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Beyond onomatopoeia: performing with words that aren't ours (Paper and practical demonstration)

“Epo-po-po-po-po-po-po-poi!”, the 227th line of Aristophanes’ comedy *The Birds*, feels soft in our lips and ears. It is a fitting transcription of the monotonous song of the Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*). The English name and the scientific name of this bird sound like a song, too. Real Hoopoes have given us sounds that are transformable into syllables and words. Despite the persistent idea of language as exceptionally human or cultural phenomenon, our spoken, written, and performed words are filled with nonhuman currents (cf. Abram 2010/2011). These material-semiotic, affective currents are the focus of my paper. I ask, how we could conceptualize this nonhuman aspect of language, and what are the effects of nonhuman currents in performing arts. Theoretically, I will focus on object-oriented conceptions of language, provided by Levi Bryant (2011a; 2011b), Ian Bogost (2012), and especially Timothy Morton (2007/2009; 2013). Object-oriented philosophy offers a non-anthropocentric view on meaning-making that focuses on the translational powers of all kinds of material and semiotic objects. In *Realist Magic* (2013), Timothy Morton traces the birth of lexical objects “brekekekex koax koax” (from *The Frogs* by Aristophanes) to real frogs and Greek language: the physically existing sound-objects are translated into word-objects. Following Morton, I suggest that language is a natural-cultural medium that re-distributes the powers of creation and agency. Language is therefore a vital element in understanding and conceptualizing nonhuman agency, both on stage and on page. To test these ideas, I will discuss some examples of sound poetry, a performance-based form of poetry that places sensual and affective qualities of language above semantic content. Accordingly, sound poetry demonstrates the ways nonhuman agency, and nonhuman currents more specifically, defamiliarize the realms we thought were most human and cultural. References: Abram, David. 2010/2011. *Becoming Animal. An Earthly Cosmology*. New York: Vintage Books. Bogost, Ian. 2012. *Alien Phenomenology or What It’s Like to Be a Thing*. Michigan, Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press. Bryant, Levi. 2011a. *The Democracy of Objects*. Michigan, Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press. Bryant, Levi. 2011b. *Wilderness Ontology*. In *Preternatural*, edited by Celina Jeffery, 19–26. New York: Punctum Books. Morton, Timothy. 2007/2009. *Ecology Without Nature. Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press. Morton, Timothy. 2013. *Realist Magic. Objects, Ontology, Causality*. Michigan, Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press.

Karoliina Lummaa is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Finnish Literature at the University of Turku, Finland. Her current research project *Avian Poetics* focuses on the question of nonhuman poetic agency by analysing bird-like formal and thematic features of poetry, e.g., the rhythmic and phonetic features of songs, visual elements resembling movement, and descriptions of avian life and environments. Lummaa’s publications include her doctoral thesis on Finnish environmental poetry; she has also co-edited several Finnish anthologies devoted to multidisciplinary environmental research, poetry criticism, and posthumanism.