

Celebrating Neighbourhood Birds: Performing Equality in Avian-human Performance

Heli Aaltonen

Associate Professor of Drama and Theatre Studies, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Norway

Abstract: Birds are messengers of climate change and loss of biodiversity. As a backdrop I use Henrik Ernston's and Erik Swyngedouw's suggestion of politicizing the environment in the era of the Anthropocene. Politicizing the environment is here fundamentally performative, which means that questions concerning environment are related to ecological understanding, egalitarian acting and respectful relationships. I argue in this text that considering and performing a non-human perspective is an equalitarian bodily practice of politicizing non-human beings around us. In this text I ask: how does avian-human performance practice politicize birds? I am interested in analysing what effects of differences are generated in the entangled relations of performance practice, and how do they relate to performative politics of equality. The concepts eco-justice, diversity, agential realism and Rancière's performative politics, which are actualized in "distribution of the sensible", are central in the diffractive analysis of non-human performance practice. In this pedagogically inclined artistic research project, I combined three bird discourses: the scientific, sentimental and "the reality-of-a-bird" discourses are embedded in performative avian-human performance inquiries. However, such studio practices are not enough. Scientific studies, combined with studies in indigenous knowledge systems and direct intra-action with diverse non-humans, can open deepened ecological understanding of the needs and desires of a more-than-human-world. Combining these aspects with performance practices may reveal more ways of politicizing non-humans and of voicing their needs and desires.

Keywords: eco-justice, performative politics, human-avian relationship, non-human performance, acting

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Introduction

This text explores the relation between “avian-human performance” practice, on the one hand, and political emancipation and eco-social justice, on the other. Performance activists, participatory applied theatre practitioners and radical drama educators have a long history of working with questions related to political activism, diversity and justice. Inequalities between different social groups have motivated applied theatre practitioners to develop multiple Brecht- and Boal-inspired reflective practices to explore questions concerning social justice which focus on human categories such as race, colour, class, sexuality, gender and ability (Nicholson, 2014; Vettraino & Linds, 2015). However, the whole idea of racism is rooted in “speciesism”, which can be defined as “an idea that being human is a good enough reason for human animals to have greater moral rights than non-human animals” (BBC, 2014). Apocalyptic news about climate change consequences and biodiversity loss (IBPES-report, 2019) have influenced many humans, who now demand eco-system rights on behalf of non-human entities.

Esa Kirkkopelto (2017, pp. 87–96) notices that “‘non-human-performance’ is intrinsically related to ethical concerns about global suffering”. At the same time interest in non-human performance does not mean that inhuman suffering is put on one side. Interest in non-human performance is a sign of a radicalisation and expansion of ideas concerning social justice. Kirkkopelto (2017) presents contemporary examples of Finnish non-human performance research which represent the testing of the limits of the scene, and the agency of performers and spectators. There are various ways of carrying out the non-human and investigating relationship between human and non-human. In my experiments with trees and birds, I have explored what Kirkkopelto calls “the transformative potential of human bodies, the ‘non-human in us’” (Kirkkopelto, 2017, p. 88); I have also carried out what Kirkkopelto refers to as “staging performances in unconventional venues and in relation to their non-human factors” (Kirkkopelto, 2017, p. 88).

The focus of this chapter is an avian-human performance workshop in February 2020 which was a preparation for an immersive children’s outdoor theatre performance-walking, *Bird Path*, to four-year-old pre-school

children. My bachelor students of drama and theatre studies performed stationary local birds in the performance. Such practice resonates well with Anne Beate Reinertsen's "walkingthinkingfeeling"-practice when she suggests "mixed child/adult group walks in nature as insect experimentations and collaborative inter-/intra observations always and again, looking beyond" (Reinertsen, 2016, p. 170).

Through the analysis of this work, I will argue that performing the non-human – considering a non-human perspective – is an equalitarian bodily practice of politicizing non-human beings around us. This kind of practice resonates with David Wright's "argument for the recognition of drama, theatre or performance as methodologies that can enable ecological understanding ...: a theatre that changes" (Wright, 2015, p. 247).

This has implications for how to think about being, knowing and ethics. I find Karen Barad's "agential realism" approach fruitful. She writes: "We don't obtain knowledge by standing outside the world: we know because we are *of* the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming" (Barad, 2007, p. 185). She suggests combining ontology, epistemology and ethics. Barad proposes "something like an *ethico-onto-epistemology* – an appreciation of the intertwining of ethics, knowing and being" (Barad, 2007). Agential realism is based on an idea that non-humans and humans are entangled in intra-active processes of becoming. It is an ongoing process in drama educational studio practice to create different material enactments and focus on different *agential cuts*. Arlander (2018a, pp. 140–141) suggests that "agential cut" may be a valuable tool for researchers who include practice in their research. She explains that "differences are made not found, and dichotomies derive from specific cuts" (p. 140). This is useful for my purpose, because the agenda is to develop drama educational work which contributes to deeper ecological understanding.

I pose the following question: how may avian-human performance practice materialise and distribute agency? Arlander (2018a) proposes that "the task for an artist-researcher is, then, not only to acknowledge her subjectivity and entanglement with the object of research but also account for the agential cuts within the phenomena at hand – that is, what is included and what is excluded from mattering". By means of

describing agentic forces in, and analysing agential cuts in, some central exercises from a drama workshop, and with some snapshots from the performance, I discuss how this case and similar performance practice relate to performative politics of equality.

In the next section I first present some theoretical approaches which have been actualized for my diffractive analysis. Elinor Vettrano and Warren Linds (2015, p. 17) write about reflection as diffraction. Diffractive approach follows Barad's (2003, p. 803, 2007) idea of analysing intraactions as a process, and defining agential cuts during the moment of writing the analysis.

The concepts, namely eco-justice, diversity and Rancière's performative politics, which is actualized in "distribution of the sensible", are central to the analysis of non-human performance practice and eco-equality. The analysis is preceded by my methodological choices of research practice. Finally, in the concluding section, I look to the future to see where such performative inquiry does appear to be moving.

Performing with theories

Drawing on the work of C. A. Bowers (1997, 2001), Rebecca A. Martusevicz, Jeff Edmundson and John Lupinazzi (2015) write about the urgent need to include questions concerning eco-justice at all educational levels. Ecological problems do not disappear by using green technology. Humans need to change their mindset from an anthropocentric worldview to an eco-centric worldview (Martusevicz et al., 2015, p. 11). This means that instead of seeing living plants, animals and minerals as resources for human use, humans are required to understand that their whole existence and wellbeing is dependent on a healthy system of life.

Ernstson and Swyngedouw argue for acts of politicizing the environment. Their approach is performative, and they suggest that "the political unfolds through the performative act of equality" (Ernstson & Swyngedouw, 2019, pp. 265–266).

The performative act of equality means re-thinking whose acts and words matter, and how much time and space is provided for different actors. Ernstson and Swyngedouw (2019, p. 266) are inspired by Jacques

Rancière's ideas about performative politics. Rancière (2004, pp. 12–13) has coined the concept “distribution of the sensible”, which links aesthetics and politics. For him it is simply a political act of distribution that decides who gets a specific amount of time and space, who has, through distribution, the ability to be visible, audible and articulate. and who are denied the same abilities and rights.

Distribution of the sensible is clearly an issue when women, children, humans with disabilities and different ethnic minorities have increasingly urged for an equal position to perform their point of view. Kirkopelto (2017, p. 94) goes even further with the idea of equality. He writes: “The claim of equality *has to go beyond the human, unless it is not unconditional* (his italics).”

How then is it possible for humans to understand birds and their needs? It seems not to be problematic at all, because “we are part of the world in its differential becoming” (Barad, 2007, p. 185). It is a question related to ways we enact with diversity.

In my case, the diversity of neighbourhood birds is the focus. Martusewicz et al. (2015, p. 26) point out that “diversity is the condition of difference created when there is a relationship between one thing or idea and anything else”. Barad's flat ontology suggests there are only material differences, and that material-discursive practices act as agential cuts creating hierarchies between different materialities (Barad, 2007). The first thing in political emancipation is to pay attention to a differently-bodied someone, become interested in someone else's perspective and difference, here including the non-human someone. The next step is to make choices of who or what performs the subject or observer, and who or what performs the observed. In each case the subject or observer becomes a part of “measuring apparatus” (Arlander, 2018a, p. 142). Different material-discursive practices create diverse agential cuts of inclusion and exclusion.

In everyday life, there are at least two discourses in use when thinking about and discussing birds. They are discourses of science and sentimentality (Mynott, 2009). The scientific discourse is mainly interested in classifying, measuring, and updating knowledge about birds. New scientific discoveries about birds' cognitive capacities and their life are

fast changing and increasing human understanding of bird behaviour (Emery, 2016). A sentimental discourse concerns affects and experiences. It has to do with different feelings that the birds awaken in us. Sentimental discourse tells not so much about birds, but it tells a lot about our “structures of feeling”, our culturally and personally tuned ways to react to different non-human beings around us.

Finnish literature researcher Karoliina Lummaa has a third perspective on discourse in her analyses of eco-poetry. She explores the materiality of birds, how “bird-ness, the reality of a bird” (2017, p. 57) is expressed in Finnish eco-poetry in the 1970s. How can we address ontological questions about bird-ness? Instead of asking separate ontological or epistemological questions about birds, it is relevant to ask about their performative enacting with us. What does it do to us to inter-act with birds? Andreas Weber (2016) believes that “a poetic first-person ecology” is a way to address this. It means that we take our entanglements with non-human life forms more seriously and believe in our poetic imaginations on the matter. He writes that “[we] are deeply interwoven into the material, mental and emotional exchange processes that all of the more-than-human world participates in” (Weber, 2016, p. 7). I aimed to combine all three discourses – scientific, sentimental and “the reality-of-a-bird” discourses – in my performative avian-human performance inquiries.

Methodology for practice and the analysis of practice

This study relates to performance as research methodology. I choose to name my approach “pedagogically inclined artistic research” (Arlander, 2018b, p. 344). This means that the exercises made in the workshops are also methods of inquiry. Later in the chapter I present and analyse some of the exercises. Pedagogically inclined artistic research belongs to a performative paradigm (Bolt, 2016, pp. 130–142). According to Bolt “the performative act doesn’t describe something, but rather it does something in the world, this ‘something’ has the power to transform the world” (p. 137). Methodologically the aim is to

make repetitions with difference (p. 140). This is exactly what I have attempted to do. I have worked for five years, starting in 2016, on relating performative practices to the issue of climate change/biodiversity loss. Because the focus in this text is my own drama educational work, it is important to define my role.

Pauliina Maapalo and Tone Pernille Østern (2018, p. 15) write about the performative bodymind researcher, who is an important performative agentic force in ongoing intra-active processes of becoming. Maapalo (2019, p. 48) describes how a researcher's bodymind and experienced intensities/differences create agential cuts during the research situation. I have understood participation in the world from a wider, not only from a human, perspective for many years (Aaltonen, 2015, 2019). My own embodied interest in birds and their wellbeing is a starting point for the research. Crows perform agentic force in my everyday life (Image 1). When I write these words, it is autumn, and this is a time when many bird species gather. As do the crows.



Image 1 Crows in an autumn sunset. Photo: Heli Aaltonen

The focus of analysis is my own studio practice where agential cuts have happened during the drama educational work. Hillevi Lenz Taguchi (2012, p. 265) writes: “I understand diffractive analysis as an embodied engagement with the materiality of research data”. Vettraino and Linds (2018, p. 18) write about implications of thinking reflection as diffraction:

The implications of this for reflection is that our attention then shifts from thinking back on our practice through the elements of actors, experience, tools and activity becomes a process of enacting through theatre the relationships, their patterns, who is excluded and included and the boundaries that are created by “the intra-actions making up complex communities” (Keevers & Treleven, 2011, p. 508). Through this process, we can see that the world can be different, with different relationships and different practices.

Diffractive approach means in this case that I revisit my practice with reading together with bodymind, intensities, diverse theoretical approaches, student reflections and analyse the agential cuts of inclusion and exclusion.

The research material comprises the creative process of planning and implementing the workshop, which is informed by a range of theoretical sources: political, philosophical and feminist new materialist theory as well as performance as research theory. The research material also includes reflective process notes, video and image documentation of the performance. From a questionnaire to the students after the work I received 38 reflection notes, together with their written consent to these notes being used as text and images in the research context.

The Bird Path performance process: An overview

One central purpose of the avian-human performance workshop was to create a site-specific, immersive (Machon, 2013) theatre performance for four-year-old children in an outdoor space, a forest site. The students were asked to act in the forest as if they were to visit someone’s home. The forest area was considered an animistic space (Image 2), where all living creatures had subjectivity, feelings and understanding. The same gentle way of listening and attuning with the forest environment

was introduced to the children. The children were told: “We need to remember that the forest is our friend, and we are not supposed to be mean to it! We can’t destroy trees and throw garbage in the forest. If we did, the birds, fairies, and trees would become sad.”¹ The practice resonates well with Anne Beater Reinertsen’s (2016, pp. 163–175) “sustainable eco-justice placemaking” thinking. She writes how “a post- or rather non-Anthropocene view reconsiders and portrays agentic forces in the biosphere beyond the human hence questioning human supremacy”.



Image 2 Entering the magical forest. Photo: Kristoffer Holmen Dye

The methodological journey started from lectures to the realization of the Bird Path performance, from theory to practice. The students performed birds, voiced their understanding of the birds’ needs and used interactive dramaturgical strategies when playing to and with children.

¹ Extract from the play script of the performance is translated by the author: “Vi må huske på at skogen er vår venn, og at vi ikke må være slemme mot den! Vi må ikke ødelegge trærne og kaste søppel! Hvis vi gjør det så blir fuglene, alvene og trærne lei seg.”

The students participated in two two-hour seminars. The student group was divided into two sub-groups of around 20 students. I facilitated the first seminar, and the second seminar I co-facilitated with Troels Vestergaard Jensen, a specialist in rhythmic dance and movement. In the first seminar scientific knowledge about birds, sensory exercises and problems experienced by the birds were intertwined. At the end of the seminar the students combined aspects of their explorations and added a poem written by them about their specific bird. The poems were re-shaped by the students while working with rhythm, movement and sound in a seminar led by Vestergaard Jensen. Later on, I had more to do finding the form of performing bird stories and rehearsing the performance at the chosen forest site.

In the following diffractive reading I am inspired by Lenz Taguchi's (2012, p. 268) advice to not ask interpretative questions like "What does this mean?". The focus is to ask: "Does it work, and how does it work?" (Lenz Taguchi, 2012, p. 268). It is not possible for an artist-researcher to be focused on all possible intra-actions which appear in the practice. However, as Arlander points out, "it is important for an artist-researcher to focus on articulating the apparatuses used, the specific agential cuts enacted, and especially the marks on bodies generated" (Arlander, 2018a, p. 141).

For the purpose of this short study, I have selected some activities from the first workshop (not the complete workshop) where the focus specifically concerned equality and diversity. I also include some snapshots from the performance.

Agential cuts in avian-human performance practice

The multifunctional Black Box theatre (Image 3) was a site for the workshop. Around 20 students worked for two hours with exercises which were designed to help them create embodied bird roles in the performance. The site, the participants of the workshop, and the time frame are all measuring apparatuses that create difference (Arlander, 2018a, p. 142).



Image 3 Experimenting with bird movements in the Black Box theatre. Photo: Heli Aaltonen

Firstly, I worked with an exercise which was designed to connect scientific knowledge and observation of the birds with theatre movement exercises. Then I introduced sounds of the birds to the group, and facilitated exercises where they combined scientific knowledge, observation and embodied performing practice. By means of a process drama (Neelands & Goode, 2015) they had to create bird roles, and they performed and explored the problems of the birds. The workshop ended with a writing exercise in which the students wrote and presented poems from the perspective of a specific bird. This became material for the performance and was later shared with the children. The entanglements of discourse and matter happen in the ongoing intra-action.

Performative entanglements and agential cuts with neighbourhood bird knowledge and video films

When I met the students in the Black Box theatre, I had asked them to wear comfortable clothes, suitable for training physical theatre. Instead

of starting with warming up exercises (which are typical in body-based work), I started by exploring birdiness from scientific discourse. In groups of four, students were asked to choose one common Norwegian stationary bird species out of eight species, and start working with others who had chosen the same bird. The species were: rock dove, called also common pigeon or city pigeon (*Columba livia*), great spotted woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*), house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), hooded crow (*Corvus cornix*), great tit (*Parus major*), Eurasian blue tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*), Eurasian magpie (*Pica pica*), and European herring gull (*Larus argentatus*). Naming the birds and dividing them into different species belong to a scientific discourse.

The students were required to learn basic differences among these day-active, resident and non-migratory “neighbourhood birds”. The source material for exploration of the bird species was a one-page fact sheet where they could read, in a short format, third-person ornithological facts about the birds: how much they weigh, what their wing span is, what they eat, what kind of nests they have etc. All these questions are relevant to explore because they help the students to perform a bird, and to understand differences between birds and themselves. Students also studied different web sites, where they could find many wild bird documentation films.

Each choice of agentic force makes a difference, and distributes agency in different ways. It is important to explore what is included and excluded during the different phases. I started the studio practice from scientific discourse, but the starting point could be sentimentality connected with embodiment. In that case I would have distributed agency for the students to tell about and perform their experiences with different birds. This could be done in an autobiographic storytelling workshop where the participants could share their experiences of real-life birds. It is important to follow scientific discourse carefully, because new bird studies discover aspects in bird behaviour not recognized in earlier scientific work, which was dominated by “bird-as-instinct-machine”-discourse.

The starting point could be “a reality-of bird-discourse” as well. Barad (2003, p. 822) suggests that “On an agential realist account, matter does not refer to a fixed substance; rather, *matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency*” (her italics).

In order to explore “intra-active becoming” with birds, the students need to meet real-life birds and make field studies. This way the students could intra-act with real birds instead of intra-acting with mediated visual and auditive signs of birds. Such things as autobiographic stories, embodiment with memories and real-life encounters with birds could be included as agentic forces in the beginning of avian-human exploration.

Listening, differentiating, embodying and making audible the bird species

The Black Box theatre was full of students who explored embodying the birdiness of their chosen species by means of physical theatre. They investigated “the transformative potential of human bodies, the ‘non-human in us’” (Kirkkopelto, 2017, p. 88). Next step in the workshop was listening to the birds and exploring a bird language. This exercise reminds me of a poetic action convention that Neelands and Goode call “Soundscape” (2015, p. 107). I used Podcast Soundboard Windows program with recordings of the sounds/songs collected from the database Xeno-canto (2020). Xeno-canto is a database for “sharing bird sounds from around the world”. From there I chose the sounds, recorded – because I wanted to use local bird dialects – in Norway.

Firstly, I played bird sounds and encouraged the students to imitate the sounds and movements of their chosen bird. This exercise is also closely related with a Verbatim-theatre exercise (Schulze, 2017), where the actor works with recorded interviews and the aim is to perform the interview and imitate all audible details of the real-life person’s testimony as authentically as possible. Then I mixed the different bird sounds, and the students’ task was to listen for their own bird sound carefully. When the different groups of “birds” heard their own bird sound, they were asked to imitate both the movement and sound of the bird. Every time I stopped playing the sound, they were asked to make a still image. The aim of this sensory exercise was to increase attentiveness and to enter into the agency of bird. One student reflected the importance of mimetic approach: “we learned to be birds ... This leads to human-animal relationship, that we were physically outdoor and had to work with our whole

body”.² Corporeal exercises helped students to develop an awareness of entanglement with “other-earthly creatures” through encouraging students to get physically, sensually and emotionally immersed in the life of birds. However, another important aspect, to be “physically outdoors”, is also mentioned in the student reflections. The birds are outdoors, and real-life intra-action with them is possible only there.

One of the groups worked with the Eurasian blue tit (2020). This little bird moves, like many other small birds, quickly from one place to another, and it seems to have a stressful life turning its head and looking from one side to another to make sure that it is safe. A student reflected on this in their reflection note: “Playful, got the first taste of what it was like to be a blue tit with both body and voice. It was quite exhausting so I was very excited about how it would be out in the woods and snow”³

Imagining and imitating bird behaviour and sounds has “spacing power”. By exploring the agency of different bird species students started to understand how the different species varied in their behavioural relationship with humans. Such bodily practice is an example of performative politics, and distribution of the sensible.

The materiality of the birds is mediated in the exercises of sound and movement. In the studio environment, fact sheets on birds, sound scape, bodies and voices in action are agentic forces which create intra-active becomings with mediated sounds, images and video films of the birds.

What kind of potentialities of improvement does such practice have? Listening to birds could easily be developed in an investigation of “the discourse of local birds” (Abram, 2010, p. 270). It means that it would be important to learn the basics of bird language. Bird language teacher Jon Young defines five vocalizations as being important to identify. They are “songs, companion calls, territorial aggression (often male to male), adolescent begging and alarms” (Young, 2013, p. 1). Various studies indicate that birds belonging to the *Corvidae* family – crows, ravens, magpies and jays – use much more complicated languages. They do not sing at all, but can utilize 23 different vocalizations (Haupt, 2009, p. 76). The bird sound

² I have translated student reflections from Norwegian to English.

³ Student reflection.

recordings which I had collected represent different vocalizations. Had the students been guided to pay attention to different vocalizations, and used their knowledge in the improvisations, they would have been able to create concrete situations between different species of birds. In order to make invisible and inaudible non-humans visible and audible, and voice their needs and desires, it is not enough to make embodied studio practices, and imagine the needs of other species. We need to learn more about non-humans. We need to be more together with them and appreciate their diversity. Kirkkopelto (2017, p. 93) writes about “the process of *equalization*”. The process is always relational and concrete⁴. Participating in the avian-human performance practice carries a potentiality to imagine a more equal world and voice the needs of the birds. However, embodied exploration of bird agency didn’t awaken interest in all students. There was one student who reflected on her lack of interest in the bird world: “I’m not very interested in this, so I have nothing to write about.”⁵ Another student found performing the non-human in us, and this borderline investigation, to be uncomfortable, a rather weird experience: “I think playing an animal is strange and unpleasant.”⁶ Reading such reflections makes me think how an anthropocentric world view impacts students’ understanding of performing. It makes me sad to read negative student reflections, but at the same time I have noticed that only a small minority of the students do not connect with this kind of work. Many more find new insights and beginnings with human-non-human borderline investigations.

Outdoor bird path performance

In the forest area bird groups chose a “station” for the performance. They performed their staged poems and in the interactive parts the children were asked to help the birds with their everyday problems. The framing story of

4 Kirkkopelto (2017, p. 93) defines “concrete” as follows: “It is concrete in that it is never merely a juridical operation, but is also a social, ethical, economic, aesthetic and bodily exercise, an *ascesis*, which may change us thoroughly. This *ascesis* of equalization, which always departs from the encounter of the other, has to be undertaken over and over again in different ways and on various levels, and it has to be undertaken by everyone otherwise we cannot live together.”

5 Student reflection.

6 Student reflection.

the performance was an ornithological trip through the forest on the “bird path” to a friendship party, which was arranged around a campfire site. It was Valentine’s Day, 14 February, and at the end of the performance the birds and the children gathered to celebrate human-avian friendship. One student reflected on the importance of the whole concept of the outdoor event: “Being out in nature and having direct contact with it – through forest walks, storytelling around the fire – brings you closer to nature”⁷ Another student wrote: “The fact that we hung up bird food [in the trees] and became birds to teach about nature, helps to create a good relationship with the animals and show respect for nature.”⁸ Celebrating a Valentine’s Day party with birds invited the participants to imagine a more equalitarian world where humans and avians are friends, and neighbours, with each other.

The students studied the outlook of the birds and painted their own faces as well as choosing “birdy” costumes for the performance (Images 4–7). The four-year-old children came to the forest site with the educators of the kindergarden and with a student who performed as a bird path guide. She guided the children from one station to the other. The ground was covered with snow. The first birds the children met were city pigeons (Image 4).



Image 4 Performing city pigeons. Photo: Kristoffer Holmen Dye

⁷ Student reflection.

⁸ Student reflection.

Two pigeons carried a third pigeon which was strapped around her legs. The pigeon's legs were tied with rope, which represented city pigeons' problems when they got hair or plastic waste around their toes. The city pigeons asked children to help them untie the rope.

Many students reflected on the importance of “performing facts” or “the real-life problems of the birds” and emphasised performative acting of species-beings in a real-life venue. The children helped the pigeons and continued their trip to the next station, where they met a group of house sparrows (Image 5).



Image 5 Children playing with house sparrows. Photo: Kristoffer Holmen Dye

The house sparrows explained that domestic cats ate up their chicks, and the sparrow group created a game with children, where the birds were escaping from the cat and protecting their chicks.

Many bird groups made interactive games with the children, where children would play diverse animals and birds. One student wrote that an important aspect in creating better avian-human relationships is [to] “let children themselves be animals, to get into their lives and their world”.⁹

⁹ Student reflection.



Image 6 Children help crows to find silver spoons. Photo: Kristoffer Holmen Dye

I was happy to read from one reflection note that four-year-old children can recognize crows (Image 6). One student wrote: “The children were able to recognize the crows, and we (practitioners) had to observe crows to work on our scenic movements. It has made me personally more aware of how other animals move too”.¹⁰ The student shows important insight by way of the created performance text. To act as a crow required an interest in the crow world if one was to find a way to make and embody crow movements. The attention to one bird species made an impact on this student and the student gained interest in observing other animals as well. It relates to a “transformative potential” of practice.

On the bird path eight different species got an equal amount of time and space, and at the end all species were gathered to celebrate Valentine’s Day together (Image 7). It was a time to celebrate friendship with all neighbourhood birds, not only with the quiet and cute ones, but also with the noisy ones that challenge us.

¹⁰ Student reflection.



Image 7 Children celebrating Valentine's Day with their bird friends. Photo: Kristoffer Holmen Dye

One kind of re-diffractive conclusion

In this study I have asked *how does avian-human performance practice politicise birds?* I have analysed agential cuts in avian-human performance practice, and have been especially interested in analysing what the practice does. I think that the diffractive analysis has shown tellingly how distribution of the sensible is affected by material-discursive practices. Birds do not communicate directly with humans about their needs and problems. It is our ethico-onto-epistemological duty to find out more how we, with our material-discursive practices, influence non-humans. It is our task to create knowledge apparatuses which offer space for the birds to be equal partners in the ongoing process of justice. Performative inquiry has revealed how the material-discursive practices act as cuts of inclusion and exclusion. Each agential cut in ongoing intra-action carries a potentiality for change. Performative practice, it is suggested by this study, has the power to act as an agentic force for change.

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