 – 11:00

11:00 – 11:30 Jessica Laraine Williams, Dr. Roger Alsop, Alex Last, Dr. Mathew Berg **Unseeing elegy of the tetrachromats**

Papers that explore music, birdsong and the Umwelt

11:30 – 12:00 Mark Pemberton **The Aesthetic Wonder of Birdsong**

12:00 – 12:30 Hollis Taylor **Birdsong: Language or Music?**

Lunch 12:30 – 1:30

1:30 – 2:00 John Tonkin **On the spatialised rendering of Birdcalls**

2:00 – 2:30 Mark Byron **Not of One Bird But of Many': The Long Migration of Clément Janequin's *Le Chant des Oiseaux***

2:30 – 3:00 Genevieve Campbell **Wayai, how the Bush Stone Curlew tells a Tiwi Ancestral story**

Afternoon Tea 3:00 – 3:30

3:30 – 4:00 Julia Miller **Linguistics and Ethno-ornithology: Bird songs and bird stories from the Western Province of Papua New Guinea**

4: 00 – 4:30 Jen Valender **Silenced strings** 2021, single channel, colour video, 3:28min

5 - 7 POP-UP EXHIBITION AND DRINKS, Sydney College of the Arts Courtyard

Tully Arnot, Robyn Backen, Stuart Bailey, Felix Cehak, Catherine Clover, Ashleigh Eriksmoen, Alex Gawronski, Helen Hardess, Tiana Jefferies, Madeleine Kelly, Blake Lawrence, Leo Lazarus, Melody Owen, Raquel Ormella, Pamela See, Shonah Trescott, Jessica Laraine Williams, Roger Aslop & Mathew Berg, and more.

Friday 20 August

9 – 9:30 Ian Maxwell, Introduction to Day 2

Papers that explore mimesis, mimicry and sight

9:30 – 10 Jay Johnston and Ruth Barcan **Looking Askance: Human–Bird Sensory Ecologies**

10 – 10:30 Tessa Laird **Pretty polyglot: parrotization as the difference in repetition.**

10:30 - 10:45 – Ashley Eriksmoen **Linear Semiosis** PechaKucha (a quick, image-heavy slide talk, 15-20 slides in 6-8 minutes)

Morning Tea 10:45 – 11:00

11 – 11:30 Johanna Bell **How do we represent extinction on the page? Poetic experiments for a verse novel**

11:30 – 12 Jessica C Masters **Henry Green’s pigeons and the death of symbol**

Communicating with birds and speculative fiction

12 – 12:30 Stuart Cooke **Ethological Poetics: reflections, refractions, and concerns**

Lunch 12:30 – 1:30

[Thinking and Storytelling with trees and birds - lunch workshop - 12:40 – 1:20](#) Brigitta Summers

5 - 10 people

1:30 – 2 Oliver Hamalainen **Corella Flashmobs: Psittacine avant-garde happenings as sites of cultural production - Creative essay**

2 - 2:30 Dr Zoë Sadokierski and Dr Timo Rissanen **Conversations with Regent Honeyeaters PART TWO**

2.30 – 3:00 Toyah Webb **Avian ‘Making Kin’ in Jeff VanderMeer’s *Southern Reach Trilogy***

3:00 – 4:00 Artists in conversation from the pop-up event

Afternoon Tea 3:30 – 4:00

4:00 Chau Chak Wing Museum visit to Natural selections, Bird specimens

END OF CONFERENCE