



**The series “Culture – Environment – Society:
Humanities and beyond”**

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**Publishing House: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlag
(Imprint of BRILL Deutschland)**

Call for Papers

**Listening to the Swan Song:
Towards a Subjectivity of Non-Human Organisms in Music
and (Music-Related) Literature of the Past and Present**

eds. Joanna Godlewicz-Adamiec, Piotr Kociumbas

The ancient Greeks told us that swans, before they die, sing their last song in a sorrowful but beautiful voice. The origin of this motif can be found in many versions of the myth of Kyknos mourning the death of his most faithful friend or lover, Phaeton. He sang in an incomparable way, arousing the pity of the gods, who transformed him into a swan and placed him in the firmament as one of the constellations. The swan song, synonymous in Occidental culture with the last work of a poet or musician, takes on new dramatic overtones in the context of current anthropogenic climate change and the real threat of extinction of more plant and animal species. It also provides us with a starting point for reflecting on the sounds produced by non-human organisms and their cultural representation in literary and musical works from the past to the present.

Drawing inspiration from the sounds produced by non-human organisms has a rich tradition in European musical culture, to mention Jean-Philippe Rameau's harpsichord miniature *La Poule* (1728), the humorous *Duetto buffo di due gatti* (1825) for two sopranos based on music by Gioachino Rossini or *Oiseaux exotiques* (1955-56) for piano and small orchestra by Olivier Messiaen, composer and ornithologist. Not to be overlooked are contemporary experiments with recorded animal sounds, such as Mindaugas Piečaitis' *Catcerto* (2009) for orchestra and a piano-playing cat, and the initiative of the bioacoustician Roger Payne, who in 1970 successfully released the album *Songs of the Humpback Whale* with sounds produced by these enormous mammals. The use of acoustic electromagnetic signals emitted by growing Lingzhi fungi in the *Radio Mycelium* sound performance by Martin Howse and the Mycelium Network Society, presented at the Taipei Biennial (2018), is another iteration of the non-anthropocentric approach. Literary works, too, boast an analogous tradition. Examples include Nicolaus Bähr's erudite Latin-German work *Ornithophonia* (1695), in which he uses onomatopoeia to imitate birdsong in poetry, or the concrete poetry of Ernst Jandl, with his poem *Auf dem Land* (1963), filled with its onomatopoeic images of animals living in the countryside.

In the planned volume, we intend to explore the path taken historically by literary and musical works that imitate and evoke the sounds produced by non-human organisms: from the description and attribution of a specific cultural meaning to these sounds, to their reception and adaptation through specific musical and/or literary means, to historical attempts at a non-anthropocentric view of the sonic potentiality of non-human organisms, and finally to the exploitation of the possibilities of sound recording and thus moving towards the subjectivity of non-human organisms as composers and/or performers in times of crisis, when the existence of an increasing number of species is under threat.

We would like to invite authors (including literary scholars, musicologists, theologians, cultural scholars, art historians, and researchers in the field of plant and animal studies) to submit articles that relate to, among other possibilities, the following topics:

- sounds of nature in theoretical reflection of the past and present in the context of animal and plant studies, among others;
- speech of non-human organisms and its cultural significance in acoustic and symbolic terms;
- the motifs of sound production by non-human organisms present in pre-Enlightenment culture and their later transposition;
- the ways in which the sounds of nature have been represented in music and literature through the ages – case studies;

- attempts to subjectify non-human organisms through music in pre-Enlightenment times vs. today's non-anthropocentric perspective;
- sounds made by non-human organisms as described in scriptures and theological literature;
- intermedial (including visual) aspects of the representation of sounds of non-human organisms in vocal-instrumental compositions through the ages.

Proposals for contributions **in English or German** (250 words) with title, abstract and short biographical details should be sent by **15 January 2024** to j.godlewicz-adamiec@uw.edu.pl or pkociumbas@uw.edu.pl. You will receive confirmation of acceptance by the end of January. Deadline for submitting the completed manuscripts (min. 6,000 words): **31 October 2024**. The volume is expected to be published – **also in open access** – in spring 2025.