

INTRODUCTION

Becoming audible means finding ways of crossing species boundaries through sound. Being creaturely means being alive and part of a living world—animal, human, insect. Being an acoustic creature—by becoming audible—is a means of signaling, through sound, all manner of sexual, territorial, or cultural messages. In these pages, a cellist duets with a nightingale, finches play guitars, women sound like birds, shamans bark to become seals, dogs learn to sing, apes give lectures, and baritones bawl as bulls. These creatures appear in different performance modes—live, recorded, artificial, hidden, broadcast—but always through a human agent/artist. That human figure sometimes functions as a type of sorcerer or shaman in order to enter the in-between spaces among species. Shamans and sorcerers were traditionally the contact agent with the extra-human world. The artists in this book continue to find ways to preserve that connection and use creaturely acoustics as their method of accessing an other-than-human consciousness. They involve themselves in actions that generate human-animal-technological personae, sounding their concerns in sets of relations to themselves and others—relations that are often messy or murky, but always vital. Out of these murky, messy actions and liberated ways of thinking, resonances occur. Music, singing, and amplified sounds—human and nonhuman—move fluidly through the air and enter

the open, vulnerable, listening body. To resonate with sound, one can both create and receive sonic vibrations and reverberations. To resonate is to be in sympathy with another body. Resonance is sympathetic, and to resound is to receive, to become resonant.

When human and animal sounds resonate together, in performance, what occurs? When the animal voice and body are used as tools to describe difference and otherness, both magical and dreadful, how do these actions relate to ongoing scholarship in nonhuman animal acoustics in the arenas of bioscience, technoscience, and cultural anthropology? Are creative actions involving animal vocalizations obligated to refer to contemporary scientific discoveries in the realms of, say, insect communication intelligence, primate social grammar, or aquatic sonar worlds? Or is the historical archive of animal tropes continually being used to retell and reperform mirrors and illuminations of human experience? Is it, in fact, impossible not to anthropomorphize animals in creative culture? These broad questions are anchored by a proposition: that sound worlds are shared worlds and always have been—between epochs, between bodies, between species. The artists that populate this book desire to get into the spaces between species. They flex vocal muscles to overcome anthropocentrism and to find new routes into a broader, creaturely, sonic world.

Becoming Audible claims that human listening and sounding, hearing and speaking, silence and song, are part of a cross-species, zoo-acoustic experience of the world. As David B. Dillard-Wright reminds us, all communication and acoustic life is gestural, ambivalent, mobile, extra-human, social, and vital. These elements are also central to the phenomenon of acoustics and communication in performance practices and performance theory. Dillard-Wright's phenomenological method of placing human experience inside a broader, creatural world is his way of "thinking across species boundaries."¹ This book is an accumulation of both thinking and writing across boundaries of disciplines brought together in a selection of material from arts and performance practices, alongside ideas and influences from animal studies, zoomusicology, zooarchaeology, cultural anthropology, and philosophy. Listening, responding, reacting, and resonating across boundaries are the transterritorial, transdisciplinary actions that dictate the main threads of the discussion here. My own live art performance practice, my interest in opera and its contradictions, and recent debates in animal studies, cultural anthropology, and philosophy have provided the framework on which to build the core argument—that

humans and animals are engaged in acoustic resonances that reverberate across species boundaries and throughout performance practices. A key component of live performance is vulnerability. To be vulnerable is to be creatural, and an awareness of vulnerability opens thinking into a shared creaturely territory, both interior and exterior.

My concepts of creaturely acoustics and interspecies resonances in performance are deepened by my engagement with the philosophies of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. In the jointly penned *A Thousand Plateaus*, first published in 1980, the writers encourage a severance with traditional ways of perceiving animals, in psychoanalysis, as metaphors for human problems. In their chapter “1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible,” they advocate a process of overcoming our limited human selves by entering into a multiplicity of proximities to animal life, beginning with the swarms of molecular entities that freely cross boundaries between our bodies and the interiors and exteriors of other living species.² There is a kind of counter-individual consciousness of the collective, the multiple, or the swarm. Becoming-animal is an openness to fluid sensations of being in the world. It is a rhizome, a structure of nonlinear thinking, which operates laterally and without hierarchical discrimination, moving in omnidirectional modes. Deleuze and Guattari write, “We are not in the world, we become with the world; we become by contemplating it. . . . We become universes. Becoming animal, plant, molecular, becoming zero.”³ In short, to be consciously alive is to become.

The animals that fascinate Deleuze and Guattari are wild and move in packs or herds. The mobile freedom of entering and leaving territories and natures brings energy to the theory of becoming. Deterritorialization and reterritorialization in animal behavior correspond with liberation in the words, signs, sounds, and ideas in art. Like the birds, horses, wolves, and insects that populate their theory, Deleuze and Guattari strongly advocate that artists also enter into a becoming-intense, becoming-animal, becoming-imperceptible state as a method to break away from the normative and the static. Their featured artists, composers, and writers are active in a fierce relationship of rhizomatic movements with the living world.⁴ With their example of Franz Kafka, metamorphosis replaces metaphor. Animals no longer merely represent or symbolize a human quality or trait. Spontaneity, liveness, and openness to contest change are the creative methods of getting access to a larger, non-anthropocentric energy. Artists seek to become-animal in order to stake out an interior territory of ideas—not a

fixed world. Becoming is moving and changing. In this way art can access a porous environment where received definitions of identity and hierarchy are collapsing and *all* beings are in a state of multispecies awareness and change.

Becoming is a metaphysical, psychological experience, a process of passing through territories and zones of proximity, where entities, molecules, and ideas affect one another without exhausting their core identities. It is an interior place of uncertainties and unknown relations, of indeterminate territories at the edge of the human and the nonhuman consciousness, where creative processes generate metamorphosis. Becoming-animal blurs distinctions between human and animal for Deleuze and Guattari. It is a state where “each deterritorializes the other, in a conjunction of flux, in a continuum of reversible intensities.”⁵ In the chapters that follow, I use their theory of becoming to explore labyrinthine sound structures in art and performance practices. I write about works that are concerned with the coming together of bodies, sounds, reverberations, frequencies, and ideas and that generate intensities of becoming for both the performer and the spectator. These works reveal the nonlinear, or rhizomatic, approach taken by artists and performers to expose their own enriched awareness of what they are doing in performance. They enter zones of proximity as a means of realizing performances that truly matter, have tangible materiality, and are fully alive. For me, becoming audible in art and in performance reaches toward a vital, spontaneous connection to the living mind and body of both human and animal in ways that are always challenging.

The subject of animal participation in human entertainment—which extends to circuses, aquatic world entertainment, and, perhaps especially, zoos—is complex and troubled by many important and valid questions of welfare, speciesism, and ethics. These questions have also been applied to the use or perceived misuse of animals in art and performance practices, where many see no place whatsoever for animals. Many informed scholars and theorists deplore how some artists claim exemption from the ethical questions that surround humans’ use and abuse of animals. Some question whether it is ethical or moral even to depict an animal in an artwork or a performance in any form. There is a view, therefore, that artists are not to be trusted in their use of living, dead, or even already stuffed animal bodies—that animals’ bodies should not be objectified for human cultural consumption.

However, art is messy, complicated, and risky. Art is not about accommodating opinions. The artists under my scrutiny here take animal lives

seriously and do not back away from serious questions about our relationships with other creatures, past, present, and future. Artists have always had to zigzag around fixed rules and regulations to get to the meaning, or the potential collapse of meaning, in order to question social norms. Even those artists who advocate social change on issues of animal welfare and animal rights use confrontational images and materials in order to get to the core of the very problems they seek to change. For example, Angela Singer's reworking of trophy taxidermy to make sculptures and "memorials" of each of the animals' deaths has been criticized for fetishizing the very thing she claims to abhor. But for her, it is a confrontation, in her studio, with the material animal body and how its death, often brutal, can somehow be commemorated in order to effect change.⁶ Equally, the use of live animals in installations and performances has faced criticism and serious questioning.

Very few of the artworks I discuss use live animals, and when they do, I examine all aspects of their use—but not judgmentally. Regarding the practices of hunting that are investigated in the opening chapters, my focus is on how the artists and, specifically, the artworks they produce explore the connections they claim to be making with living and dying nonhuman animal histories. Their works are linked, I argue, by how they propose to position the human in a much larger creatural world. Throughout this book, I follow cultural anthropologist Garry Marvin's approach, in which he states—in his essay on fox-hunting as performance—that "those interested in human-animal relationships should consider these practices (ie. *hunting and zoos*), because they involve complex sets of images and representations of animals and the natural world and complex structures of engagements with those animals and that world."⁷ As entertainment spectacles in zoos, or in the field and forest of the hunter, the animals being hunted or looked at are already in a very complex "web of significance."⁸ Animals will always be drawn into human culture where art defines what it might mean to be human.

In chapter 1, the cultural history of listening to birdsong and ornithological studies of bird vocal behavior run parallel to the history of musical technologies, instrumentation, and recording. The artists that use the techno-acoustic innovations of their time push and extend the limits of these technologies. Beatrice Harrison adopts radio; Olivier Messiaen accumulates cassette tapes; and Jonathan Harvey reworks synthesizers as methods of listening to animal sounds and adapting them. Composers Bartok and Rautavaara are among the artists using birdsong in a desire for timelessness.

In a more contemporary context, Céleste Boursier-Mougenot places sound and birdsong at the center of his installations, creating a sonic territory and a new immersive way of listening in between species. Marcus Coates's epic *Dawn Chorus* explores the ventriloquisms inherent in birdsong, and his interpretation becomes entangled with human singing in fascinating and poignant ways. In the gaps and chasms of being and becoming audible, the keen disposition and intense auditory rigor of these artists produces avant-garde performances of acoustic daring.

The acousmatics of animal acoustics—the sound we can hear without seeing or even knowing its origin—are the subject of chapter 2. Here birdsong is used in historical and contemporary performance in ways that are connected to both hunting and art practices. I analyze how both practices have co-evolved and coexist alongside each other and how they remain conjoined within the staging of the artist-becoming-animal. In the example of Daniela Cattivelli's recent sound actions and compositions, her investigations of birdsong and its impersonation by Italian bird hunters, called *chioccolatori*, provide a point of departure into some unsettling and often beautiful sound actions. These in turn redefine terms like capture, territorialization, and release as they relate to bird communication. In Cattivelli's techno-vocal soundscapes, some of the dangerous inheritance of hunting lingers where she cajoles her audience into complicated thinking about how we use animal vocals (and then bodies) for both entertainment and entrapment. She enters what Jennifer Parker-Starbuck calls a “becoming-animate” which initiates “catalysts for reformations of humanity's relationship with the non-human.”⁹

Chapter 3 explores the deeper elements of human-animal encounters in the work of Marcus Coates. Here, connections emerge with the tactical, empathic techniques of the hunter/performer alongside those of the shaman in Northern circumpolar communities and the aesthetic and performative legacies of these practices. Coates has riveted audiences with his live art and recorded artworks that engage with concepts of shamanism, schizophrenia, and becoming-animal in a Deleuze-Guattarian exploration of personhood. This chapter explores the multiplicities of selfhood, personhood, mimesis, and magical alterity that I see provoked in the work of Coates and other artists who are deeply invested in performance actions and who engage with the material values of creatural acoustics.

Animal becomings are tested in chapter 4 in the theatrical contexts of stage and laboratory and in the mergers between science and art in

Alexander Raskatov's 2010 opera *A Dog's Heart*. The opera multiplies the themes of the stray dog and the sacrificial lab animal, eugenics, Bolshevism, and biopolitics in an extravagance of musical anarchy. The dog character in this opera breaks with the history of the onstage canine, which traditionally has promised stereotypically silent obedience. This profane, scandalous creature is a vocal revelation as he goes through surgical procedures that transform him from dog to man and back to dog, violating every speech-act promise along the way. The problematized ethics of both the laboratory and the onstage animal are exposed in plain-speaking ways in both Mikhail Bulgakov's novella of the same name (1924), which inspired the opera, and in the staging of the work by ENO in London's Coliseum. The voice of the animal is most scandalizing in how he expresses his indifference to what is happening to him. Raskatov's opera ultimately declares with great irreverence that there is no hierarchy in speech, that the phenomenon of the voice emanating from the body can override or even dissolve the meaning of the words that are being sung, and that this crying out is both angelic and animalistic at the same time. In the acoustic exclamation of the operatic dog, the vocalized carnal interior becomes exterior and exposes its vulnerability in what Walter Benjamin calls the "creaturely voice," which emerges "from the mysterious interior of the organic" and, he maintains, is the foundation structure of opera.¹⁰

Hierarchies of vocalization in human-simian cultural co-evolution define both Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* and Franz Kafka's *A Report to an Academy*, the focus of chapter 5. Both narratives were created in the post-Darwinian period of the early twentieth century. These "primate dramas"¹¹ produce triadic tropes of humans, apes, and cages in which many shared biological similarities between species—the muscles of communication, the larynx, the lungs, and the tongue—become organs of special meaning for questioning human consciousness and culture. For example, through Colin Teevan's 2009 theatrical adaptation of Franz Kafka's 1917 short story, I consider Kafka's own unflinching investigation of animal muteness as confinement and human and animal vocalization as freedom. The play, *Kafka's Monkey*, and Kathryn Hunter's solo performance of this work, exposed, on the surface, a familiar human fascination with this specific animal. Red Peter is a captured great ape who learns to speak in order to escape the caged torture in which he finds himself. Breaking into the world of human speech and reason, he finds another version of imprisonment. The ape's refusal to accept the accolade of achievement the

academy wishes to bestow on him lies at the painful center of Red Peter's situation. Red Peter's ultimate tragedy is that, now that he has learned how to become human, he can never return to being fully animal.

Chapter 6 explores Harrison Birtwhistle's opera *The Minotaur* (2009), in which the labyrinth home of the caged man-beast becomes the chamber for re-sounding the monstrous tragedy of the hybrid creature. Inside this structure, the rules of language do not apply, and so the trio of monsters in the opera—female buzzard, male priestess, and bull-man—find their voices and devour the air of the opera house. The labyrinth becomes a macrocosm of the human/animal interior of both the heart and the ear. In bass singer John Tomlinson's portrayal of the Minotaur, the edifice of language comes crashing down to an almost zero point of meaning. The resounding bawl of the bull is supported by the screaming of the priestess and bird-women and the babbling of the chorus. I follow acoustic routes—corporeal, instrumental, architectural—that tunnel into this exploration of both resonance and becoming, going deep inside the human-animal acoustic exchanges that shape this concluding chapter. As Tomlinson's bull-man monster lies dying, he groans the last line of the opera: "Between man and beast, next—to—nothing."¹² His dying statement is that there is *almost* nothing separating the species. In a concluding network of resonant becomings that come together in this performance—such as the willing spectatorial body, the architectural body of the opera house, the bodies of musical instruments, and the vocalic bodies of the singers—the human-animal acoustic entanglements re-sound their materiality of lungs, muscles, and larynx in an ecology of singing and listening and becoming resonant.

Derek Mahon's poem *Songs of Praise*, which I place as a coda at the end of this book, opens with a sound-image of hymns being sung in a small church by the sea. An outside broadcast unit is recording the service for radio. The sound of the singing rises, floats outside, and reaches the rocky shore where the "conflicting rhythms of the incurious sea" absorb the thinning "tunes" into the ocean's own soundscape of crashing waves, swelling into the immensity of deep sea. Below the surface, in the silent depth of the ocean, another broadcast is being transmitted: "the trombone dispatches of the beleaguered whale."¹³ Mahon's twelve lines, crafted with great understanding, manage to capture this cosmic moment. We have the sense of him there on the shore, experiencing this collision of worlds—human, technological, animal—as a sonic event, a "soundscape" that resonates deeply for him. Mahon's mastery brings the sounds of the hymns, the sea,

and the whale together in a form of zoomusicological fusion. He leaves us with the trombone-like message from the whale as a kind of prophecy. He speaks of how the sea is not curious about our tiny ritual voices and how it seems equally indifferent to the troubled world of the whale. His alertness to the sonic human-nonhuman-animal continuum reveals a moment of becoming resonant. The phenomenon of sound vibrates through material bodies, rocks, seas, and whales. Like Mahon's poem, in what follows I envisage this physical and phenomenological push, in and out of states of being aware, being there, and becoming sonically connected with everything that is alive.