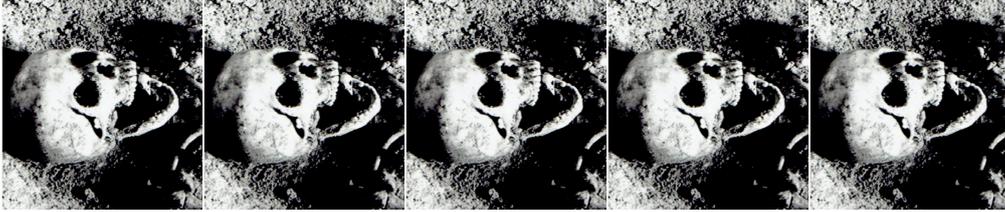


Words and Worlds: Languages and Ecologies symposium
Royal Holloway, University of London



PROPOSAL

A multi-voice reading of 'Girlspeak'¹

(featuring Fringilla, the garden chaffinch, as herself)

For *Words and Worlds*, I would like to propose a multi-voice reading (myself, five other women + a birdsong recording) of sections of a chapter in which I stage an interspecies (bird-human) conversation between Bleuel², Daughter, Echo³, Finchgirl⁴, Fringilla⁵, Mother and Swift⁶, a charm of winged female creatures perched on a tall pine branch above a raging forest fire. The conversation is composed of fragments blending speculative fiction, quotes and birdsong; mimicking adolescent girls' prattle, and foregrounding this 'girlspeak' as a radical strategy to harness alternative approaches to the patriarchal system's impasse that is failing to act in the face of the current ecological crisis. I ask in the chapter - inspired by an archaeological discovery of a skeleton of a young girl found with a chaffinch fledgling's skull in her mouth - what if the Finchgirl was able to speak in 'Finch', able to communicate with birds in their own language? What if the young chaffinch was tasked to teach humans how to live alongside birds and other more-than-humans? What could we learn listening to the Girl with a Finch in her mouth? Might the words of the Finchgirl and other adolescent girls offer us the language required to act now?

Katja Hilevaara is a collaborative artist, researcher and teacher who works in performance, installation and art-writing. Ideas around maintenance, care and enchantment are often foregrounded in her artwork, and she pays close attention to the everyday in the making and thinking of her various projects. Recent works have drawn on (auto)biography and re-imagined histories, exploring ways to tell stories that question existing narratives, and which might deliberately mis-remember or otherwise creatively interpret events to shift their perspective and meaning. Creative constraints such as tasks and instructions often shape her projects. Katja creates work with other artists and thinkers, cherishing the chance to be inspired by dialogue and conversation. She is involved in a long-term collaboration with artist Emily Orley with whom she creates performances and writes, including the co-edited *The Creative Critic: Writing As/About Practice* with Routledge in 2018. Katja is currently a Senior Lecturer in Theatre and Performance at Goldsmiths University of London. www.katjahilevaara.com

¹ Hilevaara, K (forthcoming Dec 2024). 'Girlspeak' in *Performing Punctuation*. Eds. Anna Brown and Julicanna Preston. Intellect.

² Based on Amy Bleuel, a young Wisconsin woman who set up Project Semicolon in an attempt to raise awareness of suicide and mental health.

³ Drawing on Emily Orley's speculative writing on the myth of Echo that imagines Echo and Hera as lovers who make a pact, willingly, for Echo to not speak.

⁴ Drawing on an archaeological find of a skeleton of a young girl, who was buried in late 1700s in a limestone cave in Poland, with a chaffinch skull in her mouth. More information here: <https://www.katjahilevaara.com/the-finch-girl>

⁵ *Fringilla Coelebs* is Latin for chaffinch.

⁶ This character speaks with Taylor Swift lyrics.